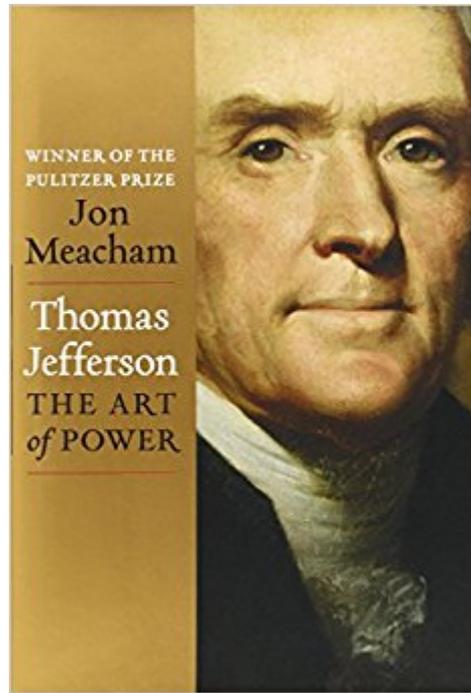


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Thomas Jefferson: The Art Of Power



Synopsis

NAMED ONE OF THE BEST BOOKS OF THE YEAR BY The New York Times Book Review • The Washington Post • Entertainment Weekly • The Seattle Times • St. Louis Post-Dispatch • Bloomberg Businessweek

In this magnificent biography, the Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *American Lion* and *Franklin and Winston* brings vividly to life an extraordinary man and his remarkable times. *Thomas Jefferson: The Art of Power* gives us Jefferson the politician and president, a great and complex human being forever engaged in the wars of his era. Philosophers think; politicians maneuver. Jefferson's genius was that he was both and could do both, often simultaneously. Such is the art of power. Thomas Jefferson hated confrontation, and yet his understanding of power and of human nature enabled him to move men and to marshal ideas, to learn from his mistakes, and to prevail. Passionate about many things—women, his family, books, science, architecture, gardens, friends, Monticello, and Paris—Jefferson loved America most, and he strove over and over again, despite fierce opposition, to realize his vision: the creation, survival, and success of popular government in America. Jon Meacham lets us see Jefferson's world as Jefferson himself saw it, and to appreciate how Jefferson found the means to endure and win in the face of rife partisan division, economic uncertainty, and external threat. Drawing on archives in the United States, England, and France, as well as unpublished Jefferson presidential papers, Meacham presents Jefferson as the most successful political leader of the early republic, and perhaps in all of American history. The father of the ideal of individual liberty, of the Louisiana Purchase, of the Lewis and Clark expedition, and of the settling of the West, Jefferson recognized that the genius of humanity—and the genius of the new nation—lay in the possibility of progress, of discovering the undiscovered and seeking the unknown. From the writing of the Declaration of Independence to elegant dinners in Paris and in the President's House; from political maneuverings in the boardinghouses and legislative halls of Philadelphia and New York to the infant capital on the Potomac; from his complicated life at Monticello, his breathtaking house and plantation in Virginia, to the creation of the University of Virginia, Jefferson was central to the age. Here too is the personal Jefferson, a man of appetite, sensuality, and passion. The Jefferson story resonates today not least because he led his nation through ferocious partisanship and cultural warfare amid economic change and external threats, and also because he embodies an eternal drama, the struggle of the leadership of a nation to achieve greatness in a difficult and confounding world.

Praise for *Thomas Jefferson: The Art of Power* • "This is probably the best single-volume biography of Jefferson ever written." • Gordon S. Wood • "A big, grand, absorbing exploration of not just Jefferson and his role in history but also Jefferson the man,

humanized as never before.ââ "Entertainment Weeklyâ [Meacham] captures who Jefferson was, not just as a statesman but as a man. . . . By the end of the book . . . the reader is likely to feel as if he is losing a dear friend. . . . [An] absorbing tale.ââ "The Christian Science Monitorâ "This terrific book allows us to see the political genius of Thomas Jefferson better than we have ever seen it before. In these endlessly fascinating pages, Jefferson emerges with such vitality that it seems as if he might still be alive today.ââ "Doris Kearns Goodwin

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Customer Reviews

I've read a couple books on Thomas Jefferson in the past. American Sphinx: The Character of Thomas Jefferson, and Thomas Jefferson: An Intimate History to name a couple. Up until this newest book by Jon Meacham, I thought that the essential character of Jefferson was essentially unknowable, a man of contradictions and hiddenness. Yet, Meacham manages, in his large but fascinating and quick read, to illuminate Jefferson through a new pair of eyes: that of his leadership. In doing so, we meet a new Jefferson, sometimes wily, always intelligent, always forward thinking. Jon Meacham wrote one of my favorite books, American Lion: Andrew Jackson in the White House, which I've read at least twice and listened to on my iPod while running each summer. Meacham has a way of writing his history that manages to avoid the endless onslaught of names and trivial facts, and truly centers on the person. By doing so, he creates a momentum in his writing that's compelling and hard to put down. Meacham's unique spin on Jefferson (if spin is the right word more of a focus) is how he developed his leadership and vision for America.

Throughout our history Presidents as politically diverse as Lincoln, Wilson, FDR, Kennedy and Reagan have enthusiastically embraced the legacy of their predecessor, Thomas Jefferson. Recent scholarship on the Founding generation, however, has unfairly diminished Jefferson in Jon Meacham's view. Biographies of Washington, Adams and Hamilton have all tended to reduce Jefferson to the role of an intriguer lurking in the background, a foil for Hamilton and Adams in particular. In *Thomas Jefferson: The Art of Power*, Meacham reclaims Jefferson's prominence in setting America on her course, asserting that most of the Presidents who served between 1800 and 1840 were Jeffersonians, and holds Jefferson up as a role model for today's politicians struggling to reconcile political idealism with the realism needed to traverse the rough waters of democratic politics. *The Art of Power* is a very well written narrative and moves at a fast paced with chapters generally ranging from 10-15 pages. While Meacham clearly admires Jefferson, though, he is able to acknowledge Jefferson's failures and contradictions as well. However, there are several shortcomings that detracted from my enjoyment of *The Art of Power*. First, while *The Art of Power* covers Jefferson's personal and political lives thoroughly, Meacham appears to have been poorly served by certain curious editorial choices. His summation of Jefferson's legacy appears in the Author's Note, and much of the detail necessary to inform the reader of vital details is contained in the nearly 200 pages of end notes. For example the text makes it appear as if there is no question whatsoever regarding Jefferson's paternity of his slave's children.

I'll admit to being a Jefferson fan. His vision is what led me to UVa, and his depth and breadth of knowledge and experience still astounds me. Truly a renaissance man who seemed to master most of what he attempted - languages, science, music, politics, and a man of stark contradictions. A man who owned slaves and yet campaigned to free them. A man who enjoyed political power but despised face to face confrontations. This book captures this man, and I think does an excellent job developing a focal point to use to understand Jefferson, his contributions and his flaws. Meacham uses one "prism" to evaluate Jefferson's life - the acquisition and use of power to achieve Jefferson's vision and aims. While this is nominally a biography, the depth of the book lies in examining how and when Jefferson acquired and used power to achieve his aims. While I had hoped to read more about the University of Virginia, I knew the book wouldn't spend much time on it, and it didn't. The vast majority of the book is spent examining the unfolding disagreement between the Federalists, primarily in New England, who sought closer relationship with England and rule by the privileged and the few, and the Democrats, primarily in the Mid-Atlantic and South, who

worked for individual democracy. It came as a surprise to me to learn that several times the Northeastern states contemplated secession over the style of government. This is little reported in US history. Jefferson felt that the Revolution was fought to free the Americans to pursue individual freedoms, individual liberty which could only result from participative democracy. Many of the Federalists believed that the average citizen could not participate in government effectively and wanted a privileged ruling class.

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