

Gentrain Unit 10 The Ideals of Thomas Jefferson, November 7, 2013. Dr. Cindy Ausec

Thomas Jefferson 1743 - 1826

- Principle author of the United States Declaration of Independence
- Third President of the United States (1801-1809)
- Founder of the University of Virginia
- Influential “Founding Father”
- Spoke five languages
- Interested in science and political philosophy – Influenced by Francis Bacon, Isaac Newton and John Locke

Government (Influenced by John Locke)

- Declaration of Independence – argued that in order to secure their “Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness” they were entitled to abolish the corrupt British government
- *Republic* - a government by its citizens in mass, acting directly and personally, according to rules established by the majority
- Each generation has the right to choose for itself the form of government it believes most promotes ‘happiness’
- Natural right of men to self government
- “The first principle of republicanism” – “*lex majoris partis* is the fundamental law of every society of individuals of equal rights”
  - His statecraft represented an almost unconditional surrender to the will of the people
  - The will of the majority being not only “the Natural law of every society,” but also “the only sure guardian of the rights of man”

Favored states’ rights over the federal government

- Considered each state a separate nation
- The states composing the federal association did so for the management of the relations with one another and with foreign nations
- The legal origins of the Union rested on the will of its member states
  - Asserted that the individual states had the right to judge the constitutionality of laws not based on powers specifically delegated to Congress by the Constitution
  - Federal government was concerned with international law
- Constitution was the permanent basis of the American government because its civil rights amendments guaranteed the individual’s right to disagree with that government
- Regarding the issues of civil law and citizen rights in general had to remain in the states

Jefferson hoped to radically extend democracy in his home state and the Nation

- Aimed at extending the rights of citizens to all who had a permanent interest of living in the country

## Politics of pedagogy – the education of a democratic citizenry

- Jefferson's Educational Reforms in Virginia - 1778 proposed three separate bills
  - First bill - mandated a system of public elementary and grammar schools throughout the state
    - Three years of schooling in basic literacy and mathematics for all free children
    - Reading lessons drawn from classical and Anglo-American history rather than scripture
  - Second bill – reconstituted the College of William and Mary as purely secular institution of higher learning
    - Mandated a system of scholarships to both the grammar schools and the university for boys of “the best and most promising genius”
  - Third bill - called for the establishment of a research library in Richmond
- During his presidency, he urged Congress to amend the Constitution so that funds could be appropriated for public education and a national university
  - Rationale for these provisions
    - Elementary education ensured the enlightenment of the people at large and thus made them the safe guardians of their own liberty
    - Instruction in history qualified people to judge the actions of their representatives
    - Primary reading in history would prevent the rise of “tyranny”
    - Did not argue that it would enable them to fully assume the reins of government and make informed decisions regarding substantive policy
  - Considered superstition dangerous because it could blind the minds of the people
    - Educational scheme removed scripture as a source of primary instruction
    - Eliminating clerics as potential purveyors of primary education
    - Envisioned that the “best geniuses” supported through scholarships that were dismissed after one or two years of college preparation would go on to be masters of the public schools
- Secularizing Virginia's University
  - Secularizing the university level education was more vital for it was there that the future statesmen would be trained
    - Called for severing all links between William and Mary and the “English Church”
    - Proposed a fully secular curriculum in the modern arts and sciences
    - Oversight would be placed in the hands of the political authorities