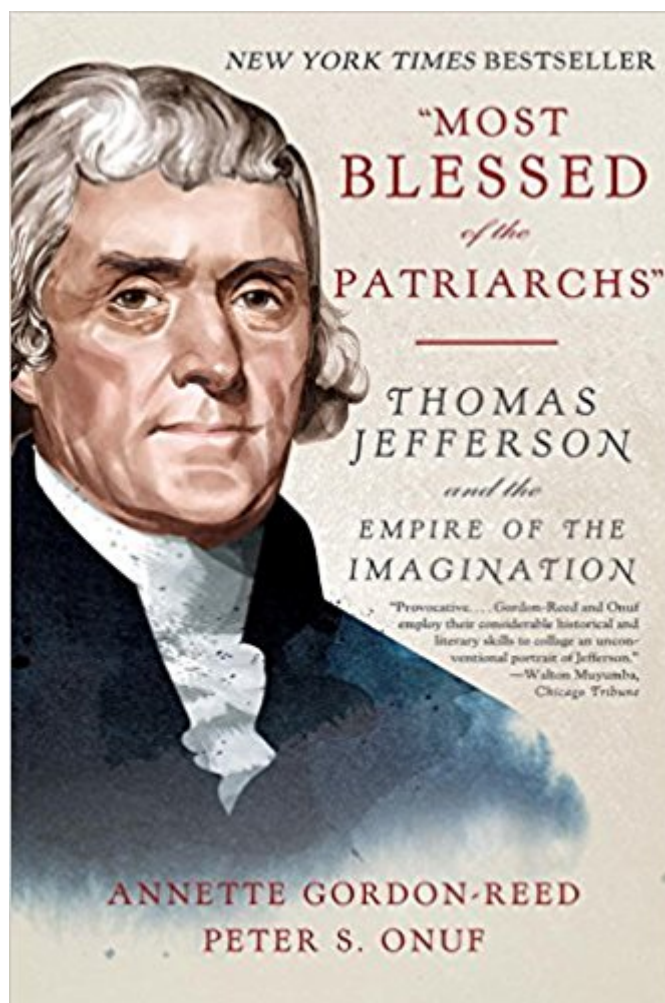


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"Most Blessed Of The Patriarchs": Thomas Jefferson And The Empire Of The Imagination



Synopsis

"An important book—richly rewarding. It is full of fascinating insights about Jefferson." —Gordon S. Wood, New York Review of Books
Hailed by critics and embraced by readers, "Most Blessed of the Patriarchs" is one of the richest and most insightful accounts of Thomas Jefferson in a generation. Following her Pulitzer Prize-winning *The Hemingses of Monticello*, Annette Gordon-Reed has teamed with Peter S. Onuf to present a provocative and absorbing character study, "a fresh and layered analysis" (New York Times Book Review) that reveals our third president as "a dynamic, complex and oftentimes contradictory human being" (Chicago Tribune). Gordon-Reed and Onuf fundamentally challenge much of what we thought we knew, and through their painstaking research and vivid prose create a portrait of Jefferson, as he might have painted himself, one "comprised of equal parts sun and shadow" (Jane Kamensky). 15 illustrations

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Customer Reviews

"Ambitious—Gordon-Reed and Onuf rightly highlight Jefferson's ideas, words and charm, the strengths that brought him such success in his life and that have sustained his standing for centuries." —David O. Stewart, Washington Post
"A fresh and layered analysis, one centered more on [Jefferson's] interior life than his deeds for posterity—Gordon-Reed and Onuf are not the first to search for other ways into Jefferson's private place, nor will they be the last. But they have provided a smart and

useful map for those who are certain to follow. — Peter Baker, New York Times Book Review — “Provocative — Gordon-Reed and Onuf employ their considerable historical and literary skills to collage an unconventional portrait of Jefferson — Few historians are as well suited to examine Jefferson in this manner — The Jefferson who emerges in these pages is a dynamic, complex and oftentimes contradictory human being. — Walton Muyumba, Chicago Tribune — “In their search for understanding rather than for comfortable bromides, Gordon-Reed and Onuf exemplify a virtue that Jefferson admired, even though, in this case, it does not always tend to his advantage. — Matthew C. Simpson, New Republic — “Given that Jefferson believed that no generation can have a rightful claim to govern another, it is fitting that Gordon-Reed and Onuf have given us a new and empowering perspective on the private and public life of one of our greatest Americans. It is a book with which the next generation can judge, and be enlightened by, Jefferson’s words and deeds. — Jeremy D. Bailey, San Francisco Chronicle — “With characteristic insight and intellectual rigor, Annette Gordon-Reed and Peter Onuf have produced a powerful and lasting portrait of the mind of Thomas Jefferson. This is an essential and brilliant book by two of the nation’s foremost scholars — a book that will, like its protagonist, endure. — Jon Meacham, author of Thomas Jefferson: The Art of Power — “A peerless team, Annette Gordon-Reed and Peter Onuf pierce the mysteries of Jefferson’s character and at last offer a compelling explanation of how the republican statesman and plantation patriarch could coexist in a single soul. Jefferson’s flaw was not hypocrisy but conviction, his unswerving belief in paternalism as empowering and beneficent. — Danielle Allen, author of Our Declaration: A Reading of the Declaration of Independence in Defense of Equality — “This inspired collaboration takes us as close as we’re likely to get to the way Thomas Jefferson understood himself and his times. Not content with clichés about a man who made his world anew, Gordon-Reed and Onuf show us the world that made the man — Here is Jefferson as he might have painted his own image, a self-portrait comprised of equal parts sun and shadow. — Jane Kamensky, author of Copley: A Life in Color

Annette Gordon-Reed is the Charles Warren Professor of American Legal History at Harvard Law School. She lives in New York City and Cambridge, Massachusetts. Peter S. Onuf is the Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation Professor Emeritus at the University of Virginia. He lives in Portland, Maine, and Virginia.

Do not be fooled by the bad reviews--this is an excellent book. Annette Gordon-Reed and Peter Onuf are both excellent Jefferson scholars and this is a well-written, informative, and insightful book. Some reviewers are treating this book like an attack on Jefferson--it's not. If you actually read it, it's very clear that Gordon-Reed and Onuf are not trying to make us think less of TJ or to dislike him---they are trying to make us think critically about him, and in ways that we haven't thought about him before. The main focus of the book is how TJ's home life and thought processes helped him view and deal with the world, so his private life is VERY relevant, despite what another review said (there's no way to understand what the man DID, unless we know how he THOUGHT and why). Most of the major criticism seems to be related to the fact that they treat Sally Hemings as a real person, rather than a moral stumbling block--they emphasize the Hemings-Jefferson relationship and use what information is available about it to analyze what exactly she and their children might have meant to Jefferson. Acting like the Hemings-Jefferson relationship didn't exist seems willfully ignorant at this point, given the weight of the circumstantial and DNA evidence. Is it really so horrible to contemplate that she might have meant something to Jefferson? Gordon-Reed and Onuf also have extensive analyses of how Jefferson conceived of gender and race, and those rank among the very best writing that I've read on Jefferson to date. They're fresh and insightful, and they add a lot of nuance to a man that you think you know everything about. In conclusion, check this book out. It made me feel like I was seeing a side of TJ I'd never seen before, and that's a rare thing for one of the most analyzed men in American history.

Excellent book. Well written and well documented. I found the lengthy section on the time Jefferson spent in France to be exceptionally long and cumbersome to read. Before that section, and afterward, the book moves along quite well and is very interesting to read. Very little time is given to his writing of the Declaration of Independence or his U.S. Presidency. I would like to have read more on how he formed his policies and programs as President. Jefferson's life was a contradiction from his early years until death. He would ardently profess certain beliefs and philosophy, but then live his life in complete opposition to what he had just written. It's difficult to know how he felt on any given issue because what he said was so different than what he did. Good book - very interesting - well documented.

A very personal history of Jefferson it focuses mostly on the man rather than his achievements. The patriarch of the title is a very human and visionary idealist making his way in an imperfect and changing world. It grapples very fairly with his complicated relationship to slavery and does an

excellent job of placing it on the context of Jefferson's times and culture. The book is a bit dry, but worth wading through

Not the traditional chronological biography, but organized thematically, which I liked. It strikes a good tone between completely apologizing for Jefferson's obvious inconsistencies and relentlessly attacking his character as a few books have. The book is repetitive at times however. By the end, I was convinced (as far as one can be) that Sally Hemmings was the father of several members of the Jefferson "household," but that part of the Jefferson's life story takes up too much space in the book. I'm am slightly more sympathetic to Jefferson than I was before I read the book, but I still find Jefferson rather oblivious to his own faults and hypocrisies. I just have a better idea of how Jefferson created a self-narrative to explain them away, at least to himself.

This book was a pleasant surprise; I haven't been keen on these authors in the past, but this book is well-written, balanced, and with a tolerable agenda. I don't think they quite hit the mark of their stated objective, which is to elucidate how Thomas Jefferson viewed himself in his world, but it's a very good attempt and excellent for the general reader.

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