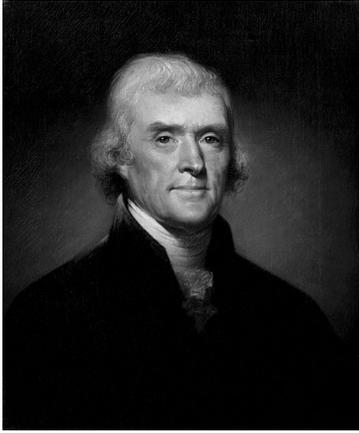


Thomas Jefferson – Lover of Liberty



Freedom and liberty are words that you've probably heard many times. They have held a significant meaning in our country since its beginning, and no one expressed that more clearly than the Founding Father from Virginia named Thomas Jefferson. Jefferson is most known for being the primary writer of the *Declaration of Independence* and for being our nation's third president.

Jefferson was born in Virginia in 1743. His father, Peter Jefferson, was a surveyor who made a good living and owned an estate in the western part of the colony. Jefferson's childhood was mostly spent in schools where he would learn languages like Latin, Greek, and French. By the time he was fourteen, Jefferson attended school at the College of William and Mary, which is in the very famous colonial town of Williamsburg.

While in Williamsburg, Jefferson threw himself into his studies. He was a very serious student! Jefferson spent many hours every day studying languages, mathematics, and science. He even found a few hours to practice his violin daily! Jefferson led a very busy life while he was in school, and he was also fortunate enough to meet and spend time with very important people in the Virginia colony.

After college, Jefferson studied to be a lawyer under the famous Virginia attorney, George Wythe. He then left Williamsburg to practice law on his own. He quickly earned a reputation for being competent in his job and extremely intelligent. During this time, he met his wife Martha and decided to build his estate, which he would call Monticello, on top of a small mountain he inherited from his father.

Jefferson enjoyed being a lawyer but became more and more interested in politics. While he lived in Williamsburg, he had listened in the lobby of the House of Burgesses (this was a group of men who were allowed to make some laws for Virginia) to men like Patrick Henry cry out against the British government's treatment of American colonists. Jefferson was convinced that Britain was being unfair as they governed the colonies. They had not allowed Americans to be represented in Parliament, royal governors were given more control over citizens, British armies were occupying American cities, and unwanted taxes were increasing everywhere in the colonies. Jefferson believed these actions by the British violated Americans' rights of liberty and freedom. Because of this, he decided to become a member of the House of Burgesses. While there, Jefferson was well-known for writing clearly about importance of American freedom.

Because of his excellent reputation as a champion for liberty, Jefferson was chosen to represent Virginia at the Second Continental Congress in Philadelphia. Here, men from the colonies would decide what actions Americans should take against the British government. In the summer of 1776, Jefferson was recruited by John Adams to be the main writer of a document that would declare America's independence from Great Britain.

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For seventeen days, on the second floor of a rented house, Jefferson worked steadily. Throughout this process, he would ask John Adams and the famous Benjamin Franklin for advice and suggestions for his writing. When he finished, the results were astounding. In about 1,300 words, Jefferson clearly describes America's reasons for declaring independence from Britain. He famously explains that government's job in a country is to protect basic human rights. He eloquently wrote these timeless lines,

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.

At the end of the *Declaration of Independence*, Jefferson officially announced that the colonies were no longer part of Great Britain but are now thirteen, united states in America. When the *Declaration* was approved in Congress on July 4, 1776, the new nation, called the United States of America, was born!

Over the next few years, the United States continued to fight the British in the Revolutionary War. During this time, Thomas Jefferson returned to Virginia to help rewrite laws that would help the state government promote freedom and liberty for its citizens. Then, in 1784, Jefferson traveled to France to become a diplomat for the United States. He would spend five years working with the French and also becoming close to John Adams, who was also in Europe at the time.

When Jefferson returned to the the United States in 1789, he served as the nation's first Secretary of State under President George Washington. He would then go on to become our country's second vice-president when John Adams became president. He continued to be known throughout this time as a man who was devoted to principles of liberty and freedom for the citizens of our new country and someone who did not want the nation's government to gain too much power over its people.

In the year 1800, Jefferson was elected to be the third president of the United States. While in office, he made an incredible deal with the country of France. Known as the Louisiana Purchase, the United States bought a huge piece of land west of the Mississippi River that just about doubled the size of the nation.

After Jefferson served as president, he returned to his beloved Monticello in Virginia. He would spend the last few years of his life busily working on things that he loved. He designed another mansion that he had built nearby, founded the University of Virginia, spent time with his many grandchildren, oversaw his farms, and he enjoyed writing letters, including many to his old friend John Adams.

On July 4th, 1826, exactly fifty years after the approval of the *Declaration of Independence*, Thomas Jefferson passed away at Monticello. America had lost its spokesman for liberty. Jefferson would always be remembered for being the Founding Father who wrote one of our country's most important documents in the *Declaration*. In it he declared the idea that "all men are created equal" and that our nation's citizens have rights that government should not try and take away. Thomas Jefferson was truly lover of liberty!