



CARLOS ROTELLAR PHOTO

The North America Nebula (NGC 7000) is classified as an H II region.

North American Nebula

As we celebrate the Fourth of July and we look pass the fireworks 2,500 light years deep into space, we find a celestial cloud of glowing gas whose shape remarkably resembles the North American continent.

The North America Nebula (NGC 7000) is classified as an H II region, meaning that its hydrogen gas is ionized by intense ultraviolet radiation



Carlos Rotellar

from nearby hot, young stars. This ionization causes the gas to emit the characteristic red light seen in this image. The bluish color we see comes from ionized oxygen gas and, in some areas, from starlight scattered by interstellar dust.

One of the most fascinating regions is the so-called "Cygnus Wall," located where Mexico would appear on a map of the continent. This dramatic ridge of gas and dust is a vigorous star-forming region where new stars are being born from collapsing clouds of interstellar material. The dark area that forms the "Gulf of Mexico" is actually a dense cloud of cosmic dust blocking the light

behind it.

It was discovered in 1786 by William Herschel, just ten years after the signing of the Declaration of Independence. Its familiar continental shape, however, was not fully appreciated until more than a century later, when wide-field astrophotography revealed its striking resemblance to North America.

Happy Fourth of July!

A Jefferson for every era, from Lincoln to Trump, and the contradictions that endure

By HILLEL ITALIE
AP National Writer

CHARLOTTESVILLE, Va. — He's a prize-winning presidential historian who wrote an entire biography of Thomas Jefferson. But even Jon Meacham needs to think for a moment before defining what it means to be a "Jeffersonian."

"Well for a long time, before the civil rights movement, it meant to be more inclined toward states' rights and limited government," says Meacham, the National Constitution Center's Semiquincentennial Scholar. He then pauses, and asks to start over, recalling how President Franklin Delano Roosevelt evoked Jefferson as an "apostle of liberty" who would have supported the U.S. fighting the Nazis in World War II.

You could define it in so many ways. Historians may argue over the "greatness" of individual founders, but as the country's 250th anniversary approaches many agree that no one's life and work resonates like Jefferson's. He embodied the "very best and the very worst" of the United States, Meacham says.

And a great deal in between. America's birth is rooted in his most profound contradiction — the man who proclaimed that "all men are created equal" while being a slaveholder to the end of his life. But Jefferson advanced and explored both sides of so many issues and world views that have defined the country's path: agrarian self-



RICHARD DREW / AP

A statue of Thomas Jefferson, right, stands in New York's City Hall Council Chamber, July 14, 2010.

sufficiency and worldly innovation, pluralism and separatism, limited government and dreams of an "empire of liberty."

"There is no more malleable figure in early America than Jefferson," says Andrew Burstein, a professor of history at Louisiana State University who has summed up Jefferson's legacy in a book he published a decade ago: "Democracy's Muse: How Thomas Jefferson became an FDR Liberal, a Reagan Republican, and a Tea Party Fanatic, All the While Being Dead."

"There have been times in American history when just about everyone would have considered themselves 'Jeffersonian,'" says historian Peter S. Onuf, author of numerous works on Jefferson. "Yet even at those moments, he was a controversial figure."

IT'S AN ARGUMENT WITHOUT END
Jefferson's legacy is debated

even in settings that owe their existence to him.

On the campus of the University of Virginia, the college he founded and regarded as a signature achievement, stands a memorial to thousands of enslaved people who lived and worked there.

At Monticello, the mountaintop estate and plantation outside of Charlottesville where Jefferson lived when not in public office, a banner near the entrance features the Declaration and the caption, "After all, our guy wrote it." But once on the grounds, reminders of his enslavement of hundreds are found throughout, from its "Burial Ground for Enslaved People" that includes dozens of graves to an exhibit dedicated to Sally Hemings, the enslaved woman with whom Jefferson is widely believed to have had six children.

Recess on the road

I am in the backseat of our van, sitting in a tiny, hollowed-out cavern of stuff.

We are traveling to Tennessee and Kentucky this weekend where I will be performing my one-man shipwreck at theaters where, if I'm lucky, I'll get a standing ovation like a few nights ago. Although to be fair, the ovation was moving toward the exits. Also, they weren't clapping.

So anyway, my wife is driving. My cousin Randa is in the passenger seat. And here I sit, trapped in the backseat. Boxed in by hordes of cardboard crates, musical instruments, hanging clothes, T-shirt containers, and one female mannequin torso whom I have nicknamed "Dolly."

Dolly models our T-shirts at the merchandise table after shows. Dolly is extremely shapely and very talented. Currently, due to our overpacked vehicle, Dolly's talent is shoved directly in my face.

Sometimes, Dolly is my only friend in the backseat. I have long conversations with her because she understands me. Although, sometimes I worry about her. I think that on some level, deep inside herself, Dolly feels hollow.

Meanwhile, Jamie and Randa are blissfully unaware that I am having conversations with foam-core representations of female thoraxes. They're far too busy talking.

That's mostly what female persons do on long road trips. They talk. I realize this statement is a broad generalization, but as is so often the case, I don't care.

Currently, Jamie and Randa are eating their Chick-fil-A salads, and talking with the trademarked hushed whispers females use whenever gossiping.

Sometimes I chime in from the backseat to ask the ladies who they are gossiping about. This annoys them. They assure me they AREN'T gossiping, they're just TALKING, so mind your own business, dammit.

Then they tune me out.

And I go back to hanging out with Dolly who, as I say, is very talented.

This is the glamour of life on the road. Occasionally, I will open my laptop and try to get some work done on writing projects. But most of the time I just nap. I've gotten very good at taking naps in moving vehicles.

Then, I am woken by Jamie.

"Let's stop and stretch our legs," she says.

So, we pull over.

We try to pull over frequently on long road trips. Namely, because we've read about how blood clots caused by sitting too long can be dangerous to your health. Also, we've heard that people who sit too long get hemorrhoids.

We pull over at a country church, outside Dunlap, Tennessee. Ebenezer Baptist Church.

The church is small. The parking lot is empty. And there is a playground behind the church that looks like it was erected during the Woodrow Wilson administration.



Sean Dietrich