



American Virtues: Thomas Jefferson on the Character of a Free People (American Political Thought (University Press of Kansas))

Jean M. Yarbrough

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Since the early days of the republic, Americans have recognized Thomas Jefferson's distinctive role in helping to shape the American national character. As Founder and statesman, Jefferson thought broadly about the virtues Americans would need to cultivate in order to preserve and perfect their experiment in republican self-government. Now in an age preoccupied with rights and divided over questions of character in public and private life, Jefferson can help us to think more clearly about our most urgent concerns.

American Virtues is the first comprehensive analysis of Jefferson's moral and political philosophy in over twenty years and the first ever to focus exclusively on the full range of moral, civic, and intellectual virtues that together form the American character. It asks what kind of character Americans as a people must cultivate to ensure their freedom and happiness and how we as a free society can nurture moral and intellectual excellence in our citizens and statesmen.

Beginning with the Declaration of Independence, Jean Yarbrough explores how Jefferson's conception of rights helps to form the American character. In subsequent chapters, she examines the moral sense virtues of justice and benevolence; the "agrarian" virtues of industry, moderation, patience, self-reliance, and independence; patriotism and modern republicanism; slavery and agrarian vice; the effect of commerce on character; the virtues connected with private property; the civic virtues of vigilance and spirited participation; the meaning of virtue and happiness for women; the virtues of republican statesmen; the place of the Epicurean virtues of wisdom and friendship in liberal republicanism; and piety and the secularized virtues of charity, toleration, and hope.

In broadening the examination of virtue to include not only civic or republican virtue but the whole range of moral and intellectual excellence that perfect the individual character, *American Virtues* moves beyond the liberal-republican debates and makes a fresh contribution to the Jeffersonian literature.

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