

Liberty vs. Property: The U.S. Founding Fathers and Their Debate over Slavery

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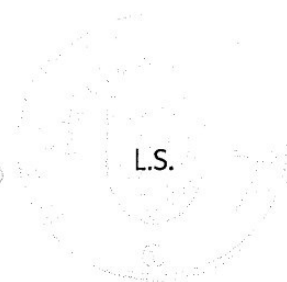
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ABSTRAKT

Tato práce pojednává o amerických Otcích zakladatelích a jejich názorech na otroctví. Zejména se zabývá rozpory v jejich slovech a činech. V období Americké revoluce získali Otcové zakladatelé svobodu pro Američany, ale následně jí odepřeli černochům. Proč tak učinili je tématem této práce. Ta na konci dojde k závěru, že se Otcové zakladatelé rozhodli zachovat otroctví, protože věděli, že americký národ by ve svých začátcích nemohl přežít takový konflikt.

Klíčová slova: Otcové zakladatelé, otroctví, Americká revoluce, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, John Jay, George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, Alexander Hamilton, John Adams, James Monroe

ABSTRACT

This thesis concerns with the U.S. Founding Fathers and their opinions about slavery. It especially focuses on contradictions between their words and actions. During the American Revolutionary Era, the Founding Fathers won freedom for all Americans but then denied it to blacks. Why they did so is the topic of this thesis. Ultimately, this thesis concludes that the Founding Fathers chose to maintain slavery because they knew that the American nation was weak and would not be able to endure conflict war in its early stages.

Keywords: Founding Fathers, slavery, American Revolution, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, John Jay, George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, Alexander Hamilton, John Adams, James Monroe

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“You’ll find that many of the truths we cling to depend greatly on our own point of view.”

Obi-Wan Kenobi

I hereby declare that the print version of my bachelor's thesis and the electronic version of my thesis deposited in the IS/STAG system are identical.

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INTRODUCTION

Before 1850, American presidents were commonly served in the White House by their slaves. In fact, until 1850, slaves were sold on the steps of the U.S. Capitol building. The Compromise of 1850 ended this latter practice, and the Civil War (1861-1865) ended the former. The Thirteenth (1865) and Fourteenth (1868) Amendments to the Constitution not only legally ended slavery but made blacks legal citizens with all the associated rights. That the Civil War had to be fought to begin with may have been partly fault of the “bungling generation” of American politicians in the 1850s, but blame also rests with the Founding Fathers, who chose to maintain slavery and in doing so, cast the die. Why they chose to do so is the topic of this thesis. The Founding Fathers are generally viewed by Americans as great patriots, who risked their lives to achieve freedom from tyranny. But in gaining their own freedom, they chose not to gift it to others. Thanks to their actions, an estimated four million blacks remained property in 1790. To attempt to understand why enlightened thinkers, such as the Founding Fathers supposedly were, maintained slavery while preaching “liberty and justice for all,” this thesis explores their thoughts on slavery and race, as well as the circumstances that influenced their decision to protect slavery, thereby setting the United States on a collision course with what many Confederates optimistically referred to as the Second American Revolution. Ultimately, it will be argued that the Founding Fathers, although they had the power to abolish slavery, chose not to do so in order keep the fledgling nation together. Division at such an early stage would have doomed their democratic experiment almost as soon as it started. Yet, in choosing to avoid the paradox of founding a new nation based on the basic human rights of liberty and property, they created a deeply-flawed nation that still suffers from their decision.¹

¹ Philip D. Curtin, *The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Census* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1969), 5.

1. THE FOUNDING FATHERS

The Founding Fathers made America what it is today. They fought for American independence, knowing full well that in doing so they were traitors to the British Empire and would be executed if they lost. Their reputation has been burdened with a duality has stuck with them ever since, with some scholars viewing them as intolerant, selfish and Amerocentric, and other scholars classifying them as heroes, men who fought for moral principles and their beliefs, no matter the consequences. In any case, if there was a specific period during which the Founding Fathers cut their teeth, it was probably the American Revolution. The Revolutionary period is possibly the most crucial and influential era of the American history. The revolutionary period (1765-1787) was not only fought on the battlefield. It was fought in the hearts and minds of colonists, as well as in halls, where the Declaration of Independence, the Articles of Confederation, and the Constitution were crafted, three significant documents that helped to define the American character.²

At the end of the Seven Years' War (1757-1763), the United Kingdom found itself in debt and decided to make the American colonists help reduce it. The result was the Stamp Act of 1765, followed by other taxes, which the colonists viewed as "intolerable," not because they were being taxed, but because they were denied representation in the House of Commons. "Taxation without Representation" thus became the rallying cry of many of the Founding Fathers, most notably Benjamin Franklin. The issue of taxation was important, because, notes historian Edmund Morgan, in the eighteenth century, American colonists saw a close relationship between liberty and property: a man without property could not possibly be free, as he would be dependent on the mercy of another man. And when the British Empire levied more taxes on America, the colonists became worried about their property, ergo their freedom. In opposition to increased taxes, one colonial governor stated, "they who have no property can have no freedom, but are indeed reduced to the most abject of slavery."³

² R. B. Bernstein, *Founding Fathers Reconsidered* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), ix; Meg Greene, and Paula Stathakis, *The Everything Founding Fathers Book: Everything You Need to Know About Men Who Shaped America* (Avon, MA: Adams Media, 2011), xi-xii.

³ Benjamin Franklin, *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin* (Stilwell: Digireads.com Publishing, 2005), 106; William Jay, *The Life of John Jay: With Selections from His Correspondence and Miscellaneous Papers* (New York: J. and J. Harper, 1833), 69; John Ferling, *John Adams: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 151; David McCullough, *John Adams* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001), 134; Edmund S. Morgan, *The Challenge of the American Revolution* (London: W. W. Norton, 1976), 8; Edmund

Historian R.B. Bernstein claims that most historians specify the Founding Fathers as those who signed the Declaration of Independence, those involved in the writing of the two constitutions, and those who participated in none of these events but enabled them to happen. Historians Meg Green and Paula Stathakis divide the Founding Fathers into three groups: signers, framers and those who, though still important, belong in neither group. The signers are those Founding Fathers who signed the Declaration of Independence. Framers were those who participated in the constitutional conventions, and then there were the rest, who did not actively participate but who facilitated the actions of the two other groups. Green and Stathakis further recognize a group of “primary Founding Fathers,” those men who became the most known for their thoughts and actions: John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, Alexander Hamilton, John Jay, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison and George Washington. As it would be difficult if not impossible within the scope of a bachelor’s thesis to deal with the opinions of all the Founding Fathers on the issue of slavery, this thesis will concentrate on the opinions of the primary founding fathers with an exception of James Monroe, who was the last Founding Fathers and also the president who coped with the issue of slavery during his presidency which is the reason he should be taken to consideration in this thesis.⁴

S. Morgan, “Revision in Need of Revising,” in *The Challenge of the American Revolution*, 43-59 (New York: W. W. Norton, 1976).

⁴ Bernstein, *Founding Fathers Reconsidered*, ix-x; Greene and Stathakis, *The Everything Founding Fathers Book*, xi-xii; Michael Teitelbaum, *James Monroe* (Minneapolis, MN: Compass Point Books, 2003), 39-41.

2. SLAVERY

The phenomenon of slavery is an old one. In fact, as far as it is possible for historians to determine, slavery has been a common practice for millennia. Throughout history, war captives were enslaved, impoverished people had an option of selling themselves, even parents sometimes sold their children when they could not afford raising them, and then there was African chattel slavery, which developed as part of the triangular trade with Europe and the western hemisphere. Today slavery is mostly illegal but still not eradicated, sex slavery being the most common form today. This thesis focuses on black chattel slavery in North America and the American Founding Fathers' approach to it.⁵

2.1. Slavery in America

The first black chattel slaves were brought to America by the Spanish in the sixteenth century, filling the labor void left by the Native American genocide. In the English colonies, the first '20 and Odd Negroes' arrived in Jamestown, Virginia in 1619. The first law considering slaves was adopted only in 1641, and the law merely recognized their existence in America. With the failure of indentured servitude, black chattel slavery experienced a boom in the eighteenth century, especially in the agricultural South, which produced labor-intensive crops such as cotton and tobacco. By the nineteenth century, slavery was so ingrained in the American mentality and character that many American presidents owned slaves and even staffed the White House with them. Paradoxically, these presidents oversaw the development of a supposedly free and democratic nation, while at the same time being served by black chattel slaves.⁶

Although there were early efforts to enslave Native Americans and even Chinese, these failed, and the English colonies were forced to rely on black chattel slavery. The advantage of enslaving Native American stemmed from their close proximity. They were already there, while blacks had to be brought by ships from Africa. The problem of Indian slavery was in their cultural background. Many Indian tribes were known for their slave trading

⁵ William O. Blake, *The History of Slavery and the Slave Trade, Ancient and Modern* (Columbus: J. and H. Miller, 1857), iii-xiv, 2.

⁶ Dorothy Schneider, and Carl J. Schneider, *Slavery in America* (New York: Facts on File, 2007), 49-50; Kenneth C. Davis, *In the Shadow of Liberty: The Hidden History of Slavery, Four Presidents, and Five Black Slaves* (New York: Henry Holt, 2016), 12; Barbara Somervill, *James Madison* (Hockessin: Mitchell Lane Publishers, 2009), 19; Junius P. Rodrigues, ed., *Slavery in the United States: A Social, Political, and Historical Encyclopedia*, vol. 1 (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2007), 87, 98.

and slave owning, but Indian slavery was of an altogether different form than chattel slavery. Indian slaves were often incorporated into families and became free over time. Moreover, Indians were prideful, often choosing death over chattel slavery. Also, the numbers of Native Americans were rapidly decreased due to the diseases brought to North America by Europeans. As a result of the germ genocide, the enslavement of Indians would have been insufficient to meet the labor demands of the British colonies.⁷

Likewise, Chinese “coolie” slavery failed due to disease as well as to the slaves’ rejection of inhumane treatment. Once word of this inhumane treatment spread to mainland China, coolie laborers did whatever they could to steer clear of American slave traders. These factors led to the dominance of black chattel slavery in America, even though it was neither the only nor the cheapest option.⁸

2.2. Slavery and Society

Although the main function of slavery was providing cheap labor for (primarily) wealthy Southerners planters, it was also indisputably an indicator of social status. The more slaves a person owned, the more respected and powerful they generally were. Slavery was also essential for the system that developed in the South. While in the North, society and the economy were built on individualism, the South was home to a ruling agrarian aristocracy. This class was considerably similar to European nobility and shared little in common with the capitalist middle class.⁹

This is another reason slavery was essential for the South. Slaves determined social statuses there, and with no slaves, the whole system would have to be reconsidered. Clearly, the upper class - meaning those with the most slaves, the largest plantations and the most money - had little interest in adapting to a new system of paid labor, especially since they were already heavily-invested in slavery.

⁷ Thomas J. Durant, Jr., and Nicole Moliere, “Plantation Slavery among Native Americans: The Creation of Red, White, and Black America,” in *Plantation Society and Race Relations: The Origins of Inequality*, ed. Thomas J. Durant, Jr. and J. David Knottnerus (Westport: Praeger, 1999), 113-25.

⁸ Moon-Ho Jung, *Coolies and Cane: Race, Labor, and Sugar in the Age of Emancipation* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), PDF e-book.

⁹ Eugene D. Genovese, *The Political Economy of Slavery: Studies in the Economy and Society of the Slave South* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1989), 34; Raimondo Luraghi, *The Rise and Fall of the Plantation South* (New York: New Viewpoints, 1978), 35.

2.3. Slavery and Economics

Slavery was, not only in America but in many countries, an essential part of the economy. Many of the Founding Fathers realized that, which might be a reason they did not pursue abolition, even though most of them considered slavery morally wrong. The Southern economy especially relied on slave labor.

Indeed, in the American South, slavery was thought of as a natural concept. Southerners grew up and lived in a proslavery system, which means free labor as we know it today was inconceivable for most cotton and tobacco planters. These export crops were highly labor intensive, and paying for labor necessary to produce these crops would have made them unprofitable. Even with slave labor, planters often found themselves in debt.¹⁰

The relationship between industrialization and the South was quite a paradox, thanks to the slavery system. Slave owners were generally against industrialization although certain features of industrialization would have been beneficial, resulting in the increased and quicker production of cotton, the main cash crop. But during the beginnings of industrialization, when factories were being built in the South, several problems appeared, the most crucial of which was the implementing of slaves in the factories' operations. As historian Eugene D. Genovese described, slaves were not fit to work in the factories, a type of labor that was totally foreign to them. Factory work necessitated close contact, near-constant oversight, and precision, all of which blacks were not used to. If the South industrialized, what would it do with its slaves, in which it had already so heavily invested, and who would do the factory work that slaves were ill-fit to do?¹¹

Although there is a very important topic to be reckoned with and that is how economy of the South prospered. Most people might imagine the slave South as prosperous and flourishing, while the truth was different. Southern plantations had indeed a high productivity, but the problem was in the efficiency which was very low - and a high productivity itself is not a guarantee of a healthy, growing economy. The answer to why the economy of the South was not efficient could be that the plantation owners were accustomed to a certain lifestyle including high spendings, also the workforce at the

¹⁰ Eugene D. Genovese. "The Significance of the Slave Plantation for Southern Economic Development," *The Journal of Southern History* 28, no. 4 (1962): 422, doi: 10.2307/2205407.

¹¹ Genovese, *The Political Economy of Slavery*, 23-24; Genovese, "The Significance of the Slave Plantation for Southern Economic Development," 422.

plantations was not used quite efficiently. This together resulted in unhealthy economy of the South. On the other hand, some historians ascribe the unhealthy economy to the field most of the South was focusing on, which was agriculture, mostly cotton. While other scholars claim, their economy was just as good and profitable as similar economies elsewhere in the world, only southerners were not investing their money efficiently and that was the flaw influencing the whole economy. One way or another, the probability of any long-term continuance of the slavery system in American South is highly unlikely.¹²

Even if the economy of the slavery South was to prevail, the influence of the North has to be taken into consideration. With the Northern capitalism arising, the Southern slaveholding system was becoming more and more endangered. While the South was based on agriculture and sort of aristocracy they developed, the North was focused on business individuals were building by themselves. It is only natural that neighboring states influence each other, even more so because of the trade between the South and the North, and this influence increased with network of railroads which was built in the South which resulted in connecting the upper South with the Northern states. That means the markets were suddenly more accessible for both sides and eventually, led to decline in slavery in the upper South.¹³

Whether the Founding Father knew all this factors and were sure the slavery will decline in time and then, the slavery systems will be easier and safer to abolish is a subjective matter. The truth is, they were all politicians, or at least were acquainted with the politics and knew its movements very well, so it might have been wise of them to postpone the ‘war against slavery’ and deal with strengthening of the nation. Some of the events and aspects that will be discussed further in this thesis however give the impression of selfishness of some of the Founding Fathers, while others give evidence of their effort to abolish slavery right away. The truth is probably somewhere in between, but one fact is indisputable - the abolition of slavery would be a huge shock for the Southerners and the effects on the union might have been fatal.

¹² Luraghi, *The Rise and Fall of the Plantation South*, 39; Genovese, “The Significance of the Slave Plantation for Southern Economic Development,” 422.

¹³ Genovese, *The Political Economy of Slavery*, 28, 34; Genovese, *The Political Economy of Slavery*, 28; Genovese, “The Significance of the Slave Plantation for Southern Economic Development,” 430.

2.4. Defending Slavery

Peoples urge to defend slavery often came from their fear of change of the system they knew. Slavery is connected not only to racism and economy, but also to sectionalism and class consciousness, which is a reason why people were so much against abolition of slavery - its abolition would cause not only economical changes, but also changes in everyday lives of each of them, so they would have to deal with radical changes throughout the whole society. An interesting fact is, that even before the first slaves were brought to America, there were people who opposed that idea and argued the considerable number of blacks brought to America would make a burden to the society to prevent slaves being imported to the colonies in the first place. However, the slavery tradition did develop in America eventually.¹⁴

The history of defending slavery in America reaches as far as slavery in America itself, although, there were only little writings on it. In one of them, William Harper argues slavery is a natural part of civilized world. He claims the growth of a civilization needs this kind of labor, and that blacks are predetermined to work as slaves, and if civilized nations did not use them in such fashion, it would be a wasted resource. Also, Harper argues that liberty is a construct because people are naturally in superior or subordinate position in their lives. But the number of works written on proslavery in America is very thin. The reason for that is however simple. Each nation with slavery tradition had its own justifications for it - it is obvious, slavery could not endure in an anti-slavery society. Americans implemented slavery into their society already in early stages of colonization which means the defense of slavery was being developed from the very beginning of slavery tradition. But another fact is that in a slavery society where there is no or little anti-slavery voices, such was America, there was no need to defend it, which means there was little written on pro-slavery arguments in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, before the anti-slavery voices arose. It could be argued that the reason for such a little writings defending slavery were produced was either lack of arguments slavery defendants had to support slavery, or not enough anti-slavery writings to oppose, the reason was however

¹⁴ Larry E. Tise, *Proslavery: A History of the Defense of Slavery in America, 1701-1840* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1987), 13; E. N. Elliott, *Cotton is King and Proslavery Arguments: Comprising the Writing of Hammond, Harper, Christy, Stringfellow, Hondge, Bledsoe, and Cartwright on this Important Subject* (Augusta, GA: Pritchard, Abbot and Loomis, 1860), 41.

most likely that the slavery thoughts were so rooted in Americans' minds, there was almost no one to advocate it for.¹⁵

¹⁵ Tise, *Proslavery*, 15; Elliott, *Cotton King*, 1-9.

3. THE FOUNDING FATHERS AND SLAVERY

Although the Founding Fathers are nearly a synonym to freedom to many people, the fact is that many of the Founding Fathers were actually slave owners. Their struggle of whether to abolish slavery which would correspond with their revolutionary ideas, or whether to retain the slavery which represented one of the most crucial pillars of the Union, the right to property.¹⁶

This ambiguity in their attitude towards slavery could be described as the well-known American Paradox. The slavery was politically important as one of the basis of the Union but contradicted to the ideas of the revolution and freedom itself. Freehling claims the Founding Fathers were against slavery but also realized it was a tool necessary for building the Union. He also argues that most people in America did not thought of slavery as of an essential matter in the future, it was more of a temporary necessary evil for them.¹⁷

The Founding Fathers are considered either as the one and only notion which lead to ending of slavery or, on the contrary, they are being looked at as politicians who did nothing at all to help abolishing of slavery. The truth however might be somewhere in between those two opinions.¹⁸

Although the Founding Fathers are universally seen as men fighting for freedom and democracy, but many of them were in fact not so eager to end the institution of slavery. They were probably too concerned of what consequences the abolition of slavery could represent. Slavery was influencing economy of America to a great extent. Also, it could be argued that America did not know any other system since the first settlers. The Founding Fathers who were 'hesitating' to do some kind of a serious action or were idle to speak openly about the morality of abolition of racial slavery, might have been worried about the impact of slavery prohibition. This fear is completely reasonable because repercussions of such a huge change in a system partially built on slavery are not easy to anticipate. As already mentioned, in America, until 1850, many of the presidents were accompanied by their slaves to work. The White House was built and maintained by slaves. In America, slavery was so well-established, the impacts were clearly about to be colossal.¹⁹

¹⁶ William W. Freehling, "The Founding Fathers and Slavery," *The American Historical Review* 77, no. 1 (1972): 81-93. doi: 10.2307/1856595.

¹⁷ Freehling, "The Founding Fathers and Slavery," 81-93.

¹⁸ Freehling, "The Founding Fathers and Slavery," 81-93.

¹⁹ Schneider, and Schneider, *Slavery in America*, 49; Davis, *In the Shadow of Liberty*, 12.

3.1. Thomas Jefferson

Thomas Jefferson is a perfect example of this ambiguity. As an author of the Declaration of Independence he believed in equality of all people, he was against slavery and meant to stop slavery from spreading across the America. Yet he believed blacks to be inferior to whites and that the South could not survive without slavery. Freehling claims that according to Winthrop Jordan, who wrote on the history of slavery and racism, Jefferson “suspected that blacks had greater sexual appetites and lower intellectual faculties than did whites.”²⁰ Despite of the fact that he owned over a hundred slaves at times, Jefferson knew slavery to be immoral and he meant to free all his slaves to let them work for him. This intention of his has been thwarted several times because of Jefferson’s financial problems.²¹

When the Declaration of Independence was being written, Jefferson, as a member of Congress responsible for writing the declaration, intended to include a part condemning slavery in it. In this part, he accused the British Monarchy and the King, George III, of being responsible for establishment and continuance of the concept of slavery in America. This was clearly a merely effort for finding someone to hold responsible for the horrific events caused by slavery, which might be the reason many members of Congress denied it. Another reason for their denial might be that they were concerned the Declaration of Independence would not pass if there were anti-slavery ideas implemented in it, even though most of them might have been anti-slavery as well. But Jefferson did succeed in his effort to abolish slave trade in America. He enforced the law which banned importing slaves into the colony of Virginia in 1778. This law made importing slaves illegal and only slaves ‘produced’ in America could be traded with, which made them much more expensive and valuable.²²

Interesting fact is that there has even been disputes over an affair which was supposed to happen between Thomas Jefferson and his mulatto servant, Sally Hemings. Sally Hemings allegedly became Jefferson’s mistress and even conceived a child with him.

²⁰ Davis, *In the Shadow of Liberty*, 12.

²¹ Davis, *In the Shadow of Liberty*, 12; Boyd Childress, “Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826)” in *Slavery in the United States: A Social, Political, and Historical Encyclopedia*, vol. 1, 350-52, Junius P. Rodrigues, ed. (Santa Barbara: ABC Clio, 2007); Morgan, *The Challenge of the American Revolution*, 114; Joyce Appleby, and Terrence Ball, eds., *Jefferson: Political Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 473.

According to many people, Jefferson did not only father one of her children, but all six of them. The dispute has been going on since 1790s and people are divided into a group denying Jefferson's paternity of Hemings' children and a group who accepts the facts. The facts being the DNA test which confirmed the DNAs of Sally Hemings' descendants and Thomas Jefferson, and times Jefferson visited Monticello where Sally Hemings worked. The objectors to the paternity generally claim the children were fathered by Thomas Jefferson's father or brother, which is a claim hard to disprove even with today's genealogy techniques, although there is the evidence of Jefferson's visitation schedule of Monticello which matches the dates of conceptions of Sally Hemings' children and which is not the same or similar enough to Monticello visits of other men in Jefferson's family. Another lead is the fact that Sally Hemings and her children were the only slaves Jefferson freed in his will, the rest was passed to his children. There is no doubt the dispute will not end any time soon but the facts stated are interesting and important fact to be stated when discussing Jefferson's relationship to slavery.²³

Thomas Jefferson was aware of the problems following the abolition of slavery. He claimed that blacks and whites will not be able to live side by side peacefully in America for hundreds of years. Also, he knew the abolition would have a great impact on America's economy, for it used to be built partially on slaves for a long time. Nevertheless he was always morally against slavery and acted upon it. He even proclaimed the abolition of domestic slavery to be "the great object of desire in those colonies where it was unhappily introduced in their infant state."²⁴

Jefferson proposed a federally financed plan to abolish the slavery in 1824, which was 8 years before his grandson, Thomas Jefferson Randolph, suggested his own scheme to end slavery in the 1832 Virginia slavery debate. Jefferson's plan would in fact have success in abolition of slavery sooner than his grandson's. Although his idea of realization of slavery abolition was always through "gradual emancipation." The purpose was to send

²² McCullough, *John Adams*, 134; Ferling, *John Adams*, 151; Roger G. Kennedy, *Mr. Jefferson's Lost Cause: Land, Farmers, Slavery, and the Louisiana Purchase* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 250.

²³ Anette Gordon-Reed, *Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings: An American Controversy* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1997), 1-2; David M. Abbey, "The Thomas Jefferson Paternity Case," *Nature* (1999): 32; Childress, "Thomas Jefferson," 350-52; Betsy McCann, "Monticello's Master: Sally Hemings and the Deconstruction of the Patriot Archetype," *Speaker & Gavel* 41, no. 1 (2004): 20-33.

slave children to their own country, away from their parents, where they would become independent.²⁵

Even though Jefferson's opinions concerning blacks were not really favourable, many historians argue that Jefferson's ideas and actions contributed a lot to actual abolition of slavery in 1865. On the other hand, some scholars claim that despite his antipathy for slavery, Jefferson never actually acted upon it and never did anything to bring the institution of slavery down. In one of his articles, Cohen claims that "Jefferson's world depended upon forced labor for its very existence."²⁶

The opinions on the matter of Thomas Jefferson's and slavery differ and the truth might not ever be known. Although it is possible that this inconsistency of Jefferson's actions, ideas and proclamations is not to be understood either one way or another. The reality could possibly be very well explained by this American-paradox-ambiguity many politicians experienced at times of slavery decline. The fact might be that Jefferson himself was torn between the revolutionary ideals of freedom and the natural inclination to traditional race slavery system he was born into.

3.2. Benjamin Franklin

Benjamin Franklin, also one of the most known and influential Founding Fathers, was born in 1706 in Boston as the youngest of seventeen children. One of his brother apprenticed him a printer. At age of 15, he started contributing to the *New England Courant*. Benjamin Franklin was interested in politics and current affairs in quite early age, he lived in France for several years and that was also the reason he was, as a member of committee that was supposed to outline the Declaration of Independence, sent to France in 1776 to represent the American colonies there. And three years before his decease in 1790,

²⁴ David B. Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770-1823* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 173; Walter D. Kennedy, *Myths of American Slavery* (Gretna: Pelican Publishing, 2003), 63, 229; Freehling, "The Founding Fathers and Slavery," 81-93.

²⁵ Ari Helo, and Peter Onuf, "Jefferson, Morality, and the Problem of Slavery," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 60, no. 3 (2003): 583-614, doi: 10.2307/3491552; Freehling, "The Founding Fathers and Slavery," 81-93.

²⁶ William Cohen, "Thomas Jefferson and the Problem of Slavery," *The Journal of American History* 56, no. 3 (1969): 503-26, doi: 10.2307/1904203.

he was elected a president of Pennsylvania Abolitionist Society, the first abolitionist society in America.²⁷

Franklin, although he was an abolitionist, considered blacks to be inferior to whites. In years 1730 to 1781, Benjamin Franklin owned house slaves. In 1780 in Pennsylvania, the gradual emancipation scheme was accepted. After that, Pennsylvania was considered a free state by most slaves. Contrary to these facts, he partook in founding of a school for blacks in Pennsylvania in 1758, which shows that, similarly to Jefferson, he was struggling his innate preconceptions about blacks. Although he was born into slavery system where perceiving blacks to be an inferior race was a natural way of thinking, Franklin knew it was not natural at all and tried to overcome these prejudices and fight the slavery system.²⁸

In 1790, the year Benjamin Franklin died, the Pennsylvania Abolitionist Society wrote several petitions concerning slavery, which were managed to get Benjamin Franklin's signature on, and put them forward to the Congress. These documents demanded a new government's approach to slavery and starting a scheme which would result in complete abolition of slavery.²⁹

Although, in 1787 Franklin declined to talk about the question of slavery on the Constitutional Convention. The Pennsylvania Abolitionist Society asked him to do so in time he was already the president of the institution, yet he declined. That is another typical discrepancy of what many would expect of Benjamin Franklin, a Founding Father, and of what really was his actions. For this, he was even called a 'hypocrite' by several members of the Society.³⁰

During his lifetime, Benjamin Franklin wrote many articles and contributions to various newspapers (and even ballads at his early age). In his work, he often mentions or focuses on slavery and racial identity from which is clear he was, similarly to Thomas Jefferson, aware of the immorality, maybe even unsustainability of the concept of slavery. But nevertheless, he never talked about these matters directly. As if he was worried of

²⁷ John C. Hammond, *Slavery, Freedom, and Expansion in the Early American West* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2007), 1; Franklin, *The Autobiography*, 5-6, 104-06.

²⁸ Marilyn Wise, "The Twist: Don't Treat Me Like a Slave," in *Seasoned to the Country: Slavery in the Life of Benjamin Franklin* (Los Angeles: Xlibris, 2013), PDF e-book; Claudine N. Ferrel, *The Abolitionist Movement* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2006), 19.

²⁹ Hammond, *Slavery, Freedom, and Expansion in the Early American West*, 1.

³⁰ David Waldstreicher, *Runaway America: Benjamin Franklin, Slavery, and the American Revolution* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2004), xiii.

consequences following expression of such convictions. Or some may even call it fear of losing one's position. Although it is strongly against our belief rooted in us because of lifetimes of influence of the education, literature and medias. Of course, this is an issue each individual sees subjectively, but the fact stays - there is a considerable ambiguity in Founding Fathers' beliefs, opinions, and in their actions.³¹

3.3. John Jay

John Jay was a lawyer and a politician born in 1745 in New York, he led many social and religious causes which were mostly focused on sequential abolition of slavery, and also on enhancing lives of free blacks. He was chosen to be the first president of New York Society for Manumission in 1885. On slavery John Jay said: "In my opinion every man, of every color and description, as a natural right to freedom, and I shall ever acknowledge myself to be an advocate for the manumission of slaves, in such way as may be consistent with the justice due to them, with the justice due to their masters, and with the regard to the actual state of society. These considerations unite in convincing me that the abolition of slavery necessarily must be gradual."³²

Similarly to the Founding Fathers discussed, John Jay despised the concept of slavery for its immorality. And just as other Founding Fathers, he did own slaves. Although his approach to slavery varied from the approaches of his colleagues. John Jay was aware of his need to own slaves, which was justified - households of that time needed slaves to keep the households running and it was nearly impossible to get the labor elsewhere. Of course, the fact is most of the people did not even tried to because, as already mentioned, slavery was a common phenomenon and little people considered it immoral. John Jay was however upset with the very fact he needed slaves in his life and the impossibility of obtaining the labor in form of free servants. On this matter, he proclaimed: "I purchase slaves, and manumit them at proper ages, and when their faithful services shall have afforded a

³¹ Waldstreicher, *Runaway America*, xiii; Franklin, *The Autobiography*, 104-06.

³² Jay, *The Life of John Jay*, 10, 16, 285; Walter Stahr, "New York," in *John Jay: Founding Father* (New York: Diversion Books, 2012), PDF e-book; Rodrigues, ed., *Slavery in the United States*, 25; Stahr, introduction to *John Jay: Founding Father*.

reasonable retribution.”³³ After the number of free servants increased, he no longer owned slaves and was relieved he no longer was a part of the slavery system.³⁴

Contradictory o the Founding Father who have already been discussed in this thesis, John Jay differs in his action toward the end of the slavery. He was appointed a member of a commission to which was assigned to draft the Constitution, and as the member of this commission, John Jay intended to include the commitment to abolish slavery in the Constitution. He failed in this noble ambition of his merely because of a tragic event.³⁵

When it came to finally accepting and adopting the Constitution in the end of the convention, John Jay was absent from New York where it took place, because of his mother’s death. If he was there, he might have carried the idea of gradual abolition of slavery through into the Constitution. It is the fact that after reading the accepted form of the Constitution, he was upset because during his absence, some aspects had been changed and some points had been added and omitted, which he would not have approved if present.³⁶

Of course the intention of including the premise considering freeing slaves and abolition of slavery could not be realized anyway because many other members of the commission for drafting the Constitution did not agree from the start, but the very idea of John Jay fighting for right of the enslaved in time of drawing the Constitution up is important. It goes against the idea of Founding Fathers being reluctant to act upon slavery indeed.³⁷

3.4. John Adams

John Adams was the second President of the United States of America, he graduated from Harvard College in 1755 and became a lawyer in 1758. He, as well as formerly discussed Founding Fathers, opposed slavery which was a trait he shared with his wife, Abigail Adams. John Adams never in his life owned a slave, nor he ever hired them - he and his wife preferred spending more money for work in their household instead of saving money by hiring or purchasing slaves. In fact, John Adams and later his son, John Quincy

³³ Jay, *The Life of John Jay*, 235.

³⁴ Jay, *The Life of John Jay*, 235.

³⁵ Jay, *The Life of John Jay*, 69; Stahr, “Revolutionary Leader,” in *John Jay: Founding Father*.

³⁶ Jay, *The Life of John Jay*, 229.

³⁷ Stahr, “Revolutionary Leader,” in *John Jay: Founding Father*.

Adams, were the only two Presidents of the United States who did not own slaves out of the first seven.³⁸

John Adams claimed slavery to be “an evil of colossal magnitude”³⁹ and a “foul contagion in the human character,”⁴⁰ and obviously, his principle of never buying or even hiring slaves proves truthfulness and honesty of these words of his. Although again, there could be found more evidence supporting the theory of ambiguousness in Founding Father’s views on slavery and their deeds to prohibit it.

As an attorney, John Adams participated several slave cases, usually defending the party of the slave owner. According to McCullough, Adams not once defended the slave in the trials, on the other hand, Ferling claims Adams did defend the slave in some trials. In case Ferling is right and John Adams did indeed appear as the advocate for the slave in some cases, then it is a proof he believed in equality and in slaves’ rights and was not afraid to show it and speak his mind publicly. However, if McCullough’s conviction is correct, it is another case of Founding Fathers’ ambiguity concerning slavery.⁴¹

John Adams might be worried about risking his reputation, his credibility in eyes of many citizens of the United States, the unwillingness to defend slaves may originate from the fear of losing one’s power. Another point of view might be that the Founding Father were aware of their influence on people and power to make changes in the system. The truth is, if they lost their credibility, they could no longer do anything about the slavery system they all opposed to. If this was the case, it was also very contradictory - to avoid sharing the anti-slavery ideas in public in order to stay able to prohibit slavery for good - but could be perceived logical in a way.

Although, there is one aspect that need to be mentioned when discussing the matter of Adams’ defending (or not defending) any slaves as an attorney. According to Butterfield, even though John Adams is considered a highly educated and capable lawyer by those who write about him, there is only a very little documentation engaging in his practice. Biographers inquiring John Adams most frequently deal with his most famous trials which

³⁸ Davis, *In the Shadow of Liberty*, 12; Ferling, *John Adams*, 172; Christina Wilsdon, *John Adams, Abigail Adams* (New Rochelle: Benchmark Education, 2011), 27; Muriel L. Dubois, *John Adams: A Photo-Illustrated Biography* (Mankato: Bridgestone Books, 2003), 5-9; Samuel W. Crompton, *John Adams: American Patriot* (Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 2006), 13; McCullough, *John Adams*, 134.

³⁹ McCullough, *John Adams*, 134.

⁴⁰ McCullough, *John Adams*, 134.

⁴¹ McCullough, *John Adams*, 134; Ferling, *John Adams*, 172.

were important not only from the point of view of humanity, but also from the political point of view. His grandson's edition of Adams' writing, only a fragment of cases Adams took part of are mentioned. The result being, there might be no way of knowing for sure whether John Adams were on any of the slave cases for the slaves as well.⁴²

In his book, Ferling also claims that "there is no evidence that he ever spoke out on the issue of slavery in any nation forum or that he ever entered into a dialogue on the subject with any of his southern friends."⁴³ This, with McCullough's allegation regarding no slaves having been defended by John Adams during his carrier as an attorney, resembles Benjamin Franklin's behavior concerning slaves. As already mentioned, Franklin rejected Pennsylvania Abolition Society's appeal to speak about the slavery matter on the Constitutional Convention in 1787 despite the fact he was the president of the Society.⁴⁴

3.5. George Washington

Alongside with Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin and others, he is perceived as one of the most influential and known Founding Fathers of America and his life's experience with slavery is another example of struggle between slavery and freedom in minds and lives of the Founding Fathers. He became the first president of the United States of America in 1789, and until 1786 he was still buying slaves. He had undoubtedly anti-slavery thoughts and ideas, though he perceived slavery as an unnecessary phenomenon for the economics.⁴⁵

In part of his book, Hirschfeld depicts George Washington as a man who only aimed to be seen as an anti-slavery person. Although, later on in the book, he presents other facts that show him as an abolitionist. Once he became a person of interest for the public, Washington realized he was perceived as a freedom fighter and that he became an influence for many people. As a result, he promised himself he would never again get involved in transactions engaging buying or selling slaves. And he did not do so even when the slaves he already owned seized to be productive and altogether, his slaves were more of

⁴² L. H. Butterfield, preface to *Legal Papers of John Adams*, vol. 1, ed. L. Kinwin Wroth and Hiller B. Zobel (Chambridge: The Belknap Press, 1965).

⁴³ Ferling, *John Adams*, 173.

⁴⁴ Waldstreicher, *Runaway America*, xiii.

⁴⁵ Fritz Hirschfeld, *George Washington and Slavery: A Documentary Portrayal* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1997), 1, 232; François Furstenberg, "Atlantic Slavery, Atlantic Freedom: George

a financial burden for Washington. And then, when several of his slaves run away from his estates, he found himself no longer able to use ‘traditional ways’ to retrieve his slaves back but yet, he did not give up on pursuing them in other, less obvious ways - this was, of course, more of a political issue than a moral one, as Washington needed to maintain his current public image.⁴⁶

Washington never intended or allowed for his opinions on slavery to be presented publicly for he suspected he would be called a hypocrite, similarly to Benjamin Franklin after his refusal to bring the matter of slavery on in 1787 on the Constitutional Convention, for still owning slaves while speaking in favor of abolitionism. The fact he decided not to trade with slaves anymore only after he became a politician which means he did it to build and keep his profile, and the fact he not only never freed his slaves, but also chased ‘in secret’ those who fled down, shows his unwillingness to ever free his slaves, which suggests that the only reason for ceasing dealing with slaves, was his political status.⁴⁷

Nevertheless, Washington was against slavery. There is evidence, that Washington was anti-slavery in thought, though he never expressed it much publicly. There were books and pamphlets (almost all of them were abolitionist) found in Washington’s library which prove he was interested in anti-slavery ideas, he also discussed his idea of freeing all his slaves once with William Gordon. Washington was not willing to speak openly about his abolitionist ideas, although he never hid them in his private life.⁴⁸

3.6. James Madison

Same as most of the Founding Fathers, or at least those who were born into wealthy families, James Madison grew up owning slaves, nevertheless, when he grew up, he saw slavery as an evil, the end of which however might destroy the South of America. And same as many Founding Fathers, he believed slavery must be ended in a gradual process. Similarly to George Washington and Thomas Jefferson, Madison considered slavery to be

Washington, Slavery, and Transatlantic Abolitionist Networks,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 68, no. 2 (2011): 247-86.

⁴⁶ Hirschfeld, *George Washington and Slavery*, 4-6.

⁴⁷ Hirschfeld, *George Washington and Slavery*, 4-6.

⁴⁸ Kevin J. Hayes, *George Washington: A Life in Books* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 231-32; Hirschfeld, *George Washington and Slavery*, 3.

immoral and not able to endure anyway for its lack of effectiveness in a long period of time in economical point of view⁴⁹

Madison struggled for adoption of laws banning or at least reducing slavery. He claimed that “the General Government have power to prevent the increase of slavery.”⁵⁰ Unfortunately, other delegates in the Government decided not to affect slavery in any laws. Although, Roberts argues in his book, that neither Madison nor any other member of the convention “made a serious effort to ban slavery.”⁵¹ The reason in this case might not be the case of Founding Fathers’ discussed ambiguity but an actual political compromise that had to be made to put such a crucial document, as the Constitution indisputably is through. As the Founding Fathers presupposed, the Southern states would simply not let the Constitution pass if it had contained anti-slavery elements.⁵²

In the Virginia Assembly in 1785, he spoke in favor of Jefferson’s bill written to support gradual prohibition of slavery and against a bill which intended to make manumission of slaves illegal. Jefferson’s bill was rejected eventually, but so was the bill outlawing slave manumission. Two years later, in 1787 on Constitutional Convention, James Madison came up with the idea which later became known as the Three-fifths Compromise which was debated over at the Convention in which Benjamin Franklin, George Washington and Alexander Hamilton participated as state delegates. This compromise determined that three fifths of all slaves were counted as citizens of the state, which was an issue that brought up a severe discrepancies between Southerners and Northerners because the South sought to use the ‘extra citizens’ for their representation, not for taxation, while the North meant this compromise to levy taxes on the South without any additional representation in the Parliament. The result of this compromise could be perceived as a kind of a penalization of slavery in form of the additional taxes.⁵³

⁴⁹ Lynne Cheney, *James Madison: A Life Reconsidered* (New York: Penguin Books, 2014), PDF e-book; Ralph L. Ketcham, *James Madison: A Biography* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 1990), 148.

⁵⁰ Jeremy Roberts, *James Madison* (Minneapolis: Learner Publications Company, 2004), 43.

⁵¹ Roberts, *James Madison*, 43.

⁵² Michael E. Newton, *Angry Mobs and Founding Fathers: The Fight for Control of the American Revolution* (Phoenix: Eleftheria Publishing, 2011), 115; Roberts, *James Madison*, 43; Cheney, *James Madison*.

⁵³ Ketcham, *James Madison*, 149; Staughton Lynd, “The Compromise of 1787,” *Political Science Quarterly* 81, no. 2 (1966): 241; Howard A. Ohline, “Republicanism and Slavery: Origins of the Three-Fifths Clause in the United States Constitution,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 28, no. 4 (1971): 564-63; Paul Finkelman, *Slavery and the Founders: Race and Slavery in the Age of Jefferson* (New York: M.E. Shape, 2001), 7.

Also, Madison had to make an unpleasant choice when the petition sponsored by Franklin, which was already mentioned in this thesis, was discussed in Congress. This petition was Franklin's last public act and it demanded gradual abolition of slavery to be enacted by law. James Madison, with his anti-slavery ideas, agreed with the petition and the gradual prohibition of slavery was something he sought as well, although he was aware of the threat of the dissections in the Congress. Especially Georgia and South Carolina would be angered by such actions.⁵⁴

However, no matter when the first legal steps toward the end of the slavery would be taken, it was at most certain that not everyone agreed, that there would be disputes over it and that there would always be a lot of Americans for whom this change would mean a financial loss. Such major changes are always troublesome but need to be taken to make the system better, even though Founding Fathers might often not make certain measures to end the slavery to maintain the political balance in the country, or to perform some act of higher priority at the time (as was the case of giving up covering the abolition of slavery in the Constitution in order to make sure it passes) they must have known, and obviously they knew, it has to come sooner or later. The question of whether it was for some kind of their individual 'comfort' or for serious concerns about the society and politics, is highly a subjective matter.

3.7. Alexander Hamilton

Mother of Alexander Hamilton was a slaveholder, he was born on sugar plantations which required a lot of slaves to maintain. In one of his jobs, Hamilton inspected ship cargoes, some of which were also slaves. Seeing the inhuman conditions slaves had to endure on the ships and the time spend growing up among the slaves may be the main reasons he became an abolitionist. A fact worth mentioning is that Alexander Hamilton opposed slavery from an early age. He considered race to be a very absurd factor to determine whether a person should be allowed to live a free life or not, and, unlike many other Founding Fathers, Hamilton did not think blacks to be inferior in any way - intellectually nor naturally.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Ketcham, *James Madison*, 315.

⁵⁵ Michael P. Federici, *The Political Philosophy of Alexander Hamilton* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2012), PDF e-book; James O. Horton, "Alexander Hamilton: Slavery and Race in a Revolutionary Generation," *The New York Journal of American History* 65, no. 3 (2004): 16-24; Lisa

Unlike Thomas Jefferson, who often address the issue of slavery and abolitionism in his works or speeches, Hamilton did not focus on slavery much in his writing, though his ideas and opinions on slavery were clear. For this he is by some perceived as a man not very eager to abolish slavery or even a man who was against racial equality. It is the truth however, Alexander Hamilton was anti-slavery and in comparison to Thomas Jefferson, who always felt blacks to be inferior even though he rationally considered slavery to be immoral, his ideas were far more unequivocal.⁵⁶

Hamilton did not believe slavery could be abolished nationally by law, hence the attempts to abolish slavery he made were of state scope. This was probably the reason why he was not supportive of every effort to abolish slavery, for example, he did not support the efforts made on the Constitutional Convention in 1787, or the Quaker petitions in 1790 by Pennsylvania Abolitionist Society, signed by its president, Benjamin Franklin (which has been already discussed in this thesis). On the other hand, he supported a scheme that intended to allow slaves to be conscripted for the patriot army and their further emancipation. Hamilton also endeavored for prohibition of slavery in the state of New York.⁵⁷

Alexander Hamilton knew the slavery abolition, or rather the merely discussions over the issue, could cause the union to collapse, which means he had probably the same reason not to press the abolition of slavery as many other Founding Fathers discussed. In this case however, the reason not to pursue the abolition of slavery in the Congress is probably Hamilton's conviction of unfeasibility of prohibition of slavery nation-wide. It is although obvious that Hamilton was pursuing the end of slavery in ways he thought were possible and not jeopardizing to the union as a whole.⁵⁸

That is a view showing Alexander Hamilton in a different way than some other Founders discussed. As is being argued, there is an option of thinking other Founding Fathers were dreaded of the possible impact of fighting for the abolition, Hamilton seems to be indeed lead by his responsibility and by what he considered to be right.

DeCarolis, *Alexander Hamilton: Federalist and Founding Father* (New York: PowerPlus Books, 2003), 18; Claudine L. Ferrell, *The Abolitionist Movement* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2006), 19.

⁵⁶ Federici, *The Political Philosophy of Alexander Hamilton*.

⁵⁷ Federici, *The Political Philosophy of Alexander Hamilton*; Hammond, *Slavery, Freedom, and Expansion in the Early American West*, 1; Horton, "Alexander Hamilton," 16-24.

⁵⁸ Ron Chernow, *Alexander Hamilton* (New York: Penguin Books, 2005), PDF e-book.

3.8. James Monroe

As has been already mentioned in this thesis, James Monroe was the last Founding Father, and also the fifth president of the United States. He was born in Virginia and since 1776 when he left school to fight for the American Revolution (where he eventually served under General George Washington) Monroe's life was all about politics. Monroe was a slave owner even though, like other Founding Fathers, was morally against slavery which he never freed, like Thomas Jefferson. When asked about the issue of never freeing his slaves even though he opposed slavery, he expressed worries about blacks' ability to deal with a free life. Like many Founding Fathers, he also acknowledged humanity of slaves and opposed the way slaves were being treated which in a way contradicted to his worry about the capability of blacks to live independent lives.⁵⁹

Although he would like to ban slavery, he advocated the opinion that decide about the slavery issue themselves, which was resulted in a conflict he had to cope with during Missouri's joining to the Union. Missouri was a slave state when it sought to be a part of the Union, and also a Northern state which was a problem because most politicians wanted to keep slavery in the South. Although he could not ban slavery in Missouri, he also did not week for a slavery being part of the North, but Monroe believed a compromise was possible. The compromise was eventually became known as the Missouri Compromise which was based on a principle that only way to accept a slave state was by simultaneously adding a free state to the Union.⁶⁰

Many Founders discussed in this thesis already, at least partially, disproved the opinions claiming they were not in fact burdened with the enslaved and that they only spoke or wrote on the slavery issue in anti-slavery ways for propagandistic purpose. Though the in the case of James Monroe, this idea might be discussed once more. The very fact of his unwillingness to emancipate his slaves is enough to doubt his honesty in the slavery issue. He was not the only Founding Father to think about slaves' lives after their manumission, there have been however possible resolution proposed and none accepted - for example Jefferson's idea of sending black children to Haiti to grow up in a free society,

⁵⁹ Stuart Leibiger, ed., *A Companion to James Madison and James Monroe* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), PDF e-book; Megan M. Gunderson, *James Monroe* (Edina: ABDO Publishing, 2009), 4.

⁶⁰ Gary Hart, *James Monroe: The American Presidents Series: The 5th President, 1817-1825* (New York: Times Books, 2005), PDF e-book; Teitelbaum, *James Monroe*, 39-41; Gunderson, *James Monroe*, 8.

which is paradoxical because Jefferson, who came up with the idea never freed his slaves either.⁶¹

There is although a different fact which could explain this contradictory phenomena in Monroe's actions and that is, again, the fear of a civil war. The abolition slavery would cause sever displeasures in the South and the fear of the Founding Fathers' concerning the surviving of the nation in case of a civil war was already discussed. The worry about the future of the Union was rational and it could be the reason of Monroe's ambiguous behaviour.

Even though it is hard, or even impossible to make a single conclusion about all the Founding Fathers, their opinions on slavery and their approach to it as a whole because they each acted as an individual and they also looked at slavery from different angles, there are some similar patterns that can be described. All of the Founding Fathers considered slavery as a morally wrong phenomenon but still when there was an opportunity to act, many of them hesitated or were reluctant to do so. The goal of this thesis is to determine whether it was caused by their inherited prejudices and racism they were trying to overcome, or whether the reason were their fears about the union which was quite young and fragile yet.

With the exception of John Adams, who never owned slaves, the Founding Fathers were slave owners themselves. The society and the environment people grow up in and live in influence them a lot, therefore there is nothing odd about the Founding Fathers' racial prejudices. Many of them considered blacks to be inferior to whites, they thought they were like children - dependent, naive, not able to live without any help - although they generally spoke in favour of their manumission. Founding Fathers believed in gradual abolition of slavery in order to allow the society to get used to a new system, and also in order to introduce slaves to free lives. Most of the action Founding Fathers took that were not strictly against slavery, or those acts against slavery they did not take could be explained both by their selfishness and their forethought. The truth is that men of power are generally afraid of losing it, and the Founders would surely jeopardize their statuses if they were radically antislavery - it was certain that people, especially in the South would not agree

⁶¹ Helo, and Onuf, "Jefferson, Morality, and the Problem of Slavery," 583-614.

with the abolition for it would mean to give up most of their workforce and get another, more expensive. In seventeenth and eighteenth century, not many were against slavery and even fewer spoke against it, which was a hard situation for politicians and people of interest who would dare to be among the first ones. That means their behavior could have been, at least partially, of selfish character.⁶²

On the other hand, Founding Fathers were men building the Union and the United States as we know them today, and they knew the system was fragile. The abolition of slavery might have caused the whole South to protest, which eventually did happen later, and the civil war would be on a rise. As was mentioned earlier, the United States' chances of prevailing were obviously much smaller then when the Civil War actually broke out. The economics of slavery system was already discussed in this thesis and it is another reason the Founding Fathers might have been cautious about the abolition. The slavery was not a phenomenon that could last forever, meaning the deliberation of the Founders was in place and more of a strategic move than a endeavor for preserving one's rank.

⁶² Ferrell, *The Abolitionist Movement*, 7-8.

4. END OF SLAVERY

The abolition of slavery was achieved through a series of events and not by one action alone, also many of the American states had their own history of outlawing slavery, especially the Northern states. Some of the Northern states even adopted laws preventing from slaves being further imported there in 1783. In 1780s, slavery naturally declined in the North, and the individual states often freed the slaves outlawed the slavery. Although different states chose different approach of emancipating the enslaved - for example Massachusetts liberated the slaves instantly, while states like New York chose to free the slaves in a gradual process. These actions resulted in abolition of slavery in all territories north from the Ohio River by 1787.⁶³

Although the most important legal acts leading to abolition of slavery all over the United States were the Emancipation Proclamation written by Abraham Lincoln which are into effect in 1863, and the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution of the United States, which were adopted in 1864 and 1868. The purpose of the Thirteenth Amendment was to make slavery illegal throughout the United States, while the Fourteenth Amendment granted citizenship to everyone born in the United States and it provided equal law protection. There are no disputes over practical significance these two act had. The Emancipation Proclamation was the act which abolished slavery in the United States of America within three years. Although this act was extremely radical, it is the most revolutionary act ever signed by the President of the United States, and the moral of it cannot be doubted. Richard Hofstadter argues in his book that the Emancipation Proclamation was merely a propaganda act, which is an assertion supported by some scholars who find language used by Lincoln when writing the Emancipation Proclamation, opposed from his other works, much more simple and highly non-specific. He also claims it did not have a real effect of actually freeing any slaves, which is an opinion held also by Michael Vorenberg. The reason according to Hofstadter is that the Proclamation only applied to the slaves in regions where Lincoln's power could not reach during the Civil War (1861-1865). On the other hand, Adam Woog determines the Emancipation Proclamation as the most important act of the slavery abolition in America and claims it

⁶³ Rodriguez, *Slavery in United States*, 24, 87-98.

helped the North win the Civil War and that it did have the intended effect of freeing the slaves in short term.⁶⁴

The problem he might have wanted to solve by the Emancipation Proclamation could have been that in time of Lincoln, Republican Party was generally strongly against slavery and its members, most of them abolitionists, requested prohibition of slavery in America. Though Lincoln was against slavery himself, he was not a radical politician, he was known for his willingness to compromise with his opponents. Also, he was afraid that an immediate abolition of slavery would destroy the South, which was a fear shared with most of the Founding Fathers and the reason he believed in a gradual abolition as well. In one of his speeches, Lincoln talked about the need to control and regulate slavery and supported this with an exclamation that the Founding Fathers would have agreed on it and intended it (which was based on facts Lincoln himself gathered). The Emancipation Proclamation is for sure an essential document in American history, although its factual purpose and practical relevance is a discussed issue. Even though this act could possibly have been more of a propaganda matter, its significance cannot be overlooked for the progressive step made in the abolition of slavery.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Michael Vorenberg, introduction to *Final Freedom: The Civil War, the Abolition of Slavery, and the Thirteenth Amendment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Adam Woog, *The Emancipation Proclamation: Ending Slavery in America* (New York: Chelsea House, 2009), 1, 87; Richard Hofstadter, *The American Political Tradition: And the Men Who Made It* (New York: Random House, 1973), 167-69; Allen C. Guelzo, *Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation: The End of Slavery in America* (New York: Simon and Schuster Paperbacks, 2004), 1-3; John R. Conway, *A Look at the 13th and 14th Amendments: Slavery Abolished, Equal Protection Established* (New York: Enslow Publishers, 2009), 48-51.

⁶⁵ Woog, *The Emancipation Proclamation*, 4-6.

CONCLUSION

This thesis concentrated on slavery and Founding Fathers, and mostly, on Founding Fathers' ideas of slavery. It proved the Founders were indeed ambiguous in the actions they took and in what they claimed. The goal of this thesis was to decide whether this ambiguity was caused by the fear of losing their power or by their true worries and beliefs. Even though it is nearly impossible to include all the facts about all Founding Fathers and even less to interpret them in the way the Founders intended them to be meant, and it is not very accurate to summarize all Founding Fathers discussed here into only one conclusion, there are facts all of them have in common.

All of the Founding Fathers discussed were abolitionists and considered slavery to be morally wrong, although they differed in their views on blacks' equality to whites - while some regarded them as equal to whites, some still thought of them as of inferior human beings. Also, the Founders sought to end slavery in America in a gradual way because they believed it was the best way for the society to get used to black citizens, and for the blacks to adapt to freedom. Although, many of the Founding Fathers were reluctant to speak publicly of the slavery issue and were unwilling to take any anti-slavery steps even though they were mostly in powerful positions in politics. To this fact is linked their shared fear for the future of the Union if it were to undergo a civil war in such early stages, which was a probable scenario if they pushed the abolition of slavery. The South was based on a slave labor system and not only because of the economy but also for the sake of their society, they developed through slavery would they try to prevent its prohibition. The rightness of their worries is supported by the fact that civil war actually did break out a few decades later, but by that time America was mature enough to handle stand prevail as one nation.

In the end, although many of the controversial actions the Founding Fathers took could be interpreted both ways - the selfish and the patriotic - the truth behind the ambiguity of individual Founding Fathers' actions will possibly never be known for sure and are an issue to subjective opinions, but the overall conclusion is that the Founding Fathers were indeed worried about the Union for they suspected it would not prevail a conflict over slavery.

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