

Primary Source Packet on Race/Race Relations

Quote 1

“Deep rooted prejudices entertained by the whites; ten thousand recollections, by the blacks, of the injuries they have sustained; new provocations; the real distinctions which nature has made ... will divide us into parties, and produce convulsions which will probably never end but in the extermination of the one or the other race. To these objections, which are political, may be added others, which are physical and moral. The first difference which strikes us is that of colour. ... They have less hair on the face and body. They secrete less by the kidnies, and more by the glands of the skin, which gives them a very strong and disagreeable odour. This greater degree of transpiration renders them more tolerant of heat, and less so of cold, than the whites. Comparing them by their faculties of memory, reason, and imagination, it appears to me that in memory they are equal to the whites; in reason much inferior, as I think one could scarcely be found capable of tracing and comprehending the investigations of Euclid: and that in imagination they are dull, tasteless, and anomalous. The Indians, with no advantages ... 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. ... Misery is often the parent of the most affecting touches in poetry. ... We know that among the Romans, about the Augustan age especially, the condition of their slaves was much more deplorable than that of the blacks on the continent of America.”

<http://tjrs.monticello.org/letter/1314> Extract from Thomas Jefferson’s Notes on the State of Virginia

Quote 2

“no body wishes more than I do to see such proofs as you exhibit, that nature has given to our black brethren, talents equal to those of the other colours of men, & that the appearance of a want of them is owing merely to the degraded condition of their existence both in Africa & America.”

<http://tjrs.monticello.org/letter/138> Letter to Benjamin Banneker, Philadelphia Aug. 30. 1791.

Quote 3

“Could we procure lands beyond the limits of the US. to form a receptacle for these people? on our Northern boundary, the country not occupied by British subjects, is the property of Indian nations, whose title would be to be¹ extinguished, with the consent of Great Britain; & the new settlers would be British subjects. it is hardly to be believed that either Great Britain or the Indian proprietors have so disinterested a regard for us as to be willing to relieve us by recieving such a colony themselves; and as much to be doubted whether that race of men could long exist in so rigorous a climate. on our Western & Southern frontiers, Spain holds an immense country; the occupancy of which however is in the Indian nations; except a few insulated spots possessed by Spanish subjects. it is very questionable indeed Whether the Indians would sell? whether Spain would be willing to recieve these people? and nearly certain that she would not alienate the

sovereignty. the same question to ourselves would recur here also, as did in the first case: should we be willing to have such a colony in contact with us? however our present interests may restrain us within our own limits, it is impossible not to look forward to distant times, when our rapid multiplication will expand itself beyond those limits, & cover the whole Northern, if not the Southern continent with a people speaking the same language, governed in similar forms, & by similar laws: nor can we contemplate, with satisfaction, either blot or mixture on that surface. Spain, France, and Portugal hold possessions on the Southern continent, as to which I am not well enough informed to say how far they might meet our views. but either there, or in the Northern continent, should the constituted authorities of Virginia fix their attention, of preference, I will have the dispositions of those powers sounded in the first instance.

The West Indies offer a more probable & practicable retreat for them. inhabited already by a people of their own race & colour; climates congenial with their natural constitution; insulated from the other descriptions of men; Nature seems to have formed these islands to become the receptacle of the blacks transplanted into this hemisphere. whether we could obtain from the European sovereigns of those islands leave to send thither the persons under contemplation, I cannot say: but I think it more probable than the former propositions, because of their being already inhabited more or less by the same race. the most promising portion of them is the island of S^t Domingo, where the blacks are established into a sovereignty de facto, & have organised themselves under regular laws & government. I should conjecture that their present ruler might be willing, on many considerations, to receive even that description which would be exiled for acts deemed criminal by us, but meritorious perhaps by him. the possibility that these exiles might stimulate & conduct vindictive or predatory descents on our coasts, & facilitate concert with their brethren remaining here, looks to a state of things between that island & us not probable on a contemplation of our relative strength, and of the disproportion daily growing: and it is over-weighed by the humanity of the measures proposed, & the advantages of disembarassing ourselves of such dangerous characters. Africa would offer a last & undoubted resort, if all others more desirable should fail us.”

<http://tjrs.monticello.org/letter/1743> Letter to James Monroe, Nov. 24. 1801.