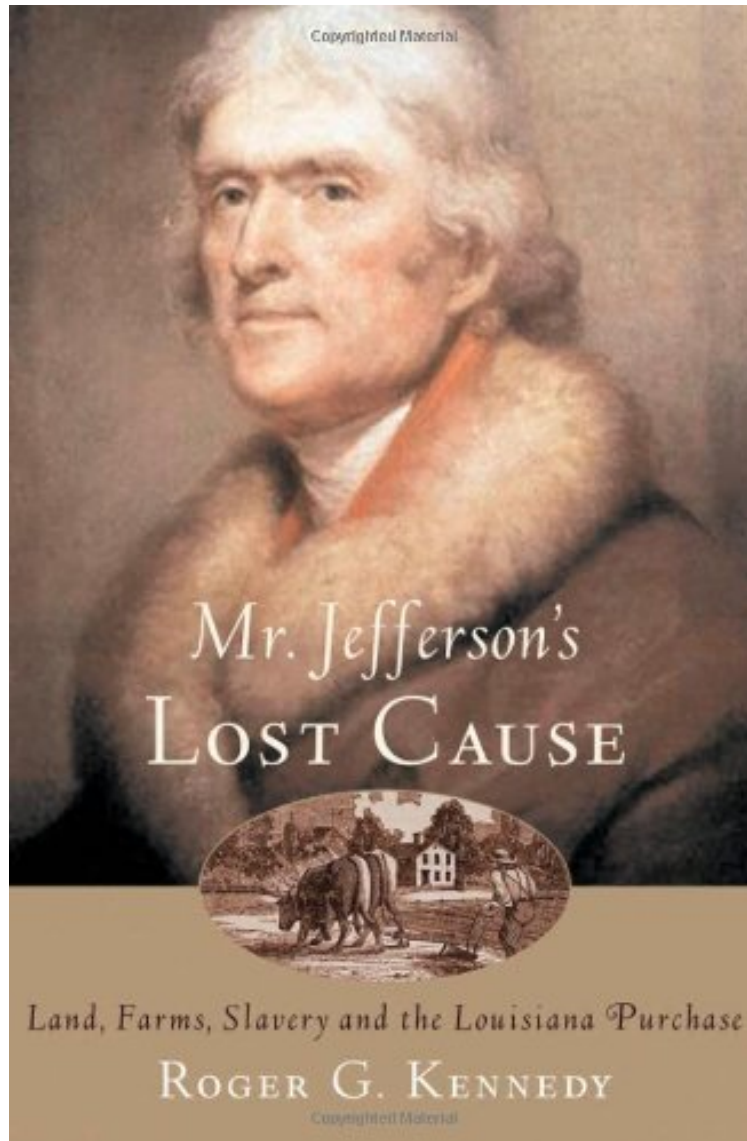


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Mr. Jefferson's Lost Cause: Land, Farmers, Slavery, and the Louisiana Purchase

Roger G. Kennedy

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Roger G. Kennedy : Mr. Jefferson's Lost Cause: Land, Farmers, Slavery, and the Louisiana Purchase before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Mr. Jefferson's Lost Cause: Land, Farmers, Slavery, and the Louisiana Purchase:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Unique thought provoking view of American historyBy RkGreat

book. Very interesting perspective. Cultures around the world should read and reflect upon this book. Sadly I am sure they won't. 5 of 5 people found the following review helpful. History Covered from a Different Angle By R. DelParto Roger G. Kennedy examines the steps that were taken by Thomas Jefferson to secure the Louisiana Territory from Spanish acquisition. MR. JEFFERSON'S LOST CAUSE: LAND, FARMERS, SLAVERY, AND THE LOUISIANA PURCHASE covers the pivotal years of 1802 and 1820 and other years connected to Kennedy's study. His main premise is to prove that if constrictions did not exist for Yeomen and slaves, if Jefferson's personal character, arrogance and pessimism, did not interfere with the decisions he made, concessions could have been made before and after the execution of the Louisiana Purchase that may have prevented the US Civil War and the issue of slavery. MR. JEFFERSON'S LOST CAUSE is a unique examination that Kennedy narrates with extreme detail. But one of the unfortunate aspects of his narration is that some of the passages are so intense with historical data that one loses his point, or forget what the book is about. As Director Emeritus of the National Museum of American History and the National Park Service, Kennedy attempts to creatively intertwine his knowledge and fondness for biological, geological, ecological history, Early American and Roman history as it relates to the activities that occurred with the land. However, they appear out of place and somewhat disconnected to the main subject at hand - Jefferson, the land, slavery, and the Louisiana Purchase. For example, readers may become lost if they do not know about geology, and the different periods that existed, the Jurassic and Cretaceous periods, which he uses as analogies to explain John Marshall's Dartmouth College decision of 1819 and how it ties in with the phases of capitalism and corporate growth as well as the introduction to chapter 13 where he begins his discussion with a short biology lesson about organisms. In addition, this is yet another book where the main character disappears amongst the immense amount of information. Kennedy dedicates a chapter or two on several key contributors to the Louisiana Purchase, Alexander McGillvray and Fulwar Skipwith. So in essence, what can be learned from reading MR. JEFFERSON'S LOST CAUSE? Kennedy emphasizes that Jefferson was the "father of the land," but did use his experience of Plantation management to the best of his ability to provide balanced relations with the Yeomen. The story and analysis of this historical event was told from a different angle, but may have been enriching if the narrative moved laterally. While reading the book, memories of the past come to mind when I used to have to write and revise papers for my history classes, and had to constantly remind myself what my thesis was. Otherwise, the bibliography is a helpful source to understand the foundation of Kennedy's research. 19 of 20 people found the following review helpful. Fascinating History of the American South By Scott Snyder This book had strong content and very weird organization. On the plus side: Kennedy puts together a commanding set of facts to show that while Jefferson's words rang strong and true, the man himself was hamstrung by his allegiance to his class and could not affect any change regarding slavery in America. One reviewer called Kennedy's work a Marxist critique of southern history. I would argue precisely the opposite. The "lost cause" of the title was the idea that yeoman farmers, tending their own farms for their own benefit would lead to a strong, engaged and committed citizenry. This was originally a Roman idea shared by men such as Adam Smith, James Oglethorpe, George Washington and Alexander Hamilton. This practice was in place in the Northern colonies and later the Northwest Territory, and led to economic development and economic independence from Great Britain, industrialization, wealthy citizens and a diversified economy. In the South, the plantation system meant large farms run by absentee landlords who exploited and ruined the soil, enslaved and robbed people of self-initiative (those people being the slaves), stifled diversification (all hail King Cotton), discouraged industrialization, and prolonged dependence and subservience to textile manufacturers in Liverpool and Manchester. Since the people actually working the land did not have a stake in it, or in the care of the tools they used, the factors of economic production - capital, land, tools and labor - all were "run into the ground." The lasting effect of the plantation system - low wages, demoralized citizens lacking entrepreneurial spirit, ruined tools, ruined fields, death and suffering - strongly parallel the effects of 60+ years of Communism in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, and before that the effects of British absentee ownership of Ireland. Indeed only in the past couple decades, a full century after the fall of the plantation system, is the South now reviving with manufacturing, entrepreneurship and economic diversification. Post Communist Eastern Europe has strong resemblances to the Reconstruction South. Therefore, if anything, Kennedy's book affirms the social, moral and economic benefits of the Capitalist market system of small time farmers and business owners over the ruin that stems from collectivization of any sort - Communist or Plantation. The rest of the book is a wonderful excursion through the history of the deep South. This is what I enjoyed about the book. On the negative side: the book needs a new title, the current one is misleading. The book is not really about the Louisiana purchase as much as it is about how Jefferson, Madison, Monroe and their cohorts lead the nation down a path to a condition that would only be rectified with much bloodshed in the 1860s. The book needs better organization (this is the worst organized book I've ever encountered). It needs a new appendix. The book mentions Aaron Burr and his doings, trial, conspiracy, sentencing, exile, etc. without provide some sort of appendix to tell us about Aaron Burr. All I know about the man is that he dueled with Alexander Hamilton and won. I think the author presume much too much on the readers part when it comes to Burr. That was troublesome. The matter of how and why the Louisiana Purchase came to be is found in ONE obscure paragraph buried deep in the book: Napoleon's real interest was the income from sugar plantations in Haiti - Louisiana served only as a source of material to operate the plantations in Haiti -- and when

Haitian rebels took over (sound familiar?) France was forced out of the sugar business and found a better use for Louisiana: cash it in - cheap. Finally, the book comes together only on the final page when Kennedy sums up Jefferson's accomplishments and failings, especially how his ideas finally came to fruition under Lincoln and in the various Homestead Acts. All in all, despite its numerous faults, I highly recommend this book. It is a very interesting and engrossing history of the US acquisition of Florida, Alabama, Mississippi and Texas; the personalities of Jefferson, Washington, Madison, Monroe; Native American-African American-European and American relations and quite a bit more. Lots of food for thought here. Great book.

Thomas Jefferson advocated a republic of small farmers--free and independent yeomen. And yet as president he presided over a massive expansion of the slaveholding plantation system--particularly with the Louisiana Purchase--squeezing the yeomanry to the fringes and to less desirable farmland. Now Roger Kennedy conducts an eye-opening examination of that gap between Jefferson's stated aspirations and what actually happened. Kennedy reveals how the Louisiana Purchase had a major impact on land use and the growth of slavery. He examines the great financial interests (such as the powerful land companies that speculated in new territories and the British textile interests) that beat down slavery's many opponents in the South itself (Native Americans, African Americans, Appalachian farmers, and conscientious opponents of slavery). He describes how slaveholders' cash crops (first tobacco, then cotton) sickened the soil and how the planters moved from one desolated tract to the next. Soon the dominant culture of the entire region--from Maryland to Florida, from Carolina to Texas--was that of owners and slaves producing staple crops for international markets. The earth itself was impoverished, in many places beyond redemption. None of this, Kennedy argues, was inevitable. He focuses on the character, ideas, and ambitions of Thomas Jefferson to show how he and other Southerners struggled with the moral dilemmas presented by the presence of Indian farmers on land they coveted, by the enslavement of their workforce, by the betrayal of their stated hopes, and by the manifest damage being done to the earth itself. Jefferson emerges as a tragic figure in a tragic period.

From Publishers Weekly This aggravating book, published to coincide with the 200th anniversary of the Louisiana Purchase, has considerable value despite itself. Like the Shenandoah River, Kennedy can't go from place to place in a straight line as he makes up words and terms ("preemptive humanism"). Yet amid the disorder and occasional pretentiousness, there's serious intent and plausible argument. Kennedy, director emeritus of the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History and author of *Burr*, *Hamilton*, and *Jefferson*, believes that, while human decisions created the American plantation system and its slave laboring force, the spread of slavery had its own momentum. Much of that, he argues, can be attributed to Thomas Jefferson, the tragic figure in this drama. Kennedy shrewdly characterizes Jefferson as someone who couldn't finish projects he started or free himself from dilemmas of his own creating, such as the purchase of an inland empire destined to be filled, not with dependent farmers--Jefferson's ideal--but with slaves, cinching slavery's hold on the nation. Of all the curious characters here, none is more central than the previously little-known Fulwar Skipwith, a Virginian who fetched up in France, Florida and Louisiana. Kennedy takes the aspirations and wanderings of Skipwith, whose tale is worth the book, to symbolize the hold of Virginia's ways over the entire South. Kennedy is at his best when writing of farming, soil exhaustion and the environmental degradation brought on by the plantation system. But for learning about the nation's doubling of territory in 1803, general readers will do much better to turn to Charles Cerami's *Jefferson's Great Gamble*. 25 illus. Copyright 2003 Reed Business Information, Inc. "Fresh, endlessly fascinating, and altogether extraordinary.... A sweeping, continent-wide reinterpretation of early US history.... Thematically rich and full of subtle arguments, Kennedy's study forces a reconsideration of accepted views. It couldn't come at a better time, given the soon-to-be widely commemorated bicentenary of the Lewis and Clark expedition."--Kirkus s (starred review) "Roger Kennedy's throws down the gauntlet in his engaging new book. Was the freedom-loving, slave-holding Thomas Jefferson responsible for the coming of the Civil War? Kennedy's bold argument will certainly stir up controversy among the specialists, but it will also force them to rethink some of the most important questions in the history of the early American republic. Mr. Jefferson's Lost Cause is vintage Kennedy, serving up a characteristically rich offering of fascinating stories, deft character sketches, and provocative conclusions."--Peter Onuf, University of Virginia "Mr. Kennedy's astringency forces us to reconsider settled opinions, always a good thing."--Wall Street Journal "Though in many ways a willful architect of the nation, Thomas Jefferson failed to build the foundation he envisioned in his heart of hearts: an Arcadian society of small farmers. His dream was trampled by a parade of vanities, intrigues, and missed opportunities, all marching lock step with the determinations of social history and natural history. Roger Kennedy highlights this fascinating story for us--he weaves it with stunning erudition, and delivers it with bounteous wit. Kennedy provides novel insights on Jefferson and numerous contemporaries, and he plows bare the roots of American land policy, revealing factors that are still germane after two centuries."--Daniel J. Gelo, University of Texas, San Antonio "From this world of filibusters and spies, slaves and masters, tribal leaders and imperial politicians, Roger Kennedy has assembled as fascinating a cast as American history has ever produced."--Richard White, Stanford University About the Author Roger Kennedy is Director Emeritus of the National Museum of American History,

Smithsonian Institution, and a past Director of the National Park Service. He has had a long and distinguished career in public service during which he has served six presidents. His books include *Burr, Hamilton, and Jefferson* and (as general editor and contributor) the twelve-volume *Smithsonian Guide to Historic America*.