

Merciless savages or sublime orators?

What did Thomas Jefferson really think about the Indians?

(Documents A-C are images)

Document D

Extract from the Declaration of Independence, 1776

He has excited domestic insurrections amongst us, and has endeavored to bring on the inhabitants of our frontiers, the merciless Indian savages, whose known rule of warfare, is undistinguished destruction of all ages, sexes and conditions.

Read full original or transcription of Declaration [here](#).

Vocabulary

excited- caused
domestic – in our country
insurrections – rebellions

endeavored- tried
merciless- without mercy, cruel
undistinguished- without distinction; all

Document E

Extract from Thomas Jefferson to Jean Baptiste Ducoigne

June 1781

I have joined with you sincerely in smoking the pipe of peace... It is a good old custom handed down by your ancestors, and as such I respect and join in it with reverence. I hope we shall long continue to smoke in friendship together... We like you, are Americans, born in the same land, and having the same interests.

Source: Jefferson speech to Jean Baptiste Ducoigne, a Kaskaskia (Indian) leader. Jefferson made this speech shortly before ending his term as governor of Virginia. This was three years after General George Rogers Clark destroyed the old French settlement at Kaskaskia, killing many Indians and extending Virginia's borders into Illinois.

Full document [here](#)

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Document F

From *Notes on the State of Virginia*, 1784

The Indians, with no advantages of this kind, will often carve figures on their pipes not destitute of design and merit. They will crayon out an animal, a plant, or a country, so as to prove the existence of a germ in their minds which only wants cultivation. They astonish you with strokes of the most sublime oratory; such as prove their reason and sentiment strong, their imagination glowing and elevated.

Vocabulary

destitute- without

germ- seed (as in *germinate*)

sublime- wonderful, exceptional

oratory- speech; speaking ability

Source: This is one of two published sources written by Jefferson, this being the only full/length book. It was written in 1784 to inform the French government about the American states, so as to encourage France to support the cause of American independence.

Full text of this section [here](#).

Document G

Extract from Thomas Jefferson to Marquis de Chastellux

Paris June 7. 1785.

I believe the Indian then to be in body & mind equal to the whiteman. I have supposed the black man, in his present state, might not be so. but it would be hazardous to affirm that, equally cultivated for a few generations, he would not become so.

Source: Jefferson wrote this letter to Chastellux while serving as American representative in Paris. Jefferson and Chastellux met in America when Chastellux served as an important member of the French alliance during the Revolution. PrC (DLC). Published in PTJ, 8:184–86.

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Document H

Extract from Thomas Jefferson to James Madison

Paris Jan. 30. 1787.

[...] societies exist under three forms sufficiently distinguishable. 1. without government, as among our Indians. 2. under governments wherein the will of every one has a just influence, as is the case in England in a slight degree, and in our states in a great one. 3. under governments of force: as is the case in all other monarchies and in most of the other republics. to have an idea of the curse of existence under these last, they must be seen. it is a government of wolves over sheep. it is a problem, not clear in my mind, that the 1st. condition is not the best. but I believe it to be inconsistent with any great degree of population. the second state has a great deal of good in it. the mass of mankind under that enjoys a precious degree of liberty and happiness. it has it's evils too: the principal of which is the turbulence to which it is subject. but weigh this against the oppressions of monarchy, and it becomes nothing.

Vocabulary

wherein- where
just- fair, equal

turbulence- instability, chaos
oppressions- lack of freedom

Source: Jefferson wrote this letter to James Madison while serving as the American representative in Paris, to advise Madison on the formation of the new government as Madison prepared to draft the Constitution. Here Jefferson is describing the positive and negative aspects of different types of government. RC (DLC: Madison Papers). Published in PTJ, 11:92–7.

Full document [here](#).

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Document I

Extract from Thomas Jefferson's Instructions to Lewis and Clark, 1803

In all your intercourse [contact; dealings] with the natives, treat them in the most friendly & conciliatory manner which their own conduct will admit; allay all jealousies as to the object of your journey, satisfy them of its innocence, make them acquainted with the position, extent, character, peaceable & commercial dispositions of the U.S. of our wish to be neighborly, friendly & useful to them, & of our dispositions to a commercial intercourse with them; confer with them on the points most convenient as mutual emporiums, and the articles of most desireable interchange for them & us. If a few of their influential chiefs, within practicable distance, wish to visit us, arrange such a visit with them, and furnish them with authority to call on our officers, on their entering the U.S to have them conveyed to this place at the public expense. If any of them should wish to have some of their young people brought up with us, & taught such arts as may be useful to them, we will receive, instruct & take care of them. Such a mission, whether of influential chiefs or of young people, would give some security to your own party. Carry with you some matter of the kinexox; inform those of them with whom you may be, of it[s] efficacy as a preservative from the small-pox; & instruct & encourage them in the use of it. This may be especially done wherever you winter.

Vocabulary

conciliatory- peace-making

allay- detain; stop; calm

emporiums- stores, shops

commercial- money-making

dispositions- wishes, perspective

efficacy- usefulness

Source: This letter from Thomas Jefferson to explorers Meriwether Lewis and William Clark included detailed instructions to them to be carried out on their upcoming journey west.

Full document [here](#).

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Document J

Extract from Thomas Jefferson to John Adams

Monticello June 11. 1812.

Before the revolution they were in the habit of coming often, and in great numbers to the seat of our government, where I was very much with them. I knew much the great Outassete [i.e., Outacity], the warrior and orator [speaker] of the Cherokees. He was always the guest of my father, on his journeys to and from Williamsburg. I was in his camp when he made his great farewell oration to his people, the evening before his departure for England. The moon was in full splendor, and to her he seemed to address himself in his prayers for his own safety on the voyage, and that of his people during his absence. His sounding voice, distinct articulation, animated actions, and the solemn [serious] silence of his people at their several fires, filled me with awe and veneration [admiration], altho' I did not understand a word he uttered. That nation, consisting now of about 2000. warriors, and the Creeks of about 3000. are far advanced in civilisation. They have good Cabins, inclosed fields, large herds of cattle and hogs, spin and weave their own clothes of cotton, have smiths and other of the most necessary tradesmen, write and read, are on the increase in numbers, and a branch of the Cherokees is now instituting a regular representative government. Some other tribes were advancing in the same line. On those who have made any progress, English seductions will have no effect. But the backward will yeild, and be thrown further back. These will relapse into barbarism and misery, lose numbers by war and want, and we shall be obliged [forced] to drive them, with the beasts of the forest into the Stony mountains. They will be conquered however in Canada. The possession of that country secures our women and children for ever from the tomahawk and scalping knife, by removing those who excite them: and for this possession, orders I presume are issued by this time...

Source: This is one of the many letters written by Thomas Jefferson to John Adams in their retirement. (Note this version has been edited for more standard spelling and punctuation.) RC (MHi). PoC (DLC). Published in *PTJ:RS*, 5:122–5.

Full text [here](#).

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Guiding Questions

Name(s) _____

Documents A-C

1. What do these images show?
2. What do these images tell you about Jefferson, as their owner?
3. Who was the intended audience? (Who would see them?)
4. Based on these images, what did Jefferson think about the Indians? How do you know?

Document D

5. What year was this document written, and who was its audience?
6. What was the purpose of this document? How do you know?
7. Based on this document, what was Jefferson's opinion of the Indians? Explain your answer by citing specific evidence from the text.

Document E

8. What year was this document written, and who was its audience?
9. What was the purpose of this document? How do you know?
10. Based on this document, what was Jefferson's opinion of the Indians? Explain your answer by citing specific evidence from the text.

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Documents F and G

11. What year were these documents written, and who was their audience?

12. What was the purpose of these documents? How do you know?

13. Based on these documents, what was Jefferson's opinion of the Indians? Explain your answer by citing specific evidence from the text.

Document H

14. What year was this document written, and who was its audience?

15. What was the purpose of this document? How do you know?

16. Based on this document, what was Jefferson's opinion of the Indians? Explain your answer by citing specific evidence from the text.

Document I

17. What year was this document written, and who was its audience?

18. What was the purpose of this document? How do you know?

19. Based on this document, what was Jefferson's opinion of the Indians? Explain your answer by citing specific evidence from the text.

Document J

20. What year was this document written, and who was its audience?

21. What was the purpose of this document? How do you know?

22. Based on this document, what was Jefferson's opinion of the Indians? Explain your answer by citing specific evidence from the text.

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Synthesis: Based on all the sources you have read, what did Thomas Jefferson really think about the Indians? How does this reflect his Enlightenment ideals? How do you think this influenced his policies as governor, statesman, and president?

Use the space below to write a short but clear and coherent essay to answer the questions above. Be sure to cite clear evidence from the text in your answer.