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To: C-Span Television
400 North Capitol St.
Washington, D.C. 20001

My wife and I enjoy your "American Presidents" series very much, we have seen them all so far.

During the Adams-Jefferson and also the Woodrow Wilson programs, I tried constantly to call 1-202-624-1111 to contribute what I think would have been useful comments. Each time, throughout the program, either the line was busy or the "circuits were overloaded". I offer the comments here for whatever use they might serve.

Woodrow Wilson

A humorous anecdote I've heard about the 1916 election: --
On election night, the Republican candidate Hughes went to bed thinking he had won. When reporters came to his door sometime later, the butler told them, "The President has already retired."

They replied, "When the 'President' wakes up, tell him the returns have come in from California and Woodrow Wilson has been re-elected."

Adams-Jefferson

Adams, Jefferson, and Franklin were the three most responsible for the adoption of the Declaration of Independence. Franklin was much the older and died in 1790. Adams and Jefferson both died in 1826 and, according to official records, both of them

- died on the same day,
- not just any day but on the 4th of July,
- not just any 4th of July but on the 50th Anniversary.

My paper, "The Vice Presidency of the United States", published in 1987, noted --

"Such a combination of coincidences strains credulity; cynicism suspects that one or both of them actually died a few days before or after but that, under the prevailing conditions of precision of records and communications, those around them altered the date of death for the sake of the obvious historic symbolism of that Anniversary day."

History Scholar Richard Bernstein wrote to me, "... it is indeed documented fact that Adams and Jefferson both died on 4 July 1826."

I wrote back -- does "documented" as of 1826 mean the same as today? When I used the hedge, "... cynicism suspects ...", I had in mind some such scenario as --

A country doctor drives his buggy up the hill to Monticello, having been summoned by one of Jefferson's slave boys.

Upon the death of Jefferson, he joins the immediate family in expressions of condolence that might include, "What a pity he did not live a few more hours (days) to see the great Anniversary."

When the time came to take quill pen in hand to enter the report, an obvious thought that might arise within that inner circle, "Why not make the 4th of July the date of death? Tom would like that."

What difference would it make?

There were no Social Security payments, insurance policies, or other modern arrangements that place monetary significance upon the date of death.

There was no bank of telephones on the premises¹ to which reporters would rush to announce the news to the world.

There were no TV camera crews camped on the lawn waiting to photograph the doctor's announcement of Jefferson's death.

There were only letters, laboriously handwritten and posted, a few days to Washington, a week to New York.

I added that if my shot-in-the-dark is mistaken, I defer to those who know better than I; on the other hand, it may be worthy of being noted that, "Such a combination of coincidences strains credulity."

Sincerely yours

