

“The Silence” Questions

1. What group demanded an end to the slave trade in the United States?
2. What stipulation was included in the newly ratified Constitution regarding the slave trade?
3. What was Rep. James Jackson *really* upset about when the suggestion about ending the slave trade was brought up to the House of Representatives?
4. Describe the wishes of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society during that time period.
5. Explain the two arguments made by the Society which helped further their cause.
6. Analyze why Congress discussed the slavery issue behind closed doors.
7. What justification did William Loughton Smith make regarding the necessity for the continuation of the slave trade?
8. What refusal would the southern slave states have made if the federal government was able to tamper with the slavery issue?
9. Explain why many northerners felt they could tolerate slavery for the moment.
10. What was Rep. Elbridge Gerry’s idea for how to appease the southern slaveholders and at the same time abolish slavery?

11. Comment upon the author's statement regarding you, the reader's hindsight about the slavery issue.

12. What had been included in a draft of the Declaration of Independence but never made the final copy of the document?

13. How many states (former colonies) were working towards abolishing slavery by the late 18th century?

14. What had Thomas Jefferson proposed in 1784?

15. "The passionate conviction that the Revolution was like a mighty wave fated to sweep slavery off the American landscape actually created false optimism and fostered a misguided sense of inevitability that rendered human action or agency superfluous." Assess the accuracy of this statement.

16. What rumblings were taking place in South Carolina in the late 18th century that would come to fruition mid-19th century?

17. Explain why the Constitution was so "intentionally elusive" regarding slavery.

18. Describe the second bargain reached at the Constitutional Convention.

19. List at least one reason some Virginians were hypocritical on the issue of slavery.

20. According to Rep. Jackson, who or what was to blame for the entrenchment of slavery in the deep southern United States?

21. Thomas Jefferson had expounded upon what might happen if United States slaves were freed. To what extent do you agree or disagree with his sentiments? Why or why not?

22. "Slavery was the unmentionable family secret, or the proverbial elephant in the middle of the room." Analyze this statement in the context of the new country.

23. Why did looking at the 1790 census allow one to predict a state's view on the abolition of slavery?

24. List two reasons why the 1790 census revealed that the end to slavery was closing.

25. The author discusses at length the difficulties in historical interpretations, citing past experience and present subjectivity. Why does he bring forth evidence from Fernando Fairfax and St. George Tucker?

26. Those who wished to see slavery gradually abolished believed two assumptions. Describe those assumptions.

27. Consider the second assumption. To what extent do you agree or disagree with that assumption?

28. List one accomplishment of the great statesman Benjamin Franklin.

29. What sharp-witted comparison did Franklin make of the speech given by Rep. Jackson, only a few weeks prior to his death?

30. In the upper reaches of political leadership, what seemed to be the consensus among men like George Washington, John Adams, etc.?
31. Why is James Madison's view of slavery summarized by Ellis as "enlightened obfuscation"?
32. What happened when the issue the Quakers brought forth was put up for a vote on March 23rd?
33. Ultimately, what was decided regarding the movement to abolish slavery and put an end to the slave trade?
34. Why is this excerpt entitled, "The Silence"?
35. What are your thoughts after reading this excerpt? Write at least a paragraph.