

How Did That Famous Letter to Thomas Jefferson Originate?

The Almanac

- Everything began in 1791, when Banneker first created and published his *Almanac and Ephemeris* in the greater Pennsylvania, Delaware, and Maryland areas.
- Included in the Almanac were tables of solar, lunar, and planetary movements as well as mathematical puzzles, words of wisdom, health tips, and given his background, agricultural advice.
- Banneker also published a treatise on bees, a mathematical study on the cycle of the 17-year locust, and numerous pamphlets for the anti-slavery movement.

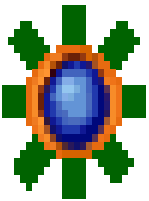


The Letter to Mr. Jefferson

- About the time that Banneker had begun to publish his almanacs, he had heard about the remarks that then Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson had made about Black Americans, referring to them as Mathematically inferior.
- Outraged, Banneker wrote a twelve-page letter to Jefferson proclaiming that he was proud of his African heritage and strongly encouraging Jefferson to accept “the indispensable duty of those who maintain for themselves the rights of human nature,” and requesting aid in improving the lot of American blacks.

AN EXCERPT FROM THE LETTER

“Sir, I freely and cheerfully acknowledge, that I am of the African race, and in that color which is natural to them of the deepest dye; and it is under a sense of the most profound gratitude to the Supreme Ruler of the Universe, that I now confess to you, that I am not under that state of tyrannical thralldom, and inhuman captivity, to which too many of my brethren are doomed, but that I have abundantly tasted of the fruition of those blessings, which proceed from that free and unequalled liberty with which you are favored; and which, I hope, you will willingly allow because you have mercifully received, from the immediate hand of that Being, from whom proceedeth every good and perfect Gift.”



It is also good to note that Jefferson was so pleased and impressed with Banneker’s Almanac that he sent a copy to the Academy of Sciences in Paris, France (the leaders of the mathematical world at that time). He also helped to make Banneker a part of the survey team for the area we now know as our Nation’s Capitol.

