



University of Colorado at Boulder

Sewall Residential Academic Program

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Re: Common Reading to Complete BEFORE Classes Start

Dear Sewall Student:

Welcome to Sewall! The Sewall Residential Academic Program faculty is excited to greet you at the start of your academic career at CU-Boulder. Being a part of Sewall's lively and challenging academic community will prepare you to succeed and excel both in your studies at CU and in your chosen career.

To get started in building Sewall's academic community, we are sending you a brief common reading that *all* Sewall students should read and think about before the start of classes. Please complete the assignment below *now* – before classes begin.

Step 1: Write down your initial thoughts

Before you pick up the enclosed reading, first brainstorm about what the United States means to you. Please take a few minutes to ponder and write down your responses to these questions.

- If you are an American citizen, what does that entail for you? What does it require of you? What does it provide you? If you're a non-US citizen, what is your perspective on American citizenship and how is that affected by your own national concept of citizenship?
- What sets the United States apart from other countries? In what ways is the United States similar to other countries?
- What are the keys to democracy and to maintaining a democracy?
- *Where* are your ideas of the United States coming from? In other words, what are the *sources* for your responses to the above questions?

Step 2: Read the handout

Enclosed is a brief selection from Thomas Jefferson's 1787 *Notes on the State of Virginia*, in which he reflects on some of the same basic questions, asked above. In this section, Jefferson responds to a question about the importance of producing manufactured goods in America and contrasts an industrial economy with an agricultural economy. This selection forms the core of what became known as the "Jeffersonian Ideal," a belief that democracy would flourish under an agrarian economy, and that individual freedom would be best expressed and maintained through private ownership and husbandry of property.

Step 3: Write down your reflection

After you finish the reading, please reflect on and write down your responses to these questions:

1. What do you notice about Jefferson's commentary? What catches your attention? What do you find most interesting, strange, significant or revealing? Write down a list of *anything* you notice about this reading.
2. Look back over the list you wrote down and choose one or two items that you noticed which you find *most* interesting or revealing.
3. Write out a brief commentary on *why* you find the items you chose most interesting or revealing.

Thank you! Please bring your reflections with you to your first Sewall class. We look forward to meeting you in a few weeks!

Selection from Thomas Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia*. (1787).

QUERY XIX. The present state of manufactures, commerce, interior and exterior trade?

We never had an interior trade of any importance. Our exterior commerce has suffered very much from the beginning of the present contest. During this time we have manufactured within our families the most necessary articles of clothing. Whose of cotton will bear some comparison with the same kinds of manufacture in Europe; but those of wool, flax and hemp are very coarse, unsightly, and unpleasant: and such is our attachment to agriculture, and such our preference for foreign manufactures, that be it wise or unwise, our people will certainly return as soon as they can, to the raising raw materials, and exchanging them for finer manufactures than they are able to execute themselves.

The political economists of Europe have established it as a principle that every state should endeavour to manufacture for itself: and this principle, like many others, we transfer to America, without calculating the difference of circumstance which should often produce a difference of result. In Europe the lands are either cultivated, or locked up against the cultivator. Manufacture must therefore be resorted to of necessity not of choice, to support the surplus of their people. But we have an immensity of land courting the industry of the husbandman. Is it best then that all our citizens should be employed in its improvement, or that one half should be called off from that to exercise manufactures and handicraft arts for the other? "Those who labour in the earth are the chosen people of God, if ever he had a chosen people, whose breasts he has made his peculiar deposit for substantial and genuine virtue. It is the focus in which he keeps alive that sacred fire, which otherwise might escape from the face of the earth. Corruption of morals in the mass of cultivators is a phenomenon of which no age nor nation has furnished an example. It is the mark set on those, who not looking up to heaven, to their own soil and industry, as does the husbandman, for their subsistence, depend for it on casualties and caprice of customers. Dependence begets subservience and venality, suffocates the germ of virtue, and prepares fit tools for the designs of ambition. This, the natural progress and consequence of the arts, has sometimes perhaps been retarded by accidental circumstances: but, generally speaking, the proportion which the aggregate of the other classes of citizens bears in any state to that of its husbandmen, is the proportion of its unsound to its healthy parts, and is a good enough barometer whereby to measure its degree of corruption. While we have land to labour then, let us never wish to see our citizens occupied at a work-bench, or twirling a distaff. Carpenters, masons, smiths, are wanting in husbandry: but, for the general operations of manufacture, let our workshops remain in Europe. It is better to carry provisions and materials to workmen there, than bring them to the provisions and materials, and with them their manners and principles. The loss by the transportation of commodities across the Atlantic will be made up in happiness and permanence of government. The mobs of great cities add just so much to the support of pure government, as sores do to the strength of the human body. It is the manners and spirit of a people which preserve a republic in vigour. A degeneracy in these is a canker which soon eats to the heart of its laws and constitution.

Jefferson, "Thomas. *Notes on the State of Virginia*. 1787. Boston: Lilly and Wait, 1832. 171-173. *Capital and the Bay: Narratives of Washington and the Chesapeake Bay Region, ca. 1600-1925*. 31 Mar 2001. *American Memory*. Lib of Congress. 21 July 2006. <<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.gdc/lhbc04902>>.