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Jefferson's Third Library: Human Rights

Thomas Jefferson's own original library collection was sold to the country to become the Library of Congress (archived article #42 at <https://www.murrysvillelibrary.org>). He immediately began a second personal library collection to feed his insatiable need for books, about which Dumas Malone wrote in his six-volume "Jefferson and His Time," Little, Brown and Company, Boston (1948 -1981).

Jefferson was a very curious person, an avid reader, a collector of books, more accomplished than seemingly possible, and, at the same time, justly subject to a claim of hypocrisy, a slaveholder. Still, he was intensely a student of human rights, along with politics, science, and engineering. So, were he to start a 21st century library, his third such, with what new books might he start the collection? But, we have to take this question category by category because his breadth of interest was so great. So, let's begin, for this time, with just Human Rights.

According to Malone, Volume 6, pp. 316-17, Jefferson made the following comment while in Paris to the editor of "Encyclopedie Methodique": "What a stupendous, what an incomprehensible machine is man! Who can endure toil, famine, stripes, imprisonment or death itself in vindication of his own liberty, and the next moment....inflict on his fellow men a bondage, one hour of which is fraught with more misery than ages of that which he rose in rebellion to oppose."

In his own "Notes on the State of Virginia," Jefferson said: "Deep rooted prejudices entertained by the whites; ten thousand recollections, by the blacks, of the injuries they have sustained; new provocations; the real distinctions which nature has made; and many other circumstances, will divide us into parties, and produce convulsions which will probably never end but in the extermination of the one or the other race."

The following are powerful and gut-wrenching books about Human Rights, with common threads and playbooks, that came well after Jefferson's time and that I think he certainly would have read and installed in his third library. They would have influenced his actions for certain.

- (1) Gilbert King, "Devil in the Grove: Thurgood Marshall, the Groveland Boys, and the Dawn of a New America," Harper Perennial, New York (2013).
- (2) Colson Whitehead, "The Underground Railroad," Anchor Books, New York (2018).
- (3) John Ehle, "Trail of Tears: The Rise and Fall of the Cherokee Nation," Anchor Books/Doubleday, New York (1988).
- (4) Ian Hughes, "Disordered Minds: How Dangerous Personalities are Destroying America," Zero Books, Winchester, U.K. (2018).

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(5) Volker Ullrich, "Hitler Ascent: 1889-1939" (V. 1) and "Hitler: Downfall 1939-1945" (V. 2), Alfred A. Knopf, New York (2016 & 2020), translated from the German by Jefferson Chase.

King and Whitehead won Pulitzer Prizes for their books, and Whitehead also won the National Book Award. All of the books can be obtained free from your local library, either by way of the WLN on-line catalog or by asking your librarian to request a book through Access PA when not found on-line. They will all move you deeply, make you feel more about the sanctity of every person/culture's Human Rights, and how they come to be violated in like ways, even today.

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