

How Did Lafayette Influence George Washington's Views on Slavery?

LESSON OVERVIEW			
GRADE LEVEL(S)	Middle/High School	TIMEFRAME	Two- 90 minute class periods
PURPOSE OF LESSON			
<p>In this inquiry, students will examine the Marquis de Lafayette's views on slavery and his influence on George Washington. They will source, contextualize, and corroborate primary source documents between Lafayette and other founders to answer the question: How did Lafayette influence George Washington's views on slavery?</p>			
OBJECTIVES			
<p>Students will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Close read sources to identify Lafayette's views and actions concerning slavery ● Source, contextualize, and corroborate sources about George Washington's views and actions concerning slavery ● Establish a claim, evidence, and reasoning answering the question "How did Lafayette influence George Washington's views on slavery?" 			
RESOURCES		VOCABULARY	
<p>Teacher Resource #1, The First Meeting of Washington and Lafayette</p> <p>Student Resource #1, Lafayette to Washington, February 5, 1783</p> <p>Student Resource #2, Washington to Lafayette, April 5, 1783</p> <p>Student Resource #3, The Cayenne Experiments</p> <p>Student Resource #4, Washington's Views of Slavery</p> <p>Student Resource #5, Source Analysis</p> <p>Student Resource #6, Claim Evidence Reasoning (C.E.R) Organizer</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● emancipation ● gradual emancipation 	
ASSESSMENT			
<p>Students will complete a CER (Claim-Evidence-Reasoning) Organizer answering "How did Lafayette influence George Washington's views on slavery?"</p>			

LESSON PROCEDURE

INQUIRY QUESTION:

How did Lafayette influence George Washington's views on slavery?

INQUIRY STEPS

Day 1:

1. Display and distribute Source #1 "Lafayette to Washington, February 5, 1783."
2. Have students individually analyze the document and answer the following sourcing questions.
 - When was this document created?
 - What type of document is it?
 - Who created this document?
 - What was the purpose of this document?
 - What does the document say?
3. After students have had time to grapple with the document independently and with a small group, discuss.
4. After discussing the sourcing questions, display Teacher Source #1 and ask the following questions:
 - Who was Lafayette?
 - What was the relationship between Lafayette and Washington?

Note to teacher: If students are not familiar with the relationship between the two men, the essay "George Washington and Lafayette" found at <https://www.mountvernon.org/library/digitalhistory/digital-encyclopedia/article/george-washington-and-the-marquis-de-lafayette/> will be helpful background.

5. Display and distribute Student Resource #2, "George Washington to Lafayette, Headquarters Newburgh, April 5, 1783". Have student pairs/groups analyze Washington's response using the following questions:
 - When was this document created?
 - What type of document is it?
 - Who created this document?
 - What was the purpose of this document?
 - What does the document say?
 - Why do you think Washington deferred discussing details about Lafayette's "scheme"?
6. After students have had time to grapple with the document in their small group, discuss as a whole group.

7. Tell students that Lafayette enacted his “wild scheme.” Distribute Student Resource #3, “The Cayenne Experiments.” Students should read the sources and answer the Close Reading Questions.
8. Debrief reading and questions.

Day 2:

1. Review the previous day’s activities and discussions about Lafayette’s views and actions surrounding slavery.
2. Tell students that they will be analyzing sources in order to answer the question “How did Lafayette influence George Washington’s views on slavery?”
3. Distribute Student Resource #4, Washington’s Views of Slavery and Student Resource #5, Source Analysis. Have students read and analyze the sources and complete the graphic organizer. Teacher note: This can be done as individuals and then debriefed in small groups or completed in small groups.
4. Debrief student analysis.

Assessment:

Students should complete Student Resource #6, Claim Evidence Reasoning (C.E.R) Organizer. They will answer the inquiry question: **How did Lafayette influence George Washington’s views on slavery?** by identifying a claim, three pieces of evidence, and reasoning for each of those pieces of evidence.

Extension:

Lafayette also interacted with other Founders on the issue of slavery. Examine his correspondence with Thomas Jefferson which can be found at <https://sites.lafayette.edu/slavery/a-lifetime-passion/jefferson-letters/>
Ask: How did Lafayette influence Jefferson’s views of slavery?

The First Meeting of Washington and Lafayette



Image Information: Currier & Ives. The first meeting of Washington and Lafayette: Philadelphia, August 3rd., ca. 1876. New York: Published by Currier & Ives. Photograph.
<https://www.loc.gov/item/2001699150/>.

Lafayette to Washington, February 5, 1783

Now, my dear General, that you are going to enjoy some ease and quiet, permit me to propose a plan to you which might become greatly beneficial to the Black Part of Mankind. Let us unite in purchasing a small estate where we may try the experiment to free the Negroes, and use them only as tenants—such an example as yours might render it a general practice, and if we succeed in America, I will cheerfully devote a part of my time to render the method fashionable in the West Indies. If it be a wild scheme, I had rather be mad that way, than to be thought wise on the other tack.

Source Information: Excerpt of a letter “To George Washington from Marie-Joseph-Paul-Yves-Roch-Gilbert du Motier, Marquis de Lafayette, 5 February 1783”

<https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/99-01-02-10575>

Washington to Lafayette, April 5, 1783

The scheme, my dear Marquis, which you propose as a precedent, to encourage the emancipation of the black people of the Country from that state of Bondage in which, they are held, is a striking evidence of the benevolence of your Heart. I shall be happy to join you in so laudable a work; but will defer going into a detail of the business, till I have the pleasure of seeing you.

Source Information: Excerpt of a letter From George Washington to Marie-Joseph-Paul-Yves-Roch-Gilbert du Motier, Marquis de Lafayette, 5 April 1783
<https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/99-01-02-10575>

The Cayenne Experiments

Source A:

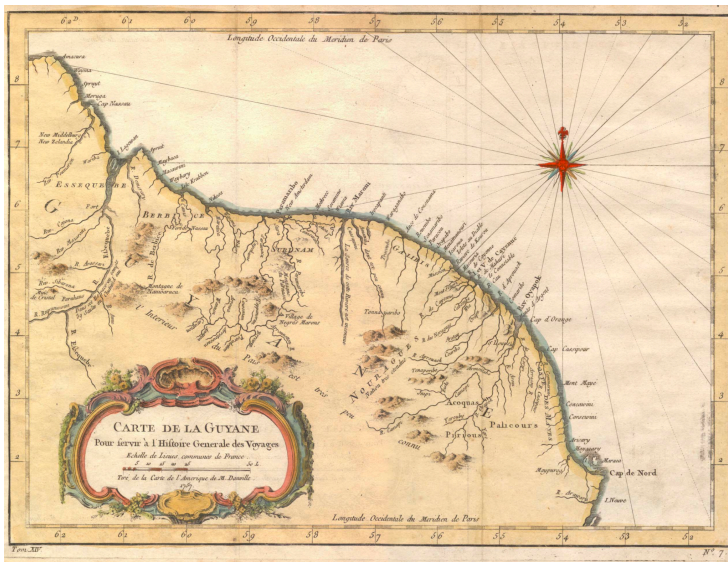
Lafayette to Washington, February 6, 1786

Another secret I entrust to you, my dear General, is that I have purchased for a hundred and twenty five thousand French livres a plantation in the Colony of Cayenne and am going to free my Negroes in order to make that experiment which you know is my hobby horse.

Source Information: Excerpt of a letter “To Washington from Marie-Joseph-Paul-Yves-Roch-Gilbert du Motier, Marquis de Lafayette, 6 February 1786”

<https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/04-03-02-0461>

Source B:



In 1785 Lafayette acquired land along the Oyapok River in the French colony of Cayenne (present day French Guiana) on the coast of South America. Here, on a plantation called “La Belle Gabrielle,” where clove and cinnamon trees flourished, Lafayette set up his experiment for the gradual emancipation of a group of nearly seventy slaves, which he had purchased with the property. The slaves were paid for their labor; the sale of any slave was expressly forbidden; schooling was provided;

and punishment for the blacks was no more severe than that for whites. Lafayette hoped to show that the birth rate would rise and infant mortality would decrease under these more favorable conditions, thus undercutting the need for the slave trade.

Source: <https://sites.lafayette.edu/slavery/the-cayenne-experiments/>

Source C:

As Lafayette's attentions were increasingly drawn to the unfolding revolutionary drama in France of 1789, the running of the Cayenne estates fell to his wife Adrienne. She relished the role and corresponded frequently with the estate managers as well as with the priests at a nearby seminary whom she asked to look after the religious welfare of the slaves. When Lafayette was imprisoned in 1792, his properties were confiscated and the Cayenne blacks were resold as slaves. However, Lafayette later took heart from the fact that when the French National Convention freed all slaves in 1794, Cayenne was the only French colony that did not experience great social upheaval.



Source:

<https://sites.lafayette.edu/slavery/the-cayenne-experiments/>

Close Reading Questions:

1. When did Lafayette enact his "wild scheme" of purchasing a plantation?
2. Where was the "La Belle Gabrielle" plantation located?
3. How was the enslaved population of the plantation treated? How was this different than other plantations?
4. What did Lafayette hope to prove with this plantation?
5. What was Adrienne Lafayette's role in the administration of the plantation?
6. What happened to "La Belle Gabrielle" and its enslaved labor as a result of the French Revolution?

Washington's Views of Slavery

Source A

George Washington to Robert Morris, April 12, 1786

I can only say that there is not a man living who wishes more sincerely than I do, to see a plan adopted for the abolition of it; but there is only one proper and effectual mode by which it can be accomplished, and that is by Legislative authority; and this, as far as my suffrage will go, shall never be wanting. But when slaves who are happy and contented with their present masters, are tampered with and seduced to leave them; when masters are taken unawares by these practices; when a conduct of this sort begets discontent on one side and resentment on the other... it introduces more evils than it can cure.

Source Information: "From George Washington to Robert Morris, 12 April 1786" *Founders Online*, National Archives
<https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/04-04-02-0019>

Source B

Washington to Lafayette, Mount Vernon, May 10, 1786

The benevolence of your heart my dear Marquis is so conspicuous upon all occasions, that I never wonder at any fresh proofs of it; but your late purchase of an Estate in the Colony of Cayenne with a view of emancipating the slaves on it, is a generous and noble proof of your humanity. Would to God a like spirit would diffuse itself generally into the minds of the people of this country, but I despair of seeing it ...

Source Information: "From George Washington to Lafayette, 10 May 1786," *Founders Online*, National Archives
<https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/04-04-02-0051#:~:text=Mount%20Vernon%2010th%20May%201786.to%20accept%20my%20grateful%20acknowledgments.>

Source C**Washington to John Francis Mercer, September 9, 1786**

...I never mean (unless some particular circumstances should compel me to it) to possess another slave by purchase; it being among my first wishes to see some plan adopted, by the legislature by which slavery in this Country may be abolished by slow, sure, & imperceptable degrees...

Source Information: "From George Washington to John Francis Mercer, 9 September 1786" *Founders Online*, National Archives

<https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/04-04-02-0232#GEWN-04-04-02-0232-fn-0002>

Source D***Reflections of George Washington***

The unfortunate condition of the persons, whose labour in part I employed, has been the only unavoidable subject of regret. To make the Adults among them as easy & as comfortable in their circumstances as their actual state of ignorance & improvidence would admit; & to lay a foundation to prepare the rising generation for a destiny different from that in which they were born; afforded some satisfaction to my mind, & could not I hoped be displeasing to the justice of the Creator.

Life of General Washington by David Humphreys published in 1789.

This biography of George Washington—the only one authorized by the general himself—was written by his close friend and military aide David Humphreys. It offers a rare, intimate glimpse of Washington's life, from his birth in 1732 until his assumption of the presidency in 1789.

Source D**Washington to Tobias Lear, May 6, 1794**

...I have no scruple to disclose to you, that my motives to these sales...are to reduce my income...that the remainder of my days may, thereby, be more tranquil and freer from cares;...for although, in the estimation of the world I possess a good, and clear estate, yet, so unproductive is it, that I am oftentimes ashamed to refuse aids which I cannot afford unless I was to sell part of it to answer the purpose...Besides these, I have another motive which makes me earnestly wish for the accomplishment of these things, it is indeed more powerful than all the rest, namely to liberate a certain species

of property which I possess, very repugnantly to my own feelings; but which imperious necessity compels; and until I can substitute some other expedient, by which expenses not in my power to avoid...can be defrayed....

Washington wrote an asterisk to reference this note, which was marked "(Private)" and written on a separate sheet of paper.

Source Information: "From George Washington to Tobias Lear, 6 May 1794,"
Founders Online, National Archives
<https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/05-16-02-0023#GEWN-05-16-02-0023-fn-0013>

Source E

Last Will and Testament of George Washington, July 9, 1799

I GEORGE WASHINGTON of Mount Vernon, a citizen of the United States, and lately President of the same, do make, ordain and declare this Instrument; which is written with my own hand and every page thereof subscribed with my name, to be my last Will & Testament, revoking all others.

Item Upon the decease of my wife, it is my Will and desire, that all the slaves which I hold in my own right, shall receive their freedom. To emancipate them during her life, would, tho' earnestly wished by me, be attended with such insuperable difficulties on account of their intermixture by Marriages with the Dower Negroes, as to excite the most painful sensations, if not disagreeable consequences from the latter, while both descriptions are in the occupancy or the same Proprietor; it not being in my power, under the tenure by which the Dower Negroes are held, to manumit them. And whereas among those who will receive freedom according to this devise, there may be some, who from old age or bodily infirmities, and others who on account of their infancy, that will be unable to support themselves; it is my Will and desire that all who come under the first and second description shall be comfortably clothed and fed by my heirs while they live; and that such of the latter description as have no parents living, or if living are unable, or unwilling to provide for them, shall be bound by the Court until they shall arrive at the age of twenty-five years; and in cases where no record can be produced, whereby their ages can be ascertained, the Judgment of the Court, upon its own view of the subject, shall be adequate & final. The Negroes thus bound, are (by their Masters or Mistresses), to be taught to read and write; & to be brought up to some useful occupation, agreeably to the Laws of the Commonwealth of Virginia, providing for the support of orphan & other poor Children. And I do hereby expressly forbid the sale, or transportation out of the said Commonwealth of any Slave I may die possessed of, under any pretence whatsoever. And I do moreover most pointedly, and most solemnly enjoin it upon my Executors hereafter named, or the survivors of them, to see that this clause respecting Slaves, and every part thereof be religiously fulfilled at the Epoch at which it is directed to take place; without evasion, neglect or delay, after the Crops which may then be on the ground are harvested, particularly as it respects the aged & infirm; Seeing that a regular &

permanent fund be established for their support so long as there are subjects requiring it; not trusting to the uncertain provision to be made by individuals. And to my Mulatto man, William (calling himself William Lee) I give immediate freedom; or if he should prefer it (on account of the accidents which have befallen him, and which have rendered him incapable of walking or of any active employment.) to remain in the situation he now is, it shall be optional in him to do so: In either case however, I allow him an annuity of thirty dollars during his natural life, which shall be independent of the victuals and clothes he has been accustomed to receive, if he chooses the last alternative: but in full with his freedom, if he prefers the first: & this I give him as a testimony of my sense of his attachment to me, and for his faithful services during the Revolutionary War.

<https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/06-04-02-0404-0001>

Student Resource #5

Source Analysis

Source	Sourcing	Close Reading	Contextualizing	Corroborating
	<input type="checkbox"/> What type of document is it? <input type="checkbox"/> When was the document created? <input type="checkbox"/> Who created the document?	<input type="checkbox"/> What is the purpose of the document? <input type="checkbox"/> What does the document say? <input type="checkbox"/> Is the document credible/reliable? Why or why not?	<input type="checkbox"/> What else was going on at the time of the document's creation? <input type="checkbox"/> How did the historic setting influence the creation of the document?	<input type="checkbox"/> How is this document similar or different to other documents? <input type="checkbox"/> Which document(s) is more reliable? <input type="checkbox"/> Which documents are best for answering the compelling question?
A				
B				
C				
D				
E				

Claim Evidence Reasoning (C.E.R) Organizer

Inquiry Question: How did Lafayette influence George Washington's views on slavery?

Claim:

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Evidence: Summarize in your own words (3 pieces of evidence from the sources)

Evidence #1:	Evidence #2:	Evidence #3:

Reasoning: Quote, Paraphrase, Explain

Text Evidence/Quote 1:	Text Evidence/Quote 2:	Text Evidence/Quote 3:
Paraphrase Quote 1:	Paraphrase Quote 2:	Paraphrase Quote 3:
Explain how quote connects back to the claim:	Explain how quote connects back to the claim:	Explain how quote connects back to the claim: