

# The Liberty of the Whole Earth

## General

### Grade Level

High School

### Author Info

Matthew Martin

[smartin@k12albemarle.org](mailto:smartin@k12albemarle.org)

Western Albemarle High school

5941 Rockfish Gap Turnpike

Crozet, VA 22932

### Type of Lesson

Document Analysis

### Duration

Two 45 minute periods; adjustable depending on the time constraints of the teacher

## Objectives

### Overview

In August of 1789, Thomas Jefferson witnessed extraordinary events that began to shake the foundations of the French government. Commenting on these remarkable changes, including the concession by Louis XVI to demands for sharing power with other groups and to conceding the establishment of fundamental rights for all French citizens, Jefferson wrote to a friend, Count Diodati, and offered this prognosis, "I have so much confidence in the good sense of man, and his qualifications for self-government, that I am never afraid of the issue where reason is left free to exert her force; and I will agree to be stoned as a false prophet if all does not end well in this country. Nor will it end with this country. Here is but the first chapter of the history of European liberty." What strikes the modern reader of these sentiments today is not just Jefferson's naively sanguine prediction about the course of the French Revolution, but also his confidence in the universality of America's own revolutionary

experience. Surely, he believed, France was the next chapter after America in the steady and inevitable progress of human liberty around the globe. While most of Jefferson's contemporaries agreed with him that the lessons of the American Revolution were universally applicable, Americans came to bitterly disagree about the extent to which they applied to events in France over the next few years. The advent of the first successful slave revolt in Saint-Domingue in 1791, strongly influenced by French revolutionary ideas and not far from America's shores, forced Americans to confront the extent of their commitment to their revolutionary ideology.

This lesson asks students to evaluate the extent of Thomas Jefferson's commitment to the ideals he expressed in the Declaration of Independence, "the all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights," and "That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government." Using the Jefferson's words and those of his contemporaries, students will be able to decide how relevant Jefferson and his contemporaries believed the American Revolution was to similar aspirations in other people, how far they were willing to commit themselves to spread those ideals on a world-wide scale.

## **Prior Knowledge**

This lesson will work best if students have some understanding of the principles of the American Revolution, the political events of the 1790s, and Jefferson's first term as president.

## **State Standards**

### **Virginia Standards of Learning Connections:**

**VUS.1** The student will demonstrate skills for historical and geographical analysis and responsible citizenship, including the ability to

- a) identify, analyze, and interpret primary and secondary source documents, records, and data, including artifacts, diaries, letters, photographs, journals, newspapers, historical accounts, and art, to increase understanding of events and life in the United States;
- b) evaluate the authenticity, authority, and credibility of sources;
- c) formulate historical questions and defend findings, based on inquiry and interpretation;
- d) develop perspectives of time and place, including the construction of maps and various timelines of events, periods, and personalities in American history;
- e) communicate findings orally and in analytical essays or comprehensive papers;
- f) develop skills in discussion, debate, and persuasive writing with respect to enduring issues and determine how divergent viewpoints have been addressed and reconciled;

**VUS.6** The student will demonstrate knowledge of the major events from the last decade of the eighteenth century through the first half of the nineteenth century by

a) explaining the principles and issues that prompted Thomas Jefferson to organize the first opposition political party;

### **Expanded Scope and Sequence Content:**

- Summarize the different views of economic and foreign policy issues that led to the development of the first American political parties.
- Controversy over the Federalists' support for the Bank of the United States, the Jay Treaty, and the undeclared war on France contributed to the emergence of an organized opposition party, the Democratic-Republicans, led by Thomas Jefferson and James Madison.
- The presidential election of 1800, won by Thomas Jefferson, was the first American presidential election in which power was peacefully transferred from one political party to another.

### **Objectives/Learning Outcomes**

- Articulate Jefferson's evolving views of the French Revolution, especially in terms of its meaning for America's role in the world.
- Articulate Jefferson's views of the revolution in Saint-Domingue over time (up through the establishment of the Republic of Haiti in 1804), and compare Jefferson's attitudes and actions toward both revolutions.
- Compare Jefferson's application of his belief in the rights of man to both the French and Haitian revolutions.
- Identify the specific steps Jefferson took in support of his views of the French and Haitian Revolutions.
- Discuss how these revolutions shaped and were shaped by the domestic political issues of the 1790s and early 1800s.

### **Essential Questions**

**Guiding Question:** How did Jefferson interpret the revolutions of the late 18th and early 19th French and Haitian revolutions, and how did it affect his views of the rights of man and the right to revolution? On balance, was Jefferson a supporter of other people around the globe in their struggle for liberty and equal rights?

# Procedures

## 1. Preparing for the activity:

Print copies (or provide links) for students of the documents and analysis questions assigned for homework and class discussion (listed below, included in the four reading text documents).

### Analyzing primary sources:

Some students might benefit from more structure in analyzing the documents. Two useful websites include a guide for using primary sources by the Library of Congress (loc.gov) at [The Learning Page](#) and the [Digital Classroom](#) of the National Archives (archives.gov), which features a set of [Document Analysis Worksheets](#).

## 2. Homework: about 1 hour

### On the day before the activity:

Divide the class into four groups, and assign for homework one of the reading sets (listed below) to each group. Have the students read the documents for their reading set and complete the questions that follow them. **Note:** Alternatively, the teacher could shorten this assignment by teaching only one revolution and distribute those documents and questions among four groups, or select only the documents in each set that suit the teacher's needs (and those corresponding questions).

On Classroom.Monticello.Org:

1. Here is a link to a [background essay](#) titled "Jefferson and the French and Haitian Revolutions" that provides historical context for these documents.

2. Students may also find this [timeline](#) titled "French and Haitian Revolutions Timeline" useful for understanding the chronology of events as they analyze their documents.

### Document Reading Sets:

[Reading Set A: Jefferson and the French Revolution, 1789-1792](#)

[Reading Set B: Jefferson and the French Revolution, 1793-1796](#)

[Reading Set C: Jefferson and the Rebellion in Saint-Domingue, 1791-1797](#)

[Reading Set D: Jefferson and the Rebellion in Saint-Domingue/Haiti 1799-1806](#)

## 3. 45 minutes

### **On the First Day of the Activity:**

1. Divide the students into four groups based on the document reading set they completed for homework (larger classes could sub-divide the groups into pairs or groups of three). Students should spend about 20 minutes discussing their responses to the questions which preceded the “Summative Questions” for their document set. Have each student write their responses supported by specific supporting evidence from the documents. Students will need access to either a hard copy or the online version of their document set to complete this discussion.

2. Sort the students into new groups by revolution, in which each group has an equal number of students from both document sets which concern that revolution. Students should discuss their answers to the “Summative Questions” for both their document sets. Students should record the range of responses (they don’t have to reach group consensus) to these questions and once again support them with evidence from the documents.

4. *45 minutes*

### **On the Second Day of the Activity:**

1. Divide the class into groups which have an equal number of students who read each document set. Alternatively, this discussion could take place with the entire class without the following group activity.

Have the students discuss for 15 or 20 minutes the answer to this question:

***To what extent did Thomas Jefferson live up to his reputation as a champion of the rights of man and the fundamental right of all people to foment revolution to achieve those rights? What specific evidence of Jefferson’s attitudes and actions supports your position?***

Teachers may help students arrive at their conclusions by asking them to divide a piece of paper in half and listing evidence for both the “he was” and “he wasn’t” positions first.

2. Have each group offer their analysis to the class, followed by a general discussion of the question by the entire class.

5. *20 (or more) minutes*

### **Extending the Lesson:**

Teachers could extend the lesson by asking students to apply the lessons they drew from Jefferson’s relative support (or lack thereof) for these revolutions with the question of what position the United States should take today regarding such revolutions. Should the United States take an active role in supporting popular revolution around the world to achieve democracy and human rights, even if like both the French and Haitian Revolutions, that might entail extensive destruction of property and human life? How might Jefferson have urged the United States to respond to

revolutions such as those unfolding as part of the Arab Spring uprisings?

Or, the teacher could give students a copy of President Obama's May 19, 2011 "Middle East and North Africa" [speech](#) (whitehouse.gov) about US policy regarding the Arab Spring uprisings, and ask students if they agree or disagree with it. What would Jefferson have reacted to Obama's speech?

## Assessment

**Informal Writing Assessment:** After completing these lessons, the students should be able to answer the following questions in brief (1 or 2 paragraphs) essays.

1. To what extent did Thomas Jefferson's views of the French Revolution change over time, and what might account for those changes?
2. Identify the concrete actions that Jefferson took regarding both revolutions in chronological order.
3. Compare and contrast Thomas Jefferson's responses to the French and Haitian Revolutions. How would you explain the differences? To what extent does he condone violence in the pursuit of human freedom?
4. In what ways did Jefferson's attitudes about these two revolutions shape his view of American political issues (and vice versa)?

**Oral Assessment:** The students could be divided into teams of 2 to 4 students and assigned to participate one of the following debates:

1. Resolved: With regard to his support for the French Revolution, Thomas Jefferson was a champion of the rights of man and the right of revolution.
2. Resolved: With regard to his support for the revolution in Saint-Domingue, Thomas Jefferson was a champion of the rights of man and the right of revolution.

Teams would be assigned an "Affirmative" or "Negative" position in the debate, and given time to construct their arguments based on the documentary (and any other evidence) that supports their position. The teacher could assign grades based on thoroughness of preparation, depth of documentary evidence, and persuasiveness of arguments.

Here is a [link](#) to a guide to particulars about debating and debate format.

**Formal Writing Assessment:**

**DBQ Essay #1:** Assign the following essay as a document-based question. Given the quantity of evidence, this essay would work best if the students had up to a week to complete it. Alternatively,

students could be given the prompt and access to the documents in advance, and asked to write their answer in class in a timed format.

**Directions:** The following question requires you to construct a coherent essay that integrates your interpretation of the documents and your knowledge of the period referred to in the question. In constructing your essay, select any 8 to 10 of the documents in any of the four document sets. High scores will be earned only by essays that both cite key pieces of evidence from the documents and draw on outside knowledge of the period.

1. “With regard to his responses to the French and Haitian Revolutions, Thomas Jefferson lived up to his reputation of supporting the rights of man and his right to revolution.” Assess the validity of this statement, restricting your answer to the period 1789-1806.

**DBQ Essay #2:** After completing the discussion porting of the lessons, students could be paired and asked to use the documents to create their own document-based question. Students would create their own writing prompt and select from the document sets any 8 to 10 documents that they think would work to accompany their writing prompt. Students would then present their question and their rationale for the documents they chose. Additionally, on an assigned day, students could be asked to write in a timed essay an answer to their question.

## **Accommodations – Advanced Learners**

This lesson can be taught as is, or can be modified to meet the needs and abilities of a teacher's students. Specific suggestions on how to do so are embedded in the lesson procedures, as are links to websites which can help students analyze primary sources.