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The Significance of Meaning Shift of the Word "Slave" in Abolishing Slavery in the United States

Diplomová práce

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Abstrakt

Tématem této práce je zrušení otroctví ve Spojených státech amerických. Konkrétně se v práci zaměřuji na analýzu pro-otrokářské a proti-otrokářské promluvy v období před občanskou válkou a jejich vliv na udržení / zrušení otroctví v závislosti na dominanci jednoho ze dvou soupeřících pojmů, pro-otrokářského *otrok-komodita* a proti-otrokářského *otrok-lidská bytost*. Cílem této práce je diskutovat důležitost změny významu slova „otrok" v 19. století, a to především zpochybnění pojmu *otrok-komodita* a nový důraz na jeho lidské vlastnosti a jednotu lidstva. V práci bude prokázáno, že význam slova „otrok" se měnil v závislosti na měnících se představách o lidech s černou barvou pleti. Tato práce navrhuje, že zrušení otroctví ve Spojených státech bylo silně ovlivněno bitvou o pravdivost jednotlivých pojmů mezi pro-otrokářskou a proti-otrokářskou promluvou. Důraz na lidskost otroka na konci 18. a v první polovině 19. století umožnil odpůrcům otrokářského systému diskutovat otroctví v širším kontextu přirozených lidských práv a tak napomohl prezentovat zrušení otroctví coby nezbytné pro udržení Unie a jejích progresivních principů. Jakmile Tento přesvědčivý argument poté napomohl vyprovokovat občanskou válku za zrušení otroctví ve Spojených státech.

Abstract

This thesis focuses on the abolition of slavery in the United States. It examines the power role of discourse in maintaining and abolishing slavery in the United States, particularly the proslavery and the antislavery discourse of the antebellum South. The thesis examines two competing concepts of human bondage which originated in the

proslavery and antislavery discourses—that of the *slave-as-commodity*, the proslavery concept, on the one hand, and the *slave-as-human*, the anti-slavery concept, on the other. It aims to discuss the significance of meaning shift of the word "slave" from *slave-as-commodity* to that of *slave-as-human,* the antislavery concept. Taking into account the very subjectivity of the meanings assigned to the words "black" and "slave", the thesis will demonstrate that in U.S. social and political discourse, the meaning of "slave" was not fixed and underwent significant changes over time. This thesis suggests that the abolition of slavery in the United States can be perceived as a result of "a battle for truth" between the proslavery and the antislavery discourse. The new emphasis on the universal humanity of both 'races' in the nineteenth century helped abolitionists link the issue of slavery to a progressive discourse of unalienable personal liberties. I argued that even though the discursive struggle over the nature of a slave did not decide the conflict over the institution of U.S. slavery, it helped to present the abolition of slavery as essential for the very survival of the Union. As such, it was a powerful argument that eventually helped trigger the war over slavery in the United States.

Klíčová slova

Spojené státy americké, zrušení otroctví, černoch, běloch, rasa, význam, analýza promluvy

Keywords

United States, abolition of slavery, blacks, whites, race, meaning, discourse analysis

Rozsah práce: 134 156 znaků

Prohlášení

1. Prohlašuji, že jsem předkládanou práci zpracovala samostatně a použila jen uvedené prameny a literaturu.
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3. Souhlasím s tím, aby práce byla zpřístupněna pro studijní a výzkumné účely.

V Praze dne 23. 7. 2014   Denisa Matsche

Poděkování

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V čem se oproti původními zadání změnil cíl práce?
Due to the insufficient number of primary and secondary sources, the thesis has changed focus from the American Indians to another minority in the United States - the African Americans. The thesis, however, still aims to explore the question of identity as was originally intended. Through the lens of poststructuralist theory, the thesis will examine the role of discourse in abolishing slavery. The aim of the thesis is to examine the role of discourse in maintaining and abolishing slavery in the United States in relation to the meaning shift of the word "slave".

Jaké změny nastaly v časovém, teritoriálním a věcném vymezení tématu?
The thesis has shifted its focus from 1960s to the pre-emancipation period which ends by the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863. Similarly to the former project, it pays special attention to a particular movement - abolitionist movement - which aims at changing (or rather re-defining) the position of a minority in the majority society.

Jak se proměnila struktura práce (vyjádřete stručným obsahem)?
First of all, the thesis will introduce various existing explanations of what led the United States to abolishing slavery on its territory. The thesis will then clearly define its own theoretical framework in which the given topic is to be examined - the Poststructuralist theory. The thesis will be then divided into two larger chapters: The Slavery Order and The Anti-slavery Order. In chapter The Slavery Order the thesis will provide early images of 'black' existing in the Western mind and those of 'dehumanized savage'. In chapter The Antislavery Order, the thesis will examine the anti-slavery discourse and the meaning shift of the word 'slave'. Finally, the thesis will discuss the significance of this meaning shift for aboliting slavery in the United States.

Jakým vývojem prošla metodologická koncepce práce?
The theoretical framework of the thesis has been clearly specified as Poststructuralism.

Které nové prameny a sekundární literatura byly zpracovány a jak tato skutečnost ovlivnila celek práce?

The thesis will use the former literature dealing with identity and race theories as was intended for the thesis on the American Indians. The new sources, however, will deal primarily with slavery issues and the African Americans.

The new literature is following:

Ashley, R.K. "The Geopolitics of Geopolitical Space: Toward a Critical Social Theory of International Politics," *Alternatives*, 12:4 (1987: Oct), pp. 403-434.

Crawford, N.C. *Argument and Change in World Politics: Ethics, Decolonization, and Humanitarian Intervention*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, pp. 1-10, 98-109 and 159-200

Crystal, D. *Linguistics*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1972, pp.158-167

Doty, R.L. *Imperial Encounters: The Politics of Representation in North-South Relations.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996, pp. 1-19 and 27-49

Douglass, F. *The Heroic Slave*. In *Autographs for Freedom*. Boston: John P. Jewett and Company, 1853, pp. 174-239

---."A Letter to Henry C. Wright, December 22, 1846." In Foner, P.S. (ed) Frederick Douglass Selected Speeches and Writings, Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 1999, pp. 49-54

Drescher, S. "The End of Slavery n Anglo-America." In *Abolition: A History of Slavery and Antislavery,* New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009, pp. 294-332

Laclau, E. and Mouffe, Ch. "Beyond Positivity of the Social: Antagonisms and Hegemony." In *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, London: Verso, 2001, pp. 93-148

Lincoln, A. "Emancipation Proclamation," January 1, 1863.

---. "Letter to Horace Greeley," August 22, 1862.

McConnaughey, G. "Darwin and Social Darwinism." *Osiris*, Vol. 9, 1950, pp. 397-412

Meyerhoof, M. *Introducing Sociolinguistics*, Routledge, 2006, pp. 54-80

Morgan, L.H. *Ancient Society*. Chicago: Charles H. Kerr and Company, 1877, pp. 3-44

Morone, J. A. "The Abolitionist Crusade (1800-1865)." In *Hellfire Nation: the Politics of Sin in American History*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003, pp. 119-215

Palmié, Stephan. "A Taste for Human Commodities: Experiencing the Atlantic Systém." In Palmié, Stephan (ed.) *Slave Cultures and the Cultures of Slavery*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press,1995, pp. 40-54

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Subjectivity," *Foucault Studies* 6, 2009, pp. 25-36

Simon-Aaron, Ch. *The Atlantic Slave Trade: Empire, Enlightenment, and the Cult of the Unthinking Negro*. Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2008, pp. i-29

Stephen Jay Gould. "American Polygeny and Craniometry before Darwin." In *The Mismeasure of Man*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1996. pp. 30-72

Stocker, B. (ed) *Jacques Derrida: basic writings*. Routledge, 2007, pp. 83-104 and 210-234

Takaki, R. *A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America*. Boston, New York, Toronto, London: Little, Brown and Company, 1993, pp. 24-75

Thompson, K.D. "Distorted Images in Travel Literature: An Exploration of the Subjugation of Blackness in the Western World." In Henderson, C.E. (ed) *American and the Black Body: Identity Politics in Print and Visual Culture*. Cranbury: Rosemont Publishing and Printing Corp, 2009, pp. 55-74

Wendt, A. "Anarchy is what States Make of it: The Social Construction of Power Politics," in *International Organization* 46(2), 1992, pp. 391-425

Zizek, S. *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections*. New York: Picador, 2008, pp. 34-62

U.S. Declaration of Independence, 1776.

Charakterizujte základní proměny práce v době od zadání projektu do odevzdání tezí a pokuste se vyhodnotit, jaký pokrok na práci jste během semestru zaznamenali (v bodech):
1. The focus of the thesis has changed from American Indians to African-Americans.
2. The methodology has been clearly specified.
3. New sources and secondary literature dealing with slavery have been added

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Obsah

Introduction

In the introduction to his *Interpreting American History*, John A. Garraty maintains that "history is made up of facts." But as he points out, it is also about what people think about what happened and how they interpret those facts.[1] The focus of this thesis is the shift in U.S. national politics regarding slavery from its acceptance to its abolition. The aim of the thesis is to provide an interpretation of the events within the theoretical framework of discourse analysis.

The rise and fall of slavery in the United States includes a number of significant historical facts. It is estimated that between the early sixteenth and the mid-nineteenth century, European ships carried between ten and eleven million African slaves to the shores of the New World to provide free labor in their Caribbean and North and South American colonies.[2] In 1619 a Dutch ship brought the very first cargo of twenty "negars," as they were then called in English, to a British North American colony, Jamestown in Virginia.[3] Thereafter, their numbers in the colonies greatly increased as a result of the Transatlantic African slave trade, the primary source of the black population in the early years of English settlement in America. In the late seventeenth century, African-born slaves were a majority of the slave population in the British North American colonies.

Nevertheless, at the time of the American Revolution, the numbers of imported Africans declined to twenty percent of the total black population, and this continued until the mid-nineteenth century, when ratio was close to zero.[4] In 1807, as prescribed by Article 1 Section 9 of the U.S. Constitution, the U.S. Congress almost unanimously voted to prohibit the importation of slaves, making any further U.S. involvement in the Transatlantic slave trade punishable by death.[5] Law enforcement, however, was weak, and generated wide criticism of the government for its perceived hypocrisy. W.E.B. DuBois estimated that approximately 250,000 slaves were smuggled into the United

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[1] John A. Garraty, the Introduction to *Interpreting American History* (London: The Macmillan Company, 1970), vii.

[2] Gary B. Nash, *Red, White &Black*: *The Peoples of Early North America* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1992), 148.

[3] Kenneth M. Stampp, *The Peculiar Institution* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 18.

[4] Robert W. Fogel and Stanley L. Engerman, *Time on the Cross* (New York: W.W.Norton & Company, 1995), 23.

[5] Don E. Fehrenbacher, *The Slaveholding Republic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 181.

States despite the law´s provisions.[6] Nevertheless, the share of African-born slaves in the population was reduced to insignificant numbers.[7]

However, this had little impact upon the *existence* of the system of slavery in the United States. As Eugene D. Genovese points out, the American South was unique as a region in that it had "the only slave system in the New World in which the slaves reproduced themselves."[8] Slaves of mixed European and African descent, so called Creoles, reproduced in greater numbers than African-born slaves. White male slaveholders were aware of the reproductive potential of their female slaves. They also increased the slave population by impregnating their slave women. Once the "one-drop" law was enacted in the South, all offspring of such unions were automatically regarded and treated as slaves for life.[9] Therefore, despite the fact that Congress officially put an end to the Transatlantic slave trade, the deficit in the numbers of imported Africans was made up by the native-born population, providing a supply of slaves to maintain the system.[10] Consequently, almost two hundred years after the first ship of Africans arrived at Jamestown colony, the slave population of the United States represented 36 percent of the entire slave population in the Western Hemisphere. This made the United States the leading slave power of the Western world, with approximately 1,750,000 slaves located in the South.[11]

By the time of the American Revolution, the system of slavery had been so firmly established in the Southern states that, despite the widespread belief that the slave trade was anathema in new-born Republic, "the peculiar institution" flourished and continued to be an inherent part of the Southern social and economic order, and thus integral to the nation's prosperity.[12] Moreover, after the Southern cotton boom in the nineteenth century, "the interstate slave trade swelled to vast proportions."[13] This, of course,

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[6] W.E.B. DuBois, *The Suppression of the African Slave-Trade to the United States of America, 1638-1870* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 76.

[7] For more information on the Republic´s attitude towards the slave trade, consult Don E. Fehrenbacher, "The African Slave Trade, 1789 to 1842," in *The Slaveholding Republic*.

[8] Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll* (New York: Random House, 1976), 57.

[9] William W. Henning, "Act XII," in *The Statutes at Large: Being a Collection of All the Laws of Virginia*, vol. 2 (Richmond, Va., 1809-23), 170.

[10] On the demographic evolution of slavery in the United States, see Fogel and Engerman, 25-27.

[11] Fogel and Engerman, 28-9.

[12] *Register of the Debates of Congress*, 20 Cong., 1 sess., 907; Fehrenbacher, 15.

[13] David L. Lightner, "Preface," in *Slavery and the Commerce Power* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), ix.

proved illusory the hope that with the outlawing of the Transatlantic slave trade, the institution of bondage would slowly but surely die out.[14]

But despite being important for the economy of the Southern U.S., slavery was abolished after the American Civil War. In 1865, the U.S. Congress passed the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution, which indicated a shift from an acceptance of the system to its official censure. It proclaimed that "[n]either slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction."[15] At the time of the Amendment's passage and ratification, none of the Confederate States were represented in the U.S. Congress.

While the facts are not disputed, it is open to interpretation why these historical events occurred in the first place. The focus of this thesis is on the shift in U.S. political discourse regarding slavery from its acceptance to its abolition. Scholarship on the abolition of slavery in the United States has long been dominated by two contesting interpretations. The first of these theories formulated an argument within the framework of a rationalist school of thought, which has long pervaded scholarship. Proponents of this approach focus first and foremost on the interests, material factors and rational behavior of individuals and social groups, which are perceived to be the primary factors influencing politics and international relations. Ideas and rhetoric, on the other hand, are considered to be secondary.[16] According to realists, it is necessary to distinguish "between truth and opinion – between what is true objectively and rationally, supported by evidence and illuminated by reason, and what is only a subjective judgment, divorced from the facts as they are and informed by prejudice and wishful thinking." Rational reasoning, Hans J. Morgenthau claimed, "sets politics as an autonomous sphere of action and understanding apart from other spheres, such as economics…, ethics, aesthetics, or religion."[17] Accordingly, in rationalist scholarship, American abolitionists tended to be portrayed as "self-interested, market-driven hypocrites."[18] Rationalist scholars interpreted the abolition of slavery in the United States not as "a moral conflict

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[14] More on this will be discussed in Chapter 3.3 in relation to Lincoln and the change of his attitude towards slavery.

[15] *The Thirteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution*; note that none of the Confederate States were represented.

[16] cf. M. Blyth, "Any More Bright Ideas? The Ideational Turn of Comparative Political Economy," in *Comparative Politics* 29 (1997).

[17] Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations* (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 1993), 4-5.

[18] "Antebellum Reform: Discipline or Liberation," in *Interpretations of American History*, ed. Francis G. Couvares et al. (New York: Free Press, 2000), 268.

over slavery. Rather, [they argued that it] resulted from the unconstitutional and aggressive strategy of the North to use its growing economic power to reduce the Southern states to political subservience."[19]

However, as idea-based approaches became prominent in the Social Sciences, scholars such as Neta C. Crawford and Seymour Drescher argued that understanding the abolition of slavery purely in economic terms is both simplistic and unsatisfactory.[20] As they pointed out, ideas cannot be discarded as secondary - they are quite the opposite. In fact, they function as the framework through which interests are defined. Colin Hay even declares that "ideas often hold the key to unlock political dynamics – as change in policy is often preceded by changes in the ideas informing policy and as the ability to orchestrate shifts in societal preferences may play a crucial role in quickening the pace, altering the trajectory or raising the stakes of institutional reform."[21] In line with this reasoning, Crawford proposed a theory according to which morality rhetoric fostered changes in the longstanding practices of slavery. However, as the author of this thesis I find both interpretations to be inadequate since they ignore slaves as if they were irrelevant.[22]

Inspired by Charlotte Epstein's study on the role of discursive power in international relations, this thesis embraces the theoretical approach of Poststructuralism that emerged after the 1970s, when semantics became a prominent field of study in Linguistics.[23] This school of thought draws heavily upon the theory of Structuralism that was first formulated by linguist Ferdinand de Saussure.[24] Jacques Derrida explained

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[19] "The Civil War: Repressible or Irrepressible?" in *Interpretations of American History*, ed. Francis G. Couvares et al. (New York: Free Press, 2000), 341; this scholarship was very similar to the historical interpretations of the conflict over slavery by Southern intellectuals of the late nineteenth century such as Albert Taylor Bledsoe, who portrayed the North as the aggressor against the ideal of the Southern way of life. This helped them to formulate the cultural doctrine of the Southern "Lost Cause." For more information on the doctrine, read, for example, Terry A. Barnhart, *Albert Taylor Bledsoe: Defender of the Old South and Architect of the Lost Cause* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2011).

[20] N.C. Crawford, *Argument and Change in World Politics: Ethics, Decolonization, and Humanitarian Intervention* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Seymour Dresher, "The End of Slavery in Anglo-America," in *Abolition: A History of Slavery and Antislavery* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 294-332.

[21] Colin Hay, "The Discursive and the Ideational in Contemporary Political Analysis," in *Political Analysis* (Basingtoke: Palgrave, 2002), 194.

[22] This issue will be addressed later in Chapter 3.

[23] Semantics is generally defined as "the study of meaning communicated through language" (definition is taken from John I. Saeed (2009) *Semantics*).; in *The Power of Words in International Relations: Birth of An Anti-Whaling Discourse* (2008), Epstein argues that the change in from pro-whaling policies to its abolition was not brought about by changing material interests of the states but by a meaning shift of the word „whale" in the anti-whaling discourse, which successfully recast whales-commodities as whales-endanger species that needed to be protected.

[24] Ferdinand Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics* (London: G. Duckworth, 1983).

that "[e]very concept is involved in a chain within which it refers to the other, to other concepts, by means of a systematic play of differences."[25] Thus created structures have always been part of knowledge, science, and philosophy.[26] What is objective reality then? Are there any universal truths? Or is everything context-dependent? As R. K. Ashley pointed out, there are no guarantees that the recovered 'hidden identities' are the kinds of "autonomous, and universal truth they are purported to be."[27] Similarly, structural anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss claimed that "everything subject to a norm is cultural and is both relative and particular;"[28] and therefore, what we think of as true reality or the way we talk about the world, is all, in essence, a "myth". As Michel Foucault declared, "[t]here are no constants, no fixed meanings, no secure grounds, no profound secrets, no final structures or limits of history."[29] Language is in essence inter-subjective, social and historical. As a result, identities are not—and cannot be—completed or finished, because meaning and ideas cannot live apart from a speaker's consciousness.[30] As Stuart Hall argued, the paradox of meaning is that (we) have to be positioned somewhere in order to speak.[31]

Through the lens of Poststructuralist Theory, this thesis examines the role of discourse in maintaining and abolishing slavery in the United States. The thesis analyzes the proslavery and the antislavery discourse as two different "regimes of truth", a concept which was first formulated by Michel Foucault. A regime of truth is first and foremost a system of power. Foucault claims that "Each society has its regime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements."[32] Accordingly, this thesis suggests that the abolition of slavery can be perceived as a result of "a battle for truth" between the proslavery and the antislavery discourse. An inherent part of this battle, I will argue, is the struggle over the truth/falsity of statements concerning the subjects of enslavement – blacks

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[25] Qtd. in R. L. Doty, *Imperial Encounters: The Politics of Representation in North-South Relations* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 6.
[26] *Jacques Derrida: basic writings*, ed. by B. Stocker (Routledge, 2007), 210.
[27] R. K. Ashley, "The Geopolitics of Geopolitical Space: Toward a Critical Social Theory of International Politics," in *Alternatives, 12:4* (1987), 408.
[28] Qtd in Stocker, 223.
[29] Qtd in Ashley, 408.
[30] Stocker, 86.
[31] Stuart Hall, "Old and New Identities, Old and New Ethnicities," in *Culture, globalization and the world-system* (London: Macmillan Education, 1991), 51.
[32] *The Foucault Reader: An introduction to Foucault's thought*, ed. by Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 73.

themselves. Taking into account the very subjectivity of the meanings assigned to the words "black" and "slave", this thesis will demonstrate that in early national and antebellum U.S. social and political discourse, the meaning of "slave" was not fixed and underwent significant changes over time. There are two competing concepts of human bondage which originated in the proslavery and antislavery discourses—that of *slave-as-commodity*, the proslavery concept, on the one hand, and *slave-as-human*, the anti-slavery concept, on the other. In the years prior to the Civil War, the abolitionist side made a concerted effort to link the concept of *slave* to that of *human*.

In the first chapter, I will analyze late colonial and antebellum definitions of the word "slave" in comparison to modern American English. This will enable me to discuss the meaning of the concept of slavery in the antebellum U.S., and also to point out the discursive particularities of U.S. Southern slavery. In the second chapter, I will turn to analyzing the proslavery discourse. In its individual subchapters I will focus on the concepts of *whiteness* and *blackness* and show how they helped create boundaries within U.S. society, particularly between those who were free and those who were enslaved. I will argue that by roughly the middle of the nineteenth century, the proslavery discourse eventually embraced the idea of *slave-as-commodity*, which was the most powerful discursive strategy to defend their system.

The third chapter will be devoted to the analysis of the antislavery discourse. First, it will discuss the weaknesses of the above mentioned scholarly interpretations of the abolition of slavery in the United States. Next, it will demonstrate that the antislavery discourse embraced the idea of universal humanity. In this, it challenged the contemporary proslavery bloc's racialist theories in the antebellum South, and instead offered theories of its own, which eventually redefined "slave" as *slave-as-human.* This, in turn, enabled opponents of slavery to link the issue of slavery to a general discourse of personal liberties as earlier defined during the Revolutionary Era, and consequently to that of the recently forged U.S. national identity. In the final chapter I will examine the speeches and writings of President Abraham Lincoln on race and slavery in order to demonstrate the importance of this meaning shift, and its linkage of slavery to concepts of *Americanness* and national unity.

This thesis will argue that the meaning shift of the word "slave" reflected the emergence of a new regime of truth competing with that of the older proslavery order. This new discursive regime managed to bridge the structural barriers between the two groups. The new emphasis on the universal humanity of both 'races' in the nineteenth

century helped abolitionists link the issue of slavery to a progressive discourse of unalienable personal liberties. I will suggest that even though the discursive struggle over the nature of a slave did not decide the conflict over the institution of U.S. slavery, it helped present the abolition of slavery as *essential for the very survival of the Union*. As such, it was a powerful argument that eventually helped trigger the war over slavery in the United States.

1 Defining Slavery

For the purpose of this study, it is vital to first introduce the concepts of *slave* and *slavery*, which lie at the core of both the proslavery and the antislavery discourses. One of the pre-eminent dictionaries of the early modern English, Samuel Johnson's 1768 *Dictionary of the English Language*, defines "slave" as "one mancipated to a master; not a freeman; a dependant."[33] According to the earliest contemporary dictionaries of American English, Noah Webster's 1828 *American Dictionary of the English Language*, the word "slave" denoted:

> A person who is wholly subject to the will of another; one who has no will of his own, but whose person and services are wholly under the control of another. In the early state of the world, and to this day among some barbarous nations, prisoners of war are considered and treated as slaves. The slaves of modern times are more generally purchased, like horses and oxen.[34]

Moreover, the meaning of the word in the antebellum period also included "a mean person; one in the lowest state of life." As for the modern American English, "slave" is defined as "a human being who is owned as property by, and absolutely subject to the will of, another; bondservant divested of freedom and personal rights."[35] Even though these definitions might seem nearly synonymous, there are significant differences between them, which, as will be shown, indicate varying perceptions of the people thus designated.

Common to the aforementioned definitions is the idea of human bondage, which indisputably lies at the heart of the concept of *slavery*. It is generally argued that slavery should be seen first and foremost as a special kind of power relationship between two human beings. The preferred definition provided by Orlando Patterson posits that all human relationships are defined and structured by the relative power of the persons involved in the interaction. The only difference lies in the degree to which one person is able to dominate another. When speaking of slavery, Patterson argues, we mean those

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[33] Samuel Johnson, *Dictionary of the English Language* (Dublin, 1768).
[34] Noah Webster, *American Dictionary of the English Language* (1828).
[35] *Webster's New World Dictionary*, 1260; as will be argued further in this thesis, it is significant that American English dictionaries of the twentieth century put the emphasis on that slaves are human beings whom freedom and personal rights are denied.

relationships of human bondage where one person exercises absolute power over another.[36] Davis B. Davis makes a similar observation when he says:

> All forms of slavery embody a profound and inherent contradiction, illustrating the most extreme form of a tension we experience almost daily in more subtle or benign interactions of inequality. I refer to the desire to dominate another person until she or he becomes a willing extension of our own will, an instrument to serve our needs.[37]

The absolute domination of one person by another, Davis argues, is as old as our civilization.[38] Therefore, when the system of slavery was introduced into the New World in the early sixteenth century, it was not a new phenomenon for either Europeans or Africans. In his work *Slavery and Social Death*, Orlando Patterson provides an excellent comparative study of a sixty-six slaveholding societies plus an additional list of nearly forty slave systems.[39] His study reveals that slavery flourished in ancient civilizations such as those of ancient Greece and Rome, but was also part of societies in the Middle East, and existed even within Africa. As Kenneth M. Stampp also notes, native African dealers often participated in the trade by purchasing captives from other African tribes for their Christian clients.[40]

What Patterson, Davis and more recent scholars such as Eugene D. Genovese conclude is that slavery is far from as monolithic as is often mistakenly assumed. Instead of a fixed, uniform system, they find significant variations within the system itself, depending on a high number of factors such as time, place, and changing socioeconomic conditions.[41] Slavery, they argue, cannot be easily defined, since it is a highly dynamic system. As Davis points out, slavery "had very different meanings in ancient Mesopotamia, fourth-century Greece, and the Roman Empire." [42] He thus makes a fair observation when he claims that "[t]he more we learn about slavery, the more difficulty we have defining it."[43]

Nevertheless, the idea of human bondage, where a slave is property subject to his or her master´s will, lies at the heart of each one of the slavery systems. In human

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[36] Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), 1.
[37] David B. Davis, *Challenging the Boundaries of Slavery* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 16.
[38] Ibid., 5.
[39] David B. Davis, *Slavery and Human Progress* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984),
[40] Stampp, 17.
[41] Davis, *Slavery and Human Progress*, 11.
[42] Ibid., 14.
[43] Ibid., 8.

history, there have been several ways to become an object of enslavement. As the etymology of the word "slave" suggests, capture was one of the most common ways. "Slave" derives from a Medieval English word "Sclave" which denotes members of Eastern European peoples.[44] The word "slavus" first referred to captives of Slavic origin who were owned and subject to another´s will.[45] Ancient Romans, for example, commonly referred to such people as "captives."[46] In general, a slave was subject to another person whether by capture, purchase, or birth. Gary B. Nash claims that a slave gained that status either for being an *outsider* to society, was captured in war, sold him/herself in order to obtain money for their family, or had committed certain crimes.[47] However, while Nash puts the status of being an outsider into an either/or relationship with the others, Patterson masterfully points out that the slave "was ritually incorporated into the society as the permanent enemy on the inside."[48] He moreover argues that no matter the original way of enslavement, the slave is someone who is "socially a nonperson [who exists] in a marginal state of social death."[49]

It is a fact that U.S. American slavery was an inherited system from its past, when the colonies were still part of the British Empire. In fact, for "most of the seventeenth century, when the slavery system in the New World was new, the Negro's status was so vague and amorphous that this ultimate position might conceivably have been defined in several different ways."[50] However, scholars observe that the system of slavery which developed in the South was "unknown in English law, and, in some respects, unlike the forms of servitude which had developed in other places." In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, U.S. Southern slaveholders created a unique system of their own, which rested on a rigid "two-caste system of whites and Negroes, [where] the latter [was] defined as anyone with any Negro blood."[51] Thus, while the slavery systems in the Anglo-French Caribbean and Brazil showed "softer" distinctions between white and black and less racial prejudice, U.S. American slavery was maintained by "virulent racism."[52]

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[44] Later used in the form "Slavus" - *The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966), 834.
[45] *Webster´s New World Dictionary* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1991), 1260.
[46] Patterson, 40.
[47] Nash, 147.
[48] Patterson, 39.
[49] Ibid., 48; in Chapter 2.3, the thesis will provide examples from the multitude of existing bills of sale of slaves in the antebellum United States as a proof of the linguistic concept of *slave-as-commodity* .
[50] Stampp, 21.
[51] This became known as "one-drop" law, which has already been mentioned in Introduction on p. 2.
[52] Eugene D. Genovese, *The World Slaveholders Made* (New York: Random House, 1969), 107.

In this chapter I provided a general characterization of slavery as a specific power relationship, where a slave is commonly seen as a social non-person. Pointing at existing varieties within the concept of *slavery*, I also showed the most important differences of the antebellum U.S. Southern slavery as compared to the inherited system of the colonial period.

In the next chapter I will turn to demonstrating that the U.S. antebellum proslavery discourse assigned blacks inferior qualities by nature, traits which were generally associated with slaves. These qualities were in clear juxtaposition with those associated with the rest of the U.S. society. As the ultimate Other, blacks were deemed fit only for enslavement. As such, they became social non-persons.[53] They were seen primarily as personal chattel on the basis of their skin color, their African ancestry, and the "natural" characteristics of the black "race." In the colonial and the antebellum periods, they were gradually defined by science as creatures who occupied the lowest ranks. Such 'bestialization' of blacks enabled slaveholders to treat them as such; alongside cattle, black people denoted the same as "slave". They were first and foremost a *commodity*, and slaveholders' property.

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[53] "Other" and "Othering" are anthropological (and cultural studies) concepts. I will further explain these concepts in relation to Claude Lévi-Strauss's theories in Chapter 2.

2 The Proslavery Discourse

The first "regime of truth" examined in this thesis is the U.S. antebellum proslavery discourse. Foucault believed that the power of such a regime lies in its pervasiveness.[54] As Russell Ferguson also argued about discourse:

> The place from which power is exercised is often a hidden place. When we try to pin it down, the center always seems to be somewhere else. Yet we know that this phantom center, elusive as it is, exerts a real, undeniable power over the entire framework of our culture, and over the ways we think about it.[55]

As such, it is the primary source of conformity. The power of *center*, or *regime*, thus lies in the way it orientates and organizes an entire social structure by creating a framework of reference, whose norms are pervasive and generally accepted as 'true'. Claude Lévi-Strauss, who is among the most influential authors writing on social structures, linked knowledge structures to the workings of the human mind. He argued that verbal categories order the very social and natural environment humans live in. If humans struggle with defining a thing, they will use what is at hand, a cultural *myth*, to help them resolve the situation.[56] One of Lévi-Strauss's key arguments was that humans think by using opposites; and as a result, they create arbitrary boundaries through binary oppositions.

The proslavery discourse can be seen as a part of what Thomas K. Nakayama calls "white's discourse". The concept of *white* "has exerted its force on everybody else… [and has maintained] that position through invisibility, that everything-ness, that normalizing potential."[57] Therefore, it is pointless to seek "a major figure [imposing] his/her definition of 'white' from above; instead, we are seeking the ways it is constituted in everyday discourse and reinscribes its position on the social landscape."[58] In antebellum proslavery discourse, the U.S. American Southern self was presented as the norm against which others were defined. As the results of an open-ended survey

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[54] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: The Will to Knowledge* (London: Penguin Classics, 1998), 63.

[55] Russell Ferguson, "Introduction: Invisible Center," in *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures*, ed. Russell Ferguson et al. (New York and Cambridge: New Museum of Contemporary Art and MIT Press, 1990), 19.

[56] For more information see Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (1962).

[57] Thomas K. Nakayama and Robert L. Krizek, "Whiteness: A Strategic Rhetoric," in *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 81 (1995): 292.

[58] Ibid., 296.

developed by Nakayama and Krizek also reveal, whites tend to perceive the concept of *whiteness* as colorless. In other words, white is not "marked"—it is the norm, the natural thing. People who defined themselves as white perceived themselves as "not being black, hispanic [sic], or the like."[59] Thus, no matter what the true essence of whiteness is, anything that is *non-white*, especially the color black, is a deviation from the norm as defined by the dominant discourse within the given structure. *Black* was a highly charged concept that wielded power over those it signified. The power relations were then maintained by establishing an asymmetry between the two concepts.

The following subchapters, particularly Chapter 2.1, show that when Europeans first encountered Africans of a significantly darker complexion than theirs, they established links to their preconceived notions of *black*, which was positioned vis-á-vis the concept of *white*. As a result, they defined black Africans in juxtaposition to their European white selves: as the ultimate European Other.[60]

There exists rich evidence that black slaves internalized the norms propagated by the dominant regime. As scholars observe, they suffered from what is called 'cultural trauma', which refers to "a dramatic loss of identity and meaning, a tear in the social fabric."[61] As was mentioned in the introduction, a discourse has the ability to abstract and conceal identities. It will be demonstrated in the following chapters that the proslavery discourse reduced a complex human being into a single abstract Other. The act of inserting any subject into a field of meaning which is ultimately external to it is, according to Slavoj Zizek, highly violent as "the very symbolization of a thing…equals its mortification."[62] Due to the normalizing effects of the power discourse, theme of identity loss pervaded African-American literature from the nineteenth century onwards.[63] African Americans suffered a two-ness of being an American and a "Negro"—"two warring ideals in one dark body," which W. E. B. DuBois called double consciousness.[64] Africans were uprooted and transported in a brutal way to the New World, which was dominated by an alien regime. They became African-Americans,

[59] Ibid., 299.

[60] The link between skin color and otherness was in progress also as a result of European interaction with "Moors" in Spain and North Africa, and "Saracens" and Arabs in the Holy Land in the Middle Ages.

[61] Ron Eyerman, *Cultural Trauma* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 10.

[62] Slavoj Zizek, *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections* (New York: Picador, 2008), 52.

[63] The author recommends a reader Toni Morrison's novel *The Bluest Eye*, whose characters' life stories are a literary example of such internalization. One of the major themes of the novel is the loss of identity and double consciousness.

[64] W.E.B. DuBois, "Of Our Spiritual Strivings," in *The Souls of Black Folk*, ed. Henry Louis Gates (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 3.

human subjects trapped within a dominant power structure, stripped of their own identity and forced to internalize the way the center perceived them as 'true'.

In this chapter I argued that to think of the antebellum proslavery discourse as a purely strategic rhetoric, fabricated by the Southern slaveholders in order to persuade blacks of their inferiority, would be highly misleading. In the following subchapters I will show that the designation of blacks as inferior and as slaves was closely tied to a process of symbolization, which had started long before Europeans knew about the existence of people with black skin.[65] Since their contact and interaction for centuries, the relational opposition of the concepts *black* and *white* significantly influenced social structures. In the search for labor in the British American colonies and later the United States, symbolization helped create a discourse which propagated the Southern two-caste system based on 'natural' human differences, where blacks suffered 'social death' through enslavement.[66]

2.1 Conceptual Boundaries: Images of Blackness in White Minds

It is apparent that the meanings of "black" and "white" do not exist independently of one another. Instead, they are involved in a chain of relations by means of a systematic interplay of differences. Accordingly, Winthrop Jordan claimed that "Americans' conclusions about themselves, no matter how vague or inconsistent, virtually precluded their arriving at certain conclusions about Negroes."[67]

The color black connoted strong feelings long before Europeans knew about the existence of people with black skin.[68] The image of "black" was and still is a powerful symbol in Christianity. In the King James Bible of 1611 there are several references to *blackness*. Darkness and night were both associated with the concept of *black* as in the following line from Proverbs: "In the twilight, in the evening, in the black and dark night."[69] In the Book of Job, *blackness* is even associated with death: "Let darkness and the shadow of death stain it; let a cloud dwell upon it; let the blackness of the day terrify

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[65] Winthrop D. Jordan, *White over Black* (New York, London: W.W. Norton, c1968), 7.

[66] American Indians, who similarly to Africans were also conceptualized as exotic inferior Other, were able to escape due to a belief that they possessed characteristics which made them unsuitable for enslavement. For more information, read for example Kenneth M. Stampp (1989).

[67] Jordan, *White over Black*, 340.

[68] Ibid., 7.

[69] Proverbs 7:9.

it."[70] While *black* embodied all that the Christian society feared or it claimed not to be itself, *white* signified the ideal and values that white society wished to be associated with, such as "purity", "innocence", and "goodness."[71] According to Genesis, "God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness."[72] As the analysis of meanings of the word "black" before the sixteenth century reveals, it denoted an array of negative meanings. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the word "black" included meanings such as "Deeply stained with dirt; soiled, dirty, foul… Having dark or deadly purposes, malignant; pertaining to or involving death, deadly; baneful, disastrous, sinister… Foul, iniquitous, atrocious, horrible, wicked… Indicating disgrace, censure, liability to punishment, etc."[73] Importantly, as seen in one of the definitions of "slave" in antebellum American English provided by Noah Webster's 1828 *American Dictionary of the English Language* cited in Chapter 1, the word "slave" acquired a negative affective meaning, similar to that of "black"—such as being "mean" and "the lowest state of life."

"We'll visit Caliban my slave," says Prospero in William Shakespeare's play *The Tempest*, which is one of the frequently cited examples of the perception of 'black' people by 'whites'.[74] The play was first performed only a few years before the first cargo of the African slaves arrived in Virginia. Even as an artistic representation, the play clearly indicates how the first African slaves would have been perceived by the inhabitants of the English American colonies. When the white character Prospero meets Caliban, a native inhabitant of a darker complexion, he describes him as "[a] freckled whelp hag-born – not honour′d with / A human shape."[75] In line with the traditional Christian values assigned to blackness, Caliban is portrayed as a wicked, evil creature, a "thing of darkness."[76] The skin color of Africans was certainly the most striking difference between them and Europeans. When Englishmen first encountered Africans, "the most arresting characteristic … was," indeed, "his color [upon which] travelers rarely failed to comment... [They] actually described Negroes as *black*--an exaggerated

[70] Job 3:5.
[71] Ronald Takaki, *A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America* (Boston, New York, Toronto, London: Little, Brown and Company, 1993), 51-2.
[72] Genesis 1:4.
[73] Qtd. in Jordan, *White over Black*, 7.
[74] William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, Act 1, Scene 2, line 308; *The Tempest* was first performed in England in 1611; a black protagonist is also, for example, in Shakespearian play *Othello*, to whom the other characters also refer in racial terms.
[75] The origin of Caliban is not clearly specified; however, given his description he is believed to be meant either an aboriginal of North America or Africa; *The Tempest*, Act 1, Scene 2, line 283.
[76] Ibid., Act 5, Scene 1, line 275.

term which in itself suggests that the Negro's complexion had powerful impact upon their perceptions."[77] It is suggested that as far as the perception of Africans is concerned, calling them "black" was not simply a reference to the reality of the skin color; rather, connotative meanings of "black" were assigned to those people as well.

In the early colonial era, before antebellum South created the rigid two-caste system between 'blacks' and 'whites', the term "slave" applied to all servants regardless of their color. Both white and black slaves could gain freedom after serving a term of a number of years, or after conversion to Christianity.[78] Yet blacks were clearly perceived as something different, deviating from the standard. This was "a time when the accepted standard of ideal beauty was a fair complexion of rose and white."[79] English surgeon Charles White used such aesthetic criteria as the basis for ranking humans. Where else but among Caucasians, he maintained, can we find "that nobly arched head, containing such a quantity of brain… that majestic beard, those rosy cheeks and coral lips? Where that…noble gait?...where, except on the bosom of the European woman, two such plump and snowy white hemispheres, tipt with vermillion."[80] Almost a hundred years after the first African slaves arrived in Virginia, some inhabitants of English American colonies publicly expressed concern over the future of the "lovely white." As Benjamin Franklin argued in his *Observations concerning the Increase of Mankind* in 1751:

> I could wish their numbers were increased. And while we are, as I may call it, securing our planet, by clearing America of woods, and so making this side of our globe reflects a brighter light to the eyes of inhabitants in Mars or Venus, why should we…darken its people? Why increase the Sons of Africa, by planting them in America, where we have so fair an opportunity, by excluding all blacks and tawneys, of increasing the lovely white…?[81]

In colonial British America, blackness of skin was believed to be some "natural infection of the first inhabitants of [Ethiopia], and so all the whole progenie of them

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[77] Jordan, *White over Black*, 4-5.
[78] Stampp, 21.
[79] Ibid., 9; modern studies reveal that this is still true. In Toni Morrison's novel *The Bluest Eye*, African-American girls are measuring themselves against the beauty ideal of a white, blond girl Shirley Temple and blue-eyed white dolls; the novel was influenced by the well-known Clarks' Doll experiment made in late 1930s.
[80] Qtd. in Stephen Jay Gould, "American Polygeny and Craniometry Before Darwin," in *The "Racial" Economy of Science*, ed. Sandra Harding (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993), 93.
[81] Ibid., 85-6.

descended, are still polluted with the same blot of infection."[82] As is recorded in the Minutes of the Judicial proceedings of the Governor and Council of Virginia, in 1630 a certain Hugh Davis was sentenced to be "soundly whipped, before an assembly of Negroes and others for abusing himself to the dishonor of God and shame of Christians, by defiling his body in lying with a negro; which fault he is to acknowledge next Sabbath day."[83] This ruling was an early example of punishment for "miscegenation" or race mixing through sexual relations.

Indeed, as showed by the example of Charles White, from the eighteenth century some early theories on human difference were formulated in rather aesthetic terms - and this will be further discussed in Chapter 2.2. In this chapter I demonstrated that the marked juxtaposition of skin colors between Europeans/Euro-Americans and Africans greatly influenced such perceptions. This sense of otherness was further enhanced by differences in cultures and religious views, which increased the distance between the two groups.

In the next chapter I will turn to demonstrating that in the eighteenth century, "black" no longer designated only a person of dark skin color but a member of a certain human *race*.[84] The aforementioned perceptions of people of "colored" skin were influenced by classical works of Greek, Roman, and Muslim explorers.[85] Those early classical writings about the exotic Other were highly influential in the Western world, as they were the foundations and also references for European knowledge about human difference.[86] "[T]he Arabs and their Muslim allies," Davis says, "were the first people to develop a specialized, long-distance slave trade from sub-Saharan Africa. They were also the first people to view blacks as suited by nature for the lowest and most degrading forms of bondage."[87] In the antebellum South, the system of slavery was justified first and foremost with racial theories, which were deeply influenced by such 'knowledge' about the black Other within the proslavery regime, but were also

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[82] Qtd. in Jordan, *White over Black*, 15; this idea also reflects in the later U.S. Southern "one-drop" law; but in fact, thanks to modern paleo-anthropological studies, the Ethiopian region is now widely considered the cradle of humanity..

[83] Henning, ed., *Statutes Virginia*, Vol 1, 146.

[84] The term *race* denotes a concepts that was culturally constructed. As the modern science discovered, it has no biological reality since there was found more variation within 'white' people than between 'white' and 'black' people.

[85] K.D. Thompson, "Distorted Images in Travel Literature: An Exploration of the Subjugation of Blackness in the Western World," in *American and the Black Body: Identity Politics in Print and Visual Culture*, ed. C.E. Henderson (Cranbury: Rosemont Publishing and Printing Corp, 2009), 56-63.

[86] Thompson, ibid.

[87] Davis, *Slavery and Human Progress*, 8.

convenient for proslavery views. It was then that the words "black" and "slave" became interchangeable terms.

2.2 The Scientific and Legal Boundaries of Slavery

In spite of the prejudices against Africans by the majority population in the English colonies, the first Africans, who were brought to Virginia colony, were not immediately enslaved on the basis of their skin color or ancestry. Whether free men, servants or slaves, blacks had a social status similar to that of slaves or indentured servants of 'white' skin color.[88] Moreover, records reveal that some of the free mulattoes in the New World were slave owners themselves.[89] During the early colonial era, blacks and whites worked side by side as plantation labor, suffering the same kind of exploitation and exhaustion. This common experience helped them overcome the differences which existed between them and build partnerships and coalitions in times of need.[90] As court decisions of the colony of Virginia from the seventeenth century indicate, white and black servants often ran away together.[91] For example, it is recorded that, in 1674, "[six English]…Servants…and Jno. A negroe Servant…hath Run away and Absented themselves from their…masters Two months." The court ordered that "the Sherriffe…take Care that all of them be whipped…and Each of them have thirty nine lashes well layed on."[92] Evidently, the punishment was the same regardless of skin color—it was based on status and offense.

Nevertheless, conditions for blacks were, according to Kenneth M. Stampp, slowly but surely changing as blacks were increasingly singled out for special treatment. Early on, Southern slavemasters developed their system by custom, justifying it with apparent physical differences. However, it took only as long as by the 1660s that statutes made clear distinctions between white and Negro bondsmen, and they gradually evolved further.[93] This was happening at a time when a fear from the lower social classes, of poor and discontented freemen and indebtors, dominated the minds of the

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[88] Takaki, 52.

[89] As was anticipated in Chapter 1, slavery also existed within African tribes; for more information on the black slaveowners, read for example Loren Schweninger, "Black-Owned Businesses in the South, 1790-1880," in *The Business History Review*, Vol. 63, No. 1, (Spring, 1989), 22-60.

[90] Takaki, 53-54.

[91] Henning, ed., *Statutes Virginia*, Vol 2, 26.

[92] Helen Catterall, ed., *Judicial Cases concerning American Slavery and the Negro,* in *Cases from the Courts of England, Virginia, West Virginia, and Kentucky* (New York, 1968), 80.

[93] Stampp, 22.

elite landholders, who were afraid of armed rebellions by the poor to such an extent that they tried to legally limit their access to weapons. In 1676 Virginia planter Nathanial Bacon raised an armed militia of black and white servants to protect themselves and the region against American Indians. The elite saw this act as a grave violation of the law, charging Bacon with a rebellion punishable by death. In response, Bacon marched with about four hundred "English and Negroes in Armes" to Jamestown. Even though the rebellion was suppressed when some rebels surrendered while others were captured and returned "to their Masters," the event had serious consequences for Virginian society as a whole. Bacon's Rebellion increased fear from the poor and, as Takaki argues, it triggered a series of efforts to establish stricter control of "any Negroe or Slave," in order to prevent any further insurrections.[94] A vital part of these provisions was a set of new legislation which "[sharpened] the color line."[95] Negroes were to be slaves for life [and] their children were to inherit the condition of their mothers.[96] This latter provision had a function of preventing insurrections by blacks, for it instilled in them the sense of inferiority—a view that was widely accepted by the majority in power, the powerful center. Moreover, it also significantly diminished reasons for poor whites to build coalitions with blacks. This will be further demonstrated in the following paragraphs.

By shaping the legal system according to their interest, powerful factions of slaveholders "steadily worked to make their class more conscious of its nature, spirit, and destiny. In the process it created a world-view appropriate to a slaveholders' regime."[97] Eugene D. Genovese argues that "an essential function of the ideology of a ruling class is to present to itself and to those it rules a coherent world view that…[convinces] the subordinate classes of the justice of its hegemony."[98] This strategy can be traced back at least to the old Greco-Roman culture, where the social order was maintained by dividing the world between those who were civilized (like the ruling class) and those who were savages.[99] In the social reality promoted by the governing class of Ancient Greece, the governing class consisted of "the best people",

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[94] Takaki, 59-61.

[95] For more on the relevant legislation, see Ronald Takaki, 61 and Kenneth M. Stampp, 22.

[96] Stampp, 22.

[97] Genovese, *Roll Jordan Roll* (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), 27.

[98] Genovese, *In Red and Black: Marxian Explorations in Southern and Afro-American History* (New York: Vintage Books, 1972), 33; qtd. in G.E.M. de Ste. Croix, *The Struggle in the Ancient Greek World* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), 411.

[99] Audrey Smedley, "Science and the Idea of Race: A Brief History," in *Race and Intelligence*, ed. Jefferson M. Fish (Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2011), 150-1, accessed October 1, 2013, Google Books; cf. de Ste. Croix; please note that for Ancient Greeks, savages were not necessarily blacks.

who represented the peak of civilization. Members of other societies were perceived as inferior. This also included captured slaves, who were seen as uncivilized savages who "needed" to be governed. Similarly, the Southern ruling class of the later colonial and especially the U.S. antebellum period created an ideology based on the concept of *black* and *race*, which aimed to convince black slaves of the legitimacy of its hegemony. At the same, it was a powerful means to appease a class of poor, disillusioned white slaves and servants, who struggled to better their lives and to escape their forced labor, and thus to maintain order in white society. From the late seventeenth century and throughout the antebellum period, "Negro" and "slave" became interchangeable terms in the proslavery discourse; and the distinction between 'whites' and 'blacks' became the same as the distinction between freedom and slavery.[100] Southern slavery played a crucial role as it enabled 'white' U.S. citizens to define their freedom against the enslaved 'black' Other. To reserve slavery for blacks was beneficial to all whites, whether they were rich or poor, whether they owned slaves or not:

> For the great majority of slaveholders it provided the more modest advantages of moderate-sized agricultural units. For the nearly three fourths of the southern whites who owned no slaves it provided less tangible things: a means of controlling the social and economic competition of Negroes, concrete evidence of membership in a superior caste, a chance perhaps to rise into the planter class. Whatever the reason, most of the nonslaveholders seemed to feel that their interest required them to defend the peculiar institution.[101]

To define blacks as slaves must have helped to comfort the desperate poor as it made impossible for U.S. whites to fall as low as this kind of social death by blackness - devoid of future prospects of liberty.[102]

The institution of slavery performed its ideological function not through the reality of owning slaves, but its potential: those poor whites who did not own slaves upheld the institution of slavery because it gave them the hope that one day they could rise in status by acquiring slaves. Eugene D. Genovese makes the important observation that "Freedom in slave society is defined by slavery. Therefore, *everyone* aspired to have slaves, and having them, not to work."[103] However, to claim that everyone had

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[100] Genovese, *The World the Slaveholders Made*, 6.
[101] Stampp, 32-3.
[102] This argument relates to Orlando Patterson's definition of slavery as "social death," discussed in Chapter 1.
[103] Genovese, *The World the Slaveholders Made*, 6.

such aspiration is rather misleading. Puritans in New England placed high value on labor not as purely economic means but as a way to individual's spiritual salvation. Hence they argued that "being a master over slaves had imbued him with some less than admirable qualities, not the least of them being laziness."[104] As a result, two competing visions will clash: that of the labor-loving Americans of the North and that of slaveholders of the old aristocratic regime in the South. The antislavery discourse of the Revolutionary Era opened a heated debate about U.S. American identity in relation to the existence of slavery, which will be discussed in detail in Chapter 3.2 and 3.3.

The corner stone of the above-mentioned ideology was the general idea that 'whites' presented the peak of civilization, and 'blacks' were inferior 'savages'. Therefore, it justified the enslavement of blacks, who, it was believed, needed to be governed by a 'wiser' and more developed white society. Hence the ruling class of the Southern colonies accepted certain provisions which singled out blacks for a different treatment. As the preamble of South Carolina's Act of 1712 declared:

> WHEREAS, the plantations and estates of this Province cannot be well and sufficiently managed and brought into use, without the labor and service of negroes and other slaves; and forasmuch as the said negroes and other slaves brought unto the people of this Province for that purpose, are of barbarous, wild, savage natures....it is absolutely necessary, that constitutions, laws and orders, should in this Province be made and enacted, for the good regulating and ordering of them...[105]

The legislature of Virginia made its first significant attempt to attach slavery to imported Africans in the late seventeenth century. In 1682 the Assembly decreed that "all servants not being christians, being imported into this country by shipping shall be slaves".[106] Since the colonists were Christians, it was almost inevitable that "the heathen condition of the Negroes seemed of considerable importance to English settlers in America" and also as a vital condition for slavery.[107] However, as is evident from Virginia´s second statutory definition of a slave from 1682, it attempted to "rest enslavement on religious difference while excluding from possible enslavement all

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[104] James C. Cobb, *Away Down South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 27.
[105] Thomas Cooper and David J. McCord, ed., *Statutes at Large of South Carolina*, Vol VII (Columbia, 1836-1841), 352.
[106] Hening, ed., *Statutes Va.,* II, 490.
[107] Winthrop D. Jordan, *White over Black*, 91; it has already been argued that cultural differences only enhanced the idea of blacks as the white's Other.

heathens who were not Indian or Negro."[108] Therefore, while it might first seem that the Southern colonies aimed to create "religious slavery," these laws were in fact the first attempt to link slavery exclusively to blacks.[109] Eventually, it was "racial, not religious, slavery which developed in America."[110]

Eugene D. Genovese observed that "Once slavery came into being, ethnocentricity and color prejudice passed quickly, although perhaps not immediately, into racism. As such, it required the division of the world among the great Caucasian powers and the attendant vogue of Social Darwinism during the second half of the nineteenth century for a fully developed racist ideology to emerge and conquer the Western world."[111] The emerging race theories which classified human beings into "natural" categories of races, were grounded in a Western preconceived knowledge of the exotic Other.[112] This was already anticipated in Chapter 2.1 in relation to the aesthetic criteria for the classification proposed by Charles White in his *Account of the Regular Gradation in Man* from 1799. One of the primary reasons why the pro-slavery discourse relied heavily upon the classification of individuals into "natural" human races is that it provided scientific justification for already existing conceptual categories. Formulated within the ethnocentric "white" structure, such scientific knowledge of racial features put "an unmistakable stamp to existing social differences."[113]

There existed several theories about race prior to the Civil War. Nevertheless, some were more powerful in the maintenance of slavery in the antebellum South than others. Etienne Serres, a French physiologist, argued that it was the theory of polygeny which most resonated with the English American colonists. One of the main tenets of this theory was the idea of the two races, Caucasian, white and "Negro," black, having originated from two completely different sources. Furthermore, the proponents of this theory claimed there were significant differences between the two races and argued their case by establishing analogies between those who were designated as "Negroes" and low 'savage' species. As Serres had observed in 1860:

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[108] Ibid., 92.
[109] Ibid., 93.
[110] Ibid.
[111] Genovese, *The World Slaveholders Made*, 105.
[112] Roxanne L. Doty, *Imperial Encounters: The Politics of Representation in North-South Relations* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 10; as mentioned in Chapter 2.1, the early writings about the exotic Other which can be traced back to the classical works of Greeks, Romans and Muslim explorers, formed the foundation Anglo-Saxon knowledge about human difference. For more information, see K. D. Thompson (2009), 56-63.
[113] Caio Prado, qtd. in Eugene D. Genovese, *The World Slaveholders Made*, 105-6.

> Their conclusion is that the *Negro is no more a white man*
> *than a donkey is a horse or a zebra*-a theory put into practice
> in the United States of America, to the shame of civilization
> (italics added by the author).[114]

Thus the theory "[lends] scientific support to the enslavement of races less advanced in civilization than the Caucasian."[115]

The color differences between the descendants of African-born slaves and the rest of the white American society were "a rather weak basis of ranked differences in interracial societies" since they were "quickly blurred by miscegenation…Very soon…there were numbers of slaves who were in fact lighter than many European masters…Within a couple of generations the symbolic role of color as a distinctive badge of slavery had been greatly muted-though, of course, not eliminated."[116] Race theories, on the other hand, built upon the concept of *blackness* and justified the superiority of whites on the basis of "blood" instead of visible physical differences of skin color.[117] As pointed out in Chapter 2.1, already in colonial British America it was believed that *blackness* was an infection inherited by the entire progeny of the first inhabitants of Ethiopia. In his account of travels around the United States, Gustave de Beaumont recalled his visit to a theater, where he "was surprised at the careful distinction made between the white spectators and the [rest of] the audience." However, soon he noticed among "the outcasts a young woman of dazzling beauty, whose complexion, of perfect whiteness, proclaimed the purest European blood. " As his companion explained to him,

> "That woman…is colored."
> "What? Colored? She is whiter than a lily!"
> "She is colored," he repeated coldly; "local tradition has
> established her ancestry and everyone knows that she has a
> mulatoo among her forebears."

However, when he saw among the whites a woman of very dark skin, his companion explained that "She is white. Local tradition affirms that the blood which flows in her veins is Spanish."[118]

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[114] Qtd. in Gould, 91.
[115] Ibid.
[116] Patterson, 61.
[117] Genovese (1971: 107) claims that in the two-caste system in the Southern United States, Negro was "defined as anyone with some (amounts varied) Negro blood."
[118] Qtd. in James A. Morone, *Hellfire Nation* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003), 119.

The very concept of *race* was first used in Spain in order to differentiate between various horse breeds, and only later was it adopted by the English to identify and characterize people that they discovered throughout their explorations.[119] Winthrop D. Jordan wrote that the earliest English travelers described Africans as "a people of beastly living, without a God, law, religion, or common wealth—which was to say that Negroes were not Englishmen." Even though they "knew perfectly that Negroes were men," they often "described the Africans 'brutish' or 'bestial' or 'beastly'."[120] In his 1607 treatise on zoology *Historie of Foure-Footed Beasts and Serpents*, Edward Topsell provided a theory which established analogies between apes and Africans.[121] Topsell, for example, argued that "Men that have low and flat Nostrils are Libidinous as Apes that attempt women, and having thick lips, the upper hanging over the neather, they are deemed fools, like the lips of Affes and Apes." Moreover, he also established connection between apes and evil. He said that "*Albertus* faith, he saw the heart of a Male Ape, having two tops or sharpe ends, which I know not whether to term a wonder or a Monster."[122] Apes were in his words "evil mannered and natured."[123]

Over two hundred years later, George Glidden and Josiah Nott published their work *Types of Mankind*. By redrawing the images of skulls, they strengthened the idea of Africans as animals as they suggested strong affinity between Negroes and gorillas. There were even suggestions that the extension of the Negro jaw in comparison to that of a chimpanzee was a sign "that blacks might even rank lower than the apes."[124] Glidden and Nott were highly inspired by the theory of *craniometry* developed by a distinguished American scientist and physician Samuel George Morton. According to Morton, there existed significant differences between the skulls of living Europeans and those of Africans. Therefore, Morton concluded that what were considered the races of humans were actually different species, whose differences can be traced back to human

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[119] Thompson, 63-4.

[120] Winthrop D. Jordan, "Englishmen and Africans," in *American Experiences,* Vol I, ed. Randy Roberts and James S. Olson (Glenview, Illinois: Scott, Foresman/Little, Brown Higher Education, 1990), 59.

[121] Please note that the Bacon Rebellion happened almost three decades after the publication of this treatise. The author believes this be a supportive argument that racial slavery in the United States was not purely a rhetoric designed to justify the slavery. Rather, it reflects that the racial slavery was a product of workings of human mind.

[122] Edward Topsell, *The History of Four-footed Beasts* (1609), 3.

[123] Topsell, 9; see also Chapter 2.1 and the image of blackness in Christianity.

[124] Gould, 86-88.

origins. In line with this theory, it was even argued that Africans and Westerners were the descendants of different Adams.[125]

> As David B. Davis explains,

> > Because the slave was *defined essentially as "not one of us,"* a captive alien, he or she was always at risk of '*bestialization*,' a word that refers to the degradation and dehumanization signified by the repeated descriptions through history of slaves being stripped naked, driven like cattle, and sold like livestock.[126]

The parallel between slaves and domestic animals "persisted in the similarity of naming, branding, and even pricing slaves according to their equivalent in cows, horses, camels, pigs, and chickens."[127] In his personal account of his life as a slave in the United States, Frederick Douglass remembers that "[in] hottest summer and coldest winter, [he] was kept almost naked—no shoes, no stockings, no jacket, no trousers, nothing on but a coarse tow linen shirt." Also, his and other children's "food was coarse corn meal boiled. It was put into a large wooden tray or trough and set down upon the ground. The children were then called, like so many pigs, and like so many pigs they would come and devour the mush…He that ate fastest got most; he that was strongest secured the best place; and few left the trough satisfied."[128] Such treatment of slaves is, Davis observed, the truly striking fact about slavery, given history of changes of the system.[129] As he points out, the concept of the slave as "a human being who is legally owned, used, sold or otherwise disposed of as if he or she were *a domestic animal*" has been "almost universally accepted" since antique times.[130]

In this chapter I analyzed how preconceived notions of *blackness,* which were discussed in Chapter 2.1, formed the basis for 'white' theories of human difference. I demonstrated that the Southern ideology, which originated in the colonial era and eventually embraced racial theories during the antebellum period, designated blacks as inferior 'savages', an idea originating from a completely different source. This ideology aimed first and foremost at stabilizing the social order in the Southern colonies and later in the Southern states. Having the support of racialist science, the Southern proponents

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[125] Proponents of this theory were accordingly called "hard liners", as they created a clear line between the two races, declaring that the qualities of a "Negro" can *never* improve.

[126] Davis, *Challenging the Boundaries of Slavery*, 6; italics original.

[127] Davis, *Slavery and Human Progress,* 13.

[128] Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), 28.

[129] See Chapter 1.

[130] Davis, *Challenging the Boundaries of Slavery*, 6.

of slavery possessed a strong argument for the enslavement of blacks according to the "one-drop" rule.

In the next chapter I will turn to a discussion of how blacks eventually became conceptualized as *slaves-as-commodity*. The above-mentioned race theories had their undeniable share in the 'bestialization' of "the Negro race." As the antebellum definition of the word "slave" in Chapter 1 indicated, "slave" denoted among others "the lowest state of life." Consequently, it will be argued that the act of bestialization in the proslavery discourse went hand in hand with the process of commodification of African Americans and their enslavement. This argument is also supported by Stephan Palmié. He believes that Africans became "human commodities" and a "commercial item" in the process of cultural construction and of taste acquiring.[131] They had been objectified in the form of "goods", which inherently rendered cultural categories tangible. Therefore, "a negro... is almost as automatically a slave as 'a mule is a machine for spinning cotton'."[132]

2.3 The Concept of *Slave-as-Commodity*

It was discussed in Chapter 1 that "slave" is commonly defined as a form of property. For instance, Ronald Takaki mentions a case from 1645 where Ralph Wormeley presented in court a certificate of a gift to Agatha Stubbings in "Consideration of Matrimony", which consisted of "Four Negro men and Two women...Ten Cows, six Draft Oxen."[133] Also according to laws of the antebellum South, blacks were "less a person than a thing."[134] Even though the legal term "personal chattel" did acknowledge the status of a slave as both a person and a property, scholars stress that legally a black slave was still more a thing than a person.[135] As John Randolph pointed out during the congressional debates in 1828: "under the laws of old Rome, [was] a man who was a slave…any the less property, because, forsooth, he was a

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[131] See Chapter 2.1 and Chapter 2.2.
[132] Stephan Palmié, "A Taste for Human Commodities: Experiencing the Atlantic System," in *Slave Cultures and the Cultures of Slavery*, ed. Stephan Palmié (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1995), 45-7.
[133] Takaki, 56.
[134] Stampp, 193.
[135] Ibid., 192-193.

person? His being a person it was that made him subject to becoming property, because his master had need of his service."[136]

The status of a slave as a mere property was a subject of heated Congressional debates as early as the late 1770s. At the time when Congress set out to determine the basis for allocating the expenses of the Confederation based on the population of each state, the so-called "three-fifths compromise" had resulted from "bargaining between northerners who wanted slaves wholly included in the calculation and southerners who wanted them wholly excluded."[137] Continental unity being of the utmost importance, it was agreed in Article 1, Section 2 of Constitution that "Representatives and direct Taxes shall be apportioned among the several States which may be included within this Union, according to their respective Numbers, which shall be determined by adding to the whole Number of free Persons, including those bound to Service for a Term of Years, and excluding Indians not taxed, three fifths of all other Persons."[138]

Nevertheless, after 1830, "the forces in the South…pressed the view," especially in the legal environment, "that slaves were a special form of property to its fullest extent and developed novel attacks on the humanity of blacks…As far as citizenship was concerned, they had not even a shadow of it. They were merely a peculiar form of property."[139] Handwritten accounts provide rich evidence that black slaves figured in the Southern masters' ledger books of the antebellum period as any other goods.[140] For the year 1845, William Ransom Johnson's account book featured the sale of "Negroes", horses, agricultural equipment and other personal property at Oakland Chesterfield County.[141]

Thompson opines that whites created and believed in the subordinate state of Africans for two reasons: "to commodify the African and to justify their pursuits of colonies and people under the power of Europe and later North America."[142] As some scholars also observed, the Founding Fathers of the United States "intentionally

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[136] *Register of the Debates of Congress*, 20 Cong., 1 sess., 920-21.

[137] Fahrenbacher, 20-5;

[138] Article 1, Section 2, *U.S. Constitution*; Please note that this section was later modified in 1868 by passing *the Fourteenth Amendment* where it says "Representatives shall be apportioned among the several States according to their respective numbers, counting the whole number of persons in each State, excluding Indians not taxed.".

[139] Fogel, 397-8.

[140] To see and read individual account books of slaveholders, see the online archive at *Unknown No Longer* of the Virginia Historical Society at http://unknownnolonger.vahistorical.org/search/results/account.

[141] http://unknownnolonger.vahistorical.org/record/1622/522.

[142] Thompson, 63.

excluded blacks from constitutional guarantees and, indeed, placed them outside the community of human beings."[143] During the congressional debates of 1828, Edward Livingston said "If not property, they are free…, we have no right to their service. If they are not property, the whole foundation on which the Constitution of this Union rests is shaken."[144] Representative Charles Miner argued that the Constitution and other laws recognize black slaves as "property under our Government, in its full meaning, and without any qualification, as much so any other species of property whatsoever."[145] Southern states thus "secure to [their] citizens as completely their right to their slaves as they do to their carts and horses."[146] As John Randolph of Virginia declared: "This is a question the United Sates Government has nothing to do with. It never had, and it never can have for the moment it lays their unhallowed hands upon the ark of that question, it ceases to be a government…What the law makes property, that is property."[147] Hence prior to the meaning shift of *slave-as-commodity* to *slave-as-human*, the U.S. government could only treat slavery as a property issue. Consequently, the question of slavery was framed as that of property instead of personal rights or liberty.

Importantly, as long as blacks were considered property, to free slaves against the will of the owner was unconstitutional. As the founding document of the United States declared, every man had the right to "life, liberty and pursuit of happiness."[148] The right to pursue happiness in fact embodies the idea that anyone should be able to move upward both socially and economically by ensuring every individual the opportunity "to rise on the economic ladder by acquiring land, labor skills, and other forms of capital" - including slaves.[149] Accordingly, proslavery Southerners argued that any attempts to abolish the system and to free their "property" would be a violation of their rights that the Union was bound to protect based on its founding documents. For example, when during the U.S. congressional debates of 1838 Representative Daniel Barnard emphasized the humanity of slaves, arguing that "slaves are not property, like an ox or

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[143] Fehrenbacher, 13.
[144] *Register of the Debates of Congress*, 20 Cong., 1 sess., 899.
[145] Ibid., 1475-76.
[146] Ibid., 907
[147] Ibid. 920-21.
[148] *U.S. Declaration of Independence*.
[149] As discussed in Chapter 2.2, the South eventually created a unique system of racial slavery based on rigid two-caste system as a means of maintaining social order within the white society. The fear of rebellions among the poor existed already in the colonial period. However, the need for such system increased once the Southern colonies became a part of the United States, which defined itself as a country of personal freedom and equal opportunities.

horse, because they are reasonable beings, and if you injure their persons you are made to answer for it," proslavery speakers such as William Brent kept pointing out that

> …in viewing the slave we must speak of him here in a legal, constitutional, and political point of view—we have nothing to do with its natural state…The slave is unknown to the law or the Constitution except as the property of the master. In that respect, he stands upon an equality with any other property, and so far as the Government of the United States is concerned, he has no legal or political protection.[150]

More importantly, Thomas Mitchell of South Carolina maintained:

> …slavery [is] as much a part of the Constitution as the great right of representation: for, though the word slave is not used in that instrument, the condition is admitted—it is clothed with rights, and protected; and the laws of Congress, and the decisions of the Supreme Court, are practical and living illustrations of its being an integral part of our system of Government. Now, when we…swore that we would support the Constitution—all of us, North and South of the Chesapeake— bond ourselves to respect and protect the rights growing out of this institution, by a tie as strong as to respect and protect the personal liberty of the Freeman.[151]

This exchange reflected the general nature of debates on slavery in the U.S. Congress in the nineteenth century. While the defenders of the institution relied on appeals to the Constitution to protect their slaves as property, the opponents of bondage argued for slaves' humanness and Christian morality.

When considered less than human with their human qualities objectified, blacks became increasingly vulnerable to any forms of violence. As G. E. M. de Ste. Croix observed, many slave societies used the "ruthless treatment of the slave" as a means "to maintain that institution in being and make it serve its purpose best."[152] As former slave and abolitionist Frederick Douglass himself observed, "[b]eat and cuff your slave, keep him hungry and spiritless, and he will follow the chain of his master like a dog."[153] Charles Pettigrew, owner of a large plantation in North Carolina, declared in his will in 1806: "It is a pity that agreeably to the nature of things, Slavery & tyranny must go together—and that there is no such thing as having an obedient & useful slave without

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[150] *Register of the Debates of Congress*, 1479.
[151] Ibid., 1020.
[152] de Ste. Croix, 410.
[153] Qtd. in Stampp, 89.

painful exercise of undue & tyrannical authority."[154] Thus the master´s absolute power over his estate often went hand in hand with physical cruelty and the inhuman treatment of black slaves.

In this chapter I showed how proslavery perceptions of blacks helped define them as *slaves-as-property*. An analysis of antebellum U.S. congressional debates also revealed that while the opponents of slavery often cited Christian morality and appealed to slaves' humanness to endorse their initiatives, the defenders of the institution relied on an appeal to the Constitution. Despite the fact that at the time when the Constitution was drafted it was believed that slavery was "dying a natural death;" and therefore, "the slavery of the other states [should be left] alone", once blacks were designated as personal chattel and recognized as such by the law, slaveholders could point to their right to property as protected by the U.S. Constitution; and consequently, any attempts to deny them those rights, they reasoned, would be a betrayal of the founding principles that both North and South agreed upon.[155] If "the bonds of fraternity" between North and South were to be preserved, Richard K. Meade warned in 1837, then Northern congressmen "must cease talking about slavery."[156] This was a discursive struggle about which meaning of the word "slave" - *person* or *property* - was more directly linked to concepts of *Americanness* and national unity.

In the next part devoted to the analysis of the antislavery discourse I will argue that as long as the conceptualization of slaves as *property* dominated, "in the Continental Congress and elsewhere, the interest of national unity" often "muffled" any "antislavery sentiment."[157] Furthermore, I will demonstrate that while some scholars argue that the morality arguments of the abolitionists in the end did persuade the nation to abolish slavery on its territory, the property argument was too strong to be thus subverted. I suggest that weakening the proslavery discourse and thereby undermining the system of slavery in the South was a task which needed more than appeals to the morality of the citizens of the United States. Abolitionists needed to win the struggle over the meaning of "slave" and to shift the meaning from that of *slave-as-commodity* to *slave-as-human* via challenging the polygeny theory.

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[154] Qtd. in Genovese, *Roll Jordan Roll*, 87.
[155] Abraham Lincoln, "Letter to Williamson Durley," in *Lincoln on Race and Slavery*, ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2009), 19.
[156] Fehrenbacher, 10-11.
[157] Ibid., 18; see, for example, the three-fifths compromise mentioned in Chapter 2.3´.

3 The Antislavery Discourse

As I already mentioned in my Introduction, abolitionists were often accused of being pure hypocrites who masked their own self-interests by moral arguments. Nevertheless, scholars such as Seymour Drescher and Christian R. Fogel have provided evidence that economic reasons were hardly the decisive force in the political changes in the antebellum United States. Drescher noted that "the world-economy as a whole seems to have been as optimal for expanding the Atlantic slave system when the British ended the slave trade in the 1830s as it was at the beginning of popular abolitionism in the 1780s."[158] Fogel likewise pointed out that slave plantations proved to be more efficient than free farms.[159] Therefore, if economic self-interest was indeed the primary factor in any political action, it would seem to be more reasonable for an abolitionist to become a slaveholder rather than to insist on the fall of a system that was profitable.

Some scholars favor the theory that the slavery system in the United States was abolished first and foremost by a persuasive appeal to the morals of U.S. citizens. Neta C. Crawford believes that the ethical argument persuaded citizens to do what was right to do. She argues that given the Christian culture of the United States, religious arguments were the most powerful.[160] James A. Morone maintains that the Puritan society of the colonies in the North "constructed their society around a crusading religious spirit," with a mission to "save the world."[161] These colonists believed that "New England would succeed and be saved when all its citizens behaved. The covenant with God—and the eyes of the world—positively pushed the early Americans to meddle in the behavior of their neighbors."[162] In the middle of the eighteenth century, the Great Awakening sparked religious revivals across the country. As Morone pointed out, they were "to mark the end of Puritan New England and the first stirring of Puritan America."[163] Thus, the religious morality of one region of the colonial North radiated outward and eventually permeated most of the Northern states of the antebellum United States.[164]

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[158] Qtd. in Crawford, 169.
[159] Fogel, 391.
[160] Crawford, 198.
[161] Morone, 33.
[162] Ibid., 36.
[163] Ibid., 101; this thesis will further elaborate on this subject in Chapter 3.2
[164] Religious revivals occurred in the South as well. However, antebellum Southern evangelicalism accommodated slavery as either compatible or part and parcel of religious doctrine. This will be discussed further in this chapter.

Various intellectuals indeed portrayed slavery as an evil institution with the power to corrupt those who participated in the system. By the 1830s, "slavery began to eclipse all of Satan's other works," and resulted in what he calls the abolitionist *crusade*.[165] The "unchristian" treatment of slaves came to serve as one of the main arguments of abolitionists against the system. As has been demonstrated, the proslavery discourse gradually degraded blacks based on their innate qualities. It stripped them of their human attributes through both science and law. Approximated to animals, inferior an all counts, a black person became in practice a piece of estate which could not claim his/her human rights. As a result, he/she became extremely vulnerable losing protection under U.S. society's moral code, living at the will of his/her master. In her famous recollections of her life as a slave published as *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* under a pseudonym, Harriet Jacobs recalls talking to a runaway slave named Benjamin. While Jacobs warned him that he might suffer from "poverty and hardships" among strangers once he reaches the North, he opines: "we are dogs here; foot-balls, cattle, every thing that´s mean. No, I will not stay."[166] A myriad of gloomy images support what blacks had to suffer in the condition of slavery on an almost everyday basis: "the half starved wretches toiling from dawn to dark on the plantations…mothers shrieking for their children, torn from their arms by slave traders…young girls dragged down into moral filth…pools of blood around the whipping post…hounds trained to tear human flesh…men screwed into cotton gins to die."[167] Female slaves in particular suffered both physical and mental pain. Whether they were made to work in inhuman conditions in the fields, beaten or starved, they suffered physical, mental and sexual abuse as well as loss of their own children, who were traded as animals on the slave market. All those were instances "of a daily, yea, of hourly occurrence."[168] Even though by the 1850s "most of the codes had made cruelty a public offense," to manage black slaves equated in many slaveholders' eyes to degrade his humanity and personality by inhuman treatment, making him/her stand in fear "like a dog" by his/her master's leg.[169] A number of historical photographs showing the scars of whipping on former slaves, and material culture such as slave shackles serve as ample objective historical evidence of the kind of suffering slaves had to undergo.

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[165] Morone, 130.
[166] Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (New York: Signet Classic, 2000), 19.
[167] Ibid., 82.
[168] Ibid., 13-4.
[169] Stampp, 219.

In 1748 Charles Louis Montesquieu wrote:

> The state of slavery is in its own nature bad. It is neither useful to the master not to the slave; not to the slave because he can do nothing through a motive of virtue; nor to the master, because by having an unlimited authority over his slaves he insensibly accustoms himself to the want of all moral virtues, and thence become fierce, hasty, severe, choleric, voluptuous, and cruel.[170]

Himself being part of an older religious anti-slavery tradition, prominent American Quaker Anthony Benezet likewise drew upon Christian morality in his writings. Benezet promoted his belief that slaves were "the children of the same Father…for whom Christ died."[171] In his novella *Heroic Slave*, Frederick Douglass purposefully reversed the traditional concepts of *black* as dark and evil and *white* as pure and innocent. Black slaves were a "deeply injured race", "intelligent and brave", the "noble" "[children] of God", whereas white men were portrayed in dark images; they were cruel and villainous: "I dreaded more these human voices than I should have done those of wild beasts."[172]

Nevertheless, this thesis argues that the morality argument alone would not have achieved the abolition of slavery, as it opened up a discussion of better treatment of slaves rather than posing a grave threat to the very existence of the institution as such. This claim can be supported by the fact that Christian morality arguments were employed by both opponents and proponents of slavery in the United States. In the first half of the nineteenth century, when the future of slavery in the new territories was a heated topic of political debates, when both black and white abolitionists launched their crusade against the immorality of U.S. slavery, when the fear of black rebellion spread among the slaveholders after the Nat Turner uprising of 1831, the antebellum lawyer, writer, and slave-owner George Fitzhugh of Virginia argued that an absolutely free society was, in fact, the destruction of the Christian principle of love-thy-neighbor.[173] Doctrines such as this, he argued, would be in a capitalist society "acts of suicidal self-sacrifice," given the fact that self-interest is the primary force in the free market.[174]

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[170] Qtd. in Crawford, 172-3.
[171] Ibid., 174.
[172] Frederick Douglass, *Heroic Slave,* in *Autographs for Freedom* (Boston: John P. Jewett and Company, 1853).
[173] Genovese, *The World Slaveholders Made,* 187.
[174] Qtd. in ibid.

"Christian morality," he continues, "was not preached to free competitive society, but to slave society, where it is neither difficult nor unnatural to practice it."[175]

It is also well-known that slaveholders often quoted carefully selected passages from the Bible in defense of their system.[176] In 1856, Thornton Stringfellow of Virginia published a work called *Scriptural and Statistical Views in Favor of Slavery* where he examined the Bible in order to prove that the institution of slavery "was incorporated into the only National Constitution which ever emanated from God;" that "its legality was recognized, and its relative duties regulated, by Jesus Christ in his kingdom; and…That it is full of mercy."[177] Stringfellow, for example, pointed out that in the Book of Genesis, God bids is servant Hagar to "return and submit herself unreservedly to Sarah's authority."[178] Elsewhere the Bible says "And the angel of the Lord said unto her, Return unto thy mistress, and submit thyself under her hands."[179] Moreover, used extracts from the New Testament to argue that "all the churches are recognized as composed of masters and servants."[180] Furthermore, as far as the issue of cruelty under slavery was concerned, Stringfellow claimed that chattel labor had always "spared the prisoner's life." Instead of being killed, he argued, "the souls thus conquered and subjected to masters…in the days of Abraham, Job, and the Patriarchs, were surely brought under great obligations to the mercy of God, in allowing such men as these to purchase them, and keep them in their families." The institution was designed, he continued, "not to enlarge the number, but to ameliorate the condition of the slaves in the neighboring nations. Under the gospel, it has brought within the range of gospel influence, millions of Ham's descendants among ourselves, who but for this institution, would have sunk down to eternal ruin."[181] In the slavery system of the Old South, he argued, "their condition, as a class, is now better than that of any other equal number of laborers on earth, and is daily improving."[182] Similarly, John C. Calhoun argued in 1837 that "Never before has the black race of Central Africa, from the dawn of history to the

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[175] Ibid.
[176] Stampp, 159.
[177] Thornton Stringfellow, *Scriptural and Statistical Views in Favor of Slavery* (Richmond, VA, 1856), 6-7.
[178] Ibid., 14.
[179] Qtd. in Stringfellow, 14.
[180] Ibid., 54.
[181] Ibid., 55.
[182] Ibid., 56.

present day, attained a condition so civilized and so improved, not only physically, but morally and intellectually" but in the slavery in the Old South.[183]

Furthermore, even though every system of slavery rested "on the idea of a slave as *instrumentum vocale*—a chattel, a possession, a thing, a mere extension of his master's will," the Old Southern system was significantly influenced by "the subtle moral pressure of an ascendant Christianity," encouraged by "the close living of masters and slaves," and enforced by "the closing of the African slave trade". [184] The slaveholders of the Old South created a historically unique kind of a paternalistic society, which developed into the "most powerful defense against the dehumanization implicit in slavery."[185] Genovese observed that "When necessary to repel abolitionist attacks, the West Indian planters affected a paternalistic stance and spoke of their role as civilizers of the lower races and guardians of the lower classes."[186] Similarly, Southern slaveholders forged a myth that slavery in the Old South is a system where "Negroes and whites abided happily together in mutual understanding."[187] In his diary from 1834 to 1844, Episcopal clergyman Henry Benjamin Whipple noted that black slaves "seem a happy race of beings and if you did not know it you would never imagine that they were slaves."[188] Or, in 1858 T.R.R. Cobb, an American scholar of slave law, wrote:

> Inquiry into the physical, mental, and moral development of the negro race seems to point them clearly, as peculiarly fitted for a laborious class. The physical frame is capable of great and long-continued exertion. Their mental capacity renders them incapable of successful development, and yet adapts them for the direction of the wiser race. *Their moral character renders them happy, peaceful, contented, and cheerful in a status that would break the spirit and destroy the energies of the Caucasian or the Native American* (italics added by the author).[189]

The fact that many black slaves attempted to rebel against or to escape their "loving fathers" was explained in medical terms. Prominent Southern physician S. A. Cartwright claimed that runaway slaves suffered from illnesses such as "drapetomania

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[183] John C. Calhoun, *Slavery a Positive Good* (1837).
[184] Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, 4.
[185] Ibid., 5, 7.
[186] Genovese, *The World the Slaveholders Made*, 30.
[187] Stampp, 322.
[188] Joseph Boskin, "Ladies and Gentlemen: Your Attention, Please! Would you Welcome The First American Entertainer Sambo!!" in *Sambo: The rise and demise of an American jester* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 42.
[189]Qtd. in Crawford, 171-2.

or "dysesthesia."[190] This discursive formulation further naturalized slavery as a condition of happiness for blacks by categorizing the desire for freedom as an 'unnatural' medical condition.

Paternalism projected an image of plantation society as a happy family where slaveholders provided "parental lead" to their slaves as if they were their children. To cement this trope, slaveholders developed a cultural stereotype of a black slave as a "happy-go-lucky irresponsible Sambo" who is led by a "serious responsible white agent."[191] Therefore, even though the paternalist society of the Old South eventually implicitly recognized the humanity of slaves, it also enhanced their perception of blacks as inferior beings who needed to be enslaved and governed by others – all the while providing counter-arguments to the abolitionists' morality criticism of the system.

In this introduction to my analysis of the antislavery discourse I pointed out the primary weaknesses of two different historical interpretations of the conflict over slavery in the United States – one that views the situation in economic terms, and another which believes in the primary role of the morality argument. I showed that the system of slavery in the United States was also well shielded against the morality arguments of "crusading" abolitionists. Therefore, a morality argument should not be seen as the primary factor motivating the political change regarding slavery in the antebellum United States.

In the following subchapters I will turn to demonstrating that in order to undermine a regime built around the relational opposition between the concepts of *white* and *black* and the idea of *slave-as-commodity*, it was necessary to challenge the initial conceptual differences between the two and to redefine "slave" as *human*. I will show that the opponents of slavery proposed competing racialist theories which significantly undermined the proslavery order by stressing the commonalities between whites and blacks and by providing a new competing "regime of truth" based on its own "scientific knowledge" of human difference. As a result, a strong new morality argument could now be formulated. More importantly, the meaning shift enabled the opponents of slavery to discuss the abolition of slavery not in terms of property rights, but in relation to the personal liberties of every U.S. citizen. I will argue that it was this shift in discourse that eventually played an important role in abolishing slavery in the United States.

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[190] Gould, 113; for more information on these "diseases," read Gould (1993: 113).
[191] Sylvia Wynter, "Sambos and Minstrels," in *Social Text,* No. 1 (Winter, 1979), 149.

3.1 The Concept of Slave-as-Human

Before the polygeny theory gained prominence in the antebellum United States, most eighteenth-century American Christian colonists were taught "a monogenesis, that all humans descended from Adam and Eve."[192] This theory upheld "the scriptural unity of all peoples in the single creation of Adam and Eve."[193] Unlike polygeny, the monogenist theory propagated the unity of mankind; that both blacks and whites did not descend from two different Adams but were born of 'the same Father'—God. This was in the colonial era when slavery was not restricted to a specific 'race' and both whites and blacks could fall into the lowest social class. However, as G. Blair Nelson pointed out, "the growing awareness of human physical diversity and of peoples inhabiting remote and geographically isolated regions played an important role in the decline of eighteenth-century notions of a universal humanity and the growing interest in human racial differences of the nineteenth-century."[194] As science began to rise in prestige during the era of the Enlightenment, 'facts' such as Morton's skull measurements "added quantitative support" to polygenists' notion of "distinct racial types" and challenged the earlier idea of a human family, thus supporting racial slavery in the United States.[195]

Nevertheless, to most educated Christians and leading scholars in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, the theory of monogeny "stood as an unquestioned fact." As showed in Chapter 3, a vital part of the morality argument was the idea that blacks were sons of the same God and "brethern" of white people, and not a distinct inferior species as the contemporary science propagated. However, given the prominence of science in the nineteenth century, it was necessary to find 'evidence' and to prove 'scientifically' that variations exist within a single human family and between separate species of different origins. Therefore, it was necessary to "[fight] science with science."[196] Monogenists of antebellum America explained the differences between 'races' primarily as a result of environmental influence, including that of social status.[197] As Benjamin Rush of Pennsylvania, a "Founding Father" of the United States, maintained in 1773: "Human

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[192] G. Blair Nelson, "19th Century Americans on Preadamist Polygenism," in *Nature and Scripture in the Abrahamic Religions: God, Scripture and the Rise of modern science,* ed. Jitse M. van der Meer and Scott Mandelbrote (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 148.
[193] Gould, 90; here we may observe that the unity of all people is discussed in relation to Christian belief of 'the scriptural unity'.
[194] Nelson, 149.
[195] Ibid.
[196] Ibid.
[197] Gould, 91.

Nature is the same in all Ages and Countries; and all the difference we perceive in its Characters in respect to Virtue and Vice, Knowledge and Ignorance, may be accounted for from Climate, Country, Degrees of Civilization, form of Government, or other accidental causes."[198] Prominent American proponent of the monogenist theory Samuel Stanhope Smith, Professor of Natural Theology at the College of New Jersey, published in 1787 and again in 1810 his *Essay on the Causes of the Variety of Complexion and Figure in the Human Species*. In this piece Smith embraced what is called "climatic determinism." In other words, Smith believed that both climatic factors and social conditions could explain variation within humankind.[199] For example, he argued that "if the Anglo-American, and the indian [sic] were placed from infancy in the same state of society, in this climate which is common to them both, the principal difference which now subsist between the two races, would in a great measure, be removed when they should arrive at the period of puberty."[200] He also believed that if blacks lived in "a climate more suited to Caucasian temperaments, [they] would soon turn white."[201]

These statements about physiology signaled a significant change in the perception and understanding of blacks, and consequently slaves. The belief that humankind was able to change in a new climate was a strong counter-argument to the polygeny theory of 'fixed' racial variation. The proponents of monogenism were accordingly called "soft liners", which reflected their attitudes towards the nature of Africans' origin and status in society. They maintained that black inferiority was not rooted in biology. Originating from the same source, blacks and whites had similar human predispositions and capabilities. As a result, monogenists drew "soft" lines between the two races. Blacks were no longer seen as an ultimate Other. It was believed that when given proper education and good standards of living, blacks could "rise" both in intellectual and cultural terms and become "civilized" members of American society.[202]

These theoretical assumptions were in turn supported by slaves themselves.[203] Former slaves, intellectuals and artists such as Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs challenged

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[198] Qtd. in Jordan, *White over Black*, 287.

[199] David N. Livingstone, *Adam's Ancestors: Race, Religion, and the Politics of Human Origins* (Baltimore: the Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 74-5.

[200] Ibid., 75-6.

[201] Gould, 91.

[202] However, some monogenists did argue that some races are more suitable for cultural and mental cultivation than others. For example, an influential scientist of the nineteenth Alexander von Humboldt believed Arabs better than Negroes in their ability for mental cultivation (Stephen J. Gould, 89-90).

[203] For more information on black rhetoric and empowerment, the author recommends, for example, Jacqueline Bacon, *The Humblest May Stand Forth* (Columbia : University of South Carolina Press, 2002) or John Stauffer, *The Black Hearts of Men* (Cambridge : Harvard University Press, 2002).

the idea that blacks, or slaves, are intellectually inferior. For example, when their works were written they often included the phrase "written by himself" or "written by herself," which was a means by which black writers of the nineteenth century claimed authorship of their works.[204] Those works were evidence for the monogenist theory. Blacks themselves demonstrated that they were far more than sambos content with slavery; they were also more than just personal chattel. They were human beings fully capable of intellectual and cultivated thinking when given opportunities for it. Most importantly, they also pointed out that they were human beings who strove to live 'the American dream'—to be free from oppression.[205]

In this chapter I analyzed the 'scientific' foundation of the antislavery regime. I showed that the perception of blacks as the ultimate Other, which formed the sound basis of the proslavery discourse, was significantly undermined by late eighteenth and early nineteenth proponents of monogenism who embraced science as a means to defend eighteenth century notions of a universal humanity. These early evolution theories, which gained greater prominence after Charles Darwin's publication of *On the Origin of Species* in 1859, violated the idea of blacks as 'beasts', an idea that significantly helped the process of commodification of black slaves. The rigid structural boundaries that maintained the proslavery order were in essence broken by the discursive deconstruction of blacks as the ultimate Other. While the proslavery order maintained a clear distinction between civilized 'us', who were free, and the savage 'them', whom they enslaved, the emphasis on the common origin of both the African and Caucasian 'race' by abolitionists enabled black slaves to be seen as the part of 'us' – of U.S. society. As such, they should be also treated alike with "brotherly love."[206] Accordingly, the antislavery discourse did not see slaves as enemies on the inside, as they had been originally defined, but they were the "unhappy brethren" of white Americans.[207]

In the next chapter I will demonstrate that once the polygeny foundation of racial slavery was shattered, nineteenth century Southern intellectuals began to embrace new theories which aimed at justifying the system of slavery in the South by transcending race. However, these theories only strengthened the resentment of Northern white society. Once

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[204] Title page of *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* (Boston: Published at the Anti-Slavery Office, 1845); Title page of *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, ed. L. Maria Child (Boston: Published for the Author, 1861).

[205] The author will discuss this further in Chapter 3.2 and Chapter 3.3 in relation to Frederick Douglass and his novella *The Heroic Slave.*

[206] See, for example, Representative Barnard's arguments during the Congressional debates in 1828 (Chapter 3.2).

[207] Crawford, 175.

black slaves were seen as more *human* than *property*, opponents of slavery gained a powerful weapon, since they were now able to link the issue to that of national unity and notions of *Americanness* – something that had previously been impossible.[208]

3.2 "Unalienable Rights"

Declarations of humans' capacity for reason, freedom, and love in the United States date back to the 18th century. In 1776, Thomas Paine wrote a political pamphlet in support of the American Revolution:

> O ye that love mankind! Ye that dare oppose, not only the tyranny, but the tyrant, stand forth!…we have every opportunity and every encouragement before us, to form the noblest purest constitution of the face of the earth. We have it in our power to begin the world over again…The birthday of a new world is at hand, and a race of men, perhaps as numerous as all Europe contains, are to receive their portion of freedom form the event of a few months.[209]

In the same year, the "Founding Fathers" of the United States signed the *Declaration of Independence* as a statement claiming their sovereignty from British "tyranny." Their document proclaimed that "[w]e hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."[210] Rooted in Enlightenment ideas, these principles wielded significant power due to their normative character. In order to understand this, it is essential to keep in mind that unlike the nations of the Old World, which had been developing national identities for centuries, tied more or less to a single territory, sharing common culture and ethnicity, "the American, this new man," as Hector de Crevecoeur observed, was neither "an European or the descendant of an European; hence the strange mixture of blood, which you will find in no other country."[211] Consequently, "Almost everyone thought that there should be *some* sort of national union;" and therefore, it was of utmost necessity for the new republic to find the inner logic—*the raison d´etre*.[212]

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[208] See Chapter 2.3.
[209] Thomas Paine, *Common Sense* (1776), The Project Gutenberg e-book.
[210] *U.S. Declaration of Independence*.
[211] J. Hector St. John de Crevecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer and Sketches of Eighteenth-Century America* (New York: Penguin Classics, 1981), Google e-book, 50.
[212] Jordan, *White over Black*, 332.

Crevecoeur's new "Americans" did not share a common history, ethnicity or culture. Therefore, it was necessary to define their national character in the kind of abstract terms with which everyone could identify. Hence "to be or to become an American," as Philip Gleason observed, "a person did not have to be of any particular national, linguistic religious or ethnic background, all he had to do was to commit himself to the political ideology centered on the abstract ideals of liberty, equality, and republicanism."[213] To be an American meant sharing the notion that "the United States is peopled by the offspring of brave, idealistic and liberty-loving minorities, who revolted against injustice, bigotry and medievalism at home."[214]

I agree with some scholars that the general idea of natural human rights and human progress provided compelling arguments for abolition otherwise not found in religion or constitutional law; as such, they helped abolitionists achieve their goal.[215] In Chapter 2.3 I discussed the major weaknesses of the abolitionist arguments which appealed to constitutional law prior to the meaning shift, when slavery was often discussed in terms of property rights, and in Chapter 3 I pointed out how proponents of slavery used the Bible to defend the institution against arguments that slavery was un-Christian and thus immoral. Already at that time it was anticipated that a truly strong, new antislavery argument would eventually be formulated.[216] Nevertheless, I find it problematic to argue that these ideas inspired abolitionists to make arguments which "[compelled] large numbers of people to alter their views," particularly "the idea of individual rights, freedom from various kinds of interference…[that] couldn't be taken away legitimately by anyone—including a king, a judge or a legislature."[217] Such interpretation would imply that proslavery Southerners never believed in ideas such as individual rights and freedom, and that in order to achieve the abolition of slavery, it was necessary to persuade them to change their views regarding natural rights. Arguments about natural human rights could not "alter" Southern views because those principles were already inherent part of their own national identity. Scholars such as Powell neglect to address the fact that the principle of natural human rights was used by slaveholders as well, particularly the right to property as proposed by John Locke,

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[213] Philip Gleason, "American Identity and Americanization," in *Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), 32.

[214] H. L. Mencken, *On Being an American* (Vintage Books: New York, 1982), 14.

[215] Jim Powell, "Ideas that Inspired the Abolitionists," in *Greatest Emancipations: How the West Abolished Slavery* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 32, 39; cf. David B. Davis, *Slavery and the Human Progress*.

[216] Also in Powell, 24.

[217] Ibid.

which was a powerful discursive strategy as it muffled early attempts at abolishing slavery. This was demonstrated in Chapter 2.3. To be fair, Powell acknowledged the fact that John Locke, who inspired the "Founding Fathers" with his theories of natural liberties, was personally involved in slavery and even helped draft the "Fundamental Constitutions of the Government of Carolina" of 1669, which said that "Every freeman of Carolina shall have absolute power and authority over his negro slaves, of what opinion or religion soever."[218] Yet Powell failed to address such seeming contradictions. Scholars who struggled with such "embarrassing" facts about John Locke often perceived them as some "unfortunate but minor lapse in the public conduct."[219]

As was demonstrated in Chapters 2.2 and 2.3, the proslavery discourse excluded slaves from the wider discourse on natural human rights by designating blacks as a separate species who were by nature inferior to the rest of U.S. Americans, a belief which helped the process of defining black slaves as *property*. Hence, prior to the meaning shift of the word "slave", words such as "we" and "men" in the *Declaration of Independence* did not necessarily encompass *all men* as a result of polygenists' reasoning, because "As a different form of life, blacks need not to participate in the equality of men."[220] Therefore, in the proslavery discourse, slavery and the ideals of natural rights and liberties could exist side by side without being seen as contradictory In his *Notes on the State of Virginia*, Jefferson expressed his opinion that "[t]his unfortunate difference of color, and perhaps of faculty, is a powerful obstacle to the emancipation of these people." Moreover, he argued that "it is not their condition …but nature which has produced this distinction" which excluded blacks from equality with white men.[221] While he was ambiguous about Africans' human faculties, the future president nevertheless naturalized their socio-economic condition based on their skin color. Jefferson "most certainly was not thinking of black men and women when he wrote the *Declaration of Independence*."[222]

Despite his views on equality of between various human races, Jefferson made an important comment on slavery in general which was to become one of the most powerful themes in Abraham Lincoln's rhetoric on the abolition of slavery: "can the liberties of a nation be thought secure when we have removed their only firm basis, a

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[218] Ibid., 25-6.
[219] For more information on John Locke's controversy, consult Wayne Glausser, "Three Approaches to Locke and the Slave Trade," in *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 51, No. 2 (April-June, 1990).
[220] Gould, 91.
[221] Thomas Jefferson, "Laws," in *Notes on the State of Virginia*, ed. J. W. Randolph (1853), 154-55.
[222] Introduction to *Lincoln on Race and Slavery*, xxiii.

conviction in the minds of the people that these liberties care of the gift of God? That they are not to be violated but with his wrath?"[223]

By asserting the humanity of slaves, the antislavery discourse attached the issue of slavery to a general discourse of human liberties. In 1700, Samuel Sewall, a Boston judge, wrote that "[f]oreasmuch as Liberty is in real valued next unto Life: None ought to part with it themselves, or deprive others of it… It is most certain that all Men, as they are the Sons of Adam, are Coheirs; and have equal right unto liberty, and all other outward Comforts of Life. GOD…hath made of One Blood, all Nations of Men, for to dwell on all the face of the Earth."[224] Almost a century later, in 1849 Alexander von Humboldt argued in line with the monogenist theory that "Whilst we maintain the unity of the human species, we at the same time repel the depressing assumption of superior and inferior races of men. There are nations more susceptible of cultivation than others – but none in themselves nobler than others." And more importantly, "All are in like degree designed for freedom."[225]

Ultimately, Thomas Jefferson "derived God-given rights from the existence of the class of natural beings known as men. To know whether certain men possessed natural rights one had only to inquire whether they were human beings." Being a slaveholder himself, "He felt the personal guilt of slaveholding deeply, for he was daily depriving other men of their rightful liberty."[226]

That the antislavery discourse was growing in influence could be observed in the observations of U.S. Americans that they were seen as hypocrites both at home and abroad.[227] In the years after the American Revolution, George Bancroft said: "Our country is bound to allure the world to freedom by the beauty of its example."[228] But, while in the Revolutionary Era the United States was seen in most of the world as a "symbol of republican self-government and personal freedom," the persistence of chattel slavery on the territory of a supposedly model republic continued to taint its reputation and ideals.[229] For example, in 1777, on his travels through Maryland,

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[223] Jefferson, "Manners," in *Notes on the State of Virginia*, 174.
[224] Samuel Sewall, *The Selling of Joseph: A Memorial* (1700), American Studies Commons e-book, 1.
[225] Gould, 90.
[226] Jordan, *White over Black*, 431; more on Thomas Jefferson in Chapter 3.4; as is evident, some slaveholders in fact did not agree with the system, some even freed their slaves (read for example Harriet Jacobs' narrative). Nevertheless, slavery was deeply embedded in the structures.
[227] Transatlantic dynamics and the circulation of ideas on human rights in relation to slavery between the continents prior to the Civil War are suggested for further research.
[228] Van Humboldt cited by Fehrenbacher, 89.
[229] Fehrenbacher, 89.

Ebenezer Hazard of Pennsylvania was astonished that "men who feel the value and importance of liberty… should keep such numbers of the human species in a state of so absolute vassalage."[230] More importantly, the image of the United States as a rebel against British oppression and a protector of freedom deteriorated not only at home but also internationally. As we learn from Don E. Fehrenbacher, by the middle of the nineteenth century, "that old enemy Britain, the very epitome of oppression in American Revolutionary rhetoric, had assumed the role of an international champion of human freedom."[231]

Slavery and the American slave trade were put in juxtaposition with the image of a model republic. It was stressed that this institution of bondage was inconsistent with the nation's founding principles, and, as such, it was considered fundamentally non-U.S. American. In 1852, less than ten years before the Civil War, Frederick Douglass published a novella in *Autographs for Freedom* for the Rochester Ladies' Anti-Slavery Society. Titled *The Heroic Slave, a Thrilling narrative of the Adventures of Madison Washington, in Pursuit of Liberty*, the novella aimed to point out the U.S. double-standards and hypocrisy involved in maintaining slavery. It was inspired by a slave ship revolt on an American ship from 1841 led by Madison Washington. The story is narrated by Mr. Listwell, a white abolitionist, who is sheltering Madison Washington, a fugitive slave, later to be captured and sold on the market. After being put on a slave ship, Madison Washington instigates an uprising against the sailors. When confronted by one of the sailors and accused of being a "black murderer", Washington replies:

> Sir… your life is in my hands. I could have killed you a dozen times over during this last half hour, and could kill you now. You call me a *black murderer*. I am not a murderer. God is my witness that LIBERTY, not *malice*, is the motive for this night's work. I have done no more to those dead men yonder, than they would have done to me in like circumstances. We have struck for our freedom and if a true man's heart be in you, you will honor us for the deed. We have done that which you applaud your fathers for doing, and if we are murderers, *so were they.*[232]

In this short excerpt, the analogy between a slave striving for liberty and a white colonist fighting against British rule is more than evident. In the novella as in Europe, the United States is depicted as an eagle talons of which are reaching for black slaves to

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[230] George Bancroft cited by Fehrenbacher, 16.
[231] Fehrenbacher, 91; more on this topic in relation to Lincoln will be discussed in Chapter 3.3.
[232] Frederick Douglass, *The Heroic Slave* (1853), 235-36.

make them his prey. Britain on the other hand, is represented as a lion protecting the slave with his mighty paw. Canada, the home of many fugitive slaves, was seen as a land of liberty.[233] Furthermore, Madison Washington, the *heroic slave* of the title, is an unquestionable allusion to George Washington. He is portrayed as follows:

> a man who loved liberty as well as did Patrick Henry, -- who deserved it as much as Thomas Jefferson, -- and who fought for it with a valor as high, an arm as strong… as he who led all the armies of the American colonies through the great war for freedom and independence.[234]

This man, this George Washington with black skin, "lives now only no higher place in the records than is held by a horse or an ox, living in the chattel records of his native State."[235] The simile is created not only by his physical appearance but also by his character. The novella clearly pointed out the existing double standards, which it aimed to deconstruct through its likening of a slave revolt to the American War of Independence. If George Washington had remained enslaved, what would have happened to the new republic? Similarly, after the Civil War in 1881, Douglass delivered a speech at the anniversary of John Brown's 1859 raid on Harper's Ferry. Led by abolitionist Brown, a relatively small number of men aimed to instigate a mass uprising of slaves by taking over the arsenal in the town and arming blacks in the region. As in the novella, here Douglass admitted that "viewed on the surface apart and alone,…the John Brown raid takes rank with the most cold-blooded and dastardly outrages ever committed upon a peaceable community."[236] But the raid "does not stand alone… It demands judgment in the light of its moral character and surroundings... It was not a mere… passionate outburst of human nature… It was planted with the first cargo of slaves... If we look back…we shall find that not Colonel Anderson, but John Brown, began the war that ended American slavery, and made this a free Republic."[237]

In this chapter I showed how the meaning shift of the word "slave" in the nineteenth century facilitated the linking of the issue of slavery to a contemporary equivalent of the discourse of human rights. This linkage is indeed reflected in modern American English definition of the word as "a human being…divested of freedom and

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[233] Ibid., 205.
[234] Ibid., 175.
[235] Ibid., 175.
[236] Frederick Douglass, "A Lecture on John Brown" (Harper's Ferry, 1881).
[237] Ibid.

personal rights."[238] The antislavery discourse made it "perfectly clear that the principles for which Americans had fought in the War for Independence required the complete abolition of slavery" in the Union.[239] Once black slaves were conceptualized in the antislavery discourse as *human,* it was becoming more and more evident that "[e]very argument which can be urged in favor of our own liberties will certainly operate with equal force in favor of that of the Negroes"[240] and vice versa. Jefferson, for example, argued that "[s]lavery was an injustice not so much for the specific Negroes held in bondage as for any member of the human species."[241] Thus although many on both sides of the argument about slavery more or less agreed on the inferior status of blacks, "race" and slavery were often discussed as two separate issues. This will be also seen in Abraham Lincoln's speeches.

In the next chapter I will analyze President Lincoln's speeches in order to demonstrate that the Civil War's president tied the issue of slavery first and foremost to the universality of personal liberties and the future of the Union and its revolutionary ideals, rather than to morality or racial equality. Even though blacks remained to be seen as inferior, the idea of universal humanity and the potential of this 'race' - as reflected in the new meaning of "slave" as *slave-as-human* - enabled abolitionists to tie the issue of slavery to a general discourse of personal liberties and *Americanness* in a way that no longer permitted proponents of slavery to define attempts to abolish slavery as a threat to 'national unity'. The abolition of slavery thus became a U.S. national interest.

3.3 The Discourse to Save the Union

This chapter is devoted to the analysis and discussion of Abraham Lincoln's letters and speeches on race and slavery, the majority of which was collected and published in a single volume *Lincoln on Race and Slavery* in 2009.[242] My aim is to analyze the themes pervading Lincoln's rhetoric on slavery and to discuss the role of the meaning shift of the word "slave" in presenting the abolition of slavery as inevitable in U.S politics.

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[238] This definition was provided in Chapter 1.
[239] Jordan, *White over Black,* 342.
[240] Qtd. in Fehrenbacher, 16.
[241] Jordan, *White over Black*, 431-2.
[242] Abraham Lincoln, *Lincoln on Race and Slavery*, ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2009).

Lincoln belonged among the political moderates, people who were opposed to sudden and extreme changes in politics. As far as slavery in the United States was concerned, he opposed extremism on both sides of the argument. In his notes for an 1855 speech on the Colonization program, Lincoln maintained that while radical abolitionists "would shiver into fragments the Union of these States; tear to tatters its now venerated constitution; and even burn the last copy of the Bible, rather than slavery should continue a single hour," proslavery Southerners were "the opposite extreme…a few, but an increasing number of men, who, for the sake of perpetuating slavery, are beginning to assail and ridicule the white-man's charter of freedom—the declaration that "all men are crated free and equal."[243] Moreover, Lincoln preferred not be associated with abolitionists in general.[244] Nevertheless, even Lincoln, who once believed that the inherited system of slavery would naturally die out on the U.S. territory, changed his position regarding the necessity of abolition of slavery after "the explosive" debates on the future of slavery in the new territories challenged the 1820 Missouri Compromise.[245]

As discussed in the previous chapters, particularly in Chapter 3.2, as a result of the different conceptualization of "Negro" and consequently that of "slave," the issue of slavery was eventually linked to a general discourse of natural human liberties. As a result, slavery was no longer a matter of "the colored race" but concerned any human being regardless of his or her skin color. Moreover, it became linked to the entire nation and to the very founding principles of the United States. In a speech in 1854, Lincoln said:

> Most governments have been based practically, on the denial of equal rights of men, as I have, in part, stated them; ours began, by affirming those rights. They said some men are too ignorant, and vicious to share in government… We proposed to give all a chance; and we expected the weak to grow stronger, the ignorant, wiser; and all better, and happier together…We made the experiment; and the fruit is before us.[246]

However, on October 16, 1854, Lincoln made a speech at Peoria, Illinois, where he expressed his fear concerning the future of "the experiment":

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[243] Lincoln, "Eulogy on Clay and Outline for Speech to the Colonization Society," in *Lincoln on Race and Slavery*, 37.
[244] *Lincoln on Race and Slavery,* 69.
[245] Ibid., 1.
[246] Lincoln, "Fragments on Slavery," in *Lincoln on Race and Slavery*, 49; original italics maintained.

> Fellow countrymen—Americans south, as well as north, shall we make no effort to arrest this? Already the liberal party throughout the world, express the apprehension 'that the one retrograde institution in America is undermining the principles of progress, and fatally violating the noblest political system the world ever saw.' This is not the taunt of enemies, but the warning of friends… Is there no danger to liberty itself…In our greedy chase to make profit of the negro, let us beware, lest we 'cancel and tear to pieces' even the white man's charter of freedom.[247]

In this particular excerpt, Lincoln clearly referred to the image of the United States as "a city upon a hill" which is at risk of being destroyed. The model republic founded on the principles of enlightenment and progress, the example for all nations across the world, had been undermined by the institution of slavery. In yet another speech from the same year, Lincoln developed his argument further:

> If A. can prove, however conclusively, that he may, of right, enslave B.—why may not B. snatch the same argument, and prove equally, that he may enslave A?—You say A. is white, and B. is black. It is *color*, then; the lighter having the right to enslave the darker? Take care. By this rule, you are to be slave to the first man you meet, with a fairer skin than your own…You do not mean *color* exactly?—You mean the whites are *intellectually* the superiors of the blacks, and, therefore, have the right to enslave them? Take care again. By this rule, you are to be slave to the first man you meet, with an intellect superior to your own.—But, say you, it is a question of *interest*; and, if you can make it your *interest* you have the right to enslave another. Very well. And if he can make it his interest, he has the right to enslave you.[248]

These excerpts, especially the latter one from Peoria, clearly show the major theme of Lincoln's rhetoric on slavery—if Americans tolerate slavery in the Union, how can they be sure that "white" freeman will not be enslaved soon as well?

This analysis reveals that it was the idea of a free individual rather than the welfare of "the colored race" that dominated Lincoln's speeches and writings. As he also stated publicly: "Let it not be said I am contending for the establishment of political and social equality between the whites and blacks. I have already said the contrary."[249] In a 1862 letter to Horace Greeley, Lincoln clearly stated his priorities in politics:

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[247] Lincoln, "Speech at Peoria, Illinois," in *Lincoln on Race and Slavery*, 68.
[248] Ibid., 50; original italics maintained.
[249] Ibid.

> If I could save the Union without freeing any slave I would do it,
> and if I could save it by freeing all the slaves I would do it…
> What I do about slavery and the colored race, I do because I
> believe it helps to save the Union; and… I shall try to correct
> errors when shown to be errors and I shall adopt new views so
> fast as they shall appear to be true views.[250]

Frederick Douglass observed that "[in comparison to] the long line of his predecessors,
many of whom were merely the facile and servile instruments of the slave power,
Abraham Lincoln was unsurpassed in his devotion to the welfare of the white race." [251]
But in spite of his primary motivations, Lincoln "was also in a sense hitherto without
example emphatically, the black man's President: the first to show any respect for their
rights as men."[252] In St. Louis in 1876, Douglass told a crowd that "you and yours were
the objects of his deepest affection and his most earnest solicitude. You are the children
of Abraham Lincoln. We are at best only his stepchildren; children by adoption,
children by forces of circumstances and necessity… for to you he was a great and
glorious friend and benefactor."[253]

In Chapter 3.1 I already indicated that in order to strengthen the defense of their
institution of bondage in the nineteenth century, when the opponents of slavery were
using science in order to defend the idea of monogenism and universal humanity,
proslavery Southerners eventually developed theories of slavery which transcended
race. Those theories propounded what Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene D.
Genovese called Slavery in the Abstract doctrine. Fox-Genovese and Genovese, in an
excellent study of those theories, note that this doctrine refers to "a social system
abstracted from race and best for whites as well as blacks."[254] Among the most
prominent proponents of such theory were influential Southern intellectuals George
Fitzhugh, George Holmes and Thomas Roderick Dew.[255] As Fox-Genovese and
Genovese pointed out, they all shared the conviction that "free society had failed; the
laboring classes needed to be subjected to personal servitude; and corporatism, not

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[250] Abraham Lincoln, "Letter to Horace Greeley," August 22, 1862.
[251] Qtd. In *Lincoln on Race and Slavery*, xviii.
[252] Ibid.
[253] Frederick Douglass, "Oration in Memory of Abraham Lincoln," in *Inaugural Ceremonies of the Freedmen's Memorial Monument to Abraham Lincoln, Washington City, April 14, 1876* (St. Louis, 1876), accessed online August 30, 2014, https://www.lib.rochester.edu/index.cfm?PAGE=4402.
[254] Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene D. Genovese, *Slavery in White and Black* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 1.
[255] One of George Fitzhugh's theories was mentioned in Chapter 3 in relation to Christian arguments in favor of slavery.

individualism, was the lesson of the past and the way of the future." More importantly, "they projected a new world order based on the subjugation of labor to individual masters."[256] This corporatist doctrine foreshadows the later debates about the "freedom" or "slavery" of wage labor, and the bitter and bloody conflicts between U.S. organized labor and management.

Lincoln, however, rather echoed the principles of natural human rights when he said: "What I do say is, that no man is good enough to govern another man, *without that other's consent*. I say this is the leading principle—the sheet anchor of American republicanism.[257] In his Peoria speech he also wondered how "Near eighty years ago we began by declaring that all men are created equal; but now from that beginning we have run down to the other declaration, that for SOME men to enslave OTHERS is a 'sacred right of self-government.'"[258] Furthermore, in 1855 he wrote to George Robertson: "When we were the political slaves of King George, and wanted to be free, we called the maxim that 'all men are created equal' a self-evident truth; but now when we have grown fat, and have lost all dread of being slaves ourselves, we have become so greedy to be masters that we call the same maxim 'a self-evident lie[.]'… Our political problem now is 'Can we, as a nation, continue together permanently—forever—half slave, and half free?'"[259]

His image of a nation "half slave, and half free" indicated the severe division within the Union, which had originally been intended to be unified by adherence to certain common principles as declared at the moment of its foundation. Debates on slavery in fact accentuated differences between North and South. As noted by Jennifer Rae Greeson, "northern writers consistently employed...[a] "we"/"they" dichotomy in describing southerners. Because the southern states supposedly embodied the backwardness and crudity that the more civilized northern states rejected out of hand, they actually seemed to represent a threat to national progress, integrity, and resolve."[260]

The meaning shift, which is the subject of this thesis, in fact managed to include blacks in the definition of "we" as the people of the United States who adhere to the principles of the *Declaration of Independence*. The meaning shift weakened the traditional dichotomy between "whites" and "blacks", "freemen" and "slaves", and

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[256] Fox-Genovese and Genovese, 289.
[257] Lincoln, "Speech at Peoria, Illinois," in *Lincoln on Race and Slavery*, 62-3; original italics maintained.
[258] Ibid., 67; original emphasis maintained.
[259] Lincoln, "Letter to George Robertson," in *Lincoln on Race and Slavery,* 75-6.
[260] Cobb, 14.

instead enabled a kind of coalition building against the South, which itself became seen as the Other. Already in 1791, a correspondent to *New York Magazine* warned, "We are again assaulted—the enemy is within. The spread of these practices…will lead us gradually into habits of intemperance and therefore rob the entire nation of the honour which we formerly acquired."[261] Presenting the North as "the moral and intellectual center of the new nation" was, according to James C. Cobb, "a recurrent theme in early writing about the American character."[262] Therefore, while the North established itself as the norm for the model republic, antebellum Southern society embraced aristocratic ideas which had "pervaded slave societies and instilled in the planters the…habit of command."[263] This was seen by Northerners as "simply too tied to the past, too wedded to hierarchy, and too wary of innovation and reform to make it much of a competitor as a potential role model for the new nation."[264] Nevertheless, once blacks became a part of the "we" in U.S. national discourse, slavery and the new order proposed by proslavery Southerners were identified as an existential threat to Northern principles, and by implication to national identity as well as to the Union itself.

The analysis of President Abraham Lincoln's letters and speeches on slavery and race confirmed that the survival of the Union and its national identity as defined in wake of the Revolutionary Era was the most powerful discourse in U.S. politics. In Chapter 2.3 I showed that in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, before the meaning shift of the word "slave" ever occurred, the concept *slave-as-commodity* muffled any attempts to abolish slavery as it allowed proponents of slavery to tie the issue to national unity through their personal right to property. However, I demonstrated that the nineteenth century concept of *slave-as-human* propagated by the antislavery discourse actually enabled abolitionists to present slavery as *the threat* to the very principles that were to be defended against disunion. It was the symbolic linkage between the antislavery and the natural human rights discourses via the meaning shift of the word "slave" that made the existence of the slavery order unacceptable if the model republic of the United States was to be preserved.

Even though the Northern emancipation of slaves had not led to true racial equality but was soon followed by the adoption of policies designed to maintain hierarchy and separation until the 1960s, the Emancipation Proclamation and the

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[261] Ibid.
[262] Ibid., 15-16.
[263] Genovese, *The World Slaveholders Made*, 6.
[264] Cobb, 20.

Thirteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution officially de-objectified slaves by assigning them humanity and the right to freedom thus obtained: "And by virtue of the power, and for the purpose aforesaid, I [Abraham Lincoln] do order and declare that all persons held as slaves within said designated States, and parts of States, are, and henceforward shall be free."[265]

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[265] Drescher, 300; Lincoln, "Emancipation Proclamation," in *Lincoln on Race and Slavery*, 268-69.

Conclusion

The abolition of slavery in the United States did not happen in a vacuum. It was a continuation of a movement driven by the idea of human progress which had originated across the Atlantic. This argument was made by distinguished historian and expert on slavery as well as American and intellectual history, Dr. David B. Davis. He defined the idea of progress as "a kind of rationalized faith or orientation…[which] rests on certain beliefs about the past and future."[266] It is "the belief that a particular course of change leads toward that which is better and desirable…[while] the standards for judging what is 'better' or 'desirable' are necessarily above or outside history."[267] The origins and truth value of this idea are still much debated and to do so here is beyond the scope of this thesis.[268] Suffice it to say that, as Davis observed, after the Enlightenment, as "the result of economic and political forces," as well as "changing conceptions of human progress," by the early nineteenth century antislavery "had become intermeshed with Europe's and especially England's ideas of material progress and commercial expansion…Slavery, in short, was the very antithesis of what the nineteenth century celebrated as modern civilization."[269]

My analysis of the U.S. antebellum discourse about human bondage also showed that the idea of progress was deeply influential within U.S. society, and gradually became intertwined with the idea of the nation's destiny, and eventually with the abolition of slavery on its territory. This, in fact, supports Davis's argument and corroborates a Transatlantic circulation of ideas and communication between antislavery forces in a number of societies.[270] But the aim of my thesis was not to identify the sources of these ideas, since such additional research would be too extensive for my purpose. Instead, I narrowed the scope and focused on the U.S. proslavery and antislavery discourses in isolation in order to identify what kinds of

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[266] David B. Davis, "Slavery and the Idea of Progress," in *The Bulletin of the Center for the Study of Southern Culture and Religion*, Vol. 3 No. 2 (June, 1979), 2, accessed 30 June, 2014, http://jsr.fsu.edu/issues/vol14/davis.pdf.

[267] Ibid.

[268] For more information, read Davis, "Slavery and the Idea of Progress."

[269] Ibid., 4.

[270] Since the scope of this thesis does not allow me to analyze Transatlantic ideas, I recommend this subject for further analysis. There exists, for example, a study of the Transatlantic circulation and reception of Harriet Beecher Stowe's antislavery novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), which shows the exchange of ideas between the continents through the example of the novel. For more information, read Denise Kohn, Sarah Meer, Emily B. Todd, eds., *Transatlantic Stowe: Harriet Beecher Stowe and European Culture* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2006). Also see Alan J. Rice & Martin Crawford, eds., *Liberating Sojourn: Frederick Douglass & Transatlantic Reform* (Athens, Ga.; London: University of Georgia Press, 1999).

ideas related to the concept of slavery circulated within the United States as a nation, and how they were employed and by whom, regardless of their origins.

As history reveals, there were "certain catches…to the general view of growing enlightenment, optimism, and humanitarianism [such as the fact that] some 60% of all the African slaves shipped to the New World were transported during the century from 1721 to 1820, and the peak years of the slave trade coincided with the high Enlightenment."[271] I discussed these seeming 'contradictions' in Chapter 3.2 through the example of John Locke as someone who at one and the same time glorified the progressive idea of a society free of bondage while supporting black slavery in the colonies. Throughout the history, people tended to exclude "certain groups and regions from the benefits of progress" on the assumption that the enslavement of these 'inferior' groups was a "necessary stage of evolution."[272] Such violation of the universality of progressive principles resulted in undue human suffering as it justified systemic cruelty towards millions of humans. As I demonstrated in my thesis, those who denied blacks the benefits of human progress in the antebellum U.S. South struggled to convince the rest of the Western world that their system of slavery and the "nineteenth century vision of moral improvement and ordered historical progress" could or should exist side by side.[273]

The conflict over the institution of U.S. slavery was certainly not decided by the discursive struggle I examined, but eventually by the industrial and military might of the North in the Civil War. However, what triggered the war and thus played a significant role in the abolition of slavery in the United States was the very discursive struggle that this thesis aimed to analyze – a battle waged over the meaning of the word "slave", and eventually over *Americanness* and the universality of progressive principles, particularly the "unalienable rights" to be free from bondage.

As a framework for analysis, I used discourse analysis. *Discourse* is "a particular way of talking about and understanding the world."[274] What is more, it has the ability to make some forms of action possible and legitimate, while delegitimizing or excluding others. In this thesis I embraced the constructivist view that "our ways of talking do not neutrally reflect our world, identities and social relations but, rather, play an active role

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[271] Davis, "Slavery and the Idea of Progress," 5; see also Introduction to this thesis.
[272] Ibid.
[273] Ibid.
[274] Marianne Jørgensen and Louise Phillips, eds., "The Field of Discourse Analysis," in *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method* (London: Sage Publications, 2002), 1.

in creating and changing them."[275] One of the premises of discourse analysis is that "discourse is a form of *social action* that plays a part in *producing the social world* – including knowledge, identities and *social relations* – and thereby in maintaining specific *social patterns*."[276] Knowledge is "created through social interaction in which we construct common truths and compete about what is true and false... Different social understandings of the world lead to different social actions, and therefore the social construction of knowledge and truth has social consequences."[277] This thesis argued that the meaning shift of the word "slave" in the U.S. antebellum South reflected changing perceptions of and attitudes towards black slaves in U.S. society; and as such, it had the ability to influence the social reality of the people involved – as well as that of the general population of the United States.

As far as the concept of *slavery* was concerned, I espoused Orlando Patterson's view according to which slavery is a special power relationship of human bondage. Slaves are incorporated into slaveholding societies as "the permanent enemy on the inside," the absolute Other of their owners.[278] This was also supported by the comparison of definitions of the word "slave" in antebellum and modern American English dictionaries provided in Chapter 1. This confirmed that the idea of human bondage, where one person wields absolute power over another, is common to all definitions of the word. However, while in modern American English "slave" denotes "a human who is owned as property [and thus] divested of freedom and personal rights," the early nineteenth century definition of the word presented "slave" first and foremost as a piece of property, "a person who has no will of his own…[someone who is] more generally purchased, like horses and oxen."[279]

Each definition is a representative of a specific worldview which in the nineteenth century competed to become the norm in U.S. society. The antebellum definition clearly reflected the concept of *slave-as-commodity*, which was propagated by the proslavery discourse and dominated the South until the middle of the nineteenth century. The modern definition, on the other hand, represents the concept of *slave-as-human*. This concept was formulated within the antislavery discourse and, as I demonstrated, it reflected the modern belief in human progress without exceptions.

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[275] Ibid.
[276] Emphasis mine. Ibid., 5.
[277] Ibid.; for more information on discourse and its role in social structures, read Introduction and Chapter 2.1.
[278] See Chapter 1.
[279] See Chapter 1.

Eventually, it helped to redefine "slave" in a way which presented the institution of slavery as incompatible with the nation's progressive ideals.

The first concept I analyzed in this thesis was that of *slave-as-commodity* propagated by the U.S. antebellum proslavery discourse. In Chapters 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3, which constitute the whole of the analysis of the proslavery discourse, I demonstrated that the U.S. antebellum proslavery discourse based its knowledge about black slave upon its preconceived notions of *blackness* and eventually upon its racial theories. These theories designated the entire 'black' progeny as a separate 'inferior' species, the ultimate black Other, the 'enemy' within U.S. society, a view which presented blacks as fit for enslavement.

In Chapter 2.1 I argued that the concept of *slave-as-commodity* was tied to the psychological process of *symbolization* which had started long before Europeans knew about the existence of people with black skin. This symbolization helped assign people of dark skin qualities which characterized them inferior and eventually fit for enslavement. While *whiteness* was presented as 'desirable' and the norm in Western societies, *blackness* connoted an array of negative meanings which had influenced the way Europeans and later Euro-Americans perceived and treated those whose skin was significantly darker than theirs. Early theories on human difference were indeed formulated in rather aesthetic terms, with *whiteness* figuring as the norm against which others were measured. Europeans and Euro-Americans defined themselves in marked juxtaposition to those with darker skin color, perceiving the self as the norm against which others were defined. This generated a strong sense of otherness, which also lies at the heart of the concept of *slave* - as "the enemy" within a slaveholding society.

In the search for labor for the British American colonies and later the United States, the preconceived notions of *blackness* as the ultimate Other helped proponents of slavery eventually create a discourse which propagated the Southern two-caste system, between black slaves and free whites, based on 'natural' human differences. As I demonstrated in Chapter 2.2, in the eighteenth century the label "black" no longer denoted a person of dark skin color but also a member of a particular human 'race'. In the antebellum South, the system of slavery was justified first and foremost with racial theories. The most influential and most propagated racial theory was that of *polygeny*. It provided an 'objective' scientific explanation of human difference according to which blacks and whites did not originate from the same source. It was argued that blacks and whites originated from two different Adams, an idea which directly attacked the earlier

belief in a single creation and universal humanity. Such theories reflected the exclusionist tendency of some progressive thinkers of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Once designated as inferior 'savages' and a 'lower' race, it was believed that blacks needed not be included in the progressive discourse on human equality and personal liberties, given their innate natural qualities which deemed them unfit for modernity. It was at this point in U.S. history that "blacks" and "slaves" became interchangeable terms.

In Chapter 2.3 I argued that the above-mentioned race theories had the lion's share in the 'bestialization' of "the Negro race" which went hand in hand with the process of *commodification* of people thus designated. As the antebellum definition of the word "slave" in Chapter 1 indicated, "slave" denoted among others "the lowest state of life." Similarly to other domestic animals, black slaves were objectified in the form of goods and they figured in account books of Southern slaveholders as any other commercial item. Legally, a black slave in the antebellum South was more a thing than a person. As I pointed out, this could be also observed in the U.S. congressional debates, where the concept of *slave-as-commodity* was a powerful weapon in the discursive struggle over the institution of slavery. As my analysis of U.S. congressional debates in the first half of the nineteenth century revealed, as long as this concept was generally accepted, any attempts to free black slaves and to abolish the institution on moral grounds were more or less silenced by slaveholders' appeals to their rights to property as protected by the U.S. Constitution. To deny them these rights would undermine the very principles which held the nation together. As such, in the discourse and legal status quo, to abolish slavery in the United States was deemed unconstitutional.

At the very beginning of Chapter 3 devoted to the analysis of the U.S. antislavery discourse, I pointed out that slaveholders' appeals to the U.S. Constitution remained the strongest argument to preserve the "peculiar institution" in the antebellum period - despite the abolitionist 'crusade' against the immorality of bondage and the slaveholders. As showed in a number of examples from the nineteenth century, Southern slaveholders and proslavery intellectuals of the antebellum period often quoted selected passages from the Bible in defense of their system. Some, such as George Fitzhugh of Virginia, even argued that absolutely free society, in fact, destroys some of the Christian principles.

Furthermore, the close spatial proximity of masters and slaves encouraged a creation of a unique kind of a paternalistic society, the image of which eventually

developed into a powerful Southern defense against the abolitionists' morality arguments. Southern slaveholders forged a myth of the plantation as a family where blacks and whites lived happily side by side, the white men providing parental lead for their black slaves as to their own children. This trope was further elaborated in the cultural stereotype of the black slave as a "happy-go-lucky" irresponsible "Sambo" who needed to be guided by a more responsible white person.[280] Consequently, in spite of the often cruel treatment of black slaves and the undeniable material culture which provided ample objective evidence of their suffering, I argued that the morality arguments were not strong enough to win the discursive struggle over the abolition of slavery in the United States, as some scholars interpret it.

Instead, I suggested that it was the very redefinition of the concept of "slave" which eventually managed to include blacks in the concept of *universal humanity* and thus formulate a decisive antislavery argument against the Southern system. As science rose in prestige during the era of Enlightenment, the 'scientific' theory of *polygenism* slowly but surely became a widely accepted 'fact' throughout the antebellum period. This theory was preferred over religious belief in *monogenism*, which was seen in the era of reason as rather dubious. 'Objective' evidence such as Samuel George Morton's collection of skull skeletons in his early nineteenth century works on craniometry cemented Western 'knowledge' about human difference which had excluded blacks from universal humanity. In order to undermine this exclusionist theory of the proslavery discourse, it was necessary to challenge the validity of the widely accepted belief that black slaves were radically different from white U.S. society by providing 'scientific' proof that both races, black and white, were given birth in a single act of creation by God.

According to scientific theories formulated within the antislavery discourse, human difference could be explained primarily as a result of an environment. Being known as 'soft-liners', the scientific monogenists argued that blacks and whites were not innately different. Instead, they believed that blacks and whites originated from the very same source and shared many capabilities. A prominent proponent of such theory in the United States was Samuel Stanhope Smith, who in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century published works in which he argued for climatic determinism. According to this theory, both climatic factors and social conditions could explain

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[280] To read more about the psychological function of this cultural imagery, such as diminishing feeling of autonomy and reducing resentment among black slaves, read Genovese, *Roll Jordon Roll* (1976).

variation within the human family. Monogenist theories of the late eighteenth and nineteenth century played a crucial role in forging the concept of *slave-as-human*. They were further supported by living evidence of well-known educated fugitive slaves, such as Frederick Douglass or Harriet Jacobs, whose literary accounts of slavery were also discussed in this thesis.

That the antislavery concept of *slave-as-human* had been receiving greater recognition in the nineteenth century than the proslavery concept of *slave-as-commodity* could have been observed in proslavery's shifting from 'racial slavery' to what became known as slavery in 'abstract'. Influential nineteenth century Southern intellectuals such as George Fitzhugh believed that in an ideal system, laborers should be subjected to personal servitude *regardless* of their race. This increased the fear within 'free' states and their citizens, and eventually put at risk the very ideals of the American Revolution as embraced in the *Declaration of Independence*.

By redefining "slave" as *slave-as-human*, the antislavery discourse also managed to link the issue of slavery to a progressive discourse of unalienable rights. In Chapter 3.2 I argued that over time, the institution of slavery came to threaten the concept of *Americanness* and the nation's ideals also in discourse. It threatened the nation's belief in its exceptional destiny to become an example to others in its progress by embracing the progressive idea that "all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."[281] As a result of the influence of the slaveholding South in law and politics, this image of the United States as the champion of freedom and the defender of personal liberties became increasingly questioned both at home and abroad throughout the antebellum period.

My analysis of President Abraham Lincoln's speeches revealed that even the Civil War's president tied the issue of slavery first and foremost to the future of American Revolutionary ideals, and eventually to the fate of the very Union of the United States. As I demonstrated through an analysis of President Lincoln's 1862 letter to Horace Greeley, even though many opponents of slavery did not truly embrace the belief that blacks could ever be fully equal to whites, the discourse of *Americanness* and its legitimacy in the nineteenth century was the decisive argument which helped to define slavery as a threat not to 'national unity' but rather to the nation's progressive

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[281] *U.S. Declaration of Independence.*

ideals and thus to every free person in the United States and beyond. The recurring theme of the president's speeches on race and slavery was that of a universality of personal liberties, which he identified as the very anchor of American republicanism. Blacks were no longer seen as the ultimate Other but human beings as any other free white man in the United States. If the nation allowed the exclusion of blacks from the progressive discourse, many feared that *anyone* else could sooner or later be enslaved.[282] This would ultimately mean the end of human progress as such.

A Pyrrhic Victory?: From Antislavery Discourse to the Language of Civil Rights

In this thesis I argued that even though the meaning shift of the word "slave" did not win the Civil War, it helped trigger the war over slavery and ultimately bolster over the nation's commitment to human progress. By the end of the Civil War, in 1865 the Thirteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution legally de-objectified slaves and cemented the concept of *slave-as-human* by granting "all persons held as slaves" their freedom. Ever since, the U.S. nation has defined slaves first and foremost as "a human being" who was "divested of freedom and personal rights."[283]

Nevertheless, history shows that despite the antislavery discourse's victory over the definition of "slave" in the nineteenth century, it did not manage to defeat deep-rooted cultural stereotypes. It was not able to prevent post-antebellum racial discourse and contemporary evolution theories from reasserting the otherness of blacks and the 'natural' inequality of human races – a standpoint widely accepted in the U.S. South and elsewhere in the nation from the Reconstruction until the 1960s. While the polygenist theory of multiple Adams suffered a deadly blow in the discursive struggle between the antislavery and proslavery discourses in the antebellum United States, evidence exists that processes of *othering* have continued from the Civil War onwards throughout the Reconstruction period, up to today.[284]

Even in postbellum U.S. society, blacks most often were relegated to "the bottom rung of any objective ladder."[285] In the period following the abolition of slavery,

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[282] This was stressed on several occasions in President Lincoln's speeches. See examples provided in Chapter 3.3.
[283] See the definition from 1991 *Webster's New World Dictionary* provided in Chapter 1
[284] See for example the contemporary work on racism *The New Jim Crow* by Michelle Alexander published in 2010.
[285] Gould, 96.

the earlier dichotomy between blacks and whites was projected on an imaginary line of human evolution. Embracing the idea of linear progress as formulated by Charles Darwin in his 1859 *Origin of Species*, U.S. American anthropologist Lewis Henry Morgan argued in 1877 for three stages of human progress based on material culture: savagery, barbarism and civilization. He argued that Africa was an ethnical "chaos of savagery and barbarism."[286] Obviously, while African descendants were people who occupied the bottom of the evolutionary scale, modern U.S. society was seen as the peak of civilization and human progress.[287] Similarly, Louis Agassiz, a professor at Harvard, argued that blacks and whites possessed innate differences which prevented them from being equal. In his article "The Diversity of Origin of the Human Races" published in July 1850, he argued:

> It seems to us to be mock-philanthropy…to assume that all races have the same abilities, enjoy the same powers, and show the same natural dispositions and that in consequence of this equality they are entitled to the same position in human society. History speaks here for itself.[288]

Based on this notion of innate differences within human races, similarly to the antebellum two-caste system, Agassiz propagated a special social system based on the segregation of blacks and whites. This was to support the emerging system of segregation and Jim Crow laws in the postbellum South. As he maintained:

> We entertain not the slightest doubt that human affairs with reference to the colored races would be far more judiciously conducted if, in our intercourse with them, we were guided by a full consciousness of the real difference existing between us and them, and a desire to foster those dispositions that are eminently marked in them, rather than by treating them on terms of equality.[289]

Such views were upheld by the legal doctrine of "separate but equal," first enunciated by the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling in its 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* case, which justified segregated public facilities for blacks and whites. This system lasted until the 1954 case of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, in which the Supreme Court ruled that racial segregation violated blacks' constitutional right to equal protection under the law, to which they were entitled as U.S. citizens. This landmark decision was a significant part

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[286] Lewis Henry Morgan, *Ancient Society* (1877), 882.
[287] See for example Lévi-Strauss and his works on ethnocentrism that were also mentioned in this thesis.
[288] Louis Agassiz, "The Diversity of Origin of the Human Races" (1850), 34.
[289] Ibid., 36.

of the U.S. Civil Rights Movement discourse of the twentieth century which, similarly to the antebellum antislavery discourse, aimed to fight a discriminatory system by challenging the widely accepted norm and racial stereotypes based on a relational opposition between the concepts of *white* and *black*.

Summary

První část této práce se zaměřuje na analýzu pro-otrokářské promluvy ve Spojených státech amerických v období před občanskou válkou. Konkrétně studuje definici slova „otrok" coby komodita, která byla danou promluvou šířena do první poloviny 19. století. Tento pojem byl velmi ovlivněn apriorní představou o černosti a následně dobovými rasovými teoriemi, které z daných představ vycházely. Koncept bělosti, se kterým se západní společnost ztotožňovala, se stal normou, vůči které byl černý otrok definován. V procesu hledání pracovní síly pro britské kolonie v Americe a pozdějších Spojených státech, pojem černost napomohl obhájcům otrokářského systému v předválečném období odůvodnit existenci kastovního systému o dvou třídách: svobodných bělochů a černých otroků. Nejvlivnější teorií, která toto rozdělení společnosti podporovala, byla vědecká rasová teorie zvaná ‚polygenie', která rozlišila bělochy a černochy na dvě rasy zcela odlišného původu, což přispělo k bestializaci černé rasy v očích bílé populace. Odtud byl jen malý krok k tomu, aby byl černý otrok vnímán coby komodita spíše než lidská bytost a bylo s ním odpovídajícím způsobem jednáno. Především byl tento pojem otrok-komodita klíčovým argumentem v rukách otrokářů, jež si tímto pojmem bránili svá ústavní práva, a to především právo vlastnit majetek.

Druhá část práce se zabývá analýzou proti-otrokářské promluvy v USA, která se rozvíjela především v pozdním 18. a dále 19. století. Výchozím bodem byla studie měnící se definice pojmu otrok - komodita na otrok – lidská bytost. Jak bylo ukázáno, dobová polygenie byla zpochybněna novými vědeckými poznatky, které obhajovaly jednotu lidstva a poukazovaly na možnost kultivace schopností každého jedince v závislosti na prostředí, ať životním či společenském. Narušením ostrého rozlišení mezi černochem a bělochem se této promluvě podařilo zahrnout černé otroky do promluvy o přirozených lidských právech, především právo na svobodu, ze které byly doposud vynecháni vlivem definice otrok-komodita. Jak bylo prokázáno na analýze proslovů a dopisů prezidenta Abrahama Lincolna, tato promluva silně rezonovala v americké společnosti, která se ztotožňovala s progresivními liberálními principy a usilovala o to stát se ukázkový příklad pozitivního lidského vývoje.

Ačkoli redefinování pojmu otrok zcela jistě nevyhrálo občanskou válku, bylo to impulzem pro válku za zrušení otroctví v USA a v samé podstatě za uchování principů americké společnosti definovaných v zakládací listině - *Deklaraci nezávislosti Spojených států amerických*.

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