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Epilogue: Mr. Jefferson at the Last

On and off in this column, in part by using the Lewis and Clark Expedition, I have been telling you a story about Mr. Thomas Jefferson, about America therefore, about Jefferson's incomparable Monticello Library, and about the origin from it of the Library of Congress as we now know it. That story in all its numbered weekly articles can be found in archive at the Murrysville Community Library website.

In this epilogue, I offer a summary by quoting two of Jefferson's own pointed remarks. Together they could be the essence in brief of this truly remarkable and singular man, and America as he and his contemporaries conceived it.

From his "Notes on the State of Virginia," the only book that he himself authored:

"Our rulers will become corrupt, our people careless. A single zealot may commence persecutor, and better men be his victims. It can never be too often repeated, that the time for fixing every essential right on a legal basis is while our rulers are honest, and ourselves united. From the conclusion of this war we shall be going down hill. It will not then be necessary to resort every moment to the people for support. They will be forgotten, therefore, and their rights disregarded. They will forget themselves, but in the sole faculty of making money, and will never think of uniting to effect a due respect for their rights. The shackles, therefore, which shall not be knocked off at the conclusion of this war, will remain on us long, will be made heavier and heavier, till our rights shall revive or expire in a convulsion."

And the related quote highlighted recently by the American Library Association, which I cited previously, too, and which bears so heavily on why public libraries matter: "If a nation expects to be ignorant and free in a state of civilization, it expects what never was and never will be. An informed citizenry is at the heart of a dynamic democracy."

And to repeat, but never too often to repeat, about who it is that makes up Jefferson's citizenry. It was the White Men of power in his day, as told best by Dumas Malone in his "Jefferson and His Time," Boston: Little, Brown and Company. The quintessential, out-of-print, six-volume oeuvre of Malone's lifetime is the story of America as told nowhere else.

You can find this all on the Internet if you are so inclined, but in all likelihood you would never have thought to look without some guidance. I have been trying to be a guide, a guide to lead you to your public Library, where on real and virtual shelves are the joys of life such as these stories told in full.

My intent going forward is to take us on more journeys just like this. We'll talk about other books and programs, both nonfiction and fiction categories, that open up to you with just The Magic Library Card!

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