



Thomas Jefferson wrote a scathing indictment of slavery in his original Declaration of Independence. Others, fearing that the thirteen separate states would never unanimously agree to such a document, removed Jefferson's words.

Yet ... Jefferson was also a product of his own time. He owned slaves. They worked on his plantation, at Monticello. He sold slaves to cover debts.

People today fault Jefferson for his yesterdays—for failing to take action to free his own slaves (let-alone all other slaves). Such debates are likely to continue into the future.

This image depicts "Lucy"—a slave who was born at Monticello. The Library of Congress tells us [more about her](#):

*Lucy (1811-?) daughter of Lilly and Barnaby, was born on Monticello and was one of Thomas Jefferson's slaves sold at public auction at Monticello in January 1827. [Jefferson died on July 4, 1826.]*

*Lucy and her parents were among the slaves whom Jefferson leased to his grandson, Thomas Jefferson Randolph (1792-1875). This photograph was taken of Lucy in the mid 1840s.*

Monticello has *different* information about Lucy. The following is from the "[Family Histories: A Beginning](#)" section of the Monticello website:

*Lucy Cottrell was the daughter of Dorothea (Dolly) Cottrell, a house servant at Monticello who, after 1826, became the property of George Blaetterman, a professor at the University of Virginia.*

*About 1850 Dolly and Lucy Cottrell went to Maysville, Kentucky, with the professor's widow, who freed them five years later. In this daguerreotype Lucy Cottrell is holding Charlotte, daughter of Blaetterman's foster son.*

It is likely that the description, provided by Monticello, contains the most updated information about Lucy.

What was life like, as a slave of Thomas Jefferson? Peter Fossett—whose father (Joseph) was Monticello's head blacksmith and his mother (Edith Hern Fossett) was a Monticello cook—later recalled what happened when Jefferson died.

Although his father was freed in Jefferson's Last Will and Testament, 11-year-old Peter and his mother were among the slaves sold to satisfy Jefferson's debts. So were Peter's siblings.

Peter, who could read and write, said this about his years as a Jefferson slave:

*I knew nothing of the horrors of slavery till our good master died, on July 4, 1826. Born and reared as free, not knowing that I was a slave, then suddenly, at the death of Jefferson, put upon an auction block and sold to strangers. I then commenced an eventful life. (Quoted in *Jefferson in His Own Time: A Biographical Chronicle of His Life, Drawn from Recollections, Interviews and Memoirs by Family, Friends and Associates*, edited by Kevin J. Hayes, at [page 191](#).)*

For more first-hand information on how Jefferson treated his slaves, see [Jefferson in His Own Time](#) which includes primary accounts from the people who knew him.

Credits:

Lucy, ca.1845, depicted by Daguerreotype. Online via Library of Congress, Courtesy of Mason County Museum, Maysville, Kentucky.

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## Media Stream



### Lucy - A Slave at Monticello

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