

# *“Through Jefferson’s Eyes”*

*Indian Perception Before & After the Louisiana Purchase*

## **DOCUMENT-BASED QUESTION**

**Directions:** The task below is based on documents (1-8). This task is designed to test your ability to work with historical documents. Look at each document and answer the question or questions after each document. Use your answers to the questions to help you write your essay.

### **Historical Background:**

There are many images of Thomas Jefferson that could be presented: war-time governor of Virginia, author of the Declaration of Independence, architect, innovator, slaveholder, planter, Secretary of State, US president, or even foodie. Just as people use these images to create their own imagination of Jefferson, he used images of people and groups of people to inform his own imaginations. As a Virginian, Indians figured greatly into Jefferson’s life as both a child and young man and later as governor of Virginia and President of the United States. Jefferson purchased the Louisiana Territory from France in 1803 and commissioned Meriwether Lewis and William Clark to assemble a crew and explore the newly-purchased acreage. Jefferson, an avid collector and curious mind, reveled in objects sent to him from the expedition. Many of these objects took a place of honor at his home, Monticello, in what he called the “Indian Hall”. Just what did Jefferson think about these Indians whose culture he displayed? Did those opinions change throughout his lifetime?

### **Task:**

For Part A read **each** document carefully and answer the question or questions after each document. Then read the directions for part B and write your essay.

For Part B use your answers to the questions in Part A, the information from your documents, and your knowledge of the subject and time period to write a well-organized essay in your own words. Write an essay in which you:

**Describe Thomas Jefferson’s view of the Indians of North America.**

**Part A**  
**Short-Answer Questions**

*Directions:* Read each document and answer the question or questions that follow each document in the space provided.

**Document 1: Letter from Jefferson to the Lieutenant of Berkeley County**

“All experience has proved that you cannot be defended from the Savages but by carrying the War home to themselves and striking decisive Blows. ... We have been too long [text loss] Humanity from enforcing [sic] good behavior by I were [text loss] Savages are to be Curbed by fear only: ...”

Source: Thomas Jefferson to the Lieutenant of Berkeley County, April 19, 1780, The Gilder Lehrman Collection, The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, New York. Accessed July 25, 2016. <https://www.gilderlehrman.org/collections/ebc966af-5e95-4d32-a92d-575430918791>.

1. What is significant about the date of this source? What is Jefferson’s position in 1780?

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2. What terms does Jefferson use that might indicate his view of American Indians.

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**Document 2: Letter from Jefferson to Henry Knox**

“...the treaty is a law made by two parties, & not revocable by one of them either acting alone or in conjunction with a third party. ...the Cherokees were entitled to the sole occupation of the lands within the limits guaranteed to them. ...it would seem very desireable [sic] to draw all the claims of preemption within a certain limit, by commuting for those out it, and then to purchase of the Cherokees the right of occupation.”

Source: Thomas Jefferson to Henry Knox, August 26, 1790, The Gilder Lehrman Collection, The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, New York. Accessed July 25, 2016. <https://www.gilderlehrman.org/collections/1a17f6a2-c42a-4246-bc50-945595314643>.

1. What is the key issue being disputed in this document?

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2. Where does Jefferson stand regarding this divisive issue?

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**Document 3: Excerpt from Jefferson’s 1787 book, *Notes on the State of Virginia***

“Of their [Indians] bravery and address in war we have multiplied proofs, because we have been the subjects on which they were exercised. Of their eminence in oratory we have fewer examples, because it is displayed chiefly in their own councils. ...I may challenge the whole orations of Demosthenes and Cicero, and of any more eminent orator, if Europe has furnished more eminent, to produce a single passage, superior to the speech of Logan, a Mingo chief, to Lord Dunmore, when governor of this state.”

Source: Jefferson, Thomas. "Notes on the State of Virginia." Avalon Project. Accessed July 27, 2016. [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th\\_century/jeffvir.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/jeffvir.asp).

1. What evidence does Jefferson provide to support his claim of Indian bravery?

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2. What other topic does Jefferson introduce for Indian/European comparison?

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**Document 4: Letter from Jefferson to David Humphreys**

“The Indians North of the Ohio have hitherto continued their little depredations, but we are in daily expectation of hearing the success of a first excursion to their towns by a party of 7. or 800 mounted infantry under Genl. [Winfield] Scott. Two or three similar expeditions will follow successively under other officers, while a principal one is preparing to take place at a later season.”

Source: Thomas Jefferson to David Humphreys, June 23, 1791, The Gilder Lehrman Collection, The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, New York. Accessed July 25, 2016. <http://www.gilderlehrman.org/collections/5c818b46-d08a-4eee-9a6c-553443410730>.

1. What evidence, if any, does Jefferson provide of the Indian’s “little depredations”?

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## Document 5: Letter from Jefferson to Governor William Henry Harrison

“...from the Secretary of War you receive from time to time information and instructions as to our Indian affairs, these communications begin of the public records are restrained...but this letter being unofficial, & private, I may with safety give you a more extensive view of our policy respecting the Indians...our system is to live in perpetual peace with the Indians, to cultivate an affectionate attachment from them...we wish to avow them to agriculture, to spinning & weaving...we shall push our trading houses, and be glad to see the good & influential individuals among them now in debt, because we observe that when these debts get beyond what the individuals can pay, they become willing to lop them off by a cession of lands. ...they will in time either incorporate with us as citizens of the U.S. or remove beyond the Mississippi...they must see we have only to shut our hand to crush them & that all our liberalities to them proceed from motives of pure humanity only.”

Source: Thomas Jefferson to William H. Harrison, February 2, 1803, The Gilder Lehrman Collection, The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, New York. Accessed July 25, 2016. <http://www.gilderlehrman.org/collections/ed1b417c-81cc-4c61-8dfc-952041352225>.

1. How is this letter from Jefferson to Harrison different from those sent to Harrison from the Secretary of War?

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2. According to this excerpt, what is Jefferson’s Indian policy?

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## Document 6: Letter from Jefferson to Benjamin Hawkins

“While they [Indians] are learning to do better on less land, our increasing numbers will be calling for more land, and thus a coincidence of interests will be produced between those who have lands to spare, and want other necessaries, and those who have such necessaries to spare, and want lands. ...the ultimate point of rest & happiness for them is to let our settlements and theirs meet and blend together...and become one people.”

Source: Thomas Jefferson to Benjamin Hawkins, February 18, 1803, Manuscript/Mixed Material. Retrieved from the Library of Congress. Accessed July 27, 2016. <https://www.loc.gov/item/mtjbib012159/>.

1. How does Jefferson intend to cause “our settlements and theirs” to “become one people”?

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## Document 7: Letter from Jefferson to Marquis de Chastellux

“...I am safe in affirming that the proofs of genius given by the Indians of N. America, place them on a level with Whites in the same uncultivated state. As to their bodily strength, their manners rendering it disgraceful to labour, those muscles employed in labour will be weaker with them than with the European labourer...I beleive [sic] the Indian then to be in body and mind equal to the whiteman. I have supposed the blackman, in his present state, might not be so.”

Source: Boyd, Julian P., ed. *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*. Vol. 8. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1953.

1. According to this document, what is Jefferson’s position on the American Indian?

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2. What do you think Jefferson means by an “uncultivated state”?

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## Document 8: Letter from Jefferson to John Adams

“[The Cherokee Indians] have good Cabins, inclosed [sic] fields, large herds of cattle & hogs, spin & weave their own clothes of cotton, have smiths & other of the most necessary tradesmen, write & read, are on the increase in numbers, & a branch of the Cherokees is now instituting a regular representative government. [S]ome 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 [sic], & be thrown further back. [T]hese will relapse into barbarism & misery, lose numbers by war & want, and we shall be obliged to drive them, with the beasts of the forest into the Stony mountains.”

Source: Jefferson, Thomas. "Thomas Jefferson to John Adams." Thomas Jefferson to John Adams. June 11, 1812. Accessed July 25, 2016. <https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/jefferson/178.html>.

1. Jefferson implies the Cherokee are “advancing”. What evidence does he provide of advancement?

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2. Based on this excerpt, how similar are the Cherokees and white settlers?

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## **Part B**

### **Essay**

*Directions:* In your own words, write a well-organized essay that includes an introduction, several paragraphs, and a conclusion. Use the documents, the answer to the questions in Part A, and your knowledge of subject and time period.

#### **Task:**

Using the information from your documents, and your knowledge of the subject and time period to write a well-organized essay in your own words. Write an essay in which you:

*Describe Thomas Jefferson's view of the Indians of North America.*

#### **Guidelines:**

##### **In your essay, remember to:**

- Use information from at least three documents
- Include historical details, examples, or reasons in developing your ideas
- Cite any information pulled from the documents
- Include an introduction, body, and conclusion