

GABRIEL'S REBELLION, AUGUST, 1800

Document Set #2:

1800 September 15 (Governor James Monroe to Jefferson)

We have had much trouble with the negroes here. The plan of an insurrection has been clearly proved, & appears to have been of considerable extent. 10 have been condemned & executed, and there are at least twenty perhaps 40 more to be tried, of whose guilt no doubt is entertained. It is unquestionably the most serious and formidable conspiracy we have ever known of the kind: tho' indeed to call it so is to give no idea of the thing itself. While it was possible to keep it secret, wh.[which] it was till we saw the extent of it, we did so. But when it became indispensably necessary to resort to strong measures with a view to protect the town, the publick arms, the Treasury and the Jail, wh. [which] were all threatened, the opposit course was in part tak[en.] We then made a display of our force and measures of defence with a view to intimidate those people. Where to arrest the hand of the Executioner, is a question of great importance. It is hardly to be presumed, a rebel who avows it was his intention to assassinate his master &ca if pardoned will ever become a useful servant. and we have no power to transport him abroad—Nor is it less difficult to say whether mercy or severity is the better policy in this case, tho' where there is cause for doubt it is best to incline to the former council. I shall be happy to have yr. opinion on these points.

1800 September 20 (Jefferson to Governor James Monroe)

Where to stay hand of the executioner is an important question. those who have escaped from the immediate danger, must have feelings which would dispose them to extend the executions. even here, where every thing has been perfectly tranquil, but where a familiarity with slavery, and a possibility of danger from that quarter prepare the general mind for some severities, there is a strong sentiment that there has been hanging enough. the other states & the world at large will for ever condemn us if we indulge a principle of revenge, or go one step beyond absolute necessity.

1. Why do you think Governor Monroe wrote this letter to Jefferson?
2. Why do you think Monroe said that he tried to keep word of the slave conspiracy secret as long as he could, and why did he change his mind?
3. How does Jefferson advise Governor Monroe?
4. What seems to be Jefferson' reason for his advice? What does that suggest about what he thought about the motives of the slaves who rebelled? What does that suggest about what he thought about his (and America's) international reputation?