

Teacher Page: Resource Sheet #06

Source: An Ordinance for the Government of the Territory of the United States Northwest of the River Ohio. Drafted by Thomas Jefferson, July 13, 1787. Courtesy, The Library of Congress.

Teaching Tip: Thomas Jefferson drafted the March 1, 1784, Congressional committee report proposing a ban on slavery and involuntary servitude in the federal territory. The draft ordinance provided “that after the year 1800 of the Christian Era, there shall be neither slavery nor involuntary servitude in any of the said states, otherwise than in punishment of crimes.” Although the southern states in Congress successfully deleted this paragraph in 1784, a similar prohibition was included in the final ordinance adopted by Congress in 1787.

Document Analysis:

1. What does Article 6 state about slavery in the territory?

Slavery will be excluded from the Northwest Territories, but any fugitives that may escape there will be lawfully returned to their original state and owner.

2. How does Article 6 of the Northwest Ordinance change what was said in 1784?

In the 1784 draft, slavery or involuntary servitude would be allowed as a punishment for crimes.

3. How old is the United States of America, according to Article 6?

Twelve years old.

4. How does Article 6 address the issue of fugitive slaves?

Slaves that may be fugitives or runaways from existing slave states should be returned to their masters.

5. How does this document help to answer the question, “Where Did Thomas Jefferson stand on the Issue of Slavery?”

Jefferson seems to be opposed to slavery, at least in new territories to the west. He is however agreeable to keeping slavery intact in existing areas, with the clause for fugitives and runaways. This document could support both sides.