

Dear Colleague:

I am very pleased that you are contemplating coming to Boston to study Thomas Jefferson. The resurgence of interest in the founding fathers, in biography, and in the connection between personal and public life makes this an ideal time to reassess Jefferson and to think about how in an egalitarian, multicultural society we can make an eighteenth-century slave owner and aristocrat relevant.

Thomas Jefferson was a man of paradoxes: a man who craved friendship, yet was intensely private; an aristocrat who detested privilege; an urban intellectual who feared cities; a slave holder who preached equality; a peaceful man who sanctioned violent rebellion; a dreamer and philosopher who served as a hard-nosed and cunning diplomat. In this three-week Institute, we will try to explain these paradoxes and deepen our understanding of one of the most important figures in American history, a figure who is fascinating, influential, inspiring, and embattled.

We will look at Jefferson's philosophy and worldview in an attempt to understand these paradoxes. But we will also examine the personality behind the philosophy. Today scholars look at temperament, illness, death, passion, parents, mentors, money, and friends. They argue that Jefferson can be understood, that historians do not have to resign themselves to mystery and paradox. Probing beneath the surface, they find a darker, more complex, and always interesting Jefferson. Furthermore, they argue, the inner man connects to and helps us understand the public man.

Pursuing the inner Jefferson for three weeks will not be just a voyeuristic venture. In the quality and originality of his mind, catholicity of his interests, and felicity of his writing, Jefferson was a genius. It is interesting and instructive to live for three weeks with such a genius, who thought not only about constitutions and constellations, but about how we might live happy, productive lives.

Boston is an ideal city in which to base our study of Jefferson. We will arrange trips to the Massachusetts Historical Society, which has an unparalleled collection of Jefferson manuscripts, an electronic archive of Jefferson's papers, and letters written by Jefferson's daughters; and to the John Adams National Historical Park and the library where Adams wrote to Jefferson his half of the most famous presidential correspondence in American history. There will also be optional field trips to Mount Auburn Cemetery in Cambridge and to the Essex-Peabody Museum in Salem. All the resources of Boston University, including the use of the library and computer center, will be available to participants, who will be given the status and privileges of Visiting Scholars. During the summer, the City of Boston hosts concerts, plays, and special events, and its permanent cultural and historical attractions are plentiful, particularly as they relate to the history of early America.

Focusing on Jefferson's personality and character and connecting them to his public career will be the theme of the first week. We will start reading Jefferson's letters, discuss his views on education, and visit the Massachusetts Historical Society.

In the second week, we will expand our understanding of the inner Jefferson by examining his views on religion, his role as a family man, and his correspondence with John Adams. We will hear from Joanne Freeman

<http://www.yale.edu/history/faculty/freeman.html> and Jan Lewis

<http://www.mfa.newark.rutgers.edu/faculty/janlewis.htm>

and visit Adams National Historical Park.

In the third week, we turn to slavery, science, and money. Peter Onuf

<http://www.virginia.edu/history/user/46> and Herbert Sloan

<https://history.barnard.edu/profiles/herb-sloan> will talk to the Institute members and we will finish our curriculum projects. Peter Hatch <http://www.monticello.org/site/blog-and-community/users/phatch> will come from Monticello to offer us a virtual tour.

The purpose of the Institute will be to look at Jefferson from as many angles as possible to deepen our understanding of his character and personality and thus to shed light on America's founding and the social and cultural history of the early Republic. The Institute will take a topical approach, looking in depth at such subjects as education, intimate life, family, money, religion, science, and slavery. During the three weeks, we will also ponder some larger questions:

- Is the intimate life knowable?
- Does it connect to the public man or woman?
- Do we each fashion our own version of Jefferson to reflect our values and needs?
- What is Jefferson's legacy?

We will ask some pedagogical questions:

- What role should biography and primary sources play in history instruction?
- How does teaching biographies fit with state standards and high stakes testing?
- How do we teach intimate information about famous Americans to young people?
- How can teachers be honest and realistic yet still inspire students and encourage citizenship?

### **Institute Leaders**

As the Director of the Institute and a Senior Research Fellow at Boston University's School of Education, I will be leading some of the discussions. I became interested in Thomas Jefferson while researching my book, *A Call to Heroism: Renewing America's Vision of Greatness*, which was published in 2002 (Atlantic Monthly Press), and while lecturing at schools around the country. There is a section on Jefferson in my book. More information about my publications and visits to schools can be found on my web site:

<http://www.heroesinamerica.org/>

I am currently studying the changing nature of American history education with a particular interest in exploring the reasons why we study history and the tension between

the goals of a realistic portrait of the past and civic inspiration. In 2002, I spoke on this subject at the White House Forum on American History, Civics and Service. My background includes academic history, secondary school teaching, and school administration. In the summers of 2005 and 2009, I led an NEH We The People Institute: *George Washington and His Legacy: Myth, Symbol and Reality*. In the summers of 2006 and 2008, I led this NEH Institute on Thomas Jefferson. For the last several years, I have been the project director for four seminars in Teaching American History.

We are fortunate to have with us for the three weeks R. B. Bernstein, <http://everybookandcranny.wordpress.com/2011/02/10/thomas-jefferson-a-biography-by-r-b-bernstein/> author of a one- volume biography of Thomas Jefferson, which Gordon Wood called “the best short biography of Jefferson ever written.” Bernstein has written nineteen books on American Constitutional and legal history. Having spent six years immersed in studying Jefferson, as well as creating a high school history curriculum, Bernstein will be an ideal lecturer, commentator and Consultant for the Institute. He is currently working on a biography of John Adams. Bernstein teaches at New York and City College.

Joan Musbach, Senior Consultant for Ladue Schools, St. Louis County Missouri served as Master Teacher in the NEH Institutes on Thomas Jefferson in 2006 and 2008. Joan brings insights for teaching about Thomas Jefferson to eighth and eleventh grade students gleaned from four decades of classroom experience. She also highly valued her participation in the Stratford Hall-Monticello Summer Institute for Teachers. She will attend all sessions and work with institute participants as the Master Teacher on their papers and projects.

Peter Wright will serve as Project Coordinator/Participant Liaison for the Institute. Originally a participant in the 2005 Institute *George Washington and His Legacy: Myths, Symbols, and Reality*, he served as Project Coordinator and Master Teacher for the 2009 Institute as well as Program Coordinator for this program’s Institutes held in the summer of 2006 and 2008. Currently, Wright is an educational consultant, behavioral and school placement specialist in the process of completing his Ed.S. in Mental Health Counseling at the University of Missouri, Columbia.

## **Readings**

Participants will read in advance of the Institute Joseph Ellis’s *American Sphinx: The Character of Thomas Jefferson*, as well as R.B. Bernstein’s *Jefferson*. Both books are available in paperback. We will be reading many primary sources, so participants should bring to the Institute the Library of America edition of Jefferson’s *Writings*, selected and edited by Merrill D. Peterson, which has basic documents and a large selection of letters. We will concentrate on the letters because, as Andrew Burstein notes, Jefferson’s “letter writing holds the greatest potential for revealing our subject’s character.” Repeatedly Jefferson mingles discussion of public policy with self-revelatory asides and digressions. A book of readings, which includes articles, interviews, and essays, will be provided at

the start of the Institute. In the evenings, we will look at and critique Jefferson videos.

The Institute will emphasize scholarship but with practical application. Teachers will be introduced to primary sources, professional articles, and web sites they can use in their classrooms. They will be asked to reflect on how Jefferson can be made relevant and compelling to students in the twenty-first century and how to deal with the myths and misinformation that surround this iconic figure.

Participation and collaboration will be an important component, and everyone will be asked to write a curriculum unit or a short paper incorporating insights gained at the Institute relevant to classroom use. Participants will share their summaries with others at the Institute, as well as with the larger professional community through the Institute's web site.

### **Logistics**

Most of the Institute sessions will be held between 9 a.m. and 3:30 p.m. with a break for lunch, leaving most late afternoons, evenings and weekends free for study, reflection, and recreation. There will be ample time set aside to meet individually with R.B. Bernstein, Joan Musbach, Peter Wright, and me.

The stipend for participants will be \$2,700, half of which will be given on opening day and the other half at the conclusion of the Institute.

Participants will be housed in their own rooms in four-bedroom suites with two bathrooms, a common room, and a kitchen in a modern, air-conditioned residence (the 10 Buick Street Residence Hall) for which they will be charged a reasonable university rate for the City of Boston, currently estimated at \$64.00 per night per person. The apartment complex is situated on the Boston University campus. More information about the 10 Buick Street Residence Hall can be found at this link:  
<http://www.bu.edu/housing/residences/stuv/10buick/>

### **Application**

On this web site you will find the Application Information and Instructions provided by NEH. The completed application should be postmarked no later than March 4, 2013 and should be addressed as follows:

Dr. Peter Gibbon Boston  
Senior Research Fellow  
Boston University School of Education  
Two Silber Way  
Boston, Massachusetts 02215

Perhaps the most important part of the application is the essay of no more than four

double-spaced pages that must be submitted as part of the complete application. This essay should include any personal and academic information that is relevant; reasons for applying to the Institute; your interests, both intellectual and personal in the topic; qualifications to do the work of the project and make a contribution to it; what you hope to accomplish by participation; and the relation of the study to your teaching.

I look forward to reading your application and would be happy to answer any questions you may have about any aspect of the program.

Peter Gibbon  
Senior Research Fellow  
Boston University School of Education  
[peterhgibbon@comcast.net](mailto:peterhgibbon@comcast.net)

Printable PDF's  
Dear Colleague Letter  
Application Information and Instructions  
Online Required Cover Sheet