

## Thomas Jefferson and the Science of Republican Government

This biography of Thomas Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia*, his only published book, challenges conventional wisdom by demonstrating its core political thought as well as the political aspirations behind its composition, publication, and initial dissemination. Building upon a close reading of the book's contents, Jefferson's correspondence, and the first comprehensive examination of both its composition and publication history, the authors argue that Jefferson intended his *Notes* to be read by a wide audience, especially in America, in order to help shape constitutional debates in the critical period of the 1780s. Jefferson, through his determined publication and distribution of his *Notes* even while serving as American ambassador in Paris, thus brought his own constitutional and political thought into the public sphere – and at times into conflict with the writings of John Adams and James Madison, stimulating a debate over the proper form of republican constitutionalism that still reverberates in American political thought.

Dustin Gish is the contributing coeditor of *The Quest for Excellence: Liberal Arts, Sciences, and Core Texts* (2016), *Shakespeare and the Body Politic* (2013), and *Souls with Longing: Representations of Honor and Love in Shakespeare* (2011). He is Instructional Faculty in the Honors College at the University of Houston.

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Gish and Klinghard are also the contributing coeditors of *Resistance to Tyrants, Obedience to God: Reason, Religion, and Republicanism at the American Founding* (2013).

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Daniel Klinghard , Dustin Gish  
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*A Political Biography of* Notes on the State  
of Virginia

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*For Caius and Sophia Gish, and Cheri, Amsden, Jocelyn,  
and Amelia Klinghard.*

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## Acknowledgments

This book originated as an impromptu discussion and reading of Jefferson's book *Notes on the State of Virginia* in the summer of 2010. But it has been composed over the course of several years since then, as it gradually "swelled nearly to treble bulk" on the road to eventual publication – not unlike the work that inspired us to write it. We hope that the outcome justifies the support of those who thought the arguments assembled here worthy of being made known. Every author imposes on the generosity of friends and colleagues to read and comment on drafts, but a coauthored book must be doubly indebted in this respect.

We are most grateful to Peter Onuf, whose guidance and friendship have made writing this book so pleasant – it is considerably better thanks to his advice. Lew Bateman, our editor, has shown remarkable patience and encouragement, especially on the long path we traveled toward the completion of this project. Our mutual friend Jeremy Bailey offered insightful critiques early on and valuable support to us both along the way. Both authors owe a debt of thanks to Douglas Wilson and the Massachusetts Historical Society, as well as to the Special Collections Library at the University of Virginia.

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Parts of the arguments have been presented at academic conferences, where we received helpful comments from many discussants. Portions of Chapters 3, 4, 5, and 9 first appeared in a cursory form in “Republican Constitutionalism and Thomas Jefferson’s *Notes on the State of Virginia*” (*Journal of Politics*, 2012). Materials in Chapters 2, 3, and 4 appeared in an earlier form in “Redeeming Adam’s Curse: The Bible and Enlightenment Science in Thomas Jefferson’s *Notes on the State of Virginia*” (*Perspectives on Political Science*, April 2013) and in our edited volume *Resistance to Tyrants, Obedience to God: Reason, Religion, and Republicanism at the American Founding* (2013).

Finally, this book has been an intellectual collaboration from the start. As with any such project, different opinions and divergent interpretations have emerged. But overall what we have written reflects agreement about its innumerable details, many arguments, and scholarly purpose. A constant, at times exhausting, always exhilarating conversation can be heard within its pages. For this reason, among others, we owe each other a great debt of gratitude. Above all, we are deeply grateful for the love and indulgence of our wonderful families who have welcomed, or at least tolerated, the presence of Mr. Jefferson as an honored and frequent guest in our homes for a long time now. We thus dedicate our book to them: Caius and Sophia Gish, and Cheri, Amsden, Jocelyn, and Amelia Klinghard.