

Spotlight

[A family farm in Georgia.](#) (Marion Post Wolcott/Interim Archives/Getty Images)

# Rural America has lost its soul

## Jefferson's vision of the family farm is a myth that won't die

BY [Steven Conn](#)

**Steven Conn** is the W. E. Smith Professor of History at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio. In addition to *The Lies of the Land* he is the author of six other books including *Nothing Succeeds Like Failure: The Sad History of American Business Schools* (2019). He lives in Yellow Springs, Ohio.

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Pity the poor American farmer. Since the 18th century, he has been freighted not simply with growing crops or raising animals, but with carrying the virtue of the American republic. Thomas Jefferson said so himself, writing that: "Those who labor 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."

He believed that independent yeoman farmers were the only Americans capable of preserving the new nation's morals and keeping it from "corruption". Since then, the American family farm has always stood for a way of life — the best way of life, in fact — and it has been venerated almost religiously. A heavy burden indeed.

That the aristocratic Jefferson never once harnessed up a plow and instead relied on slave labour to do all his farming for him was, at one level, a fitting irony. The small family farmer Jefferson conjured was always more myth than reality and became more so over the decades. Along the way, the myth has woven itself into the national DNA. According to a 2018 survey by Gallup, more than a quarter of Americans wish they could live on a farm. Fewer than 1.5% of us actually do.

In fact, farmers tend to be a minority in rural areas. Roughly 25% of America's population is classed as rural, which means that most rural people are doing something other than farming. They drive long-haul trucks; they are members (or retired) members of the military; they work for local or state government; they work in manufacturing plants which have emerged in farm fields since the Sixties. These folks, however, have not become part of our rural mythos.

Jefferson's myth of the yeoman farmer was turned into national policy in 1862 when Congress passed the Homestead Act, which offered any American 160 acres of land for free, provided the land was farmed for five years. Between 1862 and 1890 an area larger than Great Britain came under cultivation as white settlers gobbled up land that had been cleared by the U.S. Army of its original inhabitants.

But as they rushed to take advantage of this giveaway, farmers did not behave the way Jefferson rhapsodised that they would. Far from being "independent", American farmers relied on the Federal government in all sorts of ways, particularly to provide them with water through big dam and irrigation projects in the West. Nor was self-sufficiency their goal. They farmed to make as much money as they could, and from the outset they were tied to national and international commodities markets. By the 1880s, more than 30% of those homestead farmers had mortgaged their land to raise more capital. Far from standing in some virtuous opposition to Big City financiers, farmers helped to pioneer the instruments of modern finance capitalism.

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Perhaps more than anything else, however, the family farm industrialised rapidly and dramatically. The Jeffersonian fantasy pitted the pastoral as the opposite of the industrial — but American farmers saw no such distinction. They eagerly purchased the latest industrial devices to make farming easier. The John Deere corporation, maker of all sorts of farm equipment, was founded in 1837, and its last reported revenue statement (2022) topped \$52 billion. In 1865, when the Civil War ended, it took 61 hours of labour to produce an acre of wheat; by 1900 that time had dropped to three hours thanks to labour-saving technology. In the Twenties, International Harvester — another vast farm machinery producer — ran an ad campaign around the theme "Every Farm a Factory".

The industrialisation of farming, made possible by its financialisation, has had two predictable results: farming itself required less and less labour, and farms got bigger and bigger in a quest for efficiencies of scale. As early as 1910, the US Census reported significant population loss from farming areas in the middle of the country, and that exodus of people continued across the 20th century. The 1960 Census, to take another example, reported that of the 1,520 counties in the 18 states that roughly constitute the national midsection, from Mississippi and Louisiana to North Dakota, Montana, and Minnesota, 61% lost population during the previous decade; this figure rose to 92% in the counties of Arkansas.

Industrialisation has also led to the consolidation of farms. The number of farming operations peaked in 1935 at about seven million. Now the figure stands at two million. As a result, the average size of an American farm is 445 acres, roughly twice the size of the average in the UK (215 acres). But even that figure is a bit misleading because of the way farms are counted in the first place. If we look at individual states in the nation's farm belt, the numbers get much bigger: in Kansas, the average is now 780 acres; Nebraska, 1,000 acres; in Montana, over 2,100 acres. A farmer in part of rural Ohio told me a few years ago that, if you wanted to make a full-time living here, you need at least 2,000 acres. "Get big or get out!" Earl Butz, Secretary of Agriculture under Richard Nixon, liked to tell farmers, and one wonders what Jefferson would have made of him.

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## [America is showing its age](#)

By Adam Smith

That's partly why I'm not sure we ought to even use the word "farm" anymore. It's an old word, which elides as much as it describes. The kind of set-up it describes — with a homestead at its centre, animals raised for family consumption in the barn, crops grown for market — disappeared more than half a century ago at least. As one Illinois farmer described it: "General farming belongs to our past. . . .When I was a child, of course we had pigs, and put down the pork in brine for the winter, and of course we had chickens, and cows. . . . Orchards [were] plowed under to make room for more beans. That's what we grow now, soy beans and corn." That was in 1957.

Farming, as it is practised in the United States today, is more aptly described as industrial calorie production. To call 1,500 acres of corn, genetically modified to withstand harsh chemical pesticides and intended for a high-fructose corn syrup plant, a "farm" is a bit like calling a highly automated Ford factory a "workshop".

The distance between the myth of the family farm and the realities of American agriculture explains why we often speak of a farm "crisis" in the United States, and we have done so for over a century. Farmers became charity cases in 1985. Inspired by the Live-Aid rock festival to benefit Ethiopian famine victims, Willie Nelson, Neil Young and John Mellencamp organised Farm Aid to raise money for families losing their farms. The Farm-Aid fundraising project continues to this day, and its [website boasts](#): "Farm Aid has raised more than \$78 million to promote a strong and resilient family farm system of agriculture."

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## [Burning Man is a capitalist lie](#)

By Mary Harrington

That distance between myth and reality is also, I believe, at the root of the increasingly conservative, increasingly angry politics found in some (but certainly not all) rural areas. Of course, measured against the pastoral myth, with all of its redeeming and moral power, any reality is bound to come up short. But a sense of disappointment has become acute in economically distressed rural areas and in the small towns that once served as the social and economic centres of agrarian hinterlands. Drive through these places and you're likely to find nothing but a bar and a pizza shop left on the Main Street, as other shops are put out of business by a ginormous Walmart 10 miles away. Much of rural and small-town America can be seen by those who live there as landscapes of loss. In these places and under those circumstances, who wouldn't yearn to make America great again?

But as the Farm Aid website suggests, the Jeffersonian myth persists. Many Americans continue to believe that the small-scale "family farm" is at the heart of American agriculture, and even more politicians parrot that rhetoric. This celebration of the family-farm fantasy is one of the few remaining tropes shared by both political parties.

The Farm Bill, a vast, sprawling, and expensive piece of legislation, is up for renewal during this legislative session. Whatever its final details, it will undoubtedly provide an almost bottomless grab-bag of subsidies and other goodies for industrial-scale agricultural producers, as it has for the last 50 years. I'm guessing, however, that the elected officials who will shape the legislation will sing the song of the American family farm yet again, and voters will cheer in genuflection. This is a myth that will not die.

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**Jim Veenbaas** 1 month ago

WTF is this monstrosity of an essay? It is insulting to people who farm and those who don't.

I am stunned by the condescending tone, as captured by this comment; "Many Americans continue to believe that the small-scale "family farm" is at the heart of American agriculture, and even more politicians parrot that rhetoric."

Who believes this? Maybe if you've been living under a rock for the last 50 years. Everyone knows farms are getting larger and larger. They are extremely tech intensive and capital intensive. And like any industry, farmers will milk govt subsidies instead of cows if you let them.

I live in a farming community, about an hour north of a major city. I do not farm. My knowledge of farming is shockingly stunted. Some of my friends and family work in ag-related business. Many have hobby farms because they love the land. Even more work outside the community, but tolerate the commute because they love and appreciate the spirit of farm communities.

Although there are fewer farmers, their resourcefulness and problem solving skills are shared by almost everyone in these communities.

There is a strong argument against farm subsidies. If that's how the author feels, then make the case. Don't wrap it up in myths that no one believes.

69 REPLY

**Russell Hamilton** 1 month ago

Reply to [Jim Veenbaas](#)

"I am stunned by the condescending tone, as captured by this comment; "Many Americans continue to believe that the small-scale "family farm" is at the heart of American agriculture, and even more politicians parrot that rhetoric."

But Jim, is the statement wrong? I didn't find it condescending or insulting. The author has laid out the case that the Jeffersonian ideal of the self-sufficient family farm is so attractive that we can't let go of the idea, even though capitalism has pretty much finished it off.

34 REPLY

**Jim Veenbaas** 1 month ago

Reply to [Russell Hamilton](#)

IDK. Maybe I overreacted. Maybe I was triggered.

14 REPLY

**Russell Hamilton** 1 month ago

Reply to [Jim Veenbaas](#)

I probably started reading it in a better frame of mind – being amused by the author's bio which tells me that there's a University of Miami in Ohio.

Last edited 1 month ago by [Russell Hamilton](#)

12 REPLY

**Ryan Scarrow** 1 month ago

Reply to [Russell Hamilton](#)

It's Miami University, usually referred to as Miami University of Ohio, because it's in the town of Miami. It's over a century older than the one in Florida.

2 REPLY

**Russell Hamilton** 29 days ago

Reply to [Ryan Scarrow](#)

So many universities in Ohio! I've actually been to Bowling Green State University in Ohio (its fame has spread as far as Western Australia) but was totally unaware of the Miami one.

0 REPLY

**BradK** 1 month ago

Reply to [Jim Veenbaas](#)

It stuck me the same way as well. More revisionist pablum.

Though given the title, we shouldn't have been surprised.

1 REPLY

**Bret Larson** 1 month ago

Reply to [Jim Veenbaas](#)

Yes farms are bigger but where my grandfather homesteaded in Saskatchewan family farm dynamic is still strong.

 Last edited 1 month ago by [Bret Larson](#)

 20   REPLY 



**Andrew Vanbarner**  1 month ago 

 Reply to [Bret Larson](#)

True, I grew up in a rural area, albeit directly on one of the Great Lakes, but very near the farming areas the author describes.

Yes, family farms are nearly extinct, or are, conversely, multi-million dollar businesses. Yes, in the US, stoop labor (harvesting the crops that big machines miss or discard) is primarily worked by migrant laborers.

And yes, our government subsidizes them heavily. They also produce nearly all of our food.

And if those subsidies seem excessive now, wait until we "end fossil fuels," which entails somehow replacing fertilizers, pesticides, fuel, and internal combustion with, apparently, windmills and solar panels.

 Last edited 1 month ago by [ajvanbarneriv](#)

 9   REPLY



**Steve Jolly**  1 month ago 

 Reply to [Jim Veenbaas](#)

Yet another example of how academics intellectualize everything to the point of being hilariously out of touch. Like most academics, he begins safely within his own domain of reflecting on his deep understanding of his subject, but veers far afield when he then generalizes his conclusions across a broad and diverse population, ascribing academic levels of understanding and esoteric motivations to broad swaths of the population. University professors hardly represent the average American and increasingly have difficulty even accurately understanding them. Academics are paid and compensated to deeply study and deeply understand subjects, and they do, but in so doing, they develop a kind of nearsightedness when it comes to the broader world and how deeply dissimilar subjects interact. This author attributes intellectual levels of understanding and mythologizing to everyday people. I'd say he's missing the forest for the trees but he doesn't seem to be that close.

That's because there certainly is a strain of Jeffersonianism within the MAGA movement. It just isn't remotely what this author imagines, nor is it remotely related to farming. The MAGA movement is idolizing the 1776 Jefferson, the angry Jefferson, the revolutionary Jefferson, not the 1802 Jefferson, the President Jefferson, the planter Jefferson, the reflective Jefferson who championed the ideals of the family farm. The intellectuals truly fail to grasp how deep the resentment goes. To the extent that farming is used by MAGA and populist types, it's more that rural Americans are well aware that modern farming is not like days of yore, but they are also aware that the fact remains the farms are physically here, not in the cities where the laws that make farming and other resource extraction activities difficult are concocted. A common bumper sticker I see on a regular basis reads "did you eat today, thank a farmer." They understand farms and farming in the more basic sense that everyone needs food, including sophisticated city folk, but we could probably do without Facebook, Youtube, Amazon, iphones, stock traders, wall street banks, and various others who are dictating policy these days. It's not complex at all, but brutally simple.

This article is little more than a condescending, faux-sympathetic, tut-tutting to Trumpists, populists, and libertarians of all stripes about how wrong, outdated, and impractical their views are. In fact, if push ever came to shove, he's likely to find they understand the world far better than he does.

 28   REPLY 



**BradK**  1 month ago 

 Reply to [Steve Jolly](#)

RE: academics. Those who cannot do, teach.

That both the CCP and Bill Gates are buying up American farmland left and right should give some indication of its worth and necessity.

 4   REPLY 



**Steve Jolly**  1 month ago 

 Reply to [BradK](#)

Indeed. Gates is many things but stupid is not among them. The CCP, on the other hand, is taking a significant risk. If they're dumb enough to actually provoke a war, it would be well within the purview of the US government to simply confiscate all CCP assets. I

likewise don't understand why they continue to hold US debt. Surely they must realize that in the event of actual hostilities, the US is going to cancel all those treasury notes, or at least refuse to honor them until such time as there's a new regime in Beijing. The US froze the assets of Russian private citizens in response to the Ukraine conflict, so surely the CCP would forfeit basically all their American investments if they provoked an actual war.

👍 4 🗨️ ↩️ REPLY



**Jim Veenbaas** 1 month ago

🗨️ Reply to [Steve Jolly](#)

Much better said the I.

👍 2 🗨️ ↩️ REPLY



**UnHerd Reader** 29 days ago

🗨️ Reply to [Jim Veenbaas](#)

The author lives in the center of 'Woke-dom' (Yellow Springs Ohio) so we can expect a somewhat jaundiced view of the nature of anything and everything today from such academic types. As a high school senior living in nearby Dayton Ohio back in the 50's I regularly, traveled over to Yellow Springs where my Antioch College friends pretended to be a segment of the 'Beat Generation'. Those discussions we held then were somewhat Avante Guard, (or so we imagined), philosophical and quite impractical but fun. They were also excellent prep for dealing with the beginning of the split personality that has now fully arrived due to 'Wokedom', in every institution in the land.

Jack Kerouac and Lawrence Ferlinghetti may still live in the hearts of many ex college students today, especially those residing in Yellow Springs, Ohio like the author. And that would be a decided improvement over the jaundiced views of most of that Woke crowd today. The 'Beat Generation' may have been impractical but at least it did not hate America and wish to replace it with a hellish form of Cultural Marxism! God Bless America and may it soon reestablish its rightful place as 'The Shining City on a Hill' that it was in the 1950's!

👍 0 🗨️ ↩️ REPLY



**Chipoko** 28 days ago

🗨️ Reply to [Jim Veenbaas](#)

There is a tedious anti-colonialist sub-text running through this essay (e.g. "Between 1862 and 1890 an area larger than Great Britain came under cultivation as white settlers gobbled up land that had been cleared by the U.S. Army of its original inhabitants." YAWN!). I agree with you; the article does have a condescending tone. The author's argument would be more credible if he concentrated on his core theme (i.e. the development of mega-farms) rather than thumping his anti-colonialist and anti-capitalist drums in the background.

👍 4 🗨️ ↩️ REPLY



**Daniel Lee** 1 month ago

Note from Indiana: Most of the farms here are between 500 and 1,000 acres and are still operated by families, very often surrounded by a penumbra of family members who may make a living away from the land, but who are still at the very heart of the farm, helping out at harvest, gathering for holidays, anchoring communities. None of the material in the article above demonstrates a fundamental change in the rural yeomanry visualized by Jefferson.

👍 47 🗨️ ↩️ REPLY



**nigel roberts** 1 month ago

Yawn. Another exercise in "deconstructing" that which is virtuous.

If you've read one of these essays you've read them all.

👍 45 🗨️ ↩️ REPLY



**Martin Butler** 1 month ago

🗨️ Reply to [nigel roberts](#)

Yes, he's just making it all up isn't he? How dare he say something we don't want to believe!

👍 -9 🗨️ ↩️ REPLY



**nigel roberts** 1 month ago

🗨️ Reply to [Martin Butler](#)

Stop putting words in my mouth, you scoundrel.

I wrote that I found the article tedious and unoriginal – nothing more, nothing less – and I stand by that comment.

👍 22 🗨️ REPLY



**laurence scaduto** 1 month ago

🗨️ Reply to [nigel roberts](#)

You got my thumbs-up for using the word "scoundrel"!

👍 3 🗨️ REPLY



**BradK** 1 month ago

🗨️ Reply to [nigel roberts](#)

Not just a pedestrian deconstruction but an embittered one as well. What exactly is the agenda here?

👍 1 🗨️ REPLY



**Martin Butler** 1 month ago

🗨️ Reply to [BradK](#)

Seems fairly factual to me. Are his stats wrong?

👍 1 🗨️ REPLY



**Jane H** 1 month ago

America's biggest owner of farmland is now Bill Gates. That is enough to destroy anybody's soul. Microsoft co-founder Bill Gates is reportedly amassing more control over food production in the country as he continues to buy up farmland and invest in fake meat production and patented fertilisers.

Author and investigative journalist Seamus Bruner — who led teams whose findings sparked multiple FBI investigations and congressional probes into the Clinton and Biden families — says that his research uncovered Gates' efforts to buy up American farmland and invest in synthetic dairy and lab-grown meats in the name of preventing climate change. In the process, Bruner says, Gates is doing more to inflate his net worth than eliminate carbon emissions.

📄 Last edited 1 month ago by Jane H

👍 20 🗨️ REPLY



**nigel roberts** 1 month ago

🗨️ Reply to [Jane H](#)

Fact check. Bill Gates may own 280,000 of \*arable\* land but there are owners of ranchland and timberland (cattle farms and tree farms) that have many multiples of that.

👍 4 🗨️ REPLY



**Jane H** 1 month ago

🗨️ Reply to [nigel roberts](#)

Thanks for clarification.

👍 1 🗨️ REPLY



**net mag** 1 month ago

🗨️ Reply to [nigel roberts](#)

Further to this, there is about 900 million acres of cultivated land in the US; 280,000 acres is basically a rounding area relative to cropland as a whole.

The Douglas Lake Cattle Co., in the Southern Interior of the Canadian province of British Columbia, has 271,000 acres of private land. Not in the US, I grant you, but American and Canadian agriculture tends to operate along similar lines.

👍 3 🗨️ REPLY



**Steve Jolly** 29 days ago

🗨️ Reply to [net mag](#)

That really puts things into perspective. The US was a titan of global agriculture almost from the outset, and remains so today. Even a ridiculously powerful, obscenely wealthy person like Gates can barely scratch the surface.

👍 2 🗨️ REPLY



**Jürg Gassmann** 1 month ago

One correction – mechanisation of farming did not displace farm workers. The US had a dire shortage of workers, which was the driver for mechanisation.

Overall, the essay is pretty pointless, mixing two completely separate issues. One is the deliberate destruction of the middle class, of the small and medium-sized businesses – one of which was the family farm, but also including shops, craftsmen, etc.

The other is the fact that American farming has now transmogrified into the planned sector that was a hallmark of Communist economies. The Communists at least had the good sense to allow people to run their own small-scale farming businesses, mostly market garden operations and raising chickens and rabbits. These operations supplied 50% by value of agricultural production. In our freedom-loving Western democracies, these types of operations are effectively prohibited by “safety” regulations, protecting agribusiness.

👍 18 🗑️ ↪️ REPLY



**UnHerd Reader** 1 month ago

🗨️ Reply to [Jürg Gassmann](#)

The dictator who ran Zimbabwe did not have the “good sense” to allow people to run their own small-scale, backyard farming businesses – at least according to what I have on this topic. FWIW.

👍 0 🗑️ ↪️ REPLY



**Jeff Cunningham** 1 month ago

🗨️ Reply to [Jürg Gassmann](#)

Was that before or after the long periods of mass starvations that ran to tens of millions of deaths in the Ukraine under Stalin’s planned economy or during Mao’s Great Leap Forward?

👍 0 🗑️ ↪️ REPLY



**Tony Price** 1 month ago

🗨️ Reply to [Jürg Gassmann](#)

Well where I live, in South Devon (UK), there are a lot of ‘small-scale farming businesses’ as, I believe, there are also in France. So to say that they are prohibited is just bunkum!

👍 0 🗑️ ↪️ REPLY



**Brendan O’Leary** 1 month ago

I grew up on a small mixed family farm.

It was barely viable when we lived and worked there as kids in the 50s , 60s and 70s, and when it was sold there wasn’t much left after the debts and bills were paid.

Now it’s a series of small hobby farms, each connected to town power and water, enacting their fantasies of “sustainability”.

“Get big or get out” has been the mantra for decades and the never ending stream of local, state and national regulations and compliances adds to the pressure to get big or give up.

It doesn’t help that most bodies dealing with agriculture have pretty much been taken over by activists who often seem hostile to the very practice of farming or stock raising.

👍 17 🗑️ ↪️ REPLY



**R Wright** 1 month ago

What is the purpose of this piece? To deconstruct yet another western national myth? Is it even necessary at this point?

👍 11 🗑️ ↪️ REPLY



**Ardath Blauvelt** 1 month ago

So? There’s a not totally accurate myth from before the industrial revolution that recalls a time when most of us were more connected to the earth than we are today. Is that myth better or worse than the corresponding one about the love of Mother Earth by those who recoil at the thought of actually digging soil?

Take your pick. I will always treasure the knowledge and emotion that accompanies planting and digging and smelling dirt. It’s a visceral thing that humans enjoy, and need, whether it’s a pot, a plot or a huge, mechanized farm. Yes, farm. Rural life still exists despite urban sneering.

👍 9 🗑️ ↪️ REPLY



**Jeffrey Whelchel** 1 month ago

I found the article a little muddy as it wanders over several different topics. We’d be better served by an article persuasively arguing for ways to reduce or eliminate farm funding corruption or one that argued for the need to reduce corporate welfare and showed examples of how legislation could be modified to benefit small farms. In my area of Virginia, we have at least 36 small farms I can easily drive to and buy a variety of produce, meat, eggs and dairy. Some of the items are expensive, but I like the option. I’d love to see these farms thrive and be able to sell a prices that would allow them to compete with the corporations better.



👍 4 🗨️ REPLY



**UnHerd Reader** ⌚ 28 days ago

Obviously I am a little late to the party. Forgive me, I was milking the goats, and the cleaning afterwards takes way too long. Professor Conn, in his canny way, it seems to me, wants to skewer the American memory of small farming as 'nostalgic,' though without using that word, defined by academics as 'a longing for a past that never was.' He has a point.

I am a farmer. Further, I am a small farmer of the sort Prof. Conn suggests no longer exists. I do exist, and there are others like me. I farm about 50 acres and raise goats and grass for hay. I feed the hay to my goats, and I milk the goats and make cheese, which I sell to people who have more money than I do, or who just really like my cheese. I know both kinds. I do as much farm work as I can by hand, and although I have three tractors, I keep fuel consumption under a hundred gallons a year. I bust my ass, but I wouldn't trade it for anything.

I think it was in the census of 1990 that the US census bureau stopped counting family farms — that is, farms that were owned and operated by the families that lived on them. According to the census bureau, that category had fallen below 2% of the population, which was the cut off line for existence. It has never again risen to that level; family farmers do not exist in the United States.

Most of what is said in this essay is true, though the tone has a grating 'get over it!' quality. Conn is right that small farmers have been fighting a losing battle against the American state, but he also studiously ignores what academics like to call 'counterfactuals': in this case, the Amish (who have a significant presence in his state of Ohio), and Wendell Berry, who has been fighting this fight for over 50 years. The Amish have been remarkably successful as small farmers, and Berry has been the lodestar for an entire generation of aspiring farmers and homesteaders. In the U.K., James Rebanks is probably the most well-known farmer in the Berry tradition, with Chris Smaje trying to bridge the gap between academic progressives and smallholders (you can farm AND keep your pronouns!)

Professor Conn lives in Yellow Springs, Ohio, which is more than an hour away from his work at Miami of Ohio. Yellow Springs is the home of Antioch College, a largely defunct institution that holds an outsized place in the memory of the American academic left, particularly the literary left. Maybe there's a little nostalgia going on there?

👍 4 🗨️ REPLY



**Steve Jolly** ⌚ 1 month ago

It's fascinating how two hundred years after the death of Jefferson, his legacy is still shaping American politics. In America's early days, the split that created the first political party system in America was between the federalists, who advocated for more centralized power and a government more analogous to the European monarchies, and the anti-federalists, led by Jefferson, who advocated for the enshrinement of individual rights and freedoms and distrusted concentrated power. Neither of them ever really defeated the other. Two hundred fifty years later, we're arguably still having the same argument, with rural populist middle America locked in conflict with urban America. There's ultimately no solution here, just the imperfect, messy business of dividing powers between state and federal levels and between branches of government. At some point, I think most people will give up and accept that, and maybe then we won't have to be bombarded with unoriginal, poorly disguised hit pieces about the benighted souls in the hinterlands with their superstitions, myths, and backwards ways.

👍 3 🗨️ REPLY



**Bret Larson** ⌚ 1 month ago

You want to update your concept just replace farm with commodity production.

👍 2 🗨️ REPLY



**Andrew Thompson** ⌚ 1 month ago

Your opening line Steven. I got it. *O fortunatos nimium sua si bona norint, agricolas*

👍 2 🗨️ REPLY



**Chip Prehn** ⌚ 29 days ago

Glad a couple of you folks aren't in the same room with hay-forks. I think that Dr. Conn sets out in this article state some interesting, counterintuitive facts. He has all of his facts in order. What he's writing about is based on very sound scholarship. Such critical scholarship began with the study of the American West where historians demonstrated how much Big Ranchers depend, and have depended, on Big Government for a long time. I don't think that Dr. Conn is taking an opinion; I think he's just throwing out there for our consideration an interesting irony about America. ... In spite of his dreaminess at times (e.g. about the nobility of the small farmer), Thomas Jefferson's real subject was republican virtue and the best means to developing it in the citizenry. Certainly self-sufficiency was a key to the formation of this virtue — but so was and is cooperation, community, exchange, and so on. The yeoman farmer of the USA was—and actually still is—remarkably self-sufficient, and what he learns to do on and with his land is quite impressive. The "myth" of liberty, independence, and self-sufficiency just shows how Modernity has penetrated the hinterland. The

durability of the “myth” is the real question. What does it mean? What does it say about us and about our commonwealth? ... In a roundabout way, Dr Conn provides corroboration of the observation by economic historians that in antebellum America the South was not less modern and capitalist than the North; rather, modernity and capitalism were applied differently in the South. I come from farm people. Farmers are always the first to embrace back-breaking, labor-saving innovations. My farmer family were the first to have a satellite dish, the first to relish new tools and methods, &c. ... Dr Conn’s article by no means precludes the proposition that Jefferson’s “myth” is still alive, well, and ought to be.

 2   REPLY

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