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IN I

THE UNTOLD STORY OF OUR PRESIDENTS
AND THE BOOKS THEY WROTE

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Introduction

Jack Kennedy didn't need to worry—not like this, at least. When the National Book Awards announced that the senator would deliver the keynote address at its 1956 ceremony, the book trade hummed with excitement. The awards had an aura of glamour: the Commodore Hotel in midtown Manhattan, the tables piled high with cocktails and canapés. But Kennedy was *actually* glamorous. He'd be easy to spot among the older, dowdier authors. In fact, John F. Kennedy, thirty-eight years old, hair brushed back, slim suit buttoned, would be the biggest star in the room. Besides, it was just a speech. The senator had given plenty of those.

And yet sitting there, looking at his draft, Kennedy continued to fret. He knew he had to deliver the keynote in front of America's best writers. (The nominees that year included Flannery O'Connor, Richard Hofstadter, W. H. Auden, and Eudora Welty.) Then again, he was a writer himself—and, lately, a very successful one. His *Profiles in Courage* had just started its multiyear run on the best-seller lists. The book singled out eight senators who, at key times in American history, had demonstrated true courage, and reviewers were spotting that same quality—and that same historic potential—in its author. "That a United States Senator . . . produced this study," the *Christian Science Monitor* marveled, "is as remarkable as it is hopeful."

So there was no good reason for Kennedy to worry about this speech—finally, honestly, because as a US senator he had better things to worry about. That's why he normally let his staff handle his speeches, after which he might skim them (sometimes) and tweak them (lightly). That process had produced Kennedy's other recent addresses, at colleges and churches and the Massachusetts Farm Bureau Federation Convention.

To the senator, however, speaking at the National Book Awards mattered more. He picked up a pen and went to work, crossing out lines, toying with tenses, and considering the smallest word choices. He scratched out "political action" and replaced it with "political events."

He added an obscure historical allusion. He made changes in his tiny, tilted handwriting, then sent the text to his aides for further revision. By the time Kennedy and his staff had finished, there were edits all over the draft's eleven pages. The only thing they hadn't fussed with, it seemed, was the title: "The Politician and the Author: A Plea for Greater Understanding."

On the day of the National Book Awards, the Commodore Hotel pulsed with cheery enthusiasm. About a thousand literary types filed in, past the famous lobby, with its functioning waterfall, to the Grand Ballroom. The editors wore red carnations, the authors wore white, and everyone was making predictions.

Once the awards were handed out—the big winner was Auden—it was time for the keynote. Kennedy had made even more edits, tightening his case for why authors and politicians could form a respectful alliance. The senator indulged in easy jokes. ("The only fiction to which many modern politicians turn their hand is the party platform.") But he also spoke with an idealism that, four years later, would define his presidential campaign. In America, he pointed out, writers and elected officials shared a "common ancestry," starting with polymaths like Thomas Jefferson and extend-

After the National Book Awards, Kennedy chatted with the winners: W. H. Auden, John O'Hara, and Herbert Kubly (left to right).

ing to politically vigilant scribes like Harriet Beecher Stowe. They shared similar goals—defending free speech, of course, but baser ones as well. "The politician and the author," Kennedy said, "are motivated by a common incentive—public approval. 'How many books will I sell?' asks the author. 'How many votes will I get?' asks the politician."

Today, the link between political success and best-seller status seems more intimate than ever. In fact, "How many books will I sell?" has become one of the better answers to "How many votes will I get?" Writing a book before a presidential run, or writing a book after a presidency has ended, is now mandatory in American politics. These books stir up as much excitement as most compulsory entertainment. They generate eye rolls. They feel at once modern and exhausted.

This reaction is wrong, for several reasons. First, it's trite. (The *New York Times* was rolling its eyes back in 1936: "The brave words spoken by presidential candidates, even by those who aspire to be candidates, have a habit of drawing together to form a book.") Second, it flattens a rich tradition of forgotten books and, just as much, forgotten consequences. Presidents have written books that won long-shot campaigns, that made or remade political images, that legitimized America to its most worldly critics, that critiqued America to its most patriotic supporters, that revealed the White House's deepest secrets—all while creating reliable media frenzies. Present-day pundits, biographers, and historians have, for the most part, ignored these books and their impact.

Contemporary readers didn't, and that's another problem with the eye rolling: it erases a durable and distinctly American desire to know more about one's politicians, past and present. For decades, international surveys have shown that Americans outpace the residents of other democracies in terms of discussing politics, joining political organizations, and contacting elected officials—what political scientists call America's "attitudinal advantage."*

These behaviors are the external side of democracy; reading is the internal side. Before participation, before organization, before the ballot, there comes an opportunity to learn about leaders and ideas. That's the theory, at least, a theory stated again and again in the diaries and letters and book margins of America's readers: a commitment to self-improvement

*Where America trails those democracies is turnout, which lags because of the onerous and intentional structure of its elections. The rules that make it harder to vote—many of them passed in the last few years—overwhelm this "attitudinal advantage." America's voting system is now one of the least American things about it.

and self-education, each as a step toward self-government; a didactic taste for facts; a nation of nonfiction. Books have been the best way to do this. They're a medium that's both personal, in their bond between author and reader, and egalitarian, in their portable uniformity. Richard Nixon recorded a lot of things in the White House, and one of them was a list of resolutions he jotted on a legal pad. In addition to noting his need for more exercise and more optimism, Nixon wrote: "Need for more reading."

America's passion for sensible books extends to (and helps explain) its passion for history and biography. The custom of reading obsessively about the founders—and of wanting to read them in their own words—started soon after the Constitution went into effect in 1789. A love of American history is as old as America itself, and each generation has tried to define its values, and to sell its policies, by citing that history. It's another national specialty—what a British historian once called "the peculiarly American version of the space-time continuum." Americans like to collapse the past and the present, to read for serious ideas and for hero worship. They read books that grapple with the meaning of "all men are created equal"; they read books that deify the man who wrote that phrase.

That tension itself feels rather American, and not just because it leads to more participation, more lessons, more books. The importance of reading and reasoning has been preached during the nation's founding and frequently during its defense: the Civil War, World War I, World War II. During the Cold War, the editor of *Time* declared, "A good citizen is a good reader." The reverse is also true, with the most bookish Americans being 31 percent more likely to vote than their peers. In other words, a good reader is also a good citizen.

This book tells the story of how, when, and why America's presidents began writing books—and why Americans have been so consistently drawn to reading them. The modern idea of an author (powerful and isolated, reaching a national audience) is a new one. So is the modern idea of a president (powerful and isolated, setting the national agenda). These ideas grew up together, but it took time. In 1859, when Abraham Lincoln was planning his presidential bid, he wrote an autobiographical sketch to shape the early coverage. Journalists and partisans usually adapted such sketches; publishing a candidate's own words would make him seem disqualifyingly vain. Just to be sure, though, Lincoln attached a cover letter to his sketch: "Of course it must not appear to have been written by myself."

Today, it's the opposite: politicians insist the books they don't write

PART I

GEORGE WASHINGTON TO JAMES MONROE

CHAPTER ONE

In and Out of Control: Thomas Jefferson and the First Campaign Book

John Adams was in a fine mood—quite an accomplishment for any eighteenth-century traveler. It was the spring of 1785, and Adams, his wife, Abigail, and their daughter, Nabby, had spent the past few months in Paris, with John serving as a diplomat for that strange new entity, the United States of America. The Adamses had loved their time in Paris, going to ballets and balloon ascents and lively dinner parties with Thomas Jefferson, America's minister to France. Now Congress had appointed Adams the nation's first minister to England, and that meant moving the family from Paris to London—six days of jouncing in a cramped and dusty carriage, then pitching in a cramped and soggy boat.

The weather made the trip even worse, as France was suffering through a terrible drought. "The country is a heap of ashes," Adams wrote from the road. There was no grass in the fields, no vegetables at the inns. Outside the carriage, he counted skeletal sheep. Inside, however, Adams found something to keep his family merrily distracted. Before they'd left Paris, Jefferson had presented them with a copy of his new book, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, which had arrived from the printer only days before. The travelers couldn't stop reading Jefferson's book aloud to each other. "It is our meditation all the day long," Adams wrote to Jefferson. "The passages upon slavery are worth diamonds." Abigail and Nabby chimed in with favorite passages of their own, but on one thing they all agreed: Jefferson's *Notes*, Adams predicted, "will do its author and his country great honor."

Adams was only half right. *Notes* did bring great honor to Jefferson's country. It wasn't just the first book written by a future president—it was one of the two most important titles written by *any* eighteenth-century American, along with Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography*. At a time when

America's literary culture was anemic, when new books were expensive and rare, Jefferson's *Notes* offered a vivid, original, and internationally acclaimed portrait of his new nation. "The American states," one author observed, "are, in a literary view, no more than a province of the British empire." Jefferson's book defended his province to readers around the world, making its case through its arguments and its very existence.

Jefferson was the perfect person to write such a book. Once, when a doctor visited him at the White House, he noticed the president had left three books on a fireplace mantle: an Enlightenment encyclopedia, in French; a volume of Tacitus, in Latin; and an edition of Plato, in Greek. Jefferson loved and relied on books more than perhaps any other president. And yet, bizarrely enough, Jefferson has never received full credit for the book he actually wrote. *Notes* took a twisted path to publication, beginning as a private document and debuting in a semipirated French translation. By the end of his life, Jefferson claimed the process had always appalled him, and his biographers have nodded along. But that's not true. Jefferson worked on *Notes* for years and fought to control its tiniest details. He wanted to publish his book, which provides his most polished statements on politics, religion, art, war, and, yes, slavery and race.

The trouble came when his book collided with his presidential ambitions. Despite Adams's happy forecast and the book's enormous success, *Notes* ultimately brought its author not honor but misery. Without intending to, Jefferson wrote what would become America's first campaign book. He also inaugurated a second tradition—that of politicians being haunted by their past, especially by anything they were foolish enough to preserve in print.

SEDUCTION! REVOLUTION! MURDER! BOOKS!

Thomas Jefferson was born in 1743, the son of a prosperous Virginia planter. Shadwell, the Jeffersons' plantation, had a library of forty or fifty books, and according to family lore, Jefferson had read every one of them by the time he turned five. Stories like that show Jefferson was exceptional not just in his ability but in his access to books. Even a library of fifty books would have been one of the biggest in the county, and it was radically larger than the average American's. To appreciate Jefferson's literary passion—and to understand his nation's literary origins—it makes sense to start not with him but with a forgotten American named Devereux Jarratt.

Jarratt was born a decade before Jefferson, and like him, he was a tall, thin, ambitious, Virginian. Yet Jarratt seemed different in every other way. His father died when he was six, and while Jarratt's older brother, a carpenter, sent him to a plain, one-room schoolhouse, he also kept him home whenever the family needed help—and pulled him out for good after their mother died. At twelve or thirteen, Jarratt was finished with formal schooling. He didn't know how or even what to continue studying on his own. "Philosophy, rhetoric, logic," he later recalled, "there were no books on such subjects among us."

Jarratt finally tracked down a book of arithmetic, and every afternoon, while the horse he plowed with was grazing, he would peruse it for an hour or two. He soon earned a reputation for his skill with numbers, and a man from Albemarle County—the same county where the Jeffersons lived—offered to set Jarratt up as a teacher, in a plain, one-room schoolhouse of his own. Even there, books remained precious. The new teacher rode six miles and crossed a river just to borrow a single book about the New Testament. "As I had no candle," he wrote, "my custom was in an evening to sit down flat on the hearth, erect the volume on the end of a chest which stood near, and by the light of the fire read till near midnight."

Devereux Jarratt's experiences were far more typical than Thomas Jefferson's. In the eighteenth century, each stop on the literary supply chain—the person who wrote the book, the people who printed it, the people who distributed it, and, finally, the person who read it—came with its own trials and contradictions.

Religion organized everyday life in colonial America, which meant it also organized what people read. The best sellers were Bibles, sermon collections, exegetical texts. Even the secular hits focused on self-discipline and self-improvement—and rarely indulged in something as extravagant as fiction. "I myself used to have too great a hankering after those amusing studies," James Madison admitted to an old friend. "But I began to discover that they deserve but a moderate portion of a mortal's time." Instead, mortals like Madison sought out pious textbooks (the *New England Primer*) and practical guides (*The Advantages and Disadvantages of a Married Life*). Benjamin Franklin, who originally made his name as a Philadelphia printer, published *Every Man His Own Doctor*, then followed it up with *Every Man His Own Lawyer*. The next entry, Franklin joked, would be *Every Man His Own Priest*.

No other book summed up this period's tastes better than the humble almanac. In fact, colonial Americans bought more almanacs than they did

Carey and his fellow printers filled those shelves—and kept their businesses afloat—by selling everything but books. Customers could flip through newspapers or brisk political pamphlets, buy stationery or sealing wax, pick out a new quill pen (the best ones came from geese and swans), even purchase dry goods like pickled sturgeon or Spanish snuff. Customers could also buy books, but given the problems with both supply and demand, most printers preferred to import already finished volumes from England, a few at a time. Even when they did gamble on printing a book in-house—in an edition of, say, five hundred copies—American printers often chose to produce their own versions of popular British books. There was no copyright, international or otherwise, so colonial printers banked on already established hits.

All of this contributed to a constricted literary culture—and even that culture was available only to the few who lived in big cities, with their print shop–bookstores and sporadic circulating libraries. Most Americans lived far outside those cities, in farms, on frontiers, or near slapdash county seats. Since the postal service mostly declined to deliver something as heavy as a book, rural access to literature came in the occasional visits of traveling booksellers, people like Mason Weems.

Short, bald, a quill pen stuck in his hat, Weems traveled the countryside in a book-laden wagon he dubbed the Flying Library. Whenever he pulled into a town, he hollered out: "Seduction! Revolution! Murder!" It was a strange thing for a former Episcopalian minister to say, but Weems now worked for Mathew Carey, and the solemn printer and his spastic salesman made for a delightfully mismatched team. It wasn't easy to transport books from city to city, which added one more challenge to selling five hundred copies of a new edition. So Weems would fill his Flying Library with an assortment of Carey's titles, then drift from New York to North Carolina, from the Pennsylvania mountains to the Georgia coast. In addition to the books in his wagon, the parson would sell subscriptions to other titles. Subscription bookselling—of upcoming titles and hard-to-move stock, of luxury editions and everyday volumes—became a phenomenon in America, with sellers like Weems taking the order now and figuring out the payment and delivery later.

It made for a difficult life, as Weems explained in one of his frequent letters to Carey: "Roused from sweet sleep at one o'clock in the morning . . . my ears startled with female screams . . . [my] whole sense stunned with rattling wheels, cracking whips, splashing water." But Weems always found the energy to sell. (Indeed, in his letter he was selling Carey on

upping his commission.) To ensure the largest crowds, Weems timed his visits with local events—horse races, agricultural fairs, even election days. One time, while he and his wagon were stopped at a Virginia tavern, a fellow clergyman spotted a copy of Thomas Paine's *Age of Reason*, an atheistic urtext. The man began waving the book at Weems, demanding to know how he could sell such filth. "Behold," Weems said, "the antidote"—and handed him another available title, a noted minister's rebuttal.

Weems spent decades traveling, selling, and penning his dispatches from the frontlines of capitalism. What drove him, besides his zeal for profits, was his belief in the potential of a national reading culture. Weems wanted to provide books that appealed to (and were affordable to) regular readers. "Our country," he wrote to Carey, "is made up of that small fry." American literature could not yet reach those readers; it was too sober, too pricey, too diffuse. The best the country could offer were strange characters and small innovations—Ben Franklin and his proverbs, Mason Weems and his wagon, Devereux Jarratt and his book of math.

There's one last link in the literary supply chain: the author. In the eighteenth century, however, this link seemed the least important of all. Authorship, as an idea, still owed more to the age of manuscripts than to

A traveling bookseller, illustrated here in a nineteenth-century engraving, offered a volume for sale while a sack of others sat on the ground beside him.

the age of print—to a time when texts circulated among small, elite audiences; when poets relied on patrons or personal wealth; when the ideal authorial pose was one of befuddled modesty. The Enlightenment was changing this, but slowly. Descartes's *Discourse on Method*, Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature*, Locke's *Two Treatises on Government*: each of these seminal works appeared at first without their authors' names.

Authorship felt even more suspect in a republican government like America's. "No man is a true republican," declared one pamphleteer, "[who] will not give up his single voice to that of the public." America wanted to be a nation defined by the many, not the few—a place animated by ideas, not identities. For that reason, many of its writers chose to play up their humility and to publish under pseudonyms. Today the *Federalist Papers* is seen as the timeless work of James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, and John Jay. When those essays appeared in the 1780s—first in a series of newspapers, then as a two-volume book—the author was listed only as "Publius." Political insiders knew and cared about the men behind the pseudonym. Inside his personal copy, Jefferson made note of the numbers written by "Mr. Jay" and "Mr. Madison," then added "the rest of the work by Alexander Hamilton." But individual fame and daring creativity were not, or not supposed to be, the point.

It was easy for authors to be modest when they considered their legal and economic reality. While Royall Tyler worked as a lawyer in Vermont, he also wrote some of America's most significant early books. After he published one of the nation's first novels, *The Algerine Captive*—anonymously, of course—Tyler decided to write something that might actually sell: a practical textbook. A Boston printer promised him $250, until, in the middle of the project, he slashed that offer to some free copies of the final book. Printers were constantly abusing their writers—not just by cutting their pay, of which there was little to begin with, but by rewriting their words or mangling their layouts or simply lifting and reprinting their work. The author was rarely consulted about any of this. "If writing for the public is attended with no more profit," Tyler wrote, "I had rather . . . explain unintelligible law to Green Mountain jurors."

And yet a few Americans were beginning to see the value in creating a class of full-time writers. As the Revolutionary War wound down, Joel Barlow, someone who, like Tyler, was a professional who scribbled on the side, urged Congress to pass a national copyright law. "We have few gentlemen of fortune," Barlow wrote, "sufficient to enable them to spend a whole life in study." His goal wasn't fairness. He believed a new nation

needed authors because it needed advocates. There was a reason Europeans didn't take Americans very seriously. "America has convinced the world of her importance in a political and military line," Barlow wrote. But that wasn't enough. "A literary reputation," he wrote, "is necessary in order to complete her national character."

HOW JEFFERSON READ

Thomas Jefferson spent his whole life as one of Barlow's "gentlemen of fortune." While he had enough wealth to experiment with authorship, Jefferson chose to focus on an equally unstable career: politics. His heart still belonged to books. At Monticello, his plantation of five thousand acres and more than a hundred slaves, visitors marveled at his ever-evolving library—a collection that, at its peak, included nearly seven thousand volumes spilling across several rooms. Jefferson's idiosyncratic architecture gave those rooms high arches and short, angled walls, and that meant custom-built pine bookcases, each one nine feet high. "I cannot live without books," Jefferson famously wrote to Adams. But he couldn't work without them either. While books could provide pleasure or connect readers, Jefferson saw them above all as tools, just like the hammer and plane used to build those pine bookcases.

A gentleman of fortune could count on a good education. Growing up, Jefferson studied with a series of fine teachers. ("A correct classical scholar," he remembered of one.) In 1760, he headed to the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, immersing himself in the Enlightenment's best books and ideas before turning to an apprenticeship in law. Eventually Jefferson returned to Albemarle County to practice, and in 1768, its voters made him a member of Virginia's House of Burgesses.

A few years later, Jefferson married Martha Wayles Skelton, a frail but graceful widow. Martha also loved books—she was "a constant reader," remembered a family member—and the couple shared an affection for Laurence Sterne's novel *Tristram Shandy*. Jefferson had been keeping a commonplace book since he was a teenager, copying out his favorite passages from Homer, Virgil, Shakespeare, and others. At some point he added a passage from Sterne's novel to his commonplace book, a passage that captured the intensity of the newlyweds' love. It began: "Time wastes too fast . . ."

Jefferson bought all kinds of books, keeping in ardent contact with

printers like Mathew Carey. One time, a traveling bookseller, a man trying to find subscribers for a new history of Greece, knocked on Monticello's front door. He was shocked when Jefferson answered it himself. "I told him of my work," the seller remembered, "and he said it was a very bad work." When it came to books, though, Jefferson usually said yes. On the wall of his library, he nailed a piece of paper listing the twelve categories he used to organize his shelves, including ethics, mathematics, and modern history. The list was for guests; Jefferson created an even more intricate system for himself. Organizing books alphabetically, he believed, might hobble his work when he forgot an author's name, and Jefferson liked to control every variable as both a writer and a reader. "After using a book," he told a visitor, "it will be better to leave them on a table in the room." He didn't want to risk a volume being misplaced.

Over the years, Jefferson and Martha hosted many fellow readers at Monticello. A good example was François-Jean de Chastellux, a prominent Frenchman. Chastellux kept a careful diary, and he started his account of Monticello with a continental cheap shot: Jefferson, he quipped, must be "the first American who has consulted the fine arts to know how he should shelter himself from the weather." Yet the visitor was clearly charmed by owner and home. While at first he found Jefferson a bit cold, they soon fell into an intense and bookish rhythm—something that was part dance and part duel, that, as Chastellux put it, "made four days pass away like so many minutes." Their conversations would leap from politics to philosophy to the mechanics of English verse. One night, after Martha had gone to bed, they landed on a Scottish poet, and Jefferson and Chastellux started volleying their favorite passages, back and forth, until Jefferson sent for his copy of the poet's works. A bowl of punch had also materialized, and Jefferson opened the book next to the bowl. "By their mutual aid," Chastellux wrote, "the night far advanced imperceptibly upon us."

Despite his impossibly varied interests, Jefferson relied on his library to direct him—to help him concentrate and refine his ideas. One of his many paradoxes was that he was a disciplined dilettante. He didn't buy hulking folios that looked good on the shelf; he bought octavo-sized volumes that fit his hands, what he called "books of a handy size." Books, after all, were tools. "Sometimes," one of Jefferson's slaves remembered, "[he] would have twenty of them down on the floor at once."

Politics left less time for reading, family, and friends. The relationship between Britain and its colonies had always been one-sided, and now it was becoming strained. In 1773, some Massachusetts colonists hosted

though he also found time to patronize Philadelphia's bookstores. One year later, when the congress formed a committee to draft what would become the Declaration of Independence, the Virginian was an obvious choice.

It was a five-person committee, with Jefferson joined by Franklin, Adams, and two others. One of them needed to write a first draft. "You shall do it," Adams told Jefferson. Jefferson protested. Adams insisted. Why? Jefferson asked.

"Reasons enough," Adams replied. Jefferson hailed from the largest colony, for one. Jefferson was popular. Finally: "You can write ten times better than I can."

Jefferson wrote the draft in his rented rooms on the edge of town—on the second floor of a plain brick building, working on a lap desk he'd designed himself. The committee made plenty of edits. (Where Jefferson had written, "We hold these truths to be sacred and undeniable," Franklin suggested a simpler finish: "We hold these truths to be self-evident.") The full congress made even more. Jefferson sat and listened to his colleagues' suggestions—"mutilations," he called them.* He hated ceding even a sliver of authorial control. Still, he and the other delegates were proud of and terrified by the text he'd written.

That text, and Jefferson's political ascent, was shaped by his reading. It wasn't just that he drew ideas from Enlightenment and American sources—so that Locke's "life, liberty, and estate" joined with George Mason's "life and liberty and pursuing and obtaining happiness" to become "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." Jefferson's library created his celebrated style, first in *Summary View* and then in the Declaration. The author liked to tell a story about Patrick Henry, his fellow Virginian. Henry once borrowed two volumes of Hume, promising Jefferson he'd read them over the winter. In the spring, Henry returned the books, having made it no further than page thirty in the first volume. "I have often been astonished at his command of proper language," Jefferson would say of Henry, still not quite believing it. "He read nothing, and had no books." Jefferson needed books to think, legislate, and persuade. To him, the tools of a writer and the tools of a politician were the same.

On July 4, the congress approved the final Declaration. A Philadelphia

*Franklin tried to distract the author by telling him an old story from his time as printer. One of his friends, a hatmaker, had drawn up an elaborately descriptive sign for his shop. He decided to ask their circle for feedback, only to watch them nitpick the sign until all that was left were the friend's name and a picture of a hat.

printer worked late into the night, producing about two hundred copies as a poster-sized broadside—the first public version of the Declaration's text, the one most people would see in newspapers, read outside courthouses, or hear recited aloud. The only names on the broadside were John Hancock, the congress's president; Charles Thomson, its secretary; and John Dunlap, the printer. While the war with Britain lumbered forward, Jefferson's authorial act stayed behind, a secret of those Philadelphia sessions. It would be many years before regular Americans knew who actually wrote the Declaration. In 1789, for instance, a new book, *A History of the American Revolution*, described the Declaration as an "act of the united colonies"; it made no mention of Jefferson. If he wanted a literary triumph instead of a political one, he would need to try again.

HOW JEFFERSON WROTE

In the fall of 1780, a French official named François Barbé-Marbois sent a questionnaire to America and its new states. The queries were a blend of tourism bureau and chamber of commerce. What plants and fruit flourish in your region? How many seaports do you have? How did you set up your laws and courts? France was aiding America in its war against Britain and, naturally enough, wanted to know more about its ally. Most of the thirteen states ignored the questionnaire; a few sent perfunctory replies. But when Jefferson learned of Marbois's request, he realized it could provide cover for something else he'd been mulling: an ambitious project that would survey his country and its strengths. He would spend parts of the next five years on his manuscript, plus another two getting it published—years that overlapped with some of the most important and infamous moments of his life.

First, he needed to finish his term as governor of Virginia. It was a chaotic time, with Washington's Yorktown victory still a year in the future, but Jefferson was already starting his research. From Richmond, the state capital, he described his early efforts to a friend: "I am at present busily employed for Monsieur Marbois without his knowing it and have to acknowledge to him the mysterious obligation for making me much better acquainted with my own country than I ever was before." A few weeks later, Benedict Arnold and a British army captured Richmond, forcing Jefferson to flee.

It was hardly a writer's life, and Jefferson planned to retire from politics—

to devote more time to Martha and their children and also to keep working on his answers to the questionnaire. At Monticello, he could peruse his books and his papers, a collection he called "most rare and valuable . . . especially of what relates to America." The writing went slowly. (The family had to flee Monticello briefly as well.) But on December 20, 1781, Jefferson sent Marbois about forty pages of material. That same day, he sent a second copy to Charles Thomson, still the congress's secretary, asking for advice on how the text might be "more fully handled." Jefferson was already planning to expand and, it seemed, to share.

Jefferson's early retirement frustrated his friends. "The present," James Monroe wrote in an acerbic letter, "is generally conceived to be an important era." But Jefferson saw his literary project as its own kind of political act. While his earliest drafts do not survive, he ultimately wrote a book of twenty-three chapters that, following the questionnaire, he titled "Queries." This structure preserved an air of modesty, of obligation, and *Notes on the State of Virginia* does cover the basics of its titular state. Yet Jefferson also revised Marbois's queries, shuffling them silently and even inventing new ones until the format allowed him to write a sprawling book about his sprawling enthusiasms.

By far the longest chapter, Query VI, centered on animals, a topic never mentioned in the questionnaire. One of Marbois's countrymen, the comte de Buffon, had popularized a theory that animals in the New World were smaller, weaker, "degenerated," in part because their climate was wetter and colder than Europe's. Buffon's boosters took his idea further. After all, they reasoned, if America's climate was hurting its animals, it must be hurting its humans too. This belief in American inferiority appeared everywhere. One time, Franklin, who was serving as a diplomat to France, went to dinner with a mix of local and American guests. As they sat around the table, a French intellectual began declaiming about degeneracy. Franklin listened, then proposed an experiment. "Let both parties rise," he said, knowing his compatriots were on the tall side, "and we will see on which side nature has degenerated."

While Franklin could win a dinner party, America needed a more lasting response. Jefferson began collecting data on American wildlife for his book. He made long lists comparing the elk to the caribou. He compiled a table of every known bird in Virginia. He drafted a questionnaire of his own—sixteen queries on the past and present of the American moose. Jefferson wrote to the country's best hunters and explorers, telling them he would pay whatever it took for them to ship him promising samples.

He began receiving letters like this: "I killed a bear, not fat, which weighed 410 lb. after he was quartered, and have seen much larger." One day, while strolling past a shop, Jefferson spotted a freakishly big panther skin. He marched in and bought it on the spot.

Jefferson used this material to dismantle the theory of degeneracy, working through Buffon's claims in a series of logical steps. He continued to write about other topics for other queries, researching flood levels and personally inspecting Native American burial mounds. "All prospects of future happiness," he explained to Chastellux, could come from "domestic and literary objects." On May 8, 1782, Martha gave birth to the couple's sixth child. It had been a difficult pregnancy, and afterward Martha's health turned even worse. As spring faded into summer, then fall, Jefferson hovered over his bedridden wife, feeding her meals and giving her medicine. "He was never out of calling," one of their daughters remembered. "When not at her bed side he was writing in a small room, which opened immediately at the head of her bed."

That writing was almost certainly pages from *Notes*, and it's possible Jefferson showed them to his wife. Theirs had always been a literary marriage. At some point during her illness, Martha asked for Jefferson's old commonplace book. Perhaps the couple paged through it together; perhaps she turned to a particular page on her own. Either way, as her strength faded, Martha began copying their lines from *Tristram Shandy* in a faint hand: "Time wastes too fast . . ." She stopped midsentence—because of exhaustion, or emotion, or her death on September 6. Eventually Jefferson finished the passage. In a firmer hand but with a broken heart, he wrote, "And every time I kiss thy hand to bid adieu, every absence which follows it, are preludes to that eternal separation which we are shortly to make!"

Jefferson had discovered a new use for books—as a tool for grieving. After his wife's passing, he isolated himself for weeks, "as dead to the world," he admitted, "as she was whose loss occasioned it." Slowly, however, the widower returned to life, in part because he returned to his book.

Notes can feel strange and messy to modern readers. There are a *lot* of lists and tables, each one a selling point in the Age of the Almanac. Freed from the more narrowly political purview of works like *A Summary View*, Jefferson roamed among his interests. He wrote about literature, rebutting the idea—French, of course—that America hadn't developed enough poets. Since Jefferson's network of bear hunters didn't have many reports on local authors, he turned analytical instead. How long, he wondered, had Greece existed before it produced a Homer? (How long, for that mat-

ter, had France existed before it produced a Voltaire?) Jefferson then pivoted beyond poetry. "In war, we have produced a Washington," he wrote. "In physics, we have produced a Franklin." Finally, he cited America's population, which lagged well behind those of the Franklin-less England and France. "Of the geniuses which adorn the present age," Jefferson concluded, "America contributes its full share."

In Query IV, on mountains, Jefferson actually attempted to write literature. He knew he wasn't a creative writer. (As he put it, "Nature had not formed me for a continuator of Sterne.") But while revising his manuscript, Jefferson decided to draw on his literary reading to describe the spot where the Potomac and Shenandoah Rivers came together, a scene, he wrote, "worth a voyage across the Atlantic." On a sheet of paper that he would paste into his text, Jefferson used the second person to transport his reader: "You stand on a very high point of land." To your right, the Shenandoah; to your left, the Potomac—and up ahead, the notch they slowly sawed into the Blue Ridge Mountains, through which you can glimpse "a small catch of smooth blue horizon." It would become one of the book's most beloved passages.

What held the various queries together was their approach. *Notes*

One of the most celebrated passages in *Notes* described the confluence of the Shenandoah and Potomac Rivers, depicted here in a nineteenth-century engraving.

arrogance; he also worried about this book's content, especially its discussion of emancipation and expatriation. To James Monroe, who received one of the five initial copies, Jefferson confessed, "I fear the terms in which I speak of slavery . . . [may] do more harm than good."

The vagaries of transatlantic communication meant Madison did not reply until November. He adored the book and urged Jefferson to distribute it, though he understood his concerns about slavery. (Madison disguised part of his letter in a careful code.) But he was too late, as Jefferson's enthusiasm had overwhelmed his patience. The author had already fired off more than a dozen additional copies to readers in England, Italy, and France. Inside each volume, he wrote a humble inscription. In Franklin's copy of *Notes*, Jefferson downplayed "the circumstances under which they were written, and the talents of the writer"; he implored him "to put them into the hands of no person on whose care and fidelity he cannot rely." But Jefferson was clearly excited—and now he had knowingly put his book (and its author) on a trajectory toward publication.

The evidence of his excitement is conclusive. It started with his decision to privately print two hundred copies—a bold figure in an era when five hundred copies of an original book made for a solid run. It continued with his promiscuous circulation, with Jefferson handing out at least twenty-nine copies by the end of 1785. His friends, who lacked Jefferson's self-deprecating discipline, talked about publication as a given. When Adams shared his early copy of *Notes* with another friend, he described it as "not yet to be published." Even Jefferson admitted he liked the idea of excerpts appearing in French periodicals. "Make any extracts you please," he told Chastellux, who'd also received an early copy and said it reminded him of their crackling conversations at Monticello. Jefferson's letters from this period don't contain doubts or fears, except in regard to a few specific topics like slavery; instead, they shine with possibility. Should he send *Notes* to America's best college students? Jefferson wondered. Should he have his book discussed at Parisian salons? (The French were already doing that on their own.) Should he circulate it with the American Philosophical Society? Stock it at the public library in Philadelphia? Publish it—really publish it, after all?

Before Jefferson could decide on this final step, he lost control, briefly, of his book. In the fall of 1785, one of *Notes*' recipients died. Pierre-Théophile Barrois, a respected French publisher, pounced on the dead man's copy and began plotting a speedy translation. It wasn't the fairest move, but given the period's literary conventions (and given Jefferson's

celebrity), it was a predictable one. Jefferson fretted at the thought of his prose in the hands of Barrois's "hireling translator." An old friend offered to bail him out. The abbé Morellet, whom Jefferson had also sent an early copy of *Notes*, suggested he might step in as translator. While Jefferson remained nervous about publication, he was grateful and even honored by Morellet's proposition, and the two went to work.

As an old man, Jefferson liked to complain about this translation—"mutilated," he called it, the same word he used to describe the edits to his Declaration. During 1786 and 1787, though, he threw himself into each step of the edition, exercising an astonishing degree of supervision for an eighteenth-century author. He fussed over the paper, the binding, even the size of the type. He reviewed Morellet's translations, line by line. He ordered an innovative and fabulously detailed map of Virginia that would fold out of the finished book. The finest engravers lived in London, and Jefferson personally hired one of the city's best. Still, no one could care as much as Jefferson cared himself. "I have got through about two thirds of the map," he wrote to his British contact, after receiving an early version, "and have a list of 172 errors. . . . I reckon only those which are material. Small and immaterial changes of orthography I do not correct."

London was on Jefferson's mind for other reasons. He knew another enterprising printer might translate the forthcoming French edition back into English. "I am now at a loss what to do as to England," he wrote to Madison. "Every thing, good or bad, is thought worth publishing there." Madison pushed him to issue *Notes* in its original form, and Jefferson agreed to an edition of one thousand copies with John Stockdale, a printer from whom he frequently bought books. The author remained just as demanding, reminding Stockdale that there should not be "a tittle altered, added, nor omitted."

By the summer of 1787, Jefferson and Stockdale were finishing their final details, including the author's compensation, which mostly amounted to some free copies of the book. While Jefferson was waiting on those volumes, he welcomed one of his daughters to live with him in Paris. She was accompanied by one of the family's slaves, a fourteen-year-old named Sally Hemings. Thanks to DNA testing and careful scholarly work, it now seems clear that during their time in Paris, Jefferson began sleeping with Hemings and impregnated her. Hemings and Jefferson eventually had at least six children. Many years later, one of them would describe her as "Mr. Jefferson's concubine."

Both of Jefferson's editions appeared in 1787 as *Notes on the State of*

Virginia, Written by Thomas Jefferson, and as *Observations sur la Virginie, par M. J.* (though everyone understood it was Jefferson). The author carefully tracked their sales and reviews. At a time when American books struggled to make an impact in America, much less abroad, *Notes* reached all the right European readers. In Germany, a periodical translated and published much of the text. In Britain, Stockdale advertised *Notes* in more than seventy newspapers. One of the country's most prominent magazines, the *Monthly Review*, praised the book and its "ingenious author" for "vindicating . . . North America against the depreciations of Buffon."

Buffon's homeland remained the key audience. How gratifying it must have been, then, for Jefferson to open the first June issue of *Le Mercure de France*, Paris's leading journal, and discover a long and ecstatic review. Jefferson, the critic wrote, had produced "one of the small number of truly instructive books." His critique of Buffon was "a model of good logic and excellent discussion." The review ranked Jefferson alongside the beloved Franklin. "I end," the critic wrote, "by allowing the author himself to speak with eloquence." He then quoted an extended passage from *Notes*, a passage announcing America's postwar readiness to thrive on the international stage. "Our interest will be to throw open the doors of commerce," Jefferson promised, "giving perfect freedom to all persons for the vent of whatever they may choose to bring into our ports, and asking the same in theirs."

THE FIRST CAMPAIGN BOOK

A few months after *Notes* appeared in England and France, Jefferson joined the many other authors who'd watched the New World pirate their books. Jefferson and Stockdale had talked about shipping hundreds of copies to America, but the author began receiving updates from home: his book was being cited by the *Federalist Papers*, excerpted in periodicals across the country, and celebrated for its debunking of America's European critics. ("We are flattered," Joel Barlow admitted to Jefferson, "with the idea of seeing ourselves vindicated.") Soon an American printer brought out *Notes* in an unauthorized edition, and it continued to be widely read. When George Washington replied to a Scotsman who was thinking about immigrating, he directed him to Jefferson's book: "*Notes on Virginia* will give the best idea of this part of the continent," Washington promised. *Notes* had done well in Europe, but in America it became a

smash hit, going through at least nineteen editions in Jefferson's lifetime, an astounding run for a book of original nonfiction. While it's difficult to find sales numbers from this period, scholars estimate that *Notes* had sold at least twenty thousand copies by 1832—the equivalent of well over a half a million books today.

Jefferson might have preferred fewer sales, at least during election years. In fact, the nature of America's earliest campaigns ensured that *Notes* would cause lots of problems for its author, even if those problems were also one more way to gauge the book's impact.

America's first president didn't need to run since Washington was drafted—dragged, really—into the office in 1789. Washington's reluctance created a useful bearing for his fellow politicians. Campaigning was seen as ungentlemanly and gauche, usually for the same reasons authorship was seen as conceited. "Attempting to gain the affections or votes of the people," argued one congressman, "has oftener produced tyrants or dema-

Notes went through many American editions. This one—published by Mathew Carey in 1803—featured a portrait of the president as its frontispiece.

gogues . . . than patriots and good government." Candidates, and above all presidential candidates, did not go out and grubbily seek votes.

Washington's distrust of political parties proved less influential. As president, he worked not only with Adams, his vice president, and Hamilton, his secretary of the treasury, but with their ideological opponent in Jefferson, whom Washington asked to serve as his secretary of state. But this nonpartisan spirit did not last. When the president declined to seek a third term, it set up a clear battle of parties and ideas. The horse race metaphors appeared immediately. Washington's decision, an insider predicted, would be "a signal, like the dropping of a hat, for party racers to start." In the election of 1796, Adams faced off with Jefferson. It was just as true, however, to say that the Federalists faced off with the Democratic-Republicans.

Both candidates marooned themselves at home, avoiding even the appearance of active campaigning. At the state and local levels, their supporters canvassed on horseback and organized rowdy outdoor speeches; the pamphleteers picked sides. The electorate was limited almost entirely to white male taxpayers and landowners, and that was only the first antipopulist filter. Across much of the country, state legislatures chose the electors, who then chose the president. This secretive process stretched on for months, all in the hopes of curbing partisanship. It didn't work. "Party spirit is busy but not fiery," Adams wrote to his son, John Quincy. "The scribblers must have their itching scratched. Poor Jefferson is tortured as much as your better acquaintance. If he feels as little, he will not mind."

Adams and the Federalists won, barely. After four years in office—plenty of time for those scratches to fester—he met Jefferson again in a louder, meaner rematch. The election of 1800 featured more voters, more money, and more outrage. Things grew so heated that Hamilton decided to break with tradition by campaigning on behalf of the Federalists. "Hamilton harangues the astonished group," shuddered one newspaper, though of course newspapers had become as partisan as everything else. While Adams and Jefferson again stayed home, the incumbent's supporters sought his advice. Jefferson went a bit further, not just strategizing with allies but selecting and circulating his preferred pamphlets. But those actions had to occur stealthily. "Do not let my name be connected with the business," Jefferson insisted to Monroe.

Jefferson's official silence caused at least one unintended consequence: it turned his popular book into his proxy, something his critics could mine for damning details. With so many accusations hurtling around,

ing more materials, adding long marginal notes, and pondering a return to authorship. Jefferson heard from plenty of printers who wanted to try an updated *Notes* or even a prestigious set of his complete prose. In the end, he always turned them down. But the author stood by his work. "Experience," he explained to another printer, "has not altered a single principle."

Jefferson's second retreat from politics was more permanent. Late one night, near the end of the War of 1812, one of his grandsons rushed into Monticello, grasping a fresh newspaper. The Americans, led by a general named Andrew Jackson, had defeated the British in the Battle of New Orleans. The grandson knocked on Jefferson's bedroom door to see if the old man wanted to read the news. He declined. The victory could wait for breakfast.

The War of 1812 gave Jefferson another way to influence America's literary culture. In 1814, during their assault on Washington, British soldiers torched the Library of Congress. Given the wartime conditions on the Atlantic, and given the underdeveloped state of American publishing, the library seemed impossible to replace. But Jefferson had an idea. "You know my collection," he wrote to a government official. "I have been fifty years making it." Jefferson proposed selling his library to Congress at whatever price it deemed fair, and he enclosed a new catalogue he'd been designing, a rich intellectual atlas that organized his volumes into forty-four "chapters." Congress approved the purchase after some partisan squabbling, and in 1815 the first wagons left Monticello for Washington, creaking under the weight of the books. The Library of Congress decided to retain a modified version of the catalogue, and the chief librarian sent a copy to Jefferson. "You ask how I like the arrangement of the chapters," he replied. "Of course, you know, not so well as my own."

Jefferson's other big project from this period was a work now known as *The Jefferson Bible*. Proving his Federalist antagonists wrong, or maybe proving them right, Jefferson had long been fascinated with sifting the historical parts of Jesus's narrative from the supernatural ones. In the White House, he tried to make a reading copy of the Gospels that separated these strains, and he returned to the idea in retirement. He took a sharp blade and sliced up stacks of New Testaments, pasting the results in a new book on facing pages: Greek and Latin on the left, French and English on the right. It would be hard to overstate how scrupulous Jefferson was in this—how careful, how in control. When he came to Matthew 19:2, to take a small example, he saw this sentence: "And great multitudes followed him,

and he healed them there." Jefferson carefully cut out the miracle, *and he healed them there*, leaving behind the *him* and a hanging comma.

When Mathew Carey heard rumors about the project, he tried to make an offer. "Do you intend it for publication?" the printer asked. "Certainly not," Jefferson replied. "I write nothing for publication, and last of all things should it be on the subject of religion." The former president was easing into a routine of literary puttering. His famous red hair had faded to sandy, then gray. "I write now slowly, laboriously, painfully," he admitted. He spent his time reading alongside his grandchildren, sometimes pausing to share a favorite passage aloud, sometimes asking them what they were enjoying. Jefferson started assembling his last library. "Books," one granddaughter recalled, "were at all times his chosen companions."

It's a wonderful image—Jefferson surrounded by his books, still using them to work and to learn, the way he'd done his entire life. But it is static in another sense. Jefferson's life was saturated by slavery. His literary life was too. A slave, Sally Hemings's brother, had built Jefferson's custom pine bookcases. A slave had brought the bowl of punch Jefferson shared with Chastellux. When the traveling bookseller knocked on Monticello's door, it was only after a slave had intercepted him and escorted him there. While Jefferson liked to attack the idea of slavery, to denounce it as a "political and moral evil," it was not just an intellectual issue for him. Slavery was something that he saw—and experienced—every single day.

And yet, as Jefferson told one of those inquiring printers, experience had not moved him to change a single thing in his book, not even his dehumanizing descriptions of black people. Jefferson left behind a complex and frustrating record on slavery, one where biographers and historians can weigh his public actions and private statements. But he also left behind a book. In *Notes*, more than anywhere else, Jefferson said exactly what he wanted to say. His words are enough. Judge him by those. Mr. Jefferson has written; he has printed.

CHAPTER TWO

Autobiography's Founding Father: John Adams and the First Legacy Book

It was a December–December romance, with the seventy-six-year-old John Adams and the sixty-eight-year-old Thomas Jefferson setting aside their grudges, picking up their pens, and jump-starting their epistolary friendship. In letter after letter, the ex-presidents reminisced about their families, their favorite books, and their remarkable shared history. It was this final topic that occupied Adams when he sat down to write in the summer of 1815. He liked to write at a folding desk in his escritoire, a beautiful piece of furniture he'd acquired in France while a diplomat; now it filled a corner in his home in Quincy, Massachusetts, the estate he called Peacefield. Adams stored paper and ink in the escritoire's countless cubbies, and after locating some of each, he began. "Who shall write the history of the American Revolution?" he asked Jefferson skeptically. "Who can write it? Who will ever be able to write it?"

Once he finished the missive, Adams mailed it off and waited. Even as an old man, he hated this part. No one wrote as quickly, as passionately, as impulsively as John Adams. ("I have never copied, nor corrected," he once said of revising. "I understand it not.") During their late-life correspondence, Adams contributed more than twice as many letters as Jefferson, and by the time the Virginian got to his partner's posterity-minded query, he had three other letters to answer. "On the subject of the history of the American Revolution," Jefferson replied, "who ever will be able to write it? Nobody, except merely its external facts." Most of the participants hadn't taken careful notes, and for that reason, Jefferson considered it impossible to capture what had really happened inside the Pennsylvania State House.

It was a fair answer to a fair question. But Adams had not been entirely honest with his friend. After all, he knew at least one person who'd nar-

rated those famous events—Adams himself, who, more than a decade earlier, had tried to recount them not as a historian but as something far more radical: an autobiographer.

Adams left this work, more than four hundred pages in his hurried handwriting, unfinished and unpublished at the time of his death. Even today, his innovative autobiography remains largely overlooked, though Adams would say this is true of most of his prose. He could be an astonishingly productive writer once he found a proper goal. To meet the deadline for his *Defense of the Constitutions of Government of the United States of America*, the most important book he published in his lifetime, Adams worked long and lonely days, straight through Christmas. Abigail, his wife, finally went to a friend's for the holidays, where she worried her husband would forget to keep a fire going in the library. (On Christmas Day, he wrote to allay her fears. "If I am cold in the night," the busy author promised, "I will take a virgin to bed with me," with "virgin" being his nickname for their hot-water bottle.) Yet Adams could also be undisciplined. He could be distracted. As soon as any criticism appeared, he knew he'd get caught up in rebutting it. He couldn't help himself.

When it came to writing an autobiography, these weaknesses turned into strengths. Adams told almost no one about his book, which he began soon after losing the presidency in 1800. As he revisited his past—confronting what he called, in a very Adamsean line, "the torment of a perpetual volcano of slander, pouring on my flesh all my life"—he found that his emotions were pulling him to places much grimmer than he'd expected. Adams ended up writing a book that, by the standards of his time and even by the standards of today, is extraordinarily personal and pathologically petty. Hunched over that escritoire, he went to war with his enemies, marshaling a nasty intimacy that any score settler could admire—and, along the way, becoming the first president to try writing his own legacy.

BY FAITH, ALONE

Human beings have been writing autobiographically for centuries—something one can confirm in the works of Greece's Aratus, Rome's Julius Caesar, and Christianity's Saint Augustine. During the Renaissance, European aristocrats wrote a smattering of courtly memoirs. But these were exceptions. It wasn't until the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that autobiography began to develop into a wobbly genre, and America quickly

staked its claim, in part through the success of Franklin's *Autobiography*.* When Franklin's book first appeared, after his death in 1790, it became a transatlantic sensation. Still, Franklin had help. Autobiography, with its emphasis on self-invention and self-improvement, seemed ideally suited to America and its readers. It also provided the first genre in which American authors could compete on an international scale.

Early autobiographies were not as personal or revealing as their modern counterparts. Still, they were firmly democratic, especially in their range of authors. An explorer like John Smith could tell his story, and in *A General History of Virginia* he remembered (and perhaps embellished) the time he was saved by a princess named Pocahontas. Yet a Native American like Samson Occom could tell his story too. So could a Massachusetts woman like Mary Rowlandson and a black slave like Briton Hammon. Some of these titles—and there were scores more—became big sellers. Others did not appear until many years later, after their authors were dead. Either way, in America an autobiography was a book anyone could write and anyone could read.

What united most of these authors was their commitment to the Christian faith. No one did more to nurture a tradition of autobiography than the Puritans of New England. Puritan churches often required each person to apply for membership, and that meant fidgeting in front of the entire congregation and testifying about how God had moved in your heart. One seventeenth-century minister described the task like this: "Thus I was humbled, then thus I was called, then thus I have walked, though with many weaknesses since." It might sound formulaic, and it often was. But it still forced people to craft public and psychological stories about their lives: Thus *I* . . .

This impulse hummed everywhere in Puritan culture. In their diaries, men and women wrote about seeing God's majesty all around them, in the clouds of a thunderstorm or in a field of rippling grass. They saw their failures there too. One diarist recorded how, while feeding his chickens, he became overwhelmed with "what need I stood in of spiritual food." Thankfully, dia-

*One way to watch the genre wobble was in its terminology. The word *autobiography* did not become popular until the nineteenth century, and Franklin called his work-in-progress *Memoirs* and *History of My Life*, among other titles. Even when *autobiography* did enter the language, it meant something different than it does now. People who wrote "memoirs" wrote something more formal, a stately summation of their external careers; people who wrote "autobiographies," by contrast, wrote something more internal and literary. Today, these meanings have basically flipped, and since this book's terminology can't help but be retrospective, it will use the words interchangeably.

Jefferson visited Franklin at home, telling him how excited he was for the rumored book. "I cannot say much of that," the old man replied, before directing his grandson to hand Jefferson a stack of pages. "But I will give you a sample of what I shall leave."

Franklin died a few weeks later, and his book's afterlife (juicy excerpts, pirated translations) resembled that of Jefferson's *Notes*. Franklin's book sold even better, going through well over a hundred editions in its first few decades. At a time when autobiographies were especially tricky for public figures—for, say, a president, writing about his time in office—Franklin realized he could parallel his personal triumphs with his nation's. He made himself into a secular example, and when his friends read early passages, they praised precisely this quality. Franklin liked one of their letters so much he decided to include it in his text: "All that has happened to you," the reader marveled, "is also connected with the detail of the manners and situation of a rising people."

ADAMS VERSUS JEFFERSON

No one ever described Adams as a writer better than Adams did himself. In another letter to Jefferson, he summed up his style by alluding to a lush mountain in *The Iliad*: "Whenever I sit down to write to you," the author confided, "I am precisely in the situation of the woodcutter on Mount Ida: I cannot see wood for trees. So many subjects crowd upon me that I know not with which to begin." So Adams, as both a writer and a reader, would wander, chopping for a while on this tree, then trimming a branch on that one, then deciding to plant a sapling in the clearing up ahead.

The results often lacked polish and focus, and that's one reason Adams has never received enough credit for his literary talents. The bigger reason is Jefferson's shadow. Both men moved in a literary world that was incredibly small, sharing the same printers and bookstores and friends.* The club of ex-presidents was smaller still, and Adams's bookish side, while

*How small was the literary world? So small that Adams's daughter, Nabby, was briefly engaged to Royall Tyler, the Vermont novelist and lawyer. At the time, Adams was living alone in Paris, and Abigail informed him of the news in a letter (and admitted that when Tyler was a younger man, he had spent a few years in a "dissipated state"). Adams replied grumpily to both the engagement and the potential groom's profession: "My child is too young for such thoughts," the father fumed, "and I don't like your word 'dissipation' at all. . . . I am not looking out for a poet, nor a professor of belle letters."

extraordinary, would never measure up to Jefferson's. Adams was smart enough to see this. When writing to Jefferson, he sometimes changed the return address from "Peacefield" to "Montezillo"—a word, he explained, that conveyed not a large mountain ("Monticello") but a small hill.

The outline of Adams's early life can seem fairly standard for a New England striver. He was born in Massachusetts in 1735, and he could trace a branch of his family tree back to the *Mayflower* Pilgrims. But he was also the son of a farmer-slash-shoemaker, a boy with few connections who had to scrap as a student at Harvard, then as a small-town schoolteacher, and finally as a small-town lawyer. His appearance didn't stand out. (No one has described that better than Adams, either: America's second president, he wrote, looked "like a short, thick, fat Archbishop of Canterbury, seated at the table with a pen in his hand.") And yet what did stand out from the very beginning was Adams's startling ambition, his dissatisfaction with life's outline thus far—and his desire to write a bigger, better ending.

This came through clearest in Adams's diary. One day while he was still at Harvard, he folded a few sheets of paper and stitched them together with thread. It was a simple start to an incredible document he would keep, off and on, for decades, and his early entries bristled with the guilt and tabulations of a good Puritan. At twenty, he wrote, "I am now entering on another year, and I am resolved not to neglect my time." A few years later: "Another year is now gone and upon recollection, I find I have executed none of my plans." And again: "I am just entered on the twenty-sixth year of my life, and I think it is high time for a reformation." Adams could be relentless in his self-criticism, ridiculing himself for sleeping too late, for fretting about his clothes, for being socially awkward. Yet his motivating standard was not God and His plans but something more earthly—Adams's own lust for money, success, and fame. "Vanity," he wrote in another entry, "is my cardinal vice."

In his diary, Adams stoked and analyzed his ambitions with an honesty that no other founder can match. While his peers were practicing a pose of detachment (or, in Franklin's case, dancing cleverly behind that pose), Adams stared vanity in the face. Do authors, he once wondered in an essay, write books because of their "sense of duty" or "love of truth"? Hardly. "The universal object and idol of men of letters is reputation," Adams argued. "It is the notoriety, the celebration, which constitutes the charm."

This theory of literary motivation is worth keeping in mind since Adams's diary was fast evolving into the diary of a young writer. He'd

long been a diligent reader, and on trips to nearby Boston, he would stop at shops like the London Bookstore, a cosmopolitan outlet that also imported Irish linens and bottles of British beer. Despite his earnest efforts, Adams was not yet a wealthy man. But he started building a library that would eventually top three thousand volumes—still short of Jefferson's, of course, but one of the largest private collections in America. As Adams conceded to Abigail, whom he married in 1764, "I have spent an estate in books."

Adams got into arguments even with his books. In their margins, he would scribble quick judgments like "Sensible!" or "Curious! Curious!" He would go on extended rants, adding more than ten thousand handwritten words to his copy of a book by the early feminist Mary Wollstonecraft. Adams also planned to direct his energy outward, toward readers. "A pen is certainly an excellent instrument to fix a man's attention and to inflame his ambition," he admitted in his diary, and alongside his other entries he began making notes and drafting essays on the problem with

Adams liked to shop at the London Bookstore, which would have resembled this other Boston bookstore, illustrated in an eighteenth-century engraving. Note the quill pens hanging for sale on the doorpost, along with the bottles of ink in the window.

taverns and the best behavior for young ladies, the last of which was staunchly pro-bundling.

Tensions between Britain and its colonies would soon present Adams with more serious subjects. The political climate was darkening. (In 1769, a group of angry Bostonians ran the owner of the London Bookstore out of town.) Adams started a second literary habit that, like his diary, would persist for decades—writing brash pamphlets and essays, sometimes under pseudonyms like "Humphrey Ploughjogger."

In this, he parted ways with Jefferson. Although the Virginian had built his reputation on a well-received pamphlet, he mostly avoided the messy public sphere, where newspapers and magazines would steal each other's essays and print them next to news that took weeks or months to circulate. Jefferson, always worried about control, compared this environment to the chaotic sport of bear baiting, calling the colonial media "a bear-garden scene into which I have made it a point to enter on no provocation." Jefferson preferred to lure his allies into the arena, where they could battle for him. Adams did his own fighting. He engaged in real time with works like Thomas Paine's *Common Sense*, a king-bashing pamphlet that sold tens of thousands of copies—and seemed to incite an equal number of newspaper spats.

Once the Revolutionary War ended—and once Adams finished his adventures in diplomacy with Franklin and Jefferson in France—he and his family headed to London, where he would serve as the minister to England. In 1785, the Adamses moved into an elegant stone house on the corner of Grosvenor Square, where they spent their evenings reading together, with John and Abigail in easy chairs and Nabby by the fire. Their favorite distractions were always letters from home, and Adams would divvy up the latest packet. "Here is one for you, my dear," he said to his wife one night, "and here is another. And here, Miss Nabby, are four, five, upon my word, six, and more yet for your momma." Adams looked down at what was left. "Well, I fancy I shall come off but slenderly. One only for me."

Before long, Adams found himself too busy for leisure reading and letters. In the spring of 1786, Jefferson came to London to see the Adamses and to make a frosty appearance at the British court. During the visit, Adams told his friend he'd been thinking about writing a book on the best forms of government. Jefferson, still reveling in his own recent authorship of *Notes*, urged his friend to do it. Within a few months, Adams was working on his first book—what would ultimately grow into the three-volume *Defense of the Constitutions of Government of the United States of America*.

Adams filled his copy of Mary Wollstonecraft's *Historical and Moral View of the Origin and Progress of the French Revolution*, eventually writing close to 10,000 words in its margins.

might have influenced the critic. "The spirit of Franklin," he noted, "is to me very discernible."

The review was also fair. *Defense* was certainly too specialized for regular readers.* Political buffs also struggled with the book. Adams saw himself as a bold but objective tour guide, someone who was willing to point out where, say, monarchies had actually succeeded. This nuance didn't come through—because of careless readers who assumed Adams was simply defending those kings, but also because of his deluge of research and his waterlogged prose. *Defense* remained a significant work of political theory, going through several editions in America and in Europe, in addition to supplying lots of fresh meat for the media bear garden. But it also suffered from Adams's haste and stubbornness. When Abigail had read the manuscript, she warned him that Americans would take it to be pro-monarchy. The author ignored her advice.

The upside to stubbornness, of course, is not knowing when to quit. Adams finished two more volumes of *Defense*, each one longer than the last. In the spring of 1788, he and his family finally returned to America and to their new home, Peacefield. No sooner had they settled in—it took the young John Quincy Adams nearly a week to unpack his father's library—than Adams was chosen as America's first vice president.

The new role didn't slow his pen. One day in the capital, he bumped into a French diplomat. "I see well that I will have to make another trip to France," Adams blustered, "in order to explain to them my book." The vice president had already launched a new project, "Discourses on Davila," a series of essays that extended *Defense*'s themes. "Discourses" would trigger only more trouble—including the end of his friendship with Jefferson.

It all started with Thomas Paine. In 1791, Jefferson read his latest pamphlet, *Rights of Man*, then sent it to a printer who was planning an American edition. Jefferson included a short note saying he was "extremely pleased" since this new work would counter "the political heresies which have sprung up among us." The printer, in a clever bit of marketing, quoted Jefferson's letter in a preface to his edition. The comments pinged around the nation's newspapers, with readers everywhere understanding that the "heresies" Jefferson meant were Adams's latest pro-monarchy ramblings.

Jefferson quickly wrote to Adams, promising that he'd never meant for

*Mathew Carey sent some copies to Mason Weems, to sell on the road, and it earned the printer a predictably feverish reply. Weems claimed there was no chance he could move Adams's book, which was so poorly written that "the commonest carpenter might 'saw and plane' [something better] out of a maple slab of pine."

the letter to be published (true enough) and that the "heresies" weren't Adams's (a bald lie). Adams knew better, but accepted the apology icily. "My unpolished writings," he admitted to Jefferson, "have not been read by great numbers. Of the few who have taken the pains to read them, some have misunderstood them and others have willfully misrepresented them." What hurt Adams the most, it seemed, was being misunderstood by a reader as careful as Jefferson.

Their relationship began to cool just as America's partisan fires began to kindle. Before long, they were facing each other in the bitter contests of 1796 and 1800. In each election, Adams's opponents would dig through his writings in order to bend his words against him. "Do you ask me for proofs that he is a monarchist?" crowed an anonymous pamphleteer. "Read his *Defense*." Yet the candidate never took as many hits from his book as Jefferson did from his. Even on this miserable count, Adams trailed his rival.

SQUINTING TOWARD THE PRESIDENCY

Before Jefferson or Adams or even George Washington could become president, America had to invent the role itself. This was no simple task. On May 25, 1787, twelve states sent delegates back to the Pennsylvania State House, this time for the Constitutional Convention. Philadelphia, with its crowds, its soggy heat, its pre-sewer smells, did not feel as welcoming as it once had. Many Americans saw the convention as an uncertain experiment, and one of its biggest variables was the national executive. Actually, no one even knew how many executives there should be. Did America need a president or a board of presidents? No one even knew that "president" was the right term.

The convention turned to these questions near the end of its first full week. A delegate from Pennsylvania proposed a single executive, someone who could act quickly in crisis. A delegate from South Carolina seconded. Then came a long and nervous silence—"a considerable pause," in the words of James Madison, who was taking scrupulous notes. The delegates' anxiety stemmed in part from the presence of Washington, whom they'd made president of the convention and who would surely serve as America's first executive. But the delegates were also fretting about the idea of any executive at all. They'd just spent years—and, more important, lives—defeating a powerful monarch. No one wanted a system that would lead to similar mistakes.

So the silence stretched on, dilating, until Franklin broke in. He didn't offer an opinion—like Washington's, his was a distorting presence—but he did push the other delegates to debate. Slowly, they did, devoting more humid afternoons to defining the nature of executive power. While several delegates had written Adams to compliment him on his *Defense*, the book was not a major factor in the debates. By the time the convention closed in September, the delegates had designed a president who could veto legislation, issue pardons, appoint officials, negotiate treaties, and serve as commander in chief. Other than administrative tasks and a few smaller issues, that was pretty much it—the presidency was an office that would take shape largely through the actions of its occupants.

Even this seemed too much for many Americans. The states still needed to ratify the Constitution, and critics keyed on the executive. "It

In this ad, which ran in the summer of 1788, a New York bookstore promoted Adams's *Defense* alongside Jefferson's *Notes*.

squints toward monarchy," argued Patrick Henry. "Does this not raise indignation in the breast of every American?"

Washington neutralized those fears when he became president in 1789, mostly through the power of his example. After the war, the famous general could have demanded any reward he wanted. Instead, he retreated to Mount Vernon, planting crops, taking walks, and fixing his house's stubbornly leaky roof. Washington didn't lust after the presidency; he saw it as one final duty. "I feel," he told a friend, "very much like a man who is condemned to death does when the time of his execution draws nigh."

Reluctance turned out to be one of Washington's most durable presidential precedents. The other founders had national reputations and natural charisma, though not to Washington's degree. And yet they followed his tone, emphasizing that they didn't need or love power—that they were reluctantly called to serve. They exhibited the same restraint as presidents that they did as presidential candidates.

They were playing a part, at least during the campaign stage. When Jefferson bowed out as secretary of state, Adams diagnosed the real reason: "Jefferson thinks by this step to get a reputation as an humble, modest, meek man, wholly without ambition or vanity," he wrote to John Quincy. "He may even have deceived himself into this belief." Still, their presidencies and postpresidencies reflected their modest rhetoric. America's early executives did not boldly lead their parties. They did not position themselves as the voice of the people, and they did not try to dictate a national agenda. "In republican government," Madison had written in the *Federalist Papers*, "the legislative authority necessarily predominates."* Presidents deferred to that authority. The State of the Union address wasn't a chance to stump for their preferred policies; it was a chance to provide a progress report, which Jefferson emphasized by delivering it each year not as a ceremonial speech but as a simple piece of writing that a clerk would read aloud.

None of this made the presidency easy. When Adams followed Washington as president in 1797, he found himself in a tricky position—handicapped by a tiny margin of victory, beset by Britain and a feisty Napoleon Bonaparte, isolated by his decision to ask Washington's cabinet members to stick around. The job itself was isolating. "A peck of troubles

*These words, of course, came not from Madison but from "Publius." Yet the *Federalist Papers*' pseudonym provided one more example of this period's anxiety toward executives: Publius Valerius Publicola was an ancient Roman famous for his antimonarchical beliefs.

in a large bundle of papers, often in a handwriting almost illegible, comes every day," he wrote halfway through his first term. "No company. No society. Idle, unmeaning ceremony."

Adams didn't bother with organizing a newspaper to defend his administration, as other early presidents did. He decided, as always, to do the writing himself, firing off dozens of public letters that were reprinted around the country. He became only more isolated, including from some of his fellow Federalists, and he lost to Jefferson in 1800. But Adams left office with the same passion he'd felt while entering it. "I am weary of the game," he'd confessed to Abigail a few years before. "Yet I don't know how I could live out of it."

ADAMS VERSUS THE WORLD

America had never had a losing president before, which meant it was Adams's turn to set some precedents. For twenty-five years, he'd been a constant presence in national politics. Now he chose to retreat to Peacefield—to write only a handful of letters and to see only a handful of people outside his family. Those who did meet with Adams noted his despair. He tried distracting himself by reading authors like the French intellectual Madame de Staël. "The mind which devotes itself to the pleasures of ambition," she'd written, "renders itself incapable of any other mode of existence." When Adams read this passage, he jotted a feeble protest in the margin: "Books and agriculture may fill the mind."

De Staël was right—someone with Adams's ambition could not rest. His private life had reached new levels of comfort. During his presidency, Abigail had surprised him by converting part of a farmhouse near their home into a special place for his books, the best library he'd ever had. She also doubled the size of the home itself, and in a new wing Adams set up a study, complete with cozy rugs, trunks for his papers, and tall windows that let in plenty of light. But Adams also put his escritoire in that room, and before long, he was unfolding its desk and reaching for his pen. The energy that had driven his political life—and his political writings, if one could even untangle the two—had to spill out somewhere. In the fall of 1801, he began researching his family history. By 1802, he was ready to start writing his autobiography.

The genre had always appealed to Adams, who read both spiritual autobiographies and secular ones. On his first trip to France, he'd bought


image
not
available

This anecdote is one of many in which Adams's book blinks and breathes and quivers with life. It's impressive, even today, but in Adams's time, it was astonishing for a memoirist to indulge in this much private detail. He didn't banish his love life to the study of natural history, as Gibbon had. "I was of an amorous disposition," Adams wrote, "and very early, from ten or eleven years of age, was very fond of the society of females." He stressed his mature love for Abigail, calling their marriage "a connection which has been the source of all my felicity." Once Adams started a topic, though, he could rarely resist adding one more line. "My children," he wrote, "may be assured that no illegitimate brother or sister exists." It may have been a gibe at Jefferson or Franklin or one of Adams's other philandering peers. Even if it wasn't, it was striking that an early autobiographer would write such a sentence at all.

Adams's narrative was approaching the years when he actually met Franklin and Jefferson, and that seemed like the spot to pivot from a private story to a public one, or at least to bridge the two, as Franklin had so ably done. But Adams decided to stick with his own perspective while writing about the Continental Congress and the Revolutionary War. It felt even bolder than documenting the moment he first noticed young women—felt bolder, in fact, than even Franklin's approach.

The best way to compare these authors is in their competing accounts of, well, vegetarianism.* In another classic scene from the *Autobiography*, Franklin described his quest to give up meat. The benefits were obvious, starting with more money for books. But one day he ran into someone frying up fresh cod. Franklin decided that since the cod survived by eating smaller fish, it made sense to eat it himself. "So convenient a thing it is to be a reasonable creature," he concluded, "since it enables one to find or make a reason for everything one has a mind to do."

Franklin loved this strategy—present a sincere guide for self-improvement, then tweak it with humor that nodded toward a broader point. The broader points never arrived in Adams's version of going meat

*One reason this is the best comparison is that it's silly. Another is that Franklin never got to write about his own crucial role in the Revolutionary War. When he started working on his *Autobiography*, Franklin drafted a list of future topics. It was skeletal—for his stories about George Whitefield, he wrote simply "Whitefield"—but it mentioned events like the Stamp Act and wrapped up with "To France, Treaty, &c." Franklin's health problems ensured that his final narrative ended decades before that point. Had he reached his political material, he might have written a masterful legacy book. And yet, given Franklin's careful alignment of his early life and America's defining themes, perhaps he did that anyway.

free. After a long trip on horseback, during which he became quite sick, a doctor prescribed Adams a fad diet of milk, vegetables, and bread. He followed it for more than a year, though it gave him terrible indigestion. "My excellent father," Adams wrote, "at last by his tender advice at some times and a little good humored ridicule at others, converted me again to the use of a little meat." The story didn't end with some nation-building lesson. Instead, it offered another intimate glimpse of his family. It helped readers see the world the way Adams saw it.

The same thing happened when his autobiography turned political, though the view was rarely so serene. Indeed, the closer the book got to 1776, the tougher it got to read. That's in part because it got tougher to write. Adams worked on his autobiography for five years, though that span included plenty of stops and starts and bizarre authorial choices. He didn't think to dig out his old diary until he'd written many pages; once he had it, Adams revived his method from *Defense*, copying long passages from the diary and adding present-day commentary. Sometimes the results were incoherent, and Adams hinted at his authorial burden in a letter to John Quincy. Writing about his political life, Adams confessed, "would set me on fire" so reliably that "I should have occasion for a bucket of water constantly by my side, to put it out."

Adams wrote that letter during one of his more productive periods as a memoirist. Bitterness animated his book and its most delightful attacks. Adams introduced Thomas Paine as "a star of disaster"—until he crossed it out and went with "a disastrous meteor." (When it came to insults, at least, Adams made time to revise.) He came down even harder on Alexander Hamilton. Hamilton had recently died, after a scandalous duel with Aaron Burr, but Adams didn't care. He would not, he wrote, "suffer my character to lie under infamous calumnies because the author of them, with a pistol bullet through his spinal marrow, died a penitent."

A little spleen goes a long way. Adams continued cataloguing his grievances, never realizing that the increasingly drowsy reader would be the one who needed to be doused with a bucket of water. The autobiography became more needy and more preachy. Its narrative sputtered.

Through it all, though, the book remained profoundly personal. One of its best scenes—a scene Adams wrote from memory, relying on only a sliver of diary—came after he arrived in Paris in 1778 to work with Franklin and the other diplomats. Although Adams didn't speak much French, he found himself sucked into a confusing, exhausting routine of decadent parties and wine-soaked dinners. ("Franklin kept a hornbook always

in his pocket in which he minuted all his invitations to dinner," Adams wrote, "the only thing in which he was punctual.") He remembered sitting there during a particularly stimulating evening, the din of foreign conversation all around. For once, Adams preferred silence.

Eventually a young woman approached with a question: "Mr. Adams, by your name I conclude you are descended from the first man and woman," she said through an interpreter. Then she asked Adams to clarify a bit of family lore: "How [did] the first couple find out the art of lying together?"

The descendant of a Puritan admitted that he blushed. He tried to recover with a delicately metaphorical reply, something about "a physical quality in us resembling the power of electricity" drawing Adam and Eve together "like two objects in electric experiments."

His interlocutor was ready: "Well, I know not how it was," she said, "but this I know, it is a very happy shock."

While the French woman got the final word, Adams got to convey what troubled him about her culture. His autobiography revealed his personality, his values, and his vendettas—all of them authorized not by God or Nation but by Adams's personal decision to write.

Yet there were things even Adams could not disclose. His other writings had returned again and again to the relationship between people and vanity. "To be wholly overlooked," he once wrote, "and to know it, are intolerable." Somehow, in 440 pages of autobiography, Adams never got around to discussing *his* ego, much less to dwelling on his mistakes. The man who, from his earliest days as a diarist, had been brutally self-critical, had eventually encountered enemies who were more critical still. Adams responded by turning his anger outward, by girding himself with certainty. He wasn't just the first president to write a legacy book. He was the first to write a legacy book that stumbled when it came to being self-aware.

PEACE AT PEACEFIELD

Adams's autobiography never made it out of France. During another discussion of diplomacy, he alluded to his years as president and vice president before adding, "More, much more of this after." At some point in 1807, however, Adams abandoned his narrative, this time for good. "You advise me to write my own life," he noted a couple years later, in a letter to Benjamin Rush. "I have made several attempts, but it is so dull an employment that I cannot endure it. I look so much like a small boy in my own

eyes that with all my vanity I cannot endure the sight of the picture." It was the most honest thing a selectively honest man ever wrote.

The ex-president remained angry and articulate. He launched another series of newspaper essays in 1809, eventually publishing more than a hundred entries by "the late President Adams"—one last cocktail of transcribed documents and combative riffs. Adams tried to defend his older writings, often with absurd results. While perusing a book of French history, he read that the Thirty Years' War had ended "for reasons which no one could anticipate." Adams headed to the margins: "The Constitution of U.S. of 1787 was concluded in the same manner by the arrival of a ship with the first volume of the *Defense*." And yet elsewhere he described his epochal volume as "a book that has been misunderstood, misrepresented, and abused more than any other, except the Bible." Did *Defense* change the world, or did it fly over everyone's head? The truth was that no one seemed to care. The publishers who were pestering Jefferson to reprint *Notes* never bothered Adams. While he mulled a few ideas for a new book, he knew he didn't have the money to fund an edition of his own.

So he worked in his garden and on his farm. He kept enough projects going that Abigail complained about every room in the house being cluttered by papers and books. He began writing more and more letters—a manageable expense thanks to the privilege of franking, which meant that instead of postage, an ex-president needed only to sign his name and write "free" on the outside of any letter. The Adamses leaned heavily on this perk. "I have no scruples," Abigail sniffed, "as it is the only gratuity his country ever bestowed upon him."

Some of those letters went to Monticello. When Adams finally contacted Jefferson in 1812, after years of mutual silence, he knew he needed to charm his former friend. He also knew the perfect strategy: give him a book. Adams anxiously packed up a copy of *Lectures on Rhetoric and Oratory*, the new two-volume title by John Quincy, and sent it out. "As you are a friend to American manufactures," Adams wrote in a separate letter, "I take the liberty of sending you by the post a packet containing two pieces of homespun lately produced in this quarter." It was a deft pun on the state of American authorship, a subject dear to Jefferson's heart, but the difficulty of shipping books ensured that the letter arrived before the package. Jefferson, just as anxious as Adams, replied quickly and literally with a letter on the state of fabrics in the South. ("We consider a sheep for every person in the family as sufficient to clothe it.") The book arrived two days later, and Adams and Jefferson chuckled at the confusion. With that, their correspondence resumed.