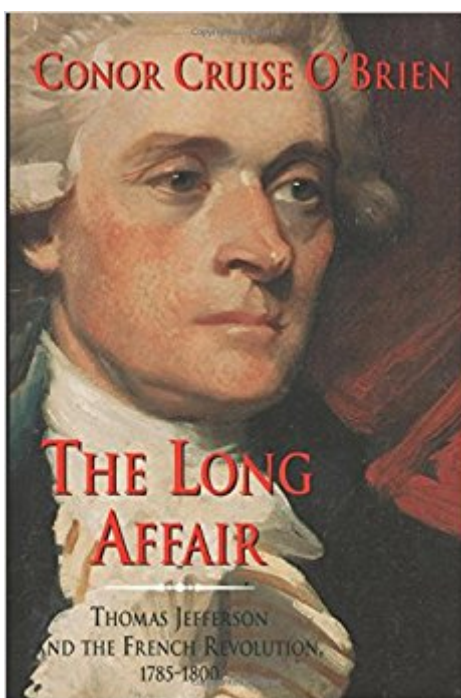


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The Long Affair: Thomas Jefferson And The French Revolution, 1785-1800



Synopsis

As controversial and explosive as it is elegant and learned, *The Long Affair* is Conor Cruise O'Brien's examination of Thomas Jefferson, as man and icon, through the critical lens of the French Revolution. O'Brien offers a provocative analysis of the supreme symbol of American history and political culture and challenges the traditional perceptions of both Jeffersonian history and the Jeffersonian legacy. "The book is an attack on America's long affair with Jeffersonian ideology of radical individualism: an ideology that, by confusing Jefferson with a secular prophet, will destroy the United States from within." —David C. Ward, *Boston Book Review* "With his background as a politician and a diplomat, O'Brien brings a broad perspective to his effort to define Jefferson's beliefs through the prism of his attitudes toward France. . . . This is an important work that makes an essential contribution to the overall picture of Jefferson." —Booklist "O'Brien traces the roots of Jefferson's admiration for the revolution in France but notes that Jefferson's enthusiasm for France cooled in the 1790s, when French egalitarian ideals came to threaten the slave-based Southern economy that Jefferson supported." —Library Journal "In O'Brien's opinion, it's time that Americans face the fact that Jefferson, long seen as a champion of the 'wronged masses,' was a racist who should not be placed on a pedestal in an increasingly multicultural United States." —Boston Phoenix "O'Brien makes a well-argued revisionist contribution to the literature on Jefferson." —Kirkus Reviews "O'Brien is right on target . . . determined not to let the evasions and cover-ups continue." —Forrest McDonald, *National Review* "The Long Affair should be read by anyone interested in Jefferson — or in a good fight." —Richard Brookhiser, *New York Times Book Review*

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Customer Reviews

Conor Cruise O'Brien, the distinguished Irish diplomat, constitutional historian and writer, has produced a typically vigorous and sweeping polemic against the reputation of the author of the Declaration of Independence Thomas Jefferson. O'Brien contends that liberals are mistaken in claiming Jefferson as one of their own; indeed he regards the right-wing militias as the true heirs to Jefferson's spirit. Contrasting Jefferson's position with that of his longtime hero, the anti-revolutionary Edmund Burke, O'Brien details the extreme edges of Jeffersonian political theory, in particular his commitment to the French Revolution even in the face of its excesses ("rather than it should have failed, I would have seen half the earth desolated"). For O'Brien, the American revolution is still a glorious achievement, but Jefferson is demoted to a mere "draughtsman" of the Declaration. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

In *The Great Melody*, O'Brien wrote a masterful study of one of the great early opponents of the French Revolution, Edmund Burke. Now he applies his counterrevolutionary principles to an examination of Thomas Jefferson, reevaluating Jefferson's thought and correcting some scholarly misinterpretations. But while the book will appeal to anyone interested in Jefferson and his pivotal role in American politics, the themes are less well-developed than in *The Great Melody*, and the book is ultimately disappointing. Through plentiful direct quotations from his subject and his own effective analysis, O'Brien demonstrates that Jefferson's support of the French Revolution began to wane after such support no longer furthered his domestic political aims and when he came to see it as a threat to slavery. Because of his support of slavery, says O'Brien, Jefferson is no longer appropriate as an icon for an increasingly multiracial American society. He points out that racists on the right have begun to claim Jefferson as a prophet, but O'Brien seems to repeat their mistake of evaluating him only through his views on race. Though Jefferson may indeed have been a racist and did not intend the Declaration of Independence ever to apply to blacks, the brilliance of the document was that it could be expanded over the years to include groups previously excluded. Though one would not want admiration of Jefferson's principles to lead to support for white supremacy, neither would one want rejection of white supremacy to lead to disbelief in the revolutionary idea that governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed. Illustrated. Copyright 1996 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Very interesting book concerning Jefferson's views, thoughts and behavior towards the French Revolution. An interpretation by the author through original research and readings of other Jeffersonian experts. It is clear the Jefferson thought the Revolution was wonderful, even during the heat of the Terror. He was a fan of Robespierre up until the February 1794 Slavery Emancipation Act that freed all the slaves in France, French colonies (and even Great Britain, according to the proclamation). At this point, Jefferson was not a fan of Robespierre and was thrilled to see he go. As with all books on Jefferson, the other leading figures are discussed throughout this book: Hamilton and his preference towards Great Britain and his hatred of slavery; Washington, his preference towards Great Britain and his non-chalance towards slavery; Franklin and his love of France and his views against slavery; Madison and Monroe, both supporters of Jefferson (although Jefferson was not as supportive towards them) and more. Jefferson seemed to enjoy uprisings, such as the Whiskey Rebellion. Our schools do not discuss the linkage between the French Revolution and the Whiskey Rebellion, but at this time, our leaders were quite alarmed at what was happening in Paris and the fear it could spread. The Whiskey Rebellion lit up these fears and Jefferson egg the rebels on. Washington was an opponent to the societies that led the rebellion, whereas Jefferson was supportive. An interesting take on Jefferson.

I bought this book after seeing the author interviewed on BookTV. I am 74 years old and have been an avid reader since age 7. I am no admirer of Jefferson's, having once read MacDonald's "The Presidency of Thomas Jefferson". In my mind, Alexander Hamilton and George Washington were our greatest national forefathers, and Jefferson hated the ideas of both. In this book, O'Brien convincingly paints Jefferson as a rabid fanatic for the French Revolution and an arch-racist. Jefferson was "against slavery", but maintained that blacks and whites could never share a country; freed slaves were to be deported to Africa! Jefferson, in the opinion of the author (and mine) should not be a hero of the liberals, but rather a hero of the racist ultra-right. Anyone wanting to understand our nation's heritage (or who is planning to vote) should read this book!

Excellent

O'Brien sets to tear down some of the shibboleths about Jefferson, most notably the idea that he was a knowledgeable and ardent supporter of the French Revolution for philosophical and epistemological reasons and that his attitudes on race were enlightened. He does a fine job of the

first, convincingly painting Jefferson's support for the French Revolution as being rather unthinking and uninformed and owing much to domestic political considerations. He argues somewhat less convincingly that the ebbing of his support was tied largely to Haiti and its connection to Jefferson's complicated personal and political relationship with the issue of slavery. Where I find O'Brien's indictment to be less convincing is in painting Jefferson not just as something other than a wistful opponent of slavery but as a notable and malignant racist. He doesn't demonstrate that Jefferson's views on the purported disparity between the races are uniquely wretched, particularly when compared to some of what was emerging elsewhere in the South. Nor am I convinced that Jefferson's supposed commitment to deportation was something other than a quixotic wish; American history (especially Southern history) to that date had not furnished many examples of an enduring coexistence between prosperous free blacks and a wider white society. Additionally, O'Brien's editorializing - his prophesying that Jefferson would have endorsed Pol Pot and potentially Tim McVeigh - is unnecessary to the arguments he makes and if anything makes a reader unwilling to follow him so far. A useful piece of revisionism and very worthwhile reading, but it is not the definitive account of Jefferson's career.

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