Recollections: The Middle Tennessee Voices of Their Times Series

Television Program with

Judge Steve Daniel and Thomas Jefferson (Dr. Clay Jenkinson)

June 1995

Interviewer: Dr. Bob Bullen, Professor of Educational Leadership
Special presentation from the TN Judicial Conference
Middle Tennessee State University

Produced by Television Services, Middle Tennessee State University

© Middle Tennessee State University

ABSTRACT: A conference and interview with Thomas Jefferson reenactor, Dr. Clay Jenkinson of the University of Nevada at Reno. Part 1 consists of Jenkinson giving a speech as Jefferson at the Tennessee Judicial Conference. In the speech “Jefferson” covers his views on the Constitution and the national government, his presidency, and relationships with various founding father figures. In Part two “Jefferson” is interviewed by Bob Bullen, answering questions about his childhood, home, and family. He discusses his relationships with various men of his day and offers insight into the views held and decisions made in his lifetime. The interview concludes with Bullen interviewing Jenkinson, as Jenkinson, and asking about his portrayal of Jefferson.

PART 1

Time Count Description of Program Content

0:00:09 Professor Bullen introduces a special two part program with Thomas Jefferson [portrayed by Dr. Clay Jenkinson, University of Nevada at Reno]. The presentation was filmed at the TN Judicial Conference in June 1995, hosted and chaired by Judge Steve Daniel of Murfreesboro, TN. Part one consists of an
introduction by Judge Daniel and a speech by Thomas Jefferson [Jenkinson] and the second part consists of an interview with Jefferson [Jenkinson] and then an interview with Dr. Clay Jenkinson himself [the second and third portions of the recorded program are not present on discs one or two].

0:00:42 Judge Daniels introduces the program by giving a little background on Thomas Jefferson and tells that the day will consist of a speech by Jefferson [Jenkinson], then an interview with him and then finally an interview with Dr. Clay Jenkinson.

0:02:27 Jefferson enters, greets the audience, gives a short overview of his life, proceeds to name and detail the reasons for his reluctance to speak publicly and the ways in which he navigated around this obstacle as he served his first term as the third president of the United States, including his refashioning of the State of the Union Address and Report.

0:07:52 Jefferson describes his trepidation due to his belief that the Earth belongs to the living and not the dead. He goes on to explain his belief in generational justice, that no generation has the right to impose its will upon the next generation, that there should be no national debt imposed upon the unborn, how the Constitution should not be imposed upon those who cannot adopt it, nor even have the right to perpetuate positive law.

0:08:48 Jefferson suggests that the national debt should be paid off by the generation that incurred it and if not paid off, that it should be cancelled automatically every 34 years. Secondly, he proposed that the Constitution be torn up “on general principles” every 19 years.

0:09:15 Finally Jefferson “feels trepidation” because he “cannot imagine two groups less useful to society than judges or lawyers.” He goes on to comment about why he feels this way.

0:10:56 Jefferson states what his constitutional theory is in all its simplicity. He continues by giving his opinion and insight into the Articles of Confederation, the idea of a National Bank, and how any constitution should be torn up when it ceases to become amendable.

0:12:58 Jefferson retells of the moment he first received the draft of the Constitution, while away in Paris, France. He remembers how he was offended and dissatisfied with the thought of a new Constitution and his reason being that he preferred the Articles of Confederation and felt that it only needed a few minor amendments before it would be a perfect document.

0:13:50 Under the Articles of Confederation, Virginia and New Jersey were sovereign nation states, and though required to come together for certain national and international purposes, they were separate nations when it came to domestic
issues or policies. This was his constitutional theory.

0:14:03 He felt that the new Constitution was much too consolidated and powerful, and that it opened the door for the government to abuse its power.

0:16:22 The most pressing problem with the new constitution, Jefferson felt, was the lack of a charter of human rights. He tells of how he proceeded to write an angry letter to James Madison, explaining the need for a bill of rights and the response he received from Madison.

0:19:02 Jefferson states the four main provisions that Madison did not see fit to include in the Bill of Rights.

0:20:19 Jefferson prepares to close his speech by giving his opinion on Native Americans and how they have rights just as we do.

0:22:59 Jefferson quotes a speech that he made reference to in the book *Notes on Virginia*.

0:27:17 Jefferson speaks of the crisis that arose shortly after he won the presidency involving the Mississippi River and the port of New Orleans He mentions his feelings towards the purchase of new territory.

0:30:24 Jefferson comments upon his many regrets throughout his life and speaks of his correspondences with John Quincy Adams.

0:33:12 Jefferson gives his opinion the politics and political views of today’s time, and how these things disturb him.

0:35:07 Jefferson tells of the promise that he made to his wife upon her death bed to never remarry and bring a step-mother in to raise the children. He speaks if the only other time that he ever fell in love.

0:39:31 Jefferson describes the circumstances that created the University of Virginia. He also speaks of his feelings about the “wall of separation” that should be erected between the Church and State.

0:41:01 Jefferson tells of the many books that he read throughout his life and of the three library collections that he obtained over the course of his life.

0:43:52 Jefferson speaks of his daily routine while residing at Monticello, including his passion for letter writing.

0:46:49 Jefferson speaks about being a “public believer in emancipation from the time of the Declaration of Independence.” He also states that he “never contemplated wholesale emancipation” of his own slaves that tended Monticello.

0:49:43 Jefferson remarks as to why he turned on the legal system.
Jefferson describes his feelings about the secession of the Southern states and how he knew when the Missouri Compromise was signed in 1819 that it would be “the death nail of the nation”.

Jefferson closes his speech by referring to a letter that he once wrote to John Adams and then he speaks about their death upon the same day, July 4, 1826; fifty years to the day of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. He quotes the last paragraph of his letter and then closes his speech.

Professor Bullen thanks everyone for watching and states that there will be a follow up with the second part of the program.

END OF PART 1

PART 2

[Significant time has passed prior to the filming of the second disc which contains the actual interview between Professor Bullen and Dr. Clay Jenkinson [who is in the character of Thomas Jefferson.]]

Professor Bullen introduces Thomas Jefferson [Jenkinson] and gives some background of his life and time serving as the third president of the United States.

Bullen asks Jefferson to speak about his early life and the influence of his father Peter to which Jefferson replies that he was the strongest man that he ever met.

Jefferson reflects upon his days at William and Mary and the influence of his classical education upon his life in later years. He speaks of George Wythe, and William Small, the Jefferson’s greatest mentors.

Jefferson remarks about the fact that when he was a boy, he never could have imagined that the colonies would become and independent nation. He feels that the continuous oppression from the British crown is what led to the fight for independence by the colonies.

Jefferson states the reasoning behind the Second Continental Congress chose him, the youngest of the men on the committee appointed to compose and edit the Declaration of Independence, to primarily do the writing, while Benjamin Franklin and John Adams were the primary editors.

Jefferson describes his belief that people are born with an empty mind and that the books, people and, other information they come into contact with shapes their beliefs and principles. He also describes his “trinity of heroes;” authors whom he felt were the greatest of educated men, as being Isaac Newton, John Lock and
Francis Bacon. He goes on to explain the impact the writing and beliefs of the men had upon him and how they helped shape his draft of the Declaration of Independence.

0:08:25 Jefferson speaks of the editing of the Declaration of Independence and determines the topic/idea that was left out that most disappoints him and the two that offended him greatly.

0:11:26 Jefferson recalls the atmosphere surrounding the Continental Congress and his feelings, as well as the feelings of the general public, about the prospect of the colonies breaking away from England to form their own nation.

0:13:24 Jefferson retells of the invasion of Virginia during the American Revolution by General Cornwallis and Banister Tarlton while he was the governor.

0:15:34 Jefferson describes the ever-changing architectural attributes and structures at Monticello and how he was influenced by Italian architect Andrea Palladio. He continues by telling of how there were no professional architects in the United States during that time. He also describes how he designed the Rotunda at the University of Virginia at Charlottesville.

0:17:43 Jefferson relates his chance to travel within France and Italy while he was the Ambassador to France and how this opportunity influenced his taste in art and design and also his concept of beauty in architecture.

0:19:11 Jefferson speaks of meeting his wife Martha and the time that surrounded their marriage.

0:20:27 Jefferson recalls the death of beloved wife, how the grief that overtook him controlled his everyday life for about three weeks and the circumstances behind the vow that he took to never marry again. He tells of how he grieved and how his daughter Martha, age eight; watched over him to make sure that he was not going to take his own life during the weeks and months that followed.

0:22:51 Jefferson details his ideas about the education of women and comments as to why he sent one of his daughters to a French boarding school.

0:24:56 Jefferson explains his obsession with books and the other “finer things in life” at the time and why he signed so many notes to spend money that he essentially did not have.

0:27:20 Jefferson describes the reasoning behind his choice to travel to Paris not long after the death of his wife.

0:28:44 Jefferson comments as to whether or not he believes that the Declaration of Independence had any effect upon the French Revolution. He describes the scenes
Jefferson remarks about being accused of being too envious of the French style of living.

Jefferson explains his reasoning behind Patrick Henry’s disgust with him and his obsession with casting an unappealing light about Jefferson.

Jefferson describes Benjamin Franklin as “the greatest man of the 18th century” and he goes on to tell of the impression that was made upon him by Franklin. He also describes Thomas Payne and John Adams.

Jefferson states his opinion of George Washington and the experience of being his Secretary of State.

Jefferson details his belief in a “balanced head and heart” and comments about the few times that he ever recalls losing his temper.

Jefferson states his opinion of General Marquis de Lafayette and also remembers the occasion of his return to the United States in 1894 and the great dinner that was held at the Rotunda at the University of Virginia.

Jefferson describes being Secretary of State and the “deal” that he helped Alexander Hamilton bargain with James Madison concerning the construction site of the new capital and the responsibility of the national government to assume state debts.

Jefferson reflects upon his personal relationship with Alexander Hamilton and prides himself in never being antagonistic towards anyone.

Jefferson comments about the four years he served as John Adams’ Vice president and the “falling out” that occurred within their friendship.

Jefferson tells of the election of 1800, the discrediting of the Federalist Party, the rise of the Republican Party to the office of the president, the situation of Aaron Burr’s attempt at the presidency, and his personal opinion of Burr.

Jefferson reflects upon his close personal and political relationship with James Madison. He tells of being neighbors and how their friendship was significant not only in their personal lives but also in their political lives as well.

Jefferson mentions his strong belief in freedom of both the press and religion. He briefly discusses the many ways that he was slandered by the press including the Sally Hemmings episode. He states his feelings and actions towards not
maintaining a permanent military force or permanent Navy. Jefferson also speaks of Albert Gallatin, their close personal relationship and the great progress that they made concerning the national debt in Jefferson’s two terms as president.

0:55:41 Bullen asks Jefferson [Dr. Clay Jenkinson, University of Nevada at Reno] to “tell [the viewers] who he really is and what his occupation is. Dr. Clay Jenkinson introduces himself and gives some background information concerning his portrayal of Thomas Jefferson and his background as a professor.

0:56:27 Jenkinson provides some concluding remarks of his study of Thomas Jefferson and some advice to those who wish to study Jefferson’s life in the future.

0:59:12 Jenkinson comments about the film Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness, a documentary about the life of Thomas Jefferson by director Ken Burns.

1:00:24 Bullen thanks Jenkinson and also gives a special thanks to Judge Steve Daniel of Murfreesboro, TN for arranging the interview.

1:00:42 The interview closes and the credits start to roll.

1:01:16 DVD 2 ends.