

Slavery Grievance (ORIGINAL)

[King George III] has waged cruel war against human nature itself, violating its most sacred rights of life & liberty in the persons of a distant people who never offended him, captivating & carrying them into slavery in another hemisphere, or to incur miserable death in their transportation thither. this piratical warfare, the opprobrium of *infidel* powers, is the warfare of the CHRISTIAN king of Great Britain. determined to keep open a market where MEN should be bought & sold, he has prostituted his negative for suppressing every legislative attempt to prohibit or to restrain this execrable commerce. . . .

Philadelphia Constitutional Convention of 1787 (ORIGINAL)

The Philadelphia Constitutional Convention was where the Founding Fathers gathered to write the Constitution. They had many debates over what the new government should look like. This is where they decided to KEEP SLAVERY. As you read the documents below, try to see if they thought slavery was a major contradiction.

Mr. RUTLIDGE: . . . Religion & humanity had nothing to do with this question. . . . The true question at present is whether the Southern States shall or shall not be parties to the Union. . . . If the Northern states consult their interest, they will not oppose the increase of Slaves which will increase the commodities of which they will become the carriers.

Mr. ELSEWORTH: . . . Let every state import what it pleases. The morality or wisdom of slavery are considerations belonging to the states themselves. What enriches a part enriches the whole. . . .

Mr. WILLIAMSON: . . . Southern States could not be members of the Union if the clause should be rejected, and that it was wrong to force any thing down, not absolutely necessary, and which any State must disagree to.

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN: I agree to this Constitution with all its faults—if they are such—because I think a general government necessary for us. . . . [W]hen you assemble a number of men, to have the advantage of their joint wisdom, you inevitably assemble with those men all their prejudices, their passions, their errors of opinion, their local interests, and their selfish views. From such an assembly can a perfect production be expected?

It therefore astonishes me, sir, to find this system approaching so near to perfection as it does. . . .

Historian Interpretation #1 (ORIGINAL)

Never did the delegates consider eradicating slavery. The Revolutionary rhetoric of freedom and equality had been left behind; Americans in general and the delegates to the Convention in particular wanted a united, well-ordered, and prosperous society in which private property—including slave property—would be secure.

Source: John P. Kaminski, *A Necessary Evil?* Madison, Wisconsin: Madison House, 1995. p.42.

Historian Interpretation #2 (ORIGINAL)

The financial cost of abolition, heavy enough by itself, was made too staggering to bear by the Founding Fathers' racism, an ideological hindrance to antislavery no less important than their sense of priorities and their commitment to property. Here again Jefferson typified the age. As Winthrop Jordan has shown, Jefferson suspected that blacks had greater sexual appetites and lower intellectual faculties than did whites. . . . These suspicions, together with Jefferson's painfully accurate prophecy that free blacks and free whites could not live harmoniously in America for centuries, made him and others tie American emancipation to African colonization.

Source: William Freehling, "The Founding Fathers and Slavery." In Kermit Hall, Ed., *The Law of American Slavery*. New York, NY: Garland Publishing, 1987. p. 221.

Historian Interpretation #3 (ORIGINAL)

Slavery. . . . hung over the Philadelphia Convention, threatening to divide northern and southern delegates. . . . Even though slavery existed by law in some of the northern states in 1787, the sentiment there favored its end. Southerners were a good deal more ambivalent, both because they had significantly greater numbers of slaves to deal with and because an end to the peculiar institution had important economic implications. . . . The result was compromise. . . . The framers were more determined to fashion a new nation than they were to bring an end to slavery.

Source: Kermit Hall, *The Law of American Slavery*. New York, NY: Garland Publishing, 1987. p. xi.