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15. A SPECIAL 4TH OF JULY

Thomas Jefferson as he appeared in 1821, when he was 78 years old. Portrait by Thomas Sully. Image online, courtesy Library of Congress.

As Thomas Jefferson <u>approached</u> the end of his life, he thought about how he would like to be remembered. He <u>designed an obelisk</u> which would mark his grave. He created the words (the misspelling is his) he wanted used:

On the faces of the Obelisk the following inscription, & not a word more Here was buried Thomas Jefferson Author of the Declaration of American Independance of the Statute of Virginia for <u>religious freedom</u> & Father of the University of Virginia.

Jefferson and John Adams both died on July 4, 1826 - fifty years to the day that the Declaration of Independence was signed. It is said Adams' last words were:

Jefferson still lives.

He was wrong, by <u>about three hours</u>.

Jefferson's words - especially "all men are created equal" - are his most enduring legacy:

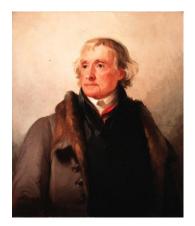
• They were an inspiration to his friend, Lafayette, and others involved in the French Revolution.

• They were an inspiration to Abraham Lincoln, who appropriated Jefferson's words as he tried to save the Union and end slavery.

• They remain an inspiration today, even for African-American scholars like <u>Julian Bond</u> who <u>try to understand</u> the man's complexities and apparent inconsistencies.

Perhaps the poet Robert Frost best captured the thought-provoking importance of "all men are created equal" when, <u>as a young man</u>, he wrote of Jefferson ("the Welshman") in <u>The Black Cottage</u>:

A SPECIAL 4TH OF JULY



That's a hard mystery of Jefferson's. What did he mean? Of course the easy way Is to decide it simply isn't true. It may not be. I heard a fellow say so. But never mind, the Welshman got it planted Where it will trouble us a thousand years. Each age will have to reconsider it.

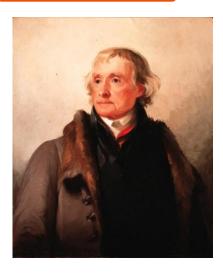
Were that to happen, Jefferson would be proud indeed.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at: <u>http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/A-SPECIAL-4TH-OF-JULY-Thomas-Jefferson</u>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/A-SPECIAL-4TH-OF-JULY-Thomas-Jefferson

Media Stream



<u>Thomas Jefferson - Portrait</u> Image online, courtesy the U.S. Library of Congress. PD View this asset at: <u>http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Thomas-Jefferson-Portrait</u>