



Documents for Thomas Jefferson

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Background

From Thomas Jefferson: Foreign Affairs on **The American Presidency**, a link from the EDSITEment-reviewed website **Internet Public Library**:

Although Thomas Jefferson came to power determined to limit the reach of the federal government, foreign affairs dominated his presidency and pushed him toward Federalist policies that greatly contrasted with his political philosophy. The first foreign episode involved Jefferson's war with the Barbary pirates... The war ended with agreements that involved one last payment of tribute, at least to Tripoli. Jefferson's action on this matter caused him to rethink the need for a well-equipped navy and halted his move to reduce the force to a mere token size.

...When Jefferson learned that Spain had secretly ceded Louisiana to France in 1800, he instructed his ministers to negotiate the purchase of the port of New Orleans and possibly West Florida. Jefferson strategically made this move in order to insure that American farmers in the Ohio River Valley had access to the Gulf of Mexico via the Mississippi River – the river was a key to the farmers' economic well-being, as they needed a vent for their surplus grain and meat. Even before the French took over Louisiana, the Spaniards had closed the Mississippi River in 1802. While Jefferson was known to be partial to the French, having the Emperor Napoleon's driving interests for world domination next door was not an attractive prospect; thus, Jefferson acted swiftly.

...Although Jefferson understood that the U.S. Constitution said nothing about the purchase of foreign territory, he set aside his strict constructionist ideals to make the deal....

...Several weeks after buying Louisiana, Napoleon declared war on Great Britain. At first, the European fighting benefited the United States since Americans functioned as the merchants carrying supplies to the warring powers. Consequently, between 1803 and 1807, total U.S. exports jumped from \$66.5 million to \$102.2 million.... Then, the bottom fell out of the trade industry as England and France each independently outlawed virtually all American commerce with their opponent.

The British navy also began seizing American ships with cargoes bound for Europe and impressing American sailors into the Royal Navy.... Cries for war erupted throughout the nation.

Jefferson banned all British ships from U.S. ports, ordered state governors to prepare to call up 100,000 militiamen, and suspended trade with all of Europe. He reasoned that U.S. farm products were crucial to France and England and that a complete embargo would bring them to respect U.S. neutrality. By spring 1808, however, the Embargo Act that was passed by Congress in December 1807 had devastated the American economy.... Eventually, the trade war would propel America into a fighting war with England during the administration of Jefferson's successor, James Madison.

Documents

- 1802, April 18: The Affair of Louisiana: To the U.S. Minister to France (ROBERT R. LIVINGSTON), Washington on Thomas Jefferson Digital Archive, a link from The American President.

The cession of Louisiana and the Floridas by Spain to France works most sorely on the U.S.... Of all nations... France is the one which hitherto has offered the fewest points on which we... conflict... and the most points of a communion of interests.... There is on the globe one single spot, the possessor of which is our natural and habitual enemy. It is New Orleans, through which the produce of three-eighths of our territory must pass to market... The day that France takes possession of N. Orleans... we must marry ourselves to the British fleet and nation. We must turn all our attentions to a maritime force.... And will a few years possession of N. Orleans add equally to the strength of France? She may say she needs Louisiana for the supply of her West Indies.

...If France considers Louisiana however as indispensable... she might perhaps be willing to look about for arrangements which might reconcile it to our interests. If anything could do this it would be the ceding to us the island of New Orleans and the Floridas. This would certainly in a great degree remove the causes of jarring and irritation between us....

- 1803, January 13: Crisis on the Mississippi: To the Special Envoy to France (JAMES MONROE), Washington on Thomas Jefferson Digital Archive, a link from The American President.

The agitation of the public mind on occasion of the late suspension of our right of deposit at N. Orleans is extreme...in the federalists generally and especially those of Congress the object is to force us into war.... Something sensible therefore was become necessary; and indeed our object of purchasing N. Orleans and the Floridas is a measure liable to assume so many shapes, that no instructions could be squared to fit them, it was essential then to send a minister extraordinary to be joined with the ordinary one, with discretionary powers, first however well impressed with all our views and therefore qualified to meet and modify to these every form of proposition which could come from the other party. This could be done only in full and frequent oral communications. Having determined on this, there could not be two opinions among the republicans as to the person. You possess the unlimited confidence of the administration

... *We shall get* (It looks as if we might get) entangled in European politics, and... be much less happy and prosperous. This can only be prevented by a successful issue to your present mission.

... The allowance therefore will be in this and all similar cases, all the expenses of your journey and voyage, taking a ship's cabin to yourself, 9,000 dollars a year... As to the time of your going you cannot too much hasten it, as the moment in France is critical....

- 1803, August 12: Jefferson's Expansionism: The Louisiana Purchase: To John C. Breckinridge, Monticello on the University of Virginia Electronic Text Center, a link from Internet Public Library.

On the subject of Louisiana... Our information as to the country is very incomplete. We have taken measures to obtain *it* (information) in full... in time for Congress. The boundaries, which... *admit... question* (are in question), are the high lands on the western side of the Mississippi enclosing all its waters, the Missouri of course, and terminating in the line drawn from the northwestern point of the Lake of the Woods to the nearest source of the Mississippi, as lately settled between Gr Britain and the U S. We have some claims, to extend on the sea coast Westwardly to the Rio Norte or Bravo, and better, to go Eastwardly to the Rio Perdido, between Mobile & Pensacola, the ancient boundary of Louisiana. These claims will be a subject of negotiation with Spain, and if, as soon as she is at war, we push them strongly with one hand, holding out a price in the other, we shall certainly obtain the Floridas, and all in good time. In the meanwhile, without waiting for permission, we shall enter into the exercise of the natural right we have always insisted on with Spain, to wit, that of a nation holding the upper part of streams, having a right of innocent passage thro' them to the ocean.

... propositions are made to exchange Louisiana, or a part of it, for the Floridas. But, as I have said, we shall get the Floridas without, and I would not give one inch of the waters of the Mississippi to any nation....

These federalists see in this acquisition the formation of a new confederacy.... The future inhabitants of the Atlantic & Mississippi States will be our sons.

This treaty must of course be laid before both Houses.... They, I presume, will see their duty to their country in ratifying & paying for it, so as to secure a good which would otherwise probably be never again in their power. But I suppose they must then appeal to *the nation* for an additional article to the Constitution....

- 1816: Jefferson to Monroe on South America
On the question of our interest in their independence, were that alone a sufficient motive of action, much may be said on both sides. When they are free, they will drive every article of our produce from every market, by underselling it, and change the condition of our existence, forcing us into other habits and pursuits. We shall indeed, have in exchange some commerce with them, but in what I know not, for we shall have nothing to offer which they cannot raise cheaper; and their separation from Spain seals our everlasting peace with her. On the other hand, so long as they are dependent, Spain, from her jealousy, is our natural enemy, and always in either open or secret hostility with us. These countries, too, in war will be a

powerful weight in her scale, and, in peace, totally shut to us. Interest, then, on the whole, would wish their independence, and justice makes the wish a duty. They have a right to be free, and we a right to aid them, as a strong man has a right to assist a weak one assailed by a robber or murderer.

- 1818: Revolt in South America on the University of Virginia Electronic Text Center
I enter into all your doubts as to the event of the revolution of South America. They will succeed against Spain. But the dangerous enemy is within their own breasts. Ignorance and superstition will chain their minds and bodies under religious and military despotism. I do believe it would be better for them to obtain freedom by degrees only; because that would by degrees bring on light and information, and qualify them to take charge of themselves understandingly; with more certainty, if in the meantime, under so much control as May keep them at peace with one another. Surely, it is our duty to wish them independence and self-government, because they wish it themselves, and they have the right, and we none, to choose for themselves; and I wish, moreover, that our ideas may be erroneous and theirs prove well-founded. But these are speculations which we may as well deliver over to those who are to see their development.
- 1820: Independence of SPANISH AMERICA on the University of Virginia Electronic Text Center
We go with you all lengths in friendly affections to the independence of South America. But an immediate acknowledgment of it calls up other considerations. We view Europe as covering at present a smothered fire, which may shortly burst forth and produce general conflagration. From this it is our duty to keep aloof. A formal acknowledgment of the independence of her Colonies would involve us with Spain certainly, and perhaps, too, with England, if she thinks that a war would divert her internal troubles. Such a war would hurt us more than it would help our brethren of the South; and our right May be doubted of mortgaging posterity for the expenses of a war in which they will have a right to say their interests were not concerned.
- 1823, February 21: Thomas Jefferson to James Monroe (NOTE: This letter does not focus on any of the events in diplomacy on which this lesson centers. It's rather a deeply personal letter demonstrating the close relationship between Jefferson and Monroe.)
Your society during the little time I have left would have been the chief comfort of my life. Of the 3 portions into which you have laid off your lands here, I will not yet despair but that you may retain that on which your house stands....

You have had some difficulties and contradiction to struggle with in the course of your administrations but you will come out of them with honor and with the affections of your country. Mine to you have been & ever will be constant and warm. Th. J.
- 1823, April 14: James Monroe to Thomas Jefferson
Respecting Cuba the idea... of a mutual guarantee of it to Spain by the United States & Great Britain... Shall it be of a character to prevent the people of the Island, from following the examples of Columbia, Buenos Aryres &c, and would Spain accept it, if it did not *extend to that object* (contain a provision forbidding becoming independent), or would England *unite in* (agree with) it?

The situation of Mexico is peculiar in our hemisphere. When a nomination of minister to the new govt. was made *Iturbide alone* (only Agustín de Iturbide who led a successful rebellion against Spain and then set himself up as dictator of an independent Mexico in 1821. He immediately faced his own rebellion and was forced to abdicate in 1823) had sent a minister here. To have *nominated to* (recognized) the other govt. (revolutionary governments) & not to Mexico would have been... *felt* (noticed) by the holy alliance....

- 1823, June 2: James Monroe to Thomas Jefferson
Our ministers... were just about to sail for Spain, & So. America.... The moment is peculiarly critical, *as respects* (in regard to) the present state of the world, & our relations with the acting parties in it, in Europe & in this hemisphere, & it would have been very gratifying to me, to have had an opportunity of free communication with you, on all the interesting subjects connected with it. The French armies have entered Spain....
- 1823, June 11: Thomas Jefferson to James Monroe
I have ever deemed it fundamental for the US. never to take active part in the quarrels of Europe. Their political interests are entirely distinct from ours. Their mutual jealousies, their balance of power, their complicated alliances, their forms and principles of government, are all foreign to us. They are nations of eternal war... *Of the brethren* (as far as the countries) of our own hemisphere, none are yet... in a shape... to war against us. And the foothold which the nations of Europe had in... America is slipping from under them, so that we shall soon be rid of their neighborhood. Cuba alone seems at present to hold up a speck of war to us. Its possession by Great Britain would indeed be a great calamity... But, should she take it, I would not immediately go to war for it; because the first war on other accounts will give it to us; or the island will give itself to us, when able to do so. ...no duty therefore calls on us to take part in the present war of Europe, and a gold harvest offers itself in reward for doing nothing... and ought to avail ourselves of the happy occasion of procuring and cementing a cordial reconciliation with *her* (Spain), by giving assurance of every friendly office which neutrality admits, and especially against all *apprehension* (fear) of our ...meddling in the quarrel with her colonies.

...That England is playing false with Spain cannot be doubted.

- 1823, August 18: Monroe to Thomas Jefferson
Our accounts from South America, & Mexico indicate that those people must undergo great difficulties before they can attain a firm establishment on a republican basis. The great defect is the ignorance of the people, by means whereof, they *are made in the hands* (become victims) of military adventurers, & priests, the instruments of their own destruction. Time, however, with some internal convulsions, and the form of our example, will gradually mature them....
- 1823, October 17: Monroe to Thomas Jefferson
I transmit to you two dispatches which were received from *Mr. Rush* (the American minister to Great Britain), while I was lately in Washington, which involve interests of the highest importance. They contain two letters from *Mr. Canning* (the British minister to the U. S.)

suggesting designs of the holy alliance against the independence of South America, & proposing ... cooperation, between Great Britain & the United States, in support of it, against the members of the that alliance. The project aims in a first instance at a mere expression of opinion.... Many important considerations are involved in this proposition. 1st. shall we entangle ourselves at all in European politics, & wars, on the side of any power against others...? 2d. If *a* (any) case can exist in which *a sound maxim* (our successful policy of neutrality) may & ought to be departed from, is not the present instance, precisely that case? 3d. Has not the *epoch* (time) arrived when Great Britain must take her stand, either on the side of the monarchs of Europe, or of the U. S. & in ...favor of Despotism or of liberty, & may it not be presumed that, aware of that necessity, her government has seized on the present occurrence...to announce...the *commencement of that career* (beginning of that policy, that is, in favor of liberty).

My own impression is that we ought to...make it known, that we would view *an* (any) interference on the part of the European powers, and especially an attack on the Colonies, by them, as an attack on ourselves...

- 1823, October 24: Thomas Jefferson to James Monroe
The *question presented by the letters you have sent me* (concept later formulated as the Monroe Doctrine), is the most momentous which has been ever offered to my contemplation since that of Independence. That made us a nation, this sets our compass and points the course which we are to steer through the ocean of time opening on us.

Our first and fundamental *maxim* (rule) should be never to entangle ourselves in the broils of Europe. Our second never to suffer Europe to intermeddle with *Cis-Atlantic affairs* (affairs on this side of the Atlantic). America, North and South has a set of interests distinct from those of Europe, and peculiarly her own. She should therefore have a system of her own, separate and apart from that of Europe.

...I am clearly of Mr. Canning's opinion, that *it* (the proposal to express an opinion against European meddling in the Americas) will prevent instead of provoking war. With Great Britain *withdrawn from their scale and shifted into that of our two continents* (on our side), all Europe combined would not undertake such a war. For how would they propose to get at either enemy without superior fleets? Nor is *the occasion to be slighted which this proposition offers of declaring our protest* (the great opportunity we have to protest) against the atrocious violations of the rights of nations, by the interference of any one in the internal affairs of another... begun by *Bonaparte* (Napoleon, the Emperor of France) and now continued by the equally lawless Alliance, calling itself Holy.

- 1823 December: James Monroe to Thomas Jefferson (dated "Received December 11")
Shortly after the receipt of *yours* (your letter) of the 24th of October... the Russian minister... *communicated* (sent) ...an *extract* (part) of a letter from his government in which the conduct of the allied powers in regard to Naples, Spain, & Portugal was reviewed and their policy explained distinctly *avowing* (declaring) their determination to crush all revolutionary movements & thereby to preserve order in the civilized world....

...it leaves little doubt that some project against the new governments is contemplated (by

the so-called Holy Alliance and France). In what form is uncertain. It is hoped that the sentiments expressed in the message, will give a check to it. *We certainly meet in full extent* (I agree fully with) the proposition of Mr. Canning (to declare the independent countries of the Americas off limits to European interference)

...Had we *moved in the first instance in England* (immediately made a joint declaration with Great Britain), ...our union with her, being masked, might have produced irritation....

...it is probable that it would have been inferred that we acted under her influence, & at her instigation, & thus have lost credit as well with our southern neighbors, as with the allied powers.

There is some danger that the British government when it sees the part we have taken, may endeavor to throw the whole burden on us....