

Slavery and Conflicting Interpretations of Scripture in the Antebellum U. S. South

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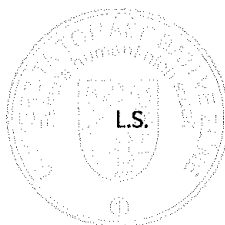
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ABSTRAKT

Kamila Lezo, „Otroctví a rozporné výklady Bible v předválečné době na jihu Spojených států,“ Univerzita Tomáše Bati ve Zlíně, 2010.

Tato bakalářská práce pojednává o přístupech k otroctví v předválečné době na jihu Spojených států. Změřuje se na čtyři skupiny obyvatel - otrokáře, otroky, svobodné černochoy a bělochy, kteří nevlastnili otroky. Drtivá většina z nich byli křesťané a měli specifické názory na otroctví, založené na svém výkladu Bible. Cílem této bakalářské práce je představit jednotlivé výklady Bible, porovnat je a dojít k závěru, zda byly stejné, nebo se lišily.

Klíčová slova: otroctví, otrokáři, otroci, Quakeři, abolicionisti, svobodní černoši, Bible, výklad, křesťanství, evangelizovat, propagující otroctví, proti otroctví, jih, otrokářské státy, náboženství, vzpoura

ABSTRACT

Kamila Lezo, “Slavery and Conflicting Interpretations of Scripture in the Antebellum U. S. South,” Tomas Bata University in Zlin, 2010.

This bachelor thesis examines the situation in the antebellum U. S. South in regards to slavery and the attitude towards slavery from specific groups that lived in the South – slaveholders, slaves, non-slaveholding whites and free blacks. Those who belonged to these groups were mostly Christians, and they had their specific interpretations of the Bible issues concerning slavery. The aim of this thesis is to examine and compare these interpretations and state whether they were the same or differed.

Keywords: slavery, slaveholders, slaves, Quakers, abolitionists, free blacks, Bible, interpretation, Christianity, Christianize, pro-slavery, anti-slavery, South, Slave States, religion, rebellion

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INTRODUCTION

When the Europeans came to America they brought their customs and traditions, but it was their Christian religion that later became a defining characteristic of the U.S. Many principles in the American Constitution were taken from the Bible, and the people who became American citizens mostly believed in one God, the Creator. They practiced their Christianity more or less actively, but still most of them had an awareness of this religion.

Of course European colonizers and immigrants were not the only participants in America's story; African slaves were brought there too. As well as the Europeans, they had their own unique customs, traditions and religions, but they were considered pagan by the Christian population and their African culture was suppressed. For example, the use of African drums was forbidden because the slaveholders were afraid their slaves could use them as a way of communicating among themselves. The African religion was also inconvenient for the American culture, so later when preachers of the Christian religion came to America, some of the slaveholders wanted to convert their slaves to Christianity, but some were indifferent, since they believed that teaching slaves to read the Bible would only give them one more mode of communication in planning a revolt.¹

Most of the slaves reacted to the message about God positively, but the question was whether they interpreted the message the same way as their white preachers and masters expected. Interpretation is usually a personal matter dictated by personal background, which was significantly different for the slaves and the slaveholders. The slaves were considered and treated as possessions, as things, as an inferior form of life, while the white American slaveholders considered themselves the peak of civilization chosen by God to bring light and democracy to the whole world.²

In addition to the slaveholders and slaves there were also white Americans who did not own slaves, and a few free black Africans. Both groups were mostly Christian, and their interpretation of the Bible concerning slavery differed, since their life situations were diverse. Many of the non-slaveholding whites were more compassionate towards the slaves perhaps because the existence of slavery did not influence their lives in any positive

¹Pbs.org "The Beat of the Blues" <http://www.pbs.org/theblues/classroom/defbeat.html> (accessed April 22, 2010).

²John Winthrop, "City upon a Hill: 1630," <http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/winthrop.htm> (accessed April 22, 2010).

way and they were able to perceive them as human beings, not as possessions. Unsurprisingly the existence of free blacks in slave states was hard for both them and the whites, which had its own consequences.

The question is whether the Christian population (including white slaveholders, white non-slaveholders, slaves and free blacks) was unanimous in their interpretation of the Biblical issues concerning slavery. In cases where the understanding was not the same, the differences are identified and analyzed.

1 THE SLAVEHOLDERS

1.1 The Background Situation of the Slaveholders

The slaveholders were mostly white American Christians who did not perceive slavery as something sinful or unacceptable. They maintained the position that slavery is “the best possible bulwark against the corrosive and un-Christian impact of industrial capitalism and its cruel and morally irresponsible market in human labor-power.” In other words they believed that the industrialization was not God’s plan for the U.S.A, and they were convinced they did their best for the society when they held slaves. Noteworthy is that the conditions brought by industrialization were seen by the slaveholders as worse than slavery. The fact that most of the slaveholders were debtors also forced them to fight for slavery, because they used their slaves as collateral for business loans. If they ever lost their slaves, they would lose the collateral on which their loans were based.³

1.2 The Slaveholders’ Interpretation of the Bible

Some of the slaveholders were cruel and used various Biblical arguments to justify slavery only because they did not want to lose their possessions. There was a great conflict in the way the slaves were viewed, because if they were really viewed as possessions, even the American Constitution guaranteed that everyone has their right to keep and protect them. One of the pro-slavery biblical arguments was that Jesus Christ never openly talked against slavery as he talked against other sins. It is known that there was slavery/servitude (both are equal translations of the original word used in the Bible) in his time, and he even met with slaves/servants in his daily life, but he never commented on their status. Another excuse for the slaveholders was that Paul commented on slaves/servants in his epistles, where he mentioned that they should obey their masters. He also said that if they got the opportunity to be freed, they should take it, but this part was never mentioned by the slaveholders, of course.⁴

³Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene D. Genovese, “The Divine Sanction of Social Order: Religious Foundations of the Southern Slaveholders,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 55, no. 2 (Summer 1987): 211.

⁴J. Albert Harrill, “The Use of the New Testament in the American Slave Controversy: A Case History in the Hermeneutical Tension between Biblical Criticism and Christian Moral Debate,” *Religion and American Culture* 10, no. 2 (Summer 2000): 151.

Another argument for the legitimacy of slavery was a section in the Bible where Noah cursed his son Ham, the father of Canaan, and said that his generation would be the servant of his brothers. The theory is the following: The descendants of Canaan were African inhabitants and they all were forever predestined to be the servants, in other words slaves to the other nations. It was also mentioned in the Bible that the descendants of Canaan became black, which served as a good tool for the slaveholders to make the distinction between the races and claim that all blacks should be enslaved. Whites were, according to this interpretation of Bible, the descendants of Japhet to whom God promised to “enlarge”. This had supported the fact that business of slaveholders grew with the help of the slaves. Therefore they believed that their practices of slavery were Biblical.⁵

⁵Anthony Pagden, “The Slave Trade: Review of Hugh Thomas’ Story of the Atlantic Slave Trade,” *The New Republic* (1997) <http://innercity.org/holt/slavechron.html> (accessed April 22, 2010).

2 THE SLAVES

2.1 The Background Situation of the Slaves

2.1.1 Stono Rebellion

Slaves had a very difficult position in Southern society. Not only were they seen and treated like possessions, but also their rights were taken away over time. The first restriction of their rights happened in 1676 after Bacon's Rebellion in Virginia in which European white slaves participated as well as African black slaves. The rebellion was led by Nathaniel Bacon, who "proclaimed freedom to all bond-laborers, in anticipation they would join his cause against the big tobacco bourgeoisie." After the unsuccessful rebellion only black slaves were kept slaves; the whites were set free. This social distinction between the blacks and whites was made so that they would not unite again in rebellions against authorities. Later in 1739, after the Stono Rebellion another restriction of rights took place. During this insurrection in South Carolina about one hundred slaves marched for freedom. After they stole guns from a shop and killed the shopkeepers, they marched with a banner that read "Liberty!" On their way they killed twenty-one white people and burned houses of slaveholders. After the rebellion had been suppressed, the Negro Act was approved. This act prohibited slaves from growing their own food, earning money, organizing meetings and learning to read. The purpose of it was to eliminate the means or situations in which slaves could organize another rebellion. The restriction of the slaves' rights increased their dissatisfaction, and it might be assumed that this led to further consequences – despite all the whites' efforts more rebellions happened later. They were usually led by strongly Christian slaves, who believed that slavery was against their religion.⁶

2.1.2 Gabriel Prosser's Revolt

One of the potentially most successful revolts was Gabriel Prosser's revolt, which took place in Richmond, Virginia in 1800. More than one thousand slaves participated in this rebellion, and it would have been successful if Prosser had not been betrayed and if a flood

⁶Jonathan Scott, "PBS Says American Slavery was Natural: Eradication Bacon's Rebellion from Popular Memory," http://www.blackcommentator.com/129/129_guest_pbs_slavery.html (accessed April 26, 2010).;

had not destroyed the bridges by which he wanted to invade the town. Whites determined that Prosser was able to organize his rebellion so well because there were no special restrictions on the movement of slaves in the slave colonies and therefore he could convince so many fellow slaves to participate. Consequently, to prevent another rebellion, the slave-owners later limited the area where slaves could be or travel. Nevertheless, in 1802 a conspiracy took place among enslaved boatmen, and “slave owners in the Virginia Assembly banned the practice of hiring slaves away from their masters (1808) and required freed blacks to leave the state or face re-enslavement (1806).”⁷

2.1.3 Denmark Vesey’s Rebellion

The conflict between the slaves, who felt oppressed to a high degree, and the whites, who increased the amount of oppression by limiting slaves’ rights, continued for a long time. It went so far that not only the black slaves had the desire to rebel against slavery, but there were also freed blacks with such needs. In 1821 there was a rebellion led by Denmark Vesey, who won a lot of money in a lottery, bought his freedom from his master and settled in South Carolina. Even though he himself was free, it troubled him very much that his fellow Africans as well as his wife and children were still enslaved. He became a member of the Methodist Episcopal Church, where he later served as a preacher to a small group. While reading the Bible and preaching, he became inspired by the books of the Old Testament where God gives Josuha instructions to defeat and kill the inhabitants of Canaan, including women and children. Vesey started using this passage from Exodus in his angry preachings against slaveholders. Together with leaders from the African church he began plotting a rebellion. His plan was to burn the houses of the slaveholders and then kill them when they tried to escape. There were a lot of free and enslaved blacks who wanted to join this rebellion. Paradoxically this plot was not implemented thanks to a slave from the area, George Wilson, who found out about the plot from a friend. Even though Denmark Vesey put his reasons for attacking the slaveholders as Biblical, Wilson found his argumentation erroneous, because it was not at all compatible with Christ’s New Testament

“Slave Rebellion: Stono Rebellion,” http://www.footnote.com/page/1437_slave_rebellion/ (accessed April 25, 2010); The Stono Rebellion, “<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part1/1p284.html> (accessed April 22, 2010);

⁷Philip J. Schwarz, “Emancipators, Protectors, and Anomalies: Free Black Slaveowners in Virginia,” *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 95, no. 3 (July 1987): 317-338; Charles Wilson Harris, *The Harris Letters* (North Carolina: University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2005), 84; “Slave Rebellion: Gabriel Prosser,” http://www.footnote.com/page/1437_slave_rebellion/ (accessed April 25, 2010).

teaching of loving one another. Wilson fretted over his predicament for some days and then finally, because he wanted to protect his own master, told him about the plot. As a reward for doing so he got freedom, yet he felt so guilty since Vesey and other leaders of the plot were hanged after trial, that before long Wilson committed suicide.⁸

2.1.4 Nat Turner's Rebellion

Another rebellion leader with Christian beliefs was Nat Turner. All his life he had hated slavery, just as his mother did. She wanted to kill him as soon as he was born to prevent him from a terrible life in slavery. As a young man he had visions that he interpreted after prayers, and he understood them as a promise of the end of slavery. He mostly focused on the Biblical promise of the New Jerusalem which he understood as Jerusalem, Virginia, which was close to where he lived. When he was a young adult, he became an unofficial religious leader in Southampton County, Virginia and he led seven disciples. The rebellion started when one of them, Will, was cruelly beaten by his owner and Turner together with others invaded the slaveholder's house one night and killed all the white people in it, except for a little baby. They then attacked surrounding houses, killing white people and gathering slaves and weapons. They were merciful only to one white family, who did not own slaves. This massacre continued till the following day, when the group of slaves was approaching Jerusalem, Virginia, where they were stopped and hundreds of them executed by a mob of whites. Nevertheless, Turner escaped and hid successfully for two months. The slave-owners in surrounding areas were terrified, which led them to execute nearly two hundred innocent black people in case they had something to do with the rebellion. Turner was finally caught, sentenced to death, executed and skinned, but the terror of rebellion had spread even as far as North Carolina. The public was frightened of "...arson, slave conspiracies, abolitionists' activities [and] vigilante justice." No wonder that it led to panic when there were "almost nightly fire alarms in Charleston." The whites claimed that "their mastery over the Negro was being tested." It is even believed that this fear was one of the factors which led to the Civil War.⁹

⁸James Hamilton, *Negro Plot: An Account of the Late Intended Insurrection among a Portion of the Blacks of the City of Charleston, South Carolina* (Boston, Joseph W. Ingraham, 1822) 17-46; "Slave Rebellion: Denmark Vesey," http://www.footnote.com/page/1437_slave_rebellion/ (accessed April 25, 2010).

⁹Ernest M. Lander, Jr., "Crisis of Fear: Secession in South Carolina, by Steven A. Channing," *The Journal of Southern History* 37, no. 2 (May 1971): 297-299; Charles Regan Wilson and William Ferris, ed.

2.1.5 George Whitefield's Approach to Slaves

The evangelist approach to African slaves varied based on experience. For example, George Whitefield (1714-1770), a preacher from England who visited America more than ten times to preach the gospel, was always very fond of the Southern slaves and was very strict to the slaveholders who treated their slaves cruelly and did not teach them about Christ. He even noted in one letter that “[s]ome masters are no better than *Monsters of Barbarity*, resorting to cruel devices and torture to extract additional labor from their bondsmen. Death was preferable for these slaves rather than continued hunger, deprivation and misery. The Blood of them spilt for these many years in [their] respective provinces will ascend up to heaven against [their masters.]” However, Whitefield never complained about the institution of slavery itself. After some time he even bought a plantation and slaves to support his orphanage in Georgia, and later he insisted on legalizing slavery. He became very afraid of the slaves and of a possible uprising. Several times he almost crossed paths with groups of blacks who might have been runaway slaves, and he was very careful to avoid them. In fact, he considered runaway slaves as God’s punishment for the areas from which the slaves escaped, because he knew the slaveholders lost their money due to the loss of slaves. After such experiences he stopped preaching to the slaveholders about how to treat their slaves; he only emphasized that the slaves should obey their masters and “give up the thoughts of seeking freedom from their masters.” In fact, in one anonymous letter, addressed to the slaves and considered to be written by Whitefield, it is stated that it is better for a slave to die than to be disobedient to his Master (God, slaveholder), which is rather contradictory with Whitefield’s earlier statement that it is better for the slaves to die than to experience the slaveholders’ poor treatment.¹⁰

2.1.6 Thornton Stringfellow's Approach to Slaves

Another preacher with a pro-slavery attitude was Reverend Thornton Stringfellow (1788-1869), the pastor of Stevensburg Baptist Church in Culpeper County, Virginia. He was a son of a slaveholder and a slaveholder himself. Since he believed that human effort is very

Encyclopedia of Southern Culture (North Carolina, University of North Carolina Press, 1989); “Slave Rebellion: Nat Turner,” http://www.footnote.com/page/1437_slave_rebellion/ (accessed April 25, 2010).

¹⁰George Whitefield, “Letter III. To the Inhabitants of Maryland, Virginia, North and South-Carolina, concerning their Negroes,” *Three Letters from the Reverend Mr. G. Whitefield* (Philadelphia, 1740): 13-16; Stephen J. Stein, “George Whitefield on Slavery: Some New Evidence,” *Church History* 42, no. 2 (June 1973): 243-256.

important in the process of gaining lost souls for Christ, he felt it was his duty to spread the idea that slavery was productive in leading the slaves out of barbarism. In other words, slavery “fulfilled God’s will and served as an instrument of His mercy.” For Stringfellow, the answer to the question whether slavery was good or bad was clear: since he thought slavery was a kind of mission, he viewed slavery as a positive good. In his opinion, “the institution of slavery itself was designed to educate the bondsmen for salvation.” Stringfellow completely ignored the conditions under which the slaves were forced to work in Southern states and claimed that “their condition, *as a class*, is now better than that of any other equal number of laborers on earth.” His Biblical argument for supporting slavery was that when Abraham’s servant/slave Hagar escaped, God told her to return to her master. In Stringfellow’s point of view this was a clear manifestation of God’s attitude towards fugitive slaves. Also in the past God blessed the slaveholding nation of Israelites, which also lent support to slavery, according to Stringfellow.¹¹

2.1.7 Summary of the Background Situation of Slaves

The situation must have been very difficult for the slaves in such a background. Those who believed in God were pushed by the white preachers to give up their hopes for being freed. It also must have been very hard for them to believe someone who has never experienced slavery, preaching about how it was God’s good plan for their lives to stay in such conditions. No wonder that black preachers who were either slaves or freemen had a different opinion. No wonder that slaves who heard various stories from the Bible, or if they were the lucky ones, read the stories themselves, did not identify themselves with the ones who should be subdued and held in slavery, but with the ones who were loved by God and who were going to experience a better future. The rights of African American slaves were taken away gradually. First, there was made the distinction between the black and white race and only the blacks were kept as slaves since then. Second, the right to growing food, earning money, organizing meetings and learning to read was taken away and there was restricted the area where the slaves could move or be. Third, free blacks in Virginia were advised to “leave the state or face re-enslavement.” Whites took the rebellions as a serious threat, which influenced their behavior towards the slaves and blacks in general.

¹¹Drew Gilpin Faust, “Evangelicalism and the Meaning of the Proslavery Argument: The Reverent Thornton Stringfellow of Virginia,” *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, 85, no. 1 (January

Ironical was that the slaveholders thought Christianity would make their slaves become faithful servants, but it was their own understanding of the Bible that led most of the slaves organize rebellions against their masters.

2.2 The Slave's Intrepretation of the Bible

On January 1808 black Reverend Absalom Jones preached "A Thanksgiving Sermon: On Account of the Abolition of the African Slave Trade," where he compared the situation of the black slaves in America to the situation of the Jewish slaves in Egypt. In his preaching he refered to the passages in the Bible where God promises to his people that he will set them free from slavery. Jones relied on the fact that God was the same yesterday, today and forever, as it was written in the Bible. Therefore, according to Jones, God was not indifferent to the injustice that happend to African slaves as He was not indifferent to the injustice that happened to the Jewish nation in Egypt. Jones also mentioned the fact that it was written in many places in the Bible that God cared about people who were oppressed and listened to their cry. But not only this, He also saved them from the hands of their enemies. This encouraged the African slaves to believe that they were going to be saved. They had a hope that God would set them free from the suffering caused by their oppressors. They didn't see themselves at all as the ones who should be kindly inferior to the whites. They saw themselves as the children of Almighty God, equal to any other human beings, with their desires for and right to freedom.¹²

1977): 3-17.

¹²Biblical Counseling, "A Thanksgiving Reminder from a Hero of Black Church History," <http://bcsfn.aacc.net/?p=333> (accessed April 22, 2010).

3 NON-SLAVEHOLDING WHITES IN THE SOUTH

3.1 The Quakers

The Quakers, who were Christian but neither Protestant nor Puritan, arrived in America in the second half of the seventeenth century from England. The Quaker religion, which was founded in England by George Fox in 1647, emphasized the importance of viewing Christ as someone who lives now and who can communicate with those who open their hearts to him. Quakers believed that the true members of Christ's church were not those whose name was on some church membership list, but those whose life was changed by Christ. Quakers called their members "Friends," and they recognized the church not as a building where various people meet but as a place of fellowship for those whose life was changed by Christ. As for the church ministers, Quakers believed that the defining quality of a minister was not his academic degree but his ability to make Christ real to the others.¹³

When Quakers first arrived in Massachusetts, they were not welcome. The local Protestants saw them as a threat to their own faith. For this reason, "Friends were lashed behind carts and whipped from town to town. They were branded with a "H" for heretic; they had their tongues bored through with a hot iron; their ears were cut off; they were banished," their books were burned, and they were sent away on the first departing ship. The death penalty was legalized for those who returned after being banished. When Quakers came to Rhode Island, Baltimore and Maryland, they were treated better, and a significant number of local inhabitants converted. However, the Quakers' impact was probably the greatest in Pennsylvania, in part because the founder of the colony, William Penn, was himself a Quaker. The colonial constitution, which included Quaker ideas of religious freedom and invoked equality and peace, was later used by the Founding Fathers when they designed the US Constitution.¹⁴

Quakers' opinion on slavery changed over time. In their early history they too were slaveowners. The situation started changing thanks to John Woolman, a Quaker clerk from New Jersey who was once asked by his employer "to draw up a bill of sale for a slave for

¹³John C. Thorn, "Early Quaker History" <http://thorn.pair.com/earlyq.htm#top> (accessed April 22, 2010).

¹⁴John C. Thorn, "Early Quaker History," <http://thorn.pair.com/earlyq.htm#top> (accessed April 22, 2010); Lorenzo J. Grene, "Quakers and Slavery in America by Thomas E. Drake," *The Journal of Negro Education* 21, no.1 (Winter 1952): 50-51.

whom he had found a buyer.” He did what he was asked to do, but then after closer consideration of slavery itself he became persuaded that it was against his Christian belief. He was so touched by his anti-slavery thoughts that he decided to inform all his fellow Quakers about what he perceived as a revelation from God. He started his journey in 1746 and travelled to Pennsylvania and to the South where he “quietly tried to persuade the heads of households with whom he was staying that they were hurting themselves and their families by keeping slaves. He did not argue. He only shared the insights that he had been given in a gentle and loving way. He was as concerned for the well being of the slaveholder as he was for the well being of the slaves.” He devoted the following twenty-five years of his life to this mission, and he was very successful. Shortly after his death in 1772, there were no more Quakers who owned slaves.¹⁵

The Quakers’ religious anti-slavery argument was based on their testimony of equality, which said that “...all people are created equal in the sight of God. Therefore all people should be treated equally.” They also referred to the “golden rule” from the Bible that says: “do to others what you would have them do to you”¹⁶

3.1.1 The Underground Railroad

Quakers were much more sympathetic towards the slaves than any other religious group in America. Perhaps thanks to their early American history, when they experienced persecution and imprisonment, they could imagine what the slaves’ lives might be like. After Quakers all agreed that slavery was against their belief, it was unpleasant for them to keep living in the South. Therefore many of them migrated to the North and settled there in the beginning of nineteenth century. Many of the Quakers in the North as well as in the South were even willing to risk fines and imprisonment for helping fugitive slaves escape north. The Quakers hid them in their own homes and as such, took part in the Underground Railroad, a network of safe houses where slaves found shelter on their way to

¹⁵John C. Thorn, “Early Quaker History,” <http://thorn.pair.com/earlyq.htm#top> (accessed April 22, 2010); Ira V. Brown, “The Quaker Origins of Antislavery by J. William Frost,” *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 104, no. 3 (July 1980): 382-383; Frederick B. Tolles, “Quakers and Slavery in America by Thomas E. Drake,” *The William and Mary Quarterly, Third Series* 8, no. 2 (April 1951): 293-295.

¹⁶Joanne Holstein, (2006) “Friends (Quakers),” Becker Bible Studies Library (January), http://guidedbiblestudies.com/library/friends_quakers.htm (accessed 27 January 2010) ; Duncan Rea Williams III, “Memorial Against Slaveholding,”

freedom. This network led from the South through the North to Canada where the slaves were eventually free. Even though the northern abolitionists hated it, the Fugitive Slave Act was passed in 1850, allowing slaveholders to go north and look for their runaway slaves. If the slaveholders found them, they would be taken back to the South and to slavery. Therefore the slaves had to travel as far as Canada to be free.¹⁷

Certain people made their living hunting down runaway slaves, and for this reason runaways usually stayed hidden during the day and then travelled at night. There was a secret sign that the participants of the Underground Railroad used that marked a house as a safe place – they placed a burning candle in their window. The people living in such a house would hide the slaves and later when the slave hunters came to ask whether or not there was a runaway slave there, they answered “No” because the Quaker belief was that there could not be such a term for a human being. Therefore they did not recognize the slaves as slaves and they were not lying when they said “No.” If the slaves were caught, “they would be flogged and returned to their masters.” It is said that about 75,000 slaves escaped north thanks to the help of about 3,000 sympathizers participating in the Underground Railroad, which operated for about thirty years.¹⁸

People who personally helped slaves were called conductors and the safe houses were called stations. There were no maps of the Underground Railroad, because it was assumed that it would be very dangerous to have them. If the maps had been found, the whole network might have been destroyed. However, there were handwritten directions for the Quakers who moved to the North because of their dislike to slavery. These maps were made for the purpose of informing the other Southern Quakers, who would like to move north, where to find a Quaker community. Such a map from the first decade of the nineteenth century still exists, depicting localities settled by the Quakers. The area

<http://www.drwilliams.org/iDoc/index.htm?url=http://www.drwilliams.org/iDoc/Wseb-214.htm>- (accessed May 1, 2010); Bible, Mathew 7:12.

¹⁷Duncan Rea Williams III, “The Underground Railroad System,” www.drwilliams.org/iDoc/Web-214.htm (accessed May 1, 2010); Gwen Wright, “Quaker Map,” http://www.pbs.org/opb/historydetectives/investigations/508_quakermap.html (accessed April 30, 2010); Nationalcenter.org, “Fugitive Slave Act 1850,” <http://www.nationalcenter.org/FugitiveSlaveAct.html> (accessed April 10, 2010); Frederick B. Tolles, “Quakers and Slavery in America by Thomas E. Drake,” *The William and Mary Quarterly, Third Series* 8, no. 2 (April 1951): 293-295.

¹⁸Zach Hunter, *Be the Change*, (Michigan: Zondervan, 2007), 75-78; Duncan Rea Williams III, “The Underground Railroad System,” <http://www.drwilliams.org/iDoc/index.htm?url=http://www.drwilliams.org/iDoc/Web-214.htm> (accessed May 1, 2010).

depicted in the map later became a significant branch of the Underground Railroad, therefore it might be assumed that the places marked on the map, which were places where the Quakers used to meet, might have also been the stations of the Underground Railroad.¹⁹

An article was published in *The Spectator* in December 1859, where the Southerners claimed that the participants of the “under ground railroad” stole the slaves from the South, where they were completely happy and cared for, and sent them to the North, where they were discriminated against and treated badly. They supported this claim with a story of one Virginian slave, found in “[a] Boston paper of recent date.” He bought his freedom and travelled to the North where he could not find any work, even though he was diligent. Southerners assert that “he had been deceived, cheated and driven from [Abolitionist’s] presence,” left with no means to return to Virginia, where he would gladly go back to his master. They put it as an experience of the vast majority of freed slaves, not just this Virginian. Even though the desire to return seems improbable for a large number of slaves, it gives a notion of how hard life was for slaves, even in the North. It supports the idea that even though many whites fought against slavery, their acts were not always based on their sympathy towards blacks.²⁰

The Quakers disagreed with other religious groups in the South in the matter of slavery so much, that many of them rather left to the North. Not only they disagreed with it, they also fought against it by organizing a network of save houses where the slaves were hidden and cared for on their escape to Canada. Although Quakers were slaveholders themselves in the history, unlike others they freed their slaves with no demand for compensation as soon as they found out that slavery was incompatible with their Christian faith.

3.2 The Southern Abolitionists

There were not many abolitionists in the South, because most of them moved north since it was either too hard for them to keep living in the slave states where they were usually discriminated against and threatened by the slaveholders or they saw a better potential in practicing their antislavery activities among Northerners who were opened to listen to them. They usually addressed one or two issues that they found immoral about slavery and

¹⁹Gwen Wright, “Quaker Map,”

http://www.pbs.org/opb/historydetectives/investigations/508_quakermap.html (accessed April 30, 2010).

²⁰*The Spectator*, December 6, 1859, p. 2. “White Southerner’s Defense of Slaveholding: Article Two,” <http://www2.vcdh.virginia.edu/teaching/vclassroom/proslavewsht2.html> (accessed April 23, 2010).

they explained why it was so from their point of view. They mostly based their argumentation on the Bible or on The American Constitution and their message was particularly spread through publishing or public speaking. Although the southern abolitionists had reached great objectives, it was still considered by some that “they were not a big threat in the nineteenth century” and their work cannot be compared to the work of the northern abolitionists.²¹

The most significant southern Abolitionist was Angelina E. Grimke, who was very complex in her argumentation against slavery. She, unlike others, addressed most of the issues that the slaveholders used in their pro-slavery argumentation and published it in an *Appeal to the Christian Women of the South*.

3.3 Angelina Emily Grimke

Angelina E. Grimke (1805 - 1879) came from a wealthy slaveholding family from South Carolina. She was the youngest of fourteen children of a devoted pro-slavery planter, who owned hundreds of slaves. Her position as an abolitionist was very difficult since women at that time were not supposed to study, speak in public or practice other “unwomanly behavior.” When she was older she moved to Philadelphia and joined the Philadelphia Female Anti-slavery Society. In 1836 she wrote an *Appeal to the Christian Women of the South* in which she gave abundant reasons why slavery was sinful and why women were equal to men and therefore they should do what they could to fight against slavery and not prevaricate, claiming that they could not do anything, because they were only women.²²

Grimke’s humble argumentation was very strict, detailed and based fully on the Bible. In the *Appeal to the Christian Women of the South* she, for example, drew attention to the fact that it is very ironic “to be born a slave under Free Republican Government,” and she recalled as well the “doctrine of the fore fathers – all men are created equal and have the

²¹Ira V. Brown, “The Abolitionists and the South, 1831-1861 by Stanley Harrold,” *The American Historical Review* 101, no. 4 (October 1996): 1283

²²Iowa State University, “Angelina E. Grimke-Weld,” under “Woman Profiles” <http://www.womenspeecharchive.org/women/profile/index.cfm?ProfileID=102> (accessed March 22, 2010); Sunshine, “Sarah Grimke and Angelina Grimke Weld: Letters on the Equality of the Sexes; Letters to Catherine e. Beecher,” <http://www.pinn.net/~sunshine/whm2000/grimke4.html> (accessed March 21, 2010).

inalienable rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, etc.” If everyone has right to liberty, is it not a crime to hold someone in an involuntary bondage?²³

She insisted that the Bible does not support slavery, and one of her reasons why was that God created Adam to rule over the animals and “the works of [his] hands,” however, not over human beings. Even after the flood when God “renewed the human rights,” He did not enlarge the number or kinds of species over which people should rule. It was also never mentioned that people should have ascendancy over other people. From this also emerges the fact that a person cannot be called a thing, since things were put under the rule of humans, unlike humans themselves. Nonetheless, the slaves in the South were called “chattel personal” and were put under the rule of men, which is sinful according to Grimke’s beliefs. The difference in submission of animals and humans was also visible by the fact that on the one hand the animals used for work had never rebelled against their masters, because it was natural for them. On the other hand when humans suffered submission and bondage, they often rebelled as it can be seen in the history.²⁴

The justifications of some slaveholders that the Africans were predestined to slavery via the curse of Ham was attacked by Grimke with the following arguments: The prophesy or the curse, said by Noah, had pictured what was going to come, and what also later occurred on “immediate descendants of Ham – Canaanites,” but it did not order that it had to be so. Although the prophesy was there, it did not defend those through which the curse happened. If it worked this way, also the Egyptian oppressors of Israelites would be excused for holding them in captivity and reducing their children, because there existed a prophesy saying that this would happen as well. The prophesy did not justify them at all, on the contrary, a passage from the Bible, which read “it must needs be that offences come, but woe unto that man through whom they come,” came true. Egypt was destroyed, while the Israelites were leaving, as a punishment for their oppression. Therefore, Grimke claimed, these stories from the Scripture should function as a threat, not as an exoneration to those who oppress the African slaves in America.²⁵

²³ Angelina Emily Grimke, *Appeal to the Women of the South* (New York: American Anti-slavery Society, 1836), 1-14.

²⁴ Angelina Emily Grimke, *Appeal to the Women of the South* (New York: American Anti-slavery Society, 1836), 1-14.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, *Appeal to the Women of the South* (New York: American Anti-slavery Society, 1836), 1-14.

Grimke's other reason for opposing slavery was Biblical interpretation of the way one could become a servant/slave according to Jewish Law written in the Bible. Firstly, she talked about the slaves from the Jewish community, secondly about the slaves from heathen community and thirdly she also added the orders given to Jews by God, which guaranteed and protected the rights of the servants as well as the rights of the masters.²⁶

There were six possibilities presented in the Bible as how to Jews could legally become servants: Firstly, "if reduced to extreme poverty, a Hebrew might sell himself, i.e. his services, for six years, in which case *he* received the purchase money himself." Secondly, "a father might sell his children as servants, i.e. his *daughters*, in which circumstance it was understood the daughter was to be the wife or daughter-in-law of the man who bought her, and the *father* received the price. In other words, Jewish women sold as *white women* were in the first settlement of Virginia—as *wives*, *not* as slaves." Thirdly, "insolvent debtors might be delivered to their creditors as servants. Fourth, "thieves not able to make restitution for their thefts, were sold for the benefit of the injured person." Fifth, "they might be born in servitude." And finally, "if a Hebrew had sold himself to a rich Gentile, he might be redeemed by one of his brethren at any time the money was offered; and he who redeemed him, was *not* to take advantage of the favor thus conferred, and rule over him with rigor." Grimke proved that the African slaves had not become slaves by any of the Biblical means, but they were sold to slavery and did not receive any money. They also did not "become insolvent by carelessness" and they did not steal to be possibly sold as a "restitution for their crimes." The slaves did not sell themselves to any tyrant from whose hands they should have been saved by being bought by the American slaveholders, nor were they born in slavery according to the Jewish law. The female slaves were never sold by their fathers and they were not treated by the slaveholders as daughters or as daughters-in-law. Therefore American masters had no right to hold the African slaves in bondage according to the Jewish law.²⁷

In the Bible, two possibilities were written how the Jews could acquire "absolute slaves" from heathens (non-Christian nations). Firstly, they were the captives taken in war, reduced to bondage instead of being killed. It was not said indeed that their children were

²⁶Ibid., 1-14.

enslaved as well. Secondly, “the bondmen and bond maids might have been bought from the heathen who [lived round the Jewish kingdom]; these were left by fathers to their children after them, but it did not appear that the *children* of these servants were ever reduced to servitude.” Based on these passages Grimke claims that, again, the African slaves were neither taken captive in war, nor bought from heathens. And unlike in America, the children of the heathen slaves were not held in bondage even in the times of Moses.²⁸

There were illegal means of obtaining slaves mentioned in the Bible as well - when someone was stolen and later sold as a slave. God reacted to this crime by giving a law saying that if there was anybody stolen and sold by the thief or found “in his hand” then the thief should be sentenced to death. Based on her research of Jewish law, Grimke argued that African slaves were stolen by the American slaveholders, who committed a crime doing that.²⁹

The rights concerning the servants/slaves from the Jewish community were focused on the treatment from the master as well as on the length of servitude. The master was ordered not to rule over the servant with “rigor,” but fear God and behave righteously. Hebrew servants had the right to be freed from the servitude after six years without any compensation for the master. It is also known that all the servants were set free after the death of their master or in the year of Jubilee, which was every fiftieth year. The rights concerning the family members of the servant were following, “[if] he come in by himself, he shall go out by himself; if he was married, then his wife shall go out with him. If his master has given him a wife and she has born him sons and daughters, the wife and her children shall be his master’s, and he shall go out by himself.” However, there were also situations when the servant was satisfied with the conditions of the servitude to such degree that he decided to stay with the master. For the sake of the servant such a decision had to be done publicly to avoid exploitation from the side of the master, “[if] the servant shall plainly say, I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free; then his master shall bring him unto the Judges, and he shall bring him to the door, or to the door-

²⁷ Angelina Emily Grimke, *Appeal to the Women of the South* (New York: American Anti-slavery Society, 1836), 1-14; Bible, Leviticus 25, 39; Bible, Exodus 21, 7; Bible, 2 Kings 4, 1; Bible, Exodus 22, 3; Bible, Exodus 21, 4; Bible, Leviticus 25, 47-55.

²⁸ Ibid., 1-14; Bible, Deutronomy 20, 14; Bible, Leviticus 25, 44.

²⁹ Ibid; Bible, Deutronomy 24, 7.

post, and his master shall bore his ear through with an awl, and he shall serve him *forever*.” This forever of course meant till the death of the master, not till the death of the servant's last descendant. To prevent violent behavior from the master, there was also a rule that read, “If a man smite the eye of his servant, or the eye of his maid, that it perish, he shall let him *go free* for his eye’s sake. And if he smite out his man servant’s tooth or his maid servant’s tooth he shall let him *go free* for his tooth’s sake.” And also, “[if] a man smite his servant or his maid with a rod, and he die under his hand, he shall be surely punished. Notwithstanding, if he continue a day or two, he shall not be punished, for he is his money.” Concerning the second part of this verse – if he continue a day or two, Grimke argued, that it was the only law that protected the master, in case the servant was unhealthy and the punishment would cause his death, although it was not the master’s intention at all. She also added that it would not fit into the context, if God protected the eye and tooth of the servant and did not protect his whole life. If the master was cruel toward his servant who died after his attack, the master was punished for murder, unlike in Slave States. American slaveholders also argued that the passage which read “for he is his money” proved that the slaves may have been treated as possessions. Nevertheless, Grimke believed that God would not give so many laws to protect the servants as people if He viewed them as “chattel personal.”³⁰

An extra law protecting the female Jewish servants regulated the conditions under which they could be sold to servitude. “A father could not sell his daughter as a slave, according to the Rabbins, until she was at the age of puberty, and unless he was reduced to the utmost indigence.” And also the following behavior from the master towards the female servant was defined: If the master was not satisfied with the servant, he was ordered to give her freedom and ask for no compensation. If the master sold the female servant to another nation instead of giving her freedom, his behavior was considered fraudulent. The female servants were intended to become wives or daughters-in-law of their masters and they were protected by the law not to be despised or maltreated, which meant that if their husband married another wife, it was illegal for him to treat the two unequally and the wife, who was shortened on her rights (food, clothing and “duty of marriage”), might have left

³⁰ Angelina Emily Grimke, *Appeal to the Women of the South* (New York: American Anti-slavery Society, 1836), 1-14; Bible, Exodus 21, 2; Bible, Exodus 21, 5-6; Bible, Exodus 21, 26- 27; Bible Exodus 21, 20-21.

him without compensation. The female slaves in the American South were never treated as daughters and were not bought with the intention to become wives or daughters in law. Even though they were shortened on all their rights, they were never set free without compensation.³¹

As regards the everyday life of the masters and their servants, there were several occasions where “the bond and free stood on common ground.” Everyone was supposed to rest on the Sabbath, the masters as well as their servants. Both of them were allowed to participate in celebrations three times a year: on the Passover, on the feast of Pentecost and on the feast of Tabernacles. This was not the same for the slaves in America, because the laws and rights for whites and blacks different.³²

Another Jewish law conflicting with the American practices was the one concerning involuntary servitude. If a servant escaped from his master, it was a duty of a Jew to let them live where they liked, not oppress them and unlike in America, it was illegal to send the fugitives back to their masters. Grimke was curious why the North could not provide to the fugitives such right as were provided to them more than a thousand years ago. “Another law prevented even voluntary servitude to be perpetual: And you shall hallow the fiftieth year, and proclaim *Liberty* throughout *all* the land, to *all* the inhabitants thereof: it shall be a jubilee unto you.”³³

It was often argued that there existed slavery in the Old Testament and therefore it justified slavery as such. Grimke asserted that the slavery in the Bible differed from the one in America and gave the following explanations: Abraham would not have prepared and served a calf himself to his guests, neither would Sarah bake cakes when they had servants. Abraham also complained to God that he had no heirs and all his possession would be inherited by his servant, but there was no possibility for African slaves to inherit anything in America. Abraham also provided his servants with arms – who of the southern slaveholders would ever let their slaves have access to weapons? Because of the covenant between him and God, Abraham was given an order to circumcise all the eight-day-old male children including the ones born in the house as well as those who were bought and were not of Jewish origin. This was perceived by Grimke as the “right of servants” to be

³¹ Angelina Emily Grimke, *Appeal to the Women of the South* (New York: American Anti-slavery Society, 1836), 1-14.

³² *Ibid.*, 1-14; Bible, Deutronomy 16.

treated as other human beings in Abraham's house. It was believed that circumcision was replaced by baptism in the New Testament and Grimke questioned the slaveholders whether they were careful to have baptized all the human beings in their household. After all, the servants of Jews were "carefully guarded from violence, injustice and wrong." Grimke argued that none of the African slaves would remain in bondage if their institution was truly judged according to the Bible. In the American South the truth about slavery was the following: Slavery was constant and the slaves were inherited after their master's death. The children of all the slaves were kept in bondage. The work of the slave was obligatory and with no compensation. No specified rules guaranteed rest or limited the working hours, all was decided by the master. A slave was considered a personal chattel and had no rights limiting the possibility of being sold and separated from their family. They could not make contracts and did not have any right to property – all belonged to their master. Neither slave nor a free black could be a witness against any white person, if their testimony would bring benefit to the slave, no matter how serious was the crime they witnessed. Nevertheless if it brought benefit to the master, slaves were allowed to give testimony against another slave or free black, even if the crime they witnessed was very serious. No laws or rights limited the behavior of the master towards their slave, therefore the slaves might have been treated as their master wished and in case they were killed, there was no trial for such murder. There was also a great inequality in the way crimes were judged. The same behavior that was considered trifling when a white person did it, was seen highly criminal in case of a black person and the extent punishment followed this inequality. Slaves also did not have any right to go to another master even if it was necessary for their personal safety. They were not even allowed to defend themselves if any free person attacked them, the master would only sue for compensation in case the slave was killed or crippled. American laws did not support any education or religious practice of slaves. The laws, according to Grimke, "[operated] most oppressively [even] upon free people of color."³⁴

Grimke used her argument that Jewish slavery could not be compared to the American one as a defence against slaveholders' claims that Jesus did not condemn slavery and therefore it was legal. According to her, Jesus did not talk about it, because there still

³³Ibid.; 1-14; Bible, Deutronomy 23, 15-16; Bible, Leviticus 25, 10.

existed the rules which guaranteed the rights of the servants and regulated the servant-master relationship. If Jewish servitude had been similar to American slavery, Jesus would probably have commented on it, because American slavery did not match his golden rule: “Do to others as you want them do to you.” She insisted that all the Southern slaveholders should apply this rule on their everyday lives and consider whether they would like to be enslaved and see their relatives in bondage. And if not, they were breaking this rule, because they did to others what they would not like to endure personally. Also by practicing something that the slaveholders would not wish to experience personally, they were breaking the command “You will love your neighbor as yourself.” Some slaveholders asserted that servitude would be unbearable for them, but their slaves did not mind, because they were accustomed to it. They also said that “the slaves [were] happier than their masters.” The question is whether the slaves were accustomed to hard work because of their nature or because of the cruel treatment that they had to face since childhood. Then if the slaves “were happier than their masters,” why did the slaveholders not enslave their own children to be “happier?” Grimke even suggested that for most Christians, including the slaveholders, it would be horrible to imagine their savior as a slaveholder. But why, if slavery was not sinful as they claimed?³⁵

3.4 Other Southern Abolitionists

3.4.1 Samuel Sewall

As early as 1700 there was a pamphlet published by Samuel Sewall called *The Selling of Joseph*. Sewall (1652-1730) was a white judge of English origin who lived in Massachusetts and who was mostly known for his participation in the Salem Witch Trials, for which he was later very sorry and publicly apologized. In his pamphlet, which was the first anti-slavery document published, he opposed many of the slaveholders’ justifications.³⁶

Firstly, he argued that nobody had the right or was in the position to be the executor of God’s wrath. Therefore there was no excuse for the Americans to enslave the African blacks and claim that this was how God had planned it, when Ham was cursed. The curse

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Norman Gross, ed., *Noble Purposes* (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2007): 3-17.

might have been out of date already, Sewall claimed. Secondly, he insisted on the fact that all people have the same Creator. This means that all people are the “co-heirs” of life and liberty, therefore no one has the right to take life or liberty from anyone else. Sewall drew a similarity between Joseph’s brothers, who had no right to sell their brother to slavery, because they were of one blood, and the Americans who, according to his belief, had no right to enslave the Africans, since they all, Americans as well as Africans, were the Adam’s descendants. Thirdly, the religious reasons for slavery were according to Sewall unacceptable. It was not justifiable if people did wrong, opposing that the wrong would cause good. The fact that it turned out well did not justify Joseph’s brothers in selling him to slavery. Americans enslaved African, asserting that they were given the chance to become Christian, but this did not justify their actions, too. If the conversion was the real reason for enslavement, as some had put it, why did the slaveholders not free those blacks who had turned to Christianity?³⁷

3.4.2 Hinton Rowan Helper

Hinton Rowan Helper (1829-1909) was an influential and controversial abolitionist. He was born in North Carolina, he studied in Mocksville and in June 1857 he published his book *The Impending Crisis of the South: How to Meet It*. Helper used the 1850 census as a source for his argument that non-slaveholding Northern techniques were much more profitable than slavery in the U. S. South, but what hit the public more was his “admonishment to the slave to gain freedom by violence if necessary.” Even though he claimed that this book was aimed to help “the nonslave-holding whites (three-fourths of the South’s population disadvantaged by slavery),” the book was soon used as a promotion tool in Lincoln’s presidency campaign. The South responded by banning this book as well as other abolitionist literature under the threat of punishment for those who had such books at home.³⁸

The Impending Crisis of the South is divided into many parts, one of which talks about Helper’s understanding of the Bible’s stance towards slavery. On the one hand, he admitted that the practice of slavery was mentioned in the Bible, but he understood it as some “mild form” of slavery or servitude that was tolerated, but never approved by God. On the other

³⁷Norman Gross, *Noble Purposes* (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2007): 3-17.

hand, the fact that it had disappeared over time proved, in his view, that it was God's will to abolish slavery. Helper claimed that slavery in America was only a "social institution originating in the convenience and cupidity of our ancestors," and as such, was much more deviant than the one in "barbarous time." Slaveholders tried to justify themselves by using the Bible to show that it was God's will for them to keep slaves. According to Helper, the question was whether the slaveholders would continue to do so if slavery was unprofitable.³⁹

Regardless of the slaveholders' pro-slavery attitudes based on the Bible, he argued that the Bible itself was undoubtedly an anti-slavery book, and he supported this argument by citing the passages from the Old and New Testament that talk about liberty, about the fact that the laborer is worthy of his hire, about the ban of oppressing others and stealing others for the reason to sell them (under the punishment of death). He also used passages where it is ordered to love the neighbour, to respect to the poor and not behave unfair to them, to be righteous at court, not to keep the wages of servants, not to envy the oppressor and not to choose any of his ways, to proclaim liberty to the servants, not to refuse help to those who cry and those who are poor, not to call anyone master or demand to be called that way, to behave to others the way they want others to behave to them, to be affectionate to the others, to do good to all men, and to use the chance to be free.

Although it may seem that Helper was fond of the slaves, he wrote also other books, which were "extremely racist and unleashed intense hatred towards the Negro race." This proves the fact that even though abolitionists insisted on emancipation of the slaves, not all of them did it because they sympathized with them, but maybe because they did not find slavery moral. It might have been the national pride that led them fight against slavery, since it was very controversial to be a citizen of a country that presents itself as democratic, but holds high percentage of its inhabitants in an involuntary bondage.⁴⁰

³⁸William S. Powell, ed., *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography* (University of North Carolina Press, 1979), http://docsouth.unc.edu/browse/bios/pn0000711_bio.html (accessed April 22, 2010).

³⁹Hinton Rowan Helper, *The Impending Crisis of the South: How to Meet It* (New York: Burdick Brothers, 1857), 275 – 276.

⁴⁰William S. Powell, ed., *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography* (University of North Carolina Press, 1979), http://docsouth.unc.edu/browse/bios/pn0000711_bio.html (accessed April 22, 2010).

3.4.3 James G. Birney

Presidential candidate of the Liberal Party, James G. Birney, was born in the 1790s in Kentucky to a slaveholding family. He studied to be a lawyer at the College of New Jersey and after his conversion to Christianity he decided to use his law skills to fight against slavery. He, for example, participated in the General Assembly of Kentucky in 1816 where he “championed laws that were in favour of the slaves and opposed laws about fugitive slaves.” However, his other steps were rather gradual than straightforward. Even though he found slavery sinful, for some time he had been a slaveholder himself, since he inherited a plantation with slaves and kept it. Before he joined the American Colonization Society (1832 – 1833) he disposed of his plantation and most of the slaves by sale. It might not be seen as the best way to be an example for others in his abolitionist acts, but eventually he manumitted the rest of the slaves by 1834, and in 1837 “he was [even] indicted for helping a fugitive slave, but was acquitted.”⁴¹

Birney helped found the Kentucky-Anti-slavery Society in 1835 and because he was persuaded that publishing was a good means through which he might influence the public, he started an anti-slavery journal at Danville, for which he was broadly discriminated against. For this reason he later moved to Cincinnati where he started publishing the *Philantropist*, “which called for the immediate end to slavery and equal rights for African-Americans and whites.” In spite of great opposition, this journal was very successful and influential, mostly in the American Northwest. Nevertheless, the most significant of Birney’s ways to fight slavery was his Liberal Party candidacy for the presidency in 1840 and 1844. Although he was not successful it is believed that “without his candidacy, abolition might have taken longer.”⁴²

⁴¹NNDB, “James G. Birney” <http://www.nndb.com/people/258/000050108/> (accessed March 15, 2010); The Sheridan Libraries, “James Birney Collection of Anti-Slavery Pamphlets,” under “Manuscripts” <http://www.library.jhu.edu/collections/specialcollections/manuscripts/birney.html> (accessed March 15, 2010); Bay City, “Civil War Experience and the Underground Railroad,” under “Historic Sites & Attractions” <http://www.tourbaycitymi.org/civil-war-experience--the-underground-railroad-79/> (accessed April 25, 2010).

⁴²Mark F. Berenstein, “The Great Debate: How Princetonians have helped to shape the national discussion of race,” *Princeton Alumni Weekly* 110, no. 7 (January 2010), under “Features,” <http://paw.princeton.edu/issues/2010/01/13/pages/5962/index.xml?page=3&> (accessed March 15, 2010); The Free Dictionary, “Birney, James Gillespie,” <http://encyclopedia2.thefreedictionary.com/Birney,+James+Gillespie> (accessed March 15, 2010).

3.4.4 John G. Fee

John G. Fee was born in 1816 in Bracken County, Kentucky. He studied at Augusta College in Bracken County and Miami University of Ohio and he also attended a Theological Seminary in 1842 and 1843. Although his parents were slaveholders, he and his wife Matilda found slavery and racism sinful, and devoted most of their lives to fighting against it. They lived in Kentucky and Fee preached the abolitionist message to the local people. In his book *Autobiography of John G. Fee, Berea, Kentucky* he describes all his life and his antislavery work and includes details and situations showing how difficult it was to live in the South as an abolitionist. His family, his institutions and he himself, too, had to face threats and violence “because of his race politics.”⁴³

One of his greatest achievements was the founding of the town Berea in 1859 as well as Berea College, which was “the first racially integrated school in Kentucky.” However, within a year the town was assailed and “deserted” by sixty armed men. After this event Fee moved to Ohio and return to Berea after as long as four years. “He [believed] that the United States as a whole, and the South in particular, [had to] accept and adopt a policy of true equality for all.”⁴⁴

⁴³Harris Henderson, “John Gregg Fee, 1816-1901” under “Collections, First Person Narratives, Document Menu, Summary” <http://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/fee/fee.html> (accessed March 17, 2010). <http://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/fee/summary.html> (accessed March 17, 2010); John G. Fee, “Autobiography of John G. Fee, Berea, Kentucky: Electronic Edition,” <http://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/fee/fee.html> (accessed April 25, 2010).

⁴⁴Allison Clark, “John G. Fee - Founder of Berea College,” <http://johngfee.org/> (accessed March 17, 2010); Harris Henderson, “John Gregg Fee, 1816-1901,” under “Collections, First Person Narratives, Document Menu, Summary” <http://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/fee/summary.html> (accessed March 17, 2010).

4 FREE BLACKS IN THE SOUTH

Free blacks were not only in the American North but in the South as well. There were, for example, about 30,000 free blacks in Virginia in 1806. In the same year the Virginia Assembly "...required freed blacks to leave the state or face reenslavement" as a consequence of conspiracy among the slaves. For various other reasons the white population was very dissatisfied with the presence of free blacks in the state. As a result, the American Colonization Society was founded in 1816, with the purpose of supporting for free blacks to travel to West Africa and found a colony. Yet the whites expected the colony to be profitable and a good business partner as well as a way to get rid of the free black community. The whites relied on their assumptions that the free blacks would be delighted by such an opportunity. Therefore they started exploring the West African coast in 1819 and close to Sierra Leone they founded a colony called Liberia. But the black response was not as straightforward as the whites predicted. Some free blacks were very keen on going to Africa and some interpreted the situation as an attack on their presence in Virginia. Those who wanted to emigrate to Liberia were mostly religious and their reason to go was to spread Christianity. They even founded an African mission society in 1815 for the purpose of preparing blacks to go to Africa as missionaries.⁴⁵

Between 1820 and 1830 there were over one hundred free blacks from Richmond who migrated to Liberia. They were literate, skilled workers or tradesmen and their expectation of the new place was to do business and get rich without dealing with the obstacles they were forced to face in Virginia.⁴⁶

The approach of the free blacks who still remained in Richmond was very diverse and individual. They usually relied only on the references of Quakers who went to Liberia personally. Therefore, some of them were enthusiastic about emigrating and others were completely discouraged after they met blacks who went to Liberia, stayed there for a year or two and then returned to America and commented on their experience in a disparaging manner. "A series of events from 1817 to 1832 persuaded those free blacks who had once been willing to consider emigration to Africa that colonization was less an opportunity

⁴⁵Marie Tyler McGraw, "Richmond Free Blacks and African Colonization, 1816-1832," *Journal of American Studies* 21, no. 2 (August 1987): 207-224; "The Stono Rebellion," <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part1/1p284.html> (accessed April 22, 2010); "Slave Rebellion: Stono Rebellion," http://www.footnote.com/page/1437_slave_rebellion/ (accessed April 25, 2010).

⁴⁶Ibid.

presented to them than a judgement placed upon them.” This can be proved by the fact that after 1820 there were mostly families that travelled to Liberia, whereas around 1830 there were only individuals travelling there, which can be understood as a sign that the willingness of the black population to move had decreased. After Nat Turner’s rebellion in 1831 the feelings of being forced to move became a reality since the slaveholders were blaming black preachers, free blacks and abolitionists for the revolt and suggested that if the free blacks did not want to leave voluntarily, they should be deported. But there was no mass deportation organized and surprisingly even though the rights of the free blacks were limited in many ways, the majority of them still chose rather to stay in America than to migrate to Africa.⁴⁷

⁴⁷Marie Tyler McGraw, “Richmond Free Blacks and African Colonization, 1816-1832,” *Journal of American Studies* 21, no. 2 (August 1987): 207-224.

5 HISTORIOGRAPHY – JOHN B. BOLES

John B. Boles deals with an interesting issue of the situation of slaves in the antebellum U.S. South in the book *Masters and Slaves in the House of the Lord*. He is right in his assertion that the religion issues and the position of blacks in the Southern society often clashed. According to him, South can be considered slave society after year 1700, because mass import of slaves began at that time. Interesting is that before 1700 the slaves and indentured servants in America were both black and white. “They together developed some sense of friendship that did not exist after that.” Africans were usually imported from Africa to the Carribean and then to America. During the stay in the Carribean they had the chance to learn English a little bit and because of that they seemed more “civilized” for the Americans. Nonetheless, after 1700 they were imported directly from Africa, which meant that they were speaking only African languages and practicing African religions. Boles correctly commented on the situation when he mentioned that soon these “uncivilized” Africans outnumbered the white Americans, who were frightened by it and who started looking for a way how to control slaves better.⁴⁸

Boles correctly notes that in the early seventeenth century there were certain groups of slaveholders. Those who did not support heathen practices of African religions or Islam, because they felt threatened by everything that was exotic to them; those who claimed that it was not immoral to hold the Africans in bondage, because they were heathen, but they did not free them when they converted to Christianity; and finally those who did not support conversion of their slaves to Christianity, because they were afraid that it would challenge their right to keep them in bondage. For this reason clergy comforted the masters that the conversion can not effect the bondage and soon it turned into the fact that it was not the non-christian status, but slaves' color and race that made them be suitable to be held in bondage. In the seventeenth century a law was even passed saying that a “civil state” of a person is not influenced by his conversion to Christianity. This law provided an easier way for those who wanted to preach the gospel to slaves, as for example the institution Associates of Dr. Bray did. The slaves were taught to read, some of them were converted and became teachers for other slaves. Nevertheless, even though the status of the slave could not change by his conversion and not so many slaves converted, there were still

slaveholders who were not comfortable with spreading the gospel, because they were afraid that the slaves would meet together to worship, but in reality they would organize a rebellion. Other slaveholders were either not Christians and did not think it was necessary for the slaves to occupy themselves with religious matters, or they thought the gospel was too precious and complicated for the slaves and there was no possible and suitable way to simplyfy it for their understanding.⁴⁹

Boles is also right when he mentions that the idea to Christianize slaves came originally from England and during the second quarter of the eighteenth century an Englishman George Whitefield came and his preachings contributed to the First Great Awakening that influenced also the slaves. Witefield's disciples had the need to preach to all people, black and white, but they did it in the manner that supported slavery, too. In the mid-eighteenth century also some of the Anglican clergy asserted that it was good to enslave the Africans, because they were given the chance to hear the gospel and become Christians. Even under such circumstances the majority of the slaves became Christian within a century, as Boles says. This was probably supported by the fact that on the one hand abolitionists accused the slaveholders of indifference as regards the religious well being of their slaves and on the other hand some claimed that slavery was an institution created by God to Christianize the Africans, which caused the slaveholders feel obliged to make slaves hear the gospel.⁵⁰

Christians in the South had an antislavery attitude and claimed that all persons, black and white were created by God and have a soul that is precious to God. Nevertheless they found slavery practical in the way of sharing the gospel and from their point of view the salavation was more important than well-being in the slave's earthly life. Therefore, in biracial churches the preacher usually had a preaching for the whites and after he finished, he turned to the blacks and had a word for them, usually instructions to behave well to their masters and be faithful servants, which would cause them be in heaven after they die. A law that demanded white supervision in case the blacks worshiped together was later

⁴⁸John B. Boles, ed., *Masters and Slaves in the house of the Lord: Race and Religion in the American South: 1740-1870* (Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1988), 1-18.

⁴⁹Ibid., 1-18.

⁵⁰Ibid.

passed, but it often happened that blacks worshiped secretly in their cabins, in the fields or deep in the woods without presence of whites.⁵¹

⁵¹John B. Boles, ed., *Masters and Slaves in the house of the Lord: Race and Religion in the American South: 1740-1870* (Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1988), 1-18.

CONCLUSION

The American white slaveholders believed that the institution of slavery was Biblical. They believed that the passages in the Bible that deal with Noah's curse of Canaan, the forefather of Africans, prove that the whole African nation was predestined to be enslaved. Their other pro-slavery argument was that Jesus Christ never said a word against slavery, but he talked against sin. Therefore if slavery was a sin, Jesus would have talked about it. The slaveholders also believed that industrialization was not God's plan for America and they should fight against it through slavery. Slaves, on the other hand saw hope for their people in the Biblical promise to the Israelites. Their situation in Egypt was very similar to the situation of the African slaves in America. They were treated cruelly and they had no rights. They believed in God, the creator and because God was not indifferent to the Israelites who cried for God's help while they were enslaved in Egypt, the African slaves also believed that God would set them free from their bondage in America. The interpretation of the Bible made by the African slaves and the American slaveholders differed greatly. The African slaves comprehended the Biblical message as a promise to be set free, while the American slaveholders perceived the Biblical message as a permission to keep the slave institution as it was.

Quakers, who were white were once slaveholders themselves, but over time they came to realize that slavery was against Christianity, and they voluntarily freed their slaves. They also started fighting against slavery by organizing the so called Underground Railroad and helped thousands of slaves escape to Canada.

Southern Abolitionists based their fight against slavery mostly on the Bible, even though some of them were racist at the same time. They believed that God created all people and therefore they all should have the same rights to life, liberty and pursuit of happiness, as it was worded in American Constitution. Slavery was according to them sinful and wrong and those who held slaves in bondage were breaking various Biblical rules. Free blacks in the South had very diverse attitudes towards slavery. Some of them, for example Nat Turner, who believed that slavery was sinful, wanted to help their enslaved brothers and organized rebellions, whereas others were interested in emigration to Liberia for the purpose of making money. Some even owned slaves themselves. And some supported slavery, because it meant they were of a higher class than other blacks.

Although arguments used by the slaveholders and antislavery public were based on the Bible, they varied to a high degree and even excluded each other. This was caused by the

fact that the interpretations of the Bible differed according to the background of those who read it. With the change of background knowledge or experience also the interpretation and attitude changed. This can be seen for example with the Quakers, who began to see slavery as anti-Christian and changed their ways, or in George Whitefield who was first sympathetic with the slaves, but later became a slaveholder.

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