AMERICAN REVOLUTION

Did the American Revolution weaken slavery in the United States?

**Viewpoint:** Yes. Influenced by the Enlightenment, many Patriots maintained that the revolution could be justified only if Americans rid their country of slavery.

**Viewpoint:** No. The American Revolution protected slavery and ensured its continuation, enabling Southerners to fashion the most thoroughgoing slave society in the New World.

Not until the middle of the eighteenth century did Americans begin systematically to question the morality of slavery. Since antiquity, thinkers as diverse as fourth-century B.C.E. Greek philosopher Aristotle, thirteenth-century Italian philosopher Thomas Aquinas, and seventeenth-century British philosopher John Locke had agreed that slavery was compatible with human progress and happiness, and few challenged this unanimity of opinion. The issue was not so much that slavery received a vigorous defense in the Thirteen Colonies as that people merely took it for granted as an unexceptional and unobjectionable fact of life. This casual acceptance of slavery changed only with the approach of the American War for Independence (1775–1783).

Although relatively few Americans during the age of revolution demanded the immediate abolition of slavery, growing numbers, including some slaveholders, expressed misgivings about continuing to hold Africans in bondage. Influenced by Enlightenment ideas of justice, natural rights, and freedom, many thinkers in both North America and Western Europe criticized slavery as a violation of basic human dignity and decency. No longer did Africans appear to observers as innately and permanently savage, depraved, and uncivilized. During the 1750s an emerging consciousness of, and emphasis on, diversity and tolerance combined with a new interest in using environmental factors to explain human nature and conduct, which altered the view that blacks were fit only for slavery. Some observers began to wonder if the “slavishness” attributed to the enslaved did not, after all, arise from their nature but from their degraded condition.

Such convictions prevailed nowhere more strongly than among the Quakers, who initiated the first organized abolitionist movement. The Quakers concluded that slavery, rather than nature, had rendered blacks indolent and unreliable. In response to a Virginia planter who asserted that blacks were too lazy and shiftless to be free, Quaker abolitionist John Woolman replied “that free Men, whose Minds were properly on their Business, found a Satisfaction in improving, cultivating, and providing for their Families; but Negroes, labouring to support others who claim them as their Property, and expecting nothing but slavery during Life, had not the like Inducement to be industrious.” The Quakers linked the new theories of environmentalism to an enlightened sense of justice and a capitalist belief in hard work to fashion a moral condemnation of slavery.

Yet, many of the Americans infused with the ideas of the Enlightenment and the spirit of revolution were also slaveholders. Virginia leaders George
Washington, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, Patrick Henry, George Mason, and Edmund Randolph come immediately to mind. They might have opposed slavery in principle as a violation of “natural rights,” even as they defended it in practice as a “necessary evil.” American independence helped to effect the abolition of slavery in the North, the emancipation of growing numbers of slaves in the upper South, and ultimately the end of the transatlantic slave trade, which came in 1808. At the same time, however, independence freed Southerners from the interference of a metropolitan government in Great Britain that, in 1833, outlawed slavery in its realm. The U.S. Constitution (1787), by contrast, protected slave property and thus implicitly endorsed the legitimacy of slavery.

Viewpoint:
Yes. Influenced by the Enlightenment, many Patriots maintained that the revolution could be justified only if Americans rid their country of slavery.

During the course of his 1858 debates with Senator Stephen Douglas (D-Illinois), Republican senatorial candidate Abraham Lincoln insisted that the Founding Fathers had placed slavery “on the course of ultimate extinction.” According to Lincoln’s understanding of American history, the Founders proclaimed the equality of man in the Declaration of Independence (1776). They then proceeded to put their ideals into practice and placed a noose around the institution of slavery by prohibiting its extension into the Northwest Territory and providing in the Constitution of the United States (1787) for the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade after 1808.

Lincoln was a better rhetorician than historian, but he was correct to suggest that the American Revolution (1775–1783) placed slavery “on the course of ultimate extinction.” Moreover, this event occurred despite the fact that the institution of slavery expanded into newly opened territory in the Southwest in the years following independence. Military necessities and economic disruptions of the War for Independence weakened slavery in the short term in the new United States. From a longer perspective, the social and political changes wrought by the Revolution doomed American chattel slavery.

Many slaves saw in the confusion of war an opportunity to run away. Fortunately for would-be runaways, the Revolution in the Southern colonies degenerated into a chaotic civil war that increased their chances of escape. Loyalists encouraged slaves to run away from Patriot masters. Either the British or their Loyalist allies liberated thousands more or stole them from their masters to be sold in the West Indies. Historian Benjamin Quarles estimates that the evacuating British carried off at least four thousand blacks from Savannah, six thousand from Charleston, and another four thousand from New York after the surrender at York Town (1781). To these figures must be added the unknown number who left with the French and the perhaps five thousand more carried off by the British prior to 1781. On the American side, according to scholar Randall M. Miller, about five thousand blacks joined the army and navy to fight for independence, “helping to reinforce blacks’ claim to the revolutionary heritage.” As a result of the war, slaves became an insecure form of property and consequently declined in value. In their groundbreaking cliometric study, Time on the Cross: The Economics of American Negro Slavery (1974), Robert W. Fogel and Stanley L. Engerman showed that although slave prices later rebounded, they were “acutely depressed during the last years of the Revolution.” By thus temporarily rendering property in slaves insecure, the military and economic turmoil of the Revolution weakened the institution of slavery for the short term.

Slavery was further weakened, and eventually abolished, in the United States by the ideological thrust of the Revolution. Before independence, slavery thrived throughout British North America without serious challenge. Under British rule only Connecticut, Rhode Island, and the Quaker colony of Pennsylvania prohibited the importation of slaves. After independence, many people, even in the South, found it difficult to reconcile fighting for liberty and the ideals of the Revolution, as expressed in the Declaration, with the institution of chattel slavery. In the North, the Revolution sounded the death knell of slavery. Every state north of Delaware moved to outlaw slavery, making it a sectional, and truly peculiar, institution. In the words of historian Winthrop D. Jordan, “The ‘real American Revolution’ involved a newly intense scrutiny of colonial society, including the peculiarly un-English institution of Negro slavery. American thinking about the status of Negroes could never again be characterized by placid and unheeding acceptance.” The Revolution therefore weakened slavery by placing its apologists in the uncomfortable position of defending bondage and inequality among a people who were increasingly coming to view such ideas as backward, immoral, and eventually un-American.

“It is important to realize that the Revolution suddenly and effectively ended the cultural climate that had allowed black slavery, as well as other forms of bondage and unfreedom, to exist
throughout the colonial period without serious challenge," historian Gordon S. Wood explains in The Radicalism of the American Revolution (1992). “With the revolutionary movement, black slavery became excruciatingly conspicuous in a way that it had not been in the older monarchical society with its many calibrations and degrees of unfreedom; and Americans in 1775-76 began attacking it with a vehemence that was inconceivable earlier.” Not by accident, the world’s first antislavery society was founded in 1775 in Philadelphia, a mere five days before the Battles of Lexington and Concord. Viewing liberty and slavery as incompatible, Northern states quickly moved to emancipate their slaves. Vermont’s constitution of 1777 prohibited slavery. In 1780 Pennsylvania provided for the gradual emancipation of all children thereafter born to slave mothers when the children reached the age of twenty-eight. The Massachusetts constitution of 1780 did not explicitly prohibit slavery but in language reminiscent of the Declaration of Independence declared that “All men are born free and equal, and have certain natural, essential, and unalienable rights.” In the Quock Walker case (1783), Massachusetts chief justice William Cushing held that the state constitution made all men free. New Hampshire abolished slavery in 1784. That same year, Rhode Island declared free all children thereafter born to slaves upon reaching age eighteen for females and age twenty-one for males. Connecticut similarly endorsed gradual emancipation in 1784. New York adopted a plan of gradual emancipation in 1799, followed by New Jersey in 1804.

Slavery also came under attack in the South. The Virginia legislature passed a law in 1778, proposed by Thomas Jefferson, that banned the further importation of slaves from Africa. This act was followed in 1782 by legislation that, for the first time, allowed for the manumission of slaves by their owners. This measure may sound insignificant but, as J. Franklin Jameson pointed out in The American Revolution Considered as a Social Movement (1926), it appears to have led to the manumission of more than ten thousand slaves within eight years. By contrast, only half that number were freed by the Massachusetts constitution. Jefferson’s ambivalence toward slavery has been well documented. Though a slave owner himself, he denounced the institution as a violation of the “most sacred rights of life and liberty” in his draft of the Declaration of Independence (1776). In 1783 he privately suggested a plan for the gradual abolition of slavery in Virginia. The plan, never acted upon, would have forbidden the introduction of any more slaves into Virginia and declared free all persons born after 31 December 1800. Also in 1783, Jefferson proposed to Congress a scheme for prohibiting slavery in the Western territory after 1800. Though his proposal was rejected, a similar antislavery provision was later applied to the Western territory north of the Ohio River in the Northwest Ordinance (1787).

In fact, awareness of the seeming incompatibility between slavery and the ideals of the Revolution was far from unusual, even in the South. Before the early 1830s few white Southerners could be found to defend bondage. Noting “the incompatibility of a state of slavery with the principles of our government, and of that revolution upon which it is founded,” the jurist St. George Tucker in 1796 proposed another plan for the gradual abolition of slavery in Virginia. Henry Laurens, George Washington, Patrick Henry, George Mason, James Madison, John Randolph, William H. Crawford, and Roger B. Taney all expressed misgivings about slavery. David Ramsay of Charleston, South Carolina, concluded The History of the American Revolution (1789) with an exhortation to his countrymen to extend the Revolutionary principle of universal justice to Africans and Indians both. Henry Clay later echoed Jefferson’s ambivalence toward slavery. Clay, a Kentucky slave owner whom Lincoln looked to as a role model, denounced the abolitionists yet publicly endorsed gradual emancipation. He also served as president of the American Colonization Society, which sought to make emancipation more palatable to white Americans by colonizing free blacks in Africa.

However, beginning in the early 1830s, with slavery extinguished in their own section, Northerners increasingly began to attack Southern slave ownership. Viewing slavery as inconsistent with Revolutionary ideals and an embarrassment to the nation, Northern abolitionists began pressing for the immediate abolition of slavery in the South. From this point forward, Southerners actively took up the defense of their peculiar institution, and slavery entered the national political discourse as a divisive sectional issue that would only find resolution on the battlefield.

Scant evidence exists that the Founders actually intended to place slavery “on the course of ultimate extinction,” as Lincoln had proposed. Nevertheless, the ultimate extinction of slavery was the inescapable, if unintended, consequence of the revolution they led. As historian William W. Freehling has noted, “the abolitionist process proceeded slowly but inexorably from 1776 to 1860: slowly in part because of what Jefferson and his contemporaries did not do, inexorably in part because of what they did.” What Jefferson and his contemporaries in the founding generation did do was confine slavery to the South and place its advocates on the defensive. As slavery became an ever more divisive and sectional issue in American politics, it became increasingly difficult for national political parties to hold together. Northern politicians found running against the Southern slave power too rewarding to abstain.
AN ACT FOR THE GRADUAL ABOLITION OF SLAVERY

In 1780 Pennsylvania passed a law that allowed for the gradual abolition of slavery; this statute was the first of its kind in the Western Hemisphere:

WHEN we contemplate our abhorrence of that condition to which the arms and tyranny of Great-Britain were exerted to reduce us; when we look back on the variety of dangers to which we have been exposed, and how miraculously our wants in many instances have been supplied, and our deliverances wrought, when even hope and human fortitude have become unequal to the conflict; we are unavoidably led to a serious and grateful sense of the manifold blessings which we have undeservedly received from the hand of that Being from whom every good and perfect gift cometh. Impressed with these ideas, we conceive that it is our duty, and we rejoice that it is in our power, to extend a portion of that freedom to others, which hath been extended to us; and a release from that state of thraldom, to which we ourselves were tyrannically doomed, and from which we have now every prospect of being delivered. It is not for us to inquire, why, in the creation of mankind, the inhabitants of the several parts of the earth were distinguished by a difference in feature or complexion. It is sufficient to know, that all are the work of an Almighty Hand. We find in the distribution of the human species, that the most fertile, as well as the most barren parts of the earth, are inhabited by men of complexions different from ours, from and each other, from whence we may reasonably, as well as religiously infer, that He, who placed them in their various situations, hath extended equally His care and protection to all, and that it becometh not us to counteract His mercies. We esteem it a peculiar blessing granted to us, that we are enabled this day, to add one more step to universal civilization, by removing as much as possible, the sorrows of those who have lived in undeserved bondage, and from which, by the assumed authority of the Kings of Britain, no effectual legal relief, could be obtained. Weaned by a long course of experience, from those narrow prejudices and partialities we had imbibed, we find our hearts enlarged with kindness and benevolence, towards men of all conditions and nations; and we conceive ourselves at this particular period extraordinarily called upon, by the blessings which we have received, to manifest the sincerity of our profession, and to give a substantial proof of our gratitude.

AND WHEREAS the condition of those persons who have heretofore been denominated Negro and Mulatto slaves, has been attended with circumstances, which not only deprived them of the common blessings that they were by nature entitled to, but has cast them into the deepest afflictions, by an unnatural separation and sale of husband and wife from each other, and from their children; an injury the greatness of which, can only be conceived, by supposing, that we were in the same unhappy case. In justice therefore, to persons so unhappily circumstanced, and who, having no prospect before them, whereon they may rest their sorrows and their hopes, have no reasonable inducement, to render that service to society, which they otherwise might; and also, in grateful commemoration of our own happy deliverance, from that state of unconditional submission, to which we were doomed by the tyranny of Britain.

Be it enacted, and it is hereby enacted, by the Representatives of the Freemen of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, in General Assembly met, and by the authority of the same, that all persons, as well Negroes and Mulattoes as others, who shall be born within this State, from and after the passing of this Act, shall not be deemed and considered as servants for life or slaves; and that all servitude for life, or slavery of children, in consequence of the slavery of their mothers, in the case of all children born within this State, from and after the passing of this Act as aforesaid, shall be, and hereby is utterly taken away, extinguished and for ever abolished.

Provided always, and be it further enacted by the authority aforesaid, that every Negro and Mulatto child born within this State, after the passing of this Act as aforesaid, who would, in case this Act had not been made, have been born a servant for years, or life or a slave, shall be deemed to be and shall be by virtue of this Act, the servant of such person or his or her assigns, who would in such case have been intitled to the service of such child, until such child shall attain unto the age of twenty eight years, in the manner and on the conditions whereon servants bound by indenture for four years, are or may be retained and holden; and shall be liable to like correction and punishment, and intitled to like relief in case he or she be evilly treated by his or her master or mistress, and to like freedom dues and other privileges as servants bound by indenture for four years, are or may be retained and holden; and unless the person to whom the service of any such child shall belong, shall abandon his or her claim to the same, in which case the Overseers of the Poor of the city, township or district respectively, where such child shall be so abandoned, shall by indenture bind out every child so abandoned, as an apprentice for a time not exceeding the age herein before limited, for the service of such children.

from even when it threatened party unity; Southern politicians discovered the same thing when confronting Northern abolitionism. Such political decisions further inflamed sectional animosity while working to erode party, and national, unity. Under such circumstances, national parties could not hold together over the long run.

To further complicate matters, demographics also worked against the South and national unity. In the years between the Revolution and Civil War (1861-1865), the North’s population grew at a faster rate than the South’s. It was only a matter of time before a truly sectional, antislavery party arose in the North intent upon dominating the Southern minority. By 1856 the Whig Party was dead. In the North, just such a sectional party, the Republicans, inherited most of the Whigs’ strength. In 1860 the national Democratic Party split along sectional lines, opening the door to Republican triumph in the presidential election. The election of Lincoln, an overtly sectional candidate whose name did not even appear on the ballot in the Southern states, in turn, drove the South to secession. In the words of historian Michael F. Holt, in The Rise and Fall of the American Whig Party: Jacksonian Politics and the Onset of the Civil War (1999), the Civil War “resulted primarily from the fact that an exclusively northern and overly antisouthern Republican party, not a bisectional Whig party, . . . defeated Democrats for the presidency in 1860.”

The American Revolution did not bring about an immediate end to slavery, but it weakened the institution and placed it on the course of ultimate extinction. “The American Revolution,” Frehling reminds us, “did not end in 1790. Over several generations, antislavery reforms inspired by the Revolution helped lead to Southern division, desperation, and defeat in war.”

—SEAN R. BUSICK, KENTUCKY WESLEYAN COLLEGE

By the middle of the eighteenth century, slavery had become an integral component of the economy and society of the British North American colonies. For many Americans who were contemplating independence from Great Britain, however, slavery was also becoming a disturbing embarrassment. The apparent contradiction between Americans’ quest for liberty and their defense of slavery did not escape the English man of letters Samuel Johnson. “How is it,” Johnson wondered, “that we hear the loudest yelps for liberty among the drivers of negroes?”

Slavery had always been something of a problem for Englishmen who, by enslaving Africans, violated their own legal traditions, since the common law did not recognize slavery. The introduction of slavery into the English colonies was thus a radical innovation of the sort that usually left the English vexed and troubled. For generations they had made their peace with or ignored the contradiction between ancient custom and modern practice, even as they benefited from the labor of their slaves. As the call went out in the 1760s to throw off the yoke of British oppression and reassert their traditional rights as freeborn Englishmen, American colonists could disregard this incongruity no longer. To do so would have marked them as hypocrites in the eyes of the world.

Many of the men who pondered independence from Great Britain thought themselves products of the Enlightenment. For eighteenth-century thinkers, the Enlightenment had emancipated the mind from authority and superstition, unveiled the truths of nature, vindicated the rights of man, and pointed the way not only toward human improvement but human perfection. To these apostles of liberty, slavery was a criminal violation of the rights of man. Its continued existence rendered impossible social order, morality, and peace and confounded the essence of enlightened civilization.

The Americans’ faith in human intelligence, reason, and benevolence encouraged them to believe that they could establish a more perfect union in which justice and liberty reigned. In the new order they were creating there would be no more oppression from despotic monarchs. All men thereafter would be free to use their God-given talents for their own benefit as well as for that of their fellow citizens. Life would become something more than an endless contest of greed and power. Slavery did not fit into this enlightened worldview. How could the American revolutionaries justify slavery while at the same time proclaiming the natural right of all men to freedom?

During the struggle for independence from Great Britain (1775–1783), many American leaders admitted that slavery was contrary to the principles for which they fought. Several reformers warned that the revolution could be justified only by a decision to rid the land of slavery. They argued that Americans could not secure their own freedom until they had emancipated their slaves. That result, of course, did not take place. Neither the revolution nor the creation of an
independent American republic ended slavery. On the contrary, independence from Great Britain freed the United States to develop in its midst the most thoroughgoing slave society in the Western Hemisphere. Had the revolution failed and the North American colonies remained subject to the Crown, the Americans would have been compelled to emancipate their slaves in 1833 when Parliament abolished slavery throughout the British Empire.

American slaveholders, like slave owners everywhere, refused to free their bondsmen in the name of a principle or an ideal, however much they professed to cherish it. Instead, they accepted emancipation only when coerced by a central government, a superior military force, or the slaves themselves. Despite their celebration of liberty, American slaveholders proved just as resistant to change.

In addition, if the American colonists fought for anything, it was above all for the right of self-determination. Slavery was of crucial importance to the national economy. Americans could not have sustained their economic viability, and hence their political independence, without it. Then, too, they believed that liberty rested on property, and, whatever else they might have been, slaves were property. Liberty required inde-
pendence and independence required property. Property was thus the foundation of liberty. Eighteenth-century Americans did not simply value property rights over human rights. In their view of the matter, human rights were intimately connected with, and supported by, property rights. The two were so intimately intertwined that one could not survive without the other. Any scheme of emancipation, however gradual, would have destroyed a legitimate form of property and thereby imperiled not only economic prosperity but the foundations of republican liberty as well. Slavery, it seemed, was interwoven so tightly into the fabric of the American republic that it could not be cradicated without unraveling it. The American War for Independence might have exposed more starkly the contradiction between slavery and freedom, and might have fashioned a set of ideals to which the opponents of slavery could appeal, but the withdrawal of imperial authority also enabled slaveholders to gain sufficient power in the new national government to protect their interests. They fastened slavery on the United States to such an extent that only a long and bloody Civil War (1861–1865) could at last eradicate it.

The central paradox in the history of the British North American colonies was that the rise of liberty coincided with the introduction of slavery. As Edmund S. Morgan has argued, Englishmen in a sense purchased their liberty, and eventually their independence from the mother country, by enslaving Africans. This development was not a fortuitous inconsistency. After all, nothing novel exists about the freedom and independence of some men depending on the coercion and oppression of others. Even as the Americans rejoiced in their ideal of liberty, they were building a society in which slavery played an increasingly prominent role. When black slaves began to replace propertyless whites at the bottom of the social order, Americans, especially those from such slaveholding colonies as Virginia, could begin to entertain such radical ideas as “all men are created equal” and “are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness . . .”

During the seventeenth century the colonial elite deemed all efforts of the propertyless to exert their rights as disruptive of social order and moved to crush them swiftly and efficiently. Governor William Berkeley of Virginia was obsessed with the danger of rebellion. The widespread introduction of slavery into the colony after 1680, however, enabled Virginians to nurture representative government in a plantation society. Slavery, according to Morgan, transformed the Virginia of Berkeley into the Virginia of Thomas Jefferson and permitted Virginians to dare speak a political language that amplified and extended the rights of poor, white men. The freedom of Englishmen in America was thus from the outset dependent upon the enslavement of Africans.

Americans were not trapped in an unintentional contradiction between slavery and freedom. Like all people, in the past as well as the present, they had created their society by making a series of related choices to solve the immediate problems that confronted them. They did not deliberately set out to construct a slave society, but they ended up with one. Africans simply proved to be the most economical form of labor that the planters could acquire. Although slavery might have come to America gradually, it enabled the colonists, for a time, to resolve the age-old tension between individual liberty and social order that on some level troubles all but the most tyrannical societies. Yet, their solution, however alluring, was ultimately false, and Americans paid dearly for their temporary comfort.

In America, freedom and independence depended on the continuation of slavery. The American Revolution made the contradiction between principles and practices more glaring, the separation between rhetoric and reality more complete. Having once attained their independence and assured their liberty, however, American leaders for the most part tried to ignore the existence of slavery and did their best to keep it from contaminating political life.

No one embodied the dilemma of the revolutionary generation more fully or more painfully than Jefferson, the principal author of the Declaration of Independence (1776). For all his opposition to slavery (he once declared that one hour of slavery was worse than ages of British oppression) Jefferson built with slave labor a model plantation on his little mountain outside of Charlottesville, Virginia, and all his life actively participated in the world the slaveholders were making in the land whose freedom he had helped to win.

Jefferson owned approximately two hundred slaves. He engaged in the slave trade, hunted down runaways, wrote the slave code for Virginia, and opposed any limits on the expansion of slavery throughout the Southern states and the Western territories. During his lifetime he emancipated only two of his slaves, and one of these individuals bought his own freedom. Willingly or unwillingly, Jefferson was locked into the support of a slave system for pragmatic reasons. With ten thousand acres of land to cultivate, Jefferson could hardly have afforded to free his slaves; without their labor his property would have lost most of its value. For more than fifty years, therefore, Jefferson, the champion of liberty and enlightenment, devoted himself to defending slavery as a legitimate form of property.
Yet, in *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1785), the only book that Jefferson ever wrote, he condemned slavery as a perversion of civility so fundamental that it precluded even an education in virtue. Within both the family and the state, the existence of slavery provided instead for an irresistible invitation to indolence and an equally irresistible education in tyranny.

There must doubtless be an unhappy influence on the manners of our people produced by the existence of slavery among us. The whole commerce between master and slave is a perpetual exercise of the most boisterous passions, the most unremitting despotism on the one part, and degrading submissions on the other. Our children see this, and learn to imitate it.... The parent storms, the child looks on, catches the lineaments of wrath, puts on the same air in the circle of smaller slaves, gives loose to his worst of passions, and thus nursed, educated, and daily exercised in tyranny, cannot but be stamped by it with odious peculiarities. The man must be a prodigy who can retain his manners and morals undepraved by such circumstances.... With the morals of the people, their industry also is destroyed. For in a warm climate, no man will labour for himself who can make another labor for him.

This combination of vices was a sure invitation to disaster, for Jefferson had always placed his hopes for the future of America squarely on the virtue of its citizens. The degeneration into indolence and tyranny would destroy the virtues necessary to sustain an independent republic.

Jefferson admitted that slavery was an evil, but he also had to concede that it had become so entrenched in American society that only the most violent means could now dispose of it. The cure, he feared, would be worse than the disease. “We have a wolf by the ears,” Jefferson wrote to John Holmes, the congressman from the district of Maine, in 1820, “and we can neither hold it nor safely let it go. Justice is in one scale, and self-preservation in the other.”

—MARK G. MALVASI, RANDOLPH-MACON COLLEGE

**References**


