



Fact check: Quote about democracy misattributed to Thomas Jefferson

Chelsey Cox

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The claim: Thomas Jefferson said giving to those who are not willing to work endangers democracy

A Dec. 16 [post](#) to the Facebook page for Save Southern Heritage and History includes a statement about democracy allegedly written by Founding Father Thomas Jefferson.

"The democracy will cease to exist when you take away from those who are willing to work and give to those who would not," says the quote, which is credited to the nation's third president in a meme.

Save Southern Heritage and History is a society and cultural website that also posts conservative news and patriotic memes, according to its Facebook profile [page](#).

USA TODAY reached out to the group for comment.

The statement has recent origins and has not been found in Jefferson's catalog of writings.

Where is the statement from?

The quote might vaguely reference an excerpt of Jefferson's 1816 translation of Antoine Destutt de Tracy's "Treatise on Political Economy."

De Tracy was a French philosopher and economist, according to a [biography](#) by the Mises Institute, a school of economics in Auburn, Alabama.

Jefferson's full translation reads: "To take from one, because it is thought that his own industry and that of his fathers has acquired too much, in order to spare to others, who, or whose fathers have not exercised equal industry and skill, is to violate arbitrarily the first principle of association, — the guarantee to every one of a free exercise of his industry, & the fruits acquired by it," according to the [Thomas Jefferson Encyclopedia](#).

The translation is much longer than the quote in the Facebook meme.

What was misattributed to Jefferson is actually pulled from a 1980s-era book.

"Dreams Come Due: Government and Economics as If Freedom Mattered" is a guide to libertarian philosophy written in 1986, according to an [editorial review](#) from Publisher's Weekly. The book's author uses the pseudonym "John Galt," the hero of Ayn Rand's 1957 novel, "Atlas Shrugged," according to Rand's [website](#).

Rand is [credited](#) as a "frequent point of entry into the libertarian movement" by libertarian think tank The Cato Institute.

The statement about democracy referenced in the claim is lifted directly from page 312 of Galt's book, according to a [screenshot](#) stored on Google Books.

There is no evidence Jefferson wrote or spoke the words credited to him in the Facebook post.

Our rating: False

We rate this claim FALSE, based on our research. A Facebook meme misattributes a quote from a 1986 book to Founding Father Thomas Jefferson. There is no record of Jefferson having written or spoken the words from the meme.

Our fact-check sources:

- Save Southern Heritage and History, accessed Dec. 17: [Facebook profile](#)
- [Mises Institute](#), Sept. 16: "[The Economics of Destutt de Tracy](#)"
- The Thomas Jefferson Encyclopedia, accessed Dec. 17: "[The democracy will cease to exist... \(Spurious Quotation\)](#)"
- Amazon, accessed Dec. 17: "[Dreams Come Due: Government and Economics As If Freedom Mattered Hardcover – July 1, 1986](#)"
- AynRand.org, accessed Dec. 17: "[Atlas Shrugged Overview](#)"
- Google Books, accessed Dec. 17: "[Dreams Come Due: Government and Economics as If Freedom Mattered](#)"
- The Cato Institute, May/June 2018: "[The Life, Ideas, and Legacy of Ayn Rand](#)"