

# LIVE *from Monticello*

*Bringing history forward*

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At Monticello, our vision is to bring history forward into national and global dialogues. These days, more and more of those conversations are happening online. What follows is just a small sampling of the topics we've been talking about during our weekly livestreams, which can all be viewed at [monticello.org/live](https://monticello.org/live).

These livestreams have already received more than 500,000 views, generating thought-provoking conversations. We hope that you'll explore our past conversations and watch — and participate in — our upcoming programs.

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## A Window on History

Bill Barker, widely recognized as the nation's foremost interpreter of Thomas Jefferson, provides a unique glimpse into the mind of Jefferson. History comes alive in a series of livestreams that feature Barker as Jefferson both solo and

in conversation with interpreters of other historical figures, including James Madison, the Marquis de Lafayette, George Washington and Alexander Hamilton.

Watch on [monticello.org/live](https://monticello.org/live).

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Ian Atkins



Talitha Corradi

## The Virtual Classroom

In a time when kitchen tables have been converted into classrooms, Monticello continues to fulfill our twofold mission of preservation and education by supporting teachers and engaging families. Find resources ranging from virtual field trips and tours to content for the digital classroom at [monticello.org/site/families-and-teachers](https://monticello.org/site/families-and-teachers).

# Jefferson's Influence on the World Today

## July 4, 2020 — Virtual Independence Day Commemoration

### Jon Meacham

Pulitzer Prize-winning historian and board chair of the Thomas Jefferson Foundation

July 4th is a day for high-minded idealism. Remember that Thomas Jefferson spent his working life as a politician trying to manufacture consensus to address the problems of the day, for a given period of time. This is in fact a pretty good working definition of politics. Closing the gap between what Jefferson thought were self-evident truths and what is the evident truth of people's daily lives is the work of the Fourth of July and, as Jefferson would say, every other day of the year.



### Annette Gordon-Reed

Pulitzer Prize-winning historian and board member of the Thomas Jefferson Foundation

Yes, it's a day to commemorate what happened at that time, and certainly the Declaration of Independence has come to mean something, not just to Americans, but to people all over the world. Along with the other revolutionaries — he didn't make July 4th possible all by himself — as the pen of the American Revolution, Jefferson had a role in making us think about what the country said it stood for. And it is our responsibility to make sure that actually comes to fruition and that we uphold that value.



#### LIVESTREAM COMMENT

Two of my favorite writers: You have illuminated the legacy of Jefferson and our African American first families who were the literal lifeblood of Monticello. Wonderful to see you together.



## May 13, 2020 — Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom

### Gary Sandling

Vice president of visitor programs and services

Jefferson very famously writes that the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom was intended to protect “the Jew and the Gentile, the Christian and Mahometan, the Hindoo and infidel of every denomination.” That’s a pretty sweeping statement for someone who lived in a place where the vast majority of the free white population were Protestant Christians. Why do you think Jefferson wrote that when he did?

### John Ragosta

Historian at the Robert H. Smith International Center for Jefferson Studies at Monticello

I like to say that Jefferson's sight was limited — he focused on white men — but his vision is expansive. The things he wrote have an influence and an impact beyond the people he might have seen right in front of him. Jefferson realizes this is going to be a country that is a melting pot. He doesn't use that term, but he recognizes that people will come to America from different nations with different creeds and different ethnicities and that, conceptually, religious freedom applies to everybody. Nobody can tell you what to think and what to believe. That concept, which was revolutionary in America, becomes the basis of the idea of the First Amendment and the separation of church and state.



Jim Atkins

*Livestream excerpts have been edited for length and clarity.*

# Slavery at Monticello

## June 17, 2020 – Interpreting Slavery at Monticello

### Brandon Dillard

Manager of historic interpretation

Is history about glorifying someone from the past? Or is history about remembering the past? As a historic site, Monticello is not here to raise up Thomas Jefferson on a pedestal. Nor are we here to tear him down. We're here to understand the complexity as best we can, which does mean that we're trying to look at all of the history, rather than just a single viewpoint of that history.



Ian Atkins



#### LIVESTREAM COMMENT

Monticello has come such a long way over the years. I'm grateful for the more complete picture presented today. It's an exemplar for other museums to follow.



### Gayle Jessup White

Public relations and community engagement officer

There's balance – the lives of the enslaved and their stories are being given equal weight to that of the lives of Thomas Jefferson and his family members. The enslaved people who helped him, who built the plantation, who built Monticello, gave Jefferson that freedom. Freedom is the operative word here. They gave him freedom, to think, to process, to do all the great things that Jefferson did. The people he enslaved are as essential as Thomas Jefferson. And theirs are the stories that we tell.



#### LIVESTREAM COMMENT

As a museum, Monticello must teach every side of life there in Jefferson's time. I think that you are doing a great job, and I thank you for these conversations.



## April 22, 2020 – Descendants of the Enslaved Community

### Niya Bates

Senior fellow for African American history

When we asked the descendants how they feel about Monticello, an overwhelming response in their interviews has been that Monticello feels like home. And while that is a very powerful motivator for them to come back and participate in our oral history project, it's not the only feeling that they share in their interviews. Many times, descendants express anger and frustration at being able to identify the person who enslaved their ancestors. But they also experience a great deal of pride and ownership of this place and the result of their ancestors' labor. It gets even more complicated when you ask the descendants how they feel about Thomas Jefferson. I think what shines out most in their responses is how they feel about Jefferson's ideas and his intellect. Almost universally, they celebrate those qualities. But they do challenge – and they push us to challenge – who Jefferson was as a slaveholder.



Ian Atkins



#### LIVESTREAM COMMENT

I'm a descendant, and there has been so much progress incorporating our story into that larger, complex narrative.



# House and Gardens

## April 29, 2020 — In the Gardens

### Peggy Cornett

Curator of plants

Nowadays we're searching for the same plants that Jefferson mentioned in his documentation. It's kind of a detective story — we try to seek out these plants from all parts of the world.

We do quite a bit with the produce that's grown in Monticello's gardens. A lot of it is grown for display to show the many varieties Jefferson grew. We've documented at least 330 different varieties of vegetables and herbs in his garden. But we also want to preserve these plants for the future, so we grow a lot of vegetables and actually let them go to seed in the garden. We also use some of these vegetables for our Monticello Farm Table café. More and more we're beginning to provide the produce from the gardens for public consumption.



Ian Atkins

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#### LIVESTREAM COMMENT

My favorite place to visit when I lived in Virginia. As an avid gardener, I was always inspired by the grounds at Monticello.

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## May 20, 2020 — Jefferson and Architecture



Ian Atkins

### Lucy Midelfort

Architectural conservator

Monticello is incredibly important for many reasons, just one of which is architecture. It's a UNESCO World Heritage Site, which puts it on par with places like the Egyptian Pyramids and the Great Wall of China in terms of global significance. Jefferson went to the College of William and Mary where he would have seen a lot of Georgian architecture, which is neoclassical, but it's relatively restrained. In putting together the designs for his house here at Monticello, Jefferson took American neoclassicism in a different direction. He set the precedent for this form of American neoclassicism that takes literal design elements from classical Rome and Greece to express Enlightenment ideals like simplicity, symmetry, order and reason.

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#### LIVESTREAM COMMENT

For aspiring museum professionals, this is priceless!! Great program.

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