

# Thomas Jefferson: America's Founding Sociopath

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*On July Fourth, the people of the United States extravagantly celebrate the high-blown expressions on human rights that Thomas Jefferson penned in the Declaration of Independence – especially the noble phrase “all men are created equal.” But Jefferson really didn’t believe that or much else that he said and wrote during his lifetime. He was, in reality, a skilled propagandist and a world-class hypocrite.*

Yet, rather than subject Jefferson to a rigorous examination for his multiple hypocrisies, many Americans insist on protecting Jefferson’s reputation. From the Left, there is a desire to shield the lofty principles contained in the Declaration. From the Right, there is value in pretending that Jefferson’s revisionist concept of the Constitution – one favoring states’ rights over the federal government – was the “originalist” view of that founding document.

So, Jefferson – perhaps more than any figure in U.S. history – gets a pass for what he really was: a self-absorbed aristocrat who had one set of principles for himself and another for everybody else. Beyond the glaring contradiction between his “all men are created equal” pronouncement and his racist views on African-American slaves, he also lectured others about the need for frugality and the avoidance of debt while he lived a life of personal extravagance and was constantly in arrears to creditors. Jefferson also wrote provocatively that “The tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots and tyrants. It is its natural manure.” That is one of Jefferson’s famous quotes repeated endlessly these days by both the right-wing Tea Party and would-be leftist revolutionaries.

But Jefferson’s bravado was more a rhetorical flourish than a principle that he was ready to live or die by. In 1781, when he had a chance to put his own blood where his mouth was – when a Loyalist force led by the infamous traitor Benedict Arnold advanced on Richmond, Virginia, then-Gov. Jefferson fled for his life on the fastest horse he could find.

Jefferson hopped on the horse and fled again when a British cavalry force under Lt. Col. Banastre Tarleton approached Charlottesville and Monticello. Gov. Jefferson abandoned his neighbors in Charlottesville and left his slaves behind at Monticello to deal with the notoriously brutal Tarleton.

In other words, Jefferson may have been America’s original “chicken hawk,” talking cavalierly about other people’s blood as the “manure” of liberty but finding his own too precious to risk. Nevertheless, Jefferson later built his political career by questioning the revolutionary commitment of Alexander Hamilton and even George Washington, who repeatedly did risk their lives in fighting for American liberty.

But what Jefferson’s many apologists have most desperately tried to obscure was his

wretched record on race. Some pro-Jefferson scholars still talk about his rhapsodic depictions of the natural beauty of Virginia in his *Notes on the State of Virginia*, but they skirt the book's sickening racism, including his pseudo-science of measuring the skulls of African-Americans to prove that all men were not created equal.



Image: Thomas Jefferson, the principal author of the Declaration of Independence and the third president of the United States (in a 1788 portrait by John Trumbull, credit: Thomas Jefferson Foundation).

## A Question of Rape

For generations, these apologists also have challenged slave Sally Hemings's late-in-life remembrance to one of her sons, Madison Hemings, describing how Jefferson had imposed himself on her sexually in Paris after she arrived in 1787 as a teen-age slave girl attending one of his daughters.

According to Madison Hemings's account, his mother "became Mr. Jefferson's concubine [in Paris]. And when he was called back home she was *enciente* [pregnant] by him." Jefferson was insistent that Sally Hemings return with him, but her awareness of the absence of slavery in France gave her the leverage to insist on a transactional trade-off; she would continue to provide sex to Jefferson in exchange for his promise of good treatment and the freedom of her children when they turned 21, Madison Hemings said.

The traditional defense of Jefferson was to portray Sally Hemings as a promiscuous vixen who lied about her relationship with the Great Man to enhance her humble standing. After all, whose word would you believe, that of the estimable Jefferson who publicly decried race mixing or a lowly African-American slave girl?

For decades, the defenders stuck to that dismissive response despite the curious coincidence that Hemings tended to give birth nine months after one of Jefferson's visits to Monticello - and the discovery of male Jefferson DNA in Hemings's descendants.

Still, the Jefferson apologists raised finicky demands for conclusive proof of the liaison, as if it were absurd to envision that a relatively young man - then in his mid-40s, a widower since his wife died in 1782 - would have initiated a sexual relationship with an African-American female, even an attractive light-skinned mulatto like Hemings (who was the illegitimate daughter of Jefferson's father-in-law and thus Jefferson's late wife's half-sister)..

Though it's true that unequivocal evidence does not exist - Hemings did not save a semen-stained blue dress so it could later be subjected to DNA analysis - historians have increasingly come to accept the reality of Jefferson's sexual relationship with his young slave girl who was only 14 when she moved into Jefferson's residence in Paris.

So, with this ground shifting under Jefferson's defensive lines, his apologists retreated to a new position, that the relationship was a true love affair. Hemings was transformed into a kind of modern-day independent woman making her own choices about matters of the heart. However, given her age and her status - as Jefferson's property - the relationship could be more accurately described as serial rape.

But the reality may be even worse. Recent historical examinations of records at Jefferson's

Monticello plantation have provided support for contemporaneous accounts of Jefferson having sexual relations with at least one other slave girl beside Hemings and possibly more.

### Fathering of Slaves

Some scholars, such as historian Henry Wiencek in his 2012 book, *Master of the Mountain: Thomas Jefferson and His Slaves*, give credence to old reports about Jefferson having a direct role in populating Monticello by fathering his own dark-skinned lookalikes.

“In ways that no one completely understands, Monticello became populated by a number of mixed-race people who looked astonishingly like Thomas Jefferson,” wrote Wiencek.

“We know this not from what Jefferson’s detractors have claimed but from what his grandson Jeff Randolph openly admitted. According to him, not only Sally Hemings but another Hemings woman as well ‘had children which resembled Mr. Jefferson so closely that it was plain that they had his blood in their veins.’

“Resemblance meant kinship; there was no other explanation. Since Mr. Jefferson’s blood was Jeff’s blood, Jeff knew that he was somehow kin to these people of a parallel world. Jeff said the resemblance of one Hemings to Thomas Jefferson was ‘so close, that at some distance or in the dusk the slave, dressed in the same way, might be mistaken for Mr. Jefferson.’”

During a dinner at Monticello, Jeff Randolph recounted a scene in which a Thomas Jefferson lookalike was a servant tending to the table where Thomas Jefferson was seated. Randolph recalled the reaction of one guest: “In one instance, a gentleman dining with Mr. Jefferson, looked so startled as he raised his eyes from the latter to the servant behind him, that his discovery of the resemblance was perfectly obvious to all.”

In the 1850s, Jeff Randolph told a visiting author that his grandfather did not hide the slaves who bore these close resemblances, since Sally Hemings “was a house servant and her children were brought up house servants – so that the likeness between master and slave was blazoned to all the multitudes who visited this political Mecca” – and indeed a number of visitors did make note of this troubling reality.

Even Jefferson admirer Jon Meacham accepted the truth of the Hemings liaison in *Thomas Jefferson: The Art of Power*. Meacham cited a quote from Elijah Fletcher, a visitor from Vermont:

“The story of Black Sal is no farce – That he cohabits with her and has a number of children by her is a sacred truth – and the worst of it is, he keeps the same children slaves – an unnatural crime which is very common in these parts – This conduct may receive a little palliation when we consider that such proceedings are so common that they cease here to be disgraceful.”

Meacham observed that Jefferson

“was apparently able to consign his children with Sally Hemings to a separate sphere of life in his mind even as they grew up in his midst. ...

“It was, to say the least, an odd way to live, but Jefferson was a creature of his

culture. 'The enjoyment of a negro or mulatto woman is spoken of as quite a common thing: no reluctance, delicacy or shame is made about the matter,' Josiah Quincy Jr. of Massachusetts wrote after a visit to the Carolinas. This was daily reality at Monticello."

This "daily reality" was also a troubling concern among Jefferson's white family though the Great Man would never confirm or deny his parentage of a number of Monticello's slaves.

"Frigid indifference forms a useful shield for a public character against his political enemies, but Jefferson deployed it against his own daughter Martha, who was deeply upset by the sexual allegations against her father and wanted a straight answer - Yes or no? - an answer he would not deign to give,"

wrote Wiencek.

Before his death, Jefferson did free several of Sally Hemings's children or let them run away - presumably fulfilling the commitment made in Paris before Hemings agreed to return to Monticello to remain his slave concubine. "Jefferson went to his grave without giving his family any denial of the Hemings charges," Wiencek wrote.

The historical record increasingly makes Jefferson out to be a serial rapist, exploiting at least one and possibly more girls who were trapped on his property, who indeed were his property, and thus had little choice but to tolerate his sexual advances.

#### Whipping the Children

The evidence of Jefferson's sexual predations must also be viewed in the context of his overall treatment of his slaves at Monticello. Though Jefferson's apologists pretend that he was a kind master distressed over the inequities of a slave system that he could somehow neither correct nor escape, the latest evidence - much of it concealed for generations to protect Jefferson's image - reveal him to be a cruel slave-owner who carefully calculated the net worth that his human chattel provided him and having boys as young as 10 whipped.

Some of Jefferson's mistreatment of his slaves derived from another of his hypocrisies, his views about simplicity and solvency. As historian John Chester Miller wrote in his 1977 book, *The Wolf by the Ears*,

"To Jefferson, the abandon with which Americans ... rushed into debt and squandered borrowed money upon British 'gew-gaws' and 'trumpery' vitiated the blessings of peace. ...

"From Paris - an unlikely podium from which to sermonize - Jefferson preached frugality, temperance, and the simple life of the American farmer. Buy nothing whatever on credit, he exhorted his countrymen, and buy only what was essential. 'The maxim of buying nothing without money in our pocket to pay for it,' he averred, 'would make of our country (Virginia) one of the happiest upon earth.' ...

"As Jefferson saw it, the most pernicious aspect of the postwar preoccupation with pleasure, luxury, and the ostentatious display of wealth was the irremediable damage it did to 'republican virtue.'"

But Jefferson himself amassed huge debts and lived the life of a *bon vivant*, spending way beyond his means. In Paris, he bought fancy clothes, collected fine wines, and acquired expensive books, furniture and artwork. It was, however, his slaves back at Monticello who paid the price for his excesses.

“Living in a style befitting a French nobleman, his small salary often in arrears, and burdened by debts to British merchants which he saw no way of paying, Jefferson was driven to financial shifts, some of which were made at the expense of his slaves. In 1787, for example, he decided to hire out some of his slaves – a practice he had hitherto avoided because of the hardship it wreaked upon the slaves themselves,”

Miller wrote.

Upon returning to the United States, Jefferson reinvented himself as a more modestly attired republican, but his tastes for the grandiose did not abate. He ordered elaborate renovations to Monticello, which deepened his debt and compelled his slaves to undertake strenuous labor to implement Jefferson’s ambitious architectural designs.

Needing to squeeze more value from his slaves, Jefferson was an aggressive master, not the gentle patrician that his apologists have long depicted.

According to historian Wiencek, Jefferson

“directed his manager, Nicholas Lewis, to extract ‘extraordinary exertions’ of labor from the slaves to stay current with his debt payments. Some slaves had endured years of harsh treatment at the hands of strangers, for to raise cash, Jefferson had also instructed Lewis to hire out slaves. He demanded extraordinary exertions from the elderly: ‘The negroes too old to be hired, could they not make a good profit by cultivating cotton?’”

Jefferson was callous as well toward his young slaves. Reviewing long-neglected records at Monticello, Wiencek noted that one plantation report to Jefferson recounted that the nail factory was doing well because “the small ones” – ages 10, 11 and 12 – were being whipped by overseer, Gabriel Lilly, “for truancy.”

His plantation records also show that he viewed fertile female slaves as exceptionally valuable because their offspring would increase his assets and thus enable him to incur more debt. He ordered his plantation manager to take special care of these “breeding” women.

“A child raised every 2. years is of more profit than the crop of the best laboring man,” Jefferson wrote. “[I]n this, as in all other cases, providence has made our duties and our interests coincide perfectly.”

According to Wiencek,

“The enslaved people were yielding him a bonanza, a perpetual human dividend at compound interest. Jefferson wrote, ‘I allow nothing for losses by death, but, on the contrary, shall presently take credit four per cent. per annum, for their increase over and above keeping up their own numbers.’ His

plantation was producing inexhaustible human assets. The percentage was predictable.”

To justify this profiting off slavery, Jefferson claimed that he was merely acting in accordance with “Providence,” which in Jefferson’s peculiar view of religion always happened to endorse whatever action Jefferson wanted to take.

### Twisting the Founding Narrative

Yet, while Jefferson’s rationalizations for slavery were repugnant, his twisting of the Founding Narrative may have been even more significant and long-lasting, setting the nation on course for the Civil War, then a near century of segregation and carrying forward to the present day with the Tea Party’s claims that states are “sovereign” and that actions by the federal government to promote the general welfare are “unconstitutional.”

The reason the Tea Partiers get away with presenting themselves as “conservative constitutionalists” is that Thomas Jefferson engineered a revisionist interpretation of the Founding document, which – as written by the Federalists and ratified by the states – created a federal government that could do almost anything that Congress and the President agreed was necessary for the good of the country.

That was the constitutional interpretation of both the Federalists and the Anti-Federalists, who mounted a fierce though unsuccessful campaign to defeat the Constitution’s ratification because they recognized how powerful the Constitution’s federal government was. [For details, see Consortiumnews.com’s [“The Right’s Made-up ‘Constitution.’”](#)]

Southern Anti-Federalists, such as Patrick Henry and George Mason, argued that the Constitution, though it implicitly accepted slavery, would eventually be used by the North to free the slaves. Or, as Patrick Henry colorfully told Virginia’s ratifying convention in 1788, “they’ll free your niggers!”

Though the Constitution eked through to passage, the fear of Southern plantation owners that they would lose their huge investment in human chattel did not disappear. Indeed, their trepidation intensified as it became clear that many leading Federalists, including the new government’s chief architect Alexander Hamilton, were ardent abolitionists. Hamilton had grown up poor in the West Indies and witnessed first-hand the depravity of slavery.

By contrast, Jefferson had grown up the pampered son of a major Virginia slave-owner, but he developed his own critical view of the evils of slavery. As a young politician, Jefferson had cautiously – and unsuccessfully – backed some reforms to ameliorate the injustices. In a deleted section of his draft of the Declaration of Independence, Jefferson had denounced slavery, citing it as one of King George III’s crimes.

However, after the Revolution, Jefferson recognized that any anti-slavery position would destroy his political viability among his fellow plantation owners in the South. While in Paris as the U.S. representative, Jefferson rebuffed offers to join the abolitionist *Amis des Noirs* because by associating with abolitionists he would impair his ability to do “good” in Virginia, historian John Chester Miller noted, adding:

“Jefferson’s political instinct proved sound: as a member of the *Amis des Noirs* he would have been a marked man in the Old Dominion.”

## Self-Interest Over Principle

With his personal financial and political interests aligned with the perpetuation of slavery, Jefferson emerged as the most important leader of the slave South, seeking to reinterpret the Constitution to blunt the potential that the federal government might eventually outlaw slavery.

So, in the 1790s, as Alexander Hamilton and the Federalists worked to create the new government that the Constitution had authorized, Jefferson's counter-movement emerged to reassert states' rights as defined by the earlier Articles of Confederation, which the Constitution had obliterated.

Jefferson skillfully reframed the Constitution's powers not by asserting an explicit defense of slavery but by voicing resistance to a strong central government and reasserting the primacy of the states. Though Jefferson had played no role in drafting the Constitution or the Bill of Rights - he was in Paris at the time - he simply interpreted the Constitution as he wished, similar to his frequent invocation of Providence as always favoring whatever he wanted.

Most significantly, Jefferson developed the concept of "strict construction," insisting that the federal government could only perform functions specifically mentioned in the text of the Constitution, such as coining money, setting up post offices, etc. Though Jefferson's concept was silly because the Framers understood that the young country would face unanticipated opportunities and challenges that the government would have to address, Jefferson built a potent political party to make his idea stick.

Jefferson's strategy was to simply ignore the Constitution's clear language, particularly its mandate in Article I, Section 8 that Congress "provide for ... the general Welfare of the United States" and its grant to Congress the power "to make all Laws which shall be necessary and proper for carrying into Execution the foregoing Powers, and all other Powers vested by this Constitution in the Government of the United States."

Jefferson simply insisted that the Framers hadn't meant what the Framers had written. Jefferson went even further and reaffirmed the concept of state sovereignty and independence that George Washington, James Madison and other Framers had despised and intentionally expunged when they threw out the Articles of Confederation. The Constitution had shifted national sovereignty away from the states to "We the People of the United States."

Despite the Constitution's explicit reference to making federal law "the supreme law of the land," Jefferson exploited the lingering resentments over ratification to reassert the states' supremacy over the federal government. Often working behind the scenes - even while serving as Vice President under President John Adams - Jefferson promoted each state's right to nullify federal law and even to secede from the Union.

Aiding Jefferson's cause was the shifting allegiances of James Madison, an early Federalist who had been tapped by Washington to be the principal architect of the Constitution. However, like Jefferson, Madison was a major Virginian slave-holder who recognized that both his political future and his personal fortune were dependent on the continuation of slavery.

So, Madison sold out his earlier Federalist allies and shifted his allegiance to his neighbor, Jefferson. Madison's break with Washington and Hamilton gave Jefferson's revisionist take on the Constitution a patina of legitimacy given Madison's key role as one of the Framers.

Jefferson spelled out this political reality in a 1795 letter to Madison in which Jefferson cited what he called "the Southern interest," because, as author Jon Meacham observed, "the South was his personal home and his political base." It was the same for Madison. [For more on Madison's role, see Consortiumnews.com's "[The Right's Dubious Claim to Madison.](#)"]

### Warring with the Federalists

In his rise to power, Jefferson waged a nasty propaganda war against the Federalists as they struggled to form a new government and endeavored to stay out of a renewed conflict between Great Britain and France. Jefferson secretly funded newspaper editors who spread damaging personal rumors about key Federalists, particularly Hamilton who as Treasury Secretary was spearheading the new government's formation.

Jefferson's governmental actions almost always dovetailed with the interests of slaveholders and his own personal finances. For instance, as Secretary of State during Washington's first term, Jefferson protested the Federalists' disinterest in pursuing compensation from Great Britain for slaves freed during the Revolutionary War, a high priority for Jefferson and his plantation-owning allies. Jefferson correctly perceived that Hamilton and John Jay, two staunch opponents of slavery, had chosen not to make compensation a high priority.

Also Jefferson's interest in siding with France against Great Britain was partly colored by his large financial debts owed to London lenders, debts that might be voided or postponed if the United States went to war against Great Britain.

Then, in the latter 1790s with French agents aggressively intervening in U.S. politics to push President John Adams into that war against Great Britain, the Federalist-controlled Congress passed the Alien and Sedition Acts, which Jefferson's political movement deftly exploited to rally opposition to the overreaching Federalists.

By the election of 1800, Jefferson had merged his political base in the slave-economy South with an anti-Federalist faction in New York to defeat Adams for reelection. The three-fifths clause, a concession by the Constitutional Convention to the South allowing slaves to be counted as three-fifths of a person for the purpose of representation, proved crucial to Jefferson's victory.

As President, Jefferson took more actions that advanced the cause of his slaveholding constituency, largely by solidifying his "states' rights" interpretation of the Constitution. But Jefferson and his revisionist views faced a formidable opponent in Supreme Court Chief Justice John Marshall, a fellow Virginian though one who considered slavery the likely ruin of the South.

As historian Miller wrote:

"While Jefferson could account for Hamilton - a West Indian 'adventurer' goaded by ambition, unscrupulous in attaining his ends, and wholly devoid of state loyalties - he could not understand how John Marshall, a Virginian who, under happier circumstances, Jefferson might have called 'cousin John,' could cast off all feeling for his 'country' (i.e. Virginia) and go over to the 'enemy'...



“As Marshall saw it, Jefferson was trying to turn the clock back to the Articles of Confederation – a regression that would totally paralyze the federal government. ‘The government of the whole will be prostrated at the feet of the members [the states],’ Marshall predicted, ‘and the grand effort of wisdom, virtue, and patriotism, which produced it, will be totally defeated.’

“The question of slavery never bulked larger on Jefferson’s horizon than when John Marshall, from the eminence of the Supreme Court, struck down acts of the state legislatures and aggrandized the powers of the federal government. For slavery could not be divorced from the conflict between the states and the general government: as the Supreme Court went, so might slavery itself go.

“States’ rights were the first line of defense of slavery against antislavery sentiment in Congress, and Jefferson had no intention of standing by idly while this vital perimeter was breached by a troop of black-robed jurists.”

## Selling Out the Haitians

Jefferson also reversed the Federalists’ support for the slave rebellion in St. Domingue (now Haiti), which had overthrown a ruthlessly efficient French plantation system that had literally worked the slaves to death. The violence of that revolution – on both sides – shocked Jefferson and many of his fellow slaveholders who feared that the rebellion might inspire American blacks to rise up next.

Alexander Hamilton, who despised slavery from his experience growing up in the West Indies, assisted the black slave leader, the self-taught and relatively moderate Toussaint L’Ouverture, in drafting a constitution, and the Adams administration sold weapons to the former slaves.

After taking over the White House, however, President Jefferson reversed those Federalist policies. He conspired secretly with the new French dictator Napoleon Bonaparte on a French plan to retake St. Domingue with an expeditionary force that would re-enslave the blacks. Jefferson only learned later that Napoleon had a second phase of the plan, to move to New Orleans and build a new French colonial empire in the heart of North America.

Napoleon’s army succeeded in capturing L’Ouverture, who was taken to France and killed, but L’Ouverture’s more radical followers annihilated the French army and declared their independence as a new republic, Haiti.

The Haitians’ bloody victory had important consequences for the United States as well. Stopped from moving on to New Orleans, Napoleon decided to sell the Louisiana Territories to Jefferson, who thus stood to benefit from the Haitian freedom fighters whom Jefferson had sold out. Still fearing the spread of black revolution, Jefferson also organized a blockade of Haiti, which helped drive the war-torn country into a spiral of violence and poverty that it has never escaped.

However, Jefferson also faced a constitutional quandary, since he had espoused the ludicrous notion of “strict construction” and there was no specific constitutional language authorizing the purchase of new lands. The solution for Jefferson, the consummate hypocrite, was simply to violate his own principle and proceed with the Louisiana Purchase.

This vast new territory also opened up huge opportunities for Southern slaveholders, especially because the Constitution had called for the end of slave importation in 1808,

meaning that the value of the domestic slave trade skyrocketed. That was especially important for established slave states like Virginia where the soil for farming was depleted.

Breeding slaves became a big business for the Commonwealth and enhanced Jefferson's personal net worth, underscoring his notations about valuing female "breeder" slaves even above the strongest males.

Inviting the Civil War

But the danger to the nation was that spreading slavery to the Louisiana Territories and admitting a large number of slave states would worsen tensions between North and South.

As Miller wrote,

"Jefferson might have averted the struggle between the North and South, free and slave labor, for primacy in the national domain - the immediate, and probably the only truly irrepressible, cause of the Civil War. Instead, Jefferson raised no objections to the continued existence of slavery in the Louisiana Purchase.

"Had he the temerity to propose that Louisiana be excluded from the domestic slave trade he would have encountered a solid bloc of hostile votes from south of the Mason-Dixon line. Jefferson was fond of saying that he never tilted against windmills, especially those that seemed certain to unhorse him. ... Jefferson neither took nor advocated any action that would weaken slavery among the tobacco and cotton producers in the United States."

Indeed, keeping the new territories and states open to slavery became a major goal of Jefferson as President and after he left office.

Miller wrote,

"In the case of the federal government, he could easily imagine circumstances - perhaps they had already been produced by John Marshall - which justified [the South's] secession: among them was the emergence of a central government so powerful that it could trample willfully upon the rights of the states and destroy any institution, including slavery, which it judged to be immoral, improper, or inimical to the national welfare as defined by Washington, D.C. ...

"Confronted by such a concentration of power, Jefferson believed that the South would have no real option but to go its own way."

Miller continued,

"As the spokesman of a section whose influence was dwindling steadily in the national councils and which was threatened with the 'tyranny' of a consolidated government dominated by a section hostile to the institutions and interests of the South, Jefferson not only took the side of slavery, he demanded that the right of slavery to expand at will everywhere in the national domain be acknowledged by the Northern majority."

In the last major political fight of his life, Jefferson battled Northern efforts to block the spread of slavery into Missouri. “With the alarm bell sounding in his ears, Jefferson buckled on the armor of Hector ... and took up the shield of states’ rights,” wrote Miller.

“Jefferson, in short, assumed the accoutrements of an ardent and an uncompromising champion of Southern rights. Possessed by this martial spirit, Jefferson now asserted ... that Congress had no power over slavery in the territories. ...

“Now he was willing to accord Congress power only to protect slavery in the territories and he converted the doctrine of states’ rights into a protective shield for slavery against interference by a hostile federal government. He was no longer concerned primarily with civil liberties or with the equalization of the ownership of property but in insuring that slave-owners were protected in the full plentitude of their property rights.

“The Missouri dispute seemed to mark the strange death of Jeffersonian liberalism.”

### Rationalizing Slavery

Jefferson’s fight to extend slavery into Missouri also influenced his last notable personal achievement, the founding of the University of Virginia. He saw the establishment of a first-rate educational institution in Charlottesville, Virginia, as an important antidote to elite Northern schools influencing the Southern aristocracy with ideas that could undermine what Jefferson dubbed “Missourism,” or the right of all states carved from the Louisiana Territories to practice slavery.

Jefferson complained that Southern men, who traveled North for their college education, were infused with “opinions and principles in discord with those of their own country,” by which he meant the South, Miller wrote, adding:

“Particularly if they attended Harvard University, they returned home imbued with ‘anti-Missourism,’ dazzled by the vision of ‘a single and splendid government of an aristocracy, founded on banking institutions and moneyed corporations’ and utterly indifferent to or even contemptuous of the old-fashioned Southern patriots who still manned the defenses of freedom, equality, and democracy” — revealing again how words in Jefferson’s twisted world had lost all rational meaning. Slavery became “freedom, equality, and democracy.”

The Missouri Compromise of 1820 that barred slavery in new states north of the 36-degree-30 parallel “made the creation of such a center of learning imperative” to Jefferson, wrote Miller, thus driving his determination to make the University of Virginia a Southern school that would rival the great colleges of the North and would train young Southern minds to resist federal “consolidationism.”

Even the Jefferson-admiring Meacham noted the influence of the Missouri dispute in Jefferson’s zeal to launch his university in Charlottesville.

“The Missouri question made Jefferson even more eager to get on with the building of the University of Virginia for he believed the rising generation of

leaders should be trained at home, in climes hospitable to his view of the world, rather than sent north,”

Meacham wrote.

In short, Jefferson had melded the twin concepts of slavery and states' rights into a seamless ideology. As Miller concluded, “Jefferson began his career as a Virginian; he became an American; and in his old age he was in the process of becoming a Southern nationalist.”

When he died on July 4, 1826, a half century after the Declaration of Independence was first read to the American people, Jefferson had set the nation on course for the Civil War.

However, even to this day, Jefferson's vision of “victimhood” for white Southerners – seeing themselves as persecuted by Northern power yet blinded to the racist cruelty that they inflict on blacks – remains a powerful motivation for white anger, now spreading beyond the South.

Today, we see Jefferson's racist legacy in the nearly deranged hatred directed at the first African-American president and in the unbridled fury unleashed against the federal government that Barack Obama heads.

As unpleasant as it may be for Americans who prefer – especially on July Fourth – to ponder the pleasant image of Jefferson as the aristocratic republican with a taste for fine art and a fondness for free-thinking, it is well past time to look at the Declaration's author as the person he really was, America's founding sociopath.

*Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. You can buy his new book, America's Stolen Narrative, either in [print here](#) or as an e-book (from [Amazon](#) and [barnesandnoble.com](#)).*

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