

Jefferson's Dream

The Ballad of the Declaration of Independence



*With Accompanying CD of
Original Ballads
Profiling Eight Great Americans
Who Ploughed Jefferson's Field*

John Perrault

HOBBLEBUSH BOOKS
Brookline, New Hampshire

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How To Use This Book

Dear Teachers & Readers,

AS YOU WEIGH THIS BOOK OF BALLADS in your hands, please trust the scale to read on the light side—on the singing side of things. Light as in wakening to ideas—singing as in saying them out.

The question arises—start with the text or with the songs? This is akin to asking the author which comes first, the words or the music? There is no one answer. The most accurate might be that they sort of happen together.

There is no right way to engage *Jefferson's Dream*. One teacher tells us listening to a particular ballad first sets just the tone for taking up text and related materials. Another says a ballad connects best after working with the larger lesson plan. Both may say that encouraging students to sing the songs—and better yet, make up some verses of their own—makes for full engagement with these eight great Americans.

Some students may not be ready to digest the text on their own—their teachers may choose to summarize these pages in hand-outs. Other students may relish the challenge of reading the text and even trying their hand at writing new ballads on other historical figures.

Clearly, there is no right order of presentation. A unit on slavery, for example, might include the ballads on Tubman, Lincoln, Douglass, and Thoreau without involving the others. And the core values of the Declaration of Independence might be successfully approached by working backward from Eleanor Roosevelt, to Douglass, to Lincoln, and finally, to Jefferson.

One thing is fundamental, however. The lives of the eight figures here—along with their ideas—come into felt focus only by merging text with song. Each song is a ballad—a short narrative poem meant to be sung. But the whole book is a ballad in a larger sense: it strives to make the story of the Declaration of Independence sing in our hearts.

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Preface

My high school history teacher grimaced in pain whenever he heard a student confuse the Declaration of Independence with the United States Constitution. He'd probably suffer cardiac arrest hearing adults make the same error today. To my mind, this is no small matter. The reports are out there: millions of Americans don't know much about history—especially their own. If we are unaware of the core documents that forged our very liberties, what does that say about our notion of patriotism?

Pledging allegiance to the flag does not alone make a patriot. It begs the question: what does the flag represent? Reflection suggests it is the visual expression of our ideals, values, history and law. And that points us to the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. If we don't know anything about either, how can we honestly say we love our country? We might as well pledge allegiance to ignorance.

This book is both an effort to recall and salute the lives of eight Americans who represent the core values of the Declaration and an argument: freedom comes with a price tag—we have to pay for it by study and exercise. We can only know what it really means by rediscovering its roots and watering its soil. If the noble ideas articulated in the Declaration of Independence are to continue to have any effect, then, as Eleanor Roosevelt argued for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the people must know them, understand them, and demand adherence to them. That demand applies to government as well as to the people themselves.

The Declaration says we all have basic rights and we're all created equal. True or false? Think about it—if it's not true—what Jefferson wrote back in 1776—then who are we as a people? What do we stand for as a nation? How can we claim justice as our cause? But—if it is true—then doesn't it seem we still have a long way to go? This book—these ballads—are an attempt to revisit this fundamental question.

I am grateful to my publisher, Sid Hall of Hobblebush Books, for his insight and acumen in producing the book, and Hobblebush Marketing Director Amy Wood for her creative assistance; to Holly Perrault for closely reading and editing the text; to Barbara London for her expert musical transcriptions of the songs; and to my dear musician friends Mike Rogers, Jim MacDougall, Ellie May Shufro, Barbara London, Rick Kress, Susie Burke, David Surette and Rick Watson who helped me survive the recording process intact. I am grateful to Eve Corey, Mary Jane Rowan, and Lisa Graziano for floating my ballads on the waters of their classrooms, and to Maryhop Brandon for her support and encouragement. Thanks are also in order to my ever patient, ever talented engineer, Jeff Landrock, who mixed and mastered, and to Barbara, Mike, Rick, Tracie and Kristen, who lent their ears to the process. Finally, my thanks to Tom Daly of Crooked Cove Records for the CD production, John W. Hession for his photograph, and Art Meyer for sharing his love of history and passion for justice.

Introduction

The Declaration of Independence, July 4, 1776: . . . *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.*

These are the words of Thomas Jefferson, confirmed by the drafting committee he led, and adopted by the Continental Congress. These words evoke the vision our Founders had of what America means, a vision that puts the individual (because sacrosanct) before the state:

. . . That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed,—That whenever any form of Government becomes destructive of these ends it is the right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.

Idealism? Or existential reality? Abraham Lincoln answered this question by equating the Declaration's concepts of equality and liberty with rights that could only be more gradually realized over time. To him, this is what the drafters meant:

They meant simply to declare the *right*, so that the *enforcement* of it might follow as fast as circumstances should permit. They meant to set up a standard maxim for free society, which should be familiar to all, and revered by all; constantly looked to, constantly labored for, and even though never perfectly attained, constantly approximated, and thereby constantly spreading and deepening its influence, and augmenting the happiness and value of life to all people of all colors everywhere.

Jefferson's vision has been ridiculed as a dream at various times in our history. Too often that ridicule has flowed from minds seduced by the gospel of

greed. Is it really true that the hearts of women and men are moved only by money? Certainly Lincoln did not accept this. He abhorred the notion that the only true principle of right action was self-interest. Lincoln believed in the transcending human values expressed in the Declaration as true and abiding for all people everywhere. If those principles were not always realized in fact, the Declaration provided the beacon to follow in the constant human struggle for justice.

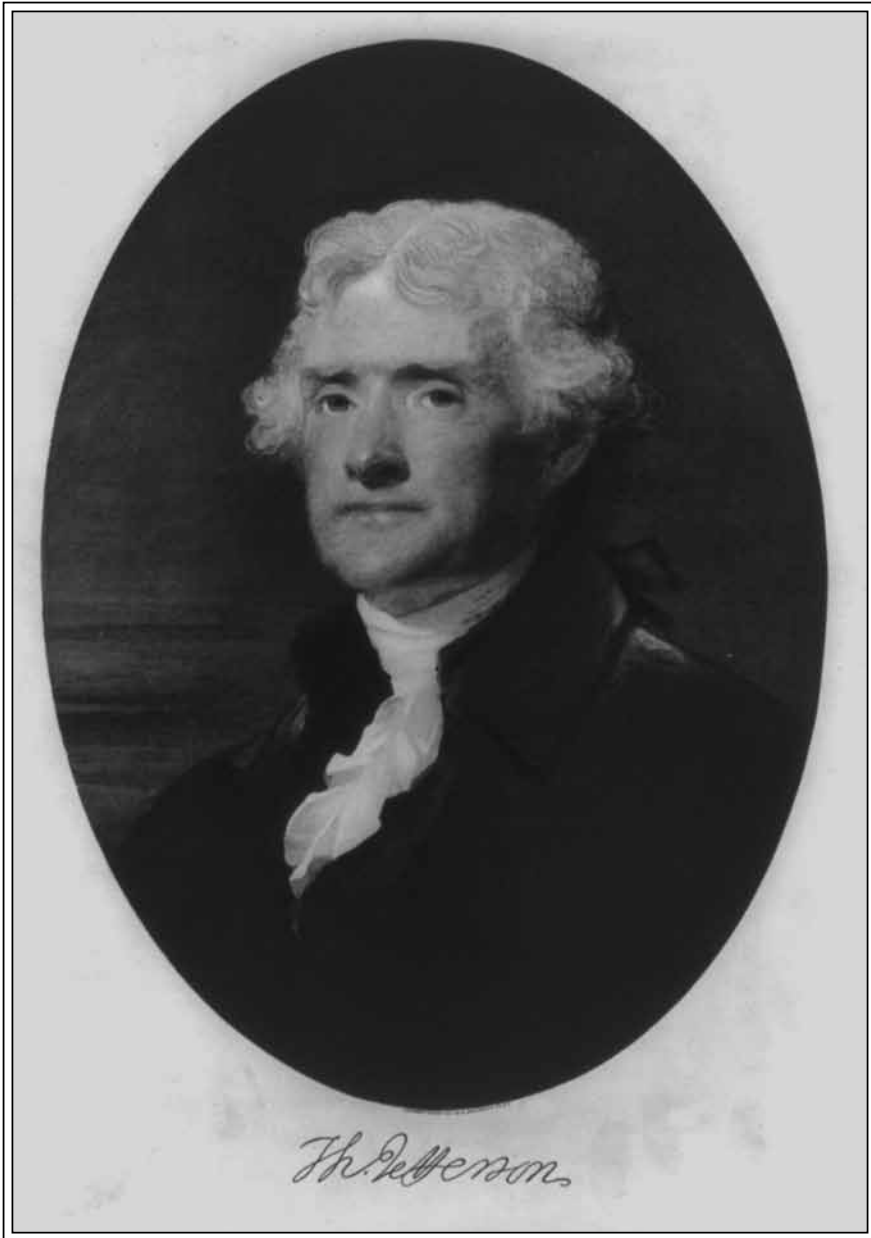
So when Martin Luther King rings out “I Have a Dream” at the Lincoln Memorial in 1963, he means what Lincoln meant—a dream in this sense: the sacred goal. Liberty and equality for all races, all genders, all faiths, all peoples. Lincoln had made it explicit. There was “something in that Declaration giving liberty, not alone to the people of this country, but hope to the world for all future time.”


How many nations—peoples—movements—, have acted out of fidelity to this “Dream.” How many hearts have been lifted to carry on in sight of this “Dream.” How many years—decades—centuries now, and the “Dream” still not fully in focus—not quite there as we gradually, progressively, wake to the reality of its meaning.

In this book and these ballads I focus on eight historical figures who took the Declaration to heart—either explicitly, by publicly advocating its values, or implicitly, by living them. Besides Jefferson and Lincoln, here are Harriet Tubman, Frederick Douglass, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Henry David Thoreau, Ida B. Wells and Eleanor Roosevelt. They don’t all agree with one another in the practical world of political action, but their visions tend to cohere when it comes to racial equality and liberty. And it is the women who get the men to see that advancing the cause of racial equality ultimately demands advocating for gender equality and women’s suffrage.

Don’t expect to find saints here. Just real men and women who looked fear in the face and persevered. Just eight strong Americans who carried the Declaration of Independence in the open book of their hearts.

Thomas Jefferson





THOMAS JEFFERSON

- Born*— April 13, 1743, Albemarle County, Virginia
- Youth*— Home-tutored, College of William and Mary, reader, horseman, fiddler, dancer
- Maturity*— Law, politics, family, Monticello, American Philosophical Society, Secretary of State, President; Significant Writings: Declaration of Independence (1776), *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1785), Statute of Virginia for Religious Freedom (1786), First Inaugural Address (1801)
- Words*— “The abolition of domestic slavery is the great object of desire in those colonies where it was unhappily introduced in their infant state. But previous to the enfranchisement of the slaves we have, it is necessary to exclude all further importations from Africa . . . ”
—*A Summary View of the Rights of British America* (1774)
- Died*— July 4, 1826, Charlottesville, Virginia

“Jefferson’s Dream”

What makes a nation? How does one begin? How does it keep going? For clarification: nations are not governments. Political regimes come and go, while nations stand steady. A nation means a people—a people who speak the same language, follow the same customs, share the same values, hold sacred the same symbols, love the same land. But how does “a people” come to be? In Europe and Asia we might be looking to myth and legend for the answer. In the United States, we can watch a nation unfold on paper.

America’s founding—its grounding—is historically present for all to see. It is stated and explained in the Declaration of Independence. Never before in history had a nation been specifically founded on its main philosophical premise: the individual before the state. Natural rights before political rights. Political legitimacy dependent on the consent of the governed. The people as sovereign. The Declaration of Independence is our rational myth—our public religion. Equality and Liberty for all. With these two claims in hand, Americans set forth to forge their destiny. It has proved a constant struggle. Every generation has come up against the tension inherent in the merging of these two standards. It is proving to be an ongoing process, an ongoing experiment. And it is far from over.

The ideas articulated in the Declaration don’t appear out of thin air. There are Magna Carta, the English Bill of Rights, the various founding charters of the thirteen colonies, and a whole crop of European philosophical writings that stand behind their evolution. Jefferson himself said he was only expressing the common sense of the matter when writing the preamble. Yet it is Jefferson’s felicitous words that capture the essence of the political mind of the times and that have stood the test of time. It is these words that have inspired millions over the centuries to risk their lives for the ideas they so eloquently express.

How is it that Jefferson came to be the one to articulate the founding values of the American experiment? His personal history is a far cry from the more radical and risk-taking stories of Thomas Paine and Patrick Henry. Jefferson grew up with books in comfortable surroundings, tended by slaves. As a young man he took to horses, the fiddle, the ladies and the dance. But while at William and Mary he came under the tutelage of serious philosophical thinkers—most notably William Small and George Wythe. Through Small, Jefferson was grounded in the culture of the Scottish Enlightenment; through Wythe, Jefferson learned his law. Arguably, Jefferson’s commitment to the moral imperative of democratic principles was fundamentally intellectual in nature.

Let us confront the hypocrisy question right up front. Jefferson was a slaveholder. Over two hundred slaves: building, preserving, serving, feeding, supporting the grand home he called “Monticello.” Recent evidence suggests that after his wife’s death, he had an intimate relationship with Sally Hemmings, a black servant to his daughter Mary, and that he fathered children by her. At the time of his death, except for a certain few, Jefferson failed to free his slaves under his will.

Yet it remains historical fact that in the Declaration Jefferson included a long passage, struck out by the Congress, condemning the slave trade on moral grounds. He also introduced a provision in a plan of legislative reform for Virginia that would have declared free all slaves born after a certain date. And in his *Notes on Virginia*, he wrote:

The whole commerce between master and slave is a perpetual exercise of the most boisterous passions, the most unremitting despotism on the one part and degrading submissions on the other . . . I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just . . .

*Jefferson's
Dream*
JOHN
PERRAULT

The essence of hypocrisy is preaching one thing and doing another—the opposite in fact. All kinds of excuses may be raised by all kinds of “Jeffersonians” for all kinds of reasons—but, try as they might, they can’t erase history. So the answer is: “Yes, there is hypocrisy there.” But does this by definition end the matter?

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Does the fact that Jefferson was a slave owner in any way make the Declaration of Independence false? That Jefferson held slavery to be a vicious assault on human dignity and freedom is a matter of record. That he condemned slavery as immoral and a threat to the very foundation of the Republic may fly in the face of his personal behavior, but that behavior in no way refutes the rightness of that condemnation.

Jefferson said “*All men* are created equal” and left the women out. Perhaps

it goes without saying that including women never entered his mind—or the mind of any of the founders for that matter. (Perhaps excepting John Adams, whose wife Abigail constantly reminded him to not forget the women.) The critical thing here is that the language Jefferson used allowed for the evolution of his terms, making possible the inclusion of every human being, black or white, man or woman, as Lincoln argued some eighty-two years later.

It is the great Frederick Douglass who tags Jefferson “the sage of the Old Dominion,” and who reminds us Jefferson knew “one hour” of a slave’s bondage was “worse than ages of the oppression your fathers (the American Revolutionaries) rose in rebellion to oppose.” When you read Jefferson on the subject of slavery you come away with the picture of a man who deplored the subjugation of the Black Race, yet lacked the necessary will to back his words with bold political action. If we can fault him on the latter, it is necessary to hail him for the former—his words—which, coming into the mouths of a Douglass and a Lincoln, prove the historic voice and enactment of the most fundamental political and cultural change this nation has ever experienced. Jefferson lived a life of inconsistencies, but the words he uttered in the Declaration of Independence—words so eloquently invoked by Dr. King at the Lincoln Memorial in 1963—continue to ring like a fire bell in the night.

What, then, are we to make of this Jefferson? This complex and seemingly contradictory man? In my ballad, I suggest that his “Dream” allows him to see that his words will be taken up by future generations in a larger and perhaps more creative sense than eighteenth century political pragmatism would allow. In his “Dream” he imagines the use to which Lincoln will put his prophetic lines.

If this be too radical an implication of a mystical element in a fundamentally rational political life, it perhaps doesn’t go as far as the facts surrounding Jefferson’s death—July 4, 1826—occurring fifty years to the date of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, and just an hour or two before the passing of his dear friend and political rival, John Adams. We know what John Quincy Adams read (by Proclamation) into the circumstances of the passing of Jefferson and Adams:

In this most singular coincidence, the finger of Providence is plainly visible! It hallows the Declaration of Independence as the Word of God, and is the bow in the Heavens that promises its principles shall be eternal, and their dissemination universal over the Earth.

We are free to make of it as we will; but the timing of the events is an incontrovertible fact.

*Jefferson's
Dream*
JOHN
PERRAULT

== 7 ==

Jefferson's Dream

Intro B \flat F

Guitar... My

Verse:

B \flat F Gmi Eb

name is Thom-as Jef-fer-son, I wrote the Dec-la-ra-tion and I

B \flat Gmi Eb Eb/D Cmi F

set the stage to free the slaves al-though I owned two hun-dred of them;

B \flat F Gmi Eb

when I wrote that Doc-u-ment "We hold these truths self-ev-i-dent,

B \flat Gmi Eb F B \flat

all men are e-qual " what I meant was all hu-man-i-ty.

CHORUS:

Dmi Gmi Cmi Eb/D Eb

Free-dom, Rea-son, eve-ry thing in sea-son,

B \flat Gmi Eb Eb/D Cmi F

Lib-er-ty, E-qual-i-ty, pa-tience friend, it won't be eas-y;

Dmi Gmi Cmi Eb/D Eb

Rea-son, Free-dom, that's what I be-lieve in,

Cmi B \flat /D Eb F B \flat F

A-mer-i-ca of Thee I—sing.

Guitar...

Jefferson's Dream

Lyrics

My name is Thomas Jefferson, I wrote the Declaration
And I set the stage to free the slaves although I owned two hundred of them;
when I wrote that Document "We hold these truths self-evident,
all men are equal" what I meant was all humanity.

Chorus:

Freedom, Reason, everything in season,
Liberty, Equality, patience friend, this won't be easy;
Reason, Freedom, that's what I believe in,
America of Thee I sing.

I served General Washington, I had to battle Hamilton,
I wrote my *Notes* with every hope we'd work the land and love the land;
all Federalists, Republicans, John Adams and James Madison,
I came to embrace both of them, they came to embrace me.

Chorus:

Freedom, Reason, everything in season, Liberty, Equality, educating everybody . . . etc.

"A fire bell, a fire storm," you can't enslave a man for long,
"I trembled for my nation's laws, when God is just" and we are wrong;
I passed the torch to Abraham to use my Declaration
and save the Union, save the Nation, ending slavery.

Chorus:

Freedom, Reason, everything in season, Liberty, Equality, "Nature's Aristocracy" . . . etc.

I lived in France, I looked to Rome, Virginia was always home,
I built my house down in the South, my mountain villa Monticello;
all my family, my dear children, Martha, Sally, all you pilgrims,
welcome, Thomas Jefferson, says welcome to my door.

Chorus:

Freedom, Reason, everything in season, Liberty, Equality, "Toleration," that's my
creed . . . etc.