

Mr. Jefferson  
&  
The Giant Moose



"I think this is the most extraordinary collection of talent, of human knowledge, that has ever been gathered together at the White House, with the possible exception of when Thomas Jefferson dined here alone."

John F. Kennedy's opening comments at a 1962 dinner for Nobel Prize winners.

“Nature intended for me the tranquil pursuits of science by rendering them by supreme delight.

Thomas Jefferson to Pierre Samuel Du Pont de Nemours

“Your first (letter) gives me information in the line of Natural history, & the second ...political news. The first is my passion, the last my duty, and therefore both desirable.”

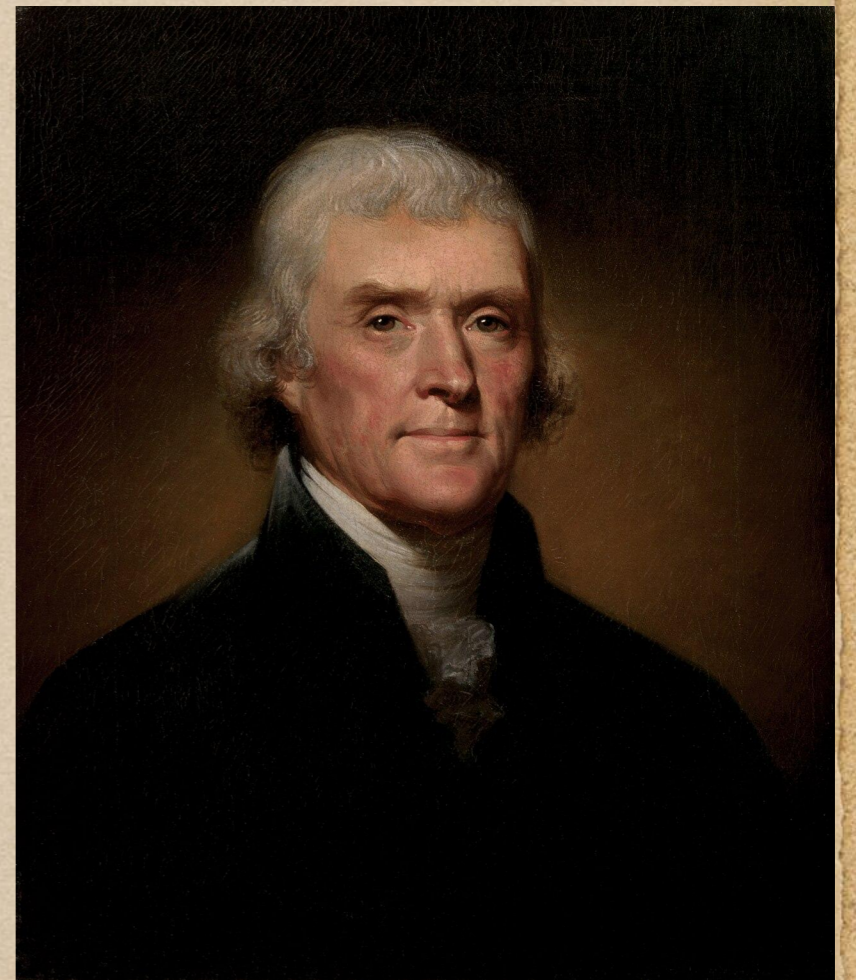
Thomas Jefferson to Harry Innes

# The Main Characters



Count  
Buffon

(Georges Louis LeClerc)



Thomas  
Jefferson

Buffon



# Buffon and The Publication of *Natural History*



(1749-1788)



# *Natural History is Hugely Popular*





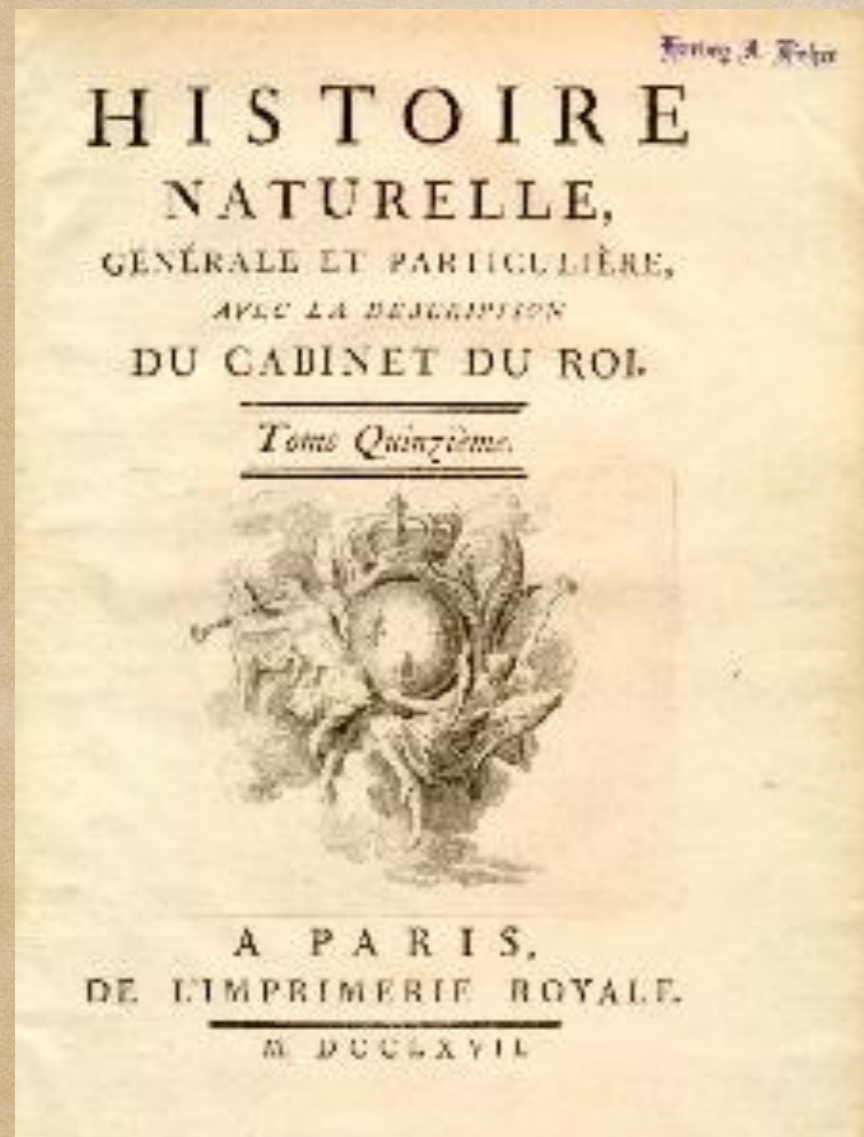
# Natural History and The Theory of New World Degeneracy



- (1) Animals found in both the New World and the Old World were smaller and feebler - degenerate - in the New World.
- (2) Animals found **only** in the New World were degenerate compared to those found **only** in the Old World.
- (3) Fewer species in the New World.
- (4) Domestication in the New World caused degeneration.



# *Natural History and The Theory of New World Degeneracy*



Where did Buffon  
get his data?



# *Natural History and The Theory of New World Degeneracy*



Why was the life in the New World degenerate?

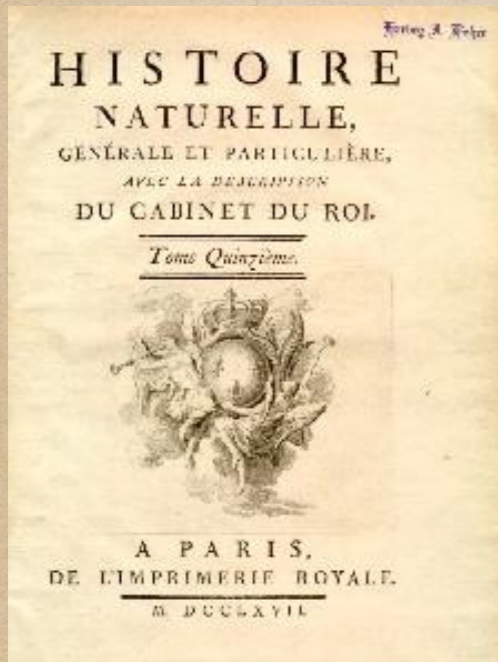
The New World was:

◆ cold

◆ humid



# The Theory of New World Degeneracy



“In these melancholy regions, Nature remains concealed under her old garments, and never exhibits herself in fresh attire;

being neither cherished nor cultivated by man, she never opens her fruitful and beneficent womb... .”



# The Theory of New World Degeneracy as Applied to Native Americans



# The Theory of New World Degeneracy as Applied to Native Americans



“He has no (body) hair, no beard, no ardour for the female....He has no vivacity, no activity of mind... He remains in stupid repose, on his limbs or couch, for whole days...”

"They have been refused the most precious spark of Nature's fire: They have no ardour for women, and, of course, no love to mankind...."

“Their heart is frozen, their society cold, and their empire cruel... “

“ In the savage, the organs of generation are small and feeble...”

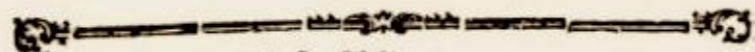
1768: Abbe' Cornelius de Pauw  
Continues the Assault

**RECHERCHES**  
**PHILOSOPHIQUES**  
SUR  
**LES AMERICAINS,**  
OU

*Mémoires intéressants pour servir à  
l'Histoire de l'Espece Humaine.*

PAR M. DE PAUW

*Avec une Dissertation sur l'Amérique & les  
Américains, par DOM PERNETY.*



*Studio disposita fidei.*

LUCRECE.



**TOME PREMIER.**



# Abbe' de Pauw Continues the Assault

## RECHERCHES PHILOSOPHIQUES SUR LES AMERICAINS.

OU

*Mémoires intéressants pour servir à  
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Américains, par DOM PERNETY.*

—  
*Studio disposita fidei.*

LUCRECE.

—  
TOME PREMIER.



“The Europeans who pass into America degenerate, as do the animals...”

“The Creoles, descended from Europeans and born in America...have never produced a single book...”

“This degradation of humanity must be imputed to... noxious vapors from standing waters and uncultivated grounds.”



# 1770: The Abbé' Raynal

A  
PHILOSOPHICAL AND POLITICAL  
HISTORY  
OF THE  
SETTLEMENTS AND TRADE  
OF THE  
EUROPEANS  
IN THE  
EAST AND WEST INDIES.

REVISED, AUGMENTED, AND PUBLISHED,  
IN TEN VOLUMES,  
BY THE ABBÉ RAYNAL.

NEWLY TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH,  
BY J. O. JUSTAMOND, F. R. S.

WITH A  
*New Set of Maps adapted to the Work, and a copious Index.*

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IN SIX VOLUMES.

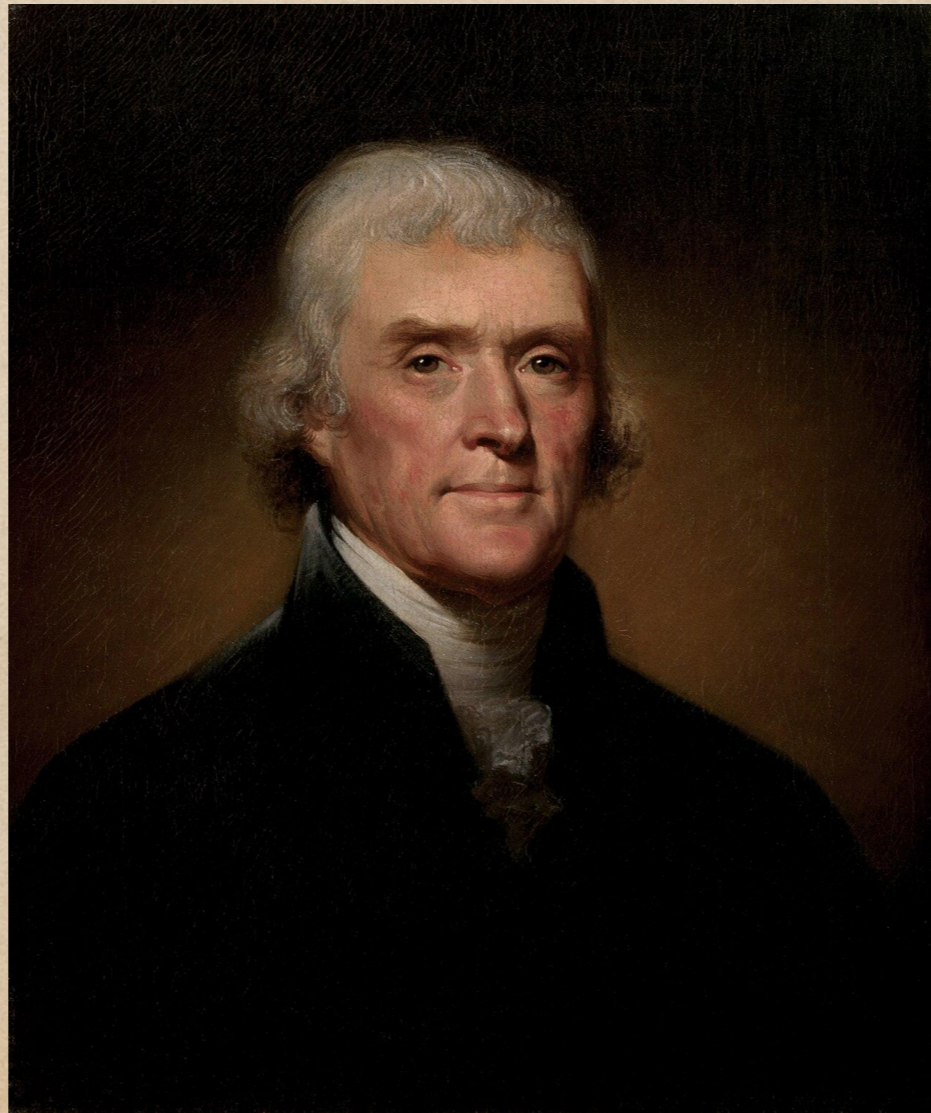
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VOL. I.

“One should not be surprised that  
America has yet to produce  
a good poet,  
a clever mathematician,  
a genius in even one art or science.”

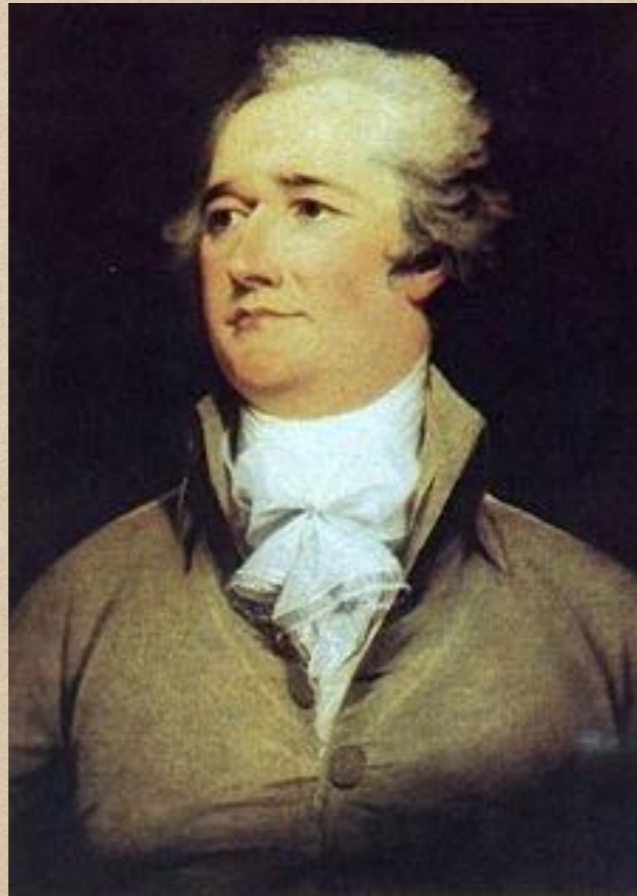
The Response From  
The Revolutionary Upstarts



# The Response From The Revolutionary Upstarts



Madison



Hamilton



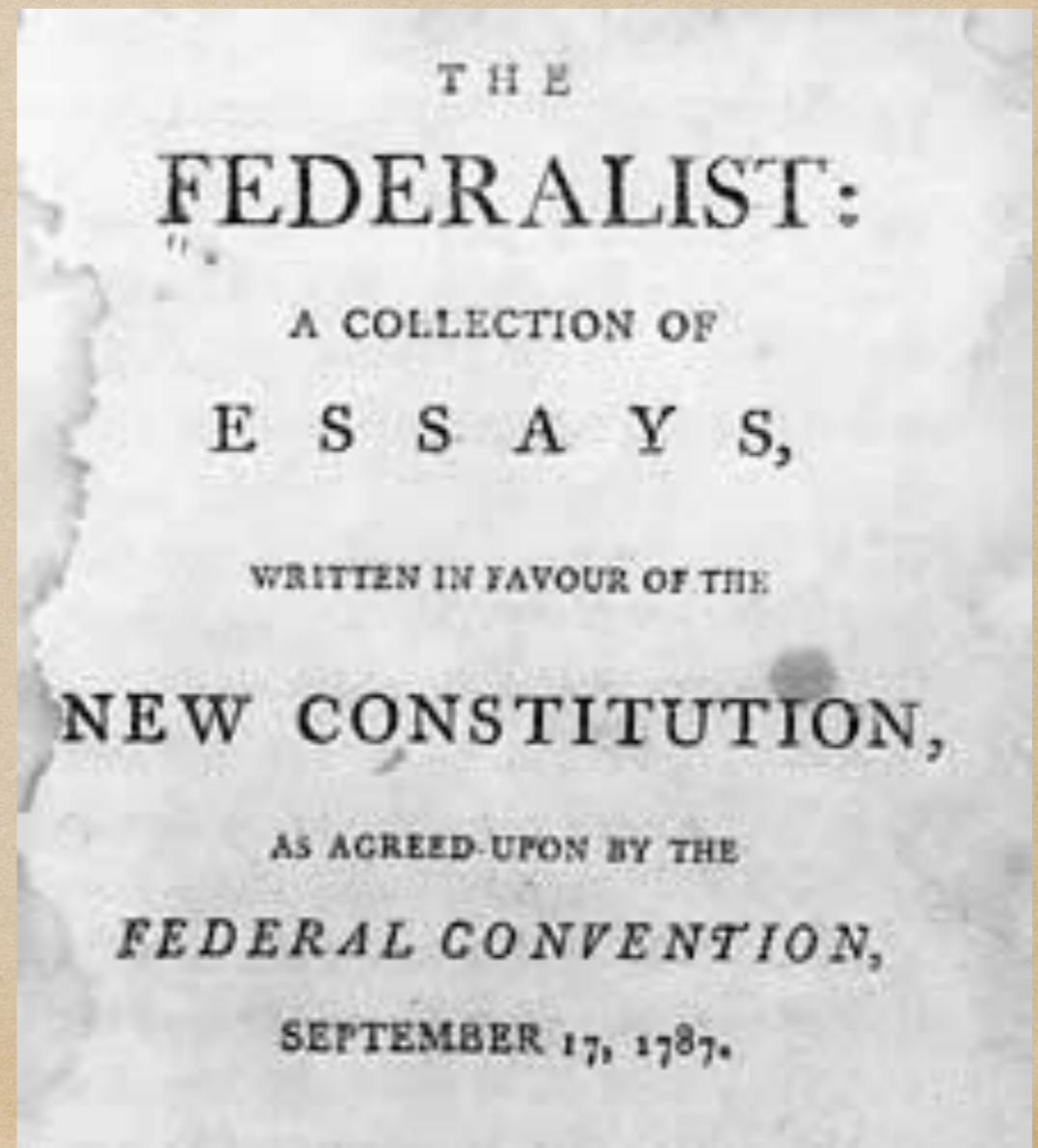
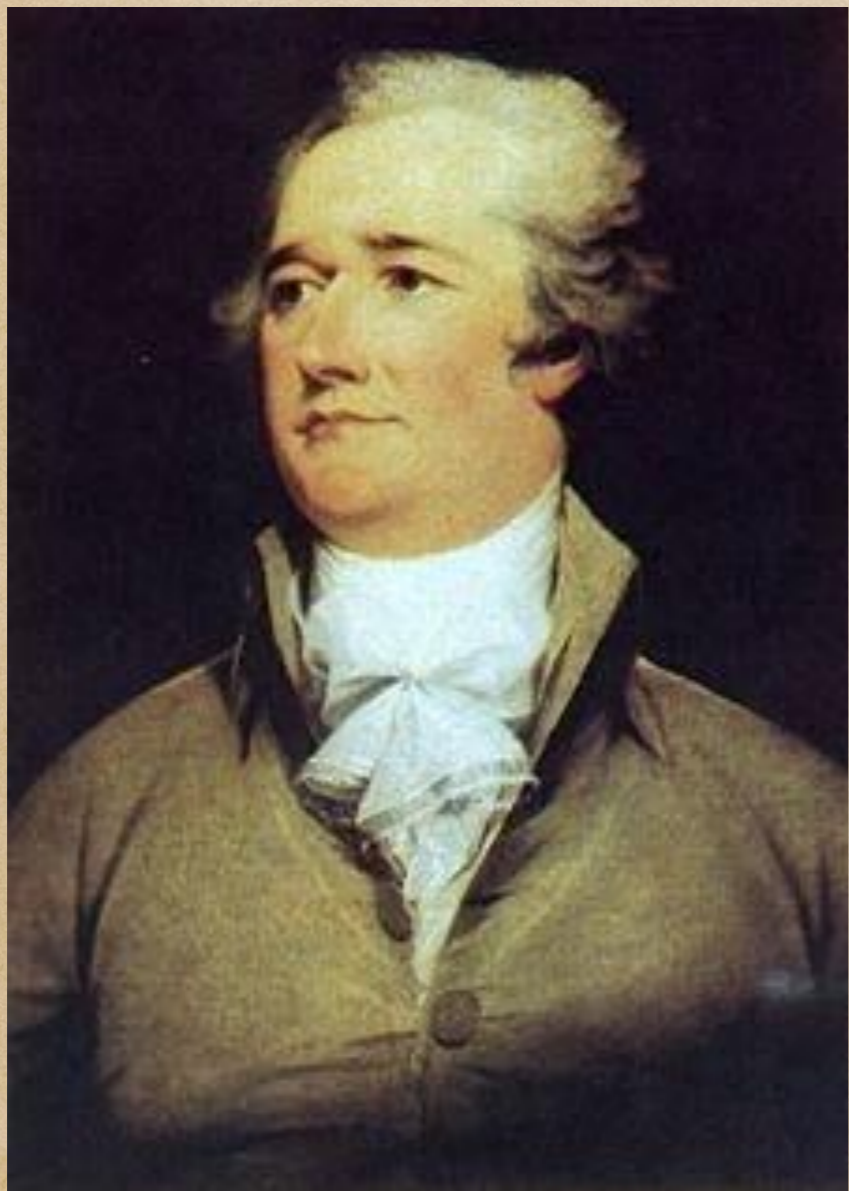
Franklin

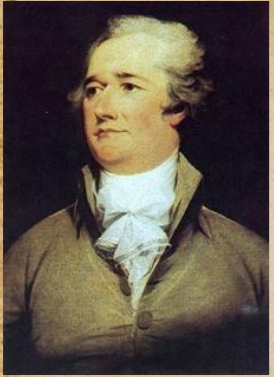
The Response From  
The Revolutionary Upstarts



Madison

# The Response From The Revolutionary Upstarts





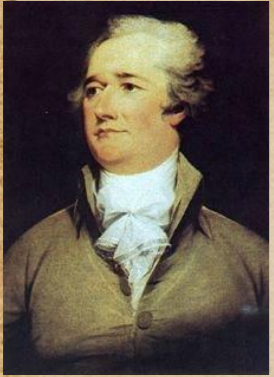
# The Response From The Revolutionary Upstarts

Federalist 11:

“Men admired as profound philosophers have, in direct terms, attributed to {European} inhabitants a physical superiority...

and have gravely asserted that all animals, and with them the human species, degenerate in America...

that even dogs cease to bark after having breathed awhile in our atmosphere.”



# The Response From The Revolutionary Upstarts

Hamilton's reply in Federalist 11:

“arrogant pretensions...”

It belongs to us to vindicate the honor of the human race,  
and to teach that assuming brother, moderation.”

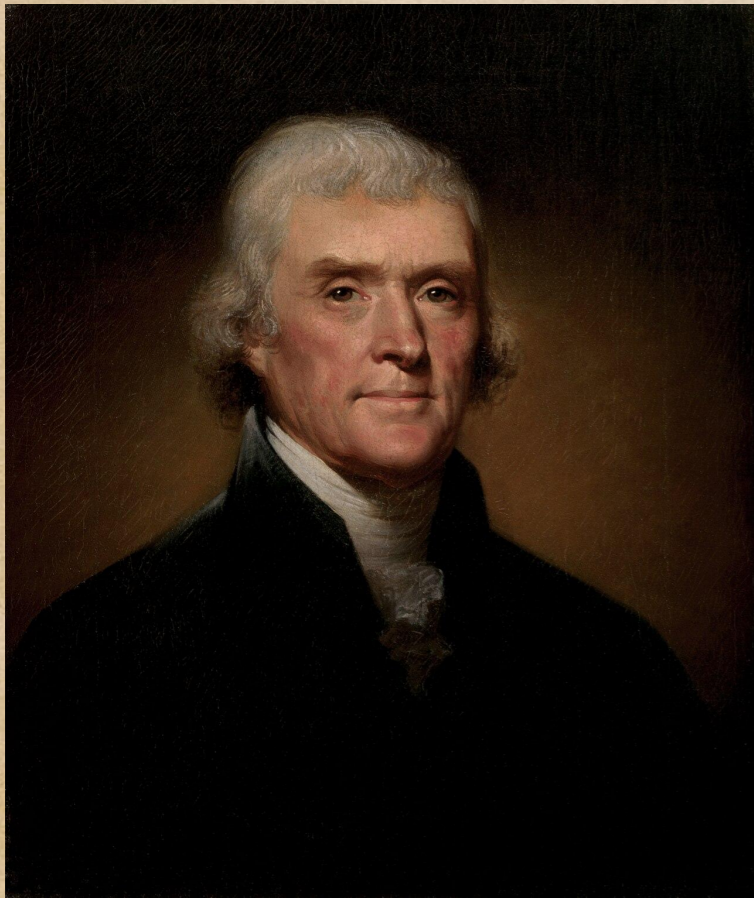
# The Response From The Revolutionary Upstarts



"in fact there was not one  
American present

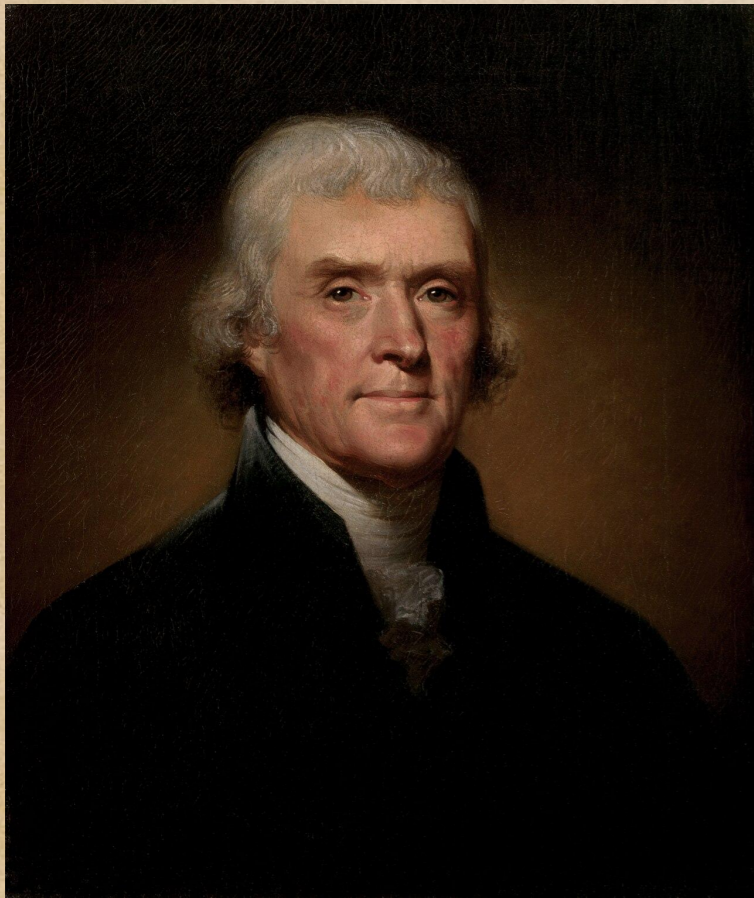
who could not have  
tossed out of the windows  
any one or perhaps two  
of the rest of the  
company."

# Jefferson Takes the Helm in the Battle Against Buffon & Degeneracy



1. Why did Jefferson care so deeply about this Buffon's theory of degeneracy?
2. What actions did he take on this front?

Why did Jefferson care so deeply about this issue?



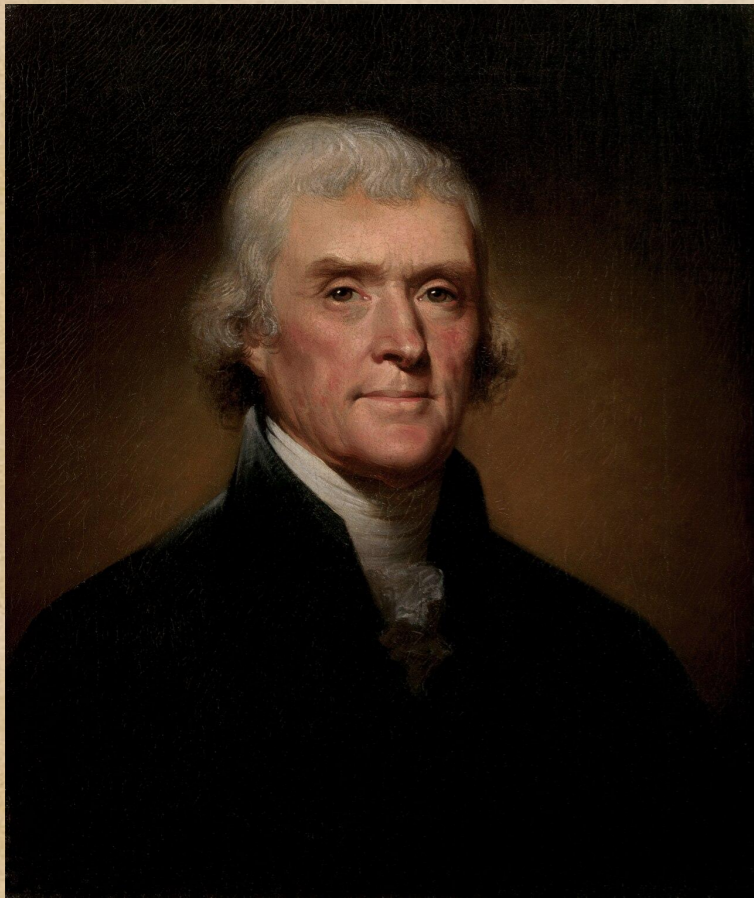
Jefferson the Naturalist

“There is not a sprig of grass that shoots uninteresting to me.”

Jefferson to his daughter, Martha

Why did Jefferson care so deeply about this issue?

## Jefferson the Empiricist



“It does not appear that Messrs. de Buffon and D'Aubenton have measured, weighed, or seen those of America.”

“Who were these travelers?”

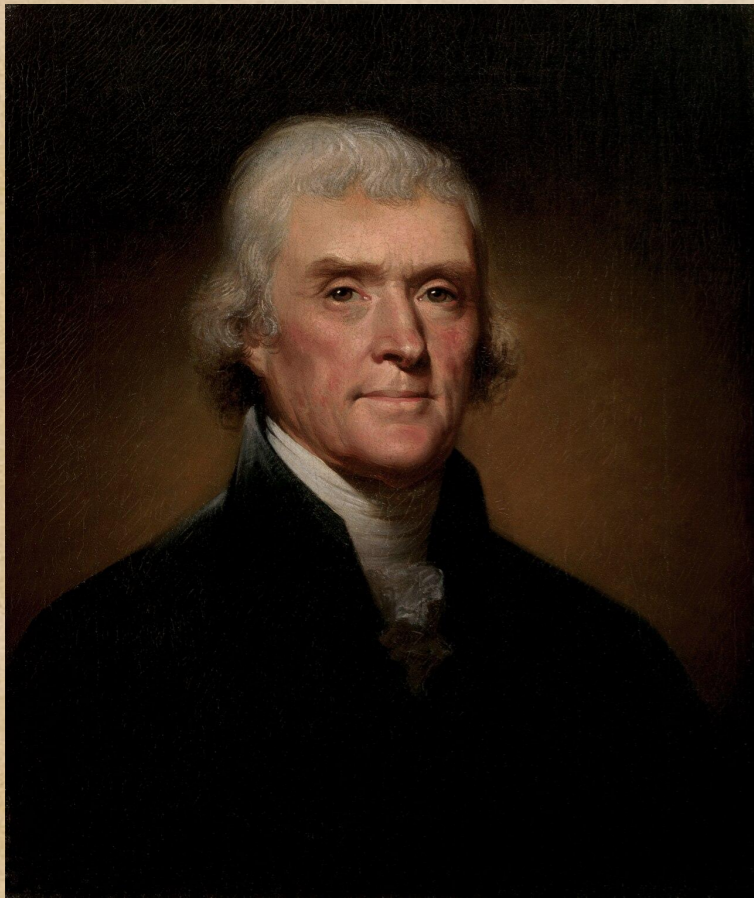
“Was natural history the object of their travels?”

“Did they measure or weigh the animals they speak of?”

“Or did they not judge of them by sight, or perhaps even from report only?”

Why did Jefferson care so deeply about this issue?

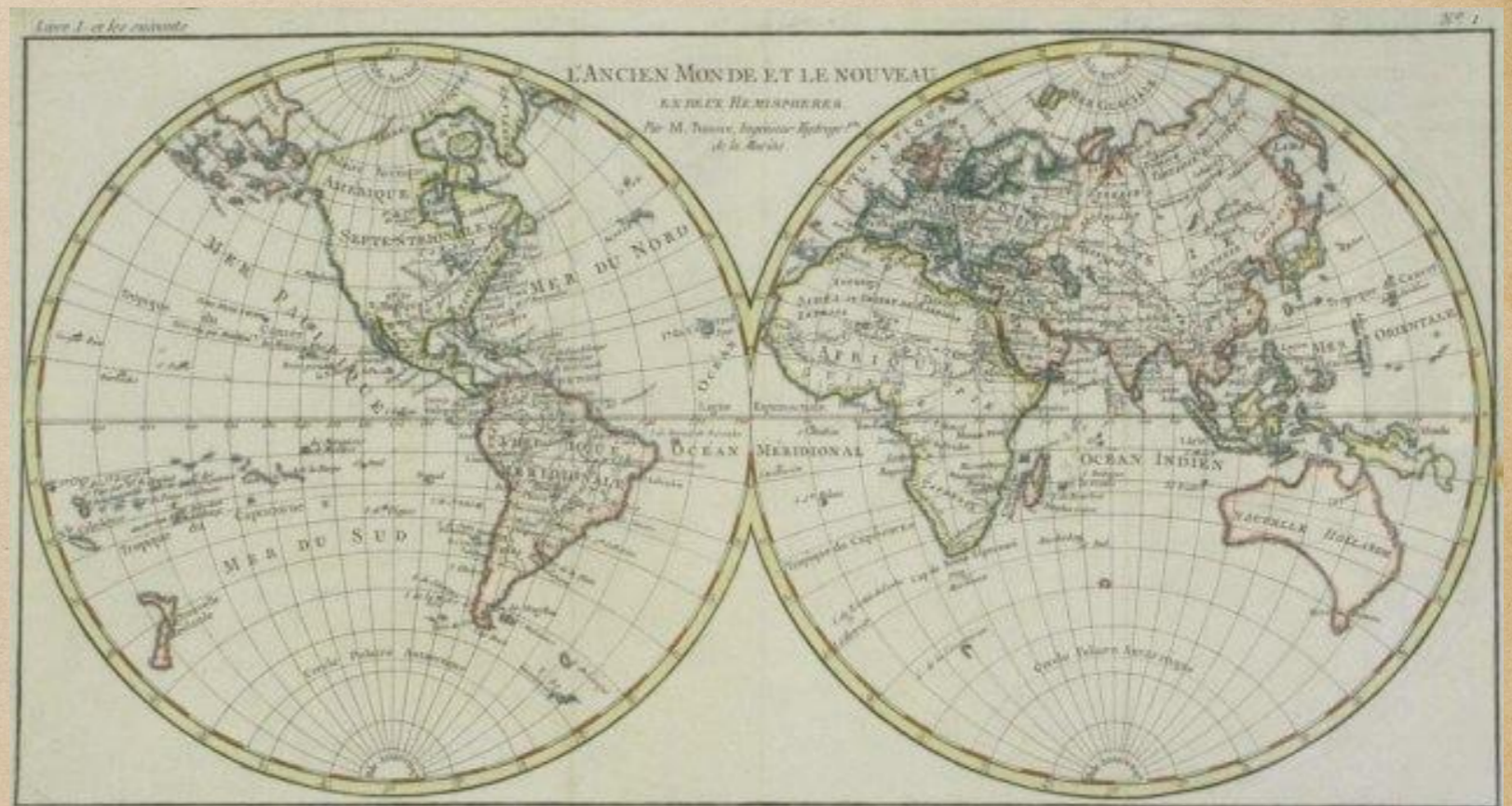
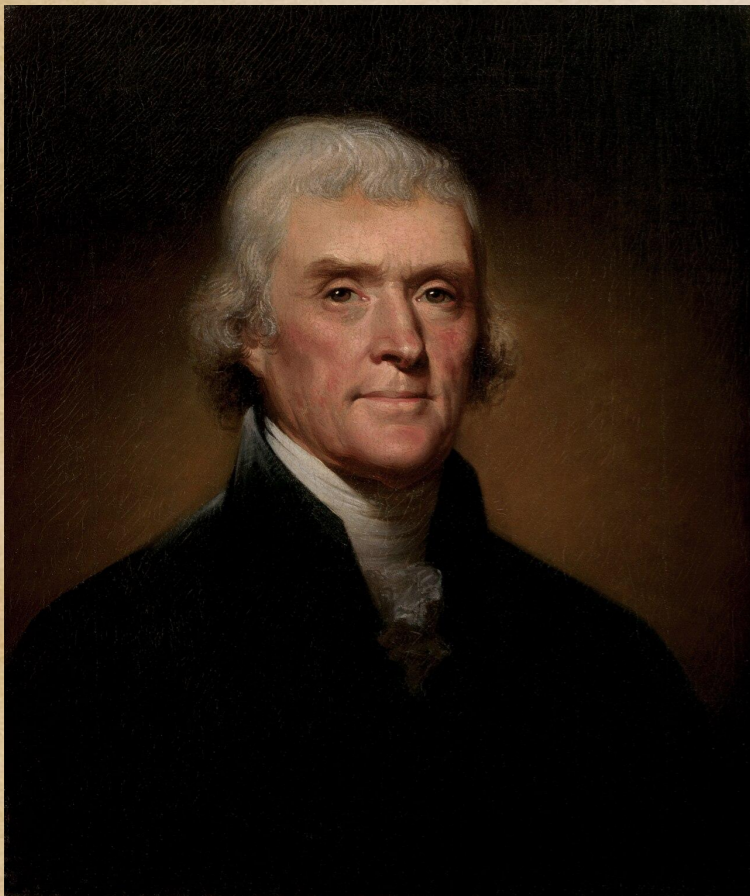
Jefferson the Literary Critic



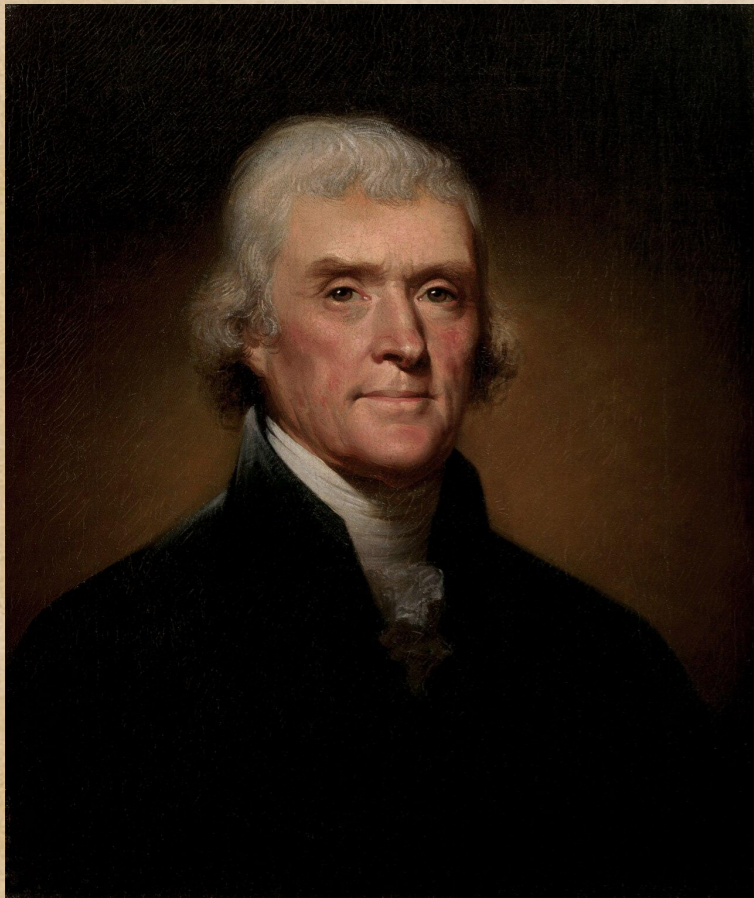
“there has been more eloquence than sound reasoning displayed in support of this theory.”

Why did Jefferson care so  
deeply about this issue?

## Jefferson the Economist

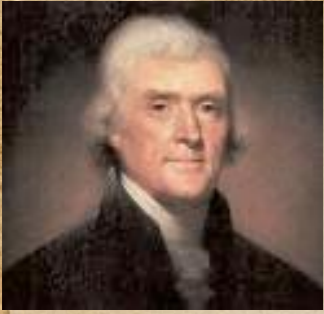


# Jefferson Takes the Helm

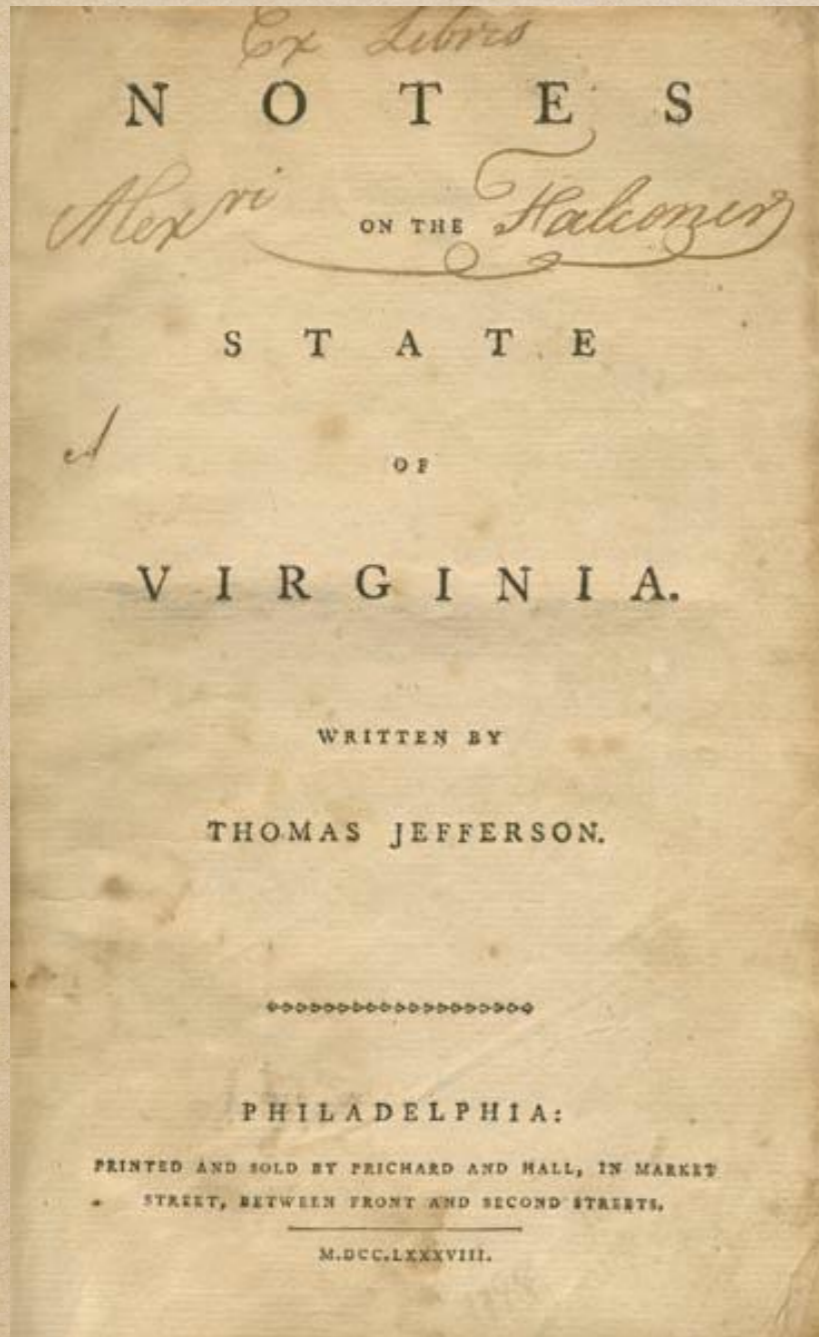


1. Why did Jefferson care so deeply about this issue?

2. What actions did he take on this front?



# Jefferson Replies: *Notes on the State of Virginia*



# Jefferson Replies: Notes on the State of Virginia

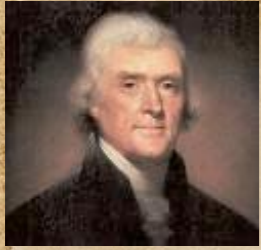
## NOTES on the state of VIRGINIA;

written in the year 1781, somewhat corrected and enlarged in the winter of 1782, for the use of a Foreigner of distinction, in answer to certain queries proposed by him respecting

1. Its boundaries	page 1
2. Rivers	3
3. Sea ports	17
4. Mountains	18
5. Cascades and caverns	33
6. Productions mineral, vegetable and animal	41
7. Climate	134
8. Population	151
9. Military force	162
10. Marine force	165
11. Aborigines	166
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13. Constitution	193
14. Laws	235
15. Colleges, buildings, and roads	275
16. Proceedings as to tories	285
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MDCCCLXXXII.

6. Productions mineral, vegetable and animal	41
7. Climate	134
8. Population	151
9. Military force	162



## Jefferson Replies: *Notes on the State of Virginia*

A COMPARATIVE VIEW OF THE QUADRUPEDS OF EUROPE AND  
OF AMERICA.

I. ABORIGINALS OF BOTH.

“The first table impeaches  
the first member of the  
assertion,

that of the animals common  
to both countries, the  
American are smallest...”



# Jefferson Replies: Notes on the State of Virginia

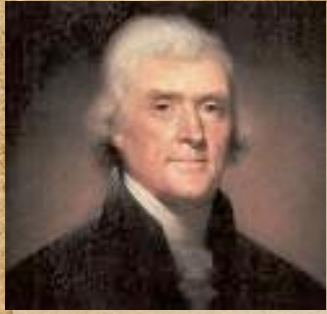
## Tables to Rebuke Buffon

### II. ABORIGINALS OF ONE ONLY.

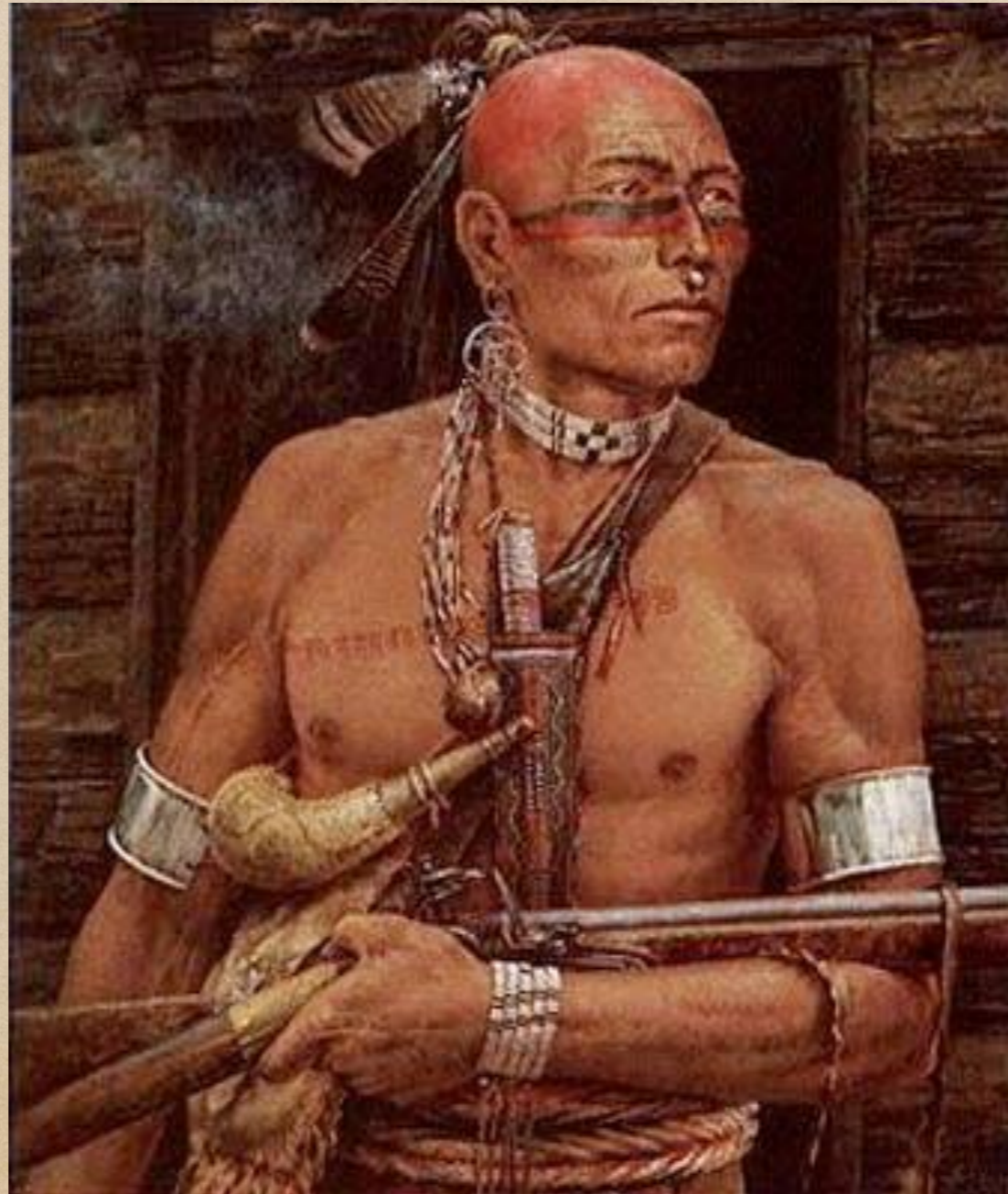
EUROPE.	lb.	AMERICA.	lb.
Sanglier—Wild boar,	280.	Tapir,	534.
Mouflon—Wild sheep,	56.	Elk, round horned,	† 450.
Bouquetin—Wild goat.		Puma.	
* Lievre—Hare,	7.6	Jaguar,	218.
Lapin—Rabbit,	3.4	Cabiai,	109.
Putois—Polecat,	3.3	Tamanoir,	109.
Genette,	3.1	Tamandua,	65.4
Desman—Muskrat,		Cougar of N. Amer.	75.
	oz.	Cougar of S. Amer.	59.4
Ecureuil—Squirrel,	12.	Ocelot.	
Hermine—Ermin,	8.2	Pecari,	46.3
Rat—Rat,	7.5	Jaguaret,	43.6
Loirs,	3.1	Alco.	
Lerrot—Dormouse,	1.8	Lama.	
Taupe—Mole,	1.2	Paco.	
Hamster,	.9	Paca,	32.7
Zisel.		Serval.	
Leming.		Sloth—Unau,	27½
Souris—Mouse,	.6	Saricovienne.	
		Kincajou.	
		Tatou Kabassou,	21.8
		Urson—Urchin.	
		Raccoon—Raton,	16.5
		Coati.	
		Coendou,	16.3
		Sloth—Ai	13.
		Sapajou Ouarini.	
		Sapajou Coaita,	9.8
		Tatou Encubert.	
		Tatou Apar.	
		Tatou Cachica,	7.
		Little Coendou,	6.5
		Opossum—Sarigue.	
		Tapeti.	
		Margay.	
		Crabier.	

### II. TABLE—CONTINUED.

EUROPE.	lb.	AMERICA.	lb.
		Agouti,	4.2
		Sapajou Saï,	3.5
		Tatou Cirquinçon.	
		Tatou Tatouate,	3.3
		Mouffette Squash.	
		Mouffette Chinche.	
		Mouffette Conepate—	
		Scunk.	
		Mouffette—Zorilla.	
		Whabus—Hare, Rabbit.	
		Aperea.	
		Akouchi.	
		Ondatra—Muskrat.	
		Pilori.	
		Great grey squirrel,	† 2.7
		Fox squirrel of Virginia.	† 2.625
		Surikate,	2.
		Mink,	† 2.
		Sapajou—Sajou,	1.8
		Indian pig—Cochon d'	
		Inde,	1.6
		Sapajou—Saïmiri,	1.5
		Phalanger.	
		Coquallin.	
		Lesser grey squirrel,	† 1.5
		Black squirrel,	† 1.5
		Red squirrel,	10 oz.
		Sagoin Saki.	
		Sagoin Pinche.	
		Sagoin Tamarin.	
			oz.
		Sagoin Ouistiti,	4.4
		Sagoin Marikine.	
		Sagoin Mico.	
		Cayopollin.	
		Fourmillier.	
		Marmose.	
		Sarigue of Cayenne.	
		Tucan.	
		Red mole.	
		Ground squirrel,	4.



Jefferson Replies: *Notes on the State of Virginia*  
Degeneracy and the Native Americans



Chief Logan  
of the Mingo Tribe

# Jefferson and the Power of the Physical



# Jefferson and the Power of the Physical

What is the height of the moose?

Are they a swift animal?

Have they ever been tamed?

ENC. IN [1784, MAR. 12]  
68

1. Is not the Caribou & the Black-Moose one & the same Animal? No - the Caribou is between a Moose & Deer
2. Is not the Gray-moose & the Elk one & the same animal & quite different from the former? They are very different animals
3. What is the height of the Moose? Eighteen hands
4. What is the difference between the black & the gray Moose? The black is the male & gray the female of the same species Have they a solid or cloven hoof? 6 cloven
5. Do their feet make a loud rattling as they run? They do
6. Is the under part of their hoof covered with hair? it is not
7. Are they a swift animal? Not very swift
8. Do they sweat when hard run or only drip at the tongue? They do not sweat
9. At what season do they shed their horns? in November And when recover them? in May
10. Has the Doe horns as well as the Buck? No
11. How many young does she produce at a time? Two
12. How far southward are they known? I know not
13. Have they ever been tamed & used for any purpose? They have been tamed but not used. I have seen a young one such a bow as gently & kindly as her calf

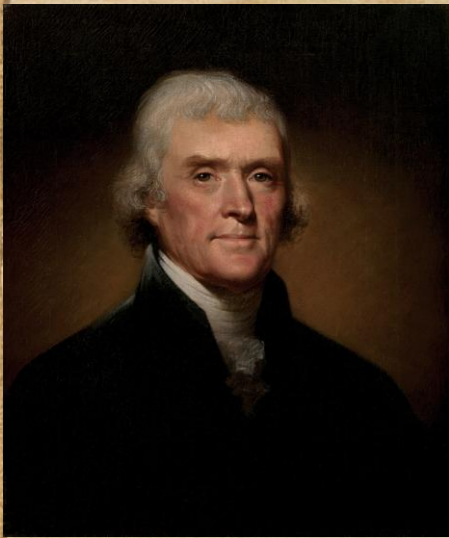
1643

# Jefferson and The Moose: General John Sullivan



General John Sullivan

Sullivan to Jefferson: "...there is a moose's horn in one of the Pigwackett towns so large that it is used for a cradle to rock the children in."



## Jefferson and The Moose: The Power of Persistence



General John Sullivan

Jefferson to Sullivan: “The readiness with which you undertook to endeavor to get for me the skin, the skeleton and the horns of the moose...

emboldens me to renew my application to you for those objects, which would be an acquisition here, *more precious than you can imagine.*”

Jefferson Sails to France - July, 1785



# Jefferson Meets the Count



Jefferson to Buffon: "... the {European} rein deer could walk under the belly of our moose."

# Jefferson Meets the Count



If Jefferson could show him such a specimen, Buffon  
“...would give up the question.”

# THE MOOSE



# THE MOOSE



Sullivan wrote:

“Every engine was set at work to preserve the bones and cleanse them from the remaining flesh.

And to preserve the skins with hair on, with the hoofs on and bones of legs and thighs in skin without putrefaction.

the skin {of the head being whole and well dresst {sic} it may be drawn on at pleasure.”

# The Plan



# Disaster on the Dock



# Disaster on the Dock



September 28, 1787

Jefferson wrote a friend that General Sullivan had put:

“...himself to an infinitude of trouble more than I meant,  
he did it cheerfully,  
and I feel myself really under obligations to him.

That the tragedy might not want a proper catastrophe, the box, bones and all are lost;  
so that this chapter of natural history will still remain a blank.

But I have written to him not to send me another.”



## The Moose Arrives in Paris, but...

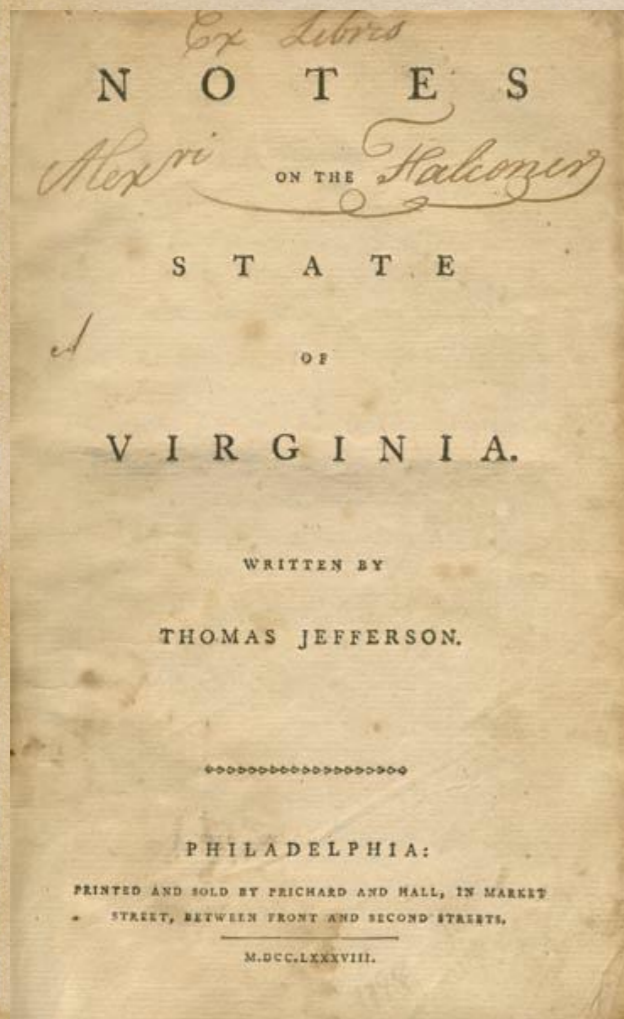
Jefferson asked Buffon that the moose be “placed on his legs in the king’s cabinet.”

Jefferson’s *Diary*: the skin and skeleton “...convinced Mr. Buffon. He promised in his next volume to set these things right.”

# The Death of the Count



# The Battle Over Degeneracy Does Not Die With Buffon



# Degeneracy Long-lasting and Far-Reaching Consequences



Jedediah Morse



# Degeneracy

## Long-lasting and Far-Reaching Consequences

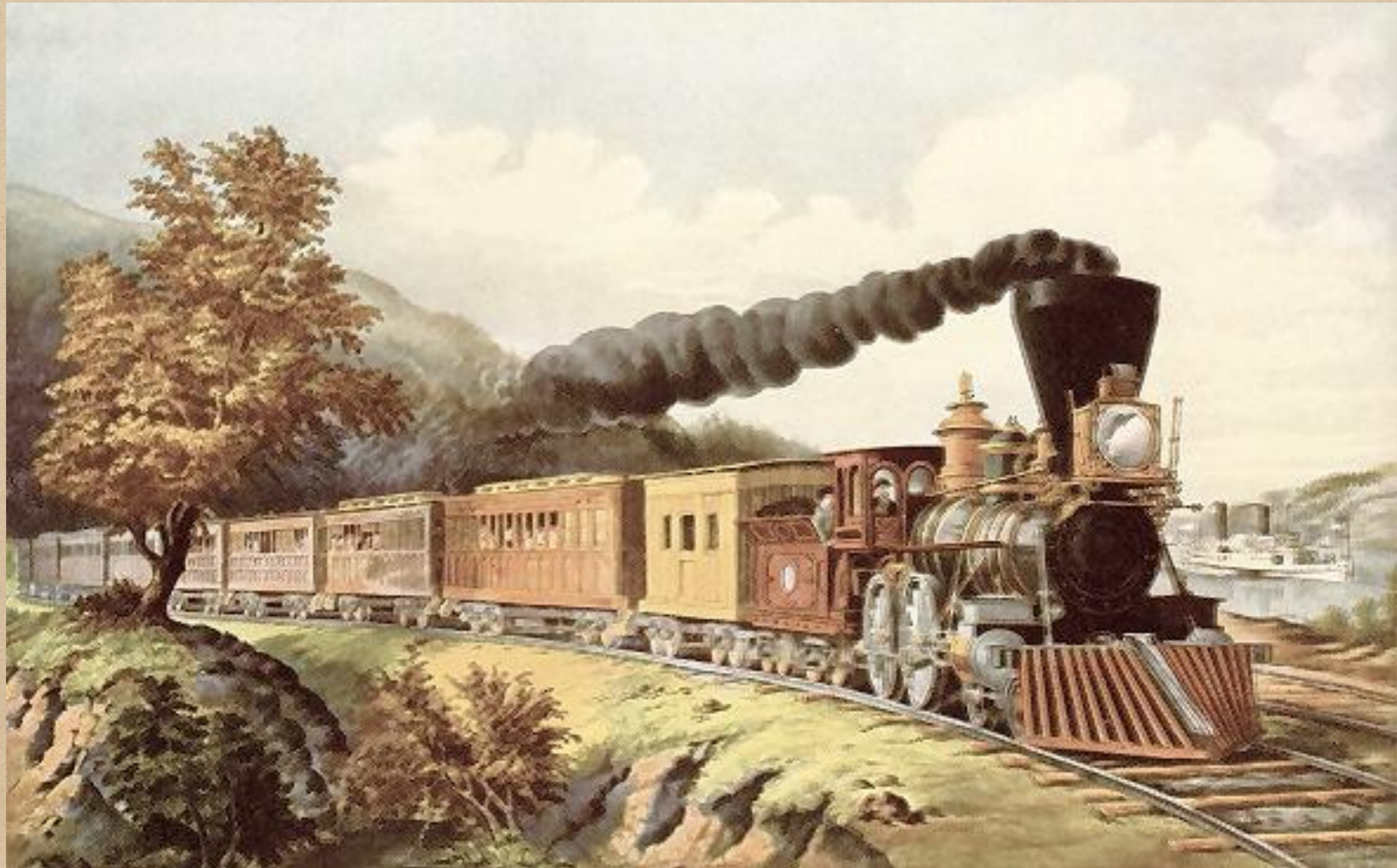


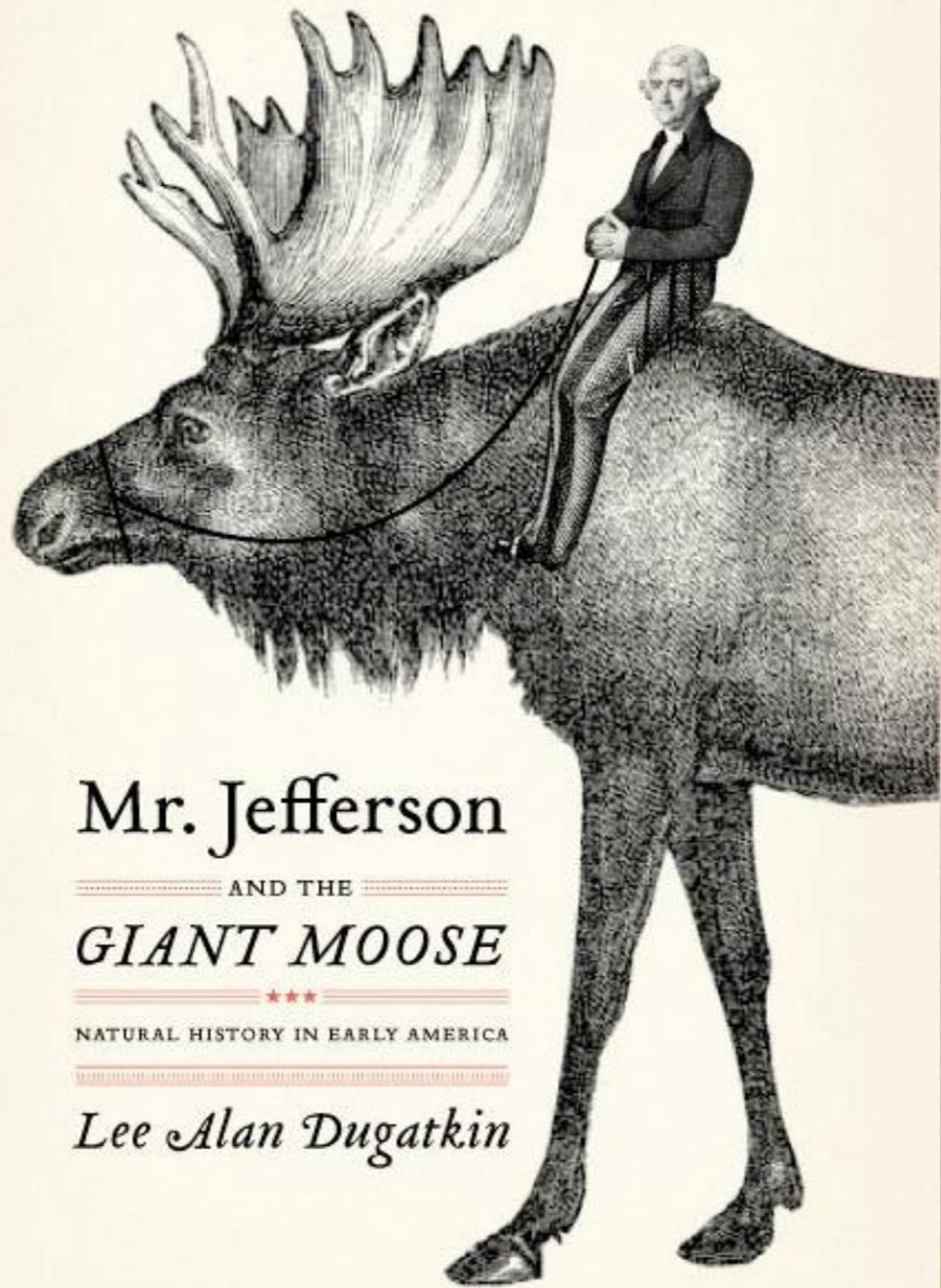
Joel Barlow

From the Anarchiad:  
"See vegetation, man, and bird, and  
beast,  
Just by the distance squares in size  
decreased...  
Huge mammoth dwindle to a mouse's  
size  
Columbian turkeys turn European flies  
Exotic birds and foreign beasts grow  
small  
And man, the lordliest, shrink to least of  
all  
There..., through inverted optics show  
All nature lessening to the sage De

# Over At Last

By the 1850s, the theory of degeneracy was all but dead...





Mr. Jefferson

AND THE

*GIANT MOOSE*

\*\*\*

NATURAL HISTORY IN EARLY AMERICA

*Lee Alan Dugatkin*