

David Barton and Jack Hibbs on Real Life with Jack Hibbs. Posted in early March, 2015 (<https://vimeo.com/120945391>).

Barton: So just—Let me jump in again on that because one of the blemishes is Washington owned slaves, Jefferson owned slaves, they could not have been good people. It's interesting that Washington who did own slaves and inherited slaves and Thomas Jefferson inherited most of his slaves when he was fourteen, he got almost two hundred slaves between his inheritance and his and his in-laws. Virginia law made it illegal to free your slaves.

Hibbs: Listen why yeah

Barton: They would not let you free your slaves, now there was a period of reprieve for a short time starting in 1782 and so when George Washington died he freed all of his slaves on his death, there was a loophole in the law and the legislature goes "oh my gosh we didn't see that," they changed the law, so Jefferson was not even able to free his slaves on his death.

Jefferson significantly- unable to free his slaves on his death- um and the other thing in Virginia law is if you owned a debt, if you owed a debt, you could not free any slaves because your slaves are sold to pay the debt. And so, Jefferson owed 2.5 million dollars from a bad debt he had gotten from his daddy-in-law, so by law, as he wrote- "I cannot free my slaves."

He paid them for what they did. He paid them for the work they did, he paid them for the crops they planted, he paid them for the fish they caught, he paid them he paid them as if they were employees, he's not allowed by law. He's the guy who one of the greatest writings out there he is the guy who introduced the first law in the nation to end slavery nationwide. It failed by one vote in Congress. And he wrote, "Oh that God would have touched a heart to vote differently how different we could be." And they missed it by one vote. He introduced the first anti-slavery law in the state and got shouted down by all the; he for his entire life fought to free slaves. That's why black Americans like Frederick Douglas, black Americans like Robert Russa Moton, and Booker Washington- they all heralded him as a great civil rights guy. Jefferson owned slaves how could he be—'Cause he lived in a state that would not let him by state law free his own slaves. And so today we want to impugn him for owning slaves when he didn't have any choice in the matter quite frankly. And you know it's not all that simple, it's a complicated thing, the slave code in Virginia was really screwed up. But that's the image again we use that to talk about how terrible these founding fathers were rather than saying what were the conditions like at the time.

Hibbs: Yeah it's sad what David's saying right now 'cause it's exactly what our current nation is hearing about how wicked this country is.