

I'm Mr. Beat. And I swear this isn't rage bait. It's just a video about Thomas Jefferson.

Was Thomas Jefferson the father of one of his slaves' children?

Or did he lead a society on a path directly toward feminism?

Was he a deeply racist slave owner?

Or did he believe that all men were created equal and that slavery was bad actually and it should end?

Was he an atheist?

Or was a huge fan of Jesus Christ?

Was he an aristocrat who defended hierarchies?

Or was he a big reason why hierarchies got destroyed in the United States?

Did he not want most people voting?

Or was he single handedly the person most responsible for the rise of democracy?

Was he, as this dude named Alexander put it... "one of those men who, when he is not pulling down, is employed in building up nothing?"

Or was he one of the greatest presidents of all time?

Yes. The answer to all of those questions is "yes."

Well, there's little evidence to prove he was an atheist, although he often got called that.

I'm here at Monticello, one of the most beautiful places on earth honestly. I'm here because this is the absolute best place to learn about the third president of the United States. They don't hide all the shady stuff. In fact, they seem to embrace the controversy here. Thomas Jefferson did horrible things and had horrible views. But he also was ♪ ahead of his time. He was ahead of his time. ♪ That's from the chorus of a song I wrote about him. I'm not just going crazy.

He's one of the four dudes, for crying out loud. One of the four dudes on Mount Rushmore.

I argue he was our first libertarian president, who truly believed that the government should have barely any power at all.

And... no doubt he was a great president and...plus he wrote that little document thingy. What was it?

The Declaration of Independence! The Declaration of Independence! The founding document that marked the birth of the United States! And his ideas won, man. Well, IDEALS. His ideals won. Ideals is probably a better way to put it.

Here's the story of perhaps the most controversial and complicated president in American history. Thomas freaking Jefferson. Well, his middle name wasn't actually freaking. I just said "freaking" for dramatic purposes.

(but first...)

Did you know that your personal data is sold online by data brokers? ANYONE can buy your personal details! Yes, even your enemies, who could get your personal information to dox you or stalk you or harass you. Well, I personally recommend DeleteMe to make sure your personal information stays private. What I like about DeleteMe is that it sends you these personalized privacy reports showing what they found, where they found it, and what they DELETED. I've been using it for awhile and it's done a pretty good job scrubbing my personal information from all kinds of shady sites out there. As you can see, they looked at 111 data brokers, and of the 2,945 listings reviewed, 23 data brokers had my personal information, man. Get 20% off DeleteMe consumer plans when you go to joindeleteme.com/mrbeat and use promo code MRBEAT at checkout (QR code on screen). That's join delete me dot com/MRBEAT, code MRBEAT. Thanks to DeleteMe for once again sponsoring this video. (turn) I think this plant is dying. You think I should water it?

(title card)

Well there ya are. I've been waiting on you. You ready to learn about Thomas Jefferson? Come on, let's go.

-Privileged and Pampered-

Thomas Jefferson was born on April 13, 1743, in Shadwell, Virginia, then part of British America. Here. Approximately here is the exact spot where Thomas Jefferson was born. And all these cars driving by? They don't care. Yeah, keep driving. He was the third of ten children born to Peter Jefferson, a surveyor and plantation owner, and Jane Randolph Jefferson, who came from a well off and well CONNECTED family.

He was always rich. And he always had slaves around to do everything for him.

His earliest memory was of being carried on a pillow by a slave on a horse. Everyone he knew profited from slavery. Thomas grew up on the edge of the frontier but in pretty comfortable circumstances. As a kid, he was extremely smart and, more importantly, CURIOUS. He began studying Latin, Greek, and history as young as nine years old. Even at that young age, he began to value the ideals of the Enlightenment. Ideals like liberty, individualism, republicanism, progress, tolerance, skepticism, and reason. And yep, he soon realized that the life he lived contradicted many of those ideals.

When Thomas was 14 years old, his dad died, leaving him around 5,000 acres of land. He also inherited his father's massive book collection. He remained studious, to a point where it was kinda weird. He meticulously wrote down records of pretty much everything he was doing and everything he liked. When Thomas was 16, he enrolled at the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia. There he studied philosophy, math, metaphysics, and the classics of course. He read John Locke and Montesquieu. One professor at William and Mary, William Small, had a big influence on Thomas, and introduced him to George Wythe, who'd eventually become the first law professor in the United States and one of the most influential legal minds of

the era, for real. He was a big reason why Thomas would later get into politics. As Thomas got older and smarter, Wythe went from being more of a mentor to a good friend.

By 1767, Jefferson was a practicing lawyer during a time when lawyers didn't get paid that well. He didn't care, he wasn't doing it for the money. He lived with his mother here at Shadwell. Uh yeah. The house isn't here anymore. I'll explain why in a bit As a lawyer, Jefferson eventually took on over 100 cases in Virginia's General Court. In seven of those cases, he defended seven enslaved people seeking freedom. In one of those cases, he said "everyone comes into the world with a right to his own person and using it at his own will ... This is what is called personal liberty, and is given him by the author of nature, because it is necessary for his own sustenance."¹ Well, the judge soon cut him off and ruled against his client. But since Jefferson felt bad, he gave his client some money to apparently escape enslavement.²

Being a lawyer must have awakened Jefferson's rebellious nature. It was at this time we began to see him 🎸talk trash🎸 about the British. Jefferson had grown pretty upset with the British government. He didn't like how colonists like himself were getting taxed and had absolutely no say in the process. He believed that the British Parliament had NO right to force laws on them without their consent. Not only that, he thought the royal governors, courts, and heck...the King himself...were constantly abusing their power...those jerks. And so, he got into politics. In 1769, he got elected to the Virginia House of Burgesses. He was just 26 years old. There, he quietly aligned with a growing number of Virginian legislators pushing back against British policies.

In February 1770, Jefferson's family home at Shadwell burned to the ground. Told ya I'd explain why. Though no one was home when this happened, this event devastated Jefferson. It had been the only home he had ever known, but the house itself wasn't too big of a loss. He had already been building a new house by that point anyway (nod behind) It's behind me. Nah man. It was what was IN his family home. He lost all of his books.

Later that year, Jefferson met a widow named Martha Skelton in Williamsburg.³ Even though she was his third cousin, he pursued a romantic relationship with her alright. We don't know much about Martha. Heck, we don't even know what she looks like. (looking over) Well I guess she COULD have looked like that. We do know they really did end up loving each other, bonding over things like their shared love of horseback riding, literature, and music. Plus, she was darn smart. The two married on New Year's Day 1772. The marriage meant Jefferson got a lot more real estate and enslaved people. And with that additional wealth and uh...enslaved labor...he was able to finish what you see behind me. Monticello, which ended up being Jefferson's main crib for the rest of his life. It originally sat on 5,000 acres, much of that land used to grow crops like tobacco. Yes, using slave labor. Throughout his lifetime, Jefferson had more than 600

¹ <https://tjrs.monticello.org/letter/45>

² Gordon-Reed, Annette (February 20, 2020). "[Thomas Jefferson's Vision of Equality Was Not All-Inclusive. But It Was Transformative](#)"

³

<https://www.monticello.org/research-education/thomas-jefferson-encyclopedia/martha-wayles-skelton-jefferson/>

enslaved people here at Monticello. To put that in perspective, if you are watching this in a classroom, the average size of a high school in the United States I would estimate is probably around 600 people, and that's how many slaves Jefferson had. That's a lot. Wayyy more than any other president.

Today located just outside of Charlottesville, it sits on a giant hill with an amazing view. "Monticello" is Italian for "little mountain," by the way. Jefferson actually designed this beautiful house. It's an example of Neoclassical architecture, reflecting Jefferson's love for ancient Roman and Italian Renaissance styles. Later, he'd add on to it. And if you're thinking, "wait, doesn't his house look familiar?" That's because it's on the back of the nickel. So, if you're rich, you've seen this many times. Monticello is the only American presidential home on the UNESCO World Heritage List. But while his home is iconic today, keep in mind it was also a plantation, built and maintained through the labor of enslaved folks. Today the fine people who work at Monticello have done their best to preserve THEIR legacy as well.

-Writing a Revolution-

Jefferson's first MAJOR political statement came in 1774, when he wrote "A Summary View of the Rights of British America." In it, he argued that the colonies owed no allegiance to Parliament and had the right to govern themselves, boy. A bold statement indeed, one that maybe could get you arrested by the government...which is why people published it anonymously and without Jefferson's permission. Even though it WAS published anonymously, many people indeed knew Jefferson had written it. By that time, he had gained a reputation as being a darn good writer, one of the most eloquent writers in the colonies as a matter of fact.

And by that time, many other prominent influencers in the colonies had also spoken out against Britain. Following the Battles of Lexington and Concord, the first battles of what became known as the American War of Independence, a bunch of influencers...I mean...influential dudes met up in present-day Independence Hall in Philadelphia on May 10, 1775. And guess who was there, representing Virginia? Thomas Jefferson! Thomas Jefferson. Most of you got that right, but Aiden. Come on, Aiden. Pay attention. You're better than this, Aiden...come on. Known as the Second Continental Congress, their goal was to unify the colonies in the war against Britain. Even then, most delegates weren't ready for independence. However, over the next year, after King George III had rejected a peace deal and the violence continued to escalate, combined with the influence of Thomas Paine's pamphlet Common Sense, among other things, more and more delegates were convinced that breaking away from Britain was the only option left.

In June 1776, the Continental Congress met again to create a committee to draft a declaration of independence from Britain. Now known as the Declaration of Independence! And who was on that committee? Thomas Jefferson, of course! Also a dude named Roger Sherman...another named Robert Livingston, a dude named John Adams, who had become friends with Jefferson, and another dude named Benjamin Franklin, who Jefferson also became friends with. Franklin was nearly 40 years older than Jefferson, but saw enormous potential in him, as did Adams. Ultimately the others let Jefferson write the first draft as he was the best writer in the group, though Adams and Franklin helped edit.

The Declaration of Independence was a letter to King George III... and the entire world really...that announced that the 13 colonies were no longer part of the British Empire. And so, it literally became the freaking document that founded the country of the United States. No big deal. The document also defined the core values of this new country. Ya know, stuff like rights. The right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness yada yada yada.... "all men are created equal" yada yada yada.... Wait a second, Jefferson wrote that all men are created equal? Did this apply to the enslaved men he owned? Jefferson's preamble is seen today as one of the most influential statements on human rights in modern history. That phrase, "all men are created equal" is a phrase that the vast majority of Americans know about.

On July 2, 1776, the Continental Congress voted for independence, and soon would famously sign the famous document that Jefferson primarily wrote. And that's why today, we blow up crap on the 2nd of July to celebrate America's birthday. Just kidding. I mean, we do blow up stuff on July 2nd, but we actually celebrate the country's birthday on July 4th. Why? Well, because the final version of the Declaration of Independence didn't get published until July 4, 1776, which is what the general public all saw in the newspapers and such. Oops.

The signers of the Declaration of Independence all knew they would now be considered traitors and that they'd all be directly targeted by the British. But it did create a national identity and helped pump up the soldiers fighting the British.

And just like that, Thomas Jefferson became one of the most famous people in the world.

Jefferson remained in the House of Burgesses, which soon became called the House of Delegates thanks to Virginia's new constitution, which Jefferson was bigly influential in helping write. That said, his Bill for Establishing Religious Freedom, which said Virginia's government shouldn't be involved with religion and especially shouldn't be forcing religious doctrine on Virginians, failed to pass, as did his attempt to make the Anglican Church no longer the government church of Virginia. By that time, he had become pretty darn good friends with another pretty chill but SMART dude named James Madison. Madison and Jefferson had worked closely together throughout their years working together in Virginia's government.

By 1778, Jefferson was arguably the most influential person in Virginia's government other than Patrick Henry, but Patrick Henry had to step down as governor the next year due to term limits. And guess who took his place? (long pause) Yep. Thomas Jefferson. You think you're really smart, don't ya. Well you are really smart!

-Dark Times-

Uh yeah, Jefferson's time as the Governor of Virginia didn't go so well...mostly since the war wasn't going so well against the British.

For starters, every day it seemed like the British were coming to kill him. Due to the imminent threat of British troops, Jefferson moved the capital of Virginia from Williamsburg to Richmond, and it's been the capital ever since. But this was a controversial decision. Richmond stinks. Just

kidding. Jefferson did struggle to manage Virginia's resources to defend itself, and had troubles building up the militia. When General Benedict Arnold invaded Virginia in early 1781, his troops marched into Richmond with little resistance. It was so bad Jefferson barely escaped in time. Arnold's men left much of Richmond in ruins. And Jefferson was powerless to stop it. In June, Martha even had to flee Monticello to avoid a raid. Geez. Jefferson would resign as governor kind of in disgrace.

Things weren't going much better at home.

That same year, his daughter Lucy died at the age of one. But back then, it was fairly common for kids to die, sad to say. Of the six kids Jefferson had with Martha, only two of them reached adulthood, Patsy and Polly. And Martha had constant health problems herself. On May 8, 1782, Martha gave birth to Lucy, who apparently weighed more than 16 pounds at birth woahness.⁴ Needless to say, it was an extremely difficult pregnancy and birth. Martha's health got dramatically worse afterward. She died on September 6, 1782. On her deathbed, she had asked Thomas to never marry again. And he kept that promise...technically...although he did hook up with Martha's enslaved teenage sister a few years later. Oof.

Still, though, the death of his wife deeply devastated Jefferson. He reportedly locked himself in a room for three weeks and carried a watch key with some of her hair inside of it for the rest of his life.⁵ For at least a year after Martha's death, Jefferson withdrew from public life, hanging out here at Monticello. However, good news came for the new nation around that time as the British had surrendered. With the Treaty of Paris (no not that one, not that one, not that one, yes that one), the war was officially over!

-France, For Real-

In 1784, Jefferson returned to public life when the Congress of the Confederation sent him to join his friends Benjamin Franklin and John Adams in Paris to become a diplomat. This rejuvenated Jefferson, who was excited to hang out in France for a few years.

Eventually Jefferson got promoted to U.S. Minister of France, serving in that role until 1789. Jefferson had a blast. Not only did he get to spend some quality time with Adams and Franklin, but he got to take in all that French art, architecture, food, and culture he loved so much. There he came to admire the French people, just as they were starting to have a revolution to overthrow the monarchy of their own.

Jefferson was particularly close with one of his enslaved people, James Hemings, so it's no surprise that he brought him to France with him. Although we don't know what James looked like, we do know that he was "three-quarters white." James trained to be a French chef and later brought back many French cooking styles to the United States. In fact, after James made macaroni and cheese for Jefferson, he later played a key role popularizing the dish back in

⁴ Hendricks, Nancy (October 13, 2015). *America's First Ladies: A Historical Encyclopedia and Primary Document Collection of the Remarkable Women of the White House: A Historical Encyclopedia and Primary Document Collection of the Remarkable Women of the White House*. ABC-CLIO. pp. 20–21.

⁵ <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-06-02-0188>

America. Which is pretty cool because mac and cheese is goated. Jefferson also brought his daughter, Patsy, to France, and in 1787 he brought James' little sister, Sally Hemings, who was also enslaved. Sally was that sister of Martha I mentioned earlier, but wait, she was enslaved? Well, they were HALF-SISTERS, so I guess that's how Jefferson justified it? What a weird dude Jefferson was. But it gets weirder. As you recall, historians are generally now pretty darn sure that Jefferson had sexual relations with Sally. There's a lot of evidence to back this up, including modern DNA samples that indicate that Jefferson got Sally pregnant several times over the years they lived together at Monticello.⁶ Jefferson had as many as nine kids with Sally, and he completely covered it up. Sally was pretty much Jefferson's secret lover yet still as a slave. But here's the thing, it may even be more messed up because we actually don't know if their relationship was consensual or not. Jefferson was in his mid-forties when the relationship began. Sally was just a teenager, and it's important to recognize the power dynamics that existed between slave owners and their enslaved people when looking at their relationship. We don't know exactly when this happened, but Jefferson likely started to hook up with her when she was around 16 years old, maybe younger. Major oof. Major oof. Major oof.

While in France, Jefferson totally missed out on the Constitutional Convention, the gathering of 55 delegates from 12 of the 13 original states that ultimately got rid of the Articles of Confederation and created the U.S. Constitution. Jefferson received a copy of the Constitution a couple months after it was signed. He was a bit concerned that it gave the federal government too much power. He believed a Bill of Rights needed to be added to guarantee civil rights and liberties against another potential tyrannical government.

In the fall of 1789, Jefferson got word that George Washington, soon to be the first president of the United States, had nominated HIM as Secretary of State. Jefferson returned to the U.S. to become the first-ever American to serve in that position, getting sworn in on March 22, 1790.

-Oh You Wanna Fight? Let's Go, Punks!-

In that position, obviously Jefferson was hugely influential, but he also famously clashed with another Washington advisor, Alexander Hamilton, the U.S. Secretary of the Treasury.

Their views about the role of the federal government couldn't have been more different. Jefferson believed in a weaker national government and stronger state governments. Hamilton wanted a STRONGER national government. Jefferson thought America's economy should be agriculturally-based and decentralized. Hamilton thought it should be more industrial and centralized. Jefferson opposed a national bank. Hamilton ultimately ended up CREATING one. And finally, Jefferson tended to side with France, while Hamilton tended to side with Britain. Jefferson thought Hamilton was an elitist who was out of touch with ordinary people. Eh, he was probably right about that. Here's what that famous rivalry looked like:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BZHnCtf-DEI> Ok, that was actually just a clip from the

musical Hamilton, but that's what I like to think it looked like that. Probably not historically accurate. Anyway, this rivalry ultimately led to the creation of the country's first two political parties: the Democratic-Republican Party, led by Jefferson, and the Federalist Party, led by Hamilton.

By the end of Washington's first term as president, Jefferson had grown frustrated by what he saw as Hamilton's growing influence over Washington. He legit thought Hamilton was steering the country back toward a monarchy. Twice, Jefferson tried to resign, but twice, Washington persuaded him to stay.⁷ Still, he ended up leaving the position for good on December 31, 1793. By that time, he had helped establish the State Department as a key part of the executive branch while also becoming the philosophical leader of the Democratic-Republican Party. Already, people were talking about HIM becoming the country's next president after George Washington.

Unfortunately, by that time the old friendship between Jefferson and Adams was unraveling, as Adams had aligned himself with the rival Federalist Party. In the presidential election of 1796, the Democratic Republicans indeed nominated Jefferson for president, and, wouldn't ya know it, the Federalists nominated John Adams. After all, Adams had been Washington's Vice President the previous eight years. Well, Adams won the election, becoming the second president in American history, but since this was before the 12th Amendment, Thomas Jefferson became the Vice President because he got second place. Yep, that's right. Adams as President and Jefferson as his Veep even though they were political rivals (turn). (turn) Talk about awkward.

And sure, Jefferson disagreed a lot with what Adams ended up doing as president. Still, though, he mostly kept his mouth shut. He did have a lot of downtime as Vice President, and during that time he wrote a bunch, including the first formal guide to Senate procedure, called A Manual of Parliamentary Practice for the Use of the Senate of the United States. Hey, I know it sounds boring, but the guide was big-time influential over how Congress would run in the future.

Jefferson had a difficult time staying quiet after Adams signed the Alien and Sedition Acts, though. The laws, which restricted speech critical of the government and made it harder for immigrants to become citizens, deeply upset him. He thought the laws were unconstitutional, and, in response to them, secretly wrote the Kentucky Resolutions, arguing that states could ignore federal laws if they thought they were stupid. They were called the Kentucky Resolutions because the Kentucky legislature adopted them.

The presidential election of 1800 ended up being a rematch between Adams and Jefferson. By this time, the two were bitter enemies. This was one of the nastiest elections in American history. The campaigns were brutal. It got so bad that Adams and Jefferson would not communicate with each other for about 12 years.

Well anyway, Jefferson won the election, but keep in mind it was highly disputed. Originally, though, both Jefferson and a kinda crazy dude named Aaron Burr got 73 electoral votes. One of the Democratic Republican electors was supposed to not vote for Burr, but he did anyway. And

⁷ https://oll.libertyfund.org/pages/jefferson-hamilton-debate-session-6?utm_source=chatgpt.com

so, with the tie, the House of Representatives had to choose one of them to become President. Thankfully they chose Jefferson, and so Jefferson became the third president and Aaron Burr the third VICE president. Jefferson called his win the “Revolution of 1800” (turn), (turn) because it marked the first peaceful transfer of power between political rivals in American history (turn). (turn) Heck yeah. I think this country’s gonna make it after all.

-President Jefferson-

On March 4, 1801, Jefferson walked to his own inauguration in plain clothes. He didn’t take a carriage like the previous two presidents. You could say it was symbolic. He wanted to change the tone. “I’m for the common man!” In his address, he called for a “wise and frugal government” and called for unity, saying, “We are all Republicans, we are all Federalists.”

Jefferson chose his pal James Madison, who by this time was his closest political ally, as his Secretary of State. He picked Albert Gallatin as his Secretary of the Treasury to undo everything Alexander Hamilton had done and cut the national debt. The rest of his advisors were all Democratic-Republicans, but from different parts of the country, at least.

So what was his leadership style? Well, he hated confrontation, that’s for sure. He preferred to influence other politicians through his WRITING, not direct conversations with them. In fact, Jefferson didn’t deliver his State of the Union address as a speech because he believed reading out loud in person felt too much like being a king. Instead, he sent it to Congress in writing, and he’d continue this tradition every year of his presidency. Heck, in general Jefferson skipped a lot of public appearances and grand speeches because he wanted to appear more like a humble public servant. Eh, he apparently was a terrible public speaker, anyway. He was soft-spoken and had a dry, low voice. He was shy and hated talking in front of crowds. Ya gotta remember, Jefferson became famous not because of his talking, but through his WRITING. Ha! He let his PEN do the talking. KnowwhatImean?

So anyway, as president, Jefferson immediately began rolling back Federalist policies. He got rid of some taxes, shrank some of the bureaucracy, and cut the size of the military. Though his overall goal was to reduce the power of government, he straight up increased his own power by arguably his biggest accomplishment as president.

The Louisiana Purchase, baby. Jefferson bought the Louisiana Territory from France for just \$15 million, nearly doubling the size of the country overnight and thus dramatically increased the country’s power over the continent. To say it was a good deal would be an understatement. It came out to about 71 cents per acre in today’s money. I totally get why Jefferson couldn’t pass that opportunity up even if he was going against his own principles. Still, Federalists in Congress and in the press would immediately 🎵 talk trash 🎵 about him abusing his power. After all, CONGRESS ideally has to approve of all purchases BEFORE they happen, not AFTER. But uh, Congress approved it, of course. While it had a positive impact long term for many Americans, it IS important to recognize that it came at a great cost to tens of thousands of Native Americans.

Jefferson asked his good friend Meriwether Lewis if he'd like to go, ya know, check out this Louisiana Territory, and Lewis was like "heck yeah, dude!" Jefferson sent Lewis and another dude named William Clark to not only explore the territory, but to make contact with various Native American tribes and, most importantly, find the Northwest Passage, a magical water route that made it all the way west to the Pacific Ocean. Well, I call the Northwest Passage "magical" because it didn't exist, not through the middle of the continent, anyway. Regardless, Jefferson got them funding and the Lewis and Clark Expedition ended up being a success that inspired future American westward expansion.

Another way Jefferson expanded the power of the president? Fighting pirates, of course. After Jefferson refused to pay North African pirates, they attacked American merchant ships, resulting in what became known as the First Barbary War, the first major overseas military action by the United States. Jefferson sent the U.S. Navy to fight them, and they ended up winning. I have more information about that war in this video if you wanna watch... if you so dare.

Meanwhile, Jefferson and his buddies had left Aaron Burr out of all important decisions. Burr spent Jefferson's first term mainly just trying to start fights. And then, on July 11, 1804, Burr killed Alexander Hamilton in a duel. Yep, THE Alexander Hamilton. Burr was charged with murder but fled west to avoid getting arrested.

Though Jefferson's old political rival was now gone, he continued to fight with the Federalists, including now John Marshall, aka "Lil' John," the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court who said the Court could strike down unconstitutional laws. But overall his first term went pretty darn well and he remained pretty darn popular. He was easily reelected in 1804, this time with a running mate. That's right, he had dropped Aaron Burr and now the legendary George Clinton became his Vice President. No, not THAT George Clinton. Yep. That's the fella.

Jefferson's second term as president didn't go as well as his first.

Sure, he had accomplishments like ending the international slave trade, getting Congress to approve expanding the Library of Congress, and continuing to reduce the national debt, but he had a much harder time unifying his political party to get things done.

He couldn't even get Aaron Burr arrested. Aaron Burr!

By 1806, everyone had apparently given up trying to arrest him for murder but instead arrested him for treason. They accused him of trying to create an independent empire in the West...probably by seizing land from Spain. However, due to a lack of evidence, Burr got acquitted, bruh. When Jefferson tried to influence the outcome of the trial, that hurt his image as a so-called defender of civil liberties. Not only that, after the Chesapeake-Leopard affair, in which a British warship attacked an American ship, killing and wounding American sailors just off the Virginia coast, Jefferson didn't do that much in response, afraid of starting another war. This, of course, made him look weak.

And when he DID react to the shenanigans of the British, he just ended up hurting a bunch of Americans. I'm talking about the Embargo Act of 1807, punks. It banned pretty much all trade with Britain and France. Jefferson supported the law in order to avoid war with both countries, but it ended up devastating the American economy. The country lost tens of millions of dollars and tens of thousands of jobs.⁸ Just like that, Jefferson's popularity tanked, even within his own political party. He left the office disillusioned and miserable. Honestly though, he just felt relieved it was over. And Jefferson was still pretty popular. His support of his buddy James Madison for president to take his place is a big reason why Madison easily won the presidential election of 1808.

-Retirement? Uhhhhh...No-

And wouldn't ya know it, Jefferson retired back HERE to Monticello...happy his presidency was over.

At Monticello, he managed the plantation, experimented with crops, and oversaw new construction projects. He also continued to learn and experiment and try to invent stuff. He arguably spent more time in retirement trying to better himself than any other president in American history.

Jefferson remained much more in the spotlight during his retirement compared to the previous two presidents, often trying to influence members of Congress and of course the two presidents who followed him- James Madison and James Monroe.

Indeederoo, he often advised both of those Jameses, and both were GREATLY influenced by Jefferson. They almost couldn't escape his shadow, either.

And Jefferson even made up with his enemies. He and John Adams finally made up and would correspond back and forth for the rest of their lives...until...ya know...they died on the exact same day...which was July 4th, America's 50th birthday.

In 1815, Jefferson sold his quite impressive personal library to the United States government to restock the Library of Congress after the British mostly destroyed the original collection in the War of 1812.

One of Jefferson's biggest retirement projects? Starting a university that he wanted to be free of church influences and where students could study stuff not offered at other colleges. In 1819, his vision became true as he founded the University of Virginia...which yeahhhh...still exists today for real. You know how I know it exists? I'm here right now. This was the first explicitly secular university in the United States in which there was clearly a wall between church and state and also...just anybody could attend. You didn't have to be an aristocrat.

In 1821, he began writing an autobiography. He threw big parties and had lots of visitors. One of his last visitors at Monticello was the American Revolution-hero Marquis de Lafayette.

⁸ <https://www.monticello.org/research-education/thomas-jefferson-encyclopedia/embargo-1807/>

Sadly, by the time Jefferson was an old man, he was deeply in debt...millions of dollars in today's money...and basically broke. Eh, typical American... he was never that good with money...bought a lot of crap that he didn't need. He'd pass that debt on to his daughter and even grandson. Monticello would have to be sold.

Like I said before, Thomas Jefferson died on July 4, 1826. Almost unbelievably, he did not free the vast majority of his slaves after he died, perhaps because he wanted his family to sell them to pay off his debts. He did free five of his enslaved skilled workers, including the aforementioned James Hemings, but he didn't even free Sally Hemings. What the heck dude? At least Patsy freed her after her dad's death.

-Legacy-

So how should we remember him?

Well, if it wasn't obvious by now, Thomas Jefferson was a man of contradictions and hypocrisy.

He wrote about liberty while holding people in chains. He said slavery was evil but didn't do much to end it once he was in power. He promoted a small, limited government, then used his executive powers as president to expand the power of the president. He promoted democracy, but only thought the educated elite were qualified to govern. He was anti-war, yet deployed the military when American commerce was threatened. He talked of equality for all, but that didn't include women, African Americans, and Native Americans. He was 🎵 ahead of his time🎵, but also very much a man of his time.

My family and I have been staying here in Virginia for a few days now, and Jefferson's legacy here is huge. You seemingly can't go anywhere without seeing his name. And while most historians still view him as one of the greatest and most influential Americans in history, as more and more people have learned of the truly bad stuff he did, he has become more and more controversial, as seen by some of his statues being vandalized and taken down in recent years.

And you don't have to like him, but ya still gotta learn about him.

Understanding Jefferson helps us understand both the ideals...and the contradictions...at the core of the American experiment. Jefferson helped define the most important values most Americans hold dearly today. Liberty, self government, a limited federal government, private enterprise, innovation, republicanism, democracy, and individual rights. Even today, these ideals are often quoted by folks on all sides of the political spectrum. He was a champion of the Enlightenment and scientific progress during a time when faith, dogma, and superstition still dominated. In other words, Jefferson's actions may have aged like milk, but his words aged like the fine wine he used to love drinking so much.

Sure, he may have 🎵 talked the talk but didn't walk the walk 🎵 but the talking was the most important part.

If you want to learn more about Thomas Jefferson, here are three books I highly recommend...

All other sources I referenced for this video are listed in the description of this video. Not that you read the description. Only dorks like me do that.

So what do YOU think about Thomas Jefferson? What important information did I leave out of this video that I should have left in? Let me know down in one of the scariest places on the internet. The YouTube comment section. Thanks for staying curious....hey, you know who else was curious...the guy who lived here. (turn and walk toward Monticello)

Sources/further reading:

Thomas Jefferson: An Intimate History by Fawn M. Brodie

Purchase here: <https://amzn.to/4eFPGYN>

Thomas Jefferson: The Art of Power by Jon Meacham

Purchase here: <https://amzn.to/3lkjluy>

Jefferson the Virginian (Volume 1) by Dumas Malone

Purchase here: <https://amzn.to/4lko1zt>

His Masterly Pen: A Biography of Jefferson the Writer by Fred Kaplan

Purchase here: <https://amzn.to/4eDcoRo>

Thomas Jefferson: The American Presidents Series: The 3rd President, 1801-1809 by Joyce Appleby

Purchase here: <https://amzn.to/44jDfyw>

<https://www.monticello.org/thomas-jefferson/brief-biography-of-jefferson/>

<https://www.monticello.org/sallyhemings/>

<https://www.whitehousehistory.org/bios/thomas-jefferson>

<https://millercenter.org/president/jefferson>

https://www.phillytrib.com/commentary/coard-president-thomas-jefferson-a-pedophile-rapist/article_f841b673-50ac-5510-8330-20d3bac6f974.html

<https://www.monticello.org/slavery/jefferson-slavery/jefferson-s-attitudes-toward-slavery/>

<https://www.monticello.org/research-education/thomas-jefferson-encyclopedia/john-adams/>

<https://www.loc.gov/collections/thomas-jefferson-papers/articles-and-essays/american-sphinx-the-contradictions-of-thomas-jefferson/>

<https://monticello-www.s3.amazonaws.com/files/old/inline-pdfs/2002wShadwell.pdf>

<https://www.monticello.org/the-art-of-citizenship/the-threat-of-debt/jefferson-and-the-national-debt/>

<https://millercenter.org/president/jefferson/campaigns-and-elections>

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