ABSTRACT

When observing the values which repeatedly appear in early American literature, we encounter ideas such as liberty, freedom, or the importance of the individual, but while property and ownership are often also core ideas and motivations for many Americans, their appearance is much more limited and excluded from certain contexts. However, property was always a key issue and economic profitability was always considered as foremost both on political and individual level. This can be seen all throughout American history since its beginning until the present, yet there is the curious trend of downplaying the importance of property in politically oriented text. While no one questioned its value in the past, Americans outwardly replaced property with liberty. Nevertheless, its importance cannot be hidden so easily and through careful examination it is shown as being understood as a pre-requisite of freedom and security, even as it is never the central focus of any major early American political text.

This thesis explores the concept of property in the context of early American political writing in the area between eighteenth and nineteenth century; drawing from texts such as the Declaration of Independence, The Federalist, The Anti-Federalist Papers, Common Sense and other contemporary political pamphlets and texts. I argue that the concept of property will prove to be one of the key concepts in early American political writing but that it was greatly downplayed on the formal level due to what might today be referred to as "political correctness" and which is examined by analyzing property in philosophical, political and racial context. The findings prove this hypothesis.