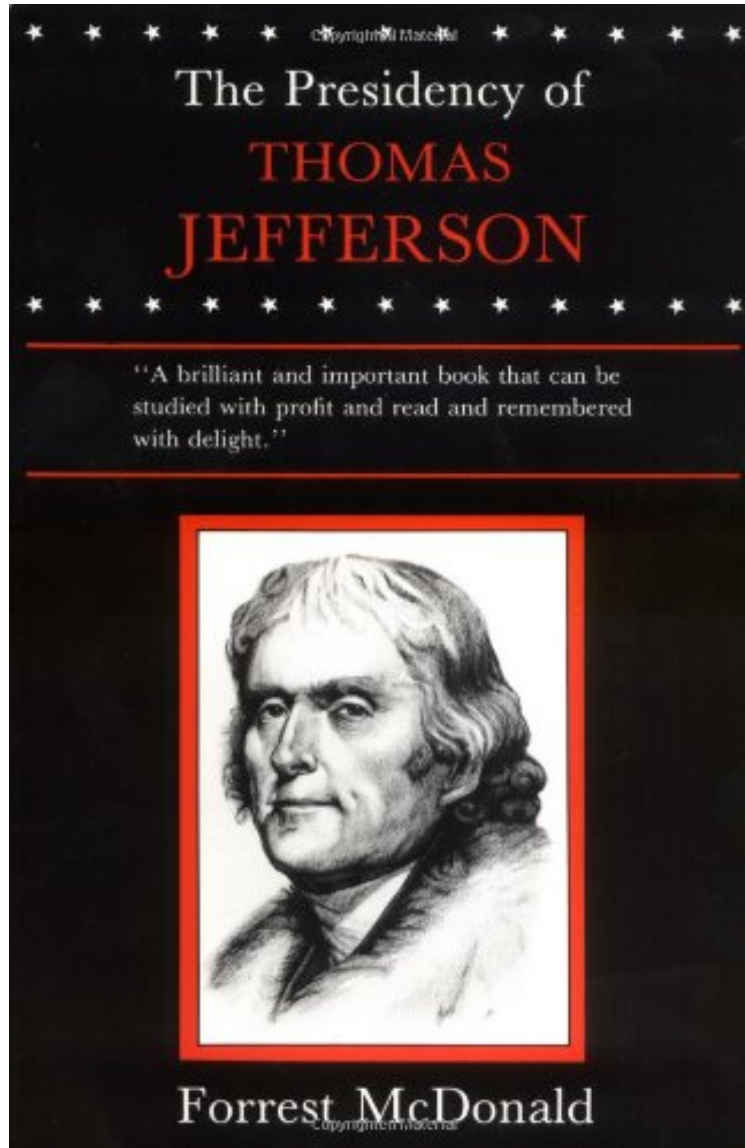


(Download pdf) The Presidency of Thomas Jefferson

The Presidency of Thomas Jefferson

Forrest McDonald

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Forrest McDonald : The Presidency of Thomas Jefferson before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Presidency of Thomas Jefferson:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. A Must for any fan of Jefferson!By Jacqueline M ScharerLoved it! Just when you think you've got your bases covered in class...get this book. I like McDonald and his study of Jefferson is thoughtful and comprehensive!3 of 5 people found the following review helpful. Essential Book about the Presidency of Thomas JeffersonBy Roger BerlindForest McDonald points out in his Preface that historians write a lot

about the ideas and writings of Thomas Jefferson but tend to overlook his 2 terms as President. That is quite unfortunate since it allows these historians to paint a much more favorable picture of Jefferson than he deserves. McDonald's essential book shows Jefferson in a very different light; instead of the idealistic Sage of Monticello and champion of freedom and liberty, McDonald shows us a man who trampled all over the Constitution and Bill of Rights during his second term in office. McDonald does this in a balanced fashion, allowing Jefferson's actions to speak for themselves. Jefferson's violations included deceiving the American public about his actual foreign policy (by issuing public and private messages to Congress), lying to Congress, approving the arrest of people without warrants and denying them legal counsel or trial by jury in the district where their supposed crimes had been committed, and approving legislation in Congress that gave him the right to violate the 4th and 5th Amendments of the Constitution while trying to enforce his disastrous and ineffective embargo. Two quotes from Jefferson in 1808 paint a pretty clear picture of how far his support for civil liberties had declined: he told his Treasury Secretary, Albert Gallatin, that "Congress must legalize all means which may be necessary to obtain its end" (meaning the enforcement of the embargo) and told one congressman that in emergencies, "the universal resource is a dictator". Despite all of Jefferson's writings about civil liberties, in the end, he felt compelled to trample all over them to achieve his foreign policy objectives. Ironically, these objectives were guided by his ideology which envisioned an agrarian republic that would be completely independent of any foreign influence or corruption. Jefferson believed that establishing the society he envisioned was the only way to ensure the long-term preservation of liberty in America. The ultimate irony is that he was irrationally willing to violate the rights of his fellow Americans in order to protect the future of these rights. It's actually a very sad story to see the author of the Declaration of Independence and man of so many other accomplishments sink so low by the end of his Presidency. I think McDonald's book should be essential reading for all Americans, especially our politicians, since it demonstrates so well the dangers of being locked into an ideological frame of mind regardless of the facts and circumstances that face us. McDonald points out that Jefferson could have abandoned his ideology and aligned America with Great Britain toward the end of his Presidency. Doing this would have been in the actual long term political and economic interests of the United States and would have avoided the disastrous War of 1812. But Jefferson was too rigid to give up his intense dislike of England and confront the realities of the situation he faced.

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. A Tale of Two Terms By Ricardo Mio Thomas Jefferson had a vision for America. It wasn't the vision of George Washington, Alexander Hamilton and John Adams: of standing armies, a strong navy, and world leadership; of central banking, liquid capital, business and industry; of independent courts and judicial review in short, all the things America would become. Jefferson's vision was for a return to a simpler time, where relationships were based upon agriculture and ownership of land, of honest labor in the earth, craftsmanship in the cities, and free trade between individuals; of militias, and local rule in short, of something akin to 18th-century Virginia. In essence, that was at the heart of the Jeffersonian Revolution of 1800a turning back of the clock and its the thesis of Forrest McDonald's scholarly, highly readable, and relatively short book (169 pages). Jefferson's goal as president, writes the author, was to restore the separation of powers through the voluntary restraint of virtuous officials, cast out the monarchists and the money men, repeal the most oppressive taxes, slash expenses, pay off the public debt, and thus restore America to the pristine simplicity of an Arcadian past. In fact, Jefferson almost succeeded. What stopped him? Inflexible ideology coupled with his hatred for the British. It led him to enact a ruinous blockade of American ports and, under the administration of his hand-picked successor, James Madison, to the even more ruinous War of 1812. Jefferson's first term in office was a smashing success. His crowning achievement, of course, was the Louisiana purchase, which nearly doubled the size of the United States. Had Jefferson's presidency ended then and there, it's arguable he would have gone down in history as one of America's greatest presidents. During those first four years, everything worked to his advantage. His Republican Party was united and ruled both houses of Congress. Every legislative act Jefferson asked for he got, a record never to be matched again. Indeed, his personal style of White House wining and dining, dazzling everyone with his knowledge of music, art, architecture, math, and philosophy proved not merely charming but highly persuasive in putting across his vision for America. Except for the tariff, he eliminated all taxes. He paid down the debt, cut the military budget to almost nothing, negotiated a bargain-basement price for the Louisiana territory, while producing a budgetary surplus most years. Jefferson's second term, however, was quite a different story. Europe had been at war, and where in the first term it worked to Jefferson's advantage, particularly in his dealings with France, in his second term it did not. He was promised Florida but events changed and the deal fell through. His Republican Party became divided, making it increasingly difficult for Jefferson to rule. Criticism, even open rebellion, was mounting and coming from several parts of the country. And the federal judiciary? From his first day in office, the Virginian had shown considerable disdain for the federal courts; but now, in his second term, his disdain degenerated into contempt for due process of law and for law itself. The breaking point for Jefferson, however, when it all went sour came with the embargo. Writes McDonald: The embargo became a program of domestic tyranny in inverse ratio to its ineffectiveness as an instrument of international policy: the more the policy was found wanting, the more rigorously was it enforced. With all of Europe at war, and England beginning to threaten U.S. shores, Jefferson had no means of defense no standing army, and an underfunded and undermanned navy plagued with rotting ships and no young officer corp to replace the aging

admiralty. As crisis after crisis piled up, Jefferson shut down. He became plagued with severe migraines and spent more and more of his time isolated in his room with curtains drawn. Embittered and exhausted, he continued to enforce the embargo down to his last day in office. Never did a prisoner, released from his chains, feel such relief as I shall on shaking off the shackles of power, he wrote. All of the Federalists programs dismantled during Jeffersons presidency would be restored during Madisons and Monroes presidencies, out of necessity. The world was changing. The time for turning back the clock if ever there was one had passed. Like it or not, the United States was a major player on the world stage, and would need an army and a navy, a central bank, liquid capital and industry, and tax the very things George Washington had enacted during his presidency. And irony of ironies Jeffersons hand-picked successors would put them all back in place. According to McDonald, Jeffersons lasting legacy as president (besides the Louisiana Purchase) was that he completed the peoples transition from thinking of themselves as subjects of a monarch to thinking of themselves as citizens of a republic.

Thomas Jefferson occupies a special niche in the hagiology of American Founding Fathers. His name is invoked for a staggering range of causes; statists and libertarians, nationalists and States' righters, conservatives and radicals all claim his blessing. In this book, Forrest McDonald examines Jefferson's performance as the nation's leader, evaluating his ability as a policy-maker, administrator, and diplomat. He delineates, carefully and sympathetically, the Jeffersonian ideology and the agrarian ideal that underlay it; he traces the steps by which the ideology was transformed into a program of action; and he concludes that the interplay between the ideology and the action accounted both for the unparalleled success of Jefferson's first term in office, and for the unmitigated failure of the second term. Jefferson as president was a man whose ideological commitments prevented him from reversing calamitous policy stances, a man who could be ruthless in suppressing civil rights when it was politically expedient, a man who was rarely, in the conventional sense of the word, a Jeffersonian. McDonald's portrait reveals him to be at once greater, simpler, and more complexly human than the mere "apostle of liberty" or "spokesman for democracy" that his adulators have relegated him to being.

"An elegant and revelatory analysis." Gore Vidal, author of *Burr* and *1876* "A brilliant and important book, one that can be studied with profit and read and remembered with delight." George Dangerfield, author of *The Awakening of American Nationalism*, 1815-1828 From the Back Cover The aim of the American Presidency Series is to present historians and the general reading public with interesting, scholarly assessment of the various presidential administrations. These interpretive surveys are intended to cover the broad ground between biographies, specialized monographs, and journalistic accounts. About the Author Forrest McDonald is Distinguished Research Professor of History at the University of Alabama and the author of fifteen books including *States' Rights and the Union: Imperium in Imperio, 1776-1876*; *The American Presidency: An Intellectual History*; *Novus Ordo Seclorum: The Intellectual Origins of the Constitution*; *"We the People": Economic Origins of the Constitution*; *E Pluribus Unum: The Foundation of the American Republic, 1776-1790*; and *The Presidency of George Washington*. He was named by the National Endowment for the Humanities as the sixteenth Jefferson Lecturer, the nation's highest honor in the humanities.