

In the United States, Thomas Jefferson is a trans-historic figure. His name, writings, and persona crop up in modern life and provide a historical reference point for current, sometimes disparate trends of social and political thought. In the process, historians, politicians, and the public alike continue to shape our understanding of him.

Thomas Jefferson is typically represented as a champion of 'freedom' and 'democracy,' however those words may be construed. One of the 'Founding Fathers' of the United States, he is regularly thought to represent a spirit of virtue and independence.

Certainly Jefferson deserves inquiry. He is long-credited as the primary author of the 1776 Declaration of Independence. A quarter-century later he began two terms as the third President of the United States.

But history, or more specifically historiography, often reveals more about the authors, the times, and the places of various writings than it does about object of study.

In the United States, the notion that Thomas Jefferson represents an oppressive figure is controversial. Most promotion and defense of Jefferson is not based on any 'pure' view of history. Instead, Jefferson is symbolic. He represents not just a particular figure in history but the ideals, traits, and characteristics which the United States continues to associate itself with. Thus, to detract from a positive appraisal of Jefferson is to detract from any positive appraisal of the United States.

Jefferson himself denied credit for creating the ideas in the Declaration of Independence. In his own view he acted politically as a tribute of the 'people.' It might be more appropriate to say he represented a certain class of people which both excluded and was engaged in an antagonistic relationship with Blacks, Native Americans, and other colonized people. Obviously these latter groups (along with women) were outside of Jefferson's thinking when he wrote, "all men are created equal," and this was implicitly understood by his contemporaries. Therefore we should not think of Jefferson's racism as his own, nor judge him personally on this basis. But the idea that we should not judge Jefferson as an individual in relation to current perspectives does not preclude the ability and duty to

critically appraise with the benefit of hindsight the broader history he was part of. Jefferson's writings, views, and official policies reflected a brand of settler-chauvinism which, based as it was on the settler-colonial social relations of the nascent United States, was fairly common. In this light, understanding Jefferson as an oppressive figure serves to promote an understanding of the oppressive relations sustained by the society he represented and led.

Negative evaluations of figures like Thomas Jefferson are prone to the charge of presentism, i.e. forming views according to present sentiments and not according to those of the society in which the object of study lived. According to this train of thought, we should analyze the role that Jefferson played strictly as understood by the society in which he lived, not part of a larger study of that society.¹ This criticism is deficient. In all historical studies certain appraisals are made, though often implicitly, of the society in which the object of study lived. The field of history is not simply the sequencing of events and assigning causal significance. Rather, historians routinely and inextricably assign value-based significance to these past events, typically based on (or at least mediated by) prevalent views and mores of the society in which they are writing. Given this, historical narratives which praise Jefferson are more accurately committing this sort of presentism as they often hinge on a current (though not eternally) favorable view of the United States during his period.²

Under scrutiny are Jefferson's writing and policies that directly related to colonized people and foreign powers. These serve to illustrate not that Jefferson himself was some horrible 'racist' (which would denote an overriding personal quality), but that he led a society which was fundamentally characterized and driven by its overt, structural oppression of others.

1 This would beg the obvious question, which part of past societies should we use as a central pivot for understanding them. Certainly, Jefferson's admirers do not implore us to analyze colonial and post-colonial Whites from the perspectives of contemporary Africans, Natives, etc.

2 Paul Finkleman, while attempting to come to terms with Jefferson's views towards slavery "in his own terms," nonetheless finds much to criticize in historians who commit this sort of presentism in Jefferson's favor: "Because they know that slavery is wrong, they have tried to shape Jefferson into their image of a properly liberal opponent of slavery. They wish to make a life-long slave owner, a man who sold numerous slave to support his extravagant life-style, into a pro-abolitionist so that Jefferson will fit their presentist conceptions of what Jefferson believed and felt."

Finkleman, Paul. "Thomas Jefferson and Ant-Slavery: The Myth Goes On." *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol. 102, No. 2 (Apr., 1994), p 202.

Class structure of colonial and post-colonial United States

The United States, unlike most other countries, was founded as a country of property owners. This property mostly came in the form of other people, i.e. African slaves, or land recently taken from Native Americans. The economy at large was structured around these two factors, and this form of social-relations (settler-colonialism, for lack of a better term) produced its own distinct ideological manifestations.

Insofar as Africans were routinely understood and treated as property, Jefferson was nuanced. He both espoused conceptual frameworks of justification for slavery and offered stern warnings over the inherent dangers of such a system. Racially-justified slavery was not some incidental fact in US history. Prior to the successful rebellion against England, approximately one in five people in the colonies was an enslaved African. This social and productive relationship was a cornerstone of the newly-birthing U.S. that Jefferson dutifully represented.

Generally speaking, settler-colonialism (which is partly based on the reproduction of the settler population at a far-greater rate than the colonized population) naturally entails its own forms of virulent racism. This had obvious implications for the US, especially in the treatment of Native Americans. Yet the most exterminationist ideologies associated with settler-colonialism usually arise after the settler population has secured a decisive advantage over the colonized. During Jefferson's lifetime, the White nation had only secured for itself a tiny portion of the land it would eventually settle. Jefferson, for his part, epitomized an early example of the duplicitous dialogue and schemes by which the US dispossessed Native Americans in the century following his presidency.

The United States was also born in a period of rapid dynamism generally. Capitalism was remaking social relations inside Atlantic countries and positioning these nations as the core of the developing modern world-system. While Jefferson was not so prescient as to foresee all the changes capitalism would bring to the United States (and was even wary of the urbanization which accompanied it), he was adept enough to flex his fledgling country's power, influence, and commercial scope within

the international arena in a manner that set the stage for later US-led global capitalist-imperialist productive and social relations.³

Agrarian ideal versus settler-colonial reality

Jefferson himself proposed an agrarian ideal. According to this abstract ideal, those who drew their subsistence from the land were more prone to virtue than those who depended on the “caprice and casualties” of commerce.⁴ All too often, historians have tended to take this rhetorical and clearly abstract ideal at face value.

It is hard to imagine that Jefferson, a slave owner, had any real experience, except perhaps of novelty, in deriving subsistence from the land. Enjoying French cuisine prepared by his slaves, he hardly fit his image on the yeoman farmer which provided the “moral” foundation of democracy. One might ask why Jefferson did not simply say, 'slave-owners, those who instill productive discipline into the inferior and least-civilized, are most prone to virtue.' However, this question overlooks the practical function of any ideological component. Underlying Jefferson's agrarian ideal of yeomanry was the settler-colonial reality of White expansion.

More than a policy, the economic foundation of the fledgling United States was greatly structured around the forceful acquisition of land from Native Americans. Supported by economic surplus generated the labor of captive Africans, Whites often moved into the a new area and squatted the land, eventually relying the US government to enforce their land claim against any long-run Native resistance which might be encountered. State power of the US government was instrumental in enabling the settlement of Native land by an expanding White population. Jefferson's agrarian ideal did

3 For more on the development of the capitalist-imperialist world-system, see Wallerstein, Immanuel. *World-systems Analysis: An Introduction*. Duke University Press, 2004.

4 “Those who labor in the earth are the chosen people of God, if ever he had a chosen people, whose breasts he has made his peculiar deposit for substantial and genuine virtue. It is the focus in which he keeps alive that sacred fire, which otherwise might escape from the face of the earth. Corruption of morals in the mass of cultivators is a phenomenon of which no age nor nation has furnished an example. It is the mark set on those, who not looking up to heaven, to their own soil and industry, as does the husbandman, for their subsistence, depend for it on the casualties and caprice of customers. Dependence begets subservience and venality, suffocates the germ of virtue, and prepares fit tools for the designs of ambition. . . .” *Notes on the State of Virginia, Query XIX*.

not merely dismiss the fact that Natives already subsisted from the land. Contemporaneous to his lifetime, it was part of a wider ideological justification and exhortation of an ensuing seizure of Native lands by White settlers.

Jefferson on slavery: holding a wolf by the ears

In recent years, Jefferson's views towards slavery of Africans have been clouded by obsessive focus on a sexual relationship he carried on with one of his slaves, Sally Hemings, and the possibility that she may have mothered several of his 'illegitimate' Black children.⁵ While the fact that Jefferson owned a sex-slave and may have enslaved his own children may tell us a lot about him as an individual, it says little about his overall views and relationship towards the larger institution of slavery.

In "Thomas Jefferson and Anti-Slavery: The Myth Goes On," Paul Finkleman notes that Jefferson, who some historians have proclaimed as an abolitionists, was anything but. George Washington, for example, (along with many others) freed hundreds of his own slaves during his lifetime and upon his death. By contrast, Jefferson freed a small handful. These acts of manumission occurred not from Jefferson's enlightened benevolence, but were typically the result of the slave's own persistence, diligence, and negotiation. What historians have often recognized as Jefferson granting freedom to a slave was in fact the slave purchasing their freedom at market price with the aid of a third party. Jefferson, who symbolized and led the United States in a bid for freedom against the British, had no personal qualms regarding the enslavement of Africans.

Historians who cast a favorable light on Jefferson highlight the fact that Jefferson supported laws stopping the import of slaves. These historians often gloss over some basic facts.

Jefferson owned more than 600 slaves during his lifetime and around 100 at any given time. Not only did these slaves provide for Jefferson's every need (including, in the case of Sally, sexual needs) at his Monticello estate, but by the early 1790s Jefferson began breeding slaves as a business venture.

⁵ Conveniently for Jefferson and many slave owners, racialization and enslavement were legally passed down on the mother's side.

Whereas George Washington was, in the words of Henry Wiencek, disgusted by the notion of chattel slavery, Jefferson adopted the practice whole heartedly, disparaged his contemporaries for having not “invested in Negroes,” and died owning more slaves than when he scribed the Declaration of Independence.⁶ Jefferson, for all the liberal zeal attributed to him, ran a successful enterprise breeding slaves. He was poised to benefit from the few legal restrictions on the slave trade that he supported.

Jefferson's main political objection to slavery was based on other considerations. He frequently referred to St Domingo, where African slaves led by Toussaint L' Ouverture rose up and violently overthrew their French colonial masters. For Jefferson, the great danger of slavery was the inevitability of similar slave revolts in the U.S.. By retaining an oppressed, captive workforce of Africans in such close proximity, Jefferson feared Whites might become “murderers of their own children.”⁷

Jefferson had little affinity for Africans. Yet he understood their relationship to Whites made them an “enemy” population. He believed emancipation was inevitable, either through the “generosity” of Whites or through the “bloody process of St. Domingo.” His own hope was for the former, yet he nonetheless felt that Africans, which he believed to be racially inferior to Whites, could never peaceably live in the United States.⁸ He likened the situation to “holding a wolf by the ears” and feared immediate emancipation.⁹ His solution was to expatriate Africans and to induce the “gradual extinction of that species of labour.” In essence, Jefferson, while proposing an emancipation of sorts, wanted to see the African-descended population disappear from the United States all together.¹⁰

Jefferson, rather than being any sort of friend of Africans, was an early proponent of scientific

6 Qtd. in Wiencek, Henry. "The Dark Side of Thomas Jefferson." Smithsonian Magazine. <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/history-archaeology/The-Little-Known-Dark-Side-of-Thomas-Jefferson-169780996.html> (accessed December 1, 2012).

7 Boyd, Julian P., Charles T. Cullen, John Catanzariti, Barbara B. Oberg, et al, eds. *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950-) 29:519.

8 “It will probably be asked, Why not retain and incorporate the blacks into the state, and thus save the expense of supplying, by importation of white settlers, the vacancies they will leave? Deep rooted prejudices entertained by the whites; ten thousand recollections, by the blacks, of the injuries they have sustained; new provocations; the real distinctions which nature has made; and many other circumstances, will divide us into parties, and produce convulsions which will probably never end but in the extermination of the one or the other race.” *Notes on the State of Virginia*. Query XIV.

9 The Thomas Jefferson Foundation, Inc.. "Wolf by the ears." Thomas Jefferson's Monticello. <http://www.monticello.org/site/jefferson/wolf-ears> (accessed December 1, 2012).

10 Thomas Jefferson, Letter to Edward Coles, August 25th, 1814. <http://www.let.rug.nl/usa/presidents/thomas-jefferson/letters-of-thomas-jefferson/jefl232.php> (accessed December 1, 2012)

racism, imploring that 'distinct races' be "viewed... as subject of natural history." Under this light, racist dialogue was analogous to discussions over which breed of an animal is best suited for certain tasks. According to Jefferson's racialist viewpoint, the life of an African was one of sensation more than reflection, they were unimaginative, needed less sleep and were kept awake by the slightest amusement, and their grief was transitory. Jefferson saw these 'natural' deficiencies inherent to Africans as a "powerful obstacle against emancipation" and ones which necessitated that freed slaves be "removed beyond the point of mixture" with Whites.¹¹ His hypocrisy notwithstanding, intellectually he favored what could only amount, in practice, to genocide of group whose population numbered approximately 900,000 people during his presidency.

While Jefferson's relation to slavery is fairly clear and straightforward, less so are histories of Jefferson which have painted him as an abolitionist and conflicted believer of racial equality. As one Virginia abolitionist, noting Jefferson's reputation, remarked, "never did a man achieve more fame for what he did not do."¹² It might be more appropriate today to state that never has one received more fame for something they actively opposed.

Jefferson and Native Americans

Compared to his views and policies on African slavery, Thomas Jefferson's significance in US relations with Native Americans has been less explored and mythologized.

Jefferson himself held a kinder view towards Native Americans than African slaves. In *Notes on the State of Virginia*, his reflections on Native Americans appear sympathetic. Rather than being racially inferior to Whites, Native Americans were simply 'uncivilized,' and he imagined that 'Nordic' peoples prior to contact with the Roman Empire lived in a similar manner.¹³

Jefferson's views regarding the different 'essential' qualities of Africans and Native Americans had a materialist basis in the different relationship the White nation had with each. Whereas Africans

¹¹ *Notes on the State of Virginia. Query XIV*

¹² Qtd. in Wiencek.

¹³ Jefferson, like most post-Enlightenment admirers of Western culture, falsely assumed a contiguous cultural heritage linking the Protestant West to Hellenic Greece.

were under the complete subjugation of Whites, Native Americans acted independently and were still treated as foreign nations. Especially prior to his presidency, a hostile united front of Native peoples, if not entirely an existential threat, might unhinge the cohesion and dominance of Whites over African slaves and forestall westward US expansion. Jefferson's view towards Native Americans was more amenable to the divide-and-rule, piecemeal manner in which Whites tactically approached the liquidation of Native nations during this nascent period of US history.

During his second inaugural address, Jefferson declared: "humanity enjoins us to teach [Native Americans] agriculture." Were it not for the fact that Jefferson's words obscured a genocidal policy, they would be humorously ironic. Native American agriculture predates contact with Europeans by hundreds or in some cases thousands of years, and included varieties of vegetables we are familiar with today: corn, squash, beans, sunflowers, etc. Natives of Jefferson's period did practice agriculture but different forms than what he had in mind. Some might misattribute Jefferson's desire to train Native peoples in White agricultural methods as a benevolent but chauvinistic imposition of his own agrarian ideal. Instead, as this 1803 letter to the governor of Indiana reveals, Jefferson sought to impel Natives into debt and further disadvantage them relative to encroaching Whites. His ultimate aim was to secure their eventual disappearance as distinct peoples in all areas east of the Mississippi River:

"To promote this disposition to exchange lands, which they have to spare and we want, for necessities, which we have to spare and they want, we shall push our trading uses, and be glad to see the good and influential individuals among them run in debt, because we observe that when these debts get beyond what the individuals can pay, they become willing to lop them off by a cession of lands.... In this way our settlements will gradually circumscribe and approach the Indians, and they will in time either incorporate with us as citizens or the United States, or remove beyond the Mississippi. The former is certainly the termination of their history most happy for themselves; but, in the whole course of this, it is essential to cultivate their love. As to their fear, we presume that our strength and their weakness is now so visible that they must see we have only to shut our hand to crush them, and that all our liberalities to them proceed from motives of pure humanity only. Should any tribe be foolhardy enough to take up the hatchet at any time, the seizing the whole country of that tribe, and driving them across the Mississippi, as the only condition of peace, would be an example to others, and a furtherance of our final consolidation"¹⁴

14 Thomas Jefferson, Letter to William Henry Harris, 1803.

http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/active_learning/explorations/indian_removal/jefferson_to_harrison.cfm (accessed December 1, 2012)

Indian removal was on Jefferson's and the public's mind when the former, during his second inaugural address, implored the latter to pay a minimal amount of taxes, part of which enabled the US government to "to extinguish the native right of soil within our limits, [and] to extend those limits."

'Official' historiography states that Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, and other 'Founding Fathers' drew inspiration and influence about democratic ideals from Native nations prior to the founding of the United States.¹⁵ More accurately and more significantly, as U.S. President, Thomas Jefferson consciously set the stage for later, more aggressive U.S. campaigns of Indian removal such as the 1830s Trail of Tears.

Jefferson's proto-imperialism

The United States in Jefferson's era had not yet received its current infamy as the world's foremost imperialist power. However, Jefferson's own foreign policy presaged the US' future international power and helped set the stage for today's imperialism.

In 1801, the first year of his presidency, Thomas Jefferson launched the first foreign intervention by US forces against non-Native Americans. Jefferson's government refused to pay the tributary 'Barbary' state's customary price for the passage of U.S. merchant ships. Instead, he sent the navy to settle the dispute. Jefferson's actions were not unpopular. He informed congress of his intent and crafted his language on the matter through an orientalist framework. A decisive point in the conflict came in 1805 when US-led ground forces captured the city of Derna. ¹⁶ The *Marines' Hymn* commemorates this war in the line, "to the shores of Tripoli."

Jefferson, in his willingness to militarily act against a foreign society for the benefit of the his own countrymen's commercial interests, foreshadowed later foreign military action against weak states aimed at opening foreign markets to U.S. interests. At the time, Jefferson, by acting against north

¹⁵ "H. Con. Res. 331, October 21, 1988". United States Senate.

¹⁶ Sutton, Angela. "Atlantic Orientalism: How Language in Jefferson's America Defeated the Barbary Pirates." *Dark Matter*. Dec. 20, 2009. <http://www.darkmatter101.org/site/2009/12/20/atlantic-orientalism-how-language-in-jefferson-s-america-defeated-the-barbary-pirates/> (accessed December 1st, 2012)

African 'pirates,' helped set a future course of U.S.-European dominance in the Mediterranean and North Africa.

Jefferson's policy towards Haiti was even more stark, both in callousness and effect. In 1791, a slave revolt led by Toussaint L'Ouverture erupted on the French colonial island of St. Domingo. By 1801, the revolt had produced the second free republic in the Western Hemisphere. One fact put it on the wrong side of the United States and Jefferson. It was now self-governed by former African slaves. Jefferson acted unmistakably against the new republic. As President, he barred trade to any part of the island not under French control, sought to isolate the rebels, and refused to recognize the government they created.¹⁷ In part because of Jefferson's hostility, Haiti was disadvantaged when it came to negotiating with the French and were forced to agree to indemnity which they paid well into the 20th century. Had Jefferson pursued a different route, Haiti today might not be one of the most impoverished countries in the world.

Haiti was not Jefferson's only interest in the Caribbean. In a letter to James Monroe in 1823, he "confessed" he had long thought it best that the US annex Cuba to extend "control" over the lands adjacent to the Gulf of Mexico. However, he calculated that it shouldn't be done at the risk of causing enmity with the British.¹⁸ Jefferson was not alone in his predatory gaze on Cuba. Rather, he was part of long line of slave owners and business interests who hoped to extend total political, economic, and social dominance over the island and region. Though the US never possessed Cuba as a formal colony, it exercised de facto rule over the island following the 1898 war against Spain until the 1959 Cuban Revolution.

The 1803 Louisiana Purchase is often credited as Jefferson's greatest foreign policy accomplishment. France, embroiled in a continental war, was keen to dispose of the territory to a non-rival country, and Jefferson, who sought to control the Louisiana delta so as to prevent obstruction to

17 Matthewson, Tim. "Jefferson and the Nonrecognition of Haiti." *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, Vol. 140, No. 1: March, 1996. pp. 22-48. <http://0-www.jstor.org.skyline.ucdenver.edu/stable/2211576>. (accessed December 1, 2012)

18 Thomas Jefferson, letter to James Monroe. 1823. <http://www.let.rug.nl/usa/presidents/thomas-jefferson/letters-of-thomas-jefferson/jefl275.php>. (accessed December 1, 2012)

trade by foreign powers, was willing to purchase it. Despite there being no legal rationale in the US Constitution for the federal government purchasing territory, Jefferson could hardly pass up the opportunity and agreed to sale. In doing so he doubled the size of the United States at a cost of pennies per acre.

More interesting than the negotiating process or context in which it occurred is the different views and practices expressed by the US and France regarding the Native inhabitants of the territory. Providing an early illustration that there are no rights - even those determined by international treaty law - of colonized people that Whites were bound to respect, the United States, rather than incorporating Natives inhabitants of the territory as citizens, as stated under Article III of the sales treaty, violated this section and continued to treat Natives as foreign occupants. The difference reflected the US' racist predilections born from the settler-colonial social relations it housed. Why US historians and the public alike today positively describe the Louisiana Purchase as one of Jefferson's 'greatest presidential accomplishments' is another question entirely.¹⁹

It would be a mistake to attribute all US history after 1801 to Jefferson. Nonetheless, he helped define the role the US would play internationally. His intervention in the Mediterranean against Tripoli and his hostility towards Haiti would form a pattern that shaped future world events. His deal with France, while operating in bad faith and ill-regard towards Native Americans, was characteristic of the manner in which colonialism began operating world-wide. Imperialistic policies by the United States, though greatly expanded in the centuries since, originated with Thomas Jefferson.

Jefferson today and tomorrow

A common refrain is that the problems of oppression associated with Jefferson and settler-colonialism

19 Balleck, Barry J. "When the Ends Justify the Means: Thomas Jefferson and the Louisiana Purchase." *Presidential Studies Quarterly*. Vol. 22, No. 4, (Fall, 1992), pp. 679-696 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27551031> (accessed December 1, 2012)

Kierner, Cynthia A. *Thomas Jefferson*. Prod. by Ken Burns and Camilla Rockwell. Florentine Films and WETA, 1996. 180 mins. (PBS Video, 1320 Braddock PL, Alexandria, VA 22314-1698) *Journal of American History*. Vol. 84, No. 3. (1997) pp 1162-1163.

are in the past, that there is no need to dwell on them. Unfortunately, this is not the case.

The 13th Amendment, adopted in the wake of the Civil War, formally banned slavery in the United States and its colonies, "except as a punishment for crime." Not surprisingly, people of color in the United States have been routinely criminalized since. As noted by Michelle Alexander, law professor and author of *The New Jim Crow*, today "more African American men are in prison or jail, on probation or parole than were enslaved in 1850, before the Civil War began."²⁰ In 2008, one in nine Black men between the ages of 18-24 were incarcerated.²¹ While the cost of incarceration may be more than the value of unpaid prison labor, modern slavery in its economic form (i.e., the production of surplus by a captive population) has continued on elsewhere. Consider the large-scale productive complexes located near trading ports in the Third World. There, tens of thousands of worker may be forced to labor on a single campus under appalling conditions at near-subsistence wages. Analogous conditions, often involving child labor, can be found in Africa mines and Central Asia fields. This dramatic factor of today's economy is sustained in great part by restrictions on the movement of labor across national borders, restrictions which workers in high-wage First World countries support and enforce. And, as noted by David Harvey, professor of anthropology and geography and author of a number of books covering political economy, "accumulation by dispossession" involving large scale privatizations is a regular feature of today's capitalist world-economy and affects the lives of indigenous and agrarian peoples around the globe.²² In part, the task of historians is precisely to dwell on past events and to connect them to present ones. The legacy of oppression that Jefferson represented, while it may have changed forms, it still with us.

Jefferson was an undeniably oppressive figure in US history. He was an unabashed racist, a proponent and beneficiary of chattel slavery, a political representative of the US in its processional dispossession of Natives, and a trend-setter of policies which contributed to dependent development of

20 Lu, Thoai. "Michelle Alexander: More Black Men in Prison Than Were Enslaved in 1850" Colorlines. March 11, 2011. http://colorlines.com/archives/2011/03/prison_system_holds_more_black_men_than_slavery_did.html (accessed December 1, 2012).

21 Liptak, Adam. "1 in 100 U.S. Adults Behind Bars, New Study Says." The New York Times. February 8, 2008. <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/28/us/28cnd-prison.html> (accessed December 3, 2012).

22 Harvey, David. *The new imperialism*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.)

future Third World countries. However, all of this occurred in the context of larger developing social relations over which Jefferson himself had no dictatorial control. Jefferson was, after all, the democratically-elected executive representative of 'his' people.

What can be learned not just from Jefferson's oppressive role but also from the progressive attributes supplied to him by historians?

Jefferson, an early proponent of 'American exceptionalism,' illustrates the actualities of U.S. exceptionalism: i.e., its exceptional and (so far) ceaseless ability to effectively mask oppression under phrases of progress. Jefferson's 'Empire of Liberty,' which both embodied the national-class interests of Whites and exacted a high cost on colonized people, foreshadowed and is part of the ideological-cultural framework of Orwellian discourse seen today. The proliferation of phrases like "free trade," "criminal justice," "Department of Defense," and "supporting freedom and democracy," all which mask some class interest within the US, is in some respect a modern extension of Jefferson's own "all men are created equal." Jefferson and the US are both exceptional for the manner and degree to which their ideological masks have been taken for granted in past and contemporary discourse.

Thomas Jefferson's image is inextricably bound with the US'. Because all history is in some regards written by the winners and because the US has been ascendant since its founding, it is not surprising that Jefferson, who effectively advanced this history forward, is praised today despite his relationship to the development of corresponding systems of oppression.

Yet fortune may eventually turn against the United States and by extension Jefferson. It is not hard to imagine, especially for historians, that in 100 years' time the United States, culturally and economically defeated, will no longer be at the helm of global affairs and historical discourse. What future historians will say about Jefferson and the nascent United States is an open question, but they will certainly be less inclined to take exalted phrases and laudatory narratives at face value.

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