

Was the Civil War God's Judgment on America?

Secularists love to insist that America was founded on racist principles, as did Bernie Sanders when he spoke at Liberty University. The fatal flaw in this argument, however, is that the concept of race does not exist in either the Declaration of Independence or the United States Constitution. There is no reference to individuals according to race, ethnicity or skin color. There is no mention of slaves or slavery. Instead of using race classifications, as modern secularists love to do, the Constitution speaks of "citizens," "persons" and "other persons."

America's Founding Documents are Colorblind

There is nothing to indicate that the freedoms guaranteed in the Declaration and Constitution do not apply to every individual. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. understood this and in his stirring "I Have a Dream Speech," he challenged America, not to dispense with its founding documents, but to live up to its founding documents. Quoting from the Declaration of Independence, he declared his hope, "That one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: 'We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.'"

Showing that he understood these freedoms to be rooted in the country's Christian origins, Dr. King, who was a devout Christian, went on to say that he had a dream that one day all Americans, whether white or black, would be able to sing together the words of that Christian, patriotic hymn,

My country tis of Thee,

Sweet land of liberty, of Thee I sing.

*Land where my fathers died,
Land of the Pilgrim's pride,
From every mountainside,
Let freedom ring!*

America's founding principles are colorblind, even if her history has not been. The famous abolitionist, Frederick Douglass, understood this and argued that the language of the founding documents must be understood as applying to everyone. "Anyone of these provisions in the hands of abolition statesmen, and backed by a right moral sentiment," he declared, "would put an end to slavery in America."

The Truth About the Three-Fifths Clause

One of the most misunderstood sections of the Constitution is the three-fifths clause in which only three-fifths of the slave population of southern states would be counted for representation. This had nothing to do with assigning value based on race. This was related to keeping the Southern states from gaining too much power in the new Congress where the number of representatives from each state would be tied to the population of that state.

The Southern states wanted to include their slave populations in order to gain more representatives and more power in the new government. The three-fifths compromise was a way of diminishing their influence in the new Congress by counting only three-fifths of the slave population for purposes of representation.

Even here the Founders did not use the word "slaves" or slavery," but "other persons." Abraham Lincoln described this refusal of the Founders to acknowledge slavery in the Constitution as like a man who hides an ugly, cancerous growth until the time comes that it can be eradicated from his body.

That the three-fifths clause had nothing to do with assigning value based on race is confirmed by the fact that at the time of the Constitutional Convention there were at least 60,000 free blacks in northern and southern states who counted the same as white people when it came to determining the number of representatives to Congress. There were also as many as ten states where blacks already had full voting privileges.

The Precise & Powerful Language of the Founders

At the Constitutional Convention concessions were made toward the Southern states because of concern that a union could not succeed if all thirteen colonies were not included. The Founders, however, were careful and precise in their language. They referred to slaves as “persons” and never used the words “black” or “white,” “slave” or “slavery.” Though not banning slavery outright at the time, the Founders put in place the legal mines and language that would eventually blow it up.

George Mason of Virginia, however, argued against such concessions and for the immediate outlawing of slavery. He warned of the judgment of God if slavery was allowed to continue, saying,

“Every master is born a petty tyrant. They bring the judgment of Heaven upon a country. As nations cannot be rewarded or punished in the next world, they must be in this. By an inevitable chain of causes and effects, Providence punishes national sins by national calamities.”

Many see the Civil War and the loss of 700,000 lives as the judgment that Mason predicted. Thomas Jefferson shared Mason’s concern for it was in the context of the continued existence of slavery that he wrote,

“God who gave us life, gave us liberty. And can the liberties of a nation be thought secure when we have removed their only firm basis, a conviction in the minds of the people that these liberties are a gift from God? That they are not to be

violated but with His wrath? Indeed, I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just and that His justice cannot sleep forever.”

Slavery Eradicated by the Constitution

With this sort of biblical and moral opposition to slavery at the nation’s founding, it is easy to see how its days were already numbered. Most of the Founders who happened to be slave owners set their slaves free. Two years before the Constitutional Convention, Benjamin Franklin set his two slaves free and began to advocate for abolition. George Washington’s situation was more complex for he had inherited a large plantation with a number of slaves and to suddenly thrust them unprepared out into the world would have been cruel and inhumane.

Washington, therefore, set in motion a compassionate program to completely disentangle Mt. Vernon from the institution of slavery. Those slaves who wanted to leave were free to do so. Those who chose to remain were paid wages, and he began a program to educate and prepare the children of slaves for freedom. He declared, “I clearly foresee that nothing but the rooting out of slavery can perpetuate the existence of our union by consolidating it in a common bond of principle.”

The Founders did not invent slavery. They were born into a world where slavery already existed. They were not perfect and it can be argued that they conceded too much at the time. Nonetheless, they did an admirable job of formulating founding documents that would eventually eradicate that horrendous institution and make America “the land of the free and home of the brave,” with people of every race and ethnicity wanting to live here. {eoa}

*This article was derived from **Dr. Eddie Hyatt’s** book Pilgrims and Patriots, available from Amazon. It is scheduled for release in Kindle on June 12 and in paperback on July*

12. Learn more about his ministry and his vision for another Great Awakening at his website, .