

American Sphinx: The Character of Thomas Jefferson



National Book Award, Nonfiction, 1997 For a man who insisted that life on the public stage was not what he had in mind, Thomas Jefferson certainly spent a great deal of time in the spotlight, even in his retirement. In his twilight years, Jefferson was already taking on the luster of a national icon, which was polished off by his auspicious death on July 4, 1826. In *American Sphinx*, Ellis sifts the facts from the legend to find the heart of the man who, at the grass roots, is no longer liberal or conservative, agrarian or industrialist, pro- or anti-slavery, privileged or populist. A man who sang incessantly under his breath; who spent ten hours a day during his presidency at his writing desk; and who sometimes found his political sensibilities colliding with his domestic agenda; who exhibited great depth and great shallowness, combined massive learning with extraordinary naivete, and should neither be beatified nor forgotten.

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