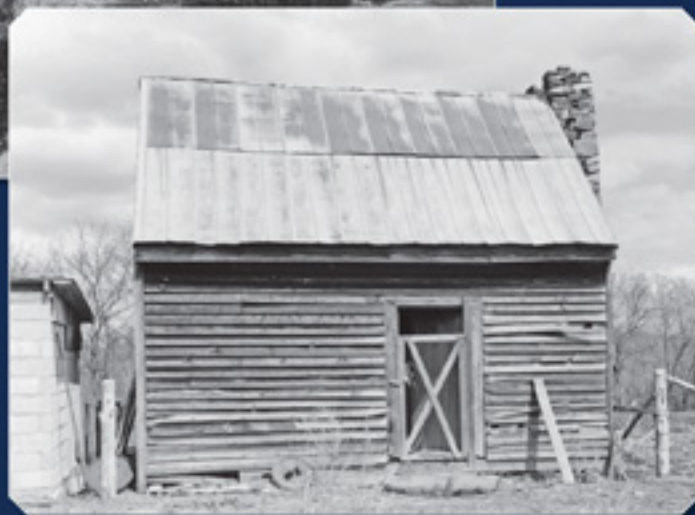


## *Debating* the DOCUMENTS

Interpreting Alternative Viewpoints  
in Primary Source Documents

# Slavery and Virginia's Enlightened Aristocracy

*How was it possible for Virginia's planters to own slaves while championing the ideas of freedom and equality?*



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# Teacher Introduction

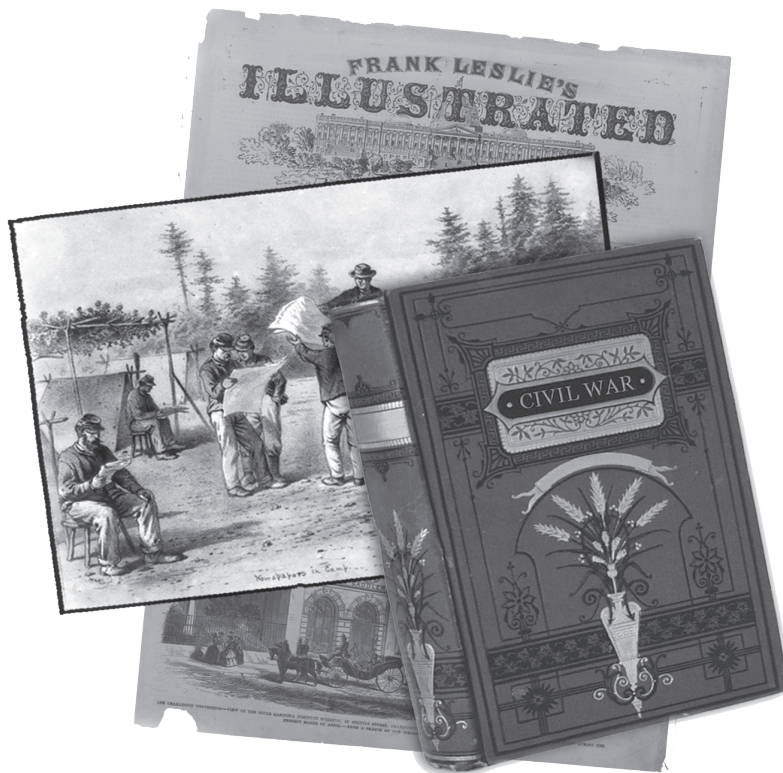
## ★ Using Primary Sources

Primary sources are called “primary” because they are first-hand records of a past era or historical event. They are the raw materials, or the evidence, on which historians base their “secondary” accounts of the past.

A rapidly growing number of history teachers today are using primary sources. Why? Perhaps it’s because primary sources give students a better sense of what history is and what historians do. Such sources also help students see the past from a variety of viewpoints. Moreover, primary sources make history vivid and bring it to life.

However, primary sources are not easy to use. They can be confusing. They can be biased. They rarely all agree. Primary sources must be interpreted and set in context.

To do this, students need historical background knowledge. *Debating the Documents* helps students handle such challenges by giving them a useful framework for analyzing sources that conflict with one another.



*“Multiple,  
conflicting  
perspectives are  
among the truths  
of history.  
No single  
objective or  
universal account  
could ever put an  
end to this endless  
creative dialogue  
within and  
between the past  
and the present.”*

From the 2011 Statement on Standards  
of Professional Conduct of the Council of  
the American Historical Association.



## ★ *The Debating the Documents Series*

Each *Debating the Documents* booklet includes the same sequence of reproducible worksheets. If students use several booklets over time, they will get regular practice at interpreting and comparing conflicting sources. In this way, they can learn the skills and habits needed to get the most out of primary sources.

### **Each *Debating the Documents* Booklet Includes**

- **Suggestions for the Student and an Introductory Essay.** The student gets instructions and a one-page essay providing background on the booklet's topic. A time line on the topic is also included.
- **TWO Groups of Contrasting Primary Source Documents.** In most of the booklets, students get one pair of visual sources and one pair of written sources. In some cases, more than two are provided for each. Background is provided on each source. *Within each group, the sources clash in a very clear way.* (The sources are not always exact opposites, but they do always differ in some obvious way.)
- **Three Worksheets for Each Document Group.** Students use the first two worksheets to take notes on the sources. The third worksheet asks which source the student thinks would be most useful to a historian.
- **One DBQ.** On page 20, a document-based question (DBQ) asks students to write an effective essay using all of the booklet's primary sources.

## ★ *How to Use This Booklet*

### **1. Have students read “Suggestions for the Student” and the Introductory Essay.**

Give them copies of pages 5–7. Ask them to read the instructions and then read the introductory essay on the topic. The time line gives them additional information on that topic. This reading could be done in class or as a homework assignment.

### **2. Have students do the worksheets.**

Make copies of the worksheets and the pages with the sources. Ask students to study the background information on each source and the source itself. Then have them take notes on the sources using the worksheets. If students have access to a computer, have them review the primary sources digitally.

### **3. “Debate the documents” as a class.**

Have students use their worksheet notes to debate the primary source documents as a class. Urge students to follow these ground rules:

- Use your worksheets as a guide for the discussion or debate.
- Try to reach agreement about the main ideas and the significance of each primary source document.
- Look for points of agreement as well as disagreement between the primary sources.
- Listen closely to all points of view about each primary source.
- Focus on the usefulness of each source to the historian, not merely on whether you agree or disagree with that source’s point of view.

### **4. Have students do the final DBQ.**

A DBQ is an essay question about a set of primary source documents. To answer the DBQ, students write essays using evidence from the sources and their own background knowledge of the historical era. (See the next page for a DBQ scoring guide to use in evaluating these essays.)

The DBQ assignment on page 20 includes guidelines for writing a DBQ essay. Here are some additional points to make with students about preparing to write this kind of essay.

#### **The DBQ for this Booklet (see page 20):**

How could Virginia’s wealthy planters become such strong champions of freedom and independence in the 1700s while also continuing to own slaves?

- Analyze the question carefully.
- Use your background knowledge to set sources in their historical context.
- Question and interpret sources actively. Do not accept them at face value.
- Use sources meaningfully to support your essay’s thesis.
- Pay attention to the overall organization of your essay.



## ★ *Complete DBQ Scoring Guide*

Use this guide in evaluating the DBQ for this booklet. Use this scoring guide with students who are already familiar with using primary sources and writing DBQ essays.

### **Excellent Essay**

- Offers a clear answer or thesis explicitly addressing all aspects of the essay question.
- Does a careful job of interpreting many or most of the documents and relating them clearly to the thesis and the DBQ. Deals with conflicting documents effectively.
- Uses details and examples effectively to support the thesis and other main ideas. Explains the significance of those details and examples well.
- Uses background knowledge and the documents in a balanced way.
- Is well written; clear transitions make the essay easy to follow from point to point. Only a few minor writing errors or errors of fact.

### **Good Essay**

- Offers a reasonable thesis addressing the essential points of the essay question.
- Adequately interprets at least some of the documents and relates them to the thesis and the DBQ.
- Usually relates details and examples meaningfully to the thesis or other main ideas.
- Includes some relevant background knowledge.
- May have some writing errors or errors of fact, as long as these do not invalidate the essay's overall argument or point of view.

### **Fair Essay**

- Offers at least a partly developed thesis addressing the essay question.
- Adequately interprets at least a few of the documents.
- Relates only a few of the details and examples to the thesis or other main ideas.
- Includes some background knowledge.
- Has several writing errors or errors of fact that make it harder to understand the essay's overall argument or point of view.

### **Poor Essay**

- Offers no clear thesis or answer addressing the DBQ.
- Uses few documents effectively other than referring to them in “laundry list” style, with no meaningful relationship to a thesis or any main point.
- Uses details and examples unrelated to the thesis or other main ideas. Does not explain the significance of these details and examples.
- Is not clearly written, with some major writing errors or errors of fact.

# Suggestions to the Student

## ★ *Using Primary Sources*

A primary source is any record of evidence from the past. Many things are primary sources: letters, diary entries, official documents, photos, cartoons, wills, maps, charts, etc. They are called “primary” because they are first-hand records of a past event or time period. This *Debating the Documents* lesson is based on two groups of primary source documents. Within each group, the sources conflict with one another. That is, they express different or even opposed points of view. You need to decide which source is more reliable, more useful, or more typical of the time period. This is what historians do all the time. Usually, you will be able to learn something about the past from each source, even when the sources clash with one another in dramatic ways.

## ★ *How to Use This Booklet*

### 1. Read the one-page introductory essay.

This gives you background information that will help you analyze the primary source documents and do the exercises for this *Debating the Documents* lesson. The time line gives you additional information you will find helpful.



### 2. Study the primary source documents for this lesson.

For this lesson, you get two groups of sources. The sources within each group conflict with one another. Some of these sources are visuals, others are written sources. With visual sources, pay attention not only to the image’s “content” (its subject matter) but also to its artistic style, shading, composition, camera angle, symbols, and other features that add to the image’s meaning. With written sources, notice the writing style, bias, even what the source leaves out or does not talk about. Think about each source’s author, that author’s reasons for writing, and the likely audience for the source. These considerations give you clues as to the source’s historical value.

### 3. Use the worksheets to analyze each group of primary source documents.

For each group of sources, you get three worksheets. Use the “Study the Document” worksheets to take notes on each source. Use the “Comparing the Documents” worksheet to decide which of the sources would be most useful to a historian.

### 4. As a class, debate the documents.

Use your worksheet notes to help you take part in this debate.

### 5. Do the final DBQ.

“DBQ” means “document-based question.” A DBQ is a question along with several primary source documents. To answer the DBQ, write an essay using evidence from the documents and your own background history knowledge.

## Virginia: Slave Society/Seedbed of Liberty

*"We hold these truths to be self-evident,  
that all men are created equal."*

These may be the most famous words in America's Declaration of Independence. They were written in 1776. The main author of the Declaration, Thomas Jefferson, was a Virginia plantation owner. George Mason, George Washington, Patrick Henry, James Madison, and many other top leaders of the American Revolution were also Virginia plantation owners. All were strong backers of the Revolution's ideals of liberty and equality. All of them were also slave owners.

Virginia was a major slaveholding colony. Yet this colony also produced some of the greatest of America's early champions of liberty and individual rights. Many people today find this strange. They wonder, how slave owners could also become champions of liberty? It seems to be a paradox—that is, it seems to include two totally opposed ideas. These two ideas, slavery and liberty, just don't seem to go together at all.

In the past, history books tended to ignore this paradox. Men like Washington and Jefferson were great heroes. The fact that these heroes were also slave owners was ignored. In recent years, some historians have gone in the other direction. They say these men were cruel and cowardly for not attacking slavery more forcefully. They want us to look down on the founders, not view them as heroes. Finally, some say it is unfair to judge the past so quickly either way, until we first see it as those at that time saw it.

Slavery began in Virginia in 1619. However, it was only in the 1700s that huge numbers of African slaves began to be brought to Virginia. In part, this was because not enough white indentured servants were arriving to work on Virginia's tobacco plantations. It may also have been because life in Virginia was more settled and healthier. Rich planters could now buy slaves knowing that they and their slaves would live long enough to make

the expense worth it. Whatever the reasons, Virginians expanded slavery, made excuses for it, and soon even praised it. Harsh laws made it hard for blacks to have any chance of ever escaping slavery. The laws gave slave owners great power over their slaves—power to control them, work them, punish them and sell them, even by breaking up their families.

At the same time, many of Virginia's wealthy plantation owners were becoming refined, educated, "enlightened." In fact, the best of them were great students of the European Enlightenment, with its faith in reason and belief in the natural rights of man. They loved books and often had large libraries in their plantation homes. They believed deeply in using reason in dealing with all aspects of life—scientific, social, political, and personal. Few of them ever worried about slavery. Yet many of Virginia's best leaders did worry about it. In fact, some of them felt deeply guilty about it. In a letter to an opponent of slavery, Patrick Henry wrote:

*Would any one believe that I am Master  
of Slaves of my own purchase! I am drawn  
along by the general inconvenience of living  
without them, I will not, I cannot justify it.*

Yet at the same time, even these sensitive Virginians did little about slavery. In a way, they seem to have felt trapped by it. Aware of it as an evil, they felt powerless to end it. Were they powerless? Were they cowardly? Were they brave for the partial stand they sometimes did take? Or did they simply not see the problem as we do today?

This is not an easy matter to decide, as the primary sources in this booklet will prove. Yet it is an important matter to debate. We hope you will use these sources to do just that.

# Virginia Slavery Time Line

**1619**

• • • The first Africans are brought to Virginia. Also, America's first assembly of elected lawmakers meets—the Virginia House of Burgesses.

**1662**

• • • A Virginia law says that if a mother is a slave, her child is also a slave for life. This is one of many laws that start to firmly link being black with being a slave and make it hard for blacks ever to gain their freedom.

**1667**

• • • A Virginia law says that baptism cannot win a slave his or her freedom.

**1693**

• • • Virginia's College of William and Mary is founded.

**1715**

• • • Black slaves make up 24 percent of Virginia's population, up from less than five percent in 1671.

**1730s–40s**

• • • The religious revival known as the Great Awakening begins. Its preachers reach out to both blacks and whites. This revival movement leads many blacks to join the Methodist and Baptist Churches.

**1750**

• • • There are 236,400 slaves in the 13 colonies, with over 206,000 of them living south of Pennsylvania. Slaves are about 20% of the entire colonial population, but more than 40% of Virginia's.

**1758**

• • • A black Baptist church is formed on William Byrd's plantation in Mecklenburg, Virginia. It is probably the first black congregation in the colonies.

**1772–74**

• • • George Washington and others in the Virginia House of Burgesses send the British king a petition calling the slave trade “a trade of great inhumanity.” Two years later, Washington helps pass the Fairfax Resolves, which ask that no more slaves be imported into the British colonies.

**1776**

• • • The Declaration of Independence says that “all men are created equal.”

**1782**

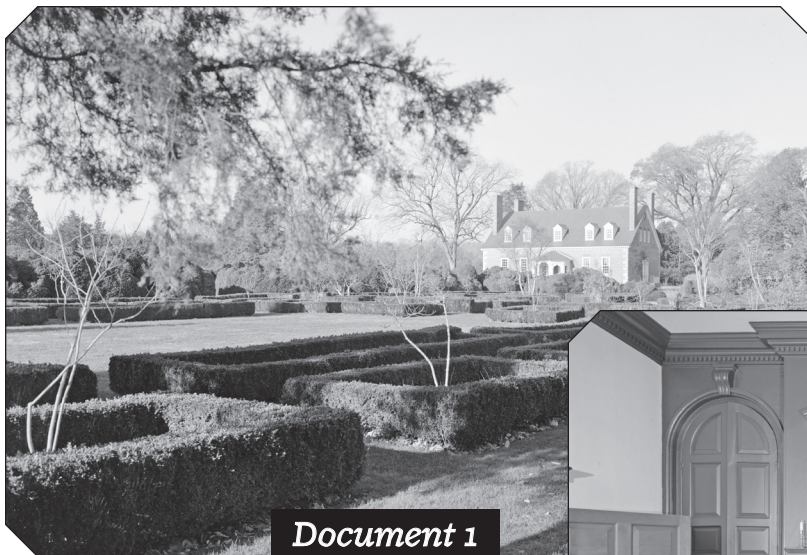
• • • A Virginia law makes it easier for slave owners to free their slaves. George Washington is the major slave owner in Fairfax County, Virginia, that year with 188 slaves, followed by George Mason with 128 slaves, William Fitzhugh with 122 slaves, and six others with 49 or more.

**1799**

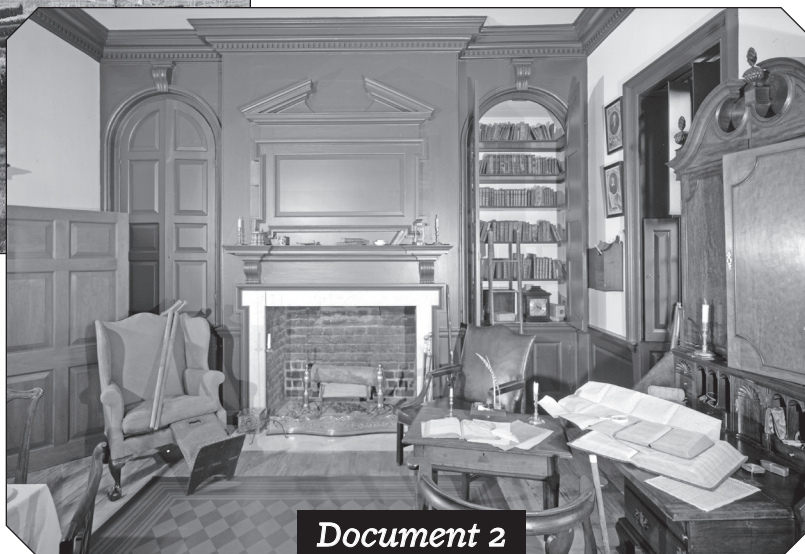
• • • Washington arranges in his will that his slaves (now more than 300) are to be freed after his death and the death of his wife, Martha.



## Visual Primary Source Documents 1 & 2



Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division,  
HABS, VA,30-LORT,1-23.



Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, HABS, VA,30-LORT,1-64.

### Information on Documents 1 & 2

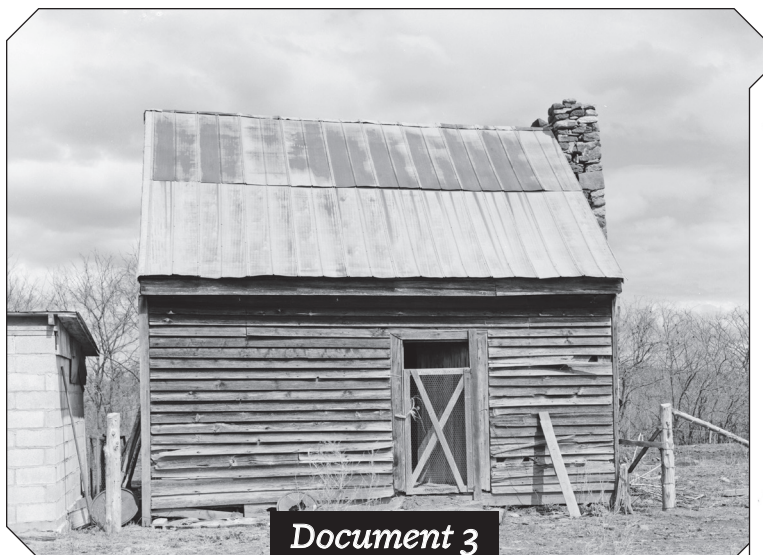
In the upper left is George Mason's Gunston Hall, which in the 1700s was surrounded by 5,500 acres of land. Mason was a wealthy Virginia planter and slave-owner. Yet he was also deeply affected by the spirit of the eighteenth century Enlightenment, with its a concern for both education and individual liberty. On the right is a parlor in Gunston Hall full of books and documents.

Mason became a key leader in the American Revolution. In 1776, he drafted the famous *Virginia Declaration of Rights*.

Later that year, Thomas Jefferson used that document's phrases when he drafted the Declaration of Independence, which Mason also signed. In 1787, Mason took part in the convention that wrote the U.S. Constitution. He refused to sign it, but still played a key role in getting the Bill of Rights added to it.

Mason was a major slave owner, yet he also strongly opposed slavery, which he once called "that slow poison, which is daily contaminating the minds and morals of our people."

## Visual Primary Source Documents 3 & 4



**Document 3**

Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, HABS, VA,16-LONI.V,1K-1.

**Negroes for Sale.**  
A Cargo of very fine stout Men and Women, in good order and fit for immediate service, just imported from the Windward Coast of Africa, in the Ship Two Brothers.—  
Conditions are one half Cash or Produce, the other half payable the first of January next, giving Bond and Security if required.  
The Sale to be opened at 10 o'Clock each Day, in Mr. Bourdeaux's Yard, at No. 48, on the Bay.  
May 19, 1784. JOHN MITCHELL.

**Thirty Seasoned Negroes**  
To be Sold for Credit, at Private Sale.  
AMONGST which is a Carpenter, none of whom are known to be dishonest.  
Also to be sold for Cash, a regular bred young Negroe Man-Cook, born in this Country, who served several Years under an exceeding good French Cook abroad, and his Wife a middle aged Washer-Woman, (both very honest) and their two Children. Likewise a young Man a Carpenter.  
For Terms apply to the Printer.

**Document 4**

Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, LC-USZ62-10474.

### Information on Documents 3 & 4

On the left is a slave cabin on the Green Hill Plantation in Campbell County, Virginia. This plantation was purchased in 1797 by Samuel Pannill and only fully developed in the 1800s. It was in its time one of the largest slave plantations in Virginia. This cabin is the only one left out of about 200 that once existed on the plantation. Though the cabin is from a somewhat later time period, it is probably fairly typical of the living conditions of slaves on Virginia's eighteenth century plantations.

On the right are two notices of slaves for sale in the American colonies in 1784. The notice on top announces the sale of a cargo of Africans just arrived in America. The notice on the bottom announces the sale of "Thirty Seasoned Negroes." This means they are African Americans who have already been in the colonies for some time and who have learned skills that add to their value as slaves.

## **Study the Documents: Visual Sources 1 & 2**

*Instructions:* Take notes on these questions. Use your notes to discuss the documents and answer the DBQ.

### **1 Main Idea or Topic** \_\_\_\_\_

Write a brief paragraph describing what you think life would be like living in this plantation home in the 1700s. Base your paragraph mainly on what you see in these two photos (Documents 1 & 2).

### **2 Visual Features** \_\_\_\_\_

Do any of the specific features in this plantation home give you an idea of what George Mason himself must have been like? List as many details as you can that you think give you an idea of what he was like.

### **3 Background Information** \_\_\_\_\_

George Mason was a well-educated plantation owner who was aware of the so-called Enlightenment thinkers of his time. What was the “Enlightenment?” Do you think Mason’s Enlightenment attitudes can be seen in the way he planned this home and its grounds? Why or why not?

### **4 Usefulness** \_\_\_\_\_

Could these photos be useful to a historian who wants to learn more about plantation life in eighteenth century Virginia? Explain your answer.



## **Study the Documents: Visual Sources 3 & 4**

*Instructions:* Take notes on these questions. Use your notes to discuss the documents and answer the DBQ.

### **1 Main Idea or Topic**

---

Write a brief paragraph describing what you think life would be like living in the slave cabin in Document 3. Use the notices on the right (Document 4) to add details to your account.

### **2 Background Information**

---

Imagine that you are to teach a group of students about American slavery. They know nothing about it. You are only given Documents 3 & 4 to use. Create a list of facts, names, and ideas you think these students would also need to know in order to get the most out of these two images.

### **3 Sources: How Reliable?**

---

The slave cabin shown here was built in the early 1800s. The notices on the right are from the 1700s, but they may or may not be from Virginia. Can these sources be useful or reliable to a historian trying to learn more about slavery in Virginia in the 1700s? In what ways, if any, are they useful and reliable for this purpose?

# Comparing the Documents

## ★ *The Visual Sources*

Answer the question by checking one box below. Then complete the statements on the Comparison Essay worksheet. Use all your notes to help you take part in an all-class debate about these documents—and to answer the final DBQ for the lesson.

**Which of these pairs of primary source documents would be most useful to a historian trying to understand Virginia's wealthy planters and their slave system in the 1700s?**



*Documents 1 & 2* ☐



*Documents 3 & 4* ☐

## Comparison Essay

*I chose Documents \_\_\_\_\_ because:*

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*I did **not** choose Documents \_\_\_\_\_.*

*However, a historian still might use the documents in the following way:*

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**Keep this in mind:** Some sources are very biased. A biased source is one that shows you only one side of an issue. That is, it takes a clear stand or expresses a very strong opinion about something. A biased source may be one-sided, but it can still help you to understand its time period. For example, a biased editorial cartoon may show how people felt about an issue at the time. The usefulness of a source depends most of all on what questions you ask about that time in the past.

## Written Primary Source Document 1

### Information on Document 1

This “document” is actually two selections from Thomas Jefferson. Jefferson was the main author of the Declaration of Independence and the nation’s third president. On the left are passages from Jefferson’s *Notes on the State of Virginia*, published in 1782. In one, Jefferson expresses racial prejudice; yet in the other, he offers a reason for opposing the evil of slavery. On the right is part of a letter Jefferson sent to Henri Gregoire in Paris in 1809. Earlier, Gregoire had written to Jefferson, describing some major achievements by black people. Gregoire wanted to prove Jefferson wrong about blacks’ inferiority. Here Jefferson answers Gregoire on this issue. (From *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, Albert Ellery Bergh, editor, Washington, D. C.: Thomas Jefferson Memorial Association, 1904, Vol. XII, p. 255.)

### Document 1

#### Part 1

**Passage One:** Comparing [Negroes] by their faculties of memory, reason, and imagination, it appears to me, that in memory they are equal to the whites; in reason much inferior, as I think one could scarcely be found capable of tracing and comprehending the investigations of Euclid; and that in imagination they are dull, tasteless, and anomalous.

**Passage Two:** There must doubtless be an unhappy influence on the manners of our people produced by the existence of slavery among us. The whole commerce between master and slave is a perpetual exercise of the most boisterous passions, the most unremitting despotism on the one part, and degrading submissions on the other. Our children see this, and learn to imitate it; for man is an imitative animal. . . . The parent storms, the child looks on, catches the lineaments of wrath, puts on the same airs in the circle of smaller slaves, gives a loose to his worst of passions, and thus nursed, educated, and daily exercised in tyranny, cannot but be stamped by it with odious peculiarities.

#### Part 2

Be assured that no person living wishes more sincerely than I do to see a complete refutation of the doubts I have myself entertained and expressed on the grade of understanding allotted to [Negroes] by nature and to find that in this respect they are on a par with ourselves. My doubts were the result of personal observation on the limited sphere of my own State, where the opportunities for the development of their genius were not favorable, and those of exercising it still less so. I expressed them therefore with great hesitation; but whatever be their degree of talent it is no measure of their rights. Because Sir Isaac Newton was superior to others in understanding, he was not therefore lord of the person or property of others. On this subject they are gaining daily in the opinions of nations, and hopeful advances are making towards their reestablishment on an equal footing with the other colors of the human family. I pray you therefore to accept my thanks for the many instances you have enabled me to observe of respectable intelligence in that race of men, which cannot fail to have effect in hastening the day of their relief.

## Written Primary Source Document 2

### Information on Document 2

By the end of his life, George Washington owned more than 300 slaves. Some were his own. Others belonged to his wife Martha and became part of his household when she married him. Washington was always troubled by slavery, and he hoped that a way could be found to end it. In his last will and testament, he finally arranged to free all of his own slaves. Below is the passage in his will in which he explains how this wish is to be carried out. The “Dower Negroes” he mentions are those who belonged to his wife as a part of her dowry. The will was written in 1799, six months before Washington died. (Some of the language in this will is hard to understand. We have defined a few terms in brackets.)

(A note on spelling and punctuation: The documents in this booklet have been altered only in that some spellings have been modernized, and the punctuation has been simplified to shorten the length of some sentences.)

### Document 2

Upon the decease of my wife, it is my Will and desire, that all the slaves which I hold in my own right, shall receive their freedom. To emancipate them during her life, would, tho' earnestly wished by me, be attended with such insuperable difficulties on account of their intermixture by Marriages with the Dower Negroes . . . it not being in my power, under the tenure by which the Dower Negroes are held, to manumit them *[that is, free them]*. And whereas among those who will receive freedom according to this devise, there may be some, who from old age or bodily infirmities, and others who on account of their infancy, that will be unable to support themselves; it is my Will and desire that all who come under the first and second description *[that is, the old and the infirm]*, shall be comfortably clothed and fed by my heirs while they live; and that such of the latter description *[that is, infants]* as have no parents living, or if living are unable, or unwilling to provide for them, shall be bound by the Court until they shall arrive at the age of twenty-five years; . . . The negroes thus bound, are (by their Masters or Mistresses), to be taught to read & write; and to be brought up to some useful occupation, agreeably to the Laws of the Commonwealth of Virginia, providing for the support of orphan & other poor Children.

And I do hereby expressly forbid the sale, or transportation out of the said Commonwealth of any Slave I may die possessed of, under any pretense whatsoever. And I do moreover most pointedly, and most solemnly enjoin it upon *[that is, order]* my Executors hereafter named, or the survivors of them, to see that this clause respecting Slaves, and every part thereof be religiously fulfilled at the Epoch *[that is, at the time]* at which it is directed to take place; without evasion, neglect or delay, after the Crops which may then be on the ground are harvested, particularly as it respects the aged & infirm; seeing that a regular & permanent fund be established for their support so long as there are subjects requiring it; not trusting to the uncertain provision to be made by individuals. And to my Mulatto man, William (calling himself William Lee) I give immediate freedom; or if he should prefer it (on account of the accidents which have befallen him, and which have rendered him incapable of walking or of any active employment) to remain in the situation he now is, it shall be optional in him to do so: In either case however, I allow him an annuity of thirty dollars during his natural life . . . & this I give him as a testimony of my sense of his attachment to me, and for his faithful services during the Revolutionary War.

## **Study the Document: Written Source 1**

*Instructions:* Take notes on these questions. Use your notes to discuss the documents and answer the DBQ.

### **1 Main Idea or Topic** \_\_\_\_\_

Using all of these passages from Jefferson, what do you think his views were about blacks and about slavery? In a single paragraph try to sum up his views on both topics as he explains them here.

### **2 Author, Audience, Purpose** \_\_\_\_\_

What are some key facts about Jefferson that you think a historian needs to know to get the most out of these passages of his?

### **3 Bias** \_\_\_\_\_

Chose the two or three sentences in these passages that best sum up Jefferson's opinions about blacks and about slavery as a system? Are any other sentences in these passages statements of fact, not opinion? If so, list them. Do you agree with any of Jefferson's statements? Why or why not?

### **4 What Else Can You Infer?** \_\_\_\_\_

That is, what is suggested or implied about Jefferson by this document? For example, what can you infer about Jefferson's attitude toward evidence and the use of reason to arrive at truth?

## Study the Document: Written Source 2

*Instructions:* Take notes on these questions. Use your notes to discuss the documents and answer the DBQ.

### **1 Main Idea or Topic** \_\_\_\_\_

In your own words, try to list all of the key demands Washington is making here for his slaves.

### **2 Author, Audience, Purpose** \_\_\_\_\_

This is George Washington's will. Would it be as important to a historian if it were the will of some other Virginia planter? Why or why not?

### **3 Bias** \_\_\_\_\_

What one or two sentences in the will best help show you what Washington really felt about his own slaves and about slavery in general? Write out these sentences here and explain why you chose them.

### **4 What Else Can You Infer?** \_\_\_\_\_

That is, what is suggested or implied about Washington, Virginia in the 1700s, or its system of slavery? For example, what can you infer about the way Washington's slaves lived during his lifetime? Also, what does the will suggest about the problems a recently freed slave might face in Virginia at this time?



# Comparing the Documents



## *The Written Sources*

Answer the question by checking one box below. Then complete the statements on the Comparison Essay worksheet. Use all your notes to help you take part in an all-class debate about these documents—and to answer the final DBQ for the lesson.

**Which of these two primary source documents would be most useful to a historian trying to understand Virginia’s wealthy planters and their slave system in the 1700s?**

*Two selections  
from Thomas Jefferson:  
passages from his “Notes  
on the State of Virginia”  
and part of a letter to Henri  
Gregoire in Paris in 1809.*

*Document 1* ☐

*A passage from  
George Washington’s  
last will and testament  
in which he finally arranges  
to free all of  
his own slaves.*

*Document 2* ☐

## Comparison Essay

*I chose Documents \_\_\_\_\_ because:*

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*I did **not** choose Documents \_\_\_\_\_.*

*However, a historian still might use the documents in the following way:*

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**Keep this in mind:** Some sources are very biased. A biased source is one that shows you only one side of an issue. That is, it takes a clear stand or expresses a very strong opinion about something. A biased source may be one-sided, but it can still help you to understand its time period. For example, a biased editorial cartoon may show how people felt about an issue at the time. The usefulness of a source depends most of all on what questions you ask about that time in the past.

# Document-Based Question

Your task is to answer a document-based question (DBQ) on Virginia's wealthy slave-owning planter elites. In a DBQ, you use your analysis of primary source documents and your knowledge of history to write a brief essay answering the question. Using all four sets of documents, answer this question.

## *Document-Based Question*

**How could Virginia's wealthy planters become such strong champions of freedom and independence in the 1700s while also continuing to own slaves?**

Below is a checklist of key suggestions for writing a DBQ essay. Next to each item, jot down a few notes to guide you in writing the DBQ. Use extra sheets to write a four- or five-paragraph essay.

- *Introductory Paragraph*  
Does the paragraph clarify the DBQ itself? Does it present a clear thesis, or overall answer, to that DBQ?
- *The Internal Paragraphs—1*  
Are these paragraphs organized around main points with details supporting those main ideas? Do all these main ideas support the thesis in the introductory paragraph?
- *The Internal Paragraphs—2*  
Are all of your main ideas and key points linked in a logical way? That is, does each idea follow clearly from those that went before? Does it add something new and helpful in clarifying your thesis?
- *Use of Primary Source Documents*  
Are they simply mentioned in a “laundry list” fashion? Or are they used thoughtfully to support main ideas and the thesis?
- *Concluding Paragraph*  
Does it restate the DBQ and thesis in a way that sums up the main ideas without repeating old information or going into new details?

# **Visual Primary Sources**



## First Group—Document 1



Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division,  
HABS, VA,30-LORT,1-23.



## First Group—Document 2



Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, HABS, VA,30-LORT,1-64.




## First Group—Document 3



Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, HABS,  
VA,16-LONI.V,1K-1.

## First Group—Document 4



### Negroes for Sale.

A Cargo of very fine stout Men and Women, in good order and fit for immediate service, just imported from the Windward Coast of Africa, in the Ship Two Brothers.—

Conditions are one half Cash or Produce, the other half payable the first of January next, giving Bond and Security if required.

The Sale to be opened at 10 o'Clock each Day, in Mr. Bourdeaux's Yard, at No, 48, on the Bay.

May 19, 1784. JOHN MITCHELL.

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### Thirty Seasoned Negroes

To be Sold for Credit, at Private Sale.

**A**MONGST which is a Carpenter, none of whom are known to be dishonest.

Also, to be sold for Cash, a regular bred young Negroe Man-Cook, born in this Country, who served several Years under an exceeding good French Cook abroad, and his Wife a middle aged Wather-Woman, (both very honest) and their two Children. Likewise a young Man a Carpenter.

For Terms apply to the Printer.

Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, LC-USZ62-10474.