



Tearing Down Historic Monuments: Is Thomas Jefferson's Next?

By Mark Herr, [CSG](#) President

“We should tear down all memorials of the United States that inspire hatred, fascism, and neo-Nazism” This is the rallying cry and unmitigated tactic of white superiorists who call themselves ‘Progressive’ elitists and anti-fascists. Through use of violence, they cry ‘self-defense’ and justify any action to overcome the voices of the so-called ‘alt-right extremists’.

One of the voices that the intolerant ‘social justice warriors’ seek to silence and erase from our fragile and fractured culture is Thomas Jefferson. He is scowled at for owning and selling the slaves he [inherited](#), which he could not legally release because of Virginia state law.

Why would Jefferson [own and sell slaves](#) while promoting the abolition of slavery? Archived [legislative records](#) and Jefferson’s personal writings reveal the answer. Carefully consider the following omitted facts that would offer balance and legitimacy to this one-sided debate.

Jefferson said, in his autobiography, *“In 1769, I became a member of the legislature by the choice of the county in which I live [Albemarle County, Virginia – also, site of the recent violence over historic statues], and so continued until it was closed by the Revolution. I made one effort in that body for the permission of the emancipation of slaves, which was rejected: and indeed, during the regal [crown] government, nothing [like this] could expect success. Our minds were circumscribed within narrow limits by an habitual belief that it was our duty to be subordinate to the mother country in all matters of government, to direct all our labors in subservience to her interests, and even to observe a BIGOTED INTOLERANCE for all religions except hers.” (emphasis added)*

Jefferson chose, between June 28th and July 4th, 1776, not to debate any changes made to his [original draft](#) of the Declaration of Independence. Jefferson's draft contained a long list of grievances with King George and with England. Interestingly, all the original grievances averaged a mere 25 words – except for one. It was the last grievance listed, and was over 160 words long. What was Jefferson's lengthy grievance that was struck from his final 'Declaration' draft?

*“He [King George – the regal [crown] government] has waged cruel war against human nature itself, violating it's most sacred rights of life & liberty in the persons of a distant people who never offended him, captivating & carrying them into slavery in another hemisphere, or to incur miserable death in their transportation thither. this piratical warfare, the opprobrium of **infidel** powers, is the warfare of the CHRISTIAN king of Great Britain. determined to keep open a market where MEN should be bought & sold, he has prostituted his negative for suppressing every legislative attempt to prohibit or to restrain this execrable [expletive] commerce: and that this assemblage of horrors might want no fact of distinguished die, he is now exciting those very people to rise in arms among us, and to purchase that liberty of which he has deprived them, & murdering the people upon whom he also obtruded them; thus paying off former crimes committed against the **liberties** of one people, with crimes which he urges them to commit against the **lives** of another.”*

When visiting Jefferson's home, Monticello, look for the color copy of Jefferson's [original draft](#) of the Declaration in the room where he home schooled his children. It is ironic that the tour guides are quick to say “We often wonder what his grandchildren thought when they found out he owned slaves.” Couldn't those guides add truth to the tour by pointing out that Jefferson's slavery grievance against King George had been removed from the Declaration? It's this kind of purposeful omission that enables the capsizing of our intentionally divided country.

In the latter part of Jefferson's life, he lamented that the slavery question was not yet resolved. But he was confident that future generations would resolve slavery once and for all.

In 1814, [Jefferson wrote](#): “Dear Sir, - Your favor of July 31 [a treatise opposing slavery] was duly received and was read with peculiar pleasure...Mine on the subject of slavery of Negroes have long since been in

possession of the public and time has only served to give them stronger root. The love of justice and the love of country plead equally the cause of these people, and it is a moral reproach to us that they should have pleaded it so long in vain...I had always hoped that the younger generation...would have sympathized with oppression wherever found and proved their love of liberty beyond their own share of it. But my intercourse with them since my return has not been sufficient to ascertain that they had made towards this point the progress I had hoped...**Yet the hour of emancipation is advancing in the march of time. It will come, whether brought on by the generous energy of our own minds or by the bloody process...This enterprise is for the young...**" (emphasis added)

In 1815, [Jefferson wrote](#): "The particular subject of the pamphlet [against slavery] you enclosed me was one of early and tender consideration with me, and had I continued in the councils [legislatures] of my own State, it should never have been out of sight. The only practicable plan I could ever devise is stated under the 14th Query of my Notes on Virginia, and it is still the one most sound in my judgement...Some progress is sensibly made in it; yet not so much as I had hoped and expected. But it will yield in time to temperate and steady pursuit, to the enlargement of the human mind, and its advancement in science. We are not in a world ungoverned by the laws and the power of a superior agent. Our efforts are in His hand and directed by it; and He will give them their effect in His own time. Where the disease is most deeply seated, there it will be slowest in eradication. In the northern States, it was merely superficial and easily corrected. In the southern, it is incorporated with the whole system and requires time, patience, and perseverance in the curative process. That it may finally be effected and its progress hastened will be the last and fondest prayer of him who now salutes you with respect and consideration." (emphasis added)

In 1825, shortly before his death, [Jefferson wrote](#), "At the age of eighty-two, with one foot in the grave and the other uplifted to follow it, I do not permit myself to take part in any new enterprises, even for bettering the condition of man, not even in the great one which is the subject of your letter and which has been through my life that of my greatest anxieties [slavery]. The march of events has not been such as to render its completion practicable with the limits of time allotted to me; and I leave its accomplishment as the work of another generation. And I am cheered when I see that on which it is

devolved, taking it up with so much good will and such minds engaged in its encouragement...”

We must learn from our whole history, not a select portion of it. Jefferson looked to the future with optimism to end slavery as he continued his letter, *“The abolition of the evil is not impossible; it ought never therefore to be despaired of. Every plan should be adopted, every experiment tried, which may do something towards the ultimate object.”*

We must not label our fellow citizens alt-left or alt-right extremists. We are all Americans, and in time, can choose to be part of building a better future, just as Jefferson confidently predicted we would.

The ultimate goal must be to leave our shared world a better place for all of our children. Not by demolishing our history or hiding from it, but by shining a light on all of history’s ugly scars so we can learn from it, as Jefferson did.

The Language of Liberty series is a collaborative effort of the Center for Self Governance (CSG) Administrative Team. CSG is a non-profit, non-partisan educational organization, dedicated to training citizens in applied civics. The authors include administrative staff, selected students, and guest columnists. The views expressed by the authors are their own and may not reflect the views of CSG. Contact them at CenterForSelfGovernance.com

Word count: 1332