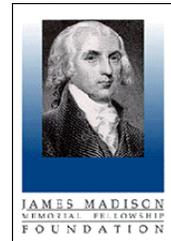


Constitutional Conversations Study Guide

George Washington and Slavery (4:41)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nqzg3HAnRMk>



Summary

This short video analyzes Washington's experiences as a "queasy slaveowner." Having inherited and traded slaves as a younger man, Washington in later life gradually moved from being doubtful about the morality of the institution to being certain

that the institution was "against the law of nature." Professor W. B. Allen contends that Washington's decision to free his slaves upon his wife's death ensured that Mount Vernon's enslaved families would remain intact and would be provided for.

Courses appropriate for this segment: United States History, American Government

Grade level: 10th -12th grade

RECALL QUESTIONS

1. How did the Jay Treaty help establish Washington's anti-slavery credentials?
2. How did Washington publicly seek to influence his home state of Virginia about slavery?
3. What important action did Washington take in his will regarding slavery? Explain.

CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS

1. Do you believe that republican principles are incompatible with slavery?
2. How were Washington's views on slavery similar to/different from other Founders?
3. Did Washington's actions and beliefs throughout his life demonstrate that he was dedicated to anti-slavery principles?

ASSESSMENT OR ENRICHMENT ACTIVITIES

1. Students may research the actions and words of other Founding Fathers (James Madison, Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, etc.) to compare and contrast with Washington.

2. Students may write a letter to another constitutional framer, a Virginia legislator, his wife, or any other prominent individual from Washington's perspective and explain his position on slavery

ANSWERS FOR RECALL QUESTIONS

1. The Jay Treaty left out a provision allowing for the return of slave property following the Revolutionary War. In addition, Alexander Hamilton described slavery as immoral in defending the absence of the provision in the final treaty.
2. He attempted unsuccessfully to promote legislation by the Virginia legislature to pass laws to permit slave owners to grant freedom as well as laws to abolish slavery.
3. Washington freed his slaves upon the death of his wife, Martha, and provided support for them after they were freed.

SUGGESTED ANSWERS FOR CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS

1. Answers will vary. The students could provide comparative discussions between other slave societies such as Republican Rome or ancient Athens that survived on slavery. Republicanism's two defining characteristics are that sovereignty lie within the people's representatives and the rule of law is supreme. Therefore, the question allows for students to argue multiple positions. Conversely, the republicanism of the Founding Fathers caused many of them to be, "queasy slave owners." Students may argue that the Founder's republicanism created a reaction against slavery.
2. Answers will vary. John Adams and Benjamin Franklin were well-known abolitionists. Thomas Jefferson's original draft of the *Declaration of Independence* reflects ambivalence about slavery. Jefferson, however, did not free his slaves upon his death.
3. Answers will vary. Washington's actions regarding the Jay Treaty, Virginia Legislature, and his final will demonstrate that he moved towards an anti-slavery stance. Yet, despite his pronouncements and will, he still lived his entire adult life as a slave owner.

CLASSROOM STRATEGIES

1. Divide the class into five different groups and assign each group a specific Founder (e.g.g. James Madison, Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, Richard Sherman, Abigail Adams, Governor Morris, Patrick Henry, Alexander Hamilton, John Jay) to compare/contrast his/her views about slavery with Washington's perspective.

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