

Thomas jefferson's government essay

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Thomas Jefferson's Government Introduction Thomas Jefferson, both in his own time and today, two centuries after this death, is considered one of America's most beloved politicians and presidents. So much so that he is claimed as a pioneer and icon by both conservatives and liberals alike, attesting to both the versatility and longevity of his political ideals and the strength of his brand of government. In an effort to better understand Thomas Jefferson and his government, a pivotal work on his life and political career will be reviewed- American Sphinx: The Character of Thomas Jefferson by Joseph Ellis. Jefferson the Physical Man As Ellis begins his book, he retells the tale of Jefferson arriving in Philadelphia for the series of meetings that would eventually give birth to the Declaration of Independence and United States Constitution. At this point, the author provides vivid imagery of Jefferson arriving in a regal carriage and an entourage, much like a celebrity of the modern day would travel and make a grand entrance (Ellis, 1996).

While the author concedes that no one in fact knows exactly what Jefferson looked like because the only supposed paintings of him are not definitely established to be him, accounts are used from his contemporaries which state emphatically that Jefferson the physical man was someone who carried himself with a regal bearing, and his physical presence was an impressive one to say the least. This type of imagery made it possible for the reader to anxiously anticipate the next passages about Jefferson, and pique a level of curiosity about Jefferson the man, the president and his government. Aside from the obvious literary device of starting off the work with some interesting text to capture the reader's attention, Ellis in this context is making the point that Jefferson was the kind of man who commanded

attention and was always up to whatever task lay before him; as a matter of fact, an anecdote that attests to Jefferson's perseverance in his journey to Philadelphia is the fact that he and his entourage got lost on the journey from Virginia to Pennsylvania, and had to stop several times to enlist the help of guides so that they could eventually reach their destination. Indeed, as will soon be seen, Jefferson would encounter many other, more substantial obstacles during his life and career, and just like his Philadelphia adventure, would enlist the help of others in order to assist him in reaching his desired destination.

Jefferson's Government Beyond the biographical, Ellis' work of course focuses on Jefferson's government. In this research, that government will be given additional attention as well. In the terminology of today, Jefferson's governmental philosophy would be described as minimalist; in other words, Thomas Jefferson was of the belief that the individual was to be the focus of governmental effort, and that the least government interference in the life of the individual, the better. Personal responsibility was a highlight of the Jefferson mindset. This can be seen from Jefferson's authoring of the Declaration of Independence which promises liberty for the individual, to Jefferson's years as president. In fact, it was Jefferson's belief in personal freedom and limited government that not only assisted in gaining public support for the American Revolution, but also allowed Jefferson to gain power in his presidential years. It is fair to argue that if the founding fathers, Jefferson chief among them, could not offer a viable alternative to the oppressive British government, the American colonists may never have taken up arms in order to bring victory in the Revolutionary War.

Furthermore, Jefferson, as well as the other early presidents of the United States, needed to provide a valid reason for the citizens of the new nation to give their allegiance to yet another government. In this instance, Jefferson and his contemporaries were able to dispel the idea of loyalty to a figure head in favor of obedience to a fair and equitable form of government that was governed not by laws of man, but rather natural laws-those common sense rules that are rooted in the religious tradition and advocate solid citizenship, hard work, and the presence of the government in an assistance role, rather than an oppressive and dictatorial one. Jefferson's government also featured strong support of states' rights as opposed to strong control exerted over states by the federal government (Ellis, 1996). This is yet another indicator of the Jeffersonian mindset of limited government, and where government must exist, having it do so as a servant of the people and not the other way around. However, the impression should not be given that Jefferson enjoyed universal support of his model of government; in fact, there was the equivalent of a house divided in that Alexander Hamilton was an advocate of a strong federal government which exerted a great deal of control over the citizens and the states. The ability of Jefferson to advance his ideas in the face of opposition from such a formidable adversary as Hamilton, who himself enjoyed a great deal of public support and reverence in his day, is yet another indicator of Jefferson's sharp mind, iron will, and persistent nature. This sort of perseverance seems to be a common denominator in all of the founding fathers, and it is this perseverance that made it possible for the United States to emerge from the struggle against British rule and for the beginnings of what would in time become the greatest nation on earth and the boldest governmental experiment in the

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history of the human race. Ellis' Disagreement with Jefferson's Government While American Sphinx is a well-written, enthralling and informative work, the impression should not be given that Ellis is an automatic advocate of Jefferson, or even that Ellis agrees with Jefferson's government itself.

This can be shown from a passage early in the book: " The explicit claim is that the individual is the sovereign unit in society; his natural state is freedom from and equality with all other individuals; this is the natural order of things. The implicit claim is that all restrictions on this natural order are immoral transgressions, violations of what God intended; individuals liberated from such restrictions will interact with their fellows in a harmonious scheme requiring no external discipline and producing maximum human happiness (Ellis, 1996, p. 9).

As a critique, one should question Ellis' assertion, for if the individual is not the unit of society, indeed little else can exist, for majorities, whether legitimate and orderly or degrading into a mob mentality must start out as individual units. Jefferson, in defense of him, was likely referring to this kind of logic. Also in fairness, as seen in Hamilton's differences of ideology with Jefferson, there were many others in Jefferson's time, and even in the present day, who disagreed with Jeffersonian government.

Perhaps the easiest way to rest this issue once and for all is to say that while Jefferson's government was one which proved to be highly effective and is imitated and discussed to this day, it was not flawless. General Discussion of American Sphinx Joseph Ellis' book deserves some additional discussion at

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this point in the research. Written more than a decade ago, the book is a combination of biography, historical account, and social commentary. Through all of this, the central theme of *American Sphinx* is freedom.

For Jefferson, freedom meant that he would help to found, and eventually lead, a nation which came about to gain freedom for an entire population of people who were deprived of freedom. That nation, once founded, would use the concept of freedom as a unifying force for the citizens of the newly created United States of America. Jefferson used his belief in freedom as a basis for one of the most successful presidencies in American history, and his ideals are used to this day as the building blocks for governmental policies.

Therefore, both Jefferson and this book about him are noteworthy. Conclusion This research has taken a prominent book and utilized it to discuss a prominent man; in this respect, not only has a book report of sorts emerged, but also a discussion about governmental affairs, personal freedom, and American history. Therefore, in conclusion, it can fairly be said that when an interesting book about an interesting man are combined, the result is a comprehensive piece of interesting research. Works Cited Ellis, Joseph J.

(1996). *American Sphinx: The Character of Thomas Jefferson*. New York: Vintage Books