

## **Jefferson, offended by prosperity? - The Daily Progress: Letters To The Editor**

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The Thomas Jefferson Foundation invokes Thomas Jefferson's putative vision, both figuratively and literally, as reason to expand its own sphere of influence over private property fourfold.

The Daily Progress story of April 8 (Group looks to preserve Monticello's viewshed) notes that Monticello has 500,000 visitors and generates \$47 million in local revenue each year. The request for increased viewshed control, voluntary at present, implies that the sensibilities of Thomas Jefferson would be offended should his spirit or some present-day visitor look out 50 miles or so and note that Jefferson's hometown and surrounding area had prospered in the 200-plus years since he lived at Monticello.

A self-appointed guardianship of all things Monticello, the Thomas Jefferson Foundation's concerns over viewshed appear to reflect more concern over the financial bottom line, and protection of a brand name, rather than the philosophical heritage of its namesake.

Leslie Bowman, president of the foundation, noted: "There's a reason we're up there with the pyramids and the Great Wall." •

Indeed, the UNESCO list of 962 World Heritage Sites also includes the Statue of Liberty and Independence Hall here in the U.S. I wonder if Ms. Bowman has visited these sites and pondered the visual content of those precious viewsheds. The visitors to the Statue of Liberty will observe a lot of commercial and residential skyscrapers in lower Manhattan, the industrial waterfront of New Jersey and an occasional garbage scow being towed across the harbor. Independence Hall is surrounded by towering office buildings. Is the premise that these sites are suffering for the fact that our Founding Fathers' vision of a prosperous new country has been fulfilled?

Thomas Jefferson's view was not of a static snapshot frozen in time. Were Charlottesville and the University of Virginia not yet built, would the Thomas Jefferson Foundation countenance their construction today?

One quote attributed to Jefferson better reflects his vision: I like the dreams of the future better than the history of the past.

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