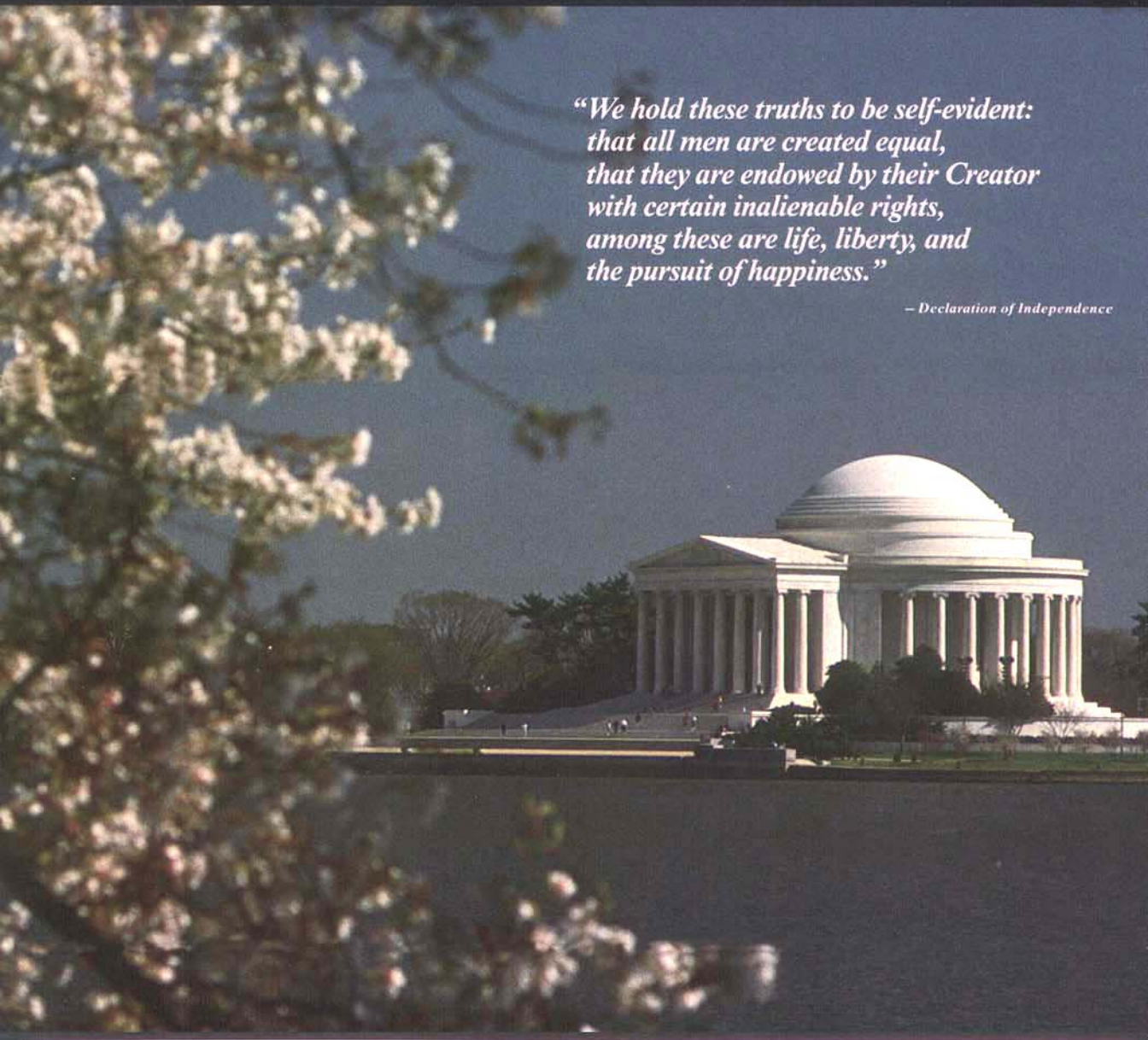
Thomas Jefferson Memorial

Washington, D.C.
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



Thomas Jefferson—political philosopher, architect, musician, book collector, scientist, horticulturist, diplomat, inventor, and third President of the United States—looms large in any discussion of what Americans are as a people. Jefferson left to the future not only ideas but also a great body of practical achievements. President John F. Kennedy recognized Jefferson's accomplishments when he told a gathering of American Nobel Prize winners that they were the greatest assemblage of talent in the White House since Jefferson had dined there alone. With his strong beliefs in the rights of man and a government derived from the people, in freedom of religion and the separation between church and state, and in education available to all, Thomas Jefferson struck a chord for human liberty 200 years ago that resounds through the decades. But in the end, Jefferson's own appraisal of his life, and the one that he wrote for use on his own tombstone, suffices: "Author of the Declaration of American Independence, of the Statute of Virginia for religious freedom, and Father of the University of Virginia."