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The Papers of Thomas Jefferson. Library of Congress.

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It is difficult to review a work in progress, especially one of such magnitude and scope. This reviewer hesitates to be critical because he realizes that many of its existing flaws will most likely be eliminated by the project's completion. Therefore, this is more of a midterm assessment—with a few suggestions thrown in—rather than a formal critique. This said, the Library of Congress has undertaken the daunting task of publishing the papers of Thomas Jefferson over its website. The Jefferson papers are about 27,000 items divided into nine series and covering over two hundred years of history, from 1606 to 1828. The value of this collection cannot be overestimated, for Thomas Jefferson was arguably the most prolific of the founding fathers and of the American Presidents. Of the former, perhaps only Benjamin Franklin and James Madison approach the Sage of Monticello; of the latter, only Madison, again, and Theodore Roosevelt. Jefferson's views on society, government, and politics are still cited and debated to this day; his personal and political contradictions, in many ways, mirror our own. Therefore, historians researching a wide spectrum of topics can and do use his papers: Colonial America, Early National, Jacksonian Era, Virginia, slavery, agricultural, architectural—the list is extensive. About forty years ago, the Library of Congress microfilmed its presidential papers series, making them more accessible to scholars. Instead of traveling all the way to Washington D.C. to use these collections, one only had to travel as far as the nearest microfilm reader. Now the Library is making these collections even more accessible; bringing them as near as the closest computer terminal. In 1998, it began the project of digitizing the presidential papers series by putting most of the George Washington papers on-line. In April 1999, the Library followed this with the first installment of the papers of Thomas Jefferson. This installment of the Jefferson papers on-line contains part of series one, Jefferson's

personal and collected correspondence of others covering the years 1621-1828, and all of series eight, consisting of manuscript volumes relating to Virginia history from 1606 to 1737 which Jefferson had collected. The rest is to follow over the next few years. It is great to have the Jefferson papers available on-line, but there are a few problems. The most significant of which is one that, unfortunately, cannot be corrected and that is the quality of the images. The collection was scanned, not from the actual documents—they were judged, correctly, too fragile—but from the microfilm. When microfilmed, some frames were blurred or came out too dark. Complicating this was the quality of some of the documents which were faded, torn, or otherwise damaged, and this also showed up on the film. So, in the next step of scanning the film, these problems were perpetuated and, in the eye of this reviewer, exacerbated (he concedes that this last point may only be his perception and not an actual result of the scanning). When using a microfilm reader, these problems can be combated by adjusting the light source, or, when printing, adjusting the copy from dark to light to print possibly a more legible copy. This is not as easy to do from a computer. Another difficulty with the website is the Jefferson papers' accessibility from the Library of Congress's webpage. It takes several clicks of the mouse to get to the papers. Starting at the Library of Congress homepage, one clicks on "American Memory Historical Collections," then "enter" then "collection finder" and finally "list all collections" and scrolls down to the Thomas Jefferson papers, or clicks on either "history" or "political science and law" and again scrolls down to the Jefferson papers. Since the Washington papers and now the Jefferson papers are on-line, it is probable that more of the presidential series will follow. Rather than having to click through several different steps, it would be helpful to place a presidential papers icon on the Li-

brary's homepage, giving direct access to the Jefferson papers, the Washington papers, and whatever may follow. There are some interesting features to the website. First, there is a browse mode, which will eventually link to all nine series of the Jefferson papers, but obviously only providing a link to those parts already on-line. The on-line installment for series one is broken down chronologically. Series eight is broken down into the various manuscript volumes. Second, there is an index. Currently, it is not a full-text searchable index, only indexing letters by headings. However, a full-text index is promised, and, when complete, will be a tremendous benefit to researchers. Such an index exists for the Washington papers. Third, there are transcriptions provided for some letters in series one and for all the volumes in series eight. If there is a transcription, when an image is called up, there is a "transcription" link. The downside to this is that currently there are not many transcriptions offered. More are promised in the future, but according to the website, they will come from Paul Leicester Ford's *Works of Thomas Jefferson* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons and the Knickerbocker Press, 1904). While Ford's edition of Jefferson's papers is useful, it is by no means exhaustive. For more complete transcribed sources of Jefferson's papers, researchers will still turn to Princeton University's *Papers of Thomas Jefferson* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950-; edited by Julian P. Boyd and others), which provides not only more exhaustive transcriptions of the Library's papers, but transcriptions of Jefferson letters not

in the Library of Congress collection. The Library offers a bibliography of Jefferson sources to provide more research material for the scholar using the collection. It also has reprinted Joseph E. Ellis's article "American Sphinx: The Contradictions of Thomas Jefferson," published in the Library's magazine, *Civilization: The Magazine of the Library of Congress* (November-December 1994). This article focuses more on perceptions of Jefferson over the last one hundred seventy years than on Jefferson himself. While the article is informative and interesting, and a Thomas Jefferson timeline is presented, this reviewer believes that a biographical essay on Jefferson would be more useful still. At the end of Ellis's article, the Library provides a link to the Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation's Jefferson website, which includes a link to a discussion of Sally Hemings, her family, and the recent DNA testing. The website offers great potential. As useful as it is now—and it is very useful—when the Library of Congress finishes digitizing the whole collection, researchers and historians will benefit greatly. If Jefferson can be considered a democrat who believed that the common man (and today the common woman) had the right to education and information, then this website lives up to the Virginian's goals. The Library of Congress has taken a valuable collection and made it available to anyone who can log on to a computer and gain access to the internet. Jefferson believed that an educated citizenry was necessary to a republican government. The Library of Congress continues to uphold this tradition.

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