Thomas Jefferson's Declaration on Slavery: The Lockean Connection

Zoltán Vajda

Abstract: In his own version of the Declaration of Independence (1776), Thomas Jefferson made references to slaves in the North American colonies of Britain that were struck out in the final version endorsed by Congress. Historians noticing this change have tended to ignore the connections that the Jeffersonian discussion of black slaves in the colonies as a "captive nation" had with English philosopher John Locke's theory of natural rights. On the other hand, scholarship finding Lockean traces in Jefferson's natural rights theory have tended to ignore the problem of black chattel slavery in Jefferson's Declaration. In an attempt to ameliorate such disconnectedness, I hope to show in this paper how Jefferson's discussion of black slaves and slavery in the document was ultimately rooted in Locke's understanding freedom and slavery together with the state of war as well as the consequences of such a connection.

Keywords: Thomas Jefferson, Declaration of Independence, slavery, state of war, captivity

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During the War of Independence poor white men of Virginia came to be the potential beneficiaries of a plan that many in the state considered "perverted." In order to recruit more soldiers for the revolutionary cause, the General Assembly of the Old Dominion launched a debate over the redistribution of slave property in the state so that less fortunate whites could have their own share of enslaved black Africans as human resources. The proposal was considered peculiar on account of the attempt to support the war effort for the cause of liberty by recruiting soldiers for the revolutionary cause from among the poor at the price of redistributing a kind of property that rested on human bondage (McDonnell 2006, 305).

In addition to revealing the complicated nature of class relations in the state, the polemic reflected a serious philosophical problem, namely how individual rights could come into conflict over the question of slavery, how cultural beliefs about self-preservation and liberty would collide in the struggle for national independence. This was a dilemma that even the Declaration of Independence hinted at, although being silent on its details. Nonetheless, its original, draft version prepared by Thomas Jefferson did address such issues – indirectly as it did.

In this essay I wish to contribute to the debate over the presence of Lockean liberalism in Jefferson's thought and show that in the text Jefferson offered national independence as a resolution of the conflict with Britain on the basis of the Lockean model of the difference between freedom and slavery. More particularly, I aim to examine how Jefferson related to Locke's understanding of the nature of slavery, what were the ideas that he adopted from the latter, and what were the ones that he rejected. As will be seen, while both thinkers subscribed to the idea of freedom and related rights rooted in the state of nature, a major difference between them was that while Locke endorsed the state of slavery as a result of just war, yet not applicable to black Africans as well as resistance to it, Jefferson rejected the act of enslavement outright but also the concept of resistance to it through violence.

Before turning to Lockean ideas in Jefferson's text with references to black chattel slavery and the trans-Atlantic slave trade in the Declaration, I will briefly discuss the significance of Locke in the American intellectual scene and in Jefferson's thought in general.

Lockean ideas found their way into American political culture in the eighteenth century. As research has shown, a significant appeal to colonials was exerted by the notion of the "equal creation" of man, and the concomitant concept of natural rights inherent to any individual including the right to "life," "liberty," and "property" (Becker 1970 (1922), 27; Huyler 1995, 207, 221, 247, 248; Diggins 1984; Dworetz 1994).

It has also been demonstrated how Jefferson was specifically influenced by Locke, and how the latter's *Second Treatise of Government* (first published in 1689-90) informed a substantial part of the Declaration of Independence – a fact even admitted by Jefferson himself (Jayne 1998; Jefferson 1825, 1501). Thus, both Locke and Jefferson emphasized the state of nature as a source of natural rights for the individual self, equally available for all, to be protected by government, which, in turn, could be changed if it posed a threat to them (Jayne 1998, 47, 51, 59; Sheldon 1991, 9, 12). (Note: For the presence of other political languages in Jefferson's thought in general, such as republican or Scottish moral philosophy see, for instance, Sheldon 1991, 45, 52, 60; Pocock 1975; Wills 1979; Lévai 2021).

Nonetheless, while drawing attention to the presence of the Lockean system of natural rights and government in Jefferson's philosophy, the very same scholarship has shown less

interest in the question of slavery itself – an understandable feature given the main thrust of research into Locke being the idea of limiting political power in defense of natural rights and, consequently, against the idea of enslavement or the subjugation of individuals.

At the same time, one age-old dilemma that scholarship has also associated with Jefferson is the tension between his endorsement of Lockean natural rights and his racialism largely articulated in connection with blacks, maintaining their inferiority to whites and even other races such as Native Americans (Ceaser 2000, 166-167; Helo and Onuf 2003; Diggins 1976; Boulton 1995; Sheldon 1991, 129; Waldstreicher 2017, 727-732).

Despite this concern, however, no interest has been shown in the complicated nature of Jefferson's attitude to black chattel slavery in his own draft of the Declaration of Independence, through its relation to Lockean ideas.

The remarkable passage where slavery meets Locke in Jefferson's original version of the Declaration is the one concerning the transatlantic slave trade, later deleted in the final version of the document accepted by Congress largely on account of its assertion of the equal status of blacks as human beings with an equal right to liberty – a thought unacceptable to southern slaveholding whites at the time of independence (Lynd and Waldstreicher 2011, 618; Becker 1970, xiii-xiv).

Research into Lockean language in Jefferson's philosophy has tended to slip over this passage, which he nonetheless considered the culmination of his diatribe against changes in British colonial policies (Boulton 2024, 21). This is all the more interesting since this argument, just like in the rest of the text, largely builds on Lockean premises, even though ignoring some – as will be seen.

The passage in question reads as follows:

> He has waged cruel war against human nature itself, violating it's most sacred rights of life and liberty in the persons of a distant people who never offended him, captivating & carrying them into slavery in another hemisphere, or to incur miserable death in their transportation thither. This piratical warfare, the opprobium of INFIDEL Powers, is the warfare of the CHRISTIAN king of Great Britain. Determined to keep open a market where MEN should be bought & sold, he has prostituted his negative for suppressing every legislative attempt to prohibit or to restrain this execrable commerce. And that this assemblage of horrors might want no fact of distinguished die, he is now exciting those very people to rise in arms among us, and to purchase that liberty of which he has deprived them, by murdering the people on whom he also obtruded them: thus paying off former crimes committed against the LIBERTIES of one people, with crimes which he urges them to commit against the LIVES of another. (Boyd 1950, 426)

What is going on here? In the passage Jefferson asserts how the king of Great Britain is to be blamed for black chattel slavery in his North American colonies. In the first place, as Jefferson argues, he generated the institution imposing it upon the colonists. In the second, he holds George III responsible for the inhumane institution of the transatlantic slave trade resulting in the enslavement of black Africans and even their death during the middle passage. Thirdly, Jefferson finds the most horrendous sin committed by the British monarch in his inciting an "insurrection" among black slaves against their masters since in doing so he pretends to compensate for the loss of liberty for a people caused by him at the expense of the lives of another people – i.e. white colonials in North America, whose liberty he is about to take away.

The violation of natural rights and their being ignored by the king is associated with the opposite of Christian conduct by Jefferson. He likens royal policies to "unchristian" ruling practices as he identifies the enslavement of black Africans and making them the object of slave trade. This is the practice of privateering, which amounts to capturing free persons forcing them into bondage and exchanging them for money after making them property. Such a conduct was regarded as an uncivilized practice at the time, characterizing corsairs of the Barbarian coast at

the time of the Revolution. They were seen as "unchristian" political entities in the Muslim world (Colás 2016, 840-857).

Here, Jefferson is obviously wrong about calling the king an instigator of enslaving practices since black Africans were already enslaved when encountering white merchants: they had been forced into bondage by African slave hunters, who acted as trade partners of the British having established fortresses along the West African sea coast during the reign of Charles II to defend their trade interests against the Dutch, facilitating the mass transportation of African slaves to the New World (Brewer 2017, 1047).

Yet, as will be seen below, the act of enslavement became a crucial element in Jefferson's reasoning vis-à-vis that of Locke. The former associates violence involved in enslavement (and the death of slaves in the Middle Passage) with the king, whereas Locke seems more ambiguous about condemning such an act.

Historian Alexander Boulton has recently argued that the final version of the Declaration strove to downplay the discussion of the particular historical context, instead emphasizing abstract, universalizing principles such as natural rights. According to him, that is the reason that Congress had all particularizing passages deleted from Jefferson's original version including the one making reference to racial slavery, instead emphasizing the danger of the political enslavement of the colonies (Boulton 2024, 2, 25). The passage in question is one such particularizing bit; at the same time, in it slavery appears not without strong links with universal, abstract principles that we can find in Locke's theory of government also including slavery.

Jefferson's passage on the Atlantic slave trade as an activity basically initiated and promoted by the British monarch involves the idea of violating two basic rights that he associates with humanity. Either of these is the right to "liberty" encroached upon through the enslavement of black Africans; the other being "life" in the sense that the Middle Passage resulted in the violent death of thousands of the enslaved, and thus Jefferson also held George III responsible for it.

Such rights are obviously identified as natural ones and thus inalienable for any human being. This is what Jefferson asserts at the beginning of the Declaration, in the passage informed by more abstract, philosophical considerations. It shows, as the conventional scholarly consensus goes, the presence of the language of Lockean liberalism as formulated in the *Second Treatise of Government*, where life and liberty appear as natural rights, rooted in the state of nature, and derived from God (Huyler 1995, 248; Jayne 1998, esp. 45, 60; Becker 1970, 65, 66; Dworetz 1994, 30; Sheldon 1991, 16, 141).

Importantly enough, the violation of the natural rights of life and liberty is intimately connected with another natural right in Jefferson's reasoning, although implicitly and in a reverse manner. Through enslavement, black Africans as human beings become objectified and commodified, thereby made suitable for commerce. Jefferson condemns the British king for the Atlantic slave trade as a commercial activity aimed at human trafficking, that is to say, transforming human beings into pieces of property through enslavement and then taking them to "a market where MEN should be bought & sold." The creation of such a kind of property, on the other hand, happens through violence, that is, by capturing humans and forcing them into bondage, thus turning them into chattel, Jefferson suggests. This is a way of acquiring property in humans that he disapproves of in the passage.

Thus, creating property for commercial purposes happens through the infringement of natural rights. This is also the reason that Jefferson criticizes the British for thwarting any attempt made by the colonists to put an end to the Atlantic slave trade based on such a dubious kind of transaction.

This is not all of it, however. The same principle of business transaction appears in Jefferson's argument about the slave insurrection incited by the British. According to him, the insurrection involves the idea of a business transaction with human lives sacrificed through race war for the emancipation of black slaves. The undoing of the original deal of turning humans

into property is taking place through the sacrifice of the lives of the colonists, who, in Jefferson's understanding, are being used by the British king through their natural right of life as assets to pay for the emancipation of blacks.

Such a criminal act, in Jefferson's interpretation, becomes a magical one, too: chattel is transformed back into human with liberty regained. Innocent colonists as slaveholders thus become part of the transaction, too, through their lives necessary to be taken away from the transformation of black chattel into liberated humans. If the first transformation of humans into property could only happen though violence in Jefferson's reasoning, the undoing of the black magic would also happen through violence according to the recipe provided by George III.

Jefferson then regards the slave rebellion against white slaveholders also as a business transaction. The natural rights of life and liberty get commodified as a result of power politics. Nonetheless, although three parties are already involved in it, only two would have to defray the costs with Britain exempted from paying anything for the support of black slaves rebelling against their masters. Such double irony must have been the main reason that John Adams, agreeing with Jefferson upon this passage being the most important of the whole document, suggested keeping it in the final version, against all odds, too (Boulton 2024, 21).

Jefferson formulated his argument in the passage about the African slave trade and his thesis about slave insurrections against the backdrop of the reality of the war. Local representatives of British rule offered freedom to enslaved Africans once they joined Tory forces. As historian Sylvia Frey has shown, although "large-scale slave" rebellions did not occur in the colonies, enslaved blacks expressed resistance to the institution by defecting to the British (Frey 1983, 376). Despite Jefferson's claim formulated in the passage, then, inciting slave insurrections was no aim of the British. The situation in Virginia was a case in point: in his famous proclamation of November 1775, John Murray, fourth earl of Dunmore, governor of the colony, called upon bondsmen to leave their masters and join his troops to gain their freedom. Furthermore, his invitation was also extended to indentured servants thereby broadering the scope of the action beyond bondspeople identitifed by Jefferson. His aim was thus to strengthen his manpower as well as to weaken planters' slave labor force through "encouraging defection" (Frey 1983, 387).

Another aspect of the reality of the war was that the proclamation had the effect of making more whites join the patriot cause. (Holton 1997, 185) In response, colonists in Virginia attempted to prevent the defection of their slaves by introducing harsh punishment for runaways as well as a sophisticated system of pardoning (Frey 1983, 383-84). Dunmore's offer for enslaved Africans to join his forces was also one major reason for the planters of Virginia turning against the British lay in since they did respond to his call, first discussing the possibility of breaking free, then enacting it (Holton 1997, 71).

The British were less interested in liberating the slaves, as Dunmore himself had several of them or encouraging them to start an insurrection than causing damage to patriot slaveholders by making bondsmen join their ranks, primarily in sea combat units (Frey 1983, 387, 388). Dunmore would even return defected slaves to their original owners once they pledged loyalty to the Crown. The aim of the British remained to invite black slaves to serve their units and not necessarily as combat troops. It was rather the property value of the slaves that concerned the British: depriving rebellious colonists of their assets was a primary goal for the former (Frey 1983, 389, 396). The first battle of the War of Independence in Virginia took place in October 1775, when British sailors attacked the village of Hampton. Organizing a counterattack, patriots managed to eliminate the unit, including the nine black soldiers who had joined them (Holton 1997, 158).

Jefferson's fear of slave uprisings was not unique and fitted in with a more general tradition in Virginia starting with the Seven Years's War (1756-63). Minor plots even characterized the colony afterward, resulting in the killing of white colonists by black conspirators (Holton 1997, 163-64, 164-65). Whites in Virginia had deeper fears of the emancipation of black slaves than of them serving in Britian's army (Holton 1997, 184). It was

also apprehended by whites in Virginia that the British could exploit such acts of slave resistance against disloyal colonists. Thus, fear of slave insurrections largely influenced Virginians' responses to the policies of the local British administration (Holton 1997, 166, 176). It was in the summer of 1775 that southern whites felt a danger of the British trying to find ways to turn enslaved blacks to their own purpose (Holton 1997, 179). The British administration's collaboration with black bondsmen contributed to a desire for independence among colonists (Holton 1997, 187). Finally, black slaves' rebellious acts preceding the year 1775 had a large role to play in Dunmore's intention to use them against white colonists (Holton 1997, 190).

Having seen the background to Jefferson's response to British policies involving enslaved blacks, we can now turn to John Locke's attitude to slavery.

Some have argued that in the passage under scrutiny here Jefferson condemns slavery as a morally wrong institution which, then, is to be seen in sharp contrast with Locke accepting it (cf. Boulton 2024, note 28). Yet, Jefferson's morality, as will be seen, becomes problematic in the light of the Lockean connection.

Locke's troubled relationship with human bondage has only partially been addressed by scholarship. A theoretician of the modern liberal democratic state, he, nonetheless, seems to have supported the idea of African slavery – even if not in his writings but at least through his involvement in the transatlantic slave trade, being a member of the Royal African Company, which proved instrumental in the transplantation of slavery to the western hemisphere. He has also been known for his drafting the constitutions of the British colony of Carolina in North America, endorsing the institution (Farr 2008, 497). Moreover, in historian Alexander Boulton's words, while Jefferson considered black chattel slavery "morally wrong" "Locke regarded slavery as part of a morally justifiable economic and social order" (Boulton 2024, 12, 9). However, this moral perspective begs qualification in the light of the context that Locke offers in his *Second Treatise*, especially considering how Jefferson himself related to the moral question of slavery.

In the first place, there is evidence to suggest that Locke's drafting the Constitution of Carolina in 1669 and his buying stocks of the Royal African Colony in 1772 were less motivated by his commitment to slavery than generally supposed. As for the constitution, he was commissioned to do the drafting along principles set for him already connecting land grants with the provision of servants as human property. As for his interest in the trans-Atlantic slave trade, he sold his stocks in 1675 (Brewer 2017, 1052, 1053-54). Furthermore, one can add, all this happened before Locke's final shift to the liberal democratic conception of political power and his ultimate endorsement of the Glorious Revolution of 1689.

But in order to understand Locke's standing on slavery we should explore what it meant to him, and how it is to be assessed within the context of his broader theory of the individual self and its interaction with others. In turn, to be able to answer this question, I need to discuss the whole system of freedom, rights, government, and slavery as envisioned by Locke.

The problem of slavery in Locke's philosophy is organically embedded in his theory of government – just like his theory of rights. According to the mainstream view, Locke composed his *Second Treatise of Civil Government* (1679–1680) (in tandem with his *First Treatise*) in order to contest the legitimacy of absolute monarchical rule based on divine right and heritage as formulated by Sir Robert Filmer in his *Patriarcha* (1680) and through that, to endorse the Glorious Revolution of 1689, completing the shift of power from monarch to Parliament – from absolute monarchical rule to one based on political representation (Laslett 1988, 49-50).

Questioning monarchical rule derived from God, Locke, nevertheless, attributes a central role to Him when he identifies the individual's right to liberty, life, and property as part of a larger divine scheme. They belong to each and every human being because of their connection with nature. This is why Locke constructs the abstract state of nature based on the law of nature by which individuals are supposed to abide, refraining from violating other individuals' natural rights. In such a state individuals are completely isolated from one another, and, also important, as there is no government whatsoever to rule over them. Therefore, in the state of nature, each

individual is sovereign in the sense that they are empowered to wield governmental power or, in Locke's words, "execute" the "Law of Nature." (Locke 1991, 271)

Thus, the state of nature is not the state of complete anarchy, as Thomas Hobbes would claim in his *Leviathan* (1651). but rather one with individuals possessing full governmental power. Yet, Locke admits, such a state can turn into a state of war very easily meaning sovereign individuals fighting and wielding "Absolute Power" over another. This would happen because being a sovereign authority in cases related to the law of nature and hence individual rights, too, individuals would also have to judge in cases involving themselves. Such situations would provide room for biased judgement and result in potentially wrong decisions. Furthermore, since in the state of nature individuals must defend themselves and their own natural rights, with no government protecting them, it can also turn into a state of war. In the state of war, however, there is no protection of natural rights other than the individuals, who are at war with one another. (Locke 1991, 279-80).

In order to prevent such a situation, that is to say, the state of nature turning into that of war, individuals leave this state by making a contract among themselves and then erecting a government above themselves, at the same time renouncing their power to execute the law of nature, including cases in which they would have to judge in cases involving themselves (Locke 1991, 275-76).

In the state of civil government, individuals then give up part of their sovereignty, electing a government to govern themselves through laws that are in line with the law of nature, i.e. they do not infringe upon natural rights. Once government makes "positive laws" that violate natural rights since being in conflict with the law of nature, such legislation may trigger lawful protest and rebellion on the part of the people that created such government, Locke agues. They also have the right to change such government aiming against their lives, liberty and property (Locke 1991, 353, 357, 415, 419) – a thought also adopted by Jefferson in his Declaration.

The state of slavery as conceived of by Locke is organically linked to the above theory of government and was derived from the broader intellectual and political context in which he formulated his own views. As historian Holly Brewer has shown, despite historians' efforts to connect modern slavery with capitalism as an economic system as well as with liberal democracy as a political one, best exemplified by the thriving institution of black chattel slavery in the southern United States, its roots, in fact, lay in the feudal vision of the Stuarts, ruling England in the seventeenth century until 1689, except for the intermittent Puritan regime. According to this vision, monarchical rule over subjects was based on divine right, with them owing unconditional obedience to it, such a relationship also being based on the hereditary principle (Brewer 2017, 1042, 1045). Furthermore, it was the Stuarts that connected the ownership of land with property in the people living there – an outright justification of the king's power over his subjects living in his kingdom as well as property holders wielding power over their slaves living on their estates. (Brewer 2017, 1043).

The latter would also be born to be slaves according to the principle of heritage – just like serfs belonging to the landlord. Such an intimate link connecting ownership in land with ownership in humans was expressed through the concept of "headright:" landgrants by monarchs in the seventeenth century could be tied to the ownership of servants, that is, people could acquire landed property in the colonies of English in North America based on the number of servants that they possessed (Brewer 2017, 1045).The absolute rule of the monarch over his subjects through land ownership was thus translated into the absolute power of the master over his slave. By challenging the former on the eve of the Glorious Revolution, Locke and other liberal critics also challenged the ideal foundation of western chattel slavery (Brewer 2017, 1043).

But what does slavery consist in for Locke?

Locke defines slavery in the *Second Treatise* as a state in which one person is under the arbitrary power of another. The state of slavery assumes the absolute power of the aggressor over the life and liberty of the one enslaved. Locke is clear that the enslavement of a free person cannot happen voluntarily since "No body can give more Power than he has himself, and he that

cannot take away his own Life, cannot give another power over it." (Locke 1988, 284) Such enslavement is justified by Locke by arguing that slavery is better than death as punishment for a crime of a certain magnitude (Locke 1990, 284).

Brewer has also argued that Locke only accepted slavery as a way of punishing a crime instead of executing the criminal and it was meant to be a temporary one, not affecting the offspring of the perpetrator. For Locke, then, enslaving someone can only happen through "just war" in retaliation for someone using force to do crime to others (Brewer 2017, 1055). Moreover, Locke holds it as temporary servitude not hereditary unlike slavery as a corollary of the Stuart system of arbitrary rule (Brewer 2017, 1055).

Since black chattel slavery was not based on such justification, that is, as punishment for some evil criminal deed, Locke's formula of slavery would not serve as a legitimate ground for enslaving black Africans.

Enslavement can only take place by force, and not voluntarily by the individual, Locke maintains, and hence he calls slavery the continuation of the state of war, which implies the use of force between humans since it comes into being as a result of somebody making an attempt at depriving another one of his freedom. This is why he argues, "As he that IN THE State of Society, would take away the *Freedom* belonging to those of that Society or Common-wealth, must be supposed to design to take away from them everything else, and so be looked on as *in a State of War*" (Locke 1988, 279; original emphases; Locke 1988, 284,). And "... force or a declared design of force upon the Person of another ... *is the State of War,"* says Locke (Locke 1988, 280; original emphasis),

Given that such a state of war is based on force as a principle governing the relationship between aggressor and victim, the latter has the right to use force against the former, since the state of war assumes the right of the individual to defend his life and liberty against the aggressor. In Locke's words, "And therefore it is Lawful for me to treat him, as one who has put himself into a State of War with me, i.e. kill him if I can; for to that hazard does he justly expose himself, whoever introduces a State of War, and is aggressor in it." (Locke 1988, 28; original emphasis). For Locke, then, enslavement involves an arbitrary use of force, resulting in the state of war, and thus the legitimate use of force in retaliation.

Jefferson makes partial use of this Lockean language of slavery in his remarkable passage on the transatlantic slave trade. Based on Locke's premises, he regards black slaves as originally free people, who became a "captive nation" through enslavement, resulting in their loss of liberty. Moreover, they got into such a state through "piratical warfare," that is, through force, which, as we have seen, Locke regards as a basic means of enslavement. At the same time, Jefferson fails to consider slavery as a continuation of the state of war in connection with the black slaves of the American colonials. Hence his outrage at the alleged insurrection of slaves, involving force, incited by the British to earn their freedom. The insurrection of black slaves fighting against their masters and for their own freedom as a violent act would make no difference compared to the state of slavery also based on violence. Locke's understanding of slavery as a state of war and thus the possibility of enslaved persons using force against their masters wielding arbitrary power over them is a strong justification of slave rebellion, which Jefferson is silent about. Furthermore, his outrage also implies the feeling of disapproval of resistance to slavery because of the force involved in it.

Before becoming a "captive people," black Africans had all the rights that a free people could have under government – following the Lockean logic. Nonetheless, having become property, they lost all the attributes that went together with living under civil government such as the right to rebel against their rulers once their rights were violated. Jefferson thus denied them the right to overthrow the rule of their masters – a right that people living under civil government possessed. Their relationship was not based on consent and election, thus it did not imply the right to rebellion that the American colonists vindicated in the Lockean fashion when denouncing imperial policies as also identified by Jefferson as their grievances in the Declaration.

Jefferson thus refused to accept Locke's argument about the state of slavery as a state of war, where those enslaved do have the right to rebel against their masters – ultimately on the same basis as the colonists would do it against king George III: they regarded his acts as attempt to establish tyrannical rule over them. In the passage, Jefferson ignores the same tyrannical rule characterizing the institution of slavery violating the natural rights of black Africans. Such an attitude resulted in his denial of the right of insurrection to slaves against their own tyrannical masters.

For Jefferson, then, in the passage, it is the original sin of enslavement that really matters. He connects it with the British, who tend to keep committing it through their support of the transatlantic slave trade and their refusal to let the colonials stop it. In doing so, Jefferson downplays the slaveholding colonists' responsibility as well as the slave traders' role in maintaining the institution.

By way of conclusion, I claim that Jefferson followed Locke in his granting natural rights to black Africans impressed into chattel slavery as a result of the "piratical warfare" practiced by the British (as well as American slave traders whom he failed to mention). He thus endorsed Lockean natural rights even in the case of Africans prior to their enslavement, denouncing it as a violation of such rights. Yet, Jefferson also differed from Locke in two respects. In the first place, with restrictions though, Locke accepted the notion of enslavement as a result of captivity, which Jefferson rejected in the Declaration. In the second place, the latter refused to accept the right of enslaved blacks to use violence against their masters as a form of resistance in consequence of the violation of a right that Locke made emphatic.

In other words, Jefferson's putting the blame for North American slavery on the British as well as his outrage over their inciting slave insurrections involving the possibility of taking away the lives of slaveholders amounted to ignoring the Lockean tenet about the nature of slavery with the potential use of force against the aggressor. While Locke approved of the starting point of enslavement through captivity as a result of just war, but that would not apply for the captive nation of blacks, Jefferson rejected it in the form of the transatlantic slave trade as an ongoing process of enslavement, as a perpetual state of war. Yet, in the passage on the African slave trade Jefferson refused to consider the situation of black Africans after enslavement as well as to conceive of slavery practiced by planters in the colonies as a perpetuation of the state of war with all the consequences as understood by Locke.

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