

COURSE GUIDEBOOK



Thomas Jefferson: American Visionary

- Lecture 1: The Allure and Challenge of Thomas Jefferson
- Lecture 2: The Mind of Thomas Jefferson
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Thomas Jefferson: American Visionary

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He has produced other courses for The Teaching Company, including *Great Minds of the Western Intellectual Tradition* (in collaboration with Dr. Michael Sugrue); *The Search for a Meaningful Past: Philosophies, Theories and Interpretations of Human History*; and *The History of the United States* (in collaboration with Dr. Louis Masur and Dr. James Shenton).

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Thomas Jefferson: American Visionary

Scope:

A man of remarkable intellectual interests and achievements, Thomas Jefferson is probably the most central and revered figure in Revolutionary and Early National America. Uniquely relevant, Jefferson's influence was felt on almost every critical policy question facing the young Republic, and his rhetorical and political legacy is still very much alive and contested today. Yet Jefferson has still remained a largely enigmatic figure, one that is peculiarly hard to place in terms of character and core convictions. These twelve lectures will be devoted to trying to elicit some of those convictions and reveal some of the personality traits of one of America's most remarkable statesmen and thinkers. The lectures will seek to understand Jefferson in his own words, viewing his beliefs in the context of his actions as well as the larger historical milieu. The goal will be to note development in Jefferson's thinking and practice, as well as to identify his core beliefs.

The first two lectures are devoted to setting the context for Jefferson's remarkable public career. His early childhood is examined as is his precocious intellectual development at the College of William and Mary. The second lecture details Jefferson's philosophical beliefs, ranging from the metaphysical to the moral and aesthetic. We note the philosophically radical and eclectic nature of Jefferson's thought and come to understand the foundational beliefs in nature and reason that informed his writing of the *Declaration of Independence*.

The next two lectures detail Jefferson's early political career. Lecture Three examines his distinguished if unremunerative legal career and his experience as a radical member of the colonial legislature. We also examine his first foray into revolutionary writing in a pamphlet that would secure him national fame and his rhetorical genius is further examined in the *Declaration of Independence*. Lecture Four examines Jefferson's proposed constitutional and legal reforms for Virginia, which suggest a mind in transition from traditional conservatism to enlightened radicalism. We conclude with an examination of Jefferson's difficult tenure as wartime governor and the tragic death of his wife.

Lectures Five and Six examine the maturation of Jefferson's political thought. *Notes on the State of Virginia* reveals a fundamental tension between the ideals of agrarianism and anti-slavery and the realities of early American society and racism. We follow Jefferson's career abroad in lecture Six, and see a further exploration of the radical potential of his beliefs, as well as romantic engagements.

Lectures Seven through Nine focus on Jefferson's critical role in the new nation, as Secretary of State, Vice President, and leader of the Republican opposition. Jeffersonian constitutional doctrines and partisan differences of this period are explored in some detail, as are the circumstances surrounding Jefferson's

eventual election to the presidency in 1800. His brilliant successes as President are detailed (e.g., cutting the federal deficit, shrinking the size of government, the Louisiana Purchase, cutting taxes, etc.) as well as his less successful ventures (the Burr prosecution, the Embargo of 1807-1809).

The final three lectures trace Jefferson's life in retirement and offer some assessment of his overall career. Even in pastoral repose Jefferson was a whirlwind of activity, offering political advice, founding the University of Virginia, and leaving a remarkable literary legacy in his correspondence with his friend and rival, John Adams. The final lecture offers some speculations about the man behind the public persona, as well as the meaning of Jefferson's legacy and career for Americans then and now.

Lecture One

The Allure and Challenge of Thomas Jefferson

Scope: Jefferson is one of the most central and revered figures in the American political tradition. Yet historians agree that he is remarkably enigmatic. This lecture examines some of the reasons for both of these facts, and examines what little we know about Jefferson's early childhood, as well as his more documented adolescence and education.

Outline

- I. Studying Thomas Jefferson is both highly rewarding and extremely challenging.
 - A. Jefferson's stature is immense.
 - B. Jefferson's career was incredibly varied and diverse.
 - C. Penetrating Jefferson's character and core beliefs is extremely difficult.
 1. Jefferson's political legacy has always been contested
 2. Jefferson was extremely private, sometimes secretive.
 - D. Our biggest challenge to understanding Jefferson lies in the contradictions in his career and personality.
 - E. Our strategy will be to track Jefferson in his writings, comparing them to each other as well as the realities in which they were situated. We will look for change as well as continuity.
- II. Jefferson's childhood must be teased from his writings, and they must be supplemented by the reminiscences of his progeny.
 - A. Jefferson's father, Peter, was a member of the lesser frontier gentry.
 1. Jefferson idolized his father, who seems to symbolize the hardy westerner.
 2. Jefferson saw his own educational success as the achievement of his father's wish.
 - B. Jefferson's mother was a scion of one of the first families of Virginia (the Randolphs).
 1. After his father's death, Thomas was under his mother's supervision until he reaches 21, and he continued to live with her until he is 27.
 2. Jefferson seems to have resented his mother's authority over him, and she may have represented dreaded aristocracy to her son.

III. From an early age, Jefferson was a remarkably precocious and diligent student.

- A. Jefferson attended the grammar school of Rev. James Maury.
- B. Jefferson attended the College of William and Mary from 1760-1762.
 - 1. Jefferson forged a close bond with Prof. William Small.
 - 2. Small introduced Jefferson to George Wythe, his future law instructor.
- C. Jefferson entered a new social world in Williamsburg.
 - 1. Jefferson, Small, Wythe, and the royal Governor Francis Fauquier become a small social circle (the *partie quarre*).
 - 2. Jefferson also socialized with his college classmates.
 - 3. Jefferson was hopelessly shy with girls.

Essential Reading:

William Sterne Randall, *Thomas Jefferson: A Life*, Chapters 1-4.

Supplementary Reading:

Fawn M. Brodie, *Thomas Jefferson: An Intimate History*, Chapters 1-4.

Alf J. Mapp, Jr., *Thomas Jefferson: A Strange Case of Mistaken Identity*, Chapters 1-3.

Questions to Consider:

- 1. Why was Jefferson so secretive? Is it indicative of shyness and desire for privacy or does it suggest "skeletons" in the closet?
- 2. What do you make of Jefferson's youthful socialization and scholarship? Is Jefferson remarkably mature for his age? Is he simply "cozying up" to a learned coterie who can advance his career, or do they function as surrogate fathers to the young college student?

Lecture Two

The Mind of Thomas Jefferson

Scope: Despite the opacity of Jefferson's character, there is a remarkable clarity to his mind. Jefferson left a clear record of his philosophical convictions. While there is an undoubted eclecticism to his views, there is also coherence (if not always consistency). Jefferson's core philosophical beliefs were decidedly radical for his time and ours. He was a free-thinking secular humanist.

Outline

- I. Jefferson's core philosophical beliefs were decidedly radical for his time and ours. He was a free-thinking secular humanist.
 - A. Jefferson embraced science against revealed superstitions.
 - B. Jefferson was part of the Enlightenment struggle against intolerance and tyranny.
 - C. Jefferson had an abiding optimistic faith in progress.
 - D. Jefferson's world view was an eclectic combination of naturalism, rationalism, and proto-romantic sensibility.
- II. Jefferson's metaphysical views were grounded in scientific naturalism.
 - A. Jefferson explicitly rejected rationalist beliefs in innate ideas as well as the more elaborate idealism of Plato and Christian dualism.
 - 1. He denounced Plato's "foggy mind" in a letter to John Adams.
 - 2. He saw Platonic idealism as part of a dark age priestly plot to confuse and exploit the people.
 - B. Jefferson associated his three heroes of the Enlightenment—Bacon, Newton and Locke—with materialism.
 - 1. Jefferson argued that all physical realities can be constructed from sense data.
 - 2. Jefferson's metaphysical universe was populated with bodies in motion.
 - 3. From his point of view, talk of immaterial entities was literally nonsense.
 - C. Jefferson's materialism resulted in a radical psychological reductionism.
- III. Jefferson's ethical views were both naturalistic and eclectic.
 - A. Jefferson's theory of the good was the Epicurean ideal of a life of tranquil pleasure.
 - B. Jefferson's Epicureanism was tinged with a heavy dose of Stoicism.

- C. Jefferson also agreed with the moral sense doctrines associated with Hutcheson, Smith, Reid, and other figures in the Scottish Enlightenment.
 - 1. Jefferson saw the moral sense as a secularized conscience.
 - 2. Jefferson used the moral sense as bulwark for his democratic urges.
 - 3. Jefferson struggled with localizing the moral sense.
 - 4. His use of moral sense doctrine exemplifies his eclecticism.
- IV. Jefferson's religious beliefs are part of what Peter Gay has called the Enlightenment's "Christian paganism."
 - A. Jefferson was dismissive of evangelical religion.
 - B. Jefferson's attitude to Jesus Christ was complicated.
 - 1. He deeply admired the ethical teachings of Jesus, and keeps a scrapbook of them.
 - 2. Jefferson was an Arian in that he denied the divinity of Christ, seeing him as a wise moral teacher like Socrates.
 - C. A radical free thinker, Jefferson was the most advanced spokesman for a complete separation of church and state in his day.
 - D. Jefferson helped eliminate divinity as a subject at the College of William and Mary and the University of Virginia.
 - E. Jefferson misunderstood the role of religion in the lives of most Americans.
 - 1. Jefferson thought that most thinking Americans privately rejected trinitarian Christianity.
 - 2. Jefferson believed that orthodox and evangelical Christianity would not last long in American culture.
- V. Jefferson's aesthetic views are a curious combination of neo-classicism and proto-romanticism.
 - A. Architecturally, he was a strict disciple of Palladian classicism.
 - B. Jefferson's literary tastes were proto-romantic.
 - 1. His favorite contemporary literature was the sentimental writing of Lawrence Sterne.
 - 2. His rhapsodic descriptions of the Virginia topography were riddled with the Burkean romantic aesthetic of the beautiful and the sublime.

Essential Reading:

Charles A. Miller, *Jefferson and Nature: An Interpretation*.

Supplementary Reading:

Andrew Burstein, *The Inner Jefferson: Portrait of a Grieving Optimist*.

Daniel Boorstin, *The Lost World of Thomas Jefferson*.

Questions to Consider:

1. What is the role of nature in Jefferson's worldview? How does it relate to his conception of reason?
2. What, if any, are the implications of Jefferson's religious views to his political career and legacy?

Lecture Three

Jefferson the Revolutionary American

Scope: In the years before he was catapulted to national fame and prominence, Jefferson established his public identity within Virginian society and politics. After examining this identity, we focus on the writings that catapulted Jefferson to national fame and leadership, *A Summary View of the Rights of British America* and *The Declaration of Independence*. A careful reading of his language reveals a radical mind reaching out to all Americans to forge a new nation.

Outline

- I. Jefferson became a national leader because of his remarkable rhetorical ability to express the convictions of the American mind. His famous writings are among the founding documents of American national identity.
- II. In the years before he was catapulted to national fame and prominence, Jefferson established his public identity within Virginian society and politics.
 - A. In 1767, he completed his legal studies, was admitted to the bar, and subsequently practiced in the colony's highest court.
 - 1. Most of Jefferson legal work involved land cases known as "caveats."
 - 2. In 1770 Jefferson takes on, *pro bono*, the case of Howell v. Netherland, involving slavery.
 - 3. Jefferson appealed to Natural Law beyond the mere legal statutes of the province in a losing effort to gain freedom for a person of color.
 - B. In 1779, he was elected to the House of Burgesses where he participated in the colonial resistance.
 - 1. Jefferson was part of the burgesses who met out of chambers in Williamsburg to form the revolutionary Virginia "Association for Non-Exportation."
 - 2. Jefferson seconded a motion to permit voluntary emancipation (or manumission) of slaves.
 - C. In 1772, he married the widow Martha Wayles Skelton.
 - 1. Martha shared her husband's tastes in music and literature.
 - 2. She gave birth to his eldest daughter, Martha (Patsy) on Sep. 27, 1772.
 - 3. Jefferson's father-in-law died in 1774 and Thomas inherited his massive landholdings, slaveholdings, and debts.

III. Jefferson first entered the national limelight with the publication of his *A Summary View of the Rights of British America* in 1774.

- A. Jefferson's argument was based on an interpretation of colonial American history that ultimately appealed to the natural rights of free emigrants to form social contracts along whatever lines "shall seem most likely to promote public happiness."
 - 1. Jefferson claimed that America was settled without any aid from Great Britain.
 - 2. In his view, America's first European settlers had the right to impose any political arrangements they desired, and they chose to remain connected to England solely through the king.
 - B. Jefferson fundamentally denied any parliamentary sovereignty over American affairs, including the Navigation Acts.
 - 1. Since the only tie to the mother country was the king, Parliament had no right to legislate over a foreign dominion.
 - 2. The frequency of cited violations of American rights led Jefferson to conclude that there existed a parliamentary conspiracy to "enslave" the Americans.
 - C. Jefferson also blamed the British government for promoting slavery in the colonies. Finally, he invoked the social contract idiom of Locke and warned the king about the consequences of violating his trust.
- IV. Jefferson's national stature as a leading revolutionary was secured with his authorship of the *Declaration of Independence*.
- A. Jefferson's skill at combining disparate and eclectic sources is exemplified in the famous second paragraph, drawing on commonwealth, natural rights, and Scottish realist vocabularies within a larger Lockean idiom.
 - 1. Jefferson dramatically inflates the importance of the preamble in his drafting, making it a founding document in American statecraft.
 - 2. Jefferson is intentionally vague in his use of political and philosophical vocabularies, inviting a variety of interpretations.
 - 3. Jefferson tries to speak for the grievances of all geographical sections.
 - B. Equally revealing are the changes Congress made on the original draft.
 - 1. The Congress removed a clause that blamed the king for slavery as well as inciting those very slaves to insurrection.
 - 2. The Congress intruded phrases invoking God and divine providence that were not in Jefferson's original.

Essential Reading:

Alf J. Mapp, Jr., *Thomas Jefferson: A Strange Case of Mistaken Identity*, Chapters 4-7.

Supplementary Reading:

Carl L. Becker, *The Declaration of Independence: A Study in the History of Political Ideas*.

Jay Fliegelman, *Declaring Independence: Jefferson, Natural Language, and the Culture of Performance*.

Pauline Maier, *American Scripture: Making the Declaration of Independence*.

Garry Wills, *Inventing America: Jefferson's Declaration of Independence*.

Questions to Consider:

1. How do you interpret the sense of Jefferson's phrase about "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness"? What are the implications of alternate readings? Are such rights truly self-evident?
2. Why did Jefferson include the slave trade in his list of grievances against the king? What is the significance of this charge? What does it tell us about Jefferson's political thinking?

Lecture Four

Jefferson the Revolutionary Virginian

Scope: This lecture examines Jefferson's political career in Virginia after the writing of the *Declaration of Independence*. Jefferson's proposed legal and constitutional reforms reveal a revolutionary mind still mired in traditional modes of thinking. His tenure as wartime governor of Virginia suggests a less than ideal military commander and the death of his wife reveals his deeply emotional side.

Outline

- I. Jefferson's deepest political affiliation was always with Virginia, and once independence had been declared he hastened back to his native state to participate in its revolutionary reconstruction.
- II. In the summer of 1776, Jefferson drafted a new constitution for the state of Virginia which was not adopted. The document is a curious combination of Whig constitutionalism, agrarian radicalism, and patriciate optmacy.
 - A. The overall scheme of Jefferson's constitution was dominated by Whig ideals of balance and liberty.
 1. The legislature was bicameral with an executive shorn of a legislative veto.
 2. The document contained a liberal "bill of rights."
 - B. Some of Jefferson's provisions evinced a budding agrarian radicalism.
 1. Jefferson proposed to distribute small lots of unoccupied land to poor white men.
 2. Jefferson wanted to institute universal white male suffrage.
 - C. Other of Jefferson's provisions are quite conservative.
 1. Most local offices were appointed rather than elected.
 2. Neither the Senate nor the executive were popularly elected, and the former were given extended terms.
- III. In 1779, Jefferson submitted his program of legal reforms, "Report of the Committee of Revisors." It is a combination of enlightened toleration, democratic didacticism, and traditionalism.
 - A. His "Bill for Establishing Religious Freedom" exemplified the pluralism and toleration of the Age of Reason.
 - B. His "Bill for the More General Diffusion of Knowledge" is an expression of the Enlightenment's faith in the spread of knowledge through mass education.
 1. Jefferson proposed breaking the counties into local school districts for universal primary education.

2. Jefferson's plan included an educational hierarchy of schools that will allow a small number of bright disadvantaged students to receive a free education through the college level.
- C. Presumably inspired by the enlightened legal humanism of Beccaria, Jefferson's proposed "Bill for Proportioning Crimes and Punishments," is an oddly harsh and traditional judicial code.
 1. Jefferson proposed the public gibbeting of those who challenge another to a duel and kill them.
 2. He called for disfigurement as punishment for sex crimes and "rough and tumble."
 3. Presumed witchcraft was to be punished with flogging and ducking.
- IV. The end of Jefferson's political tenure in Virginia came at time of great loss and sadness for Jefferson
 - A. Jefferson's governorship ended in disgrace and he was charged with cowardice and administrative incompetence, although an inquiry into his conduct ultimately exonerated him.
 1. When North Carolina was invaded by the British in the fall of 1780, Jefferson was dilatory in supplying militia and supplies to the Continental Army.
 2. When Virginia itself was invaded in the fall and winter of 1780, Jefferson did not react until it was too late, resulting in the sacking of Richmond and his near-capture at Monticello by the forces of Banastre Tarleton.
 - B. Bitter and disappointed, Jefferson began one of many retirements, only to face the death of his wife in 1782.
 1. Jefferson nursed his sick wife from May 1782 until her death the following September.
 2. His wife's death left him deeply grief stricken, revealing a tender core behind the stoic mask. "Ten years of unchequered happiness," coinciding with the momentous events of the American Revolution, were over for Jefferson, who was left with his two young daughters, his other four children having died at birth or in infancy.

Essential Reading:

Alf J. Mapp, Jr., *Thomas Jefferson: A Strange Case of Mistaken Identity*, Chapters 8-9.

Merrill D. Peterson, *Thomas Jefferson and the New Nation: A Biography*, Chapters, 3-4.

Supplementary Reading:

William Sterne Randall, *Thomas Jefferson: A Life*, Chapters 13-14.

Fawn M. Brodie, *Thomas Jefferson: An Intimate History*, Chapters 9-10, 12.

Questions to Consider:

1. Why was Jefferson so unsuccessful as a wartime governor?
2. On the whole, were Jefferson's proposed reforms progressive or traditional?

Lecture Five

The American Sage: Notes on the State of Virginia

Scope: Jefferson began drafting *Notes On The State Of Virginia* in response to inquiries he had received from the French government during his governorship of Virginia, and first published them during his tenure as a diplomat in Paris. A classic of early American letters, the text is both a work of enlightened natural and social science as well as patriotic boosterism and American provinciality. It reveals the maturation of Jefferson's thought, as his revolutionary experience has induced a growing radicalism based on a mixture of high Enlightenment theory, real Whig ideology, and commonwealth sensibilities. Still, contradictions abound between the soaring egalitarianism of Jefferson's agrarianism and his tortured comments on slavery.

Outline

- I. A classic of early American letters, Jefferson's *Notes* is both a work of enlightened natural and social science as well as patriotic boosterism and American provinciality.
 - A. It reveals the maturation of Jefferson's thought, as his revolutionary experience had induced a growing radicalism based on a mixture of high enlightenment theory, real Whig ideology, and commonwealth sensibilities.
 - B. It also reveals the contradictions between the Jeffersonian ideal and early American realities.
- II. Jefferson's agrarianism takes on a distinctly moral tone.
 - A. One source of Jefferson's agrarianism is the real Whig cult of independence.
 - 1. This doctrine holds that economic independence is a prerequisite for meaningful civic participation.
 - 2. Such independence is best exemplified in the Whig tradition with landholding and farming.
 - 3. In accord with this tradition, Jefferson believed that independent farmers make the best citizens.
 - 4. Jefferson's view has negative implications for urban Americans, whom he thought were incapable of virtue.
 - B. Another source is Rousseauian primitivism.
 - 1. Rousseau had scandalized the Age of Enlightenment world by arguing that progress in the arts and sciences produced decadence and moral decline.
 - 2. Jefferson embraced the "shame culture" of Amerindians over the "guilt culture" of "civilized" Europe.

- 3. Jefferson also approved of the extreme decentralization of authority he found in Native American societies.
 - C. Jefferson's agrarianism was always informed by his civic humanism.
 - D. Jefferson's ideals were exemplified in his Northwest Ordinance.
 - 1. Jefferson submitted his plan in 1784 and it was largely adopted the following year.
 - 2. Jefferson's plan called for sale of small lots and territorial self-government along republican principles.
 - E. There is an obvious tension between Jefferson's ideals and American realities.
 - 1. Jefferson's Ordinance was a failure and was replaced in 1787 by a scheme for congressionally-appointed government and real estate development by large land companies.
 - 2. Jefferson acknowledged that in reality many white families in Virginia were disfranchised and that apportionment was still unfair.

III. Jefferson's statements on slavery were also ambivalent.

- A. Jefferson was an outspoken and radical opponent of slavery.
 - 1. Slavery was a violation of the rights of man.
 - 2. Slavery also has a devastating impact on the manners and morals of the masters.
- B. Jefferson was also a decided racist, albeit with a bad conscience.
 - 1. Jefferson claimed that Blacks were racially inferior to Whites and Amerindians.
 - 2. Jefferson feared interaction between the races, and favored emancipation with forced exportation and colonization in the West Indies or back in Africa.
 - 3. He believed that even free blacks could never be assimilated into American life and political structures.
- C. Slavery was Jefferson's personal *bete noir*, the one problem he could neither solve nor squarely face.

Essential Reading:

Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, ed. by William Peden.

Supplementary Reading:

Alf J. Mapp, Jr., *Thomas Jefferson: A Strange Case of Mistaken Identity*, Chapter 10.

Fawn M. Brodie, *Thomas Jefferson: An Intimate History*, Chapter 11.

John Chester Miller, *The Wolf By the Ears: Thomas Jefferson and Slavery*, Chapters 6-9.

Richard K. Matthews, *The Radical Politics of Thomas Jefferson: A Revisionist View*, Chapters 3-6.

Questions to Consider:

1. How do you square Jefferson's strictures against slavery with his avowed racism? Is he intellectually inconsistent?
2. Is Jefferson's agrarianism radical or is it backward-looking?

Lecture Six

Jefferson Abroad

Scope: In 1784, Jefferson embarked for Europe as Minister Plenipotentiary, and the following year he succeeded Benjamin Franklin as Ambassador to France. Europe had a transformative effect of Jefferson, who emerged from his deep mourning following the death of his wife to fall in love twice while in France. His experience in Europe also heightened the radical nature of his political beliefs, as evidenced by his enduring commitment to the French Revolutionary cause.

Outline

- I. In 1784, Jefferson embarked for Europe as Minister Plenipotentiary, and the following year he succeeded Franklin as Ambassador to France. His European tour of duty had an immense impact on his career and life.
 - A. Jefferson engaged in a variety of diplomatic ventures.
 1. Jefferson and John Adams collaborated on commercial treaties and loans for the United States.
 2. Jefferson also worked to release prisoners held by the "Barbary" pirates.
 - B. Jefferson absorbed the high culture that Europe, and Paris in particular, had to offer.
 1. Jefferson's exposure to Roman and Parisian architecture had a huge impact on his own designs.
 2. Jefferson went on three brief tours of much of Western Europe.
- II. Europe transformed Jefferson emotionally. He finally got over the death of his wife and fell in love.
 - A. In 1786, he begins an affair with Maria Cosway the artist wife of the noted English miniaturist Richard Cosway.
 1. Jefferson and Cosway fell in love in the late summer of 1786, and spent much time together before she had to leave for London in October.
 2. She returned without her husband the following summer, but the relationship fizzled out.
 3. The great legacy of this affair was Jefferson's famous letter, "My Head and My Heart."
 - B. Somewhat more conflicted was his emerging and long-term relationship with his teenage slave and half-sister-in-law, Sally Hemings.
 1. Sally Hemings was the fourteen-year old daughter of her mulatto mother, Betty Hemings, and John Wayles, Jefferson's father-in-law.

2. Jefferson promised to free their children if she would return with him to Virginia, instead of staying in France and becoming free.

III. Jefferson's political thought took a turn to the left, as his agrarian radicalism became extremely pointed.

- A. Jefferson questioned the "natural right" of private property.
 1. To Madison he advocated the abrogation of inherited public debts.
 2. Jefferson proposed a generational limit to all legislation and constitutional arrangements.
- B. Jefferson embraced primitivism.
- C. In the face of Shay's Rebellion, Jefferson defended the right to revolution.
 1. Jefferson argued that rebellions kept governments "honest."
 2. Jefferson argued that events like Shay's Rebellion were in fact quite rare and benign.
 3. The absence of occasional insurrection suggested a lack of republican vigilance and virtue.

IV. Jefferson was utterly transformed by the French Revolution.

- A. Initially, Jefferson had reservations about the possibility of reform in France, and his proposals to Lafayette are extremely moderate.
- B. When mob violence erupted in 1789, however, Jefferson enthusiastically embraced it, seeing the French and American revolutionary causes as essentially the same.
 1. In the summer of 1789, Jefferson saw the mob as essentially reasonable and just and predicted a moderate constitutional outcome.
 2. In 1791, Jefferson claimed that the American and French revolutions were mutually supportive.
- C. This attitude persisted during his service as the first Secretary of State in the Washington administration. Even the Jacobin terror failed to shake Jefferson's faith as expressed in his infamous "Adam and Eve" letter of 1793.

Essential Reading:

Joseph J. Ellis, *American Sphinx: The Character of Thomas Jefferson*, Chapter 2.

Fawn M. Brodie, *Thomas Jefferson: An Intimate History*, Chapters 13-17.

Alf J. Mapp, Jr., *Thomas Jefferson: A Strange Case of Mistaken Identity*, Chapters 12-14.

Supplementary Reading:

Connor Cruise O'Brien, *The Long Affair: Thomas Jefferson and the French Revolution, 1785-1800*.

Richard K. Matthews, *The Radical Politics of Thomas Jefferson: A Revisionist View*, Chapters 2, 7.

Questions to Consider:

1. What does Jefferson's avid embrace of the French Revolution say about his political position and core values?
2. What, if anything, do Jefferson's romantic liaisons reveal about his character?

Lecture Seven

Jefferson versus Hamilton

Scope: Jefferson's tenure as Secretary of State in Washington's administration placed him in direct conflict and competition with Alexander Hamilton, the brilliant but enigmatic Secretary of the Treasury. Jefferson saw Hamilton as his political nemesis as well as a rival for the paternal affection and approval of Washington. They differed on almost every question of policy, from foreign affairs to the nature and interpretation of the Constitution. As his conflict with Hamilton deepened, Jefferson emerged as the leader of the party in opposition to the Administration he served in the State Department.

Outline

- I. Jefferson's tenure as Secretary of State placed him in conflict and competition with Alexander Hamilton, the brilliant Secretary of the Treasury.
 - A. Jefferson and Hamilton were extremely different in almost every way.
 1. Jefferson was a member of the Virginia aristocracy, while Hamilton was a bastard from the West Indies.
 2. Jefferson was shy and pacifistic, and Hamilton was a dashing and arrogant soldier.
 3. As opposed to Jefferson's agrarianism, Hamilton was a champion of urban commerce and industrial development.
 - B. Hamilton's accomplishments were significant.
 1. Hamilton was an extremely gifted student and lawyer.
 2. Hamilton had supported early attempts to revise the Articles of Confederation.
 3. Hamilton had been one of the prime movers behind the constitutional movement and one of the principal authors of the *Federalist*.
 - C. Jefferson saw Hamilton as an "engine of political corruption."
- II. Jefferson and Hamilton differed in their conception of the Constitution and proper role of government.
 - A. Hamilton saw the Federal government as national in scope, while Jefferson saw it as a compact among the states.
 1. Hamilton's nationalism came from his military background. He favored a powerful central government that could control the states and was based on direct popular consent.
 2. Jefferson feared vigorous central government, and saw the Constitution as a compact among the states. He favored a bill of rights, which Hamilton had opposed.
 - B. Jefferson and Hamilton fundamentally disagreed in their modes of interpreting the Constitution.
 1. Jefferson believed in a strict construction of the Constitution based on the Tenth Amendment.
 2. Hamilton favored implied powers, and believed on a loose interpretation of the Constitution based on Article I, Section 8.
- III. Jefferson and Hamilton also disagreed fundamentally over foreign policy.
 - A. Jefferson and his Republican Party championed the French revolutionary cause while Hamilton's High Federalists supported Britain.
 - B. The clash on foreign policy was also personal, involving charges of duplicity and misconduct on both sides.
 1. Jefferson resented Hamilton's secret intrusion into foreign affairs, which was the realm of the Secretary of State.
 2. Hamilton felt that Jefferson was unwilling to engage in meaningful diplomacy with the British, and believed that he was not accurately representing the views of the President.
- IV. The struggle between Jefferson and his Republican Party against Hamilton's High Federalist quickly became remarkably bitter and divisive.
 - A. Jefferson hired Philip Freneau as a translator and set him up as the head of a political newspaper that attacked Hamilton and the Federalists, charging him with corruption.
 - B. Hamilton, for his part, wrote his A. L., American, and "Catullus" essays, denouncing Jefferson for his support of Freneau and questioning his support of the Washington administration he served.
- V. Jefferson appealed to Washington against Hamilton, revealing a passionate hatred and conspiratorial fear of his rival. When these appeals failed, Jefferson retired for the second time.

Essential Reading:

Merrill D. Peterson, *Thomas Jefferson and the New Nation: A Biography*, Chapter 7.

Alf J. Mapp, Jr., *Thomas Jefferson: A Strange Case of Mistaken Identity*, Chapter 15.

Supplementary Reading:

Stanley Elkins and Eric McKittrick, *The Age of Federalism: The Early American Republic, 1788-1800*, Chapters 1-8.

Richard Hofstadter, *The Idea of a Party System*, Chapters 1-3.

Questions to Consider:

1. Considering Jefferson's position within Washington's cabinet, was his opposition to that administration's policies principled? Why or why not?
2. Assess the validity of Jefferson's charges against Hamilton. Was he, in fact, an "engine of corruption?"

Lecture Eight

States' Rights and the "Revolution of 1800"

Scope: In 1796, Jefferson was elected John Adams's Vice-President and briefly considers forming a unity government with him. Jefferson and his opposition were placed in a precarious position by the news of the "XYZ Affair" and the outbreak of the "Quasi-war" with France. It was this low point that summoned Jefferson's best in political acumen. His brilliant leadership guided the Republicans to victory in the "Revolution of 1800," but Jefferson would ironically need the help of Alexander Hamilton to secure his own presidency over Aaron Burr.

Outline

- I. In 1796, Jefferson emerged from retirement to lead his Republican party to ultimate victory.
- II. After he learned the results of the election of 1796, he drafted a letter to Adams proposing a unity government given the dangers of global war abroad and vitriolic partisanship at home.
 - A. Jefferson proposed to assure the re-election of Adams if he will head the Republican Party.
 - B. Madison advised Jefferson not to send the letter.
 1. Madison noted that Jefferson might be seen as betraying his supporters.
 2. Madison argued that Republican opposition to Adams was likely, and any tie to him could be politically embarrassing.
- III. Jefferson and his opposition was placed in a precarious position by the news of the "XYZ Affair" and the outbreak of the "Quasi-war" with France. It was this low point which summoned Jefferson's best in political acumen.
 - A. He disassociated the Republican and French revolutionary causes.
 1. Jefferson insisted that any such identification was a result of Federalist propaganda.
 2. Jefferson embraced a policy of "commerce with all nation, alliance with none," sounding reminiscently like President Washington.
 - B. Jefferson seized on the Alien and Sedition Acts as evidence of a High Federalist conspiracy to undermine liberty and constitutional government.
 1. Jefferson responded with the "Kentucky Resolutions" which invoked the notions of states' rights and nullification.
 2. Jefferson argued that these acts betrayed a Federalist conspiracy against liberty and republican government.

3. Privately, Jefferson described the sectional basis of the party divisions, and urged patience.
- IV. Jefferson's political judgment was unerring, for, just as he expected, Adams proved unwilling to be led by the Hamiltonian within his party and administration.
- A. When Adams finally concluded peace with France, the Federalist party split.
 1. Hamilton publicly castigated Adams in a pamphlet.
 2. The result, in the ensuing national election, was a narrow Republican victory, the so-called "Revolution of 1800."
 - B. A peculiar constitutional loophole, however, resulted in a tie vote in the Electoral College between Jefferson and his purported running mate, Aaron Burr of New York.
 1. Burr entered into negotiations with the Federalists in Congress and seemed to be their preference.
 2. Jefferson recalled a conversation with Adams in which the Federalists demanded policy assurances before they would install Jefferson as President.
 - C. Ironically, it is Hamilton who interceded for Jefferson and swung enough of his party to keep Burr from winning the presidency.
 1. Hamilton thought of Jefferson as a deluded and slightly fanatical, yet honest, opponent, while he considered Burr a dangerous adventurer.
 2. Jefferson had sorely misread Hamilton's character and adherence to high-minded principle.

Essential Reading:

Merrill D. Peterson, *Thomas Jefferson and the New Nation: A Biography*, Chapter 8.

Alf J. Mapp, Jr., *Thomas Jefferson: A Strange Case of Mistaken Identity*, Chapter 16.

Joseph J. Ellis, *American Sphinx: The Character of Thomas Jefferson*, Chapter 3.

Supplementary Reading:

Richard Hofstadter, *The Idea of a Party System: The Rise of Legitimate Opposition in the United States, 1780-1840*, Chapter 4.

Stanley Elkins and Eric McKittrick, *The Age of Federalism: The Early American Republic, 1788-1800*, Chapters 12-15.

Questions to Consider:

1. Was Jefferson's opposition to the Alien and Sedition Acts principled or politically expedient?
2. Why did Hamilton finally support Jefferson against Burr? What does this suggest about their adversarial relationship?

Lecture Nine

Principle and Practice in Jefferson's Presidency

Scope: Jefferson referred to his election as the "Revolution of 1800" because he saw it as a defense of the principles of 1776 that the Federalists had tried to undermine. And in many ways, Jefferson's presidency reflects a return to the "country ideals" of diminished Federal government and strict construction of the Constitution. In other regards, however, Jefferson's tenure in office represented a stark contrast between his purported principles and his actual practice. Ultimately what informed Jefferson's actions was not constitutional or even political-economic considerations, but a "higher sense" of political priorities based on his vision of the American future.

Outline

- I. Jefferson referred to his election as the "Revolution of 1800" because he saw it as a defense of the principles of 1776 that the Federalists had tried to undermine.
 - A. In many ways, Jefferson's presidency reflected a return to the "country ideals" of diminished Federal government and strict construction.
 1. Jefferson expressed these ideals in his First Inaugural Address.
 2. Jefferson succeeded in cutting the Federal debt, eliminating domestic taxes, and shrinking the Federal government.
 - B. In other regards, however, Jefferson's tenure in office represented a stark contrast between his purported principles and his actual practice.
 1. Jefferson maintained Hamilton's financial and revenue scheme.
 2. Jefferson claimed that "what is practicable must often control what is pure theory."
 - C. Ultimately what informed Jefferson's actions was not constitutional or even political-economic considerations, but a "higher sense" of political priorities.
- II. Jefferson struggled with the problem of patronage and partisanship.
 - A. In his Inaugural Address Jefferson decried partisan hostility and called for reconciliation and bipartisanship ("We are all Republicans; we are all Federalists").
 - B. In practice, he was extremely partisan.
 1. He was anxious to create a Republican officer corps in the Army.
 2. Jefferson purged many Federalists from the judiciary, occasionally with questionable constitutional justification.
 3. Jefferson's federal appointments were often partisan.

- C. Squaring Jefferson's rhetoric with his practice is difficult, unless one remembers his ability to demonize his opponents in his imagination and read them as a "disloyal" opposition.
 1. He claimed that the Federalists were the enemies of progress and science.
 2. He saw the Federalists as fundamentally identical with the "toryism" of the revolutionary period.
- III. Jefferson's most impressive achievement, the Louisiana Purchase of 1803, was also his most constitutionally suspect.
 - A. The critical actor in the deal was Napoleon.
 1. Spain ceded Louisiana to France in 1801, and Napoleon planned to develop Louisiana as part of his plan for a western empire.
 2. The failure to recapture San Domingo made Louisiana of little value to Napoleon.
 3. Needing cash to fight Great Britain, Napoleon offered to sell the entire province for a mere fifteen million dollars in 1803.
 - B. At the time, the purchase was extremely controversial and divisive.
 1. Many northern Federalists feared that Louisiana would upset the sectional balance of power and result in disunion.
 2. In fact, sectional crises did occur over the western territories in 1820 and throughout the 1850s.
 - C. Jefferson's own theory of strict construction denied the president the power to make such a deal.
 1. There was no constitutional provision for the acquisition of new territory.
 2. Jefferson initially desired a constitutional amendment retroactively sanctioning the purchase, but dropped the idea when advised that it could be politically embarrassing.
 - D. Once again, Jefferson sacrificed constitutional ideals to the higher goal of an empire of liberty.
- IV. Perhaps the most glaring contradiction in Jefferson's presidency was that between his libertarian convictions prior to holding office and his beliefs and practices while in the White House.
 - A. Throughout his career he had championed freedom of the press. Once in office, however, he suggested to various governors that they silence journalistic critics under state sedition laws.
 - B. He demonstrated a similar lack of consideration for due process in the aftermath of Burr's "conspiracy"—a half-baked scheme to incite secession in the western territories; the result was that Burr was acquitted.
 1. Jefferson pronounced Burr guilty before his trial; even to this day no one is quite sure of what Burr had actually planned.

2. Jefferson personally directed the prosecution, and when he failed, he was seen as somewhat vindictive.
- C. Most notorious of all, however, were his actions during the Embargo of 1807-1809.
 1. The Embargo was an attempt to use "peaceable coercions" against violations of American neutral shipping by England and France.
 2. Many of the Embargo Act's provisions allowed for widespread search and seizure without warrants or due process.
 3. Jefferson imposed military occupation and government in upstate New York to eliminate smuggling across the Canadian border.
 4. The Embargo crippled the northern economy and led to high urban unemployment.

Essential Reading:

Merrill D. Peterson, *Thomas Jefferson and the New Nation: A Biography*, Chapters 9-10.

Joseph J. Ellis, *American Sphinx: The Character of Thomas Jefferson*, Chapter 4.

Supplementary Reading:

Leonard Levy, *Jefferson and Civil Liberties: The Darker Side*.

John Chester Miller, *The Wolf by the Ears: Thomas Jefferson and Slavery*, Chapters 16-19.

Drew R. McCoy, *The Elusive Republic: Political Economy in Jeffersonian America*.

Questions to Consider:

1. What do you make of Jefferson's appeal above the Constitution to a "higher law"? Is it a sign of hypocrisy or rather a commitment to a revolutionary mentality?
2. Was the Embargo of 1807-1809 a noble experiment, or just a naive policy? Why did it fail?

Lecture Ten

Literary Legacies

Scope: Following his presidency, Jefferson retired to Monticello and withdrew from public affairs. Despite his modesty, however, Jefferson understood that his political career had been epoch-making in the new nation's history, and he self-consciously created literary legacies from that career in his retirement, of which the most notable example was his renewed correspondence with John Adams.

Outline

- I. In his third retirement, Jefferson, surrounded by his family on his beloved mountaintop, claimed to be focused on pastoral concerns.
 - A. A simply private man now, he purportedly avoided newspapers and did not concern himself over public matters.
 - B. Despite his modesty, however, Jefferson understood that his political career had been epoch-making in the new nation's history, and self-consciously created literary legacies from that career in retirement.
- II. Jefferson gave us two accounts of his life, the *Anas* in 1818 and his *Autobiography* in 1821.
 - A. Both texts exemplify Jefferson's self-effacing modesty, high-minded principle, and unswerving optimism and confidence in the rectitude of his convictions.
 - B. Perhaps not too surprisingly, Jefferson's recollection was not always accurate.
 - C. Both efforts were abortive. Jefferson couldn't effectively tell his own story.
- III. Jefferson's greatest legacy was undoubtedly his resumption of, and contribution to, the Jefferson-Adams correspondence. Considered by many to be the greatest work of early American letters, the correspondence was self-consciously written for posterity and represents one of the noblest achievements of the "founding generation."
 - A. Jefferson and Adams had been extremely close friends since their first great collaboration at the Continental Congress.
 - B. Political rivalry in the late 1790s finally divided the two friends.
 1. Jefferson's partisan allies in the press castigated President Adams, which neither he nor his wife, Abigail, could forgive.
 2. For his part, Jefferson felt deeply hurt over Adams' appointment of the infamous "midnight judges."

- C. A long silence emerged between them only broken in 1812 by the constant cajoling of the “visionary” Benjamin Rush.
 - 1. Rush claimed that in a dream he had a vision of an epistolary reconciliation of the two champions of American independence.
 - 2. Rush cajoled and flattered both parties, finally effecting a resumption of their correspondence.
- IV. After restating their political positions and explaining their past actions, the correspondence covered every major topic, from metaphysics and political-economy to theology, *belles- lettres*, international affairs and the virtues of the Enlightenment.
 - A. Their characters are exemplified in the opening exchange.
 - 1. Adams’ opening comments revealed his self-deprecating humor and warmth.
 - 2. Jefferson missed Adams’s little joke, and responded with a morally earnest dissertation.
 - B. Adams moved the discussion to their political positions.
 - 1. Adams prodded a reluctant Jefferson to defend his political actions as well as his criticisms of his Federalist opponents.
 - 2. Jefferson’s response was both forthright and gracious, laying out the bases of his dissent from Federalist orthodoxy.
 - C. The discussion turned from the practice to the theory of politics, especially the problem of aristocracy.
 - 1. Adams denied the difference between natural and artificial aristocracy which Jefferson insisted on.
 - 2. Jefferson thought that Adams overstated the danger of aristocracy in the young Republic, and was more trusting of the electorate.
 - 3. Jefferson claimed that Adams’s fears of aristocracy were possibly based on the domination of first families in New England in contrast to the “democratic” Chesapeake.
 - D. Jefferson and Adams engaged in extended metaphysical debate.
 - 1. Jefferson argued for a thorough-going materialism.
 - 2. Adams claimed to be an ontological “agnostic” and invoked the arguments of Berkeley against Jefferson’s materialism.
 - E. Adams evoked Jefferson’s fundamental credo.

Essential Reading:

Joseph J. Ellis, *American Sphinx: The Character of Thomas Jefferson*, Chapter 5.

Fawn M. Brodie, *Thomas Jefferson: An Intimate History*, Chapters 30-31.

Supplementary Reading:

Lester J. Cappon, ed., *The Adams-Jefferson Letters: The Complete Correspondence Between Thomas Jefferson and Abigail and John Adams*.

Merrill D. Peterson, *Adams and Jefferson: A Revolutionary Dialogue*.

Questions to Consider:

1. Why was Jefferson unable to tell his own story without the intercession of his friend Adams? What does this tell us about his character?
2. Was Benjamin Rush correct in prophesying that the Adams-Jefferson correspondence would be one of the most honorable and uplifting events in American political letters?

Lecture Eleven

Final Projects, Closing Fears

Scope: In his final years, Jefferson struggled to put his "legacy" in order. At the personal level, this meant solving his perennial problem of indebtedness, something he was never able to do. On his plantation, it meant structuring his experience of mastery in such a way as to avoid being exposed to the degradations of slavery. Jefferson also had to come to terms with political legacies and intractable problems that had dogged him throughout his career, in particular those of slavery (raised critically by the Missouri controversy) and broad-based education.

Outline

- I. In his final years, Jefferson struggled to put his "legacy" in order.
 - A. At the personal level, this meant solving his perennial problem of indebtedness, something he was never able to do.
 1. Jefferson retired from the presidency with substantial assets as well as large debts.
 2. Jefferson's expenses were prodigious, his investments and debt consolidations were disastrous, resulting in his financial insolvency after the Panic of 1819.
 - B. On his plantation, it meant structuring his experience of mastery in such a way as to avoid being exposed to the degradations of slavery.
 1. Jefferson never personally disciplined his slaves and avoided supervising them personally in the fields.
 2. Jefferson preferred to supervise the slaves in his nail factory, where he could treat them as quasi-free laborers and reward their efficiency and diligence.
 - C. Jefferson also had to come to terms with political legacies and intractable problems that had dogged him throughout his career.
- II. The greatest unresolved problem for Jefferson was always slavery.
 - A. Jefferson solved this dilemma through wishful thinking.
 1. Jefferson placed his hopes for emancipation in the rising generation.
 2. Despite the absence of meaningful action against slavery, Jefferson remained confident that eventually slavery would be eliminated.
 - B. His own proposed solution was fanciful and more than a bit draconian in some of its details.
 1. Jefferson favored emancipation coupled with forced deportation.
 2. Jefferson suggested the need for compensation of the financial loss of Southern property by Northern taxes.

- C. Jefferson was no longer able to wish the issue away in a spirit of blithe optimism when the Missouri Controversy awoke him "like a fire bell in the night."
 1. Jefferson's feared that the question of slavery in the territories would exacerbate sectional tensions, possibly resulting in disunion. Reaction to the controversy was striking.
 2. He took an ardently pro-Southern, "pro-slavery in the territories" position, which coupled with his renewed states' rights convictions and fear of northern encroachment, a stance that would later be known as "fire eating."

- III. Jefferson's other great unresolved project was education, without which he feared for the duration of republican government.
 - A. In his retirement, Jefferson continued to push for his ward scheme of education for Virginia.
 1. Public education would both uplift the masses and create a natural aristocracy of talent and virtue.
 2. Jefferson subtly transformed his ward scheme into a blueprint for grass-roots participatory democracy.
 - B. In 1818, he began planning a new public university in Charlottesville which was chartered the next year. Jefferson was instrumental in designing both the architecture and the curriculum.
 - C. The results of Jefferson's curricular meddling was an early form of political correctness.
 1. The Professor of Law and Government was required to pledge fealty to the reigning orthodoxy of states' rights and Jefferson's view on the "Missouri Question."
 2. Jefferson wanted to reprint a politically bowdlerized version of Hume's *History of England*.
 3. Jefferson included Anglo-Saxon in the curriculum because the textbooks would express his political principles.

Essential Reading:

Merrill D. Peterson, *Thomas Jefferson and the New Nation: A Biography*, Chapter 11.

John Chester Miller, *The Wolf by the Ears: Thomas Jefferson and Slavery*, Chapters 24-29.

Supplementary Reading:

Clement Eaton, *Freedom of Thought in the Old South*.

Questions to Consider:

1. Do you think Jefferson was sincere in his optimism about eventual abolition of slavery?

2. On the balance, was Jefferson's curricular meddling progressive or doctrinaire?

Lecture Twelve

Through a Glass Darkly: The Man and the Symbol

Scope: A shy, private man who only shone in small gatherings, Jefferson hid behind a "southern" mask of polite stoic sociability, projecting a public facade of almost disembodied rationality. Yet there is more to Jefferson than the mask, as witnessed by his dalliances with Cosway, Hemings, and his infamous pass at Betsy Walker. A loving patriarch, Jefferson was also a demanding parent. Jefferson's character, like his magnificent house, is predicated on an ability to occlude from vision those realities whose presence would be upsetting or even unbearable. This is more than a personal trait, however, for Jefferson's nature was artistic, and his greatest work was his prose poetry of American democracy. Like his character, his vision of America was also based on an ability to focus on glittering ideals by ignoring unpleasant actualities.

Outline

- I. Peering into Jefferson's soul is a peculiarly perilous undertaking.
 - A. Jefferson hid behind a "southern" mask of polite stoic sociability, projecting a public facade of almost disembodied rationality.
 - B. There is more to Jefferson than the mask, as witnessed by his dalliances with Cosway, Hemings, and his infamous pass at Elizabeth Walker.
 1. Elizabeth Walker was the wife of Jefferson's school chum, John Walker.
 2. While asked to look in on her in the 1760s, Jefferson made one of several alleged passes at Elizabeth.
 3. Years later, when the story was published by a vituperative journalist, Jefferson acknowledged his actions and proclaimed Mrs. Walker's innocence.
 - C. What we see in Jefferson's character is always speculative, often reflecting our own predilections.
- II. Jefferson was a loving father and patriarch.
 - A. He collected his children and grandchildren around him in his retirement and always sought a neighborhood of a few close intimate friends.
 - B. At the same time, Jefferson was also a demanding if not tyrannical parent.
 1. After the death of his wife, he placed his eldest daughter Martha ("Patsy") in virtual emotional thralldom, threatening to withhold his affections if she failed to act up to his high expectations.

2. Martha always remained devoted to her father, and she moved her family to Monticello after her marriage.
 - C. Equally revealing is Jefferson's ability to maintain his optimism at home by simply ignoring uncomfortable realities.
 - D. Most troubling of all is his relationship with Sally Hemings and her children.
 1. Jefferson did treat the Hemings children differently than his other slaves, but he did not bestow affection on them as he did with his white grandchildren.
 2. While all of Sally Hemings' children were freed at Jefferson's death, several of them were over 21, in violation of his "pledge" to her in Paris.
 - E. Jefferson's curious family life may reveal a critical aspect of Jefferson's optimism and buoyancy; given the tragic circumstances that surround him and the irrational bind in which history has placed him, confidence in the future might have been a necessary tonic, like whistling past the graveyard to overcome a dreadful anxiety.
- III. Perhaps the most revealing aspect of Jefferson's home life is, literally, his home.
- A. Monticello is one of the great architectural achievements of early American history.
 1. Neo-classically correct in its adherence to Palladian forms, the symmetrical exterior with classical pediments and columns exemplifies the order and rationality of the Enlightenment.
 2. Jefferson's mountaintop villa is oriented on an east-west axis, symbolically drawing us in from the east and projecting us boldly into the west through the garden facade parlor.
 3. Jefferson's design, and simple but elegant ornamentation stress horizontal monumentality over vertical ostentation, and its site sensitivity is expressed by the octagonal dome which symbolically caps the mountaintop.
 - B. Monticello is also, however, a *tromp l'oeil* or hall of illusions.
 1. Unlike most contemporaneous plantation houses, Jefferson obscured the presence of outbuildings, known as dependencies, which were not seen from the main entrance.
 2. Those dependencies, which are visible from the garden façade, contained cooking and storage facilities.
 3. The slave residences were hidden underneath the dependencies, in underground passageways. Thus, dependency was symbolically rendered invisible, but only by being built into the very foundations of the structure.

4. Like so much in Jefferson's life, the noble and shining glory of Monticello rested on the hidden world of African-American slaves and their labor.

- IV. The tension between Jefferson's optimistic idealism and the realities of his life are symbolic of the American political experience.
- A. Edified by the high ideals we aspire to, we are equally mired in the realities of racism, violence and economic exploitation.
 - B. Jefferson's greatness is not revealed in his statesmanship or his political theories, but rather in his soaring rhetoric.
 - C. Jefferson was a visionary artist at heart, and his role in the American tradition is that of our foremost prose poet of political democracy.

Essential Reading:

Alf J. Mapp, Jr., *Thomas Jefferson: A Strange Case of Mistaken Identity*, Chapter 17.

Joseph J. Ellis, *American Sphinx: The Character of Thomas Jefferson*, Epilogue.

Supplementary Reading:

Annette Gordon-Reed, *Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemming: An American Controversy*.

William H. Pierson, Jr., *American Buildings and Their Architects*, vol. I, Chapter 8.

Questions to Consider:

1. Why is Jefferson's character so elusive?
2. Why has Jefferson remained so central to the American sense of identity? Is the Jeffersonian ideal still viable or desirable at the new millennium?

Timeline

- 1743 Born April 13 at Peter Jefferson's Shadwell plantation in present-day Albemarle County, Virginia.
- 1745 The Jefferson family moves to the Tuckahoe estate of the recently-deceased William Randolph.
- 1752 The Jefferson family returns to Shadwell.
- 1757 Peter Jefferson dies, leaving Thomas under the legal authority of his mother, Jane Randolph, until he is twenty one years of age.
- 1758-1760 Jefferson attends the grammar school of James Maury, and receives a classical education.
- 1760-1762 Jefferson attends the College of William and Mary, where he studies with, and befriends, Professor William Small.
- 1762-1767 Jefferson reads law with George Wythe, spends two years as a clerk in Williamsburg followed by three years of intensive reading at Shadwell. He was admitted to the bar and was chosen to sit in the Albemarle County Court in 1767.
- 1769 Admitted to the House of Burgesses in the spring. Participates in Virginia Association and other forms of colonial protest and resistance. Begins construction of Monticello.
- 1770 Argues the case of Howell vs. Netherland *pro bono*, invoking natural law against the slave codes of Virginia.
- 1772 Marries the widow Martha Wayles Skelton on January 1, and his eldest daughter Martha (Patsy) is born on September 27.
- 1773 Upon the death of his father-in-law, John Wayles, Jefferson inherits over 11,000 acres and 134 slaves. He also inherits substantial debts.

- 1774 Writes the *A Summary View of the Rights of British America* in the late summer, gaining widespread recognition throughout the Colonies.
- 1775 Member of the Virginia delegation to the Second Continental Congress.
- 1776 Jefferson drafts the *Declaration of Independence* which is adopted on July 4, 1776. Subsequently he drafts a constitution for his state which was not adopted. Beginning in 1776, Jefferson serves for three years in Virginia's revolutionary House of Delegates.
- 1778 A second daughter, Mary (called Polly or Maria) is born on August 1.
- 1779 Elected Governor of Virginia on June 1. Submits proposed legal reforms, few of which are enacted.
- 1780 Elected a member of American Philosophical Society in January. Re-elected Governor of Virginia on June 2. British invade Chesapeake in late fall and winter of 1780.
- 1781 British depredation continue right up to the end of Jefferson's tenure in office, and an inquiry is made into his conduct which later clears him of any wrongdoing. Completes draft of *Notes on the State of Virginia*.
- 1782 Death of Martha Wayles Jefferson on September 6.
- 1783 Serves as Virginia delegate to Congress.
- 1784 Submits to Congress a plan for government of the western Territories, revised and adopted as Northwest Ordinance of 1785. Appointed minister plenipotentiary with Adams and Franklin, Jefferson sails with his daughter Patsy from Boston on July 5.
- 1785 Succeeds Franklin as minister to France. Publishes *Notes on the State of Virginia*.

- 1786 Tours London and English gardens with Adams in the spring. Adapts plan of *Maison Caree* for the proposed Virginia Statehouse. Falls in love with Maria Cosway in the summer in Paris.
- 1787 Tours Northern Italy and Southern France in the late spring. His younger daughter Mary (Polly) arrives with fourteen-year-old Sally Hemings.
- 1788 Tours Netherlands and Rhineland in spring. Chronicles growing political tumult in France.
- 1789 Attends opening of *Estates-General* in spring. Witnesses mob violence in Paris. Returns to Virginia in the late autumn.
- 1790 Accepts post as Washington's Secretary of State.
- 1791 Argues for strict construction of the Constitution regarding the chartering of Hamilton's Bank of the United States. Hires Philip Freneau as a clerk in the State Department. Begins organization of Republican opposition.
- 1792 Appeals to Washington against Hamilton.
- 1793 Urges recognition of "Citizen" Edmund Genet, an ambassador from Revolutionary France. Argues for the continuing validity of American treaties with France, and against a statement of official neutrality between France and Great Britain. Resigns as Secretary of State and begins his second retirement.
- 1796 Begins second construction of Monticello. Elected vice-president in December.
- 1797 In early January, considers forming a unity government with President Adams, his old friend, but is dissuaded by James Madison. Elected president of the American Philosophical Society.

- 1798 The "XYZ" affair and Quasi-war with France create a crisis for the Republican party. Jefferson responds to the Alien and Sedition Acts with his Kentucky Resolutions, championing strict construction, states' rights, and nullification.
- 1800 Vote of Electoral College in the presidential election results in a tie between Aaron Burr and Thomas Jefferson. Hamilton works for Jefferson's election in the weeks ahead, helping to secure the will of the electorate.
- 1801 Inaugurated President of the United States on March 4. End of correspondence with John Adams for over a decade.
- 1802 Repeals Judiciary Act of 1801. Attacked in press by James Callender, a former journalistic supporter of Jefferson, who publicizes allegations about Jefferson's relations with Elizabeth Walker and Sally Hemings.
- 1803 Impeachment of Federal Judges Pickering and Chase. Louisiana Purchase. Lewis and Clark expedition.
- 1804 Mary (Polly) dies April 17. Jefferson tries to rekindle his friendship with Abigail Adams after she sends him a letter of condolence, but to no avail. Re-elected President of the United States.
- 1805 Warns of abuses by press in his second Inaugural Address. Privately urges state prosecutions of journalistic offenders. Jay Treaty expires, and Britain and France resume their depredations on American mercantile shipping.
- 1806 Burr "conspiracy" unfolds in late fall and winter.
- 1807 Trial of Aaron Burr in Virginia in the summer, resulting in his acquittal. *USS Chesapeake* fired on by *HMS Leopard* on June 22, 1807. Jefferson responds with his

Embargo of 1807, which is enacted on December 22.

- 1808 Four more Embargo Acts were passed in the course of year, ostensibly stopping smuggling but clearly violating due process. On April 19 he declares the area around Lake Champlain in upstate New York, "in insurrection" and a military occupation ensues.
- 1809 Repeals Embargo on March 1, and retires as President three days later.
- 1810 Jefferson urges his "ward" scheme of public education and self-government on Governor John Tyler of Virginia.
- 1811 Jefferson supervises the publication and translation of Destutt de Tracy's *A Commentary and Review of Montesquieu's Spirit of the Laws*, arguing against the moderation associated with Montesquieu.
- 1812 Resumes Adams correspondence at urging of Benjamin Rush.
- 1814 Offers to sell his library to the United States. This collection would serve as the foundation of the Library of Congress. Resigns as President of the American Philosophical Society.
- 1817 Jefferson's ward scheme for public education is finally defeated in the legislature. He begins designs for the University of Virginia.
- 1818 Completes *Anas*. Helps plan University of Virginia at Rockfish Gap meeting in the summer.
- 1819 University of Virginia receives its charter.
- 1820 Troubled by Missouri Controversy, Jefferson comes to embrace the position that slavery ought not be outlawed in any of the western territories.

- 1821 Writes *Autobiography*.
- 1825 University of Virginia commences classes.
- 1826 Jefferson dies at Monticello, July 4 (the same day as John Adams).

Biographical Notes

John Adams (1735-1826) A Harvard educated lawyer, Adams became actively involved in the colonial protest movement in the mid-1760s. A champion of independence, he worked with Jefferson in the Continental Congress to forward that cause and a warm friendship emerged. Later they served together as diplomats in Europe, and the friendship grew even deeper. Adams served on almost every important committee in the Continental Congress, drafted the constitution for his native state of Massachusetts, authored numerous controversial works, and served as Washington's Vice-President before being elected to the chief magistracy in 1796 over Thomas Jefferson, who served as his Vice-President. Their friendship was severely strained by the partisan rivalries between them, only to be renewed in a famous correspondence in the second decade of the nineteenth century.

John Breckenridge (1760-1806) Breckenridge attended William and Mary from 1779-1781 before studying law and moving to Kentucky. He served as that state's attorney general in 1795 and was a United States Senator from 1801-1805 where he led the Republican Party. Breckenridge helped secure passage of Jefferson's Kentucky Resolutions in 1798, and as a supporter of western concerns was a champion of the Louisiana Purchase of 1803. Jefferson would appoint Breckenridge his Attorney General in his second term.

Aaron Burr (1765-1836) A graduate of the College of New Jersey (now Princeton), Burr studied theology and law. Burr joined the Continental Army and participated in Benedict Arnold's campaign against Canada. Burr was admitted to the bar in New York in 1782, and elected to the United States Senate (1791-1797). Burr would tie Jefferson for electoral votes in 1800, and ultimately be elected Vice-President. After killing Hamilton in a duel in 1804, Burr became implicated in a western filibustering conspiracy for which he was never convicted.

Dunmore, John Murray, Earl of (1732-1809) A Scottish Lord and part of the infamous Jacobite rising of 1745, Dunmore was appointed royal governor of New York in 1770, and was appointed royal governor of Virginia less than a year later. Dunmore dissolved the House of Burgesses in 1773 and 1774 because of its "treasonable" protestations. In June 1775 Dunmore and his family removed to the British warship *Fowey*, and in November declared martial law and issued a proclamation offering freedom to those slaves who would join the British forces.

Fauquier, Francis (c. 1704-1768) Acting royal governor of Virginia for (1758-1768) in the absence of the actual governors (the Earl of Loudon and Jeffrey Amherst). He was by and large a friend to the colonies; however, acting on instructions, he dissolved the House of Burgesses in 1765 after that body opposed the Stamp Act. He was part of Jefferson's social circle at the College of

William and Mary in the colonial capital of Williamsburg. Fauquier County, VA is named for him.

Albert Gallatin (1761-1849) Born in Geneva in Switzerland, Gallatin received his education at the Geneva Academy and emigrated to the United States the following year (1780). Gallatin served in the Pennsylvania state legislature from 1790-1792, and then the House of Representatives from 1795-1801, becoming the leader of the Republican minority in 1797. Gallatin served ably as Secretary of the Treasury throughout Jefferson's presidency.

Elbridge Gerry (1744-1814) A Harvard graduate, Gerry was a merchant, member of the Massachusetts committee of correspondence, and a delegate to the Continental Congress (1776-1781, 1782-1785). A signer of the Declaration of Independence, Gerry was a friend and supporter of Jefferson's, and was elected to the first Congress in 1789, which he would leave after his second term. In 1797 he was one a member of the infamous "XYZ" peace delegation to France, and remained behind after his two colleagues returned to the United States. Elected Governor of Massachusetts in 1810, he would be elected James Madison's vice president in 1812.

Alexander Hamilton (1757-1804) An illegitimate child from the West Indies, Hamilton arrived in New Jersey in 1772, and went on to attend King's College (now Columbia) in New York City prior to the Revolutionary War, in which he served with distinction as Washington's secretary and aide-de-camp. Hamilton served in the Continental Congress and was one of the prime movers behind the Federalist movement of the 1780s and one of the principal authors of *The Federalist*. As Washington's Secretary of the Treasury, Hamilton clashed with Jefferson who served as Secretary of State, and the two rivals came to head their respective parties. Ultimately, Hamilton would help secure Jefferson's elevation to the presidency in place of Aaron Burr in 1800. Four years later, Burr would mortally wound Hamilton in a duel in Weehawken, New Jersey.

John Jay (1745-1829) A graduate of King's College (now Columbia University), Jay was admitted to the New York bar in 1768. A delegate to the Continental Congress in 1774 and 1775, Jay was elected President of that body in 1778. Between 1777-1779 he served as Chief Justice of the state of New York, and was chosen the first Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court in 1789. Jay had served with Adams and Franklin on the peace delegation of 1782, and would be dispatched by Washington to negotiate a controversial treaty with Great Britain in 1794. Jay was also a contributor, with Hamilton and Madison, to *The Federalist*.

James Madison (1751-1836) A graduate of the College of New Jersey (now Princeton) in 1771, Madison would help draft the revolutionary constitution for his native Virginia in 1776. One of Jefferson's closest friends and political confidants, Madison was one of the moving forces behind the Federalist movement of the 1780s and a principal author of *The Federalist*. Madison served as the leader of the Republican Party in the House of Representative from 1789-

1797. In the following year he authored the Virginia Resolutions in protest of the Alien and Sedition Acts, a slightly more moderate version of Jefferson's Kentucky Resolutions. Madison would serve as Jefferson's Secretary of State, and would succeed Madison as President (1809-1817).

Benjamin Rush (1745-1813) A graduate of the College of New Jersey (now Princeton), Rush studied medicine in Philadelphia and at the University of Edinburgh, Scotland, receiving his medical degree from the latter in 1768. A noted physician and statesman, Rush was a delegate at the Continental Congress and a signer of the Declaration of Independence. A friend of both Jefferson and Adams, he was instrumental in their eventual reconciliation.

William Small (? - 1775) Professor of Mathematics, Science, Philosophy and Rhetoric at the College of William and Mary (1758-1764), Small had graduated from the college at Aberdeen. Small was Jefferson's primary instructor at William and Mary and made the young student "his constant companion," introducing him to his future law instructor George Wythe. After his return to England, he traveled in scientific circles, befriending such men as James Watt, Erasmus Darwin, Joseph Priestly, and Josiah Wedgewood.

William Short (1759-1849) A graduate of William and Mary, Short was made a member of the Executive Council of Virginia in 1783-1784. A personal friend of Jefferson's, Short accompanied him to France and served as his private secretary. Short remained in Europe after Jefferson's return to the United States, and was made *charge d'affaires* in 1789. In 1792 he served as a minister at the Hague. His reports of the Jacobin terror provoked Jefferson's famous "Adam and Eve" letter. Short returned to the United States in 1820.

George Washington (1732-1789) Soldier and statesman, Washington saw action with British General Braddock during the Seven Year's War ("French and Indian War"), and would capture Fort Duquesne in 1758. A leader of colonial resistance in Virginia and a delegate to the Continental

Congress in 1774 and 1775, Washington was chosen Commander-in-Chief of the Continental Army, and served successfully throughout the duration of the war. A member of the Constitutional Convention, Washington would be elected the first President of the United States, and would appoint Thomas Jefferson as his Secretary of State during his first term. Jefferson's activities on behalf of the Republican opposition to the Washington administration soured relations between the old friends.

George Wythe (1726-1806) One of Virginia's finest legal minds, Wythe was first admitted to the colonial bar in 1746. Elected to the House of Burgesses beginning in 1754, Wythe emerged as a moderate opponent of the Stamp Act and other Parliamentary taxes. Wythe was Jefferson's law instructor, and would become the first professor of law at the College of William and Mary in 1779. Wythe would also train Henry Clay, James Monroe, and John Marshall. Wythe

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