

## **Thomas Jefferson**

### **BIOGRAPHY REVIEW**

by

: Saul K. Padover

(1952, a Mentor Book)

Abridged from his famous biography  
**A GREAT AMERICAN'S LIFE AND IDEAS**

This Synopsis by David W. Allan

"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with inherent and unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness, that to secure these rights governments are instituted among men. We...solemnly publish and declare, that these colonies are and of right ought to be free and independent states...and for the support of this declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of divine providence, we mutually pledge our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honour."

These immortal words, penned by Thomas Jefferson, as he introduced the World's most successful revolution, are inscribed in the hearts of every freedom-loving American. How grateful we should be that the Lord raised up this giant (in all aspects of his nature) of a man.

No man in this or any other country in the Western world--excepting only Leonardo da Vinci--ever matched Jefferson in the range of his activities, in the fertility of his thinking, and in the multiplicity of his interests. The number of things Jefferson did or knew how to do still astonishes us. He was a mathematician, surveyor, architect, paleontologist, prosodist, lawyer, philosopher, farmer, fiddler, and inventor. He set up an educational system; he built a university; he founded a great political party; he helped design the national capital; he was instrumental in establishing America's coinage; he doubled the territory of the United States; he collected scientific materials in the fields of zoology, geology and anthropology; he wrote a classic essay on poetry; he codified the legal system of his native State. He could converse and read several languages. Everything interested him; nothing was alien to his mind.

In brilliant letters, his total correspondence runs into 18,000 pieces of mail. Jefferson formulated his ideas with depth and beauty rarely excelled. He was a passionate champion of the rights, freedom, and dignity of man. Young Jefferson adopted his motto: "Rebellion to tyrants is obedience to God."

It had taken two days to travel the 100 miles from Williamsburg to Monticello, following the marriage of TJ to Martha Wayles Skelton. Virginia had received a record snowfall. Their two-horse chaise broke down on the way. Proceeding on horseback and taking a mountain track, rather than a road--traveling through some 18 inches of snow--they arrived at Monticello late the second night. The home was still in the skeletal stage, with only one room prepared for occupancy. The night was cold and dreary, and Jefferson, with his usual consideration for others, would not disturb the servants. He stabled the horses himself and took his bride into their new "home." ...kindled a fire... found a bottle of wine; the two shared a toast and succumbed to laughter out of sheer happiness.

Jefferson was a devoted family man. His devotion to his wife was inspiring to all who knew them. She was the object of his love. Combined in her slender person were a number of irresistible qualities. She was well-born, beautiful, finely educated, warm-hearted, a graceful dancer, a fine musician, full of high spirits, and wealthy. Six children were born to them--three died in infancy. Martha's untimely death was devastating to Jefferson.

In 1776, Jefferson was not the leader of the Virginia delegation in Congress, but he was probably its most learned member and certainly its best writer. At the age of 32, he was a gentleman "who could calculate an eclipse, survey an estate, tie an artery, plan an edifice, try a cause, break a horse, dance a minuet, and play the violin." At this time in his life, he penned the immortal words in the Declaration of Independence. In a letter to Colonel William S. Smith, John Adam's son-in-law, TJ said, "The tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots & tyrants. It is its natural manure."

Jefferson, as a US foreign ambassador, could not be in Philadelphia in 1787, but he had trained James Madison in great detail with his thinking--plus they were very close in their political philosophies. Madison's major lead in the constitutional convention was in large measure representing Jefferson. However, when TJ read the constitution, he was upset because it lacked the Bill of Rights. He was also concerned about having no time limit to office--especially for the President. The people had to be eternally protected against the Government. Otherwise, he was well taken by what had been produced.

When he was approached with a proposition to make money in a financial enterprise, he replied: When I first entered on the stage of public life (now twenty-four years, ago), I came to a resolution never to engage while in public office in any kind of enterprise for the improvement of my fortune, nor to wear any other character than of a farmer. I Have never departed from it in a single instance, and I have in multiplied instance found myself happy in being able to decide and to act as a public servant, clear of all interest, in the multiform questions that have arisen, wherein I have seen others embarrassed and biased by having got themselves into a more interesting situation. Thus I have thought myself richer in contentment than I should have been with an increase of fortune.

His popularity was so great that he almost won the 1796 election without campaigning--only two votes shy. However, he prepared carefully for the 1800 election--fearing the loss of freedom if the opposing party won. He championed the cause of the common people and spoke in their name. He not only formulated their inarticulate hopes but also believed in their intelligence, trusted their judgment, respected their character. Jefferson wanted every man to have a chance for life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

During this campaign, he was attacked as an infidel, because he did not go to church. Jefferson was a very devout believer in Christ and practiced the gospel teachings better than almost any man, but he was attacked furiously because of his non-traditional religious approach and castigated as a heathen. Much character assassination took place because of these religious feelings. At the height of the campaign of vilification, Jefferson gave voice to one of his angriest yet immortal statements in a letter to Dr. Rush: "...I have sworn upon the altar of God, eternal hostility against every form of tyranny over the mind of man." This immortal quote is now inscribed in stone in the Jefferson memorial.

So much mud was hurled at Jefferson that some of it stuck. This religious oppression came mainly from the clergy--proud in their ministries, but not with an ounce of support from Jefferson--hence, the jealousy and bigotry that was leveled toward him. For generations, many communities, particularly in the North, continued to regard Thomas Jefferson as Antichrist. As late as 1830 the Philadelphia Public Library refused to keep any works dealing with the life or writings of Jefferson. In New England, he was pursued by relentless clerical hatred. A Puritan clergyman during a baptism asked the father for the child's name. "Thomas Jefferson," the father replied. "No such unchristian name!" thundered the clergyman. "John Adams, I baptize thee."

Jefferson abhorred the idea of big national debt. It was clear that debt meant interest, interest called for higher taxes, and higher taxes involved a reduction in the standard of living of the common people. Coddling the bankers and robbing the toilers was not Jefferson's idea of a good society. He once explained in a letter to Samuel Kercheval:

If we run into such debts, as that we must be taxed in our meat and in our drink, in our necessities and our comforts, in our labors and our amusements, for our callings and our creeds, as the people of England are, our people, like them, must come to labor sixteen hours in the twenty-four, give the earnings of fifteen of these to the government for their debts and daily expenses; and the sixteenth being insufficient to afford us bread, we must live, as they now do, on oatmeal and potatoes; have no time to think, no means of calling the mismanagers to account; but be glad to obtain subsistence by hiring ourselves to rivet their chains on the necks of our fellow-sufferers.

As President, Jefferson inherited a national debt of over \$80,000,000. ...by the end of his administration--despite the purchase of Louisiana and losses due to the Embargo--the national debt was decreased by \$27,000,000.

He loved America as a wise father proud of his offspring, not as an anxious lover jealous of his mistress. He wanted his land to be a beacon of freedom to mankind,... a haven for the world's oppressed.

Of all emigrating peoples, Jefferson preferred Italians. They were among the world's finest artisans and artists, as well as energetic farmers and viticulturists.

He regarded diplomats with suspicion as the spoilers of peace and their craft as the smithy of war. To William Short, he wrote, "I have ever considered diplomacy as the pest of the peace of the world, as the workshop in which nearly all the wars of Europe are manufactured."

He won an overwhelming second term and was beloved by the people. A lot of problems arose during his second term; most of which were out of his control, but he weathered the storm. Announcing at the beginning of his second term that this would be his last, he left it in great honor. During his eight-year tenure as our Third President, he avoided war; never saw a drop of blood spilled, and negotiated many national conflicts from blowing up into war. This was during the Napoleon wars in Europe--with lots of reasons to be drawn into the conflicts. Providentially, Jefferson was able to find Napoleon in a weak moment and bought the whole of the Louisiana Territory for 60,000,000 French francs (about \$15,000,000). This included what we now know as Arkansas, Colorado, Iowa, Kansas, Louisiana, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, North and South Dakota, Oklahoma, and Wyoming--comprising an area of almost a million square miles. All of Europe, including Scandinavia, could be tucked away in this area.

1809: Few men in history ever achieved such philosophical balance and spiritual harmony as did Jefferson; the German poet Goethe was of similar balance. Jefferson said at this time in his life, "My temperament is sanguine. I steer my bark with Hope in the head, leaving Fear astern."

Margaret Bayard Smith, the wife of the editor of the National Intelligencer and Washington Adviser, an ardent Jeffersonian triweekly, visited Monticello about four months after TJ's retirement. She wrote:

There is a tranquility about him, which an inward peace alone could bestow... His tall and slender figure is not impaired by age... His white locks announce an age his activity, strength, health, enthusiasm, ardor, and gayety contradict. His face owes all its charm to its expression and intelligence; his features are not good and his complexion bad, but his countenance is so full of soul and beams with much benignity... His low and mild voice harmonizes with his countenance rather than his figure. But his manners--how gentle, how humble, how kind... To a disposition ardent, affectionate, and communicative, he joins manners timid even to bashfulness and reserved even to coldness.

Jefferson confided in her that his whole life was a conflict between private inclination and public duty. He incurred great debt while serving as President, but did it because of his integrity to the principles he believed in.

He and John Adams had been members of opposite political parties, and though friends early on had been driven apart by political contentions. In 1812 Jefferson received a letter that counted a great deal to him; it was signed--"with sincere Esteem your Friend and Servant"--John Adams. Thus began a classic correspondence in American history. The reconciliation of the two friends was the work of Dr. Benjamin Rush, the Philadelphia physician who was also one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence.

In one of the letters to Adams, Jefferson wrote:

I have given up newspapers in exchange for Tacitus and Thucydides, for Newton and Euclid, and I find myself much happier. Sometimes, indeed, I look back to former occurrences... Of the signers of the Declaration of Independence, I see now living not more than half a dozen on your side of the Potomac, and on this side, myself alone. You and I have been wonderfully spared, and myself with remarkable health... I am on horseback three or four hours of every day... I walk little, however, a single mile being too much for me, and I live in the midst of my grandchildren... I salute you with unchanged affection and respect.

In October 1823, Jefferson received a startling letter from President Monroe. Jefferson was then past eighty. Monroe was drawing on Jefferson's great wisdom regarding a matter of grave international importance, that of co-operating with Great Britain to keep European Powers out of the Americas. At this point in history, Great Britain and the U.S. had been on terms of uninterrupted hostility for half a century. Proposing friendly cooperation seemed almost ludicrous, but Jefferson responded:

The question... is the most momentous which has ever been offered to my contemplation since that of Independence... Our first and fundamental maxim should be, never to entangle ourselves in the broils of Europe. Our second, never to suffer Europe to intermeddle with cis-Atlantic affairs.

Monroe accepted Jefferson's advice, and even his line of reasoning--out of which came the

Monroe Doctrine. Like many other freedom issues of great magnitude, we see Jefferson as the supporter and even the author of most of them directly or indirectly.

He told Charles Thomson regarding the words of Jesus he had pasted in a special credo book which he had personally made: "A more beautiful or precious morsel of ethics I have never seen, it is a document in proof that I am a real Christian, that is to say, a disciple of the doctrines of Jesus." He told Dr. Benjamin Waterhouse--a famous medical scientist from Boston: "The doctrines of Jesus are simple, and tend all the happiness of man. 1. That there is only one God, and he is all perfect. 2. That there is a future state of rewards and punishments. 3. That to love God with all thy heart and thy neighbor as thyself is the sum of religion. He saw the apostasy in Christianity and hoped the American people would return to the pure teachings and unspoiled doctrines of Jesus.

To Joseph Marx, a Jew, he said that the Jewish sect was "parent and basis of all those of Christendom," That it had been singled out by Christians "for a persecution and oppression which proved they have profited nothing from the benevolent doctrines of him whom they profess to make the model of their principles and practice."

Most of the last decade of Jefferson's life was spent establishing the University of Virginia at Charlottesville. He wisely used every ounce of his political influence, his patience, and gentle persuasion, which often happened over a meal at Monticello. The energy he put into this effort at his age is incredible. He was the basic influence in energizing state legislative funding, the architectural design, the choosing of its illustrious faculty (mostly from abroad where he was well known and greatly respected). His belief in education and the blessings of an enlightened man were fundamental drivers in his personal life. He wished to impart these to America.

Monticello (Italian for "Little Mountain") is an architectural masterpiece. He developed an incredible library to help satisfy his insatiable appetite for learning. Yet he always liked to be known as a farmer. Indeed, it was the most beautiful farm in the area with a marvelous vegetable garden, all kinds of fruit trees, and a variety of nut trees, a most lovely flower garden. He grew grapes and loved good wine--no hard liquor nor rich foods; he was basically vegetarian using meat more as a condiment. He believed one should always rise from the table just a little bit hungry. He invented the Malboro plow for efficient turning of the soil; it looks all the same as what is used today. The rolling hills of his estate off from Monticello must be some of the most beautiful in the state. He was fascinated with astronomy and clocks--building a seven-day clock as part of the entryway. He was on his horse almost every day up until just two weeks before he died. Frequently (almost daily at times), he would ride into Charlottesville (some eight miles) to check the progress of the University and to encourage the work.

In 1824, after Jefferson's 81st birthday, he received a most memorable visit from his dear friend, Lafayette. They had not seen each other for 35 years, and the world had been through many revolutions and many wars. Lafayette arrived at Monticello accompanied by an escort of Virginia gentlemen with Revolutionary banners. There was a fanfare of martial trumpets. The cavalcade stopped on the lawn in front of the portico where the thin, white-haired man was standing. As Lafayette got out of the carriage, Jefferson descended the steps of the portico. Jefferson could barely walk. Lafayette was lame. "As they approached each other," Thomas Jefferson Randolph recalls, "their uncertain gait quickened itself into a shuffling run, and exclaiming, ' Ah Jefferson!'

'Ah Lafayette!' they burst into tears as they fell into each other's arms." Hundreds of people witnessed the scene; there was not a dry eye among them. It will be remembered that Lafayette's support of the revolution was critical, and Jefferson was the main negotiator in the alliance.

The friends spent two happy weeks together with a million things to say to each other, and before his departure, Lafayette was given a banquet at Charlottesville with invited guests: Madison, and President Monroe. Jefferson praised Lafayette for all he had done for the cause of American liberty and the splendid aid he had given Jefferson in Paris:

My friends, I am old, long in the disuse of making speeches, and without voice to utter them... ..this friend... was my most powerful auxiliary and advocate. He made our cause his own... His influence and connections there were great. All doors of all departments were open to him at all times... I only held the nail, he drove it. Honor him them.

Lafayette thought that there never was anybody like his friend Jefferson. He told a friend that the "history of the human race tells us of no one who has ever had a broader mind, a loftier soul, a stronger republicanism" than the Sage of Monticello.

Being strongly against slavery he fore-warningly said:

God who gave us life gave us liberty. Can the liberties of a nation be secure when we have removed a conviction that these liberties are the gift of God? Indeed I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just, that his justice cannot sleep forever. Commerce between Master and Slave is despotism. Nothing is more certainly written in the book of fate than that these people are to be free.

He found himself in a bind--having inherited slaves and not being able to survive without following the pattern of the South. He chose to therefore make their situation as humanly acceptable as possible. He was dearly beloved by his slaves and they could not do enough for him. As part of his will, he was able to give some of them property, money, and their freedom. This is incredible since one of his greatest worries in his last years was the huge indebtedness of Monticello--most of which he incurred while serving as President.

Jefferson had a great relationship with his grandson, Thomas Jefferson Randolph, who made good on all of the debts after TJ's death. Much of Monticello had to be sold to do it, and it must have been a terrible load for his grandson, but his honor, love, and respect for his grandfather drove him to keep the respect of this great man and his family name.

Jefferson took a private and deeply moving farewell of his beloved daughter Martha--his only surviving child. He wrote her a poem and handed it to her in a little casket:

A DEATH-BED ADIEU FROM TH. J. TO M.R.

Life's visions are vanished, its dreams are no more;

Dear friends of my bosom, why bathed in tears?

I go to my fathers: I welcome the shore

Which crowns all my hopes or which buries my cares.

Then farewell, my dear, my lov'd daughter, adieu!

The last pang of life is in parting from you!

Two seraphs await me long shrouded in death;

I will bring them your love on my last parting breath.

These Seraphs refer to his wife and daughter Maria.

Here was Buried  
THOMAS JEFFERSON  
Author of the  
Declaration  
of American Independence  
of the  
Statute of Virginia  
for  
Religious Freedom  
and Father of the  
University of Virginia

Jefferson approached death calmly. He read much from the Bible and from the Greek dramatists (in the original). His mind and speech were vivacious and animated to the end. He wrote his own epitaph, which is inscribed on a gray granite obelisk over his grave in the family cemetery at Monticello:

This is all he wanted to be remembered for. Let us read from that statute:

We the General Assembly of Virginia do enact that no man shall be compelled to frequent or support any religious worship, place, or ministry whatsoever, nor shall be enforced, restrained, molested, or burthened in his body or goods, or shall otherwise suffer, on account of his religious opinions or belief; but that all men shall be free to profess, and by argument to maintain, their opinions in matters of

religion, and that the same in no wise diminish, enlarge, or affect their civil capacities.

At his death, James Madison said, "...he lives and will live in the memory and gratitude of the wise & good, as a luminary of Science, as a votary of liberty, as a model of patriotism, and as a benefactor of humankind."

He and John Adams died the same day, 4 July 1826, exactly fifty years after they had both signed the immortal Declaration of Independence. My heart is full of gratitude for the likes of Thomas Jefferson. His contribution is not adequately appreciated by those who are beneficiaries of his noble and great work.

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This little synopsis is my effort to increase the appreciation of our marvelous blessing of freedom amongst my family and friends. It is my belief that the price of freedom is not in the memory of modern Americans. It is my prayer that our lives will reflect our deep and heartfelt appreciation for our heritage and blessings. May our faith, focus, and energies show the Lord the depth of our appreciation? May we stand up for truth and freedom that it may never be lost for it is eroding rapidly. Our founding fathers and mothers laid the foundation for the restoration of the most important truths in the universe--how to gain the greatest of all the gifts of God (Eternal Life). It was the Savior (the God of the Old Testament) who raised up the noble and great ones to bring about the reformation, the American Revolution, and the restoration.

My gratitude to Jesus Christ for all of these blessings is beyond bounds to describe. The freedom established in this great land and vouchsafed by the inspired constitution will be the basis of the Kingdom of God on earth when he whose right it comes to reign as King of Kings and Lord of Lords--even though it may yet hang by a thread. Let us be watchmen on the tower that we may do our part, to defend freedom at all costs. May we also be willing to mutually pledge our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor?

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