

On the Thomas Jefferson controversy

5 January 1999

Thanks for the cogent, rational, and level-headed rebuttal to those like Conor Cruise O'Brien and Christopher Hitchens who would tie the life, beliefs, and actions of a man of the 18th century to the mindset of the late 20th, and condemn him thereby. Such "presentism" is not only ahistorical, but denies people in struggle the ability and right to learn from the lessons, the strengths and the weaknesses, of those who have gone before them.

Jefferson was an intellectual, political, and moral titan. He was also a human being, inseparable from his flaws and his weaknesses and from the intellectual climate of his own historical period. As any number of biographies make abundantly clear, he would be the first to admit such.

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See also:

"The Jefferson-Hemings controversy: In defense of history"

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