

On April 13, 1943, President Franklin D. Roosevelt dedicated the Jefferson Memorial on the edge of the Tidal Basin in Washington, DC. World War II had injected the two hundredth anniversary of Thomas Jefferson's birth with special significance. The tide of history had just shifted its course. One of the foremost political figures in American history finally took his place in the ultimate American pantheon, within sight of George Washington's soaring monument and Abraham Lincoln's brooding, seated statue. No American has ever before enjoyed such a transcendent status as Thomas Jefferson. And over the next 250 years of American history, no public figure would ever reach the same historic heights.

This is the triumphant "political" image of Jefferson, yet one far from reality. Jefferson had desired to live in the "tranquil, permanent felicity" that flowed from a secluded home life at his elegant mountain estate, Monticello.<sup>1</sup> But during the last seventeen years of his cloistered family life, his story was infused with high drama in a congealed world of alcoholism, domestic violence, family jealousies, bankruptcy, and a grisly murder. Then came a humiliating series of political wounds, including an alleged sexual affair with a slave, corroding Jefferson's personal and professional reputation.

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Jefferson, *Letters and Addresses of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. William B. Parker (Buffalo: National Jefferson Society, 1903), 43.