

1 Letter from Robert E. Lee to his wife, Mary Lee
2 A Response to President Franklin Pierce's State of the Union Speech (December 2, 1856)
3 Colonel Robert E. Lee
4 December 27, 1856

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6 **Note to Reader:** President Pierce's State of the Union speech was delivered on December 2, 1856. This speech showed the president's concern for the
7 future of the Union as a result of the conflict over slavery. In 1856, Colonel Robert E. Lee lives in Virginia but 5 years later (1861) he resigns from the U.S.
8 Army and is appointed as the commanding General of the Confederate Army from 1861-1865.
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10 I was much pleased the with President's message. His views of the
11 systematic and progressive efforts of certain people at the North to
12 interfere with and change the domestic institutions of the South are
13 truthfully and faithfully expressed. The consequences of their plans and
14 purposes are also clearly set forth. These people must be aware that their
15 object is both unlawful and foreign to them and to their duty, and that
16 this institution, for which they are irresponsible and non-accountable,
17 can only be changed by them through the agency of a civil and servile
18 war. There are few, I believe, in this enlightened age, who will not
19 acknowledge that slavery as an institution is a moral and political evil. It
20 is idle to expatiate on its disadvantages. I think it is a greater evil to the
21 white than to the colored race. While my feelings are strongly enlisted in
22 behalf of the latter, my sympathies are more deeply engaged for the
23 former. The blacks are immeasurably better off here than in Africa,
24 morally, physically, and socially. The painful discipline they are
25 undergoing is necessary for their further instruction as a race, and will
26 prepare them, I hope, for better things. How long their servitude may be
27 necessary is known and ordered by a merciful Providence. Their
28 emancipation will sooner result from the mild and melting influences of
29 Christianity than from the storm and tempest of fiery controversy. This
30 influence, though slow, is sure. The doctrines and miracles of our
31 Saviour have required nearly two thousand years to convert but a small
32 portion of the human race, and even among Christian nations what gross
33 errors still exist! While we see the course of the final abolition of human
34 slavery is still onward, and give it the aid of our prayers, let us leave the
35 progress as well as the results in the hands of Him who, chooses to work
36 by slow influences, and with whom a thousand years are but as a single
37 day.

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39 Although the abolitionist must know this, and must know that he has
40 neither the right not the power of operating, except by moral means; that
41 to benefit the slave he must not excite angry feelings in the master; that,
42 although he may not approve the mode by which Providence
43 accomplishes its purpose, the results will be the same; and that the
44 reason he gives for interference in matters he has no concern with, holds
45 good for every kind of interference with our neighbor, -still, I fear he
46 will persevere in his evil course. . . . Is it not strange that the descendants
47 of those Pilgrim Fathers who crossed the Atlantic to preserve their own
48 freedom have always proved the most intolerant of the spiritual liberty
49 of others?
50

slave
elaborate
God
elimination

Teacher's Guide

Name of Text: Letter from Robert E. Lee to his wife, Mary Lee on December 27, 1856 in response to President Pierce's State of the Union Speech on December 2, 1856.

Question Composers: Vallarie Larson, Judy Spencer

Standards:

H.2.18 Describe the institutionalization of slavery in America, the resistance of the enslaved, & the ongoing struggle between proponents and the opponents of slavery

CCSS ELA-Literacy. RH 6-8.1 Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources

RH 6-8.2 Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions

WH 6-8.2a Introduce a topic clearly, previewing what is to follow; organize ideas, concepts and information into broader categories as appropriate to achieving purpose

Questions in Finalized Order	<p>What is the point of this question? Why did you write it. Is there an overarching understanding you are trying to reach with students?</p> <p>Include all answers (words, phrases, sentences with line numbers)</p>
<p>Who is the author of this letter? When was the letter written? What is the topic of this letter?</p>	<p>Answers: Line 1-8- Colonel Robert E. Lee, 1856 and topic is slavery</p>
<p>To whom is Lee referring to as, “certain people at the North”, in Line10</p>	<p>Answers: Line 32-abolitionists</p> <p>Rationale: This question makes it clear whom Lee is referring to and is important to understanding the entire document.</p>
<p>What are Lee’s feelings about slavery and the treatment of black people?</p>	<p>Answers: Line 18-“slavery as an institution is a moral and political evil: Line 22- “The blacks are immeasurable better off here than in Africa, morally, physically and socially.” Line 23, “The painful discipline they are undergoing is necessary for their further instruction as a race, and will prepare them, I hope, for better things.”</p> <p>Rationale: This question suggests Lee’s views about the black people in America, that even though he didn’t think slavery was alright, he thought that the black people were better off in America than in Africa.</p>
<p>In Lines 20-22, Lee states, “While my feelings are strongly enlisted on behalf of the latter, my sympathies are more deeply engaged for the former.” What does Lee mean by <i>latter</i>? What does he mean by <i>former</i>? What would this expression suggest?</p>	<p>Answer: Line 21- Former is the white people Line 22-Latter is the black people (colored race)</p> <p>This suggests that Lee thinks that the black people are better off here in America, that slavery has it’s disadvantages but they are still better off here than Africa</p> <p>Rationale: This question helps with the understanding of former/latter, but also helps with the understanding of Lee’s position in regard to slavery and the treatment of black people.</p>

Questions in Finalized Order	<p>What is the point of this question? Why did you write it. Is there an overarching understanding you are trying to reach with students?</p> <p>Include all answers (words, phrases, sentences with line numbers)</p>
<p>What does Lee say will be the result of the abolitionist's efforts to end slavery?</p>	<p>Answer: Line 16, "civil and servile" war Line 40, "angry feelings of master"</p> <p>Rationale: This question suggests that Lee believes that many of the problems that America is facing are due to the abolitionist's actions.</p>
<p>How does the last sentence, "Is it not strange that the descendants of those Pilgrim Fathers who crossed the Atlantic to preserve their own freedom have always proved the most intolerant of the spiritual liberty of others?" Relate to Lee's statements about abolitionists?</p>	<p>Answer: Line 10-11, "certain people at the North to interfere with and change the domestic institutions of the South..." Line 13, "these people must be aware that their object is both unlawful and foreign to them and to their duty..." Line 38, "Although the abolitionist must know this, must know that he has neither the right not the power of operating"</p> <p>Rationale: This question makes it clear that the abolitionist should not interfere with the process of Providence</p>
<p>How does the "Note to the Reader", provide an additional insight to Lee's views of slavery and abolition?</p>	<p>Answer: Line 6-8: Lee resigned from the U.S. Army and became the commanding General of the Confederate Army, which supported the institution of slavery. Line 32-33: Lee believes the final abolition of slavery isgoing onward...but should be by slow influences.</p> <p>Rationale: This question clarifies that Robert E. Lee supports the institution of slavery by joining the Confederate Army. However, Lee believes slavery should be abolished but at a slow progression and in the hands of God.</p>

Writing Prompt:

In your first paragraph use 3 pieces of evidence answering the question, why Lee doesn't support slavery.

In your second paragraph discuss 2-3 reasons why Lee doesn't support the actions of the abolitionists using contextual evidence.

Checklist identifying key points to identify in order to measure student success or difficulty with this writing assignment and reading.

- ✓ In paragraph 1 evidence can include any of the following:
 - Line 18, "...slavery as an institution is a moral and political evil"
 - Line 19, "It is idle to expatiate on its disadvantages"
 - Line 20, "I think it is a greater evil to the white than to the colored race"

- ✓ In paragraph 2 evidence can include any of the following:
 - Line 11, "...systematic and progressive efforts of certain people at the North to interfere with and change the domestic institutions of the South"
 - Line 13, "The consequences of their plans are truthfully and faithfully expressed."
 - Line 14, "These people must be aware that their object is both unlawful and foreign to them and to their duty, and that this institution, for which they are irresponsible and non-accountable, can only be changed by them through the agency of civil and servile war."
 - Line 41, "...must know that he has neither the right nor the power of operating, except by moral means; that to benefit the slave he n=must not excite angry feelings in the master."
 - Line 44, "...and that the reason he gives for interference in matters he has no concern with, hold good for every kind of interference with our neighbor, still, I fear he will preserver in his evil course"