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Jefferson and Democracy

Michael Hardt

The core of Thomas Jefferson's political thought is a project for democracy—an endeavor perhaps more urgent and realizable in our day than it was two hundred years ago. And yet it is difficult to pronounce the word *democracy* today. It feels uncomfortable in the mouth. It tastes like ashes, as if the beautiful dreams it once contained have been burnt out by political reaction and cynicism. The most visible political projects today that fly the banner of democracy, in fact, really promote something closer to its opposite—war, authoritarian government, and social inequality. In most parts of the world when you hear the word *democracy*, it is a good idea to run in the other direction, because the bombs are sure to start falling soon. Since the term *democracy* has been so corrupted and abused, many contemporary political thinkers deem it better to avoid the word altogether. My view instead is that we should struggle over the concept rather than abandon it. Reading Jefferson, in fact, is one way to restore or reinvent the concept of democracy, recognizing again what democracy is and what it could be.

Jefferson also provides us, before arriving at a concept of democracy, with a democratic critique of U.S. democracy. He argues, in other words, against the undemocratic character of many of the social forms and institutions that are commonly conceived as central to democracy in the United States: the Constitution and its schema of representation, the forms of authority that maintain social order, the social and political hierarchies that result from unequal property ownership, and much more. This critique of U.S. democracy, which is equally applicable today, is a first step in the demystification of the concept of democracy, stripping it of at least some of the distortions and corruptions it has suffered. Such demystification is necessary to clear the space for the articulation of a new concept. Jefferson, of course, occupies a particular position of authority for such an operation, since he not only played a central role in the early construction of the United States but also remains at the pinnacle of the official national pantheon. In the context of a national discourse

Editorial Note: American Quarterly is pleased to publish this think piece on Thomas Jefferson. In our next issue, we will print several responses to this article.—Curtis Marez, Editor

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that still gives so much weight to the views and intentions of the framers and founders, the difference between Jefferson's democracy and that of the United States is particularly potent.

One of the obstacles to reading democracy in Jefferson's political thought, however, is the mentality of U.S. exceptionalism that has plagued and continues to plague studies about the United States both within and outside the academy. For most of the twentieth century, the major currents of academic and popular writing about the United States (with notable exceptions, of course) reinforced the center of the tradition and often served as an arm of the project for U.S. global hegemony, preaching the virtuous exception of the United States, its supposed unity, social equality, and democratic way of life. Innumerable hagiographic studies present the founders of the republic, in particular, as the best and the brightest, moral exemplars, founts of inexhaustible wisdom. Since the 1970s, however, and increasingly in the last decade, the major streams of scholarly work on the United States have shifted focus away from the center towards groups that have been marginalized, particularly those that have been subordinated based on race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality. The result has been a wonderful flowering of new perspectives on the United States from below, offering a multifaceted and plurivocal panorama.¹

This shift, though, bringing the margins to the center, raises a new question: what to do with what used to be considered the center? What to do in particular, in this case, with the eighteenth-century revolutionaries such as Jefferson who have so long populated the official political discourse? One obvious and logical response is simply to ignore them: they have far too long been the objects of popular and scholarly attention and now it is time to focus on others. A second response is to continue the focus on the center but reverse the polarity. Such studies tend, in general, to repeat the old U.S. exceptionalism in an inverted form. The United States is still viewed as separate and different from the rest of the world but now because of its imperialist, racist, and repressive character. With respect to Jefferson, after decades of hagiography, the vast majority of scholars since the 1970s have been dedicated to criticizing him—for his racist views, his ownership of slaves, his unacknowledged sexual relationship with one of those slaves, his drive for westward expansion that extended plantation slavery and usurped Native American lands, and much more.² This is important work and these charges, I should emphasize, are all legitimate—with respect to Jefferson, the founders as a group, and U.S. history in general.

These responses, however, do not seem to me sufficient. First of all, they have created a strange division of labor in the discourse about the dominant U.S. tradition, particularly with respect to the founders. Whereas those on

the right (both in the academy and the political sphere) continue to celebrate unquestioningly the founders and the U.S. heritage as a whole, those on the left generally dedicate themselves entirely to critique. The majority of the left has, in this respect, abandoned claim to identifying its legacy in that tradition, thus conceding a particularly powerful terrain of political discourse. Secondly, it is typical of the mentality of U.S. exceptionalism (and its inverted image) to treat the dominant tradition as if it were a unified whole. There are, of course, important conflicts and alternatives even among the figures at the pinnacle of the official U.S. national imaginary, as there are indeed in all national histories.

I thus propose a third strategy to approach what used to be considered the center: reinterpret it, recognize the conflicts within it, and thereby identify the liberatory alternatives that are still living, that are indeed part of our democratic heritage. A first step to working against this exceptionalism and parochialism is to adopt a more global standpoint and read Jefferson the way we read comparable political and philosophical figures at the center of other national traditions, such as (to give a range of examples) Simón Bolívar, Lu Xun, Giuseppe Mazzini, or Jean-Jacques Rousseau. All of these figures failed in their democratic and republican projects, and all of them expressed views that should be criticized, but their political thought nonetheless still carries vital elements and concepts that need to be rearticulated today.

What I propose then is to read Jefferson as a political *thinker*, and thus not to focus on the practical choices of his political career or the moral choices of his personal life. If we are to take seriously Jefferson's thought and read him as we read other political theorists we need, first of all, to accept that there will be inconsistencies and even contradictions not only between his life and his thought but also within his thought. The gaps and contradictions of philosophers, in fact, are often the most interesting and useful points to work with. Sometimes these contradictions can help us identify failures of thought, that is, moments when the project of a philosopher breaks down and needs to be carried beyond where it was left. This is indeed frequently the case with Jefferson. What one needs to do is carry his thought beyond his own limitations. The second guide we should follow in reading Jefferson, especially if we are going to treat him as a *political* thinker, is to recognize his historical distance from us. This does not mean to excuse his shortcomings because of those of his times, but rather to discern the political operation his thought attempted with respect to his own society and then discover what a parallel one would be with respect to our own. The object, then, is not to recover the real Jefferson and his true intentions but rather to ask what his thought can do for us today.

This too will continually lead us to extend the lines of his thought: Jefferson beyond Jefferson.

Jefferson's concept of democracy is articulated across four broad themes: social equality, economic equality, freedom, and republicanism. With respect to each of these Jefferson offers elements of a powerful and radical vision, but he also fails in each case to carry that vision through. He is continually plagued by contradictions, ending up in theoretical dead ends that seem to undermine his original efforts. The task of interpretation requires, then, that in addition to recognizing Jefferson's vision we also identify the obstacles he encounters and, finally, find ways to guide his thought beyond them, to make it powerful in our time.

Social Equality, or, Singularity in the Common

Jefferson is best known for his bold assertion in the *Declaration of Independence* that "all men are created equal" and social equality is indeed central to his thought. As soon as Jefferson pursues this notion in any of a variety of social fields, however, tremendous obstacles rise up such that the initial impulse collapses and folds back on itself, returning stubbornly to a framework of dramatic social inequality. Jefferson's phrase "all men," for example, could be construed to designate all humans, regardless of sex—"all humans are created equal"—but in his thought it refers only to men and not women. Gender difference, in fact, does not even seem to be for Jefferson a problem worth consideration, and it plays such a small part in his writings that there is little for us to say about it.³ Racial difference, in contrast, is one of his constant preoccupations and perhaps the central field in which he confronts the dilemmas of social inequality. At the same time, however, race is the greatest stumbling block for his thought. Jefferson's racism and slave-holding directly contradict any theory of equality. This is perhaps the most difficult challenge for interpretation that faces contemporary readers of Jefferson. The traditional response to this challenge is simply to ignore or minimize the more troubling or embarrassing aspects of his thought, especially those on race, in order to preserve his virtuous image. The common contemporary response is instead to focus squarely on Jefferson's racism and therefore dismiss entirely his notions of social equality. I am not interested, though, as I said, in praising or condemning the man but rather in discovering what is vital and useful in his political thought. I will thus need a more complex interpretative strategy that first explores his notion of social equality, then clarifies the obstacles that undermine it, and finally tries to find a way to carry the thought forward beyond Jefferson's limitations. Confronting

squarely at the outset this most difficult aspect of Jefferson's political thought will allow us later to appreciate without hindrances some of the other, more productive aspects.

Before addressing race matters, we might anticipate Jefferson's vision of social equality by looking briefly at the nonhuman terrain, specifically the question of equality in animal species. When he is not distracted by his own racial prejudices and the practical, political pressures of race, he is able to think through the complexities of social difference much more clearly. In his *Notes on the State of Virginia*, Jefferson goes to great lengths to establish that plant and animal species in the Americas are equal to those in Europe. He is inspired and irritated by the great French naturalist Buffon, who maintains that European animal species are superior. In the Americas, according to Buffon, animals are smaller than those in Europe and there are fewer species. He adds to these erroneous claims a dubious hypothesis: animals will be larger in a land that is hot and dry than in one that is cold and humid; and the fact that America is colder and more humid than Europe explains why its animals will be smaller. Despite the absurdity of these arguments, Jefferson patiently and passionately counters each of Buffon's claims along with its theoretical basis.⁴

This is a very curious debate. Why would Jefferson devote such attention and passion to the question of the comparative size and number of animal species on the different continents? And, furthermore, why would the French naturalist, who is such an innovative scientific figure in so many respects, make claims about the animals of the Americas on such feeble evidence? Jefferson recognizes that the French scientist proceeds unscientifically in this case because he is blinded by a commonplace of colonial thought that links the superiority of European civilization to the superiority of its territory and natural gifts. This is a political debate displaced onto a biological terrain. Jefferson thus has to attack the colonial prejudices of European scientists on their own terrain, disproving the claims of the superiority of European animal species in order ultimately to counter the assumption of the superiority of European civilization.

What is most interesting, however, is that Jefferson does not insist on the superiority of American animal species in symmetrical reaction to the European colonial assumptions, but instead shifts the terms of the discussion with the aim of seeking a notion of universal equality. He contests the idea that difference implies a natural hierarchy, in other words, and instead articulates a notion of equality composed of two essential elements: the *common* that all share and the *singularity* of each.

Jefferson first points out how Buffon, in his claim of the superiority of animal species on one side of the globe, has ignored the common. "As if both

sides were not warmed by the same genial sun; as if a soil of the same chemical composition, was less capable of elaboration into animal nutriment; as if the fruits and grains from that soil and sun, yielded a less rich chyle, gave less extension to the solids and fluids of the body, or produced sooner in the cartilages, membranes, and fibres, that rigidity which restrains all further extension, and terminates animal growth. The truth is, that a Pigmy and a Patagonian, a Mouse and a Mammoth, derive their dimensions from the same nutritive juices" (169). Science teaches us above all, Jefferson explains, about the common that all life shares—the common wealth of the earth and sun, the common composition of bodies. To say that all life shares this, however—and this is the central point—does not mean that all life is the same. On the contrary, the common is the only scene on which real difference appears. "The difference of increment," Jefferson thus continues, "depends on circumstances unsearchable to beings with our capacities. Every race of animals seems to have received from their Maker certain laws of extension at the time of their formation" (169). Every race of animals, in other words, is singular, which means simply, at this point, that each is perfect in its own way such that it makes no sense to imagine one species superior to another. The various species are equal despite their being different or, rather, to push the notion one step further to a more challenging formulation, they are equal because they are each singular. The foundation of equality according to this notion, in other words, does not rely on sameness, but rather on the combination of the common and singularity. In this way Jefferson's thought suggests a shift of the theoretical axis from the contradictory conceptual relation between identity and difference to the complementary one between the common and singularity.

The comparison of animal species on the two sides of the Atlantic leads directly for Buffon, and thus also for Jefferson, to the comparison of human races. Buffon claims that humans, too, follow the general rule that living beings are smaller in the Americas, and in the case of humans, his claims are even more bizarre and absurd. Jefferson quotes at length Buffon's claims that although Native Americans are roughly the same height as Europeans, the males have smaller penises, less sexual desire for females, and less body hair, and are less courageous. Jefferson once again rebuffs the strange list of charges, defending the Native Americans against the imagined evidence of natural inferiority, in each case striving to demonstrate that there is a common human nature that all share. He is careful at this point not to deny that "there are varieties in the race of man," but questions only whether their faculties "depend on the side of the Atlantic on which their food happens to grow, or which furnishes the elements of which they are compounded? Whether nature has enlisted herself

as a Cis or Trans-Atlantic partisan?” (189). Since nature does not favor Europe or America, in other words, it makes no more sense to speak of superiority among human races than it does among animal species. In a letter presenting his *Notes* to a French friend, Chastellux, a few years later, in 1785, Jefferson emphasizes this equality of Native Americans: “I am safe in affirming, that the proofs of genius given by the Indians of North America, place them on a level with whites in the same uncultivated state. . . . I believe the Indian, then, to be, in body and mind, equal to the white man” (801).

Jefferson’s confident proposition of racial equality, however, quickly runs into a series of obstacles, particularly after he becomes president. He maintains throughout this period in his words and policies that Native Americans should be ruled by white people, that they should be stripped of their land, and that they should be forced to adopt sedentary agricultural methods and social habits, assimilating completely to white civilization.⁵ The primary vehicle and object of the domination of Native Americans in Jefferson’s thought and political practice is focused on land and property. Some of the key projects of Jefferson’s presidency—the Louisiana Purchase, for example, and westward expansion more generally—require depriving Native Americans of their land or forcing them to sell it. In Jefferson’s mind the acquisition of land by the white government and white settlers is inseparable from the project to transform Native American economic and social practices from hunting to agriculture. He often presents the two as mutually supporting elements in a sort of virtuous circle: white farmers will benefit from more land and Native Americans will benefit from becoming agriculturalists, which will require less land.⁶ It is certainly plausible that, since Jefferson believes agricultural practices and economic relationships are the key to social and political autonomy, he feels benevolent when encouraging Native Americans to become agriculturalists. One should also be able to see clearly, however, and it is difficult to imagine that Jefferson did not recognize this, that such a shift toward an agricultural life would result in the destruction of traditional Native American societies.⁷

In either case, the purported benevolence Jefferson’s strategy is undercut decisively by the coercive and devious tactics he employs to further the project. Pushing Native Americans into debt to force them to sell land is one of his more benign tactics. “To promote this disposition to exchange lands, which they have to spare and we want, for necessaries, which we have to spare and they want,” he writes in 1803 to the future president William Harrison, then governor of the Indiana Territories, “we shall push our trading uses, and be glad to see the good and influential individuals among them run in debt, because we observe that when these debts get beyond what the individuals can

pay, they become willing to lop them off by a cession of lands” (1118). And behind such gentle tactics, Jefferson reminds his governor, there is always at the ready military violence. “Should any tribe be fool-hardy enough to take up the hatchet at any time, the seizing the whole country of that tribe, and driving them across the Mississippi, as the only condition of peace, would be an example to others, and a furtherance of our final consolidation” (1118–19). Given the brutality of Jefferson’s methods—combining economic coercion with military force—it is difficult to maintain an image of his benevolence toward the Native Americans. He appears rather, in such moments, as a promoter of racist policies aimed solely at the benefits of the white population.

Let us try, though, to follow through Jefferson’s thought on its own terms. The virtuous goal in Jefferson’s mind of all these policies, however vicious, is the assimilation of Native Americans into white society. Native Americans abandoning their traditional hunting economy, becoming agriculturalists, and selling their land is a prerequisite. “In truth, the ultimate point of rest & happiness for them,” he writes in 1803 to Benjamin Hawkins, an Indian agent for the U.S. government to the Creek Indians, “is to let our settlements and theirs meet and blend together, to intermix, and become one people” (1115). This is the endpoint of Jefferson’s thinking on social equality with respect to Native Americans: an absolute assimilation leading to one people and one nation. The only way they can be equal, in other words, is if they cease to be different and become the same as white people. The forced economic transformation from hunting to agriculture is only one step in this process.

Here we can recognize clearly the political consequence of a conceptual shift when Jefferson moves from thinking the equality of animal life in Europe and the Americas to that of human life. Animal species are part of a common nature and at the same time singular: these two elements establish their equality. With regard to human races, Jefferson similarly verifies their common nature, but not their singularity, perhaps for fear that racial difference—more or less body hair, larger or smaller penises—would necessarily imply racial hierarchy. What we saw in the discussion of animals, however, is exactly the opposite: singularity is precisely what frees difference from hierarchy. Mammoths are larger than mice and hares run faster than cows, but these differences do not make one species superior to another. On the contrary, they are equal because singular. Without such a concept of singularity, equality can be thought only as sameness and unity—one people, one nation—and all difference must be destroyed. This is how a belief in and desire for the equality of Native Americans to Europeans leads Jefferson directly to, when put in the most positive terms, a policy of absolute assimilation or, in less flattering but more accurate terms,

a policy of the destruction of Native American civilizations. When equality rests on sameness, difference can appear only as a threat.

Jefferson's thinking about racial equality with respect to African Americans follows an entirely different course than that about Native Americans.⁸ His own racial prejudices and the pressures of contemporary social conditions pose even greater obstacles in this case. We should recognize before entering the heart of the matter that, despite the fact of owning slaves himself, Jefferson throughout his life expresses moral opposition to slavery and the slave trade. He calls slavery a sin against nature and declares the institution detrimental for both slave and master. Numerous times he expresses his support (in principle, at least) for the end of the slave trade and emancipation, but continually defers real moves in those directions, sometimes citing obstacles posed by political forces and his white compatriots. My inclination is, despite all the complications we will soon encounter, to accept Jefferson's genuine abhorrence for the institution of slavery.

His opposition to slavery, however, does not correspond to a belief that African Americans are equal to the white people.⁹ Here he departs even further from the terrain of animal life on which he articulates a concept of equality with some success. He does not begin in this case with any notion of common nature. He does not ridicule the notion that nature would be a cis- or transatlantic partisan, favoring one race over another, as he did in his description of Native Americans; nor does he emphasize poetically that each is warmed by the same genial sun, nurtured by soil of the same chemical composition, as he did in the context of animal species. Instead he simply lists the characteristics of African Americans, all of which are cast as marks of inferiority. His catalog of African American traits, in fact, echoes Buffon's absurd characterizations of animals and humans of the Americas. Black people are less beautiful than white people, Jefferson claims, smell worse, and generally lack prudence, reason, and imagination. They may be more gifted musicians, he continues, but are no writers or poets (265–67). Whereas he holds Native Americans to be in some sense “equal to the white man,” then, he presents “as a suspicion” that “the blacks, whether originally a distinct race, or made distinct by time and circumstances, are inferior to the whites in the endowments both of body and mind” (270). Jefferson seems, almost despite himself, not to be able to suppress his racism with respect to African Americans as well as his disgust for black bodies.¹⁰ We can see here that as the common that human races share fades into the background, the differences between them become rigid.

Before proceeding further with Jefferson's theoretical developments, we should look briefly at how practical and political circumstances exacerbate the

obstacles to his thinking the equality of African Americans, as they did also in the case of Native Americans, leading him near the end of his life to propose some astonishingly racist “solutions” to the race problem. I already noted that Jefferson repeats throughout his life his desire for an end to the slave trade and an emancipation of the slaves, but throughout the decades of the revolution and his presidency he never finds adequate political expression for this desire. Furthermore, whereas Washington and other revolutionary leaders of that generation free their slaves, Jefferson does not—except the slaves who are his own children, and those only after his death. Jefferson’s economic interests as slaveholder, however, are not the most significant obstacles for him. Instead the two primary practical impediments to a general emancipation that Jefferson confronts consciously regarding slavery and African American equality are the system of property relations and the legacy of racial hatred.

Jefferson recognizes quite clearly, first of all, that emancipation is not only a moral question but also an economic one. And furthermore, in the economical realm, the transformation of production from slave labor to waged labor does not seem as intractable to him as does the basic question of property rights. Emancipating the slaves means depriving owners of their property. It would be the same, considering the matter only in economic terms, as declaring that some other form of property is no longer subject to private ownership, such that all landowners, for instance, would have to give up private rights to their land. In a letter written near the end of his life, in 1824, Jefferson calculates what it would cost for the federal government to compensate slave owners for their lost property. He shows a certain embarrassment in considering the value of slaves as property, recognizing that the premise itself is immoral, but he pursues the question because it is a legal reality: “for actual property has been lawfully vested in that form, and who can lawfully take it from the possessors?” (1485). If the 1.5 million slaves in the United States at the time were valued at \$200 each, simplifying his calculations a bit, just compensation would require the government to pay \$300 million, a sum unimaginable as a state expenditure at the time. This is the obstacle: it would be unlawful—a violation of the principle of private property—to deprive owners of their property without compensation, but there is no available means to compensate them. The only way to deprive that class of its property, he might have added, would be through an act of war.

A second, and in Jefferson’s view more intractable, practical obstacle to emancipation is the accumulated racial hatred of black people for white people from the decades of slavery, torture, and abuse. The specter of the Haitian Revolution is undoubtedly present in his mind.¹¹ It is inconceivable to him

that freed slaves would live peacefully with their former masters and not return some of the violence they have suffered. “We have the wolf by the ears,” Jefferson writes memorably during the crisis resulting from Missouri’s application for statehood as a slave-holding state in 1820, “and we can neither hold him, nor safely let him go” (1434). White people cannot hold African Americans in slavery because it is morally reprehensible, politically unjust, and socially dangerous, Jefferson means to say, and yet cannot release them because of the racial violence that would ensue.

In the 1820s Jefferson imagines a plan to resolve these practical obstacles. In order not to invalidate legal property, he proposes a complicated gradual emancipation whereby children born to slaves after a specific date would be free, but would remain with their slave mothers until they reach maturity. He knows that this plan does not really escape a violation of private property—slave property laws include ownership of offspring—but he says it is the best he can imagine (1485). For the problem of racial hatred and violence Jefferson sees no solution other than deporting all the former slaves to a colony in West Africa after emancipation. (During these years Jefferson is in contact with the American Colonization Society, which was founded in 1816 to establish colonies for emancipated slaves.) Seen in its most benevolent light, one might think of Jefferson’s plan as a “two-state solution,” equal but separate. In a more nefarious light, however, this forced emigration bears disturbing resemblances to numerous historical examples of projects for racial extermination.

Now that we have seen the primary theoretical and practical obstacles that stand in the way of Jefferson’s thinking social equality, does anything remain of his notion? Does his celebrated affirmation that “all men are created equal” completely collapse under the weight of these impediments? There seems to me no doubt about the depth and consistency of Jefferson’s racism with respect to both Native Americans and African Americans, and indeed other scholars have established this fact much more authoritatively than I. If I were interested in Jefferson as moral exemplar or even as statesman, such a claim might function simply as a condemnation and put an end to the investigation, but since I am approaching him as a political thinker, my path has to continue along a more complex route.¹²

Jefferson’s thought of social equality is certainly incomplete and contradictory but it does provide at least the germ of a very powerful notion that consists of two primary elements: the common and singularity. This notion begins to emerge in his thinking about animal species but then continually runs aground when he confronts human races. Jefferson has less difficulty with the first element, the common. I see no reason to doubt the sincerity of his conviction

that all men are created equal, warmed by the same sun, as he might say, and nourished by soil of similar chemical composition. He is drawing here on a tradition of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century arguments that conceive the state of nature as a continuing fact and affirm the common basis of all humanity. In other words, whereas some theorists of the state of nature, Hobbes, for example, pose an end to the natural state when the civil state is constructed, Jefferson, along with Spinoza, even though in a somewhat different way, sees the state of nature as continuing within the civil state. When Jefferson says that all men are created equal, then, this does not refer to a past that has been negated by society but means rather that all are animated by a common nature that persists as the permanent basis of social equality.

The difficulties arise for Jefferson when dealing with singularity. When confronting the racial differences of Native Americans and African Americans, in fact, Jefferson falls respectively down the opposite slopes of a notion of singularity. In the one case, the recognition that Native Americans share a common nature with Europeans leads him to try to negate the racial differences both theoretically and practically, even to the point of forcing Native Americans through devious means to sell their land and adopt the economic and social habits of white civilization. With regard to African Americans, instead, racial differences are so strongly present in his mind that they seem to blind him to the common and cause him to lapse into the conviction that difference implies hierarchy and subordination.

For Jefferson to think racial difference using the tools he developed for animal species, seeing all as emerging from a common world, each as perfect in its own way, and thus not superior or inferior, would certainly be a step forward. Even this notion, however, suggests only a very thin, rudimentary concept of singularity. To make this line of thought useful for thinking racial and social equality today, one would need to grasp a much more complex concept of singularity.¹³ W. E. B. DuBois, writing more than a century later, is perhaps the thinker who most successfully makes good on Jefferson's incipient notion of social equality and manages to think race as singularity. In DuBois's work there is certainly no question of racial equality requiring or being established on the basis of sameness. Each race has its own singular "gifts" to contribute and that fact in part establishes their equality. And yet this singularity does not mean that races are fixed and unchanging; on the contrary, they are constantly subject to mixture and transformation in a general process of social becoming. DuBois's conception of racial equality, which displaces in this way identity and difference in favor of multiplicity and movement, certainly extends well beyond the limitations of Jefferson's thought. According to DuBois, in fact,

the insubordinations and insurrections of African Americans were the key elements that have made thinking democracy possible. “It was the Negro himself,” DuBois explains, “who forced the consideration of this incongruity [between democracy and slavery], who made emancipation inevitable and made the modern world at least consider if not wholly accept the idea of a democracy including men of all races and colors.”¹⁴ DuBois helps us take one large step, at least, toward making Jefferson’s notion of social equality an essential element of democracy.

Economic Equality, or, Free Access to Productive Property

One of the strengths of Jefferson’s conception of political equality and political rights is his recognition that they are intimately tied to economic equality. We can get an initial indication of this connection by bringing together two passages of the draft constitution for the state of Virginia, which he wrote in June 1776, at almost the same time as the *Declaration of Independence*. In a letter to Edmund Pendelton later that summer, Jefferson explains that his intention in writing the Virginia Constitution was to extend suffrage to “all [read: all white male adults] who had a permanent intention of living in the country” (756). This proposition, of course, runs counter to the traditional property requirement for the vote and counter to the desire of many of his colleagues. To sidestep this difficulty, Jefferson develops an ingenious strategy in his draft constitution. He does include, to satisfy his colleagues, a property requirement stating that in order to vote one must own at least one-quarter acre in town or 25 acres in the country (338). Later in the draft, however, he includes a clause that in practice nullifies that limitation on suffrage: “Every person of full age neither owning nor having owned 50 acres of land, shall be entitled to an appropriation of 50 acres or to so much as shall make up what he owns or has owned 50 acres in full and absolute dominion” (343). What results is the kind of syllogism dear to logicians: everyone who owns less than 25 acres will be excluded from the vote, but all who own less than 50 acres will be given that much by the state; therefore, no one will be excluded from the vote.¹⁵ Jefferson’s proposal was not, of course, incorporated into the final version of the state constitution, but we can already glimpse in this example how Jefferson’s notion of political equality is intimately linked to common access to property and the relatively equal distribution of wealth.

To grasp the connection in Jefferson’s thought between political and economic equality we need to investigate his oft-cited but poorly understood preference for agriculture over manufacture. What first catches the attention

of many readers is Jefferson's extravagant praise of the virtue of agriculturalists. "Those who labour the earth," he writes, for example, in his *Notes on the State of Virginia*, "are the chosen people of God, if ever he had a chosen people, whose breasts he has made his particular deposit for substantial and genuine virtue" (290). Such laudatory phrases, however, tells us nothing about why Jefferson considers agriculture or agriculturalists commendable. We get a slightly more substantial indication in a letter he writes to John Jay a few years later, in 1785. "Cultivators of the earth are the most valuable citizens. They are the most vigorous, the most independent, the most virtuous, & they are tied to their country & wedded to it's [*sic*] liberty & interests by the most lasting bonds" (818). Of this list the most significant element for Jefferson is the (potential) independence of agriculturalists, but still in this and similar passages he gives no satisfactory explanation of his preference for agriculture. Without any more content one is left to speculate that Jefferson may be driven by a belief in the virtue of intimate contact with the earth or simply that he is inclined to praise his fellow Virginians, who are at the time primarily agriculturalists.

The perplexity with Jefferson's position is only multiplied when one adds to his extravagant praise of agriculturalists his proposal of an economic policy for the United States that favors agriculture over manufacture and discourages industrial development. "Let our work-shops remain in Europe," he urges, so that the United States can remain predominantly agricultural. He does not mean by this that manufactured goods should not be available for consumption in the United States, but rather that the existing international division of labor should be reinforced: "we should long keep our workmen in Europe, while Europe should be drawing rough materials & even subsistence from America" (836). What Jefferson is advocating here is the perfect recipe for national economic dependency and underdevelopment. All the economists who have studied imperialism, from Lenin to Samir Amin, have identified this basic situation: the dominant country imports raw materials from the subordinated territories and exports back, in a relationship of unequal exchange, the manufactured goods. With these economic views Jefferson is also clearly swimming against the stream of economic thought in his day, rejecting the primary tenets of capitalist development. We know that he is familiar, for example, with Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* and, more close to home, he is constantly confronted with the economic thinking of John Jay, John Adams, and especially Alexander Hamilton, which points in an entirely different direction. When today Hamilton's economic views are celebrated for having anticipated the future course of U.S. capitalism, Jefferson's thoughts can only appear out of date and backward looking, if not completely reactionary.¹⁶

To understand Jefferson's advocacy for agriculture correctly, however, one has to begin with the negative side, that is, his reasons for opposing manufacture. His concern is to avoid not so much national economic dependence as relationships of dependence of the workers and citizens. This is the perspective that will allow us to see that at the heart of his economic thought are really concerns about equal property relations. A tour through France and Germany in 1785, on the eve of the industrial revolution in Europe, became a formative experience for Jefferson's economic thought. He is horrified by the desperate poverty he encounters. In a letter to James Madison from Fontainebleau he explains that the wretched poverty he observes all over Europe, both in the teeming cities and the countryside, is a result of the dramatically unequal division of property in European societies. "Whenever there are in any country uncultivated lands and unemployed poor, it is clear that the laws of property have been so far extended as to violate natural right. The earth is given as a common stock for man to labor and live on. If for the encouragement of industry we allow it to be appropriated, we must take care that other employment be provided to those excluded from the appropriation" (841–42). Once again we find that the common is the basis of Jefferson's notion of equality: all have, he claims, "the fundamental right to labor the earth" because the earth is common (842). His central point in the letter to Madison, however, is that government can and should counteract the economic forces that tend to destroy economic equality and concentrate property in the hands of the few. "I am conscious that an equal division of property is impracticable but the consequences of this enormous inequality producing so much misery to the bulk of mankind, legislators cannot invent too many devices for subdividing property" (841). Although Jefferson is not willing to advocate a completely equal division of property, he is quite clear that something approximating such equality is highly desirable and should be the object of government action. In this light, the proposal in his draft constitution for Virginia is fundamental and radical not only for advancing universal suffrage but also for its economic effects: all those without sufficient property should be given it by the state. This is clearly the kind of device he is recommending to Madison for subdividing property. Jefferson ends this portion of the letter with a celebration of agriculturalists like others we have already seen—"The small landholders are the most precious part of the state" (842)—but now, we are in a better position to grasp the logic of such a claim.

Jefferson's economic notions thus reside on an explicitly political foundation. We have to begin with the independence and equality that he sees as the primary political virtues of citizens and producers. These qualities rely, in

turn, on there being no one left without the means to produce, that is, without access to productive property—and ultimately on there being a roughly equal division of property in the society. Once we have arrived at this point, however, we still do not have an explanation for why Jefferson values agriculture over manufacturing. To take this last step we need to articulate a hypothesis that remains implicit in Jefferson's thought about the different implications for property relations for manufacture and agriculture. Jefferson takes for granted that manufacturing and industry require the concentration of property in the hands of the few and the creation of a large class of dependent workers without property. These class divisions are, in large part, the cause of the misery that Jefferson laments when touring Europe. And this economic division is closely related in Jefferson's mind to the political division between the rulers and the ruled: "under pretence of governing," he writes from Paris to Edward Carrington, "they have divided their nations into two classes, wolves & sheep. I do not exaggerate. This is a true picture of Europe" (880). The real reason Jefferson wants to keep the workshops in Europe, then, is that if imported to the United States they would necessarily bring with them radically unequal property relations and therefore the political subordination of one class of citizens to another. Jefferson clearly assumes, as Charles Beard puts it, "the incompatibility of an immense proletariat and an egalitarian political democracy."¹⁷

Having seen Jefferson's reasons for opposing the manufacturing and nascent industrial relations of Europe, we are finally in the position to understand his extravagant praise for agriculture. Agriculture, in contrast to manufacturing, can function with an equal or relatively equal division of property—or, at least, it could in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. And thus the virtue of agriculture is that this possibility of an equal distribution of property can form the basis of the political equality of independent citizen-producers. We should be very clear, however, that Jefferson's vision of agricultural equality cannot be construed as conservative or backward looking. Land was not equally divided in Jefferson's time or previously in the United States or in Virginia—far from it! The equal distribution of land among agriculturists would be a revolutionary act. And the fundamental virtue of agriculture in Jefferson's mind is that it makes this revolution possible.

At this point we can see that the essence of Jefferson's economic position is not really about agriculture or manufacturing or any other specific mode of production. His central preoccupation is with the right to free access to productive property. That is what he means when he says that the earth is common and all equally have the right to work it. He can imagine how an agricultural society can achieve this situation, wherein the property and the means of pro-

duction (the land, primarily) can be divided and all can have access to it.¹⁸ (A good twentieth-century correlate of his position, just to give a reference point, might thus be kibbutz socialism.) His antagonism to manufacturing follows directly from the fact that he cannot imagine how its productive property can be divided equally and all given equal access to it. In the century after Jefferson, of course, industrial capitalism in Europe and the United States created even greater concentrations of property and greater working populations without property than he could imagine. But the century too saw experiments of worker-owned factories and worker councils to manage production that were aimed at Jefferson's goal. One must assume that if he could imagine an equal ownership and free access to productive property in manufacturing and industry, that is, if he could imagine a manufacturing or industrial society without class divisions, Jefferson would support it wholeheartedly.¹⁹

I should pause for a moment to recognize that, although I have not mentioned racial difference so far in this section on economic relations, it is nonetheless present, as it is always in Jefferson's thought, even when it is working in the background. His conception of universal access to land for all white male citizens, for example, is premised on a constant surplus of land, which is made possible only by a continual westward expansion and acquisition of Native American lands. Jefferson, in other words, does not propose the kind of land reform that would take property from the wealthy and divide up large estates in order to distribute to the poor. His dedication to property rights—whether from his own beliefs or his strong sense of political realism—is too strong to accept such a solution. Instead, his notion of land reform, such as it is, distributes “open” lands that have been taken or bought from Native Americans.

It is clear nonetheless, despite such contradictions, that Jefferson's economic thought contains a revolutionary core. To read his economic thought simply as an affirmation of agricultural production or the family-sized farm or a yeoman republic misses the essence of his project.²⁰ His vision of a nation of small-holding farmers is merely an available example for approximating his primary goal: free and universal access to the common. In fact, with the changes in agricultural production in the last century, such that it is increasingly difficult today for small-holding farmers to remain viable and independent anywhere in the world, agriculture no longer provides the social and political qualities that Jefferson sought. Negatively, Jefferson is focused on avoiding the poverty, inequality, and social division that plague the European countries as a result of the property relations of manufacturing and nascent industrial capitalism. Such economic inequality that closes access to the common creates dependent and unequal citizens incapable of supporting the kind of republican political

system Jefferson wants. Positively, what is central to his economic thought is the need for a productive system that allows for free access to productive property or, at least, a relatively equal division of property in order to make possible autonomous and equal political participation.

In the economic realm, just as it was in terms of race, Jefferson's concept of equality is constituted by the complementary relationship between the common and singularity, where now the common is conceived as productive property and singularity takes the form of autonomy. We are forced by his economic thinking, however, to take an important leap forward in our understanding of the common. Jefferson begins with a notion of the common as what is natural and given: the earth, for example, is the common stock given to humanity to work and produce. This is similar to the notion of the common that grounds his thinking about the differences among animal species and human races. What we increasingly recognize as we cast his economic thought forward toward our day, however, is that the common that forms the basis for production is not preexisting but created; the common, in this sense, is both natural and artificial. Land itself has absorbed human labor and been transformed by it; manufacturing and industry stand on a common basis that is produced socially; and today even more clearly common languages, codes, sign systems, communications networks, and the like are the fabric of economic production. The common is not only the basis of social production but also its result and thus the basis of future productive activity in an expanding spiral. The puzzle that stymies Jefferson is how to create common and equal access to productive property when that property is not simply given by nature but the product of previous social production. To follow Jefferson's thought today, in other words, one would have to discover how in contemporary economic conditions to best favor free access to productive property, how to create the common in such a way that it remains open to all, affording each the potential of productive autonomy.

Freedom, or, the Primacy of Resistance

The elements of singularity and autonomy that we have already recognized are given their clearest and most radical political expression in Jefferson's notion of freedom. His pronouncements about freedom are so radical, in fact, that some of his contemporaries thought them irresponsible and dangerous, and indeed many today find them no less shocking. Jefferson goes so far as to praise rebellions against the U.S. government, adding that he hopes the citizens will periodically rebel. Is Jefferson bent on destroying the government

he helped form? Is he simply a partisan of anarchy? To appreciate Jefferson's notion of freedom, we need to take a step back and situate it in the history of political thought, in particular with respect to two contrasting notions of resistance, which themselves correspond to two notions of sovereignty. This detour will allow us to fill out the theoretical foundation on which Jefferson's notions of freedom and resistance rest, and recognize how they are essential to the concept of democracy.

The history of modern European political philosophy can be divided, simplifying the matter a great deal, by two basic notions of sovereignty. The first line is born of a thoroughly modern notion of freedom that posits the autonomy of the multitude and its social relations against any preestablished or divine conceptions of social order or hierarchy. According to this conception, sovereignty is secondary; it arises only from a relationship between the rulers and the ruled, and in this relationship the multitude is always primary over the sovereign. This line of thought extends at least from the Machiavelli of the *Discourses* to Spinoza's political treatises. The only real, substantial bodies are those of the multitude, according to a common metaphor among revolutionaries in the English civil war, whereas sovereigns and rulers are merely shadows created by the light cast off those bodies. This play of bodies and shadows emphasizes the autonomy and primacy of the multitude in the relationship of sovereignty. The second line, which is in many ways the victorious line historically, views sovereignty as primary. In the most extreme examples of this line—one might think of the work of Jean Bodin and Thomas Hobbes—sovereignty or majesty is conceived as an autonomous substance, and thus the multitude of its subjects follow from the sovereign's power. Hence the common analogy in this line of thought between the sovereign and the divine: the sovereign is a god on earth, in the position of the creator, whereas its subjects are creatures, created, and hence secondary. For many authors of this line, Hobbes again is a good example, sovereignty is at times posed not as an autonomous substance but as a relationship, such that the sovereign ruler needs to gain the consent of the ruled to exert hegemony, but the sovereign always has the power to predetermine this relationship, the power, in the final analysis, to create consenting subjects. What is central to this second line, in short, is that sovereignty always remains primary.

The difference between these two notions of sovereignty is even clearer when one looks at the corresponding notions of resistance or rebellion. For the second line of thought, which holds sovereignty to be primary, resistance against the government has a strictly negative role. By negative I mean not so much that resistance is generally considered illegitimate in this tradition, which is certainly

true, but rather that even the resistance it conceives legitimate is viewed merely as a check or limit on government, and in that sense a negative force. Since sovereignty is primary, the multitude's only role is to correct the sovereign when it strays from the proper path. For the first line of thought, in contrast, since the multitude is primary over sovereignty, resistance and rebellion actually have a positive, foundational role. One could go back to Machiavelli's notion of a people in arms to articulate this notion, but it is more appropriate in this case to refer to the final chapter of John Locke's *Second Treatise on Government* on the right to resistance, since we know Jefferson is very familiar with this text. (Many scholars have pointed out that numerous passages of the *Declaration of Independence* are adapted directly from this chapter of Locke's *Treatise*.) Locke bases the right to resistance on the notion that the multitude that constitutes society is autonomous and that from it alone government derives its existence and legitimacy. He can thus turn the theory of the primacy of sovereignty on its head. When government is dissolved, according to Locke, power "reverts to the Society, and the People have a Right to act as supreme."²¹ Locke's position would not make sense if he were to assume that the multitude derives its existence and coherence only from the action of the sovereign. In that case the dissolution of the government would result simply in disorder or civil war. Instead he views the multitude as autonomous and primary in the sense that it is capable of creating its own coherence, whereas government is merely an effect or reflection of its actions. Dissolution of government, then, simply returns power to where it primarily resides, in the multitude. This first line of thought thus leads to the seemingly paradoxical formulation that resistance is primary—that is, not only is resistance legitimate, but also rather than being merely a check or limit on sovereignty, resistance (and the threat of it) is the constantly present constituent foundation of sovereignty. Against the primacy of sovereignty, then, stands the primacy of resistance.

On this theoretical basis, then, we are in the position to understand Jefferson's notions of freedom and resistance. Let us look specifically at his reactions to two violent events: Shays' Rebellion and the French Revolution. Shays' Rebellion begins in the summer of 1786 when a group of farmers in western Massachusetts who cannot pay their debts protest against the government. Their leader, Daniel Shays, is a veteran of the Revolutionary Army, as are many of the others. The rebels demand that to relieve their debts the state of Massachusetts print more money, as other states such as Rhode Island have done. When the state legislature does not respond to their demands, the farmers, some 1,500 strong, arm themselves. Their first action is to block from meeting

the court that is scheduled to take away their property. In the town of Great Barrington the rebels break open the jail and free the debtors.

Jefferson at the time of the rebellion is in Paris as U.S. emissary. A few months after the initial events, in January 1787, Abigail Adams, who is a native of Massachusetts but living at the time in London, writes him a letter condemning the rebellion in very strong terms. “Ignorant, restless desperadoes,” she writes, “without conscience or principles, have led a deluded multitude to follow their standard, under pretence of grievances which have no existence but in their imaginations.”²² To confirm how confused the multitude is, she cites the variety of grievances they pose: some crying out for paper currency, some for the equal distribution of property, some for the annulment of all debts, and so forth. The variety of the claims confirms in her mind how insubstantial they are. Her explanation, in fact, is that the farmers’ debts are the result of their taste for luxury goods: “Luxury and extravagance both in furniture and dress had pervaded all orders of our Countrymen and women, and was hastening fast to sap their independence by involving every class of citizens in distress, and accumulating debts upon them which they were unable to discharge” (1562). Her solution to the problem, therefore, is higher import taxes on luxury goods coming from Britain. And about the rebels themselves she seems to endorse the idea that an example should be made of them.

Jefferson, unmoved by Abigail Adams’s concerns, responds that, unlike her, he hopes the rebels are treated leniently and pardoned. He goes on to explain that he actually approves of the rebellion. “The spirit of resistance to government is so valuable on certain occasions, that I wish it to be always kept alive. It will often be exercised when wrong, but better so than not to be exercised at all. I like a little rebellion now and then. It is like a storm in the Atmosphere” (889–90). Abigail Adams is so upset by the letter—perhaps indeed by the flip tone of the last two sentences cited above about an event that she takes so seriously—that she breaks off contact with Jefferson for several months. He is quite serious, however, despite his tone, about the beneficial effect of rebellion to government, even if sometimes the rebels are ignorant and their demands confused or mistaken. Jefferson had written to Madison a few weeks earlier expressing the same opinion, hoping for leniency for the rebels and using the same meteorological metaphor about the benefits. “I hold it that a little rebellion now and then is a good thing, & as necessary in the political world as storms in the physical” (882). The glib tone in both letters about such a serious matter is curious and may be an (unsuccessful) attempt at softening his views since he knows they will displease his interlocutors.

Contrary to Jefferson's hopes, the rebel farmers are not treated leniently. They are pursued and arrested, and within a year a dozen of them have been executed. Furthermore, the Constitutional Convention, meeting at the time, is paying much too much attention to the rebellion, in Jefferson's view, creating unwanted measures to prevent any such future revolt.²³ Perhaps in part because of these effects on the constitutional debates, Jefferson expresses his views more strongly when he revisits the topic in November 1787 in a letter to Colonel William Smith, the Adamses' son-in-law. He makes three primary points in the letter. First, he affirms that rebellions are legitimate even when they are based on false or confused motives. He concedes, perhaps unnecessarily, that the grievances that led to Shays' Rebellion were not well founded, but adds that was a result of ignorance not wickedness. His point is that since people cannot always be well informed, they should act on the basis of the knowledge they have. "If they remain quiet under such misconceptions it is a lethargy, the forerunner of death to the public liberty . . . Let them take arms" (911). Second, Jefferson notes that such rebellions have not been frequent—this is the only significant rebellion during the eleven years since independence—and indeed that regular rebellions are desirable. "God forbid we should ever be 20 years without such a rebellion" (911). Third, and finally, his most dramatic statements concern the need for rebellion to maintain freedom. He considers that a few lives lost periodically are insignificant compared to the benefits of rebellion. "The tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots and tyrants. It is its [*sic*] natural manure" (911). In order to appreciate how radical is this statement, compare it to a much more common formula often used from the perspective of sovereignty. We are continually told by governments, especially in times of foreign war, that citizens must sacrifice their lives to defend freedom, combating foreign enemies and protecting their own government. Such a statement demands obedience to the sovereign government and imagines such loyalty to be the bulwark of freedom. Jefferson's statement, however, runs in exactly the opposite direction. Citizens must periodically rise up against their own government, spilling both their own blood (patriots) and that of the government's forces (tyrants)! Instead of loyalty, Jefferson celebrates vigilant disobedience to the government as the primary safeguard of freedom!

From the perspective of many of his contemporaries—not only Abigail Adams but also certainly the majority of participants at the Constitutional Convention—Jefferson's celebration of rebellion and his apology for political violence can only be seen as a recipe for anarchy. To understand this political divergence we need to return to the distinction between two traditions of po-

litical thought we articulated earlier. If one holds to the primary of sovereignty, then the rebellion of the multitude, which remains in a secondary position, can at times serve to check and correct governmental power but must never threaten it. Since society derives its coherence only from government, according to this view, any serious challenge to sovereign power risks anarchy. If one maintains the primacy of resistance, in contrast, then the sovereign government must periodically be reminded by force of its secondary position with respect to the multitude. Rebellions serve as such a useful reminder, as Jefferson maintains, even when they are based on misconceptions and conducted by a “deluded multitude.” What is most important for him is not the justness of the specific rebellion but the political relation that all such rebellions reaffirm: the multitude is primary and sovereign power merely a shadow or reflection of it. Such rebellions do not risk anarchy or civil war, from this perspective, because the multitude that constitutes society is autonomous, capable itself of generating its coherence and consistency.

Some of Jefferson’s views on the French Revolution echo in even stronger terms his statements about Shays’ Rebellion. His views about the French Revolution, of course, change several times during its different phases. As U.S. minister to France, he lives in Paris from 1785 until October 1789 and thus observes firsthand the eve and onset of the revolution. He even attends the opening of the Estates General in May 1789. He is not supportive of the revolution in the beginning and favors reforms that would leave the king in power, but once the revolution begins to take its course, he finds himself often in the position of defending it against detractors. In fact, throughout the 1790s and especially during the election of 1800, Jefferson’s political fortunes are strongly tied to the French with accusations of Jacobinism, in contrast to the corresponding charges of Anglophilia brought against Adams and the Federalists. In this context, then, Jefferson’s support of the French Revolution often serves in his mind as a defense of republicanism against the monarchism of the Anglophiles.

Jefferson makes his most radical statements about the French Revolution in a letter written to William Short in 1793, during the period of the most intense revolutionary violence. Short is a fellow Virginian and a distant relative of Jefferson. He served as his secretary while Jefferson was minister to France and Jefferson trained him in the position. Short subsequently takes over as U.S. emissary in Paris after Jefferson’s departure and remains in the post from 1789 to 1793. In 1793, shortly before writing this letter, Jefferson becomes upset by the negative reports about the developments of the French Revolution and Jacobin violence that Short has sent President Washington. The letter, then, is

intended by Jefferson as a reproach, chastising Short for not supporting France, an important U.S. ally. The former pupil certainly must feel the sting of the master's criticisms. Public opinion in the United States, Jefferson reports to Short with considerable exaggeration, is almost universally in support of the French Revolution, and the successes of republicanism in France have given the coup de grace to the remaining monarchists in the United States. Probably closer to the truth, even if it is not clear that Jefferson himself conceives it this way, is that Jefferson's own political fortunes and those of all who would soon be called republicans had been buoyed by positive reports about France, and the interests of his opponents, who would soon be known as federalists, are supported by negative news from France.

What is most interesting in the letter, however, and cannot be reduced to domestic political squabbles, is Jefferson's celebration of freedom in the face of extreme revolutionary violence. Even though he is probably not aware at the time of the extent of the violence, he does concede to Short that many guilty people were killed without adequate trial and many innocents were killed too, but he mourns them no more or less than anyone who falls in the course of battle. This is a war for freedom, Jefferson reasons, and as in all wars there will be casualties. The republican cause for freedom, he adds for emphasis, is worth an even higher price. "The liberty of the whole earth was depending on the issue of the contest, and was ever such a prize won with so little innocent blood? My own affections have been deeply wounded by some of the martyrs to this cause, but rather than it should have failed, I would have seen half the earth desolated. Were there but an Adam & an Eve left in every country, & left free, it would be better than as it now is" (1004). Jefferson is certainly taking to the extreme the common revolutionary slogan, give me liberty or give me death. Perhaps rather than Adam and Eve, his vision relates more closely to the fable of Noah's Ark: two survivors of the revolutionary flood from each country but a free pair that can repopulate the postdeluvian world in the interests of freedom.

This passage of Jefferson's letter continues to shock and horrify commentators today as much as it did in his own day. Conor Cruise O'Brien, for instance, wrote an entire book attacking Jefferson's support for the French Revolution and his argument centers on this 1793 "Adam & Eve" letter to Short. O'Brien casts Jefferson as an irresponsible apologist for Jacobin violence. He becomes enthusiastic about the French Revolution, O'Brien asserts, only when the bloodshed begins, and furthermore, he continues, Jefferson has merely an abstract notion of the actual events in France, and is finally uninterested in the facts. "It is difficult to resist the conclusion," O'Brien writes in his own

inflated rhetoric, “that the twentieth-century statesman whom the Thomas Jefferson of January 1793 would have admired most is Pol Pot.”²⁴

To understand Jefferson’s position adequately we have to return, once again, to the distinction between the two traditions of political thought we articulated earlier. From the perspective of the primacy of sovereignty, there can be no justification for revolutionary violence against an established government. This is either an invitation to anarchy or simply irresponsible action, because without the foundation of the sovereign power the multitude is an incoherent, self-destructive mass plagued by perpetual change. For Jefferson, however, and from the perspective of the primacy of resistance in general, the multitude is capable of generating coherence and stability internally. One should never despair of the people in the United States, Jefferson claims, but instead count on their prudence (letter to Price, 798–99). “I am persuaded myself that the good sense of the people will always be found to be the best army. They may be led astray for a moment, but will soon correct themselves” (letter to Carrington, 880). What is most important for Jefferson, however, and serves as the prime justification for political violence, is the establishment and maintenance of the proper relationship of priority between the multitude and the government. Rebellion and political violence are necessary periodically not only as reminders that government is secondary and derives its power only from the multitude but also to change the government to bring it in line with the current desires and composition of the multitude.

Now we are in the position finally to understand what Jefferson means by freedom or liberty in these passages. What is the liberty that he imagines nourished by the blood spilled in rebellions against the government? And what is the freedom his Adam and Eve possess after the devastating flood of revolutionary violence? Liberty and freedom mean simply for Jefferson that the multitude is autonomous and thus able to exert its priority over government. This has little to do with individualist notions of the freedom to do as one pleases in the course of everyday life. Freedom for Jefferson is the right of the multitude constantly to exert its power over and determine the actions of government. Freedom is the affirmation of the primacy of resistance in opposition to the primacy of sovereignty. This political autonomy of the multitude is clearly built on the two elements of Jefferson’s thought we articulated earlier: the social equality of all singularities and the economic independence and equality that is achieved through the equal division of and free access to productive property. Equal and independent citizens are the necessary components of a society that is able to generate its own coherence and exert its primacy over the government. Equality, in this sense, is inseparable from freedom.

Throughout these various discussions of resistance and freedom, Jefferson confronts a central paradox facing any theory of democracy: the ignorance of the multitude. Since the majority is ignorant, the common adage goes, does that mean that in a democracy ignorance will rule? This is the point at which many less intrepid thinkers, horrified by the “deluded multitude,” turn away from democracy. Some others try to theorize democracy by assuming unrealistically that all in society will always conform to the dictates of reason. Jefferson instead recognizes that the multitude will act at times on the basis of ignorance, and yet he still affirms not only their right to rebel but also the benefits of their rebellion. His thinking in this regard runs parallel to that of Spinoza, and, in fact, Spinoza’s thought can help carry this line of democratic thinking further.²⁵ The two thinkers share a pair of basic assumptions: one on the virtue of disobedience, since freedom can never result from obedience to authority; and another on the capacities of the multitude, even though it is born ignorant, to become intelligent and rule itself autonomously. The process leading the multitude from ignorance to wisdom is indeed the steep path that runs throughout Spinoza’s work. Jefferson, it seems to me, never articulates this path coherently. It is present, of course, in all his writings on the value of education, and, perhaps more important for our purposes here, it is implicit in his views on the beneficial effects of political participation. Rather than a prerequisite for political participation, for Jefferson, the wisdom of the multitude is its primary result. “I have no fear,” he writes, “but that the result of our experiment will be that men may be trusted to govern themselves without a master.”²⁶ No conception of democracy is viable that does not foresee such a process—a training in freedom—to generate continuously the intelligence and wisdom of the multitude.

Republicanism, or, Participatory Government

Republicanism for Jefferson requires a government of freedom, which must be, as we have just seen, a government that allows for and even promotes the primacy of resistance over sovereignty. On the face of it one might say, from the dominant perspective of political theory we articulated above, that would be no government at all, mere anarchy, since the stability and authority of rule is constantly subject to and determined by the force and will of the multitude. Jefferson’s notion of republican government, then, from this perspective, would be a contradiction in terms: a form of government that negates the sovereignty of rule. According to the logic of Jefferson’s thought, however, to say it along with the English revolutionaries of an earlier century, republican government

is really only a shadow that reflects the real substance, the multitude of subjects that compose society. Jefferson's republicanism is thus the project to invent ever better forms to allow this multitude to rule itself autonomously.

What we need to understand, however, and what Jefferson himself strives repeatedly to articulate, is how this multitude can organize itself in a coherent and stable constituent process—not only as negative limit to the tyranny of government but also as a positive, autonomous, constituent power, capable of ruling itself.²⁷ One way to recognize the progression of his thought in this regard is to track his critiques of the U.S. Constitution and the government it establishes. Jefferson, of course, does not advocate voting against the passage of the Constitution. His style of thought and politics does not work in absolutes. At the time of the Constitutional Convention he criticizes the draft Constitution in some limited ways but considers it an important step in a long constituent process—a beginning, not an end. For the remainder of his life, then, he continually tries to push the constituent process forward. We might organize his critiques of the Constitution, for convenience, into two groups: one against the sovereign authority of the government, which we can situate, for conceptual convenience, against the figure of Hamilton; and a second against the system of minority rule created by the representative schema, posed against the figure of Madison.²⁸ These two clusters of critiques will help us frame Jefferson's own conception of republicanism as an open constituent process and a fully participatory government.

Jefferson is in Paris during the period of the drafting and discussion of the Constitution, so his participation is limited to correspondence with those involved. At the time he lodges two objections to the proposed Constitution, both of which are aimed to defend against the potential tyranny of government. His first objection to the initial draft is that it dictates no term limits for representatives, especially for the presidency. The presidency proposed by the Constitution, he complains to Adams, “seems a bad edition of a Polish king” (913). The Polish king is elected periodically too, he explains, but since once such officials are in power reelection is all but guaranteed, they easily become rulers for life. Jefferson's second objection to the Constitution, which like the first is aimed at potential government tyranny, laments the omission of a bill of rights. He is not satisfied with the argument by some members of the Constituent Assembly that a bill of rights is not necessary because all powers not given to the government by the Constitution are, by implication, preserved for the people (916). Hamilton takes the argument against a bill of rights even further in the *Federalist Papers* when he claims that such a bill is not necessary because the government *is* the people. The people are author of the Constitution, he

maintains, somewhat ingenuously, and their representatives execute it. There is thus no need to protect the people from the government.²⁹ For Jefferson, however, such claims are just ideological mystifications. In the idiom of the English revolutionaries we cited earlier, one might say that Hamilton is trying to pass off the shadows (the rulers) for the substance (the multitude). Jefferson's insistence on the formal protection against the government provided by a bill of rights is simply another instance of his notion of the primacy of resistance over sovereignty. These two initial critiques of the Constitution are preventive measures, guards against the authority of the government, the kind of authority for which Hamilton was perhaps the greatest advocate. Jefferson's republicanism in this regard involves simply a defense against government power.

A series of more positive and substantial propositions situate Jefferson against Madison, leading him to pose republicanism against the constitutional schema of representation itself. Jefferson's point of departure is his support of the constant rule of the majority. In previous sections we have seen his attempts to think social equality and economic equality as preconditions for republicanism. We also saw his efforts, particularly in his draft for the Virginia Constitution, to devise a schema of universal suffrage—where “universal,” we should remember, means for him white, male adults. On the basis of equality and extended suffrage, then, Jefferson holds as one of his central principles of government the rule of the majority or, as he says in his first inaugural address, “absolute acquiescence in the decisions of the majority” (495). Jefferson is well aware, of course, that Madison's advocacy for the Constitution is based centrally on its being a bulwark *against* the rule of the majority. Madison explains in the *Federalist Papers* that the arrangements of representation designated by the Constitution are crafted to separate the government from the voters and their will. Both the averaging effect of a large electorate and the period between elections, he explains, give the representatives a relative distance and independence from the will of the population. This complex, seemingly contradictory notion of representation is the signature concept of Madison's thought: at the same time that representative schemas connect the multitude to government, the ruled to the rulers, it also separates them. Representation in this sense is a disjunctive synthesis that simultaneously creates both a connection and a gap at the heart of power.

When Madison famously argues in *Federalist* no.10 that the separation provided by representation is necessary in order to guard against the rule of the majority, he specifies two examples of cases when this rule of the majority can become tyrannical, one economic and one religious. The economic argument is given the more prominent position in *Federalist* no.10.³⁰ The danger that

Madison foresees is that the wealthy minority faction will suffer the rule of the poor majority faction of the population, threatening their economic privilege. “The most common and durable sources of faction,” Madison writes, “have been the various and unequal distribution of property” (*Federalist* no.10, 47). And the protection of property, Madison insists, is the first object of government. Jefferson, of course, is unlikely to have much sympathy for this argument. On the contrary, in the letter from France we read earlier, Jefferson proposes to Madison himself a strong redistribution of property to reduce to a minimum the hierarchies of wealth. If the rule of the majority were to lead toward the wider allocation of property and the relatively equal division of it, then that would coincide perfectly with Jefferson’s own economic project.

When Madison writes to Jefferson about the Constitution, however, he cites only his argument about religious freedom and not the economic rationale. Jefferson argued strongly for many years, often together with Madison, for religious freedom in Virginia. Madison thus knows he can count on Jefferson’s sympathy when he writes about the dangers of the religious prejudices of the majority. Some objections to the religious freedom offered by the Constitution, he explains to Jefferson, come from those who fear it has “opened a door for Jews Turks & infidels” (1564). If a majority sect is able to rule, he continues, no law will be able to protect the religious minorities. Jefferson’s sensitivity to the religious aspect of Madison’s argument and fear of religious intolerance, however, are not sufficient to convince him of the need to separate the multitude from rule through the representative schema of the Constitution. His position is founded both on an evaluation of the danger and an estimation of the potential. On the one hand, in other words, although Jefferson recognizes the possible perils posed by majority rule, he is much more concerned about the tyranny of the minority: the minority of the wealthy, the minority of those in power. On the other hand, he estimates to be much greater the potential benefits of majority rule on the multitude and on government. These disagreements with Madison give us a first indication that Jefferson’s advocacy of the rule of the majority implies a broad critique of the representative schemas of the Constitution, since, as Madison makes quite clear, the purpose of representation is not only to connect the government to the voters but also to separate it from them, guarding against the rule of the majority. Extended suffrage and equal representation are certainly preferable to monarchy, but they are not nearly enough to satisfy Jefferson’s democratic desires.

Jefferson does propose, almost three decades after the Constitutional Convention, an alternative to the Constitution’s representational schema in a system of wards or “elementary republics” in which each citizen would

participate actively in government. Each county would be divided into one hundred of these wards, according to Jefferson's plan, each of which would be centered on one school for the children. He conceives the structure and size of the wards to be something like the New England townships, and thus his proposal would generalize that local political tradition to other parts of the country, but the function and power of the wards would be very different from that of townships under the Constitution. All the citizens of the ward would gather to deliberate on local issues but would also discuss larger political questions and delegate representatives to the various higher assemblies. He imagines a pyramid of delegation, with the wards as the foundation, sending delegates to the county governments, which in turn would send delegates to the state level, and finally the states would send delegates to the federal government. This is still a form of representation, of course, but one very different from that of the Constitution. In this pyramidal schema of wards, all citizens actively participate in government, and their delegates are constantly and directly bound to their will. "Where every man is a sharer in the direction of his ward-republic, or of some of the higher ones, and feels that he is a participator in the government of affairs, not merely at an election one day in the year, but every day; when there shall not be a man in the State who will not be a member of some one of its councils, great or small, he will let the heart be torn out of his body sooner than his power be wrested from him by a Caesar or a Bonaparte" (1380). Hannah Arendt claims that the appropriate correlates to Jefferson's ward structure in the later nineteenth and twentieth centuries are the Paris Commune, the Russian soviets and the German communist councils.³¹ Her claim is plausible in that in each of these cases, active participation and structures of delegation are intended to give the multitude constant authority over the government. Jefferson's proposal for these elementary republics thus undermines the representational schema at the heart of the Constitution by operating a kind of dialectical negation, playing on the dual role of representation, to connect and to separate. The wards, in other words, aim to make representation complete, absolute (in linking the multitude to power) and thereby destroy representation (as a mechanism of separation). When the connective function of representation is pushed to its extreme, it undermines representation's function of separation.

Jefferson's critique of the U.S. Constitution and its representational schema, along with his alternative proposal of the ward system, are eventually consolidated conceptually, toward the end of his life, around the definition of republicanism. He points out, first of all, that in the years of the revolution and the new republic, republicanism was a vague and poorly defined concept:

“we imagined everything republican which was not monarchy” (1396). A more precise definition is needed. Clearly he is not satisfied, for example, with Madison’s definition in *Federalist* no.10 that a republic is “a government in which the scheme of representation takes place” (49). For Jefferson, instead, “a government is republican in proportion as every member composing it has his equal voice in the direction of its concerns” (1396). Such a notion of the control of government by the multitude does not negate all forms of representation—indeed Jefferson says at times that he thinks it would be impractical to avoid all forms of representation in a government larger than a small township—but it only accepts the kind of representation contained in his proposal of the ward system, with short terms, instructed delegation, and direct and equal voting. In fact, republicanism for Jefferson relies as much as possible on not representation but the direct action of the citizens. Here is perhaps his most complete and radical definition: “Were I to assign to this term [republic] a precise and definite idea, I would say, purely and simply, it means a government by its citizens in mass, acting directly and personally, according to rules established by the majority; and that every other government is more or less republican, in proportion as it has in its composition more or less of this ingredient of the direct action of the citizens” (1392). Jefferson’s repeated use of the term *direct* in this passage is intended to contrast with the indirectness of representation. A republic, contrary to what Madison claims, is not any government in which the scheme of representation takes place. Representation, in fact, is an obstacle to republicanism to the extent that it reestablishes and enforces a separation between the rulers and the ruled. Jefferson sets a much higher standard: a republic is a government in which the multitude directly rules itself or in which there is a small as possible gap between the rulers and the ruled. And the participatory experiences of such a republic must serve to generate and reinforce the capacities of the multitude.

Once Jefferson has clarified the definition of republicanism, he uses it to critique the U.S. Constitution and the U.S. government. “If, then, the control of the people over the organs of their government be the measure of its republicanism,” he writes, “and I confess I know no other measure, it must be agreed that our governments have much less of republicanism than ought to have been expected” (1394). The U.S. government of 1816 and the U.S. Constitution are not republican or not sufficiently republican and thus need to be transformed. “Where then is our republicanism to be found?” he asks. “Not in our constitution certainly, but merely in the spirit of our people” (1397). The motor of this transformation can only be the people themselves. Here again we can recognize an echo of Jefferson’s notion we articulated above that

resistance is primary to sovereignty. If republicanism is to be a government of freedom, it must be premised not on the sovereignty of the government but on the power of the multitude that will periodically revolt against any sovereign power to reassert its authority. And that government must be an engine for generating the intelligence and wisdom of the multitude through their active participation.

Since his notion of republicanism requires a government of the primacy of resistance, it should come as no surprise that Jefferson maintains that the Constitution itself should be revised or rewritten periodically, once every generation, that is, every nineteen or twenty years.³² One should not revere constitutions sanctimoniously, he writes, as if they were too sacred to be touched. In fact, for us to be beholden to follow the constitution of a previous generation would be like allowing the hand of the dead to rule over the living. To each generation, as Condorcet writes in the 1793 French Constitution, its own constitution. We should never allow a constituted power to be consolidated, Jefferson might say in the language of the tradition, but must always keep open the constituent process. And indeed, as we just saw, Jefferson's notion of ward republics would involve a radical revision of the Constitution, completely transforming its representational schema. It is probably no coincidence that the periodicity of this opening of the constituent power—every twenty years—corresponds to Jefferson's notion of the periodicity of beneficial rebellion against the government. In response to Shays' Rebellion, as we saw earlier, he declares, "God forbid we should ever be 20 years without such a rebellion." Each generation must renew the cause of freedom with a rebellion against the government and a new or revised constitution. These two periodic events, however, rebellion against the government and revision of the Constitution, are really only manifestations of the essential element: the primacy of the multitude over the sovereign power.

Now we are in the position to see clearly the fundamental dividing line that Jefferson draws. If, on the one hand, it were true that the population were merely a "deluded multitude," ultimately incapable of governing itself, then democracy would be impossible and some sovereign power—be it an elected minority, a fixed set of institutions, a constituted power—would have to stand above the multitude and rule. If, on the other hand, as Jefferson believes, the multitude were capable—not spontaneously but as the *result* of the revolutionary experiment—of governing itself with no master and forming a constituent power, then democracy would finally be possible and all forms of constituted power could be subordinated to the rule of the multitude. This is the dividing line that any theory of democracy must face. And it marks Jefferson's politi-

cal thought as among the most radical and most *democratic* moments in the entire U.S. tradition.

Jefferson's Formula for Democracy

This reading of Jefferson's writings has resulted in a set of tools for thinking democracy. I should point out, somewhat belatedly, that Jefferson never uses the term *democracy* in the way I propose here. (Before the early nineteenth century, in fact, the term is used as a positive designation in the United States by relatively few authors.) Even though he does not use the term, however, the concept of democracy is present throughout Jefferson's work and indeed the concept is stronger there than it is in much of subsequent U.S. political thought, even when the term becomes ubiquitous. As we have seen, Jefferson is not the kind of political theorist who readily invents new terms. He more often adopts terms from the dominant discourse and works to transform them. (For this reason, I have found it useful in the course of this essay to introduce some terminology from other authors to highlight the novelty of Jefferson's concepts.) He insists, nonetheless, on the precision of political concepts. Against the vague and ambivalent invocations of democracy so common today, then, Jefferson provides us, despite his own limitations and failures of thought, with a rich and precise articulation of the concept of democracy.

The four themes under which I have organized his thought can serve as an initial formula for Jefferson's concept such that democracy = social equality + economic equality + freedom + republicanism. (Think of this, if you like, as an alternative, or complement, to Lenin's famous formula whereby communism = soviets + electrification.) Each of the four themes of this formula, however, undergoes a significant redefinition in Jefferson's thought that distinguishes it from traditional understandings. In fact, when we look closely at each of the elements, we find that the formula is not really a solution but rather the identification of a problem—real problems of political theory that remain unsolved for Jefferson and for us still today.

One element that Jefferson's thought makes clear, first of all, in its successes and even more clearly in its failures, is that social equality cannot be based on sameness or identity. Any notion of equality based on sameness will invariably be threatened by the expression of social difference. A classic ruse of liberal thought to sidestep this problem is to claim to set aside social hierarchies, with the pretext that social inequalities can be separate from the field of political equality. In Jefferson's thought, however, the social cannot be separated from the political in that way. Extending Jefferson's thinking, in fact, we can arrive at

a thoroughly political understanding of social equality based on a multiplicity of singularities that reside in the common. Jefferson struggles with this concept primarily in the context of race, but it can apply equally to other fields of social difference. The key to this notion of singularity, which Jefferson seems only to glimpse fleetingly, is that it allows us to understand social difference in a way that does not imply hierarchy. The question, in other words, is how to develop a concept of social equality that does not require negating or holding at bay our differences (of race, gender, sexuality, and other social axes) but rather recognizes them as a multiplicity of singularities that implies no hierarchy.

Jefferson's economic theory of equality extends significantly the concept of the common. His point of departure is the traditional notion of a common nature: the earth is common to all, given for all to work. The virtue of this "natural" state, in his mind, is that, since each has access to productive property and can produce autonomously, such an economic arrangement creates the conditions for a politically independent and active population. To arrive at such an economic arrangement from a society that is now defined by wealth and poverty, then, Jefferson suggests mechanisms of division to make property ownership as equal as possible. This accounts in large part for his preference for agricultural production, since only in agriculture—as opposed to manufacture or industry—can he imagine the equal division of productive property, that is, the division of land into small-holding farms. What is really essential for Jefferson is that all have free and equal access to productive property, whatever form that property takes. The common, then, which is the basis for production, is not something natural and given, but rather the result of previous social production. Today land, just as well as genetic information, and industrial machinery just as well as communication networks, function as the common. The question in this case, then, is how to create the common so it is open for all to use productively, how in our current economic context to allow all free and equal access to productive property and thereby foster a multitude of autonomous and active producers?

Jefferson's concept of freedom translates into political terms the autonomy of productive social singularities, and thus freedom becomes immediately antagonistic. The exemplary expressions of freedom for him, in fact, are rebellions against the government. His central notion of freedom is premised on the assumption that the multitude of social singularities, even though they are born ignorant, are capable of wisdom, capable, that is, of autonomously forming a stable and coherent society. Freedom can be defined as the primacy of the resistance over sovereignty only because there is an autonomous social

formation as the basis of political expression. The question, then, is first how the equal and autonomous social singularities can form a society capable of freedom and, second, how to create a government of freedom that is able not only to grant the priority of the multitude, but also to foster its intelligence and wisdom.

Republicanism, finally, is Jefferson's way of bringing together all of these elements in constitutional terms. We have to recognize, however, the paradoxical turns of Jefferson's constitutional thought, due in part to the fact that he constantly struggles conceptually against the terms available to him. His republicanism involves a form of representation, for instance, that perpetually strives to undermine the separation between the rulers and the ruled, and yet that separation is a defining element of the concept of representation. The constitutional order, furthermore, must never be allowed to consolidate in a constituted power but must rather constantly be forced open by new constituent processes through periodic rebellion and revision. Any references to Jefferson's republicanism or constitutionalism have to appreciate these paradoxes. Hence the question: how can we create a constitutional process that is permanently open to constituent forces and driven by the equal and autonomous participation of the entire population? How can the schemas of participation serve as a permanent self-training to expand the capacities of the multitude?

We are now in the position to give a more precise Jeffersonian formula: democracy = singularity + autonomy + resistance + constituent power. The real object of this entire endeavor, however, is not only to restore (or really invent) a concept of democracy adequate to our times but also and more importantly to find a way to put it into practice. Jefferson himself might have said, after all, to borrow a phrase from a revolutionary theorist of the subsequent century, that it is often more pleasant and useful to go through the "experience of revolution" than to write about it.

Notes

1. Bringing the margins to the center has indeed been a major theme of almost every presidential address to the American Studies Association at least since Mary Helen Washington's "Disturbing the Peace: What Happens to American Studies If You Put African American Studies at the Center," *American Quarterly* 50.1 (March 1998): 1–23.
2. On the tendency since the 1970s of scholars to critique Jefferson, see Peter Onuf, "The Scholar's Jefferson," *William and Mary Quarterly* 50 (October 1993): 671–99; Sean Wilentz, "Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Thomas Jefferson," *New Republic*, March 10, 1997, 32–40; and Joseph Ellis, "Jefferson: Post-DNA," *William and Mary Quarterly* 42.1 (January 2000): 125–38.

3. Joyce Appleby and Terence Ball gather together the few letters and documents in which Jefferson expresses his views on women and politics—generally that women should not be involved in it—in a section of their collection of Jefferson's work titled "Women (not) in Politics," in *Political Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 540–47.
4. See Jefferson, *Writings*, ed. Merrill Peterson (Washington, D.C.: Library of America, 1984), 169. All subsequent page references to Jefferson's work will refer to the Library of America edition unless noted otherwise.
5. One sign of Jefferson's colonial mentality is the way he often refers to the relationship between Native Americans and the white rulers as one between children and parents, even posing himself, during his presidency, as "father" to them. The trope of parents and children, of course, is a commonplace of European colonial thinking that has long served to support the notion that European domination is beneficial for the dominated, like the custodianship of a parent for a child. I should note that this trope of parents and children is embedded in a statement cited above as an affirmation of Native American equality. Indians are on the same level with white people, Jefferson writes, "in the same uncultivated state" (801). If, in fact, by racial equality he simply means the relation of an adult to a child, then this is not a substantial proposition of equality, but simply a theory of hierarchy masked in the language of equality.
6. See, for instance, the 1802 letter in which Jefferson tries to convince the Native American leader Brother Handsome Lake of the benefits of land sales (556).
7. The contrast between Jefferson's purported benevolence and the genocidal consequences of his actions with respect to Native Americans is the central theme of Bernard Sheehan's *Seed of Extinction: Jeffersonian Philanthropy and the American Indian* (New York: Norton, 1974); Anthony Wallace echoes this view: "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" (*Jefferson and the Indians: The Tragic Fate of the First Americans* [New York: Belknap Press, 2001], viii).
8. The contrast between Jefferson's favorable views of Native Americans and his negative views of African Americans is a commonplace in Jefferson scholarship. For two excellent discussions, see Catherine Holland, "Notes on the State of America: Jeffersonian Democracy and the Production of a National Past," *Political Theory* 29.2 (April 2001): 190–216; and Frank Shuffelton, "Thomas Jefferson: Race, Culture and the Failure of Anthropological Method" in *A Mixed Race* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 257–77.
9. Winthrop Jordan poses this as Jefferson's central dilemma: "he hated slavery but thought Negroes inferior to white men" (*White Over Black* [Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968], 429).
10. For a representative analysis of Jefferson's racism with respect to African Americans, along with his views on slaves and slavery, see Paul Finkelman, *Slavery and the Founders* (Armonk, N.Y.: Sharp, 1996), 105–37. For an older and much gentler treatment of Jefferson, see John Chester Miller, *The Wolf by the Ears* (New York: Free Press, 1977).
11. See, for example, Jefferson's July 1793 letter to Monroe on the Haitian Revolution. See also Tim Matthewson, "Jefferson and the Nonrecognition of Haiti," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 140 (1996): 22–48. More generally, on the role of Haiti in Jefferson's foreign policy, see Gordon Brown, *Toussaint's Clause: The Founding Fathers and the Haitian Revolution* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi), 2005.
12. Similar examples of interpretation in political theory might help us discover a course for dealing with this challenge posed by Jefferson's racism. Think, for instance, of how Franz Fanon, perfectly conscious of Hegel's racism, uses Hegel's thought for his antiracist and anticolonial project in *Black Skin, White Masks*. Or consider, alternatively, how Wendy Brown, clearly recognizing Nietzsche's misogyny and aristocratic elitism, still employs his thought as a primary guide for her feminist and egalitarian project in *States of Injury*. In neither case is it a question of praising or blaming Hegel or Nietzsche, but rather a matter of employing the powerful conceptual tools they make available.
13. An adequate theory of singularity has to understand its intimate relation to multiplicity and recognize that multiplicity, in fact, always precedes singularity. This relation can be characterized, to be very brief, in three ways. First of all, every singularity is defined not in itself but only by its relation to the multiplicity of other singularities outside of it in the social field. Secondly, a singularity is not a unity but rather is composed internally of a multiplicity of differences. And, finally, singularities are never identical to themselves over time but are always becoming different through processes of mixture

- and transformation. This notion of singularity has been developed, with variations, by a number of contemporary philosophers, including Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, Alain Badiou, and Giorgio Agamben. It is also the subject of extended investigation in my books with Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000), and *Multitude* (New York: Penguin, 2004).
14. W. E. B. DuBois, *The Gift of Black Folk* (New York: AMS Press, 1971), 139. For a basic presentation of DuBois's views, see *The Souls of Black Folk*, but for a more complex vision in a utopian key of the revolutionary interaction among a multiplicity of races as equal singularities, see his novel *Dark Princess* (reissued by University Press of Mississippi, 1995). For analyses that highlight the philosophical depth of DuBois's thought, see Ronald Judy, "On W. E. B. DuBois and Hyperbolic Thinking," and Nahum Chandler, "Originary Displacement" both in *Boundary 2* 27.3 (Fall 2000): 1–35 and 249–86, respectively.
 15. It is unclear whether or not Jefferson assumes slave labor would be used to work the 50 acres of land, but it is not implausible that a family could work that much land using only its own labor or hired help. To put this quantity of land in context, it is useful to remember Thaddeus Stevens's 1865 proposal, put into effect during Reconstruction briefly and on a limited basis under the direction of the Freedman's Bureau, to confiscate the land of the great southern plantations and distribute 40 acres to each freed male slave, selling the remainder to pay the national debt. The assumption in this case is clearly that the labor of the freedman's family is sufficient. See W. E. B. DuBois, *Black Reconstruction* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1935), 197–98 and 219–35.
 16. For a contemporary presentation of Hamilton's economic views, see Ron Chernow, *Alexander Hamilton* (New York: Penguin, 2004). For a critique of Jefferson's "reactionary utopia" of agriculture, see Manfredo Tafuri, *Architecture and Utopia*, trans. BarbaraLuigia LaPenta (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1979).
 17. Charles Beard, *Economic Origins of Jeffersonian Democracy* (New York: Macmillan, 1915), 422.
 18. C. B. MacPerson explains how for Jefferson property ownership is necessary for freedom. "With one's own small property one could not be made subservient. And small property was the great guarantee against government tyranny as well as against economic oppression" (*Democratic Theory* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973], 135).
 19. Claudio Katz argues convincingly that Jefferson's economic views and conception of property should be understood as anticapitalist, aimed specifically at capitalist labor arrangements. See "Thomas Jefferson's Liberal Anticapitalism," *American Journal of Political Science* 47.1 (January 2003): 1–17.
 20. For examples of interpretations that accept at face value that Jefferson's economic theory is aimed simply toward small-holding agriculture and the construction of a yeoman's republic, see Roger Kennedy, *Mr. Jefferson's Lost Cause: Land, Farmers, Slavery, and the Louisiana Purchase* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Stanley Elkins and Eric McKittrick, *The Age of Federalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 195–203; and A. Whitney Griswold, "The Agrarian Democracy of Thomas Jefferson," *American Political Science Review* 60. 4 (August 1946): 657–81.
 21. John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, ed. Peter Laslett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960), 446.
 22. *The Adams-Jefferson Letters*, ed. Lester Cappon, 2 vols. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1959), vol. 1, 168.
 23. For an indication of the effects of Shays' Rebellion on the reflections of the Constitutional Convention, see *The Federalist Papers*, ed. Clinton Rossiter (New York: Penguin, 1961), no. 6, 24; no. 25, 134–35; no. 28, 146; and no. 74, 416. Unsurprisingly all references to the rebellion appear in texts attributed to Hamilton, who was most concerned about maintaining social order and the authority of the government.
 24. Conor Cruise O'Brien, *The Long Affair: Thomas Jefferson and the French Revolution, 1785–1800* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 150.
 25. I find no evidence that Jefferson read Spinoza, although his library does contain a copy of his works. Enlightenment thought is so saturated with Spinoza's ideas, however, that they could have reached Jefferson by innumerable routes.
 26. Letter to David Hartley, July 2, 1787, in Jefferson, *Writings*, ed. Andrew Lipscomb (Washington, D.C.: Thomas Jefferson Memorial Association), vol. 6, 151.
 27. On the concept of constituent power, see Antonio Negri, *Insurgencies: Constituent Power and the Modern State*, trans. Maurizio Boscaqli (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

28. Richard Matthews helpfully situates Jefferson in contrast to both Madison and Hamilton. See *The Radical Politics of Thomas Jefferson* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1986), 97–118.
29. *The Federalist Papers*, no. 84, 481.
30. See Charles Beard's brilliant reading of *Federalist* no. 10 in *An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution of the United States* (New York: Macmillan, 1913), 156–58.
31. Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (1963; New York: Penguin, 1991), 248–50 and 256–58. For another useful reading of Jefferson's ward proposal, which poses it specifically as a solution to some central political problems of the age of globalization, see Gary Hart, *Restoration of the Republic: The Jeffersonian Ideal in the 21st Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), esp. 81–162.
32. David Mayer helpfully brings together Jefferson's views on the periodic revision of the Constitution. See *The Constitutional Thought of Thomas Jefferson* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1994), 295–319.