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978-0-521-86731-3 - The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Jefferson

Edited by Frank Shuffelton

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THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO  
THOMAS JEFFERSON

This *Companion* forms an accessible introduction to the life and work of Thomas Jefferson, third President of the United States and author of the Declaration of Independence. Essays explore Jefferson's political thought, his policies towards Native Americans, his attitude to race and slavery, as well as his interests in science, architecture, religion, and education. Contributors include leading literary scholars and historians; the essays offer up-to-date overviews of his many interests, his friendships, and his legacy. Together, they reveal his importance in the cultural and political life of early America. At the same time these original essays speak to abiding modern concerns about American culture and Jefferson's place in it. This *Companion* will be essential reading for students and scholars of Jefferson, and is designed for use by students of American literature and American history.

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## NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

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DOUGLAS R. EGERTON is a professor of history at Le Moyne College. His *Charles Fenton Mercer and the Trial of National Conservatism* examined the career of the founder of the American Colonization Society, a group of conservative white antislavery politicians who wished to send freed slaves to Liberia. More recent books, *Gabriel's Rebellion*, *He Shall Go Out Free: The Lives of Denmark Vesey*, and *Rebels, Reformers and Revolutionaries* explore slave rebelliousness.

JOANNE B. FREEMAN, Professor of History at Yale University, is the author of *Affairs of Honor: National Politics in the New Republic*, and the editor of *Alexander Hamilton: Writings*. She also has published articles on politics, political culture, and honor culture in the *William and Mary Quarterly*, the *Journal of the Early Republic*, and the *Yale Law Journal*, among other publications, and contributed chapters to *Novel History: History According to the Novelists*, *Neither Separate Nor Equal: Congress and the Executive Branch in the 1790s*, *The Revolution of 1800: Democracy, Race, and the New Republic*, and *The Democratic Experiment: New Directions in American Political History*. She is currently working on a study of the culture of Congress in antebellum America.

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#### NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

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THOMAS HALLOCK is an assistant professor of English at the University of South Florida, St. Petersburg. He is the author of *From the Fallen Tree: Frontier Narratives, Environmental Politics, and the Roots of a National Pastoral*, and he is currently editing William Bartram's Manuscripts, in a forthcoming two-volume edition.

ARI HELO (Ph.D.) is a research fellow at the University of Helsinki, Renvall Institute for Area and Cultural Studies. His doctoral dissertation from 1999 handled Jefferson's republicanism and the problem of slavery. His more recent publications include "Jefferson, Morality, and the Problem of Slavery," co-authored with Peter Onuf in *William and Mary Quarterly*, and "How the Revolution Lost Its Political Meaning," in *America in the Course of Human Events*, ed. Josef Jarab, Marcel Arbeit, and Jenel Virden.

RICHARD SAMUELSON is Assistant Professor of History at California State University, San Bernardino. He completed work on his chapter while serving as the Henry Salvatori Visiting Fellow at Claremont McKenna College. He has taught at the University of Paris, 8; the National University of Ireland, Galway; the University of Glasgow; and the University of Virginia, from which he received his Ph.D. in American History in 2000. He is currently completing a book about John Adams's political thought.

GORDON M. SAYRE is a professor of English at the University of Oregon where he teaches seventeenth- and eighteenth-century American literature with a special interest in travel and captivity narratives and relations with native peoples. He has edited an anthology, *American Captivity Narratives*, and is the author of "*Les Sauvages Américains*": *Representations of Native Americans in French and English Colonial Literature* and *The Indian Chief as Tragic Hero*.

FRANK SHUFFELTON teaches American literature at the University of Rochester. He has written two volumes of critical annotated bibliography covering writings about Thomas Jefferson since 1826. Updates to these volumes can be found online at the Portal of the Monticello Library and elsewhere. He has also written widely about American literature from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries and in 2006 was honored as the MLA Distinguished Scholar of Early American Literature.



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ERIC SLAUTER is an associate professor of English at the University of Chicago, specializing in American cultural, intellectual, and literary history, with additional research and teaching interests in law and political thought, art and material culture, and the history of the book. He is currently completing a book entitled *The State as a Work of Art: The Cultural Origins of the Constitution*. He has held research fellowships from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, and the McNeil Center for Early American Studies at the University of Pennsylvania.

DARREN STALOFF teaches history at the City College of New York and the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. He is the author of *The Making of an American Thinking Class: Intellectuals and Intelligentsia in Puritan Massachusetts* and *Hamilton, Adams, Jefferson: The Politics of Enlightenment and the American Founding*.

LUCIA STANTON directs research at Monticello, where she is the Shannon Senior Research Historian at the Robert Smith International Center for Jefferson Studies. She has co-edited, with James A. Bear, Jr., *Thomas Jefferson's Memorandum Books 1767-1826*, and is the author of *Slavery at Monticello* and *Free Some Day: The African American Families of Monticello*. She continues to work on an oral history project to collect information about Jefferson's slaves and their descendants.

TIMOTHY SWEET teaches American literature at West Virginia University, with a particular interest in literature and the environment in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries. He is the author of several essays in this area and of *American Georgics: Economy and Environment in Early American Literature*. His earlier *Traces of War: Poetry, Photography, and the Crisis of the Union* attests to an additional interest in photography and literature.

RICHARD GUY WILSON holds the Commonwealth Professor's Chair in Architectural History at the University of Virginia. A frequent lecturer and a television commentator, he has also published widely, with many articles and books on different aspects of American and modern architecture, including *The American Renaissance*; *McKim, Mead & White, Architects*; *Machine Age in America*; *Thomas Jefferson's Academical Village*; *Campus Guide: University of Virginia*; and *The Colonial Revival House*.

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## CHRONOLOGY

- 1743 Born April 2 (OS) at Shadwell, Goochland (now Albemarle) County, the plantation of his father, Peter Jefferson, and his mother, Jane Randolph Jefferson.
- 1752–7 Attends the Latin school conducted near Tuckahoe by the Revd. William Douglas, “a superficial Latinist.”
- 1757 Peter Jefferson dies.
- 1758–60 Enters the school of Revd. James Maury, whom he remembers as “a correct classical scholar.”
- 1760–2 Attends College of William and Mary, at Williamsburg, and studies with William Small, the Professor of Natural Philosophy: “[F]rom his conversation I got my first views of the expansion of science & of the system of things in which we are placed.”
- 1762–7 Studies law under the direction of George Wythe, one of the most learned members of the Virginia bar, a signer of the Declaration of Independence, and the first Professor of Law at William and Mary.
- 1764 Comes of age and inherits 2,650 acres from his father and at least twenty slaves.
- 1767 Is admitted to the bar and begins his own law practice.
- 1769 Begins building the first Monticello, following his own design, on a mountain across the Rivanna River from Shadwell. He will later tear this down and build the second Monticello on the same site.
- 1769–76 Member of the Virginia House of Burgesses for Albemarle County.

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- 1772 Marries Martha Wayles Skelton, a 23-year-old widow, on January 1. Their first child, Martha (called Patsy), is born on September 27.
- 1773 His father-in-law, John Wayles, dies and leaves 11,000 acres of land and 135 slaves as well as debts that force Jefferson to sell over half the land. Purchasers pay in depreciated Revolutionary currency, and Jefferson struggles for the rest of his life under the burden of this debt.  
With four others proposes a committee of correspondence in each colony to “consider the British claims as a common cause.” Governor Dunmore dissolves the House of Burgesses.
- 1774 Writes instructions for Virginia delegates to the first Continental Congress, which are subsequently published as *A Summary View of the Rights of British America*.
- 1775–6 Elected a delegate from Virginia to second Continental Congress. Drafts a version of the Declaration on the Necessity of Taking Up Arms. In June, 1776, drafts the Declaration of Independence.
- 1776–9 Member of Virginia House of Delegates. Serves on Committee of Revisors charged with drawing up a body of law for Virginia. These proposed laws, not all of which were passed, include his Bill for Establishing Religious Freedom, a Bill for the More General Diffusion of Knowledge, and bills reforming laws of inheritance.
- 1779 Elected governor of Virginia.
- 1780 Elected a member of the American Philosophical Society, the nation’s premier society for the advancement of science. Re-elected governor of Virginia. On December 29, British forces under Benedict Arnold invade Virginia.
- 1781 A second invasion of Virginia forces Jefferson and several members of the House of Delegates to flee Monticello two days after his term of office as governor expires. A subsequent inquiry on his conduct as governor unanimously absolves him of any censure. Receives a list of questions from François Marbois, secretary to the French legation, and begins to write what would become *Notes on the State of Virginia*.

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- 1782 Martha Wayles Jefferson dies. Jefferson emotionally devastated.
- 1783–4 Virginia delegate to Congress. Writes “Report of a Plan of Government for the Western Territory,” which becomes basis for organizing the Northwest Territory.
- 1784 Appointed minister plenipotentiary to join Benjamin Franklin and John Adams in Paris.
- 1785 Succeeds Franklin as minister. Arranges for a private edition in Paris of *Notes on the State of Virginia*. Publishes a revised edition in 1787 in London, after a badly translated French edition appears.
- 1789 French Revolution begins. Jefferson meets with Lafayette and other Patriot party leaders and supports their discussions about a constitution. Returns to the United States in November.
- 1790–3 Serves as George Washington’s first secretary of state. Objects to Alexander Hamilton’s plans to increase the power of the federal government, beginning with his financial system.
- 1791 Jefferson and James Madison persuade Philip Freneau to edit a newspaper to counter the Federalist-dominated press. Edition of Paine’s *Rights of Man* with Jefferson’s comments criticizing John Adams’s “political heresies” creates controversy.
- 1792 Hamilton attacks Jefferson in anonymous letter to the press. Jefferson begins to be seen as the leader of the opposition to Federalist interests.
- 1793 President Washington issues a Proclamation of Neutrality, in response to war between France and Britain. Edmond Charles Genet, the new French minister, challenges the executive’s position and creates controversy, leading to Jefferson’s drafting of papers demanding his recall. Jefferson retires as secretary of state at the end of December.
- 1794 Returns to Monticello, resumes active interest in farming. Whiskey Rebellion in Western Pennsylvania.
- 1796 Publication of letter written to Philip Mazzei claims “an Anglican monarchical, & aristocratical party has sprung up,” leading to Federalist attacks. Elected vice president in December, with Federalist John Adams as president, because

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- the Constitution at the time called for the candidate getting the most votes to become president, the one with the second most votes to become vice president. Assumes leadership of the opposition Republican party.
- 1797 Installed as president of the American Philosophical Society the day before his inauguration as vice president.
- 1798 Revelation of XYZ affair, in which French agents of the Directory sought bribes from an American diplomatic mission in Paris, inspires hysterical anti-Jacobin response that targets Jefferson and other Republicans. Congress passes Alien and Sedition Laws. Jefferson secretly drafts the Kentucky Resolutions, which call on individual states to reject the constitutionality of the laws and to regard them as void. Madison drafts Virginia Resolutions also protesting the Alien and Sedition Laws.
- 1800 Publishes appendix to *Notes* with testimony about Logan's speech. Republican caucus nominates Jefferson and Aaron Burr for president and vice president. Leading up to the election, vituperative attacks in the press appear from both Republicans and Federalists. Gabriel's slave rebellion in Virginia crushed. The Electoral College receives the same number of votes for Burr as for Jefferson, and the tie sends the decision to the House of Representatives.
- 1801 Federalists in Congress explore the possibility of electing Burr over Jefferson, but on the thirty-sixth ballot, Jefferson is elected. Inaugurated president on March 4. Walks from his boarding-house to the Capitol to be sworn in and deliver inaugural address. After Pasha of Tripoli declares war on the United States, sends a naval squadron to the Mediterranean to protect American shipping against depredations of Barbary pirates. On December 8 sends first annual message to Congress rather than delivering an address, thus beginning a tradition of written messages that continues through the nineteenth century.
- 1802 Sends letter to the Danbury Baptist Association on January 1, affirming the principle of separation of church and state. Writes to Robert R. Livingston, minister to France, about concerns regarding French control of New Orleans and Louisiana. James Callender publishes accusations that Jefferson keeps a black concubine named Sally.

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- 1803 Louisiana Purchase Treaty signed in Paris on April 20, but Jefferson had already sent to Congress on January 18 a secret message proposing an exploring expedition into the Louisiana Territory, to be led by Meriwether Lewis. Sends his “Syllabus of the Doctrines of Jesus” to Benjamin Rush.
- 1804 Re-elected president with an overwhelming majority of the votes. Daughter Maria Jefferson Eppes dies.
- 1806 Lewis and Clark expedition returns to St. Louis. Issues proclamation warning against a plot by Aaron Burr to separate western states from the union and attack Mexico.
- 1807 Act barring importation of slaves after January 1, 1808, is passed. Trial of Aaron Burr for treason ends in his acquittal. HMS *Leopard* fires upon the USS *Chesapeake* after demands to search the American ship for British deserters are refused. British Orders in Council and Napoleon’s Berlin Decree threaten neutral shipping. Jefferson proposes the Embargo Act, passed by Congress in December.
- 1809 Non-Intercourse Act, signed on March 1, repeals the Embargo Act, which had failed to have any diplomatic impact but had damaged the American economy. Retires as president on March 4.
- 1810 The Virginia Literary Fund established; Jefferson writes to Governor John Tyler about education.
- 1812 Resumes correspondence with John Adams.
- 1814 Becomes trustee of Albemarle Academy. Offers to sell his library to Congress, to replace the one burned by the British. Resigns as president of the American Philosophical Society.
- 1816 Virginia bill to establish Central College is passed. Named to the Board of Visitors.
- 1817 Bill embodying Jefferson’s general education plan is defeated in the legislature. Cornerstone of Central College is laid in Charlottesville.
- 1818 Legislature passes a bill establishing a university, chartered in the following year and located on the site of the Central College. Drafts so-called Rockfish Gap Report, resulting from a meeting of the commissioners in charge of planning the university.

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- 1820 Denounces the Missouri Compromise, fearing it will provoke sectional hostilities and is another example of federal “consolidationism” that usurps state powers.
- 1821 Writes memoir later referred to as his *Autobiography*.
- 1823 Writes to President James Monroe about foreign relations in advance of proclamation of the Monroe Doctrine.
- 1824 Lafayette visits Charlottesville on his triumphal return to America, is entertained at Monticello and at a dinner in the Rotunda of the University.
- 1825 First students arrive at the University of Virginia. Jefferson’s health begins to decline.
- 1826 Dies at Monticello, July 4, 1826. John Adams dies on the same day.