

Andrew Jackson, Slavery, and Historians

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Abstract

Historians have neglected to give full consideration to the place of slavery in Andrew Jackson's private and public life. They rarely move beyond a few well-known examples of Jackson's treatment of slaves that have been referenced since James Parton's biography first appeared in the mid-nineteenth century. Recent research by historians has identified Jackson's commitment to slavery and its effect on United States politics, but more work remains to be done on his own slave communities in Tennessee and Mississippi and the ramifications for his public actions. This article also argues that historians have failed to examine slavery's role in Jackson's life because of an overreliance on the *Correspondence of Andrew Jackson* volumes edited by John Spencer Bassett and a lack of archival research in the collections of Jackson papers held by the Library of Congress and Scholarly Resources, Inc.

In his 2006 article, 'Andrew Jackson: Chivalric Slave Master', Matthew S. Warshauer considered the question of Jackson's attitude toward, and treatment of, his slaves. He argued that Old Hickory displayed 'a paradoxical paternalism' toward them. Over the course of his life as a slave owner, Warshauer wrote, 'there existed between Jackson and his slaves a rather complex, but very real relationship marked by a give and take on both sides'. For decades, Jackson 'had no qualms about maintaining order with the "cow-hide"', using violence when necessary to maintain order on his Hermitage plantation near Nashville, Tennessee, and to remind slaves of his authority as their owner. For example, in 1804, he offered not only a reward for a runaway slave but also additional payment to anyone who administered up to 300 extra whiplashes on him. In 1821, he ordered his nephew, Andrew J. Donelson, to have a female slave, Betty, given 50 lashes if she persisted in 'putting on some airs'. Warshauer traced the change in Jackson's violent treatment of slaves to the 1827 death of Gilbert, a male slave who frequently ran away, as he did in June of that year. Two months later, Ira Walton, Jackson's overseer, recaptured Gilbert; Jackson ordered the slave whipped as an example. In the course of being brought before the other slaves, Gilbert slipped the ropes that bound his hands. He tried to smash the overseer's head with a piece of wood, but, during the struggle, Walton succeeded in stabbing Gilbert with a knife several times, eventually cutting his throat. The wound to the throat was not immediately lethal, but he died shortly after the fight. Gilbert's death upset Jackson, who unsuccessfully tried to have Walton indicted for murder. Jackson 'was unquestionably affected by Gilbert's death', Warshauer concluded, 'and from that point on attempted to ensure that Hermitage slaves were treated with "humanity"'.¹

Warshauer's article constituted a rare attempt by an historian to analyze Jackson's role as a slave owner. Historians' reluctance to examine adequately and specifically Andrew Jackson's slave ownership and his support of the institution of human bondage is both surprising and disappointing, especially given the attention paid to slavery and its ties to three other presidents: George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and James K. Polk.

Jackson was not only a slave owner, but also a slave trader, engaging in the domestic slave trade that stretched, in his case, from Virginia through Tennessee to New Orleans during the 1790s and beyond. He bought and sold dozens of slaves from his first purchase in 1788 until 1844, the year before his death. When Jackson died in 1845, his estate listed 161 slaves: 110 at the Hermitage and 51 at Halcyon, the Coahoma County, Mississippi, plantation that he co-owned with his son, Andrew Jackson, Jr. This number placed him 'among the slaveholding aristocracy' of Tennessee; in the only comparative data available, that from the 1850 census, only 24 Tennesseans owned more than 100 slaves. As a congressman and as a president, Jackson addressed the position of slaves within American society via legislation, executive orders and pardons, and government appointments. In short, the few anecdotes about slavery that usually appear when historians deal with Jackson's political career fall far short of providing a complete picture of the institution's role in his private and public life. What follows is an historiographical overview of slavery's place in Jackson's personal life and politics, with suggestions for future areas of research.²

Writing in the years just prior to the Civil War, Jackson's first biographer, James Parton, considered him 'the most indulgent, patient, and generous of masters'. 'He took slavery for granted', Parton observed, and never 'considered the subject as a question of right or wrong'. Moreover, Jackson's slaves 'loved him, and revere his memory', a sentiment that was repeated in newspaper reports well into the Jim Crow era. Historians later in the century were less detailed and emphatic in addressing the topic, however. William Graham Sumner's biography of Jackson accepted the evidence that he had been a slave trader when he clashed with Indian agent Silas Dinsmoor in 1811. In listing the issues that Jackson faced as president, Charles H. Peck paid no attention to slavery, preferring to focus on Jackson's ability to overcome his undeveloped intellectualism and inferior rhetorical expression. John W. Burgess's overview of what he termed 'the Middle Period' acknowledged slavery's role in national politics but only implied Jackson's part. Burgess suggested that the president was 'blinded... to the real significance' of the censorship of abolitionist material sent via the United States mail system in 1835; however, Burgess recognized the controversy as essential to the question of Texas annexation and the sectional crisis that followed.³

The first few decades of the twentieth century witnessed historians ignoring or minimizing Jackson's connection to slavery. One of the most important of these historians was John Spencer Bassett. His work in producing a six-volume (plus an additional index volume) edition of Jackson's papers provided scholars with their most readily accessible primary source for Jackson's thoughts and actions. Yet, in his earlier biography of Jackson, Bassett had barely acknowledged the institution of slavery, much less Jackson's reliance on it for his personal fortune. A perusal of the edited correspondence and Bassett's notes on them in his papers at the Library of Congress makes clear that he learned the importance of slavery in Jackson's life, but his death in January 1928 prevented any possible revision of his biography that might have given slavery more prominence. Another influential Jackson scholar was Marquis James, whose biography of the seventh president won the Pulitzer Prize in 1938. James believed that Jackson was the 'ideal slave-owner' who considered his slaves a part of his family as they shared a 'genuine and reciprocal attachment'. James offered the life of the slave Sam as an example. Jackson had freed him in 1816, but he 'could not induce [Sam] to leave' the Hermitage. Reflecting the Jim Crow age in which he lived, James concluded, 'For the times it was not a bad life for the negro... nowhere [else] in the contemporary world did the negro find tutelage in the arts of civilization on the whole so beneficial'.⁴

Other major twentieth-century works on the Jacksonian period published prior to the 1960s made little effort to understand Jackson's link to slavery. Arthur M. Schlesinger,

Jr.'s Pulitzer Prize-winning *The Age of Jackson* (1945) discussed slavery in relation to the nullification crisis and Texas annexation, but when it came to examining support for slavery, Schlesinger used the term 'Jacksonians' in a general way or gave examples besides Jackson, such as Martin Van Buren and James K. Polk, to illustrate the debate over slavery's divisiveness. Richard Hofstadter's important 1948 essay on Jackson acknowledged that the Tennessean came to prominence through the accumulation of capital, including the purchase of slaves, yet Hofstadter then focused on liberal capitalism without explicating how slavery continued to influence Jackson's life and politics. John William Ward's influential 1955 study of Jackson's symbolism made only passing reference to his slave ownership and the importance of slavery to his politics. Marvin Meyers argued in *The Jacksonian Persuasion* (1957) that his work was 'an inquiry into some special traits of democratic politics during the Jacksonian years... the political concerns of a generation' that explained 'their party loyalties'. Nevertheless, much like Schlesinger, Meyers' focus was on class warfare and economic issues, with no sign of slavery shaping or affecting Jackson's life.⁵

Given the times in which they wrote, one can understand why the above historians failed to include slavery as a significant analytical perspective. Historians such as William A. Dunning had examined slavery, but the scholarship reflected the racist perspectives of the times. Not until the 1960s would most scholars consider on a widespread basis slaves as agents of change. Freeing themselves from the interpretive constraints placed upon Jackson by past generations would also have been difficult for historians. For years, he had served as a symbol of democracy, of the lower and working classes, throwing off the chains of wealth and elitism to seize control of the government promised, at least rhetorically, to the American people in 1776 and 1787. Many of these historians were also writing under the influence of the economic upheaval caused by the Great Depression and the global fear precipitated by the rise of fascism; an examination of slavery did not fit neatly into these modern concerns. Yet, failing to contextualize that symbolism by mentioning who was left out of the democratic process and who, by their labor, made it possible for Jackson to move up in society and gain power was a major shortcoming of their works.⁶

Beginning in the late 1950s, the historiography of the United States' past began to value social factors, such as race and class, in its interpretations. Books by Lee Benson and Edward Pessen centered on the significance of New York and the Northeastern working class, but they also acknowledged the place of slavery in the Jacksonian period, as well as in Jackson's personal and public life. For example, in critiquing Richard Hofstadter's essay on Jacksonians and the growth of liberal capitalism, Benson noted that 'racist doctrines enabled most southerners to accept the shared beliefs of liberal capitalism'. Pessen was blunter: 'Jackson, a large slaveowner and seller and purchaser of slaves, was not prepared to entertain attacks on the system that served his personal needs so well'. The mention of slavery, however, was cursory and not seminal to the urban, entrepreneurial focus of the Benson's and Pessen's scholarship.⁷

Richard H. Brown's seminal 1966 article on the proslavery foundations of the Democratic party marked the beginning of scholars wrestling meaningfully with Jackson's slave ownership and its political consequences. Brown argued that Martin Van Buren used the sectional division over slavery created by the Missouri crisis of 1819–1821 to form the Democratic party, with Jackson at its lead. Frederick M. Binder, whose book examined 'the color problem' as seen in the examples of three presidents, devoted a chapter to Jackson and 'the Negro'. Jackson's 'most frequently expressed intention', he argued, 'was to get the maximum amount of labor from each Negro, and that all other considerations

were either related to or secondary to this goal'. His 'attitude' toward the enslaved, whether his own slaves or the general institution of human bondage, 'appears to have been governed at all times by immediate and practical expediency'. Binder not only acknowledged that Jackson's private wealth was predicated upon the buying and selling of slaves, but he also delved into rarely addressed moments of Jackson's public career when the General had to interact with African Americans, such as prior to and after the Battle of New Orleans and, later, during his invasion of Spanish Florida. Jackson's support of slavery, Binder suggested, was also implicitly behind his advocacy of Texas annexation.⁸

While attention to Michael Paul Rogin's *Fathers and Children* (1975) usually centered (and still centers) on his controversial psychoanalytical methodology or his criticism of Jackson's treatment of Native Americans, the Berkeley political scientist offered other insights that spoke to Jackson's conception of paternalism and the resulting consequences for his slaves. 'Kindly paternalism... required total power from the owner', Rogin proposed, and 'total submission from the slave'. Jackson was an example of a slave owner who took 'pleasure in the exercise of sadistic domination'. Slaveholding allowed Jackson to '[gain] authority as a member of the planter aristocracy'. Moreover, Rogin emphasized that Jackson's forays into Florida in the 1810s and his initiation of the Second Seminole War in the mid-1830s was in part to allow white southerners to recapture runaway slaves, acquire new slaves, and protect southern plantation society. Rogin also noted, 'It was common for men involved in Indian relations to adopt Indian children', offering Jackson, his friend and Secretary of War John H. Eaton, and Indian agent Thomas L. McKenney as examples. While Rogin's evidence was minimal, two American Studies scholars have recently addressed this practice in great detail: Christina Snyder, an assistant professor at Indiana University, in a published book and several articles, and Dawn Peterson, a lecturer at Smith College, in a forthcoming dissertation. The scholarship on these 'adoptions' allows historians to examine the manifestations of Jackson's paternalism toward both slaves and Native Americans and compare his treatment of these two groups of 'others'.⁹

The 1970s and early 1980s witnessed the publication of the most exhaustively researched Jackson biography since James Parton's of the previous century. Robert V. Remini, a prolific Jacksonian-era scholar, had previously written monographs on the presidential election of 1828 and the Bank War, as well as a political study of Martin Van Buren. His three-volume biography of Jackson seemingly addressed every aspect of his life, including his ownership and treatment of slaves. Remini's view of Jackson was similar to Warshauer's, written almost two decades later. At times, Jackson 'treated his slaves decently and tried to make certain his workers were not abused'. He was also 'severe', however, as in the case of Betty, and 'had little mercy' with runaway slaves, such as Gilbert. Much like Warshauer, Remini also argued that Jackson's 'abominable disposition toward recalcitrant slaves... softened' later in life, although he located the change 6 years later, in 1833. Without explanation, he concluded that when Jackson's slaves died, their demise 'genuinely disturbed him—and not on account of the financial loss'. In a separate essay on slavery published in 1988, Remini denied that slavery had much, if anything, to do with the presidential election of 1828, the nullification crisis, or politics in general in the 1820s and the early 1830s. He blamed John Quincy Adams, John C. Calhoun, and historians Samuel Flagg Bemis and Richard Brown for the emphasis on slavery in the founding and function of the Jacksonian Democratic party. Still, Remini admitted that Jackson and his supporters believed that 'slaveholding was as American... as capitalism, nationalism, or democracy'.¹⁰

About the same time that Remini was downplaying slavery's influence on Jacksonian politics, scholarly monographs on the Jacksonian period were acknowledging its importance. David M. Pletcher and Thomas R. Hietala emphasized Jackson's commitment to Texas annexation out of fear of British abolitionism and its threat to slavery in the West. William J. Cooper, Jr., argued that Jackson's success was attributable not only to his national status as the Hero of New Orleans but also to his southern identity. Jackson's 'southern organizers and supporters', Cooper wrote, 'invoked his name as the new apostle of the South, the new Jefferson, the new sentinel of southern power and prerogative in the nation'. One of the keys to this identity was, in his estimation, Jackson's slave ownership. Harry L. Watson stressed the contradiction between Jacksonian democracy and the president for whom it was named, the owner of 150 slaves who 'had no sympathy whatsoever with contemporary efforts to free them'. Much like Watson, Charles Sellers pointed out the 'mythology' of Jackson's image as a 'plain cultivator of the soil', all the while financing an extensive kinship network, building a 'pillared brick mansion', and maintaining a functioning plantation worked by dozens of slaves. Donald B. Cole's examination of Jackson's presidency emphasized the Democratic party's commitment to slavery as a means to preserve its national coalition in the face of an increasingly large, organized, and boisterous abolitionist movement.¹¹

Recent scholarship has continued to recognize slavery's influence on Jackson's politics. In his Bancroft Prize-winning *Rise of American Democracy* (2005), Sean Wilentz briefly mentioned Jackson's slave ownership and argued that the majority of his political allies chose moderation in regard to slavery, preferring to label it a 'misfortune that would eventually disappear' in order to protect the Democrats' political power. Daniel Walker Howe's Pulitzer Prize-winning survey of the Jacksonian years, more so than any other overview of the period, highlighted the significance of Jackson's defense of slavery. The Democratic party 'defined itself, even in the North, as the protector of slavery'. In Howe's estimation, 'Jackson's opposition to abolitionism turned out to be of more long-term significance to the Democratic Party than his opposition to nullification'. Howe implicated Jackson and the Democrats in perpetuating 'white supremacy' by 'ignoring inconvenient federal laws' when it served their slaveholding interests. Recent studies of the 1828 presidential election have mentioned slavery's relevancy as an election issue, although the emphasis has perhaps been less than it should have been. Lynn Hudson Parsons' *The Birth of Modern Politics* (2009) claimed that Adams' supporters 'made little public reference' to Jackson's slave ownership. Parsons mentioned briefly opponents' use of Jackson's 1811 dustup with Dinsmoor to label him a slave trader and two other examples of slavery's visibility in the 1828 media. Donald Cole's study of the 1828 election contended that 'the major theme of the election' was the reintroduction of the political party system and 'the rise of mass political parties'. Still, slavery played a prominent role in Jackson's victory, he acknowledged. Although Cole provided an overview of the historiographical evolution of that argument, he failed to give attention to the accusations of slave trading used against Jackson in the summer of 1828. In fact, Duff Green's views on slavery drew more attention than did Jackson's.¹²

For nearly two decades, Remini's *magnum opus* seemed to discourage other historians from tackling Jackson's life. Recently, scholars have once again begun to venture into biographical studies of Old Hickory, with varying degrees of emphasis on his slave ownership. Hendrik Booraem considered Jackson a 'typical' southern slave owner; 'he was neither unusually lenient nor unusually severe'. Booraem believed that Jackson 'eagerly awaited' the chance to own a slave. His colleagues in the Carolinas were slave owners, and possessing slave property was 'a mark of status, a virtual necessity for an ambitious

young man'. Andrew Burstein criticized previous historians who tried to rehabilitate Jackson's image 'by terming him an indulgent and patient master'. Instead, Burstein argued, slavery was a fact of life on the southern frontier, and Jackson 'was more active in the slave trade than most.... [H]e pursued profit as purposefully whether the commodity was for his country store or for purposes of labor'. H. W. Brands treated Jackson gently but not without contradiction. His 'involvement with slavery began almost inadvertently', Jackson receiving his first slave by virtue of a legal client's inability to pay his fee. The 'relatively modest number' of his slave transactions in the 1790s made him 'a slaveholder rather than a slave trader'. Later, however, Brands argued that Jackson 'bought and sold slaves as his business required', but as the Tennessean's stature grew, he withdrew from 'the traffic in slaves' to protect his reputation. This contention ignored the reality that Jackson continued to buy and sell slaves as president and up until at least February 1844. Recalcitrant slaves received 'brutally severe' punishment; obedient slaves were treated 'as humanely as his need to profit by their labor allowed'. Sean Wilentz's brief biography of Jackson was matter-of-fact in acknowledging Old Hickory's slaveholding. He warned, however, that it was 'easy to judge Jackson according to neo-abolitionist standards, to condemn him as slaveholder and, even further, as pro-slavery'. 'Such verdicts', he wrote, 'too often had more to do with the self-regarding sanctimony of posterity than... with history; and in Jackson's case, they obscure far more than they illuminate'. In his Pulitzer Prize-winning biography, *American Lion: Andrew Jackson in the White House* (2008), Jon Meacham called Jackson 'an unrepentant slaveholder'. 'Led by the president', Meacham wrote, 'the Jackson circle lived with a wrong, profited from it, and actively protected it'.¹³

One of the reasons that recent historians have failed to address new facets of slavery in Jackson's life and politics is because they have relied extensively, often exclusively, on Bassett's six-volume edited collection of Jackson's correspondence. For decades, Bassett's volumes were the easiest way to access Jackson's correspondence. Bassett, however, was selective in his publication of letters and did not provide a complete calendar of Jackson correspondence. Jacksonian scholars' overreliance on the Bassett volumes has been detrimental to studies of Jackson on a number of topics, especially slavery.¹⁴

One example serves to illustrate the point. Bassett's volumes do not include any of the correspondence surrounding Gilbert's death, described at the beginning of this article. Bassett includes one letter from 1822 mentioning Gilbert's escape, but that is the extent of his appearance in the six volumes. Gilbert's proclivity to escape (he did so in 1822, 1824, and 1827) was mentioned by Marquis James, but he failed to include Gilbert's death; not until the publication of vol. 5 of the *Papers of Andrew Jackson* (1996) was Gilbert's fate addressed and not until Brands' biography (2005) was it mentioned in a scholarly biography. How such a compelling story, which gives insight not just into Jackson's views but also slave life at the Hermitage, eluded historians for so long is only explainable through scholarly reliance on the Bassett volumes.¹⁵

In contrast to Bassett's edited collection, the editors of the *Papers of Andrew Jackson* have gone to great lengths to examine lesser-known aspects of Jackson's life and the lives of those around him, including slaves. The ongoing series began publication with its first volume in 1980; the recently published eighth volume, extends the published correspondence to the end of 1830. Via their calendaring of Jackson's correspondence and their explanatory footnotes, Sam Smith and Harriet Owsley, Harold Moser, and, now, Dan Feller and their editorial teams have given historians a wealth of evidence to use in evaluating Jackson the slave owner. Even with this valuable resource available, historians need to get dirty in the archives and other public and private repositories to uncover other

facets of Jackson's life not yet covered by the project. Jon Meacham was able to do this in *American Lion*. He gained access to unpublished papers, owned by Donelson descendants, that addressed Jackson's slaveholding. When it comes to uncovering new primary sources on nineteenth-century presidents, there may not be many of these opportunities available for historians, but even if they are lacking, there are other possibilities. For example, there is Jackson correspondence, particularly post-1837, in the Library of Congress and on the microfilm supplement produced by Scholarly Resources, Inc., that likely has not been looked at in decades except by the editors of the *Papers of Andrew Jackson* project.¹⁶

With these admonitions in mind, there are avenues of research that seem fruitful for clarifying slavery's importance in Jackson's life and career. For example, plantation life at the Hermitage and Halcyon plantations offers an abundance of potential topics for exploration. Archaeologists and material culture scholars, including Larry McKee, Brian Thomas, and Whitney Battle-Baptiste, have examined aspects of slavery at the Hermitage; however, the lives of the slaves themselves have been ignored by academic historians. This oversight is all the more telling given the Hermitage staff's extensive work to make the slave community that resided there more visible during tours of the historic site. A comparative history of the two plantations would make it possible to examine the similarities and differences, if any, between the administration of an Upper South and a Lower South plantation owned by the same person. Taking the Hermitage and its slaves, overseers, and crops in isolation offers a longitudinal case study of a southern plantation, which could then be situated within the context of plantations of the Upper South or the region writ large. Additionally, there has been no scholarly examination of life at the Hermitage after Jackson's death. What happened to Jackson's slaves, some of whom ran away, some of whom stayed until death? How did Andrew, Jr., and his wife, Sarah, treat slaves as they faced bankruptcy in the mid-1850s, finally ceding control of the Hermitage to the state of Tennessee? Finally, there were dramatic instances during Jackson's presidency that compelled him to confront the institution of slavery and its effect on individual African Americans. One example is the case of John Arthur Bowen, a Washington, D.C., slave convicted in 1835 of trying to kill his owner, Anna Marie Thornton, widow of Dr William Thornton, the architect of the United States Capitol. Jackson pardoned him after the widow Thornton and prominent Washington politicians and elites petitioned for mercy. Was Bowen's case unique? If so, what was Jackson's reasoning for the pardon; if not, what does an examination of his pardons of free blacks and slaves tell us? How, if at all, did the abolitionist campaign of 1835 and the presidential election of 1836 factor into his decision?¹⁷

One last example drives home the importance of conducting more research on Jackson and slavery. In the late 1990s, Dorothy Price-Haskins, a retired grant writer for the U.S. departments of Education and Labor, founded the Hermitage Slave Descendant Organization. Its intent was to find descendants of sexual encounters that Jackson had with his female slaves. She was led to this point by the oral history of these sexual liaisons passed down in her family. (Price-Haskins herself claims that she is a descendant of Jackson via his slave, Charlotte.) She compiled this oral history into a self-described 'Fictional Based on Facts Novel', entitled *Unholiest Patrimony: "Great Is the Truth and It Must Prevail"* (2007). The book makes a number of controversial assertions, namely:

1. Jackson's mother, Elizabeth, taught her three sons to hate the enslavement of other human beings;
2. Jackson had a sexual relationship with one of his slaves, Hannah, which resulted in the birth of their daughter, Charlotte;

3. Charlotte kept documentation of this sexual affair and the resulting offspring in the form of a journal;
4. Charlotte's journal and other documentation proving Jackson's paternity are being kept in private hands because family members have been harassed for proclaiming their ties to the Tennessee president; in some cases, documentation was stolen from the family.¹⁸

Most, if not all, Jackson biographers would find these claims surprising, if not absurd. There is no 'smoking gun' that would prove her claims, at least not one that has been produced publicly. Yet, Price-Haskins' story is intriguing, especially in light of the interest in Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings over the past few years. How do historians address these claims? The existing scholarship on Jackson and his slaves is woefully inadequate to even begin to offer answers; conducting more research, then, seems imperative. It may not satisfy Price-Haskins, but, at the very least, we can begin to understand more fully Jackson's interaction with his slaves and his understanding of the political, social, and economic environment that justified the institution. Just as importantly, it would help historicize Jackson's community of slaves, who for too long have been ignored.

What, then, are we to make of the connection between Jackson's slave owning and his politics? Did being a slave owning planter influence his policy-making, or was he simply a politician who also happened to own slaves? It is clear from Jackson's correspondence with his family and business partners during and after his presidency that he was a man concerned not only with maintaining profitable plantations but also with leaving his family in a secure financial position once he was dead. 'I will, if my means are equal to the object, free you from debt', Jackson wrote his son in a typical letter. 'The farm with the aid of your own industry and aconomy [*sic*] must support us, and after I am gone, you and your family'. Owning slaves to perform the labor required for profitability was an unquestioned necessity. That is not to say that Jackson did not consider the effect of slavery on politics and vice-versa. One need only look at the abolitionist mails controversy of his second term and the later Texas annexation debate to see that he understood clearly the consequences of political agitation against slavery, but, for him, it was not an all-encompassing issue, as it became for men such as Calhoun.¹⁹

Jackson's support of slavery, therefore, was more pragmatic than ideological. He supported himself and his family by being a planter, which required the ownership of slaves. He also recognized two things, however. The danger to slavery's future posed by abolitionism jeopardized the 'safety of our country, commerce, and our revenue'. At the same time, he also believed that the choice of nullification and secession, which some southern slave owners declared their states' rights, was an unconscionable act that threatened 'insurrection and war'. 'We must act as the instruments of the law', Jackson wrote a South Carolinian during the nullification crisis of 1832–1833, 'and if force is offered to us in that capacity then we shall repel it with the certainty, even should we fall as individuals'.²⁰

Short Biography

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Currently, he is writing a biographical study of Andrew Jackson's southern identity, emphasizing the influence of honor, kinship, slavery, and violence in shaping Jackson's character and politics. Cheatham is the author of *Old Hickory's Nephew: The Political and Private Struggles of Andrew Jackson Donelson* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007) and editor of *Jacksonian and Antebellum Age: People and Perspectives* (Santa Barbara, Calif.: ABC-Clio, 2008). He has also published in *Journal of the Early Republic*, *Tennessee Historical Quarterly*, and *West Tennessee Historical Society Papers*. Cheatham also blogs about the Jacksonian era at <http://mcheatham.wordpress.com>.

Notes

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¹ Matthew S. Warshauer, 'Andrew Jackson: Chivalric Slave Master', *Tennessee Historical Quarterly*, 65 (Fall 2006): 203–205, 210–213, 224; and AJ to AJD, 3 July 1821, Andrew J. Donelson Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

For the sake of brevity, this essay focuses almost exclusively on book-length studies. Articles and essays, such as Warshauer's, are noted when they play an important historiographical role. This decision does not change the overall argument of the essay, however.

² Henry Wiencek, *An Imperfect God: George Washington, His Slaves, and the Creation of America* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003); Annette Gordon-Reed, *Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings: An American Controversy* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1997); idem, *The Hemingses of Monticello: An American Family* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2008); Clarence E. Walker, *Mongrel Nation: The America Begotten by Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2008); William Dusingberre, *Slavemaster President: The Double Career of James Polk* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Inventory of personal estate, 4 August 1845, 'Slaves-General' folder, The Hermitage, Nashville, Tennessee (hereafter cited The Hermitage); and Arda Walker, 'Andrew Jackson: Planter', *East Tennessee Historical Society's Publications*, 15 (1943): 30.

For a biographical study of a southern politician that successfully interweaves ideas about slavery and practices of slaveholding, see Drew Gilpin Faust, *James Henry Hammond and the Old South: A Design for Mastery* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982). My upcoming biography of Jackson, which looks at his southern identity, will elucidate the extent of Jackson's involvement in the domestic slave trade and his slaveholding in more detail.

³ James Parton, *Life of Andrew Jackson*, 3 vols. (New York: Mason Brothers, 1860–1861), vol. 1, 249; William Graham Sumner, *Andrew Jackson as a Public Man: What He Was, What Chances He Had, and What He Did with Them* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1895), 23; Charles H. Peck, *The Jacksonian Epoch* (New York: Harper, 1899), 328–41; and John W. Burgess, *The Middle Period, 1817–1858* (New York: Scribner's, 1900), 272–3, 296.

The slave files held at the Hermitage contain numerous newspaper clippings of reporters who visited with and interviewed Jackson's longest-surviving former slaves, such as Uncle Alfred and Hannah, in which the persistent theme of their connection and devotion to Old Hickory was repeated. As late as 1921, Maria Baker, a former Hermitage slave living in Wilson County, Tennessee, was described by a reporter as 'worthy of her birthplace, worthy to have been one of 'Marse Andrew Jackson's' black folks, reflecting the energy and indomitable spirit of the greatest of all Tennesseans'. *Nashville Banner*, (Summer) 1921, 'Maria Baker' folder, The Hermitage.

⁴ John Spencer Bassett, *The Life of Andrew Jackson*, new edition, 2 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1911, 1916), vol. 1, 35, 66; vol. 2, 547; *Correspondence of Andrew Jackson*, 7 vols., eds. John Spencer Bassett and J. Franklin Jameson (Washington, DC: Carnegie Institution, 1926–1935); Research notes, boxes 52 and 53, Papers of John Spencer Bassett, Library of Congress, Washington, DC; and Marquis James, *Portrait of a President* (Indianapolis and New York: Bobbs Merrill, 1937), 30, 398.

Bassett's failure to emphasize slavery in his biography was also surprising given his advocacy of 'racial liberalism' in a 1903 article published in *South Atlantic Quarterly*, a piece that almost cost him his faculty post at Trinity College (now Duke University). See, John Spencer Bassett, "'Stirring Up the Fires of Race Antipathy": The Seventy-Fifth Anniversary of "the Bassett Affair"', *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 77 (Autumn 1978): 389–98.

⁵ Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Age of Jackson* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1945), 190–1, 422–37, 452–4; Richard Hofstadter, *The American Political Tradition and the Men Who Made It* (New York: Knopf, 1948; New York: Vintage, 1973), 56–85; John William Ward, *Andrew Jackson: Symbol for an Age* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1955), 42–4, 148, 228–9, n. 30, 258, n. 43; and Marvin Meyers, *The Jacksonian Persuasion: Politics and Belief* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1957, 1960), vi (quotation from the preface to the 1960 edition).

⁶ One notable exception to this avoidance of Jackson's ties to slavery during the early twentieth century was Arda Walker's article, cited in fn. 2.

Some historians, such as Frederic Bancroft and Carl Becker, were already challenging the Dunning interpretation of slavery, but most of the attention of revisionist scholars, who included W. E. B. Du Bois, John Hope Franklin, Carter G. Woodson, and C. Vann Woodward, focused on the Reconstruction period. See Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 229–34.

⁷ Lee Benson, *The Concept of Jacksonian Democracy: New York as a Test Case* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), 273; and Edward Pessen, *Jacksonian America: Society, Personality, and Politics* (Homewood, IL: Dorsey Press, 1969), 28–9, 62–6, 97–9, 109–13, 156, 206–7, 214–5, 231–3, 243, 246–7, 310–4, 322–5.

To see the changes that occurred between the late 1960s and the late 1970s, compare above-cited pages in the original edition of Pessen's *Jacksonian America* with the revised edition (Homewood, IL: Dorsey Press, 1978; Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985), esp. pp. 38–46, 109–13, 290–3, 301–3.

⁸ Richard H. Brown, 'The Missouri Crisis, Slavery, and the Politics of Jacksonianism', *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 65 (Winter 1966): 55–72; and Frederick M. Binder, *The Color Problem in Early National America as Viewed by John Adams, Jefferson and Jackson* (The Hague: Mouton, 1968), 120–35.

⁹ Michael Paul Rogin, *Fathers and Children: Andrew Jackson and the Subjugation of the American Indian* (New York: Knopf, 1975; New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 1991, 1995), 56–7, 194–5, 237–9, 350 n.74; Christina Snyder, *Slavery in Indian Country: The Changing Face of Captivity in Early America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010); and Dawn Peterson, 'Unusual Sympathies: Settler Colonialism, Slavery, and the Politics of Adoption in the Early American Republic' Ph.D. diss. (New York University, forthcoming). Thanks to Natalie Inman and Ann Toplovich, respectively, for bringing the work of Snyder and Peterson to my attention.

For criticism of Rogin's methodology, see William Gilmore, 'The Individual and the Group in Psychohistory: Rogin's *Fathers and Children* and the Problem of Jackson's Health', *Psychohistory Review* 6 (Fall–Winter 1977): 112–26.

Jackson was hardly the first prominent southern politician to view Native Americans and African Americans differently. Thomas Jefferson, for example, lauded Native Americans' capacity for 'sublime oratory' and 'imagination glowing and elevated', while submitting that 'never yet could I find that a black had uttered a thought above the level of plain narration' (*Notes on the State of Virginia*, ed. William Peden (New York: W.W. Norton, 1954), 140). A fruitful avenue of research might be to compare the views of Jackson and Jefferson, the two most prominent Democratic presidents of the nineteenth century, on Africans/African Americans vs. Native Americans.

¹⁰ Robert V. Remini, *Andrew Jackson*, 3 vols. (New York: Harper & Row, 1977–1984), vol. 1, 133–4, vol. 2, 250–1, vol. 3, 50–1, 452–3; and Remini, *The Legacy of Andrew Jackson: Essays on Democracy, Indian Removal, and Slavery* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988), 83–111. Jackson may have been undergoing the struggle over paternalistic slavery experienced by the Upper South, as Lacy K. Ford recently detailed in his *Deliver Us from Evil: The Slavery Question in the Old South* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

Although he did not explain his assessment in detail, another biographer, James C. Curtis, forcefully stated Jackson's commitment to slavery: Jackson 'never questioned the legitimacy of slavery. Nor did he philosophize about the position of blacks in American society'. He experienced 'none of the anguish and guilt' displayed by prominent planters, such as Thomas Jefferson. See, James C. Curtis, *Andrew Jackson and the Search for Vindication* (New York: HarperCollins, 1976), 16.

Robert P. Forbes has made a convincing argument that Remini was wrong about slavery's irrelevancy to the politics of the 1820s and early 1830s. See his *The Missouri Compromise and Its Aftermath: Slavery and the Meaning of America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

¹¹ David M. Pletcher, *The Diplomacy of Annexation: Texas, Oregon, and the Mexican War* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1973), 114–5; Thomas R. Hietala, *Manifest Design: Anxious Aggrandizement in Late Jacksonian America* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), 24, 226; William J. Cooper, Jr., *The South and the Politics of Slavery, 1828–1856* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978), 6–7; Harry Watson, *Liberty and Power: The Politics of Jacksonian America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1990; rev. edn., 2006), 13, 243; Charles Sellers, *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815–1846* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 179; and Donald B. Cole, *The Presidency of Andrew Jackson* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1993), 225–8.

One exception to this scholarly trend was Richard B. Latner's study of Jackson's presidential administrations. Latner downplayed slavery's significance in the nullification crisis and in the decision-making among Jackson and his advisors, preferring to emphasize the desire of Martin Van Buren and other leading Democrats to preserve the party through republican principles. See, Richard B. Latner, *The Presidency of Andrew Jackson: White House Politics, 1829–1837* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1979), 15, 144, 212.

¹² Sean Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy: Jefferson to Lincoln* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2005), 170–1, 512; Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815–1848* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 329, 429–30, 524; Donald B. Cole, *Vindicating Andrew Jackson: The 1828 Presidential Election and the Rise of the Two-Party System* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2009), 48–9, 74–5, 186–91, 196–7; and Lynn Hudson Parsons, *The Birth of Modern Politics: Andrew Jackson, John Quincy Adams, and the Election of 1828* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 144, 171–3.

¹³ Hendrik Booraem, *Young Hickory: The Making of Andrew Jackson* (Dallas: Taylor, 2001), 41, 186; Andrew Burstein, *The Passions of Andrew Jackson* (New York: Knopf, 2003), 23–4; H. W. Brands, *Andrew Jackson: His Life*

and *Times* (New York: Doubleday, 2005), 72–3, 149–52; List of slave bills of sale, ‘Receipts and Records of Sale’ folder, Hermitage; Sean Wilentz, *Andrew Jackson* (New York: Henry Holt, 2005), 121–3; and Jon Meacham, *American Lion: Andrew Jackson in the White House* (New York: Random House, 2008), xxi, 302–4.

Although it remains unpublished, Bettina Drew’s dissertation, *Master Andrew Jackson: Indian Removal and the Culture of Slavery*, (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 2001), comes the closest to analyzing Jackson’s life in relation to slavery.

¹⁴ In the sixth volume of the *Correspondence of Andrew Jackson*, J. Franklin Jameson, who took over editing duties after Bassett’s death, noted that in 1931, the Library of Congress acquired ‘a collection of nearly 1200 additional letters and documents, to be joined to the main collection of Jackson Papers’. Obviously, given their acquisition so late in the completion of the project, the vast majority of these letters and documents did not make it into the Bassett volumes. Jameson was one of the founders of the American Historical Association and the director of the Department of Historical Research at the Carnegie Institution of Washington, which published the *Correspondence of Andrew Jackson* volumes. See, *Correspondence of Andrew Jackson*, vol. 6, v; John Higham, *History: Professional Scholarship in America* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1965; 2nd edn., Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University, 1989), 6, 22–5.

¹⁵ Andrew Jackson to Egbert Harris, 13 April 1822, in Bassett and Jameson (eds.), *Correspondence of Andrew Jackson*, 3: 158; James, *Andrew Jackson*, 2: 30–1; Harold D. Moser, David R. Hoth, and George H. Hoemann (eds.), *The Papers of Andrew Jackson: Volume V, 1821–1824* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1996), 170–1; and Brands, *Andrew Jackson*, 365–6.

Another ignored example is that of Alexander Donelson’s approximately two dozen slaves, some of whom were deeded to Jackson between 1835 and 1838 when they refused to go to Liberia. Jackson attempted to help reunite the family in 1838, but the only mention of these slaves, and Jackson’s role in their lives, is a brief aside in James’ biography (vol. 2, 397–8).

¹⁶ See, for example, Meacham, *American Lion*, 302. Andrew Burstein’s *Jefferson’s Secrets: Death and Desire at Monticello* (New York: Basic, 2005) makes a similar argument about scholars’ lack of examination of Jefferson’s post-presidential papers and years.

¹⁷ Larry McKee, ‘The Earth Is Their Witness’, *The Sciences*, 35 (March/April 1995): 36–41; Larry McKee and Brian W. Thomas, ‘Starting a Conversation: The Public Style of Archaeology at the Hermitage’, *Southeastern Archaeology*, 17 (Winter 1998): 133–9; Brian W. Thomas and Larissa Thomas, ‘Gender and the Presentation of Self: An Example from the Hermitage’, in Jillian E. Galle and Amy L. Young (eds.), *Engendering African American Archaeology: A Southern Perspective* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2004), 101–31; Whitney Battle-Baptiste, ‘The Other from Within: A Commentary’, in John H. Jameson, Jr. and Sherene Baugher (eds.), *Past Meets Present: Archaeologists Partnering with Museum Curators, Teachers, and Community Groups* (New York: Springer, 2007), 101–6; Battle-Baptiste, ‘Sweepin’ Spirits: Power and Transformation on the Plantation Landscape’, in Sherene Baugher and Suzanne M. Spencer-Wood (eds.), *Archaeology and Preservation of Gendered Landscapes* (New York: Springer, 2010), 81–94; Jean V. Berlin, ‘A Mistress and a Slave: Anna Maria Thornton and John Arthur Bowen’, *Proceedings of the South Carolina Historical Association* (1990): 69–74; and Stephanie Cole, ‘Changes for Mrs. Thornton’s Arthur: Patterns of Domestic Service in Washington, DC, 1800–1835’, *Social Science History*, 15 (Autumn 1991): 367–79. The pardon documents for Bowen, including Thornton’s narrative of what happened and petitions from prominent Washingtonians, are found on reels 30 and 31 of the *Papers of Andrew Jackson* microfilm supplement (Wilmington, Del.: Scholarly Resources).

¹⁸ ‘Alfred Descendants’ folder, The Hermitage; and Dorothy Price-Haskins, *Unholiest Patrimony: “Great Is the Truth and It Must Prevail”* (Denver: Outskirts Press, 2007).

¹⁹ Andrew Jackson to Andrew Jackson, Jr., 9 March 1834, in Bassett and Jameson (eds.), *Correspondence of Andrew Jackson*, 5: 253–4.

²⁰ Andrew Jackson to William B. Lewis, 8 April 1844, Andrew Jackson to Joel R. Poinsett, 2 December 1832, in Bassett and Jameson (eds.), *Correspondence of Andrew Jackson*, 6: 277–8, 4: 493–4; Richard R. John, ‘Affairs of Office: The Executive Departments, the Election of 1828, and the Making of the Democratic Party’, in Meg Jacobs, William J. Novak, and Julian E. Zelizer (eds.), *The Democratic Experiment: New Directions in American Political History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 65–6; and Richard E. Ellis, *The Union at Risk: Jacksonian Democracy, States’ Rights, and the Nullification Crisis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 178–98.

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