

1. Why does Winthrop claim that the "leading principle of the revolution" is violated by the new Constitution?

44. A July Fourth Oration (1800)

Source: *American Mercury* (Hartford, Conn.), July 10, 1800.

From the earliest days of the new nation, July Fourth became a day of public commemoration. In 1800, a speaker whose name was not reported in the press delivered an Independence Day oration at Hartford, Connecticut. He celebrated the "universal principles" of the Declaration of Independence but chastised his fellow citizens for failing to live up to them fully. Like many other Americans, he rejoiced in the revolutions that, beginning in France, had swept parts of Europe, predicted further progress for the Rights of Man in years to come, and identified the American example as the catalyst for the spread of freedom overseas.

On the other hand, the speaker condemned slavery as a flagrant violation of American values and a source of shame for the nation, asking pointedly, "Declaration of Independence! Where art thou now?" He went on to urge that "our daughters" ought to enjoy the same rights as "our sons," an idea that had been put forth by a few writers in the 1790s, but was quite unusual for the time. Overall, the speech offered both an illustration of American nationalism in the aftermath of the Revolution, and a telling commentary on the extent and limits of American freedom at the dawn of the nineteenth century.

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TO THE PRINCIPLES, the genuine, universal principles of the Declaration of Independence, we consecrate this day. Our festivity is not on account of the achievements of armies, nor merely because the seat of government is removed from London to Philadelphia, but because the American people have calmly and deliberately declared,

that "all men are created equal," and in the presence of the supreme God have, in support of this declaration, pledged their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor.

...

Whatever may be the future fate of America, she has destroyed the Bastille, she has liberated Belgium, her principles have scaled the Alps, and inundated the plains of Italy, they have climbed the walls of Rome.... [Before] long Ireland shall take her harp... and shake the air with notes of liberty. Greece shall wake from her long slumber, some new Demosthenes shall plead the Rights of Man, while new Homers sing the triumphs of the free.... The Spanish monarchy totters at its base, exhausted by frequent wars, impoverished by a profligate administration. Farther degrees of colonial oppression will be the [attempted cure].... Then will the inward burnings of colonial rage burst into a flame, then will the Rights of Man echo from Florida to Chile, and re-echo from Lima to St. Salvador. The principles of freedom will then be learned from those who now wield the scourge of slavery, the benevolent system of Jesus shall resound from the ruins of the... Inquisition.

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And thou, sable Ethiop! Suffering brother, let the principles of this day irradiate thy benighted countenance! Already has the voice of thy tears and blood reached heaven!... St. Domingo [has] seen thy race revenged, and their chains broken on the tyrants' heads.

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Citizens, my soul shrinks from herself, and startles at the name of Africa! Where we have heaped crime upon crime! Where we have excited murders, robberies, and burnings, that we might punish them in our own land with endless, hopeless slavery.... Declaration of Independence! Where art thou now?

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It is pleasing to turn from the contemplation of our inconsistencies, to the purity of our principles. The basis of the Declaration, from which the friend of his species hopes so much, is the Equality

of Man. How the idea first got abroad, that men were not equal, is difficult to conceive, unless we refer the claim to the arrogance of power in the dark ages of the world.... The Equality of Man is the bond of our union and the constituted law of the land.

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Citizens, you must teach your children the principles of this day, and by the best education in your power to bestow, teach them to understand them.... But citizens, in this, as in all other things, if you do not begin well, you will never end well. Those principles of freedom, which embrace only half mankind, are only half systems, and will no more support the burden of humanity, than [a] section of an arch will support a column. Our daughters are the same relations to us as our sons, we owe them the same duties, they... are equally competent to their attainments. The contrary idea originated in the same abuse of power, as monarchy and slavery, and owes its little remaining support to the same sophistry.

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What is liberty? Is it a something that men may keep without care and lose without injury? No citizens. Liberty is a tender plant, which wants the constant vigilance of its owner—he must weed and water, and defend it *himself*; hirelings may destroy it by carelessness, by accident, or by design, and once it withers, it is difficult to be restored.

The habits of men who have been [raised] under a monarchy ill comport with the simplicity of republicanism. It is not enough that we have a republican form of government, we must acquire a *republican mind*. We must be frugal, sober, industrious, self-dependent, privately and publicly hospitable.... We must eradicate national prejudices.... We must always remember that *men*, and not soil, constitute the state.

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Questions

1. How does the speaker seek to persuade his audience of the evils of slavery?

2. What does the speaker identify as the major reasons to celebrate American independence?

44. Thomas Jefferson on Race and Slavery (1781)

Source: *Thomas Jefferson, Notes on the State of Virginia* (Philadelphia, 1788), pp. 145–53, 172–73.

No American of the revolutionary generation did more to shape prevailing views on race than Thomas Jefferson. His writings reflected a divided, even tortured mind. In *Notes on the State of Virginia*, written in 1781 and published a few years later, Jefferson ruminated on whether blacks should be considered inferior to whites. Although generally, Jefferson attributed different peoples' varying degrees of civilization to environmental factors, Jefferson concluded that what he considered blacks' inferiority was innate. Jefferson made clear that he understood that slavery violated the principles of the Declaration of Independence he had written. He looked forward to the day when slaves would be emancipated. But, he insisted, once freed, they must be removed from the United States. Blacks, in Jefferson's view, could never become equal members of the American nation.

MANY OF THE laws which were in force during the monarchy being relative merely to that form of government, or inculcating principles inconsistent with republicanism, the first assembly which met after the establishment of the commonwealth appointed a committee to revise the whole code. . . . The following are the most remarkable alterations proposed. . . .

To emancipate all slaves born after passing the act. The bill reported by the revisors does not itself contain this proposition; but an amendment containing it was prepared, to be offered the legislature

whenever the bill should be taken up, and further directing, that they should continue with their parents to a certain age, then be brought up, at the public expence, to tillage, arts or sciences, according to their geniusses, till the females should be eighteen, and the males twenty-one years of age, when they should be colonized to such place as the circumstances of the time should render most proper, sending them out with arms, implements of household and of the handicraft arts, seeds, pairs of the useful domestic animals, &c. to declare them a free and independant people, and extend to them our alliance and protection, till they have acquired strength; and to send vessels to the other parts of the world for an equal number of white inhabitants; to induce whom to migrate hither, proper encouragements were to be proposed. It will probably be asked, Why not retain and incorporate the blacks into the state, and thus save the expence of supplying, by importation of white settlers, the vacancies they will leave? 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; and many other circumstances, will divide us into parties, and produce convulsions which will probably never end but in the extermination of one or the other race.

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—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. Whether the black of the negro resides in the reticular membrane between the skin and scarf-skin, or in the scarf-skin itself; whether it proceeds from the colour of the blood, the colour of the bile, or from that of some other secretion, the difference is fixed in nature, and is as real as if its seat and cause were better known to us. And is this difference of no importance? Is it not the foundation of a greater or less share of beauty in the two races? Are not the fine mixtures of red and white, the expressions of every passion by greater or less suffusions of colour in the one, preferable to

that eternal monotony, which reigns in the countenances, that immoveable veil of black which covers all the emotions of the other race? . . .

They seem to require less sleep. A black after hard labour through the day, will be induced by the slightest amusements to sit up till midnight, or later though knowing he must be out with the first dawn of the morning. They are at least as brave, and more adventuresome. But this may perhaps proceed from a want of forethought, which prevents their seeing a danger till it be present. When present, they do not go through it with more coolness or steadiness than the whites. They are more ardent after their female: but love seems with them to be more an eager desire, than a tender delicate mixture of sentiment and sensation. Their griefs are transient. Those numberless afflictions, which render it doubtful whether heaven has given life to us in mercy or in wrath, are less felt, and sooner forgotten with them. In general, their existence appears to participate more of sensation than reflection. . . .

—The opinion, that they are inferior in the faculties of reason and imagination, must be hazarded with great diffidence. To justify a general conclusion, requires many observations, even where the subject may be submitted to the anatomical knife, to optical glasses, to analysis by fire, or by solvents. How much more then where it is a faculty, not a substance, we are examining; where it eludes the research of all the senses; where the conditions of its existence are various and variously combined; where the effects of those which are present or absent bid defiance to calculation; let me add too, as a circumstance of great tenderness, where our conclusion would degrade a whole race of men from the rank in the scale of beings which their Creator may perhaps have given them. . . . I advance it therefore as a suspicion only, that the blacks, whether originally a distinct race, or made distinct by time and circumstances, are inferior to the whites in the endowments both of body and mind. . . .

There must doubtless be an unhappy influence on the manners of our people produced by the existence of slavery among us. The

whole commerce between master and slave is a perpetual exercise of the most boisterous passions, the most unremitting despotism on the one part, and degrading submissions on the other. Our children see this, and learn to imitate it; for man is an imitative animal. This quality is the germ of all education in him. From his cradle to his grave he is learning to do what he sees others do. If a parent could find no motive either in his philanthropy or his self-love, for restraining the intemperance of passion towards his slave, it would always be a sufficient one that his child is present. But generally it is not sufficient. The parent storms, the child looks on, catches the lineaments of wrath, puts on the same airs in the circle of smaller slaves, gives a loose to his worst of passions, and thus nursed, educated, and daily exercised in tyranny, cannot but be stamped by it with odious peculiarities. The man must be a prodigy who can retain his manners and morals undepraved by such circumstances. And with what execration should the statesman be loaded, who permitting one half the citizens thus to trample on the rights of the other, transforms those into despots, and these into enemies, destroys the morals of the one part, and the amor patriae of the other. For if a slave can have a country in this world, it must be any other in preference to that in which he is born to live and labour for another: in which he must lock up the faculties of his nature, contribute as far as depends on his individual endeavours to the evanishment of the human race, or entail his own miserable condition on the endless generations proceeding from him. With the morals of the people, their industry also is destroyed. For in a warm climate, no man will labour for himself who can make another labour for him. This is so true, that of the proprietors of slaves a very small proportion indeed are ever seen to labour. And can the liberties of a nation be thought secure when we have removed their only firm basis, a conviction in the minds of the people that these liberties are of the gift of God? That they are not to be violated but with his wrath? Indeed I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just: that his justice cannot sleep for ever.