

The 1808 Slave Trade Abolition Deadline (2 Days)

OVERVIEW AND BACKGROUND TO LESSON:

The trans-Atlantic slave trade was, by design of the U.S. Constitutional Convention compromises, set to expire in 1808. Some historians believe the founders felt that the end of the slave trade would mean a slow ending to slavery. The notes of the Convention assuredly reveal that slavery was too volatile an issue to discuss at such an early stage of the new republic. In twenty years, though, slavery had taken root in the country and the population of slaves increased exponentially due to natural births, meaning the end of the trans-Atlantic slave trade no longer translated into a gradual or easy end to slavery. In *American Slavery*, Peter Kolchin even suggests that the end of the trans-Atlantic slave trade hastened the defenses of the slave apologists, because by abolishing one of the most abhorrent aspects of slavery, other justifications for slavery started to arise, coming to full power by the time of the Civil War. Regardless, the intent of the founders to avoid the dissolution of the country over the slavery issue at ratification of the Constitution by delaying the conversation until 1808, does not translate into a similar discussion for the next generation, which was economically and socially dependent on slavery. In this lesson, students will examine the data of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and primary sources related to the slave trade. The data will easily reveal to students a steep incline before 1808 and, in fact, a continuation of imported enslaved Africans after the deadline expired. Students will also examine perspectives on slavery, as the deadline approached and passed. This lesson allows students to develop their own conclusions about both the intention and impact of the 1808 deadline on the founding and trajectory of slavery.

OBJECTIVES:

At the conclusion of this lesson, students will be able to:

1. Create and interpret graphs and statistical information regarding the trans-Atlantic slave trade, specifically from 1776-1866.
2. Analyze the intention and impact of the 1808 deadline upon the trajectory of slavery in the United States.
3. Group data, primary sources, and secondary source research into categories to inform an opinion about the intentions and impact of the 1808 deadline to end the trans-Atlantic slave trade.

SUGGESTED GRADE AND COURSE:

This lesson is designed for 10-12th grade US History courses, though it could be used for US Government courses studying the Constitutional Convention compromises or the impact of federal law on the actions of individuals.

STANDARDS:

Geography (<http://www.ncge.org/geography-for-life>)

- **Geographic Knowledge: The World in Spatial Terms**

How to use maps and other geographic representations, tools, and technologies to acquire, process, and report information.

- **Geographic Knowledge: Human Systems**
The characteristics, distribution, and migration of human populations on Earth's surface.

NCSS Themes (<http://www.socialstudies.org/standards/strands/>)

- II Time, Continuity, and Change
- IV Individual Development and Identity
- V Individuals, Groups, and Institutions
- VI Power, Authority, and Governance

NCHS Standards (<https://phi.history.ucla.edu/nchs/united-states-history-content-standards/>)

Era 2 Colonization and Settlement (1585-1763)

- **Standard 3:** How the values and institutions of European economic life took root in the colonies, and how slavery reshaped European and African life in the Americas.

Era 4 Expansion and Reform (1801-1861)

- **Standard 2:** How the industrial revolution, increasing immigration, the rapid expansion of slavery, and westward movement changed the lives of Americans and led toward regional tensions.
- **Standard 4:** The sources and character of cultural, religious, and social reform movements in the antebellum period.

RESOURCES/MATERIALS:

Ideally, students should be able to use computers for this lesson, allowing them to each work with the data and create their own statistical summaries and graphs. Students should also be encouraged to view the data on particular voyages, as they see fit, that fit the 1776-1866 time period. A teacher may choose to offer extra credit or encouragement for students to examine other variables for importations of enslaved Africans into the mainland North America by other variables, such as slave insurrections. Students may also be interested in examining the percentage of enslaved Africans who died en route, to see if those percentages increased as slave ship owners and captains hurried to meet the 1808 deadline. If computers are available for the whole lesson, students would be able to follow the links for the primary sources to read the selections, but should be encouraged to find additional voices. The entire lesson, however, can be used as a paper and pencil lesson in class. Teachers may create the graph, using the suggested parameters, and print the necessary primary and secondary sources for students to examine on the class day. Teachers may also choose to conduct the lesson as direct instruction, viewing the data on a projector. Finally, the teacher should be able to decide if students will complete the assignment individually, with partners, or in small groups. The lesson is most efficiently and effectively completed in small groups, where students can discuss the interpretation of the data and primary sources.

ACTIVITIES/PROCEDURES:

Should the class have access to computers, the day of lesson should progress as such:

1. Project this primary source from the Constitutional Convention Notes on the board and allow students to “think-pair-share”—that is read it, write or think on their own, share ideas with a neighbor, and then discuss as a class:

Wednesday, August 22. In Convention

Art VII sect. 4. resumed Mr. Sherman was for leaving the clause as it stands. He disapproved of the slave trade; yet as the States were now possessed of the right to import slaves, as the public good did not require it to be taken from them, & as it was expedient to have as few objections as possible to the proposed scheme of Government, he thought it best to leave the matter as we find it. He observed that the abolition of Slavery seemed to be going on in the U.S. & that the good sense of the several States would probably by degrees compleat it. He urged on the Convention the necessity of despatching its business. (from James Madison’s Notes)

2. Background Information: Explain to students that, as designed by the Constitutional Convention, in order to keep the Southern states in the new government, the founders agreed to delay the end of the slave trade and, therefore, any discussion about slavery, for twenty years, putting the 1808 deadline in writing in Article I, Section 9 of the Constitution. Tell students that today, they will examine to determine if both the intention and the impact / result of this deadline helped hasten or prolong the existence of slavery in the United States.
3. Now, instruct students to work individually, with a partner, or small groups, to work their way through the slave trade database and other linked primary sources. Give each student or set of students the required worksheet to complete by the end of the second class period. Day one the class begins examining the data and sources. Day two is spent finishing the examination of the data and sources, and then discussing.

Here is a guide to the student worksheet. A student version of the worksheet, copy ready, is attached at the bottom of this lesson. Teachers may choose to have students complete this worksheet with paper and pencil, or typed on a computer and submitted electronically. The focus question will later be the final assessment, individual student writing, so be sure to emphasize this question for all students before they begin to dissect the data and sources.

FOCUS QUESTION:

To what extent did the abolition of the slave trade in 1808 impact the trajectory of slavery in the United States?

Using the required evidence (database, primary sources, secondary sources, linked to this table), please record your responses to the evidence. Decide how the evidence about the slave trade impacted the overall view of slavery in the United States, over time. Then, record your reasoning in either the “increased acceptance” or “decreased acceptance” box.

****Teacher Note: You may choose to have the students use the database, given the below search criteria, or have the search criteria available for display or by links, or printed on paper in advance for students to examine in stations. Students may be assigned to examine sources individually or in groups to facilitate discussion.*

EVIDENCE (copy selections or provide links)

	Increased Acceptance of Slavery	Decreased Acceptance of Slavery
<u>List of Voyages</u> - 1776-1866 with principal place of slave landing in mainland North America		
<u>Summary statistics</u> - 1776-1866 with principal place of slave landing in mainland North America		
<u>Data Visualization</u> - 1776-1866 with principal place of slave landing in mainland North America (Graph type: Bar chart; x axis- year arrived with slaves; y axis- Avg. number of slaves embarked)		
<u>Defense of Slavery in Virginia, 1757</u>		
<u>Living Africans Thrown Overboard</u>		
<u>Plan of a Ship for Transporting Slaves, 1789</u>		
Jones’s Sermon, 1808 http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part3/3h92.html		
Pro-slavery Petitions, 1784 http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part2/2h65.html		
<u>“Of the Natural Rights of Colonists”</u>		
<u>Address to the Public, 1789</u>		

<u>“Slavery a Positive Good”</u>		
<u>Constitution: Article I, Section 9, Paragraph 1</u>		
Peter Kolchin- excerpt from <i>American Slavery</i> (see excerpt below in Appendix A)		

Wrap-Up/Assignment: Exit Card.

After groups discuss the reactions to the data and primary sources, with regards to the 1808 deadline for the trans-Atlantic slave trade, each student should submit a short writing. On a 3x5 notecard, to submit as “exiting” the class, students should respond briefly and individually to the following question from discussion: **How did the 1808 deadline and subsequent abolition of the trans-Atlantic slave trade impact the trajectory of slavery in the United States?**

ASSESSMENT/EVALUATION:

Student work and understanding should be assessed by

1. “Think- pair- share” at the opening. In oral responses, verify that students understand both the design and context of the 1808 deadline
2. Graphs and statistical summaries on the slave trade database should be checked before allowing students to complete those first three sections of the worksheet chart, to make sure that parameters were set correctly (if students are using database on their own and not as a prepared hand-out by teacher)
3. Completion of student-guided worksheet for examining and interpreting data and primary sources
4. Class discussion—verify that students understand the interpretations for both the intent and the impact/results/outcome of the trans-Atlantic slave trade.
5. Individual student writing—(3x5 notecard)—allow for students to have varying interpretations about both the intent and outcome of the 1808 deadline on the trajectory of slavery in the United States.

VOCABULARY:

- Compromise
- Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade (1808 deadline)
- “necessary evil” vs. “positive good”
- Slave apologists

FURTHER READING & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

Questions for Discussion

1. What was the intent of the 1808 abolition of the slave trade in the US (1807 for Great Britain)?

2. What was the impact of the abolition?
3. What happened to the number of imported slaves to the United States between 1805 and 1808? Explain the change.
4. How many voyages landed in mainland North America after the abolition of the slave trade? (remember Florida is technically Spanish territory until 1821).
5. Why does the slave trade continue after it is illegal? What might this say about respect for the law?
6. Does the abolition of the slave trade end slavery in the United States? Explain.
7. What is the difference in describing slavery as “a necessary evil” versus “a positive good?”
8. How might the abolition or the continuation of the slave trade have altered views about slavery? (i.e., as Kolchin suggests, the slave trade took away the most reprehensible aspect of slavery for many, so accepting slavery was more easily rationalized)
9. Why didn't the founders opposed to slavery (Jefferson, Madison, Washington in particular) do more to end slavery or at least immediately end the slave trade? How might their personal lives impact their political decisions?
10. Would an abolition of the slave trade in 1789 have altered the course of slavery sooner? At the Constitutional Convention, do you believe the founding fathers' intention was to allow slavery to “wither on the vine” or do you believe they merely intended to “punt” the slavery issue to the future generation?

Lesson Plan Bibliography and Suggestions for Further Reading

- Calhoun, John C. “Slavery a Positive Good.” Speech to U.S. Senate, February 6, 1837. *Congressional Globe*, 24th Cong., 2nd sess., 1837, 157–59. In *Teaching American History*. <https://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/slavery-a-positive-good/>
- Ellis, Joseph E. *Founding Brothers: The Revolutionary Generation*. New York: Vintage Books, 2000.
In particular, for this lesson, see the chapter titled “The Silence” to read a short discussion of early attempts to abolish slavery and the unspoken contract to avoid the issue in the first twenty years.
- Kaminski, John P., ed. *A Necessary Evil? Slavery and the Debate over the Constitution*. Madison: Madison House Publishers, Inc., 1995.
This text offers editorial notes and primary sources for discussion about slavery and the founding of the United States. Particularly interesting for this lesson is Chapter 7: “Slavery and the Founders: Three Perspectives,” an outstanding essay and collection of primary sources from Washington, Jefferson, and Madison that details their changing views of slavery.
- Kolchin, Peter F. *American Slavery, 1619-1877*. New York: Hill and Wang, 2003.
- Pope-Hennessey, James. *Sins of the Fathers: The Atlantic Slave Traders, 1441-1807*. Edison, NJ: Castle Books, 2004.
For this lesson, see especially Chapter 15: “Better Late than Never?”

Public Broadcasting Service. "Africans in America Resource Bank Index." Africans in America. http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/rb_index.html.

Solberg, Winton U., ed. *The Constitutional Convention and the Formation of the Union*. Second Edition. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990.

Appendix A: Kolchin Reading

p.79-80. “The African slave trade, viewed as deplorable even by many defenders of slavery, was also the object of considerable legislation, at both the state and the national level. Widespread opposition to the trade in the North and upper South led the second Continental Congress to pass a resolution opposing slave imports in 1776, and a number of states (including Virginia in 1778) banned such imports on their own. In the upper South, economic depression sharply reduced the demand for new slaves, and the happy convergence of economic interest with principle easily carried the day. Farther south, however, in South Carolina and Georgia, planters suffered from an acute shortage of labor and bitterly resisted what they considered the hypocritical efforts of those who now had enough slaves suddenly to force others to do without.

Although advocates of the slave trade represented a small minority among the Founding Fathers, they were powerful enough to force a compromise on the question at the Constitutional Convention of 1787; the new Constitution prohibited Congress from outlawing the slave trade for twenty years. During this period, labor-hungry planters in the lower South imported tens of thousands of Africans; indeed, more slaves entered the United States between 1787 and 1807 than during any other two decades in history. Still, the general understanding among those who were politically active was that Congress would abolish the slave trade at the end of twenty years, an expectation that was borne out by congressional legislation passed in 1807 and taking effect in 1808. In their usual cautious, roundabout manner, the Founding Fathers succeeded in ending the importation of Africans to the United States; many believed, incorrectly, that this ending would doom slavery in the United States as well.

The Constitutional Convention showed the Founding Fathers at their most cautious with respect to slavery. In drafting the Constitution, they carefully avoided the word ‘slavery,’ resorting to a variety of euphemisms such as ‘other persons’ and ‘persons held to service of labor.’ At the same time, they acceded to slaveholding interests by recognizing the right of masters to reclaim fugitives and by unanimously accepting a compromise formula whereby for purposes of congressional representation a slave would count as three-fifths of a free person, thereby substantially augmenting the political power of the Southern states. In the future, both supporters and opponents of slavery would wrap themselves in the Constitution and claim to be expressing the views of the Founding Fathers. In fact, although most of the decisions taken by the delegates at the Constitutional Convention represented compromises rather than clear-cut victories for pro-slavery or anti-slavery forces, on balance the Constitution bolstered slavery by throwing the power of the federal government behind it.

Still, to many informed Americans in the 1790s, time seemed to be on the side of reason, reform, and progress. The Northern states were in the process of abolishing slavery within their borders. Congress had acted to guarantee that the Northwest would be forever free. The laws of several Southern states had been changed to facilitate private manumissions, and hundreds of slave owners in the upper South were taking advantage of these laws to free some or all of their chattels. And although importation of new slaves remained legal in South Carolina and Georgia, a compromise had been worked out that would end such importation in 1808. In short, a moderate opponent of slavery—like many of the Founding Fathers—had good grounds for being cautiously optimistic. Slavery appeared to be in full retreat, its end only a matter of time.”

p.85-87. “Despite the hopes aroused during and immediately after the American Revolution, Southern slavery survived the era intact. The reform spirit had never spread very far in the lower South, where most slave owners seemed far more concerned with securing additional African laborers before the 1808 deadline than with the moral ambiguities of holding humans in bondage. And in the upper South, the kind of moderate questioning of slavery that was so pervasive in the 1770s and 1780s declined during the 1790s and early 1800s, as a new orthodoxy increasingly took hold of the region.”

Student Worksheet

Name (s) _____ Period _____
 Date _____

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<u>“Of the Natural Rights of Colonists”</u>		

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