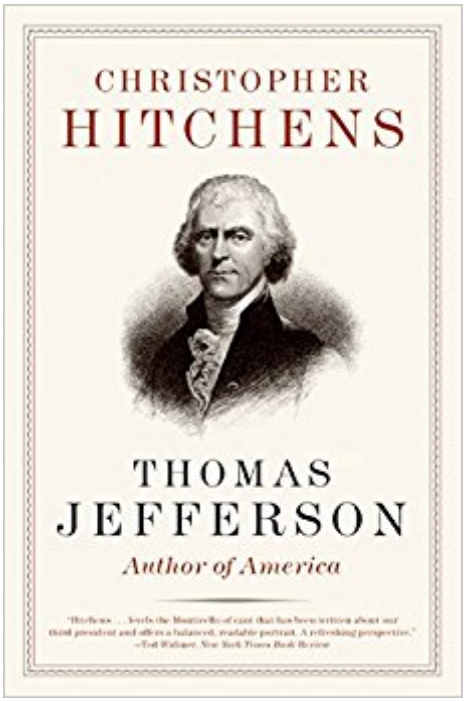
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Thomas Jefferson: Author Of America (Eminent Lives)



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Synopsis

In this unique biography of Thomas Jefferson, leading journalist and social critic Christopher Hitchens offers a startlingly new and provocative interpretation of our Founding FatherÃ¢â ¬â •a man conflicted by power who wrote the Declaration of Independence and acted as ambassador to France yet yearned for a quieter career in the Virginia legislature. A masterly writer, Jefferson was an awkward public speaker. A professed proponent of emancipation, he elided the issue of slavery from the Declaration of Independence and continued to own human property. A reluctant candidate, he left an indelible presidential legacy. With intelligence, insight, eloquence, and wit, Hitchens gives us an artful portrait of a complex, formative figure and his turbulent era.

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Customer Reviews

In this unique biography of Thomas Jefferson, leading journalist and social critic Christopher Hitchens offers a startlingly new and provocative interpretation of our Founding Father. Situating Jefferson within the context of America's evolution and tracing his legacy over the past two hundred years, Hitchens brings the character of Jefferson to life as a man of his time and also as a symbolic figure beyond it. Conflicted by power, Jefferson wrote the Declaration of Independence and acted as Minister to France yet yearned for a quieter career in the Virginia legislature. Predicting that slavery would shape the future of America's development, this professed proponent of emancipation elided the issue in the Declaration and continued to own human property. An eloquent writer, he

was an awkward public speaker; a reluctant candidate, he left an indelible presidential legacy. Jefferson’s statesmanship enabled him to negotiate the Louisiana Purchase with France, doubling the size of the nation, and he authorized the Lewis and Clark expedition, opening up the American frontier for exploration and settlement. Hitchens also analyzes Jefferson’s handling of the Barbary War, a lesser-known chapter of his political career, when his attempt to end the kidnapping and bribery of Americans by the Barbary states, and the subsequent war with Tripoli, led to the building of the U.S. navy and the fortification of America’s reputation regarding national defense. In the background of this sophisticated analysis is a large historical drama: the fledgling nation’s struggle for independence, formed in the crucible of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, and, in its shadow, the deformation of that struggle in the excesses of the French Revolution. This artful portrait of a formative figure and a turbulent era poses a challenge to anyone interested in American history -- or in the ambiguities of human nature. Discover More Eminent Lives Francis Crick: Discoverer of the Genetic Code by Matt Ridley Freud: Inventor of the Modern Mind by Peter Kramer Machiavelli: Philosopher of Power by Ross King Muhammad: A Prophet for Our Time by Karen Armstrong George Washington: The Founding Father by Paul Johnson Alexis de Tocqueville: Democracy’s Guide by Joseph Epstein --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

In this brief yet dense biography, the newest in HarperCollins’s Eminent Lives series, Hitchens (A Long Short War, etc.) proposes that Jefferson "designed America" when he wrote the Declaration of Independence, establishing "the concept of human rights, for the first time in history, as the basis for a republic." Hitchens is quick to point out, however, the obvious contradiction-that Jefferson was both an advocate for freedom and a slaveholder. Beginning with his aristocratic upbringing, which Jefferson purportedly viewed with "indifference," this biography explores both the private and public aspects of Jefferson’s life, from his political philosophies to his affair with his slave Sally Hemings. In an attempt to set the facts straight about Hemings, Hitchens explains that, while technically a slave, she was actually related to Jefferson’s wife and was treated "more like a privileged housemaid." Presenting countless excerpts from Jefferson’s writings, Hitchens closely analyzes the President’s words to reveal the Enlightenment ideas that shaped American policy, such as the separation of church and state and the prohibition of cruel and unusual punishment. This opinionated, lively narrative sheds light not only on Jefferson’s complex personality but on the politics of his time, making it both a fascinating character study and an excellent review of early American history. Copyright Ã Â© Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Firstly, this is not a book about Thomas Jefferson; this book is an argument in support of Christopher Hitchens' political ideals, Thomas Jefferson is merely the vessel Hitchens uses in order to present those ideas and arguments. Hitchens does so amazingly in this brief snapshot of the life of one of our Founding Fathers. I learned a lot from it, and had a really fun time along the way.

Hitchens makes a convincing argument for the greatness of Jefferson as a President. This is a must read for those, like myself, who are not sold on the genius of Jefferson. Hitchens places the Jefferson Administration in context and argues that his achievements continue to shape America. Hitchens certainly does his best to stress the likelihood that Jefferson was an Atheist, and makes the case that Jefferson viewed religion as a proxy for conscience, and that the guarantee of religious liberty extends to the protection of all formulations of conscience. Hitchens also does not shy away from Jefferson's struggle with slavery and inability to choose a difficult right over the prevalent wrong.

An excellent, digestible, exploration into the entwined world and mind of one of America's leading founding fathers. Plus, it reverberates to this day, as the author makes a strong link between today's jihadists and the Barbary pirates. This book is well worth the effort and should be considered for the modern curriculum of all students of world history and Geo-politics.

After reading a few of his books I was sort of surprisedthat his writing style is, well, not quite as good as I would have expectedwhen compared to his verbal style in dozens of lectures,documentaries, debates, and interviews of Hitch I watched on YouTube.At-least in the few books I read, I found his style a bit arch and anachronistic in affect,as though, not only was he writing of Jefferson, but as a contemporary of Jefferson.He also, is full of asides, that tend to make the content a little too"ramble-y" for my taste. Or perhaps his writing is too conversational for my liking.Or maybe he was simply hung-over several times while writing this or that bookor article. ;^). It's no secret that he liked his scotch, and would write whilewhile his blood-alcohol concentration was all over the map.Never the less, the guy was an original, and I really enjoy his stuff.

The American Revolution is, by far, my favorite historical period. I'm also a big fan of Hitchens, so I was really looking forward to great read, Unfortunately, I found it a bit rambling, and just a rehash of the same standard, conventional wisdom we've seen dozens of times before. I was also somewhat

taken aback that Hitchens,and his editor, thought that references were unnecessary. There were many instances, throughout his narration, that.I was wish that he had cited his original source. This was not a very scholarly "historical" effort, in my humble opinion.

Christopher Hitchens brought an interesting perspective to the Thomas Jefferson we thought we knew. Being an atheist Hitchens was free to examine the conflict in Jefferson's life around the religious culture of his day. He illuminated that aspect of Jefferson's life philosophy that has only been sketched out by other authors I have read so far. Jefferson was a complex man whose writings reveal someone caught in the dilemma of his time, that of many dogmatic religious factions pressing to make their doctrines a blended part of our secular democracy. Despite Jefferson's eloquent phrasing of man's self evident right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness he many times declined to free his own slaves, with the exception of Sally Hemming's children. All the while he grappled to deal with his own use of slaves he tried to convince his fellow politicians of the paradox of slavery in the founding of the United States. How ironic that the man who wrote the Declaration of Independence and edited the Christian Bible into his own "Jeffersonian Bible" could not seem to hold to one course in his life. After reading Hitchen's book it is easy to see how so many people can quote from Jefferson to defend polar opposites of many issues.

Though brief, I found the work rather informative. Christopher Hitchens' prose and style can be enjoyable to read and straightforward enough as to be entirely comprehensible.Hitchen's biography of Jefferson included sordid details about his subject's personal life, it was imbricated with an accounting of the age's facets (Thomas Paine, Autonomy, Secularism, Slavery), and expressed (as only Hitchen's can) Mr. Jefferson's ability to singularly shape the future of the United States and the future of democracy around the world.

Great biography written by a Brit who held dual citizenship. All the important aspects of Jefferson's life were included with a few surprise facts. So many biographies are bogged down by ancestral trees. I love reading bios but if you have to wade through 100 -200 pages before the subject is born I have many times lost interest. I highly recommend this series Eminent Lives for younger readers , especially those of high school age. There is such a new perspective put on history when it is told in story form and the character is not fictional but an actual Founding Father.

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