

## Document 4 – Historiography on Jefferson and Missouri

Source 4A: *Gordon S. Wood, Empire of Liberty: A History of the Early Republic, 1789-1815. Oxford: OUP, 2009, pp. 737-738.*

The Missouri crisis, said Jefferson, was “not a moral question, but one merely of power.” He was wrong. It was a moral question, and the passions of the sons of the Founders were neither unwise or unworthy; indeed, they had been his passions as well – the love of liberty and the desire for equality. No American had spoken more eloquently or more fully for the radical impulse of the Enlightenment than Jefferson. No one had expressed the radical meaning of the Revolution – the deposing of tyrannical kings and the raising up of common people to an unprecedented degree of equality – than Jefferson. Yet he always sensed that his “empire of liberty” had a cancer at its core that was eating away at the message of liberty and equality and threatening the very existence of the nation and its democratic self-government; but he had mistakenly come to believe that the cancer was Northern bigotry and money-making promoted by the Federalist priests and merchants [...] The Civil War was the climax of a tragedy that was preordained from the time of the Revolution. Only with the elimination of slavery could this nation that Jefferson had called “the world’s best hope” for democracy even begin to fulfil its great promise.

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Source 4B: *Peter S. Onuf. Jefferson’s Empire: The Language of American Nationhood. Charlottesville, VA: UVP, 2000, pp.112-113.*

[The] agonies Jefferson suffered over the efforts to block the admission of the new state of Missouri reflected tensions in his conception of the Americans’ new republican empire. These tensions grew out of his understanding of, and commitment to, the principle of equality, the foundational principle of his “empire for liberty”. Jefferson did not retreat from a commitment to civil liberties or embrace a notion of states’ rights in order to defend the interests of southern slaveholders. From the very beginning of his political life, Jefferson recognized the central importance of the autonomy, integrity, and equality of republics as corporate entities—as well as of the republican institutions that alone could guarantee the equal rights of self-governing individuals within the new states.