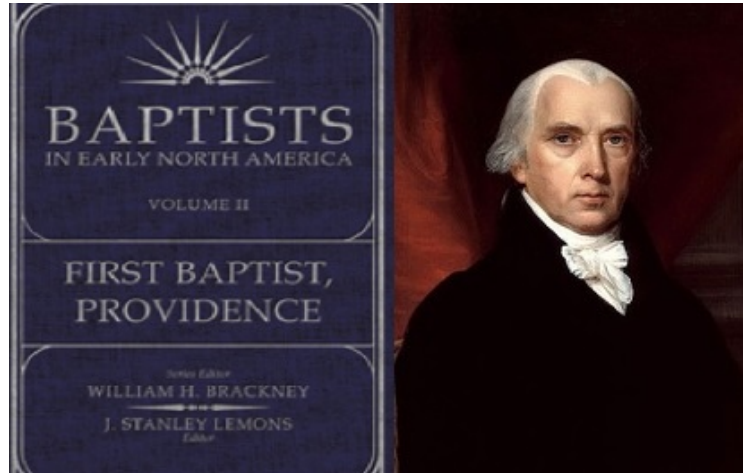


American Minute with Bill Federer

Persecution of Virginia Baptists influenced James Madison's views on defending Liberty of Conscience

In times of crisis people turn to **Christ**, and following the **crisis** of the **French and Indian War**, Americans turned to **Christ** in **religious revivals**.



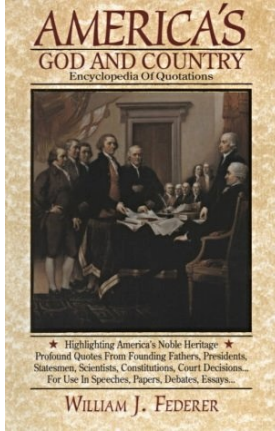
Virginia's government, though, was **established Anglican** and imposed **strict lockdowns on unapproved church gatherings**.

A Virginia historical marker read:

"**John Weatherford's Grave ... Baptist Preacher ...** and early advocate of religious liberty, **jailed** for five months ... for **unlicensed preaching**. His **release** was **secured by Patrick Henry**" ... [continue reading American Minute here ...](#)

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Another marker stated:

"Crooked Run Baptist Church ... **Thomas Ammon** became a **minister** and was **imprisoned in the Culpeper jail for preaching.**"

A marker in Caroline County, Virginia, stated:

"1771, The **Hermon Baptist Association** to commemorate the **heroism** of

- Bartholomew Chewing,
- John Young,
- Lewis Craig,
- Edward Herndon,
- John Burrus,
- James Goodrich,

who by the **order of the court** ... were **imprisoned** in the **Caroline County jail** ... on the charge of '**teaching and preaching the Gospel without having Episcopal ordination or a license from the General Court.**'"

Robert B. Semple's *History of the Baptists of Virginia* (1810, p. 25) recounted:

"The ... rapid increase of the **Baptists** in Virginia must be ascribed primarily to the power of God working with them ...

Yet ... there were ... cooperating causes; one of which ... was the loose and immoral deportment of the **Established clergy**, by which the people were left almost

destitute of even the shadow of true religion.

'Tis true, they had some outward forms of worship, but **the essential principles of Christianity** were not only **not understood among them**, but by many never heard of ...

Having no discipline, **every man followed the bent of his own inclination**. It was not uncommon for the rectors of parishes to be men of the lowest morals.

The **Baptist preachers** were, in almost every respect, **the reverse of the Established clergy**"

Established Anglican clergy, called "parsons" received income in the form of tobacco from farmers.

In 1763, there was a **poor harvest** and **farmers** were being forced off their farms to pay debts, yet the parsons insisted on being paid the usual amount.

The "**Parson's Cause**" case went before King George III, who **sided with the established clergy**.

Patrick Henry, in his first major public appearance as an attorney, December 1763, successfully convinced the jury to reduce the damages farmers had to pay to **one penny**, declaring:

"That a **King**, by disallowing Acts of this salutary nature, from being the father of his people, **degenerated into a tyrant** and **forfeits all right to his subjects' obedience**."

James Madison wrote to William Bradford, January 24, 1774, about the **fate of Baptist ministers** who were canceled and imprisoned by **official state clergy**:

"That **diabolical hell-conceived principle of persecution** rages among some and to their **eternal**

infamy the clergy can furnish their quota of imps for such business. **This vexes me** the most of anything whatever.

There are at this time in the adjacent Culpeper County not less than 5 or 6 well meaning men in jail for **publishing their religious sentiments** which in the main are very orthodox ...

So I (leave you) to pity me and pray for **Liberty of Conscience** to revive among us,"

Charles F. James wrote in *Documentary History of the Struggle for Religious Liberty in Virginia* (Lynchburg, VA: J. P. Bell Company, 1900, pp. 12-14, 26):

"While yielding a ready obedience to the civil authorities in all civil affairs, **in matters of religion** they recognized **no lord but Christ**. They were truly apostolic in **refusing to obey man rather than God.**"

In 1768, three **Baptist ministers**, John Waller, Lewis Craig, and James Childs, were **arrested** in Spottsylvania County, Virginia, for **preaching** to a crowd in violation of the government lockdown orders.

After 4 weeks in prison, Lewis Craig was brought to trial. **Governor John Blair, Sr., rebuked the sheriff** of Spottsylvania County:

"You may not molest these conscientious men, so long as they behave themselves in a manner becoming pious Christians.

I am told that they differ in nothing from our Church but in (the manner of) Baptism, and their renewing of the ancient discipline, by which they have reformed some sinners and brought them to be truly penitent ...

If this be their behavior, it were to be wished we had

some of it among us."

After 8 more weeks in prison, John Waller and James Childs were brought to **trial** for "**preaching the Gospel contrary to law.**"

Patrick Henry road 50 miles to defend them.

The **prosecuting attorney** told the judge:

"May it please your worship, these men are great **disturbers of the peace:** they can not meet a man upon the road, but they must ram a text of Scripture down his throat!"

In their defense, **Henry** addressed the court:

"May it please your lordships, what did I hear read? Did I hear an expression that **these men**, whom you worships are about to **try for misdemeanor**, are charged with **preaching the Gospel of the Son of God?**"

Henry successfully secured their release.

In 1770, **Baptist preachers**, William Webber and Joseph Anthony, were **arrested and thrown into Chesterfield County jail**, where "they did much execution by preaching through the grates of their windows."

In Middlesex County several **Baptist ministers** were **canceled, denied rights, and imprisoned**. The *Virginia Gazette*, 1772, reported that authorities:

"... sought to justify the persecution, **charging Baptists** with heresy and hateful doctrines, with **disturbing the peace** of religion, and **denying that they were entitled to the benefit of the toleration act.**"

Rev. James Ireland was a Baptist preacher.

A plaque stated:

"In memory of **James Ireland**, Minister of the Gospel, Born in Edinburgh, Scotland and converted in Frederick County, Va. Baptized and ordained at Sandy Creek, NC.

Imprisoned at Culpeper, Va. for preaching the gospel.

Organizer of Baptist churches, pastor of Buckmarsh Baptist Church 1786-1806. His body lies in Buckmarsh Cemetery near here.

'Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye, for we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.' Acts IV: 19-20"

James Ireland was one of thirty Baptist preachers imprisoned in Virginia from 1768-1770.

Warned that he would be arrested if he preached, he stood on a table and began speaking.

Two men seized him and dragged him to jail.

Thrown in a cell infested with mice and spiders, the jailer, who owned the local tavern, encouraged drunks to beat him up.

Ireland still summoned strength to preach through the bars of his cell window to the crowd gathered outside.

Local authorities broke up the crowd by sending horsemen to ride through and trample them.

In spite of attempts on his life, such as poisonings or filling his cell with smoke, **Ireland** wrote letters to his friends: "From My Palace in Culpepper."

Ireland went on to plant many Baptist churches.

Francis L. Hawks wrote in *Contributions to the Ecclesiastical History of the United States of America* (1836):

"No **dissenters** in Virginia experienced for a time **harsher treatment** than the **Baptists** ... They were **beaten and imprisoned** ... **Cruelty taxed ingenuity** to devise **new modes of punishment and annoyance.**"

James Madison was born March 16, 1751, in King George County, Virginia, the oldest of 12 children.

Madison recalled as a boy standing with his father outside the jail in the village of Orange and hear **Baptists** preaching from cell windows -- their **crime** was **preaching without approval from the government.**

Madison attended **St. Thomas Episcopal Church**, built on land given by **Madison's great-grandfather**, Colonel James Taylor II.

A minister who preached there was **Presbyterian Rev. James Waddell**, a founding trustee of Liberty Hall (Washington and Lee University).

Years earlier, **Waddell** had tutored **Madison**, as well as **Meriwether Lewis** and future Virginia **Governor James Barbour**.

George Washington was visited by **Rev. James Waddell**, whom **Patrick Henry** described, along with **Rev. Samuel Davies**, as the **two greatest orators he had ever heard**.

After hearing **Rev. Waddell** sermons, **Madison** remarked:

"He has spoiled me for all other preaching."

Rev. Waddell's preaching was described by **U.S.**

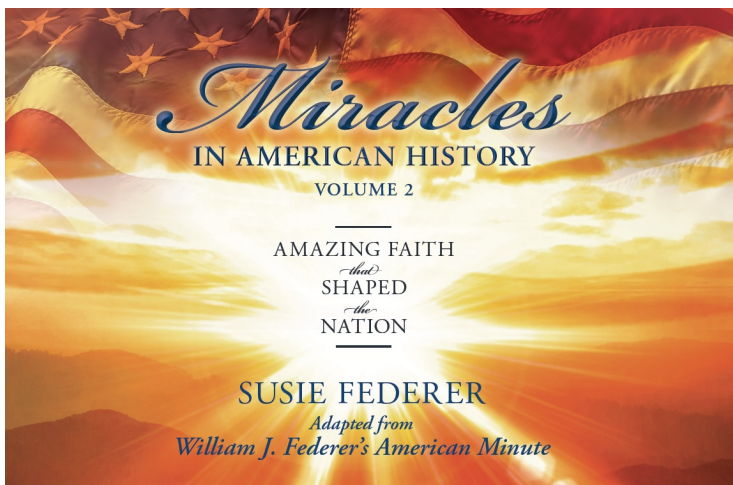
Attorney General William Wirt, who wrote in 1795:

"Every heart in the assembly trembled in unison. His peculiar phrases that force of description that the original scene appeared to be, at that moment, acting before our eyes ...

The effect was inconceivable. The whole house resounded with the mingled groans, and sobs, and shrieks of the congregation."

Madison invited **other Presbyterian preachers** to speak at his **Montpelier estate**, such as **Samuel Stanhope Smith** and **Nathaniel Irwin**, of whom he wrote:

"Praise is in every man's mouth here for an excellent discourse he this day preached to us."



[Miracles in American History- Vol. TWO: Amazing Faith that Shaped the Nation](#)

In June of 1776, **George Mason**, drafted the **Virginia Declaration of Rights**.

Madison helped revise **Article 16** of **Virginia Declaration of Rights** (*Papers of Madison*, I, 171-75) to read:

"That Religion, or the duty we owe to our CREATOR, and manner of discharging it, can be directed only by reason and conviction, not by force or violence;

and, therefore, that **all men are equally entitled to the**

free exercise of religion, according to the dictates of conscience,

and that it is the **mutual duty of all to practice Christian forbearance, love and charity** toward each other."

The next year, 1777, **Jefferson** wrote his initial draft of the **Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom:**

"Almighty God hath created the mind free, and manifested his supreme will that free it shall remain by making it altogether insusceptible of restraint; that all attempts to influence it by temporal punishments, or burdens, or by civil incapacitations, tend only to beget habits of hypocrisy and meanness,

and are a departure from the **plan of the holy author of our religion**, who being lord both of body and mind, yet **chose not to propagate it by coercions** on either, as was in his Almighty power to do, **but to extend it by its influence on reason alone."**

In support of **Jefferson's Statute**, **Madison** wrote ***Religious Freedom--A Memorial and Remonstrance against Religious Assessments***, June 20, 1785:

"The **Religion** then of every man **must be left to the conviction and conscience of every man**; and it is the right of every man to exercise it as these may dictate.

This right is in its nature **an unalienable right**. It is unalienable, because the opinions of men, depending only on the **evidence contemplated by their own minds cannot follow the dictates of other men:**

It is unalienable also, because what is here a right towards men, **is a duty towards the Creator ..."**

Madison continued:

"It is the duty of every man to render to the Creator such homage and such **only as he believes to be acceptable to Him ...**

Before any man can be considered as a member of Civil Society, **he must be considered as a subject of the Governour of the Universe ...**

We maintain therefore that **in matters of Religion**, no man's **right** is abridged by the institution of civil society, and that **Religion** is wholly exempt from its cognizance."

When **Baptists** had their church services disrupted, **Madison** introduced legislation in Virginia's Assembly, October 31, 1785, titled "**A Bill for Punishing Disturbers of Religious Worship**," which passed in 1789.

In 1787, **Madison** attended the **Constitutional Convention**, where he took a prominent role, resulting in him being referred to by some as the **Father** or **Chief Architect of the Constitution**.

He argued for an immediate **end to the importation of slaves**, though the Convention settled on ending importation by 1808.

He proposed **limiting the power of slave-holding states** with the three-fifths compromise.

To help convince the states to ratify the Constitution, **Madison** wrote 29 of the 85 articles which made up ***The Federalist Papers***, along with **Alexander Hamilton**, who wrote 51, and **John Jay**, who wrote 5.

Madison wrote in 1829 (*Writings* 9:351--57):

"The happy Union of these States is a wonder; **their Constitution -- a miracle**; their example the hope of

Liberty throughout the world. Woe to the ambition that would meditate the destruction of either!"

James Madison made a journal entry, June 12, 1788:

"There is not a shadow of right in the general government to inter-meddle with religion ... The subject is, for the honor of America, perfectly free and unshackled. **The government has no jurisdiction over it.**"

After the Constitution was ratified, a popular **Baptist preacher Rev. John Leland** considered campaigning to be a Representative from Virginia to the first session of the U.S. Congress.

His main issue was religious freedom.

John Leland wrote *Rights of Conscience Inalienable*, 1791, that Baptists wanted not just toleration, but equality:

"Every man must give account of himself to God, and therefore every man ought to be at liberty to serve God in a way that he can best reconcile to his conscience.

If government can answer for individuals at the day of judgment, let men be controlled by it in religious matters; otherwise, let men be free."

Leland reportedly met with **James Madison** in Orange County and after **Madison's** promise to introduce an Amendment protecting religious liberty, **Leland** convinced **Baptists** to get involved in politics and support **Madison** for Congress.

George Mason proposed **wording for the First Amendment:**

"That **religion, or the duty which we owe to our Creator, and the manner of discharging it, can be**

directed only by reason and conviction, not by force or violence, and therefore all men have an equal, natural, and unalienable **right to the free exercise of religion**, according to the **dictates of conscience**; and that **no particular religious sect, or society of Christians**, ought to be favored or established by law, **in preference to others.**"

True to his promise, in the first session of Congress, June 7, 1789, **Madison** introduced:

"The civil rights of none shall be abridged on account of religious belief or worship."

This would eventually become the **First Amendment**.

In 1793, a **Yellow Fever** epidemic hit **Philadelphia**, killing 10 percent of the city's population.

Among the dead was **Todd Payne**, who was survived by his widow, **Dolley Payne**, and their son, **John Payne Todd**.

The following year, 25-year-old **Dolley Payne** married 43-year-old **James Madison**.

James and Dolley Madison often visited with **Jefferson**.

An account circulated that **Dolley Madison** heard of Jefferson visiting with **Baptist Preacher Andrew Tribble** (*The Christian Watchman*, Boston, MA, July 4, 1826):

"Mr. Tribble asked Mr. Jefferson how he was pleased with their **church government?**

Jefferson replied, that it had struck him with great force, and had interested him much; that he considered it the only form of **pure democracy** that then existed in the world, and had concluded that it would be **the best plan of Government for the American Colonies.**"

Thomas F. Curtis wrote in *The Progress of Baptist Principles in the Last Hundred Years* (Charleston, S.C.: Southern Baptist Publication Society, 1856):

"A gentleman ... in North Carolina ... knowing that the venerable **Mrs. (Dolley) Madison** had some recollections on the subject, asked her in regard to them.

She expressed a distinct remembrance of **Mr. Jefferson** speaking on the subject, and always declaring that **it was a Baptist church from which these views were gathered.**"

President Coolidge stated at the 150th anniversary of the Declaration, July 4, 1926:

"This preaching reached the neighborhood of **Thomas Jefferson**, who acknowledged that his '**best ideas of democracy**' had been secured at **church meetings.**"

Madison wrote to Robert Walsh, March 2, 1819:

"That there has been **an increase of religious instruction** since the revolution can admit of no question.

The **English Church** was originally the established religion ...

Of **other sects** there were but few adherents, except the **Presbyterians** who predominated on the west side of the Blue Mountains.

A little time previous to the Revolutionary struggle, the **Baptists sprang up**, and made **very rapid progress.**

Among the early acts of the Republican Legislature, were those **abolishing the Religious establishment**, and **putting all sects at full liberty** and on a perfect

level.

At present the population is divided, with small exceptions, among the **Protestant Episcopalians**, the **Presbyterians**, the **Baptists** and the **Methodists** ...

I conjecture the **Presbyterians** and **Baptists** to form each about a **third**, and the **two other sects together** of which the **Methodists** are much the smallest, to make up the remaining **third** ...

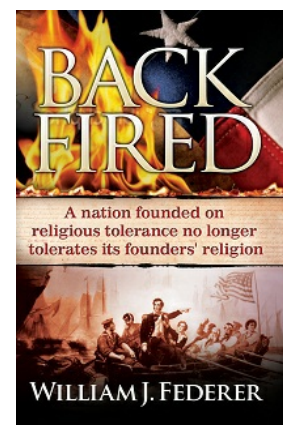
Among the other sects, **Meeting Houses** have **multiplied** and continue to multiply ...

Religious instruction is now diffused throughout the Community by **Preachers of every sect with almost equal zeal** ...

The **qualifications of the Preachers**, too among the new sects where there is the greatest deficiency, are understood **to be improving**.

On a general comparison of the present and former times, the balance is certainly and vastly on the side of the present, as to the **number of religious teachers the zeal which actuates them, the purity of their lives and the attendance of the people on their instructions.**"

[BACKFIRED-A Nation Founded for Religious Tolerance No Longer Tolerates the Religion of Its Founders](#)



James Madison was elected the fourth President of the United States.

In his First Inaugural Address, March 4, 1809. he stated:

"My confidence will under every difficulty be best placed ... in the guardianship and guidance of that **Almighty Being** whose power regulates the destiny of nations, whose blessings have been so conspicuously dispensed to this rising Republic,

and **to whom** we are bound to address **our devout gratitude** for the past, as well as **our fervent supplications** and best hopes for the future."

In 1789, Europe descended into war, which had repercussions in America.

The **French Revolution** was followed by **Napoleon's military conquests**.

In 1798, **Napoleon** invaded Egypt and defeated its Muslim mamluk slave army in just a few weeks.

He attempted to introduce the concepts of equality, freedom and democracy, but found there were no words in the Arabic language to convey such concepts.

Returning to Paris in 1799, **Napoleon** was crowned Emperor in 1804.

He combined the French and Spanish navies with the intention of invading England in 1805, but his forces were defeated at the Battle of Trafalgar, leaving Britain with the most powerful navy in the world.

In 1812, **Napoleon** invaded Russia with nearly 500,000 men.

Six months later, he retreated from Russia with less than 50,000 troops.

As **Napoleon's** threat to Europe diminished, **Britain**

refocused ambitions on America with the **War of 1812**.

President James Madison proclaimed a Day of Prayer, July 9, 1812, stating:

"I do therefore recommend ... rendering the **Sovereign of the Universe and the Benefactor of mankind** the public homage due to **His holy attributes**;

of acknowledging the transgressions which might justly provoke the manifestations of **His divine displeasure**; of seeking **His merciful forgiveness**; ...

that in the present season of calamity and war **He would take the American people under His peculiar care** ...

that **He would inspire all nations with a love of justice and of concord**, and with a reverence for the unerring precept of **our holy religion**, to do to others as they would require that others should do to them."

British ships sailed into **Lake Eire**, and invaded **New York, New Orleans** and **Washington, D.C.**

Madison encouraged the nation in his Second Inaugural Address, March 4, 1813:

"The war with a powerful nation, which forms so prominent a feature in our situation, is stamped with that justice which invites **the smiles of Heaven** on the means of conducting it to a successful termination."

The next year, on July 23, 1813, **Madison** issued another **Day of Prayer**:

"If the **public homage** of a people can ever be worthy of the favorable regard of the **Holy and Omniscient Being** to whom it is addressed, it must be ... **guided only by their free choice, by the impulse of their hearts and the dictates of their consciences** ...

proving that **religion, that gift of Heaven** for the good of man, is **freed from all coercive edicts."**

On September 10, 1813, **Captain Oliver Hazard Perry** had an astonishing victory over the British in the **Battle of Lake Erie**.

Napoleon abdicated the throne on April 6, 1814, and was exiled to the **Island of Elba**.

On August 24, 1814, a force of 4,500 **British soldiers** marched toward Washington, D.C. In a panic, citizens hastily evacuated.

Dolley Madison is credited with having the White House staff save the Gilbert Stuart **portrait of George Washington** by having it cut out of its frame.

With the help of their servant, **Paul Jennings**, her carriage was able to make it safely out of the city as **British Admiral George Cockburn** was riding in.

Cockburn entered the White House, ate dinner, then set the house on fire.

He had British soldiers enter the **U.S. Capitol Building** and sit in the Congressmen's chairs, holding a mock Congress.

He asked, who was in favor of burning the U.S. Capitol, and the soldiers yelled, "aye," after which they proceeded to torch the Capitol, the Treasury, the Library of Congress, and attack the Navy Yard.

The Patent Office was the only government office not burned by the British.

Suddenly, dark clouds rolled in, wind and thunder grew into a "frightening roar," and lightning began striking.

A tornado touched down sending debris flying, blowing off roofs, knocking down chimneys and walls on British troops.

Two cannons were lifted off the ground and dropped yards away. Violent winds slammed both horse and rider to the ground.

The book, *Washington Weather*, recorded **British Admiral George Cockburn** exclaiming to a lady:

"Great God, Madam! Is this the kind of storm to which you are accustomed in this infernal country?"

To which the lady replied:

"No, Sir, this is a special interposition of Providence to drive our enemies from our city."

A British historian wrote:

"More British soldiers were killed by this **stroke of nature** than from all the firearms the American troops had mustered in the feeble defense of their city."

As British forces fled, **torrential rains** fell for two hours, **extinguishing the fires.**

After marching back to their ships over roads covered with downed trees, they found two of their ships blown ashore and others with damaged riggings.

On September 1, 1814, **Madison** wrote:

"The enemy by a sudden incursion has succeeded in invading the capitol of the nation ...

During their possession ... though for a single day only, they wantonly destroyed the public edifices ...

An occasion which appeals so forcibly to the ... patriotic devotion of the American people, none will forget ... Independence ... is now to be maintained ... with the strength and resources which ... **Heaven has blessed.**"

Less than 3 months later, **Madison** proclaimed a **National Day of Public Humiliation, Fasting & Prayer to Almighty God** on November 16, 1814, stating:

"The two Houses of the National Legislature having by a joint resolution expressed their desire that in the **present time of public calamity and war, a day may be recommended** to be observed by the people of the United States

as a day of **public humiliation and fasting and of prayer to Almighty God** for the safety and welfare of these States, **His blessing on their arms**, and a speedy restoration of peace ... **of confessing their sins** and transgressions, and of strengthening their vows of repentance ...

that **He would be graciously pleased to pardon all their offenses** ... I have deemed it proper ... to recommend ... **a day of ... humble adoration to the Great Sovereign of the Universe.**"

General Andrew Jackson won the **Battle of New Orleans**, providentially **defeating a larger British force** on January 18, 1815.

After the War, **Madison** proclaimed a **National Day of Thanksgiving & Devout Acknowledgment to Almighty God**, March 4, 1815:

"No people ought to feel greater obligations to **celebrate the goodness of the Great Disposer of Events and of the Destiny of Nations** than the people of the United States ...

To the same **Divine Author of Every Good and Perfect Gift** we are indebted for all those privileges and advantages, **religious** as well as civil, which are so richly enjoyed in this favored land ...

I now recommend ... a day on which the people of every religious denomination may in their solemn assemblies unite their hearts and their voices in **a freewill offering to their Heavenly Benefactor** of their homage of **thanksgiving and of their songs of praise."**

In the 1830s, **Madison** served a term as president of the **American Colonization Society** which helped free blacks who so desired to found the country of **Liberia**.

The **Madison's** had family problems. **Dolley Madison's** son, **John Payne Todd**, became an alcoholic, repeatedly jailed, and ran up enormous gambling debts.

James Madison bailed him out, even mortgaging the family's ancestral **Montpelier** plantation.

After his death, bankrupt **Dolley** had to sell it.

Due to her son putting her in a dire financial situation, **Dolley** lived as a pauper in Washington, DC, till she sold her husband's memoirs to Congress.

During these impoverished years, Dolley was cared for by none other than **Paul Jennings**, the **Madison's former servant**, who made sure she had enough food, and even gave her money out of his own pocket.

Paul Jennings was freed with the help of **Senator Daniel Webster**, by whose recommendation he got a job at the **Department of the Interior's Pension Bureau**.

Madison's family had been in Virginia since the mid-1600s and had a 5,000 acre tobacco plantation, the

largest in Piedmont, with an estimated 100 slaves.

Though Christian denominations, particularly, Quakers and Methodists, were pioneering the cause to end slavery, the abolitionist movement as a whole was still in its infancy and did not gain momentum till the Second Great Awakening of the early 1800s.

In 1863, **Paul Jennings'** story was published as “**A Colored Man’s Reminiscences of James Madison.**”

In it, he recalled **Madison:**

"One day riding home from court with old Tom Barbour (father of Governor Barbour), they met a colored man, who took off his hat. **Mr. Madison** raised his, to the surprise of old Tom; to whom **Mr. Madison** replied, "I never allow a negro to excel me in politeness."

Jennings continued:

"Mr. Madison, I think, was one of the best men that ever lived.

I never saw him in a passion, and never knew him to strike a slave, although he had over one hundred; neither would he allow an overseer to do it.

Whenever any slaves were reported to him as stealing or 'cutting up' badly, he would send for them and admonish them privately, and never mortify them by doing it before others. They generally served him very faithfully."

Jennings described **Madison** further:

"He was temperate in his habits. I don't think he drank a quart of brandy in his whole life ...

When he had hard drinkers at his table, who had put away his choice Madeira pretty freely, in response to

their numerous toasts, he would just touch the glass to his lips, or dilute it with water, as they pushed about the decanters.

For the last fifteen years of his life he drank no wine at all."

As a young man, **James Madison** wrote to a college friend William Bradford, November 9, 1772:

"A watchful eye must be kept on ourselves lest while we are building ideal monuments of renown and bliss here we neglect to have **our names enrolled in the Annals of Heaven.**"

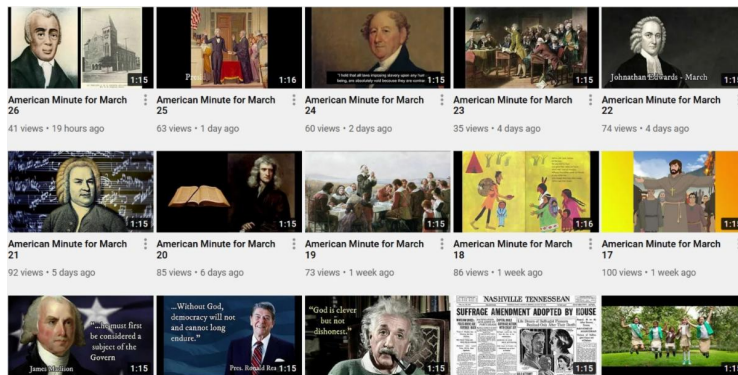
As an old man, **Madison** wrote to Frederick Beasley, November 20, 1825:

"The **belief in a God All Powerful wise and good, is so essential to the moral order of the world and to the happiness of man**, that arguments which enforce it cannot be drawn from too many sources."

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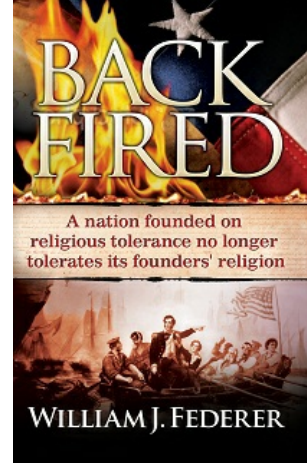
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