

Anthony F. C. Wallace



JEFFERSON *and the* INDIANS

The Tragic Fate of the First Americans



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OF THE
FIRST AMERICANS



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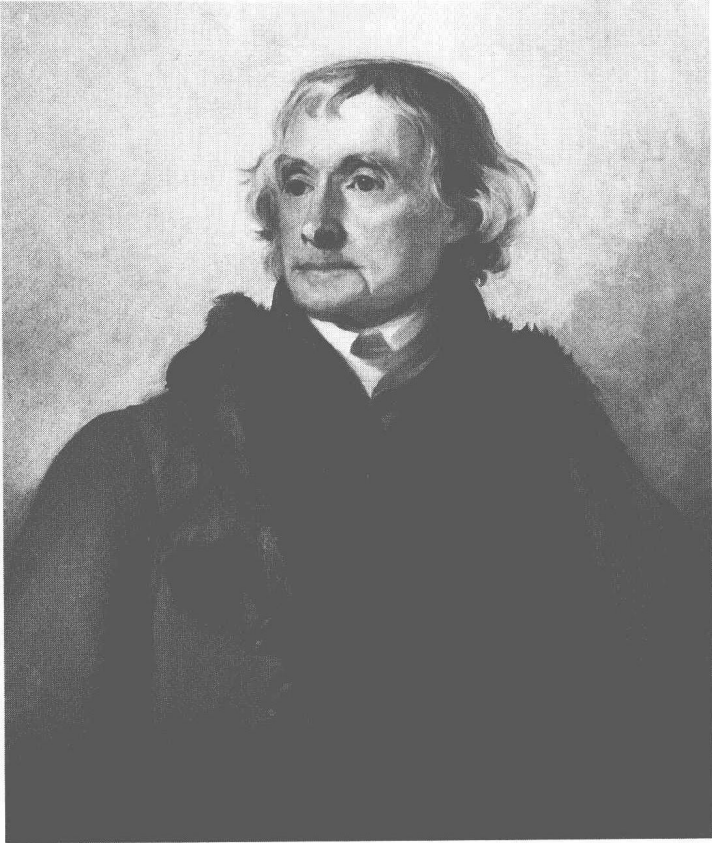
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Thomas Jefferson. Oil on canvas by Thomas Sully, 1821.
Courtesy of the American Philosophical Society.

To Betty
my companion on the Jefferson journey

Cities, Towns, and Other Points of Interest, c. 1800



Preface

THOMAS JEFFERSON was an enigma in his own time, revered by some, reviled by others. Today, two hundred years later, he is an enigma with charisma, fascinating to the public and the scholarly world alike. His image looms over us from a cliff in the Black Hills and from the Memorial in Washington; visitors throng his house and gardens at Monticello, where he longed to live among his books, even though he perennially sought public office. His inspiring one-liners, most notably “all men are created equal” and “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness,” have taken on a life of their own, attaining meanings far removed from what Jefferson himself likely intended. In our own time, Thomas Jefferson has become a culture-hero, the American Prometheus, our version of the universal Trickster, that morally ambiguous mythic being who steals fire from the gods and brings the arts, sciences, and social institutions to the world.

Joseph Ellis has called Jefferson the American Sphinx, and, along with other biographers, has noted his many inconsistencies. Jefferson’s advocacy of national independence, minimal government, and maximal individual freedom has been hailed as the world’s charter for democracy and also as the authority for isolationism, states’ rights and nullification, and revolutionary militias. He has been praised as a critic of slavery and condemned as a hypocritical slave-owning racist. His relationship with a black slave, Sally Hemings, his wife’s half-sister and the mother of one or more of his own children, has been characterized as a long-term union of mutual affection and respect, as an example of sexual exploitation by a master who refused to emancipate his concubine or her children while he lived, and as an unthinkable association for a gentleman of virtue. And, with respect to Native Americans, Jefferson appears both as the scholarly admirer of Indian character, archaeology, and language and as the planner of cultural genocide, the architect of the removal policy, the surveyor of the Trail of Tears.

The fascination with Jefferson has grown, perhaps, because he embodied some of the major dilemmas of American culture—fault-lines in the national character where differing views on how to share the spaces of the world grind together. He evokes an awareness of classic problems in a democracy: what to do about slavery; how to deal with ethnic differences; how to define the proper balance between freedom and governance; how to preserve agrarian values in an increasingly industrial world; how far to expand the nation's boundaries; how to manage an emerging commercial empire's foreign affairs, by defensive isolation or aggressive alliance building; how to decide on war and peace; how to balance the budget while promoting the national interest; how to respond to the conflicting claims of religion and science. On some of these issues, Jefferson was at times a shape-shifter, articulating one policy in public only to execute another in private, or later publicly. In no domain of his life as a philosopher-politician-official do such dilemmas appear more conspicuously than in his relations with Native Americans.

This is a book about Jefferson's attitudes, beliefs, and behavior toward the Indians. It does not pretend to be a survey of Native American cultures of his time or a compendium of tribal histories. I have tried to be fair in assessing Jefferson's conduct in Indian affairs, but viewed from the late twentieth century, some of his actions appear to be hypocritical, arbitrary, duplicitous, even harsh. Certainly some of the unintended consequences of his policies of civilization, removal, and protection of frontier populations against Indian retaliation for encroachments and atrocities were catastrophic for the Indians. Thomas Jefferson played a major role in one of the great tragedies of recent world history, a tragedy which he so elegantly mourned: the dispossession and decimation of the First Americans.

In the chapters that follow, we trace the development of Jefferson's ambivalent attitudes toward Indians and the hardening of these attitudes into presidential policy. The Introduction tells the story of Jefferson and John Logan, the Great Mingo, the eloquent Indian whose tragic fate symbolized for Jefferson, and for generations of readers, the coming doom of the red race. Chapter 1 describes the business world in which Jefferson grew up, a world of real estate speculators, including his father's friends, obsessed with obtaining Indian land. Chapter 2 examines Jefferson's political rhetoric toward Native Americans during the Revolution; his experiences as war governor led him to depict the Indians first as cruel enemies

and then as friendly neighbors. Chapters 3, 4, and 5 deal with Jefferson's proposals for scholarly studies of Indian languages, cultures, and ancient origins. Chapter 6 takes up the Federalist program for "civilizing" the Indians, which Jefferson observed in the 1790s, adopted when he became President, and found difficult to implement. In Chapters 7, 8, and 9 we follow Jefferson's Indian policy as President: purchasing Indian lands, establishing peace and trade with the tribes of the Louisiana Territory, and encountering opposition to the civilization program from Native American religious and political reformers. The last chapter brings him back to his philosophical labors in the quiet study at Monticello, and the Conclusion considers the legacy of his dealings with the First Americans.

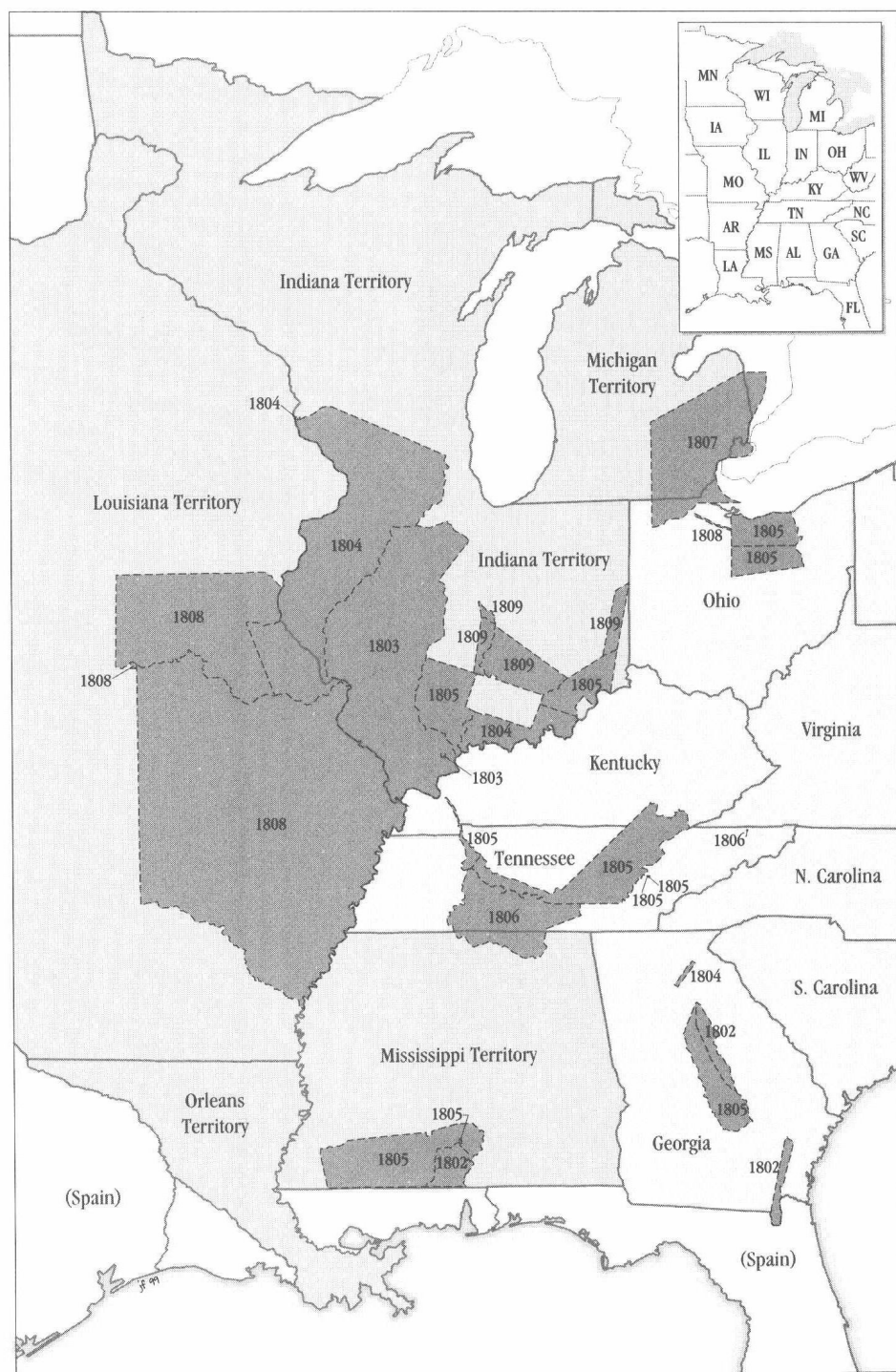
Throughout, we find the same theme recurring, the self-serving Jeffersonian conception of Native Americans that is revealed in the carefully edited story of Logan which he presented to the world in 1785 in *Notes on the State of Virginia*: the Indians as noble but doomed savages, tragically slaughtered in wars precipitated by a few murderous frontiersmen and a few vengeful warriors, a surviving remnant yearning to be civilized but fated to lose their land to a deserving white yeomanry.

Indian Nations, c. 1800





Indian Land Cessions during Thomas Jefferson's Presidency, 1801-1809



Logan's Lament

I appeal to any white man to say, if ever he entered Logan's cabin hungry, and he gave him not meat; if ever he came cold and naked, and he clothed him not. During the course of the last long and bloody war [the French and Indian War, 1755–1763], Logan remained idle in his cabin, an advocate for peace. Such was my love for the whites, that my countrymen pointed as they passed, and said, "Logan is the friend of white men." I had even thought to have lived with you, but for the injuries of one man. Col. Cresap, the last spring, in cold blood, and unprovoked, murdered all the relations of Logan, not sparing even my women and children. There runs not a drop of my blood in the veins of any living creature. This called on me for revenge. I have sought it: I have killed many: I have fully glutted my vengeance. For my country, I rejoice at the beams of peace. But do not harbour a thought that mine is the joy of fear. Logan never felt fear. He will not turn on his heel to save his life. Who is there to mourn for Logan?—Not one.

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Logan's Mourner

IN HIS *Notes on the State of Virginia*, which Thomas Jefferson began writing in 1781 and first published in 1785, he inserted an English rendering of a speech by the Indian leader Tachnedorus, or John Logan. The address had been delivered to the victorious Lord Dunmore, governor of Virginia, on the occasion of the signing of a peace treaty with the Shawnees in 1774. It was the valedictory address of a defeated warrior.¹

Jefferson introduced Logan's Lament, as the speech came to be called (see opposite), ostensibly as part of his refutation of the claim of the famous French naturalist, the Comte de Buffon, that the American aborigines, like other products of the New World, were deficient in natural abilities in comparison with Europeans. An elegant writer but no speech-maker himself, Jefferson was an admirer of eloquence in any mode, and he declared that Logan's speech was in no way inferior to the best examples of classical rhetoric, including Demosthenes and Cicero.²

The impact on the public of Jefferson's story of Logan the Great Mingo and of the speech itself was extraordinary. Its popularity derived in part from its succinct expression of an apocalyptic view of Indian history that was becoming increasingly prevalent in Jefferson's time, helped along in various ways by Jefferson himself. Logan, the last of his line, was symbolically the last of a dying race, consumed in the holocaust brought by the European invaders, tragically destined to become extinct, yet facing annihilation without surrender. He had sought, too late, to join the white man's world. Now, a doomed but unrepentant savage, he must die alone.

Logan's Lament has been endlessly reprinted, beginning with Washington Irving's *Sketch Book* and later in the McGuffey *Readers*, and has been memorized and recited by millions of schoolchildren. It still endures as an example of rhetorical excellence; a few of my own colleagues and students report learning it in their youth. At a small park in Ohio, on the site of the treaty-signing, there stands a memorial monument with Logan's speech

inscribed in bronze. And below, another bronze plaque was added in 1979, a tribute by a class of fifth-grade students, honoring the brave Logan, who fought to defend his people.³ Even Jefferson's detractors, like the nineteenth-century historian Brantz Mayer, have conceded the power of Logan's words; in 1867 in a book devoted to questioning the veracity of Jefferson's account of the murder of Logan's family, Mayer admitted, "For ninety years 'Logan's speech' has been repeated by every school boy and admired by every cultivated person as a gem of masculine eloquence."⁴ Scholarly interest in Logan continues to this day, and the general image of the Indian as noble savage conveyed in the story of Logan and in other sections of Jefferson's *Notes* has animated a long tradition of American novel and drama.⁵

The immediate historical context of Logan's Lament was sketched by Jefferson in a prefatory passage in the *Notes*. The events he narrated there, and the circumstances that he did not reveal and perhaps even concealed, make the story of Logan and Lord Dunmore's War a paradigm for Indian-white relations, not only in Jefferson's time but for later generations as well. The story of Logan embodies a tragic, self-fulfilling philosophy of history that describes the process by which the fall of the Indian nations and the acquisition of their land would be accomplished. These themes come up again and again in Jefferson's career, both public and private, and form the leitmotif of his Indian policy.

Thus Jefferson's story of Logan, and Logan's Lament, may be regarded as an epitomizing event, to use anthropologist Raymond Fogelson's apt phrase—a narrative that encapsulates, in an account of a single salient happening, the attitudes, values, feelings, and expectations of a community about important, complex, ongoing historical processes. It serves as a rationalization of the past and a vision of the future, a paradigm of destiny, a parable of fate. And the spin that Jefferson gave the affair reveals the leanings of a political mind.⁶

The Story of Logan

Jefferson's first account in the *Notes* of the incidents necessary for understanding Logan's speech was terse: "In the spring of the year 1774, a robbery and murder were committed on an inhabitant of the frontiers of Virginia, by two Indians of the Shawanee tribe. The neighbouring whites, according to their custom, undertook to punish this outrage in a summary