**African Slavery in America**

By Thomas Paine

Pennsylvania Journal and the Weekly Advertiser

1775

To Americans:

villain

sad

kindness

famous

against; corrupted

cruel

deserved reward or punishment

question

robbed

arguable

agreeing

sick

wise

ability

That some desperate wretches should be willing to steal and enslave men by violence and murder for gain, is rather lamentable than strange. But that many civilized, nay, Christianized people should approve, and be concerned in the savage practice, is surprising; and still persist, though it has been so often proved contrary to the light of nature, to every principle of Justice and Humanity, and even good policy, by a succession of eminent men, and several late publications.

The Managers the Trade themselves, and others testify, that many of these African nations inhabit fertile countries, are industrious farmers, enjoy plenty, and lived quietly, averse to war, before the Europeans debauched them with liquors, and bribing them against one another; and that these inoffensive people are brought into slavery, by stealing them, tempting Kings to sell subjects, which they can have no right to do, and hiring one tribe to war against another, in order to catch prisoners. By such wicked and inhuman ways the English are said to enslave towards one hundred thousand yearly; of which thirty thousand are supposed to die by barbarous treatment in the first year; besides all that are slain in the unnatural ways excited to take them. So much innocent blood have the managers and supporters of this inhuman trade to answer for to the common Lord of all!

They show as little reason as conscience who put the matter by with saying — “Men, in some cases, are lawfully made slaves, and why may not these?” So men, in some cases, are lawfully put to death, deprived of their goods, without their consent; may any man, therefore, be treated so, without any conviction of desert? Nor is this plea mended by adding — “They are set forth to us as slaves, and we buy them without farther inquiry, let the sellers see to it.” Such man may as well join with a known band of robbers, buy their ill-got goods, and help on the trade; ignorance is no more pleadable in one case than the other; the sellers plainly own how they obtain them. But none can lawfully buy without evidence that they are not concurring with Men-Stealers; and as the true owner has a right to reclaim his goods that were stolen, and sold; so the slave, who is proper owner of his freedom, has a right to reclaim it, however often sold.

The great Question may be — What should be done with those who are enslaved already? To turn the old and infirm free, would be injustice and cruelty; they who enjoyed the labours of the their better days should keep, and treat them humanely. As to the rest, let prudent men, with the assistance of legislatures, determine what is practicable for masters, and and best for them. Perhaps some could give them lands upon reasonable rent, some, employing them in their labour still, might give them some reasonable allowances for it; so as all may have some property, and fruits of their labours at the own disposal, and be encouraged to industry; the family may live together, and enjoy the natural satisfaction of exercising relative affections and duties, with civil protection, and other advantages, like fellow men. Perhaps they might sometime form useful barrier settlements on the frontiers. Thus they may become interested in the public welfare, and assist in promoting it; instead of being dangerous, as now they are, should any enemy promise them a better condition.

for their own benefit

good

hatred

savior

wild

The past treatment of Africans must naturally fill them with abhorrence of Christians; lead them to think our religion would make them more inhuman savages, if they embraced it; thus the gain of that trade has been pursued in oppositions of the redeemer’s cause, and the happiness of men. Are we not, therefore, bound in duty to him and to them to repair these injuries, as far as possible, by taking some proper measure to instruct, not only the slaves here, but the Africans in their own countries? Primitive Christians, laboured always to spread the divine religion; and this is equally our duty while there is an heathen nation: But what singular obligations are we under to these injured people!

These are the sentiments of

JUSTICE AND HUMANITY.

**Text-Dependent Questions**

Name of Text: African Slavery in America

Question Composers: Lino DeMichieli, John Douglass, Dave Huffmire, Tabitha Neufeld

Standards: Nevada History standard H2.18

Common Core Standard History

| Questions | What is the point of this question? Why did you write it. Is there an overarching understanding you are trying to reach with students?  Include all answer**s** (words, phrases, sentences with line numbers) |
| --- | --- |
| What do you learn from lines 1-5?  Hypocrisy means that one behaves in a way opposite to their beliefs. Using evidence from lines 7-12, how is hypocrisy shown in the text? | This question familiarizes students with the main idea of the text. It allows them to start thinking about why Thomas Paine feels slavery is bad.   * “civilized , nay, Christianized people should approve, and be concerned in this savage practice” (9) * “contrary to the light of nature, to every principle of Justice and Humanity” (11) |
| The word “inoffensive” begins with the prefix “in.” “In” means not when used as a prefix. Based on this prefix, what do you think the word inoffensive (16) means?  Give examples from the text on lines 13-23 that show how African Civilizations were inoffensive. | Depending on the students’ knowledge of vocabulary they may or may not know what the prefix “in” means. This helps students to understand the many ways African civilizations were advanced and not primitive.  •“fertile countries” (14), “industrious farmers” (14), “enjoy plenty” (14),”lived quietly, averse to war” (15) |
| In paragraph two, how did Europeans interfere with these “inoffensive” civilizations? | This question allows the students to compare the lifestyle of Africans to what the Europeans brought with slavery. This question shows the continued hypocrisy of slave trading civilized Europeans.  • “debauched with liquors”(15), “bribing against one another” (16), “stealing them, tempting kings to sell subjects” (17) |
| Using evidence from the text in paragraph three, how does Thomas Paine show others are pro-slavery? | This question enables students to show they understand the counter argument to Paine that there were pro-slavery views.   * “men, in some cases, are lawfully made slaves, and why may not these.” (25) * “they are set forth to us as slaves, and we buy them without farther inquiry, let the sellers see to it.” (28,29) |
| On line 29, it states “such men may as well join with a known band of robbers, buy their ill-got goods, and help on the trade.” First, what does Paine mean by this statement, and second, explain how this analogy relates to Paine’s view on slavery. Use evidence from paragraph three. | The point of this question is to connect the argument with an analogous situation. Students would have to understand the statement on line 29 before they could answer the analogy.   * Students would have to understand that buying something from a robber makes them just as guilty, so supporting the slave trade by buying slaves is just as immoral as selling slaves. * “ignorance is no more pleadable in one case than the other, the sellers plainly own how they obtain them.” (31,32) |
| Using evidence from the text, lines 36-49, identify what the Great Question is according to Paine. What are some of his suggestions for answering this Great Question? | This question allows students to show that they understand Paine’s idea of what to do with freed slaves. It sets the students up to answer the final culminating writing prompt.   * “what should be done with those enslaved already?” (36) * “turn the old and infirm free would be injustice and cruelty” (37) * “perhaps some could give them lands upon reasonable rent” (40,41) * “so as all may have some property, and fruits of their labours at the own disposal, and be encouraged to industry.” (43) * “perhaps they might sometime form useful barrier settlement on the frontier.” (46) |
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Please compose a clear writing prompt or question to follow this close analytic reading. Make sure that your writing prompt/question follows the CCSS writing standards (choose informational or argumentative) and that you use the terminology of the standards. The writing assignment can be a very formal essay or a fairly short piece, as long as it demonstrates that students have understood the document and can use evidence from it effectively.

In a three paragraph informational essay, how does Thomas Paine argue that slavery in unjust? Please follow the outline below.

1. Paragraph one, use evidence from the text (lines 7-23) to show the history of the slave trade according to Paine. Be sure to include information of African civilization.
2. Paragraph two; explain the pro con argument from lines 24-35. Make sure to cover both pro slavery quotes and any analogies present.
3. Paragraph three should explain the moral tone of Paine’s writing. Focus on evidence from lines 36-58 regarding the Great Question and the moral problem of Christians owning slaves.

In the space below, create a very specific checklist that helps teachers what exactly to identify in order to measure student success or difficulty with this particular writing assignment on this particular reading. Make sure to use your grade level’s writing standards as a guide. Be clear!

* That slavery is against the principles of nature and humanity.
* Show evidence that African civilization were prominent and advanced. That Europeans changed the landscape by bribing leaders to gain slaves.
* Explain the analogy of guilt by association described in paragraph three.
* Show pro slavery quotes.
* Explanation of what the Great Question is according to Paine.
* Explain how Christians owning slaves can create a situation where slaves hate Christianity and thus do not embrace it within their community.