

Who Was Thomas Jefferson

Thomas Jefferson

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Thomas Jefferson (April 13 [O.S. April 2], 1743 – July 4, 1826) was an American Founding Father and the third president of the United States from 1801 to 1809. He was the primary author of the Declaration of Independence. Jefferson was the nation's first U.S. secretary of state under George Washington and then the nation's second vice president under John Adams. Jefferson was a leading proponent of democracy, republicanism, and natural rights, and he produced formative documents and decisions at the state, national, and international levels.

Jefferson was born into the Colony of Virginia's planter class, dependent on slave labor. During the American Revolution, Jefferson represented Virginia in the Second Continental Congress, which unanimously adopted the Declaration of Independence. Jefferson's advocacy for individual rights, including freedom of thought, speech, and religion, helped shape the ideological foundations of the revolution and inspired the Thirteen Colonies in their revolutionary fight for independence, which culminated in the establishment of the United States as a free and sovereign nation.

Jefferson served as the second governor of revolutionary Virginia from 1779 to 1781. In 1785, Congress appointed Jefferson U.S. minister to France, where he served from 1785 to 1789. President Washington then appointed Jefferson the nation's first secretary of state, where he served from 1790 to 1793. In 1792, Jefferson and political ally James Madison organized the Democratic-Republican Party to oppose the Federalist Party during the formation of the nation's First Party System. Jefferson and Federalist John Adams became both personal friends and political rivals. In the 1796 U.S. presidential election between the two, Jefferson came in second, which made him Adams' vice president under the electoral laws of the time. Four years later, in the 1800 presidential election, Jefferson again challenged Adams and won the presidency. In 1804, Jefferson was reelected overwhelmingly to a second term.

Jefferson's presidency assertively defended the nation's shipping and trade interests against Barbary pirates and aggressive British trade policies, promoted a western expansionist policy with the Louisiana Purchase, which doubled the nation's geographic size, and reduced military forces and expenditures following successful negotiations with France. In his second presidential term, Jefferson was beset by difficulties at home, including the trial of his former vice president Aaron Burr. In 1807, Jefferson implemented the Embargo Act to defend the nation's industries from British threats to U.S. shipping, limit foreign trade, and stimulate the birth of the American manufacturing.

Jefferson is ranked among the upper tier of U.S. presidents by both scholars and in public opinion. Presidential scholars and historians have praised Jefferson's advocacy of religious freedom and tolerance, his peaceful acquisition of the Louisiana Territory from France, and his leadership in supporting the Lewis and Clark Expedition. They acknowledge his lifelong ownership of large numbers of slaves, but offer varying interpretations of his views on and relationship with slavery.

Thomas Jefferson (miniseries)

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Thomas Jefferson is a 2025 American television documentary miniseries. The six-part miniseries chronicles the life of Thomas Jefferson, a Founding Father and third President of the United States, and premiered on the History Channel on February 17, 2025.

Thomas Jefferson and slavery

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Thomas Jefferson, the third president of the United States, owned more than 600 slaves during his adult life. Jefferson freed two slaves while he lived, and five others were freed after his death, including two of his children from his relationship with his slave (and sister-in-law) Sally Hemings. His other two children with Hemings were allowed to escape without pursuit. After his death, the rest of the slaves were sold to pay off his estate's debts.

Privately, one of Jefferson's reasons for not freeing more slaves was his considerable debt, while his more public justification, expressed in his book *Notes on the State of Virginia*, was his fear that freeing enslaved people into American society would cause civil unrest between white people and former slaves.

Jefferson consistently spoke out against the international slave trade and outlawed it while he was president. He advocated for a gradual emancipation of all slaves within the United States and the colonization of Africa by freed African Americans. However, he opposed some other measures to restrict slavery within the United States, and also was against voluntary manumission.

Thomas Jefferson Randolph

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Thomas Jefferson Randolph (September 12, 1792 – October 7, 1875) was a Virginia planter, soldier and politician who served multiple terms in the Virginia House of Delegates, as rector of the University of Virginia, and as a colonel in the Confederate Army during the American Civil War. The favorite grandson of President Thomas Jefferson, he helped manage Monticello near the end of his grandfather's life and was executor of his estate, and later also served in the Virginia Constitutional Convention of 1850 and at the Virginia Secession Convention of 1861.

Martha Jefferson

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Martha Skelton Jefferson (née Wayles; October 30, 1748 – September 6, 1782) was the wife of Thomas Jefferson from 1772 until her death in 1782. She served as First Lady of Virginia during Jefferson's term as governor from 1779 to 1781. She died in 1782, 19 years before he became president.

Of the six children born to Thomas and Martha, only two survived to adulthood, Martha and Mary. Martha died four months after the birth of her last child. The couple's letters to one another were burned, though by whom is unknown, and Thomas rarely spoke of her, so she remains a somewhat enigmatic figure. (Similarly, Jefferson did not speak much of his mother, Jane Randolph Jefferson.)

As a widower, Thomas had a long-standing relationship and children with Martha's half-sister, Sally Hemings, an enslaved woman who was three-quarters white by descent.

Jefferson Memorial

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The Thomas Jefferson Memorial is a national memorial in Washington, D.C., built in honor of Thomas Jefferson, the principal author of the United States Declaration of Independence, a central intellectual force behind the American Revolution, a founder of the Democratic-Republican Party, and the nation's third president.

Built between 1939 and 1943, the memorial features multiple quotes from Jefferson intended to capture his ideology and philosophy, known as Jeffersonian democracy, which was staunchly supportive of American republicanism, individual rights, religious freedom, states' rights, virtue, and prioritized and valued what he saw as the undervalued independent yeoman. Jefferson was simultaneously deeply skeptical of cities and financiers and hostile to aristocracy, elitism, and corruption. He is widely considered among the most influential political minds of his era and one of the most consequential intellectual forces behind both the American Revolution and the American Enlightenment.

The Jefferson Memorial is built in neoclassical style and is situated in West Potomac Park on the shore of the Potomac River. It was designed by John Russell Pope, a New York City architect, and built by Philadelphia contractor John McShain. Construction on the memorial began in 1939 and was completed in 1943, though the bronze statue of Jefferson was not completed and added until four years after its dedication and opening, in 1947. Pope made references to the Roman Pantheon, whose designer was Apollodorus of Damascus, and to Jefferson's own design for the rotunda at the University of Virginia as inspirations for the memorial's aesthetics.

The Jefferson Memorial and the White House form anchor points to the National Mall in Washington, D.C. The Washington Monument, initially intended to be built at the intersection of the White House and the Jefferson Memorial's site, was ultimately built farther east because the ground at that location was deemed too soft and swampy.

The Jefferson Memorial is a designated national memorial and is managed by the National Park Service of the U.S. Department of the Interior's National Mall and Memorial Parks division. In 1966, the Jefferson Memorial was named to the National Register of Historic Places.

In 2007, it ranked fourth on the "list of America's favorite architecture", published by the American Institute of Architects.

Sally Hemings

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Hemings' mother was Elizabeth "Betty" Hemings. Hemings' father was John Wayles, the enslaver of Elizabeth Hemings who owned her from the time of her birth. Wayles was also the father of Jefferson's wife, Martha, making Hemings the half-sister to Jefferson's wife.

Hemings' maternal grandmother was an enslaved African woman whose name is not recorded. Hemings' maternal grandfather was John Hemings, an English captain. Therefore, Hemings was of 3/4 European and 1/4 African descent, making her a quadroon according to contemporary American racial classification. This also means Hemings was the third generation of women in her family to be impregnated by a free man during her enslavement and the second to be impregnated by the man she was enslaved to.

Martha Jefferson died during her marriage in 1782. In 1787, at 14, Hemings accompanied Jefferson's daughter to Paris where they joined Thomas Jefferson. In Paris, Hemings was legally free, as slavery was not legal in France. At some time during her 26 months in Paris, Jefferson is believed to have begun intimate relations with her. As attested by her son, Madison Hemings, Sally agreed with Jefferson that she would return to Virginia and resume her life in slavery, as long as all their children would be freed when they came of age.

Multiple lines of evidence, including modern DNA analyses, indicate that Jefferson impregnated Hemings several times over the years they lived together on Jefferson's Monticello estate, and historians now broadly agree that he was the father of her five children. Whether this should be described as rape remains a matter of controversy, as there is no evidence that Jefferson forced Hemings to have intimate relations; however, if Jefferson did force her, there would be limited evidence given his ownership of her and the inherent insularity of a slave estate. Additionally, her ability to consent is dubious given Jefferson's near-complete control over Hemings as his property and the fact that she was between 14 and 16 years old when he began having sex with her, while he was in his 40s. Four of Hemings' children survived into adulthood and were freed by Jefferson or his will as they came of age. Hemings died in Charlottesville, Virginia, in 1835 in the home of her freed sons.

The historical question of whether Jefferson was the father of Hemings' children is the subject of the Jefferson–Hemings controversy. Following renewed historical analysis in the late 20th century, the Thomas Jefferson Foundation empaneled a commission of scholars and scientists who worked with a 1998–1999 genealogical DNA test that found a match between the Jefferson male line and a descendant of Hemings' youngest son, Eston Hemings. The Foundation's panel concluded that Jefferson fathered Eston and likely her other five children as well. A rival society was then founded, the Thomas Jefferson Heritage Society, which commissioned another panel of scholars in 2001 that found that it had not been proven that Thomas Jefferson fathered Sally Hemings' children; the panel, however, was unable to disprove that Thomas Jefferson had fathered her children. In 2018, the Thomas Jefferson Foundation of Monticello announced its plans to have an exhibit titled *Life of Sally Hemings*, and affirmed that it was treating as a settled issue that Jefferson was the father of her known children.

Jefferson Thomas

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Jefferson Allison Thomas (September 19, 1942 – September 5, 2010) was one of the Little Rock Nine, a group of African-American students who, in 1957, were the first black students ever to attend classes at Little Rock Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas. In 1999, Thomas and the other students of the Little Rock Nine were awarded the Congressional Gold Medal by President Bill Clinton.

Presidency of Thomas Jefferson

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Thomas Jefferson's tenure as the third president of the United States began on March 4, 1801, and ended on March 4, 1809. Jefferson assumed the office after defeating incumbent president John Adams in the 1800 presidential election. The election was a political realignment in which the Democratic-Republican Party swept the Federalist Party out of power, ushering in a generation of Jeffersonian Republican dominance in American politics. After serving two terms, Jefferson was succeeded by Secretary of State James Madison, also of the Democratic-Republican Party.

Jefferson took office determined to roll back the Federalist program of the 1790s. His administration reduced taxes, government spending, and the national debt, and repealed the Alien and Sedition Acts. In foreign

affairs, the major developments were the acquisition of the gigantic Louisiana Purchase from France in 1803, an embargo against trade with both Great Britain and France, and worsening relations with Britain as the United States tried to remain neutral in the midst of the Napoleonic Wars that engulfed Europe. He established a military academy, used the Navy to protect merchant ships from Barbary pirates in North Africa, and developed a plan to protect U.S. ports from foreign invasion by the use of small gunboats (a plan that proved useless when war came in 1812). He also authorized the Lewis and Clark Expedition to explore the Louisiana Territory and the Pacific Northwest.

During his second term, Jefferson's attention was focused on the trial of then former Vice President Aaron Burr for treason, which resulted in an acquittal, and on the issue of slavery, specifically the importation of slaves from abroad. In 1806, he denounced the international slave trade as a "violation of human rights" and called upon Congress to criminalize it. Congress responded by approving the Act Prohibiting Importation of Slaves the following year. Rising tensions between the United States and Britain dominated the final years of Jefferson's second term, as the Royal Navy began impressing sailors from American ships and attacking American shipping. Jefferson rejected war and instead used economic threats and embargoes that ultimately hurt the U.S. more than Britain. The disputes with Britain continued after Jefferson left office, eventually leading to the War of 1812.

Despite the economic and political troubles caused by naval tensions with Britain, Jefferson was succeeded by his preferred successor in the form of James Madison. His legacy remained highly influential until the American Civil War, but his reputation has ebbed and flowed since then. Nonetheless, in surveys of academic historians and political scientists, Jefferson is consistently ranked as one of the nation's most esteemed presidents.

Martha Jefferson Randolph

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Martha "Patsy" Randolph (née Jefferson; September 27, 1772 – October 10, 1836) was the eldest daughter of Thomas Jefferson, the third president of the United States, and his wife, Martha Wayles Skelton Jefferson. She was born at Monticello, near Charlottesville, Virginia.

Randolph's mother died when she was nearly 10 years old, when only two out of her five siblings were alive. Her father saw that she had a good education. She spoke four languages and was greatly influenced by the education she received in a Paris convent school with daughters of the French elite. By 1804, she was the lone surviving child of Martha and Thomas Jefferson, the only one of the couple's children to survive past the age of 25.

Martha Jefferson married Thomas Mann Randolph Jr., who was a politician at the federal and state levels and was elected as governor of Virginia (1819–1822), which made her the first lady of Virginia. They had twelve children together.

Randolph oversaw the operation of Varina and Edge Hill with her husband, and Monticello with her father. She was in regular correspondence with her father when they were not together. She provided emotional stability for Jefferson, which helped him weather his tumultuous political career. Besides overseeing Monticello, she lived with Jefferson at the White House, serving as an informal First Lady.

After the White House, Randolph and her children lived at Monticello and cared for her father. Due to debt, the Randolphs sold Varina and lost Edge Hill plantation to foreclosure in 1825. Randolph inherited Monticello and Jefferson's debts when her father died in 1826. Many of the enslaved people at Monticello were sold to cover some of the debt.

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