

Document 2 – The Complexity of Abolition

SOURCE 2A: [Excerpt] *Draft of Instructions to the Virginia Delegates in the Continental Congress (MS Text of A Summary View, &c.)*, July 1774.

[...] The abolition of domestic slavery is the great object of desire in those colonies where it was unhappily introduced in their infant state. But previous to the enfranchisement [sic] of the slaves we have, it is necessary to exclude all further importations from Africa. Yet our repeated attempts to effect this by prohibitions, and by imposing duties which might amount to a prohibition, have been hitherto defeated by his majesty's negative: thus preferring the immediate advantages of a few British corsairs to the lasting interests of the American states, and to the rights of human nature deeply wounded by this infamous practice. Nay the single interposition of an interested individual against a law was scarcely ever known to fail of success, tho' in the opposite scale were placed the interests of a whole country. That this is so shameful an abuse of a power trusted with his majesty for other purposes, as if not reformed would call for some legal restrictions. [...]

<http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-01-02-0090>

Glossary:

Enfranchisement – to set free (in this context)

Corsairs – pirates

SOURCE 2B: [Excerpt] *Samuel Johnson, Taxation No Tyranny: An Answer to the Resolutions and Address of the American Congress, 1775.*

But there is one writer, and, perhaps, many who do not write, to whom the contraction of these pernicious privileges appears very dangerous, and who startle at the thoughts of "England free, and America in chains." Children fly from their own shadow, and rhetoricians are frightened by their own voices. Chains is, undoubtedly, a dreadful word; but, perhaps, the masters of civil wisdom may discover some gradations between chains and anarchy. Chains need not be put upon those who will be restrained without them. This contest may end in the softer phrase of English superiority and American obedience.

We are told, that the subjection of Americans may tend to the diminution of our own liberties; an event, which none but very perspicacious politicians are able to foresee. If slavery be thus fatally contagious, how is it that we hear the loudest yelps for liberty among the drivers of negroes?

<http://www.samueljohnson.com/tnt.html>

Glossary:

Pernicious – wicked

Rhetoricians – speakers/orators

Perspicacious – wise/insightful

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SOURCE 2C: [Excerpts] From Thomas Jefferson to James Monroe, 24 November 1801

Washington Nov. 24. 1801.

[...] Could we procure lands beyond the limits of the US. to form a receptacle for these people [African Americans]? on our Northern boundary, the country not occupied by British subjects, is the property of Indian nations, whose title would be to be extinguished, with the consent of Great Britain; & the new settlers would be British subjects. it is hardly to be believed that either Great Britain or the Indian proprietors have so disinterested a regard for us as to be willing to relieve us by receiving [sic] such a colony themselves; and as much to be doubted whether that race of men could long exist in so rigorous a climate. on our Western & Southern frontiers, Spain holds an immense country; the occupancy of which however is in the Indian nations; except a few insulated spots possessed by Spanish subjects. it is very questionable indeed Whether the Indians would sell? whether Spain would be willing to receive [sic] these people? [...] The West Indies offer a more probable & practicable retreat for them. inhabited already by a people of their own race & colour [sic]; climates congenial with their natural constitution; insulated from the other descriptions of men; Nature seems to have formed these islands to become the receptacle of the blacks transplanted into this hemisphere. whether we could obtain from the European sovereigns of those islands leave to send thither the persons under contemplation, I cannot say: but I think it more probable than the former propositions, because of their being already inhabited more or less by the same race. the most promising portion of them is the island of St. Domingo, where the blacks are established into a sovereignty de facto, & have organised [sic] themselves under regular laws & government. [...] Africa would offer a last & undoubted resort, if all others more desirable [sic] should fail us [...]

Th: Jefferson

<http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-35-02-0550>

Glossary:

Receptacle – a container

St. Domingo – the colonial name for the island of Hispaniola [comprising the present day nations of Haiti and the Dominican Republic] – the name was also given in various forms to the French and Spanish colonies that developed on the west and east of the island respectively. In 1801, the entire island was under nominally under French control, but a slave insurrection led by Toussaint Louverture had gained effective control of the entire island.