



Thomas Jefferson: Draftsman of a Nation

Natalie S. Bober

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Thomas Jefferson's was one of history's greatest voices for the importance of individual freedom. His eloquence on this fundamental right became the cornerstone of our nation and a central theme of the Enlightenment. And yet, Jefferson presided over a society that depended on slavery and was himself the holder of numerous slaves. How are students of history to reconcile this contradiction in the third president? Now celebrated biographer and historian Natalie Bober presents a life of Jefferson that does not evade this difficult question. Bober explores the slave community that built and maintained his home, Monticello--and what their lives under Jefferson tell us about him and about slavery as an early American institution.

To assess fully what Jefferson might mean to our time, we must first understand what it meant to be a man of his own time. From the first page, the world he inhabited is made vivid--and so, too, is Jefferson himself, standing before us as a freckled and, for the eighteenth century, unusually tall young man. Bober follows him through a life in which the presidency was just one of many accomplishment. As designer of Monticello, he was one of the great architects of his era; as founder of the University of Virginia, he was one of the nation's early champions of higher education. His greatest legacy is perhaps as author of the Declaration of Independence, a nearly unrivaled instance of words giving tangible meaning to life. The Jefferson revealed here is distinguished by his often contradictory nature but also by his optimism, his curiosity, his exceptional sense of history (including the history still to be made).

While primarily aimed at young readers, the book is a substantial work of scholarship, based on several years research of primary-source materials (including black oral history) and the most current writings, and like Bober's earlier works should attract students of history of all ages. This book faces the fact that Jefferson was a flawed human being--and insists that this does not disqualify him as a hero.

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