We are not afraid to follow truth wherever it may lead, nor to tolerate any error so long as reason is left free to combat it.

**Thomas Jefferson** (13 April 1743 – 4 July 1826) was the third president of the United States.
States (1801–1809), author of the Declaration of Independence (1776), a political philosopher, and one of the most influential founders of the United States.

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» A lively and lasting sense of filial duty is more effectually impressed on the mind of a son or daughter by reading King Lear, than by all the dry volumes of ethics, and divinity, that ever were written.

» Letter to Robert Skipwith (August 3, 1771); also in The Writings of Thomas Jefferson (22 Vols., 1905) edited by Andrew A. Lipscomb and Albert Ellery Bergh, Vol. 4, p. 239

» The God who gave us life, gave us liberty at the same time.

» Summary View of the Rights of British America (1774); The Writings of Thomas Jefferson (22 Vols., 1905) edited by Andrew A. Lipscomb and Albert Ellery Bergh, Vol. 1, p. 211

» No freeman shall be debarred the use of arms [within his own lands].

» Draft Constitution for Virginia (June 1776) This quote often appears with the parenthetical omitted and with the spurious extension, “The strongest reason for the people to retain their right to keep and bear arms is as a last resort to protect themselves against tyranny in government.”
He who permits himself to tell a lie once, finds it much easier to do it a second and third time, till at length it becomes habitual; he tells lies without attending to it, and truths without the world's believing him. This falsehood of tongue leads to that of the heart, and in time depraves all its good dispositions.

Letter to Peter Carr (August 19, 1785)

What a stupendous, what an incomprehensible machine is man! Who can endure toil, famine, stripes, imprisonment and death itself in vindication of his own liberty, and the next moment . . . inflict on his fellow men a bondage, one hour of which is fraught with more misery than ages of that which he rose in rebellion to oppose.

Letter to Jean Nicholas Demeunier (January 24, 1786) Bergh 17:103

Our liberty depends on the freedom of the press, and that cannot be limited without being lost.

Letter to Dr. James Currie (January 28, 1786) Lipscomb & Bergh 18:ii

The two principles on which our conduct towards the Indians should be founded, are justice and fear. After the injuries we have done them, they cannot love us . . . .

Letter to Benjamin Hawkins (August 13, 1786) Lipscomb & Bergh ed. 5:390

The basis of our government being the opinion of the people, the very first object should be to keep that right; and were it left to me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers, or newspapers without a government, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter.

Letter to Colonel Edward Carrington (January 16, 1787) Lipscomb & Bergh ed. 6:57

I hold it, that a little rebellion, now and then, is a good thing, and as necessary in the political world as storms in the physical.

Letter to James Madison (January 30, 1787); referring to Shays' Rebellion Lipscomb & Bergh ed. 6:65

Experience declares that man is the only animal which devours his own kind; for I can apply no milder term to the governments of Europe, and to the general prey of the rich on the poor.

Letter to Colonel Edward Carrington (January 16, 1787)

God forbid we should ever be twenty years without such a rebellion. The people cannot be all, and always, well informed. The part which is wrong will be discontented, in proportion to the importance of the facts they misconceive. If they remain quiet under such misconceptions, it is lethargy, the forerunner of death to the public liberty. ... What country before ever existed a century and half without a rebellion? And what country can preserve its liberties if their rulers are not warned from time to time that their people preserve the spirit of resistance? Let them take arms. The remedy is to set them right as to facts, pardon and pacify them. What signify a few lives lost in a century or two? The tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots and tyrants. It is its natural manure.

Letter to William Stevens Smith (November 13, 1787), quoted in Padover’s Jefferson On Democracy
I had rather be shut up in a very modest cottage with my books, my family and a few old friends, dining on simple bacon, and letting the world roll on as it liked, than to occupy the most splendid post, which any human power can give.

Letter to Alexander Donald (February 7, 1788)

Whenever the people are well informed, they can be trusted with their own government; that whenever things get so far wrong as to attract their notice, they may be relied on to set them to rights.

Letter to Richard Price (January 8, 1789)

The republican is the only form of government which is not eternally at open or secret war with the rights of mankind.

Letter to William Hunter (March 11, 1790)

We are not to expect to be translated from despotism to liberty in a featherbed.

Letter to Lafayette (April 2, 1790)

I consider the foundation of the Constitution as laid on this ground: That "all powers not delegated to the United States, by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States or to the people." To take a single step beyond the boundaries thus specially drawn around the powers of Congress, is to take possession of a boundless field of power, no longer susceptible of any definition. The incorporation of a bank, and the powers assumed by this bill, have not, in my opinion, been delegated to the United States, by the Constitution... They are not among the powers specially enumerated...


I would rather be exposed to the inconveniences attending too much liberty than to those attending too small a degree of it.

Letter to Archibald Stuart (1791)

Let what will be said or done, preserve your sang-froid immovably, and to every obstacle, oppose patience, perseverance, and soothing language.

Letter to William Short (March 18, 1792)

Delay is preferable to error.

Letter to George Washington (May 16, 1792)

We confide in our strength, without boasting of it; we respect that of others, without fearing it.

Letter to William Carmichael and William Short (1793)

The second office of the government is honorable and easy, the first is but a splendid misery.

Letter to Elbridge Gerry (May 13, 1797)

It was by the sober sense of our citizens that we were safely and steadily
conducted from monarchy to republicanism, and it is by the same agency alone we can be kept from falling back.

» Letter to Arthur Campbell (1797)

» A little patience, and we shall see the reign of witches pass over, their spells dissolve, and the people, recovering their true sight, restore their government to its true principles. It is true that in the meantime we are suffering deeply in spirit, and incurring the horrors of a war and long oppressions of enormous public debt. If the game runs sometimes against us at home we must have patience till luck turns, and then we shall have an opportunity of winning back the principles we have lost, for this is a game where principles are at stake.”

» From a letter of 1798, after the passage of the Alien and Sedition Acts.

» Resolved … that it would be a dangerous delusion were a confidence in the men of our choice to silence our fears for the safety of our rights: that confidence is everywhere the parent of despotism — free government is founded in jealousy, and not in confidence;

» The Kentucky Resolution (November 16, 1798)

» It is jealousy and not confidence which prescribes limited constitutions, to bind down those whom we are obliged to trust with power… Our Constitution has accordingly fixed the limits to which, and no further, our confidence may go… In questions of power, then, let no more be heard of confidence in man, but bind him down from mischief by the chains of the Constitution.

» Draft Kentucky Resolution (1798. ME 17:388)

» To preserve the freedom of the human mind then and freedom of the press, every spirit should be ready to devote itself to martyrdom; for as long as we may think as we will, and speak as we think, the condition of man will proceed in improvement.

» Letter to William Green Mumford (June 18, 1799)

» There is no act, however virtuous, for which ingenuity may not find some bad motive.

» Letter to Edward Dowse (April 19, 1803)

» I observe an idea of establishing a branch bank of the United States in New Orleans. This institution is one of the most deadly hostility existing against the principles and form of our Constitution. The nation is at this time so strong and united in its sentiments that it cannot be shaken at this moment. But suppose a series of untoward events should occur sufficient to bring into doubt the competency of a republican government to meet a crisis of great danger, or to unhinge the confidence of the people in the public functionaries; an institution like this, penetrating by its branches every part of the union, acting by command and in phalanx may, in a critical moment, upset the government. I deem no government safe which is under the vassalage of any self-constituted authorities, or any other authority than that of the nation or its regular functionaries. What an obstruction could not this Bank of the United States, with all its branch banks, be in time of war! It might dictate to us the peace we should accept, or withdraw its aids. Ought we then to give further growth to an institution so powerful, so hostile?

Whensoever hostile aggressions...require a resort to war, we must meet our duty and convince the world that we are just friends and brave enemies.

Letter to Andrew Jackson (December 3, 1806)

Nothing can now be believed which is seen in a newspaper. Truth itself becomes suspicious by being put into that polluted vehicle.

Letter to John Norvell (June 11, 1807)

Blest is that nation whose silent course of happiness furnishes nothing for history to say.

Letter to Diodati (1807)

The care of human life and happiness, and not their destruction, is the first and only legitimate object of good government.

“To the Republican Citizens of Washington County, Maryland” (March 31, 1809)

I have often thought that nothing would do more extensive good at small expense than the establishment of a small circulating library in every county, to consist of a few well-chosen books, to be lent to the people of the country under regulations as would secure their safe return in due time.

Letter to John Wyche (May 19, 1809)

It has always been denied by the republican party in this country, that the Constitution had given the power of incorporation to Congress. On the establishment of the Bank of the United States, this was the great ground on which that establishment was combated; and the party prevailing supported it only on the argument of its being an incident to the power given them for raising money.


That we are overdone with banking institutions which have banished the precious metals and substituted a more fluctuating and unsafe medium, that these have withdrawn capital from useful improvements and employments to nourish idleness, that the wars of the world have swollen our commerce beyond the wholesome limits of exchanging our own productions for our own wants, and that, for the emolument of a small proportion of our society who prefer these demoralizing pursuits to labors useful to the whole, the peace of the whole is endangered and all our present difficulties produced, are evils more easily to be deplored than remedied.


Politics, like religion, hold up the torches of martyrdom to the reformers of error.
But though an old man, I am but a young gardener.

The acquisition of Canada this year, as far as the neighborhood of Quebec, will be a mere matter of marching, and will give us experience for the attack of Halifax the next, and the final expulsion of England from the American continent.

Statement during an early stage of the War of 1812, in a letter to William Duane (August 4, 1812)

The earth belongs to the living, not to the dead.

I agree with you that there is a natural aristocracy among men. The grounds of this are virtue and talents.

It is a palpable falsehood to say we can have specie for our paper whenever demanded. Instead, then, of yielding to the cries of scarcity of medium set up by speculators, projectors and commercial gamblers, no endeavors should be spared to begin the work of reducing it by such gradual means as may give time to private fortunes to preserve their poise, and settle down with the subsiding medium; and that, for this purpose, the States should be urged to concede to the General Government, with a saving of chartered rights, the exclusive power of establishing banks of discount for paper.

I like well your idea of issuing treasury notes bearing interest, because I am persuaded they would soon be withdrawn from circulation and locked up in vaults & private hoards. It would put it in the power of every man to lend his 100. or 1000 d. tho’ not able to go forward on the great scale, and be the most advantageous way of obtaining a loan. The other idea of creating a National bank, I do not concur in, because it seems now decided that Congress has not that power, (altho’ I sincerely wish they had it exclusively) and because I think there is already a vast redundancy, rather than a scarcity of paper medium.

A man has a right to use a saw, an axe, a plane, separately; may he not combine their uses on the same piece of wood? He has a right to use his knife to cut his meat, a fork to hold it; may a patentee take from him the right to combine their use on the same subject? Such a law, instead of enlarging our conveniences, as was intended, would most fearfully abridge them, and crowd us by monopolies out of the use of the things we have.

Merchants have no country. The mere spot they stand on does not constitute so strong an attachment as that from which they draw their gains.

Letter to James Olgivie (August 4, 1811)
Letter to Charles Willson Peale (August 20, 1811)
Letter to John W. Eppes (June 24, 1813)
Letter to John Adams (October 28, 1813)
Letter to John W. Eppes (6 November 1813)
Letter to Thomas Law (6 November 1813)
Letter to Oliver Evans, (16 January 1814); published in The Writings of Thomas Jefferson (1905) Vol. 13, p. 66
Letter to Horatio G. Spafford (March 17, 1814)
The hour of emancipation is advancing... this enterprise is for the young; for those who can follow it up, and bear it through to its consummation. It shall have all my prayers, and these are the only weapons of an old man.

Letter to Edward Coles (August 25, 1814)

I am really mortified to be told that, in the United States of America, a fact like this can become a subject of inquiry, and of criminal inquiry too, as an offence against religion; that a question about the sale of a book can be carried before the civil magistrate. Is this then our freedom of religion? and are we to have a censor whose imprimatur shall say what books may be sold, and what we may buy? And who is thus to dogmatize religious opinions for our citizens? Whose foot is to be the measure to which ours are all to be cut or stretched? Is a priest to be our inquisitor, or shall a layman, simple as ourselves, set up his reason as the rule for what we are to read, and what we must believe? It is an insult to our citizens to question whether they are rational beings or not, and blasphemy against religion to suppose it cannot stand the test of truth and reason.

Letter to N. G. Dufief, Philadelphia bookseller (1814) who had been prosecuted for selling the book Sur la Création du Monde, un Système d’Organisation Primitive by M. de Becourt, which Jefferson himself had purchased.

Self-interest, or rather self-love, or egoism, has been more plausibly substituted as the basis of morality. But I consider our relations with others as constituting the boundaries of morality. With ourselves, we stand on the ground of identity, not of relation, which last, requiring two subjects, excludes self-love confined to a single one. To ourselves, in strict language, we can owe no duties, obligation requiring also two parties. Self-love, therefore, is no part of morality. Indeed, it is exactly its counterpart.

Letter to Thomas Law (1814)

I cannot live without books.

Letter to John Adams (June 10, 1815)

If a nation expects to be ignorant and free, in a state of civilization, it expects what never was and never will be.

Letter to Colonel Charles Yancey (January 6, 1816)

Enlighten the people generally, and tyranny and oppressions of body and mind will vanish like evil spirits at the dawn of day.

Letter to Du Pont de Nemours (April 24, 1816)

The system of banking we have both equally and ever reprobated. I contemplate it as a blot left in all our Constitutions, which, if not covered, will end in their destruction, which is already hit by the gamblers in corruption, and is sweeping away in its progress the fortunes and morals of our citizens. Funding I consider as limited, rightly, to a redemption of the debt within the lives of a majority of the generation contracting it; every generation coming equally, by the laws of the Creator of the world, to the free possession of the earth he made for their subsistence, unincumbered by their predecessors, who, like them, were but tenants for life.

Letter to John Taylor (28 May 1816) ME 15:18 : The Writings of Thomas
We may say with truth and meaning that governments are more or less republican, as they have more or less of the element of popular election and control in their composition; and believing, as I do, that the mass of the citizens is the safest depository of their own rights, and especially, that the evils flowing from the duperies of the people are less injurious than those from the egoism of their agents, I am a friend to that composition of government which has in it the most of this ingredient. And I sincerely believe, with you, that banking establishments are more dangerous than standing armies; and that the principle of spending money to be paid by posterity, under the name of funding, is but swindling futurity on a large scale.

— Letter to John Taylor (28 May 1816) ME 15:23

Our legislators are not sufficiently apprized of the rightful limits of their power; that their true office is to declare and enforce only our natural rights... and to take none of them from us. No man has a natural right to commit aggression on the equal rights of another; and this is all from which the laws ought to restrain him... and the idea is quite unfounded, that on entering into society we give up any natural right.

— Letter to Francis W. Gilmer (June 27, 1816); The Writings of Thomas Jefferson edited by Ford, vol. 10, p. 32

I, however, place economy among the first and most important republican virtues, and public debt as the greatest of the dangers to be feared.

— Letter to William Plumer (July 21, 1816)

Bigotry is the disease of ignorance, of morbid minds; enthusiasm of the free and buoyant. Education & free discussion are the antidotes of both.

— Letter to John Adams (August 1, 1816)

I hope we shall take warning from the example [of England] and crush in its [sic] birth the aristocracy of our monied corporations which dare already to challenge our government to a trial of strength and bid defiance to the laws our country.

— Letter to George Logan (November 12, 1816)

There is an error into which most of the speculators on government have fallen, and which the well-known state of society of our Indians ought, before now, to have corrected. In their hypothesis of the origin of government, they suppose it to have commenced in the patriarchal or monarchical form. Our Indians are evidently in that state of nature which has passed the association of a single family... The Cherokees, the only tribe I know to be contemplating the establishment of regular laws, magistrates, and government, propose a government of representatives, elected from every town. But of all things, they least think of subjecting themselves to the will of one man.

— Letter to Francis W. Gilmer (1816)

Lay down true principles and adhere to them inflexibly. Do not be frightened into their surrender by the alarms of the timid, or the croakings of wealth against the ascendancy of the people.
I believe... that every human mind feels pleasure in doing good to another.

What all agree upon is probably right; what no two agree in most probably is wrong.

I have the consolation to reflect that during the period of my administration not a drop of the blood of a single fellow citizen was shed by the sword of war or of the law.

We were laboring under a dropsical fulness of circulating medium. Nearly all of it is now called in by the banks, who have the regulation of the safety-valves of our fortunes, and who condense and explode them at their will. Lands in this State cannot now be sold for a year’s rent; and unless our Legislature have wisdom enough to effect a remedy by a gradual diminution only of the medium, there will be a general revolution of property in this state.

Of liberty I would say that, in the whole plenitude of its extent, it is unobstructed action according to our will. But rightful liberty is unobstructed action according to our will within limits drawn around us by the equal rights of others. I do not add “within the limits of the law” because law is often but the tyrant’s will, and always so when it violates the rights of the individual.

But this momentous question [the Missouri Compromise], like a firebell in the night awakened and filled me with terror. I considered it the knell of the Union.

I know no safe depository of the ultimate powers of the society but the people themselves; and if we think them not enlightened enough to exercise their control with wholesome discretion, the remedy is not to take it from them, but to inform their discretion.

We are not afraid to follow truth wherever it may lead, nor to tolerate any error so long as reason is left free to combat it.

That one hundred and fifty lawyers should do business together ought not to be expected.

And even should the cloud of barbarism and despotism again obscure the science and libraries of Europe, this country remains to preserve and restore light and liberty to them. In short, the flames kindled on the fourth of July, 1776,
have spread over too much of the globe to be extinguished by the feeble engines of despotism; on the contrary, they will consume these engines and all who work them.

» Letter to John Adams (September 12, 1821)

I agree with you that it is the duty of every good citizen to use all the opportunities, which occur to him, for preserving documents relating to the history of our country.

» Letter to Hugh P. Taylor (October 4, 1823)

Men by their constitutions are naturally divided into two parties: (1) Those that fear and distrust people, and wish to draw all powers from them into the hands of the higher classes. (2) Those who identify themselves with the people, have confidence in them, cherish and consider them as the most honest and safe, although not the most wise depository of the public interests. In every country these two parties exist; and in every one where they are free to think, speak, and write, they will declare themselves.

» Letter to Henry Lee (August 10, 1824)

I think myself that we have more machinery of government than is necessary, too many parasites living on the labor of the industrious.

» Letter to William Ludlow (September 6, 1824)

1. Never put off till to-morrow what you can do to-day.
2. Never trouble another for what you can do yourself.
3. Never spend your money before you have it.
4. Never buy what you do not want, because it is cheap; it will be dear to you.
5. Pride costs us more than hunger, thirst and cold.
6. We never repent of having eaten too little.
7. Nothing is troublesome that we do willingly.
8. How much pain have cost us the evils which have never happened.
9. Take things always by their smooth handle.
10. When angry, count ten before you speak; if very angry, an hundred.

» “A Decalogue of Canons for Observation in Practical Life” (February 21, 1825)

The good old Dominion, the blessed mother of us all.

» “Thoughts on Lotteries” (1826)

May it be to the world, what I believe it will be, (to some parts sooner, to others later, but finally to all), the signal of arousing men to burst the chains under which monkish ignorance and superstition had persuaded them to bind themselves, and to assume the blessings and security of self-government.

» Letter to Roger C. Weightman, on the decision for Independence made in
1776, often quoted as if in reference solely to the document the Declaration of Independence (June 24, 1826)

» All eyes are opened, or opening, to the rights of man. The general spread of the light of science has already laid open to every view the palpable truth, that the mass of mankind has not been born with saddles on their backs, nor a favored few booted and spurred, ready to ride them legitimately, by the grace of God. These are grounds of hope for others. For ourselves, let the annual return of this day forever refresh our recollections of these rights, and an undiminished devotion to them.

» Letter to Roger C. Weightman, declining to attend July 4th ceremonies in Washington D.C. celebrating the 50th anniversary of Independence, because of his health. This was Jefferson’s last letter. (June 24, 1826)

This is the Fourth?

» Last words (Jefferson died on July 4, 1826, the 50th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence)

» A few accounts declare that he asked on the night of the third: “Is it the fourth?” Most accounts declare the cited words were his last, and that he died a few hours before John Adams, whose last words are alleged to have been: “Thomas — Jefferson — still surv — “ or “Thomas Jefferson still survives.”

» Here was buried Thomas Jefferson, author of the Declaration of American Independence, of the Statute of Virginia for Religious Freedom, and Father of the University of Virginia.

» Epitaph, upon his instructions to erect a “a plain die or cube … surmounted by an Obelisk” with “the following inscription, and not a word more… because by these, as testimonials that I have lived, I wish most to be remembered.” It omits that he had been President of the United States, a position of political power and prestige, and celebrates his involvement in the creation of the means of inspiration and instruction by which many human lives have been liberated from oppression and ignorance.

[edit] Declaration of Independence (July 4, 1776)

» When, in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth the separate and equal station to which the laws of nature and of nature’s God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

» We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with inherent and inalienable rights; that among these, are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; that to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed; that whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or abolish it, and to institute new government, laying its foundation on such principles, and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness.
An early draft of the Declaration of Independence (June or July 1776); John Adams altered *inalienable* to *unalienable* in the copy that was actually signed, believing this to be more correct. An even earlier draft read: “We hold these truths to be sacred and undeniable; that all men are created equal and independent, that from that equal creation they derive rights inherent and inalienable, among which are the preservation of life, and liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” (June 1776)

» We must therefore...hold them as we hold the rest of mankind, enemies in war, in peace friends.
» On the British

» And for the support of this declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of divine providence, we mutually pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor.

[edit] Notes on the State of Virginia (1781-1785)

» Ignorance is preferable to error; and he is less remote from the truth who believes nothing, than he who believes what is wrong.
» Query 6

» The error seems not sufficiently eradicated, that the operations of the mind, as well as the acts of the body, are subject to the coercion of the laws. But our rulers can have authority over such natural rights only as we have submitted to them. The rights of conscience we never submitted, we could not submit. We are answerable for them to our God. **The legitimate powers of government extend to such acts only as are injurious to others. But it does me no injury for my neighbour to say there are twenty gods, or no god. It neither picks my pocket nor breaks my leg.** If it be said, his testimony in a court of justice cannot be relied on, reject it then, and be the stigma on him. Constraint may make him worse by making him a hypocrite, but it will never make him a truer man. It may fix him obstinately in his errors, but will not cure them. **Reason and free enquiry are the only effectual agents against error.** Give a loose to them, they will support the true religion, by bringing every false one to their tribunal, to the test of their investigation. They are the natural enemies of error, and of error only. Had not the Roman government permitted free enquiry, Christianity could never have been introduced. **Had not free enquiry been indulged, at the aera of the reformation, the corruptions of Christianity could not have been purged away.** If it be restrained now, the present corruptions will be protected, and new ones encouraged. Was the government to prescribe to us our medicine and diet, our bodies would be in such keeping as our souls are now. Thus in France the emetic was once forbidden as a medicine, and the potatoe as an article of food.

» Common misquotation: “If people let government decide what foods they eat and what medicines they take, their bodies will soon be in as sorry a state as are the souls of those who live under tyranny.”
» Query 17

» The Newtonian principle of gravitation is now more firmly established, on the basis of reason, than it would be were the government to step in, and to make it
an article of necessary faith. Reason and experiment have been indulged, and error has fled before them.

» Query 17

Subject opinion to coercion: whom will you make your inquisitors? Fallible men; men governed by bad passions, by private as well as public reasons.

» Query 17

Is uniformity attainable? Millions of innocent men, women, and children, since the introduction of Christianity, have been burnt, tortured, fined, imprisoned; yet we have not advanced one inch towards uniformity. What has been the effects of coercion? To make one half the world fools, and the other half hypocrites.

» Query 17

The legitimate powers of government extend to such acts only as are injurious to others. But it does me no injury for my neighbor to say there are twenty gods or no God. It neither picks my pocket nor breaks my leg.

» Query 17

Millions of innocent men, women and children, since the introduction of Christianity, have been burnt, tortured, fined, imprisoned: yet we have not advanced one inch towards uniformity. What has been the effect of coercion? To make one half the world fools, and the other half hypocrites. To support roguery and error all over the earth. Let us reflect that it is inhabited by a thousand millions of people. That these profess probably a thousand different systems of religion. That ours is but one of that thousand. That if there be but one right, and ours that one, we should wish to see the 999 wandering sects gathered into the fold of truth. But against such a majority we cannot effect this by force. Reason and persuasion are the only practicable instruments. To make way for these, free inquiry must be indulged; and how can we wish others to indulge it while we refuse it ourselves. But every state, says an inquisitor, has established some religion. “No two, say I, have established the same.” Is this a proof of the infallibility of establishments? Our sister states of Pennsylvania and New York, however, have long subsisted without any establishment at all.

» Query 17

I doubt whether the people of this country would suffer an execution for heresy, or a three years imprisonment for not comprehending the mysteries of the trinity.

» Query 17

In a warm climate, no man will labour for himself who can make another labour for him. This is so true, that of the proprietors of slaves a very small proportion indeed are ever seen to labour. And can the liberties of a nation be thought secure when we have removed their only firm basis, a conviction in the minds of the people that these liberties are a gift of God? Indeed I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just; that His justice cannot sleep forever.

» Query 18

Those who labor in the earth are the chosen people of God, if ever he had a chosen people, whose breasts He has made His peculiar deposit for substantial
and genuine virtue.

"Query 19

It should be our endeavour to cultivate the peace and friendship of every nation, even of that which has injured us most, when we shall have carried our point against her. Our interest will be to throw open the doors of commerce, and to knock off all its shackles, giving perfect freedom to all persons for the vent of whatever they may chuse to bring into our ports, and asking the same in theirs. Never was so much false arithmetic employed on any subject, as that which has been employed to persuade nations that it is their interest to go to war.

"Query 22

[edit] Letter to Peter Carr (1787)


"He who made us would have been a pitiful bungler, if he had made the rules of our moral conduct a matter of science. For one man of science, there are thousands who are not. What would have become of them? Man was destined for society. His morality, therefore, was to be formed to this object. He was endowed with a sense of right and wrong, merely relative to this.

"The moral sense, or conscience, is as much a part of man as his leg or arm. It is given to all human beings in a stronger or weaker degree, as force of members is given them in a greater or less degree. It may be strengthened by exercise, as may any particular limb of the body. This sense is submitted, indeed, in some degree, to the guidance of reason; but it is a small stock which is required for this: even a less one than what we call common sense. State a moral case to a ploughman and a professor. The former will decide it as well, and often better than the latter, because he has not been led astray by artificial rules.

"Above all things, lose no occasion of exercising your dispositions to be grateful, to be generous, to be charitable, to be humane, to be true, just, firm, orderly, courageous, &c. Consider every act of this kind, as an exercise which will strengthen your moral faculties and increase your worth.

"Your reason is now mature enough to examine this object [religion]. In the first place divest yourself of all bias in favour of novelty & singularity of opinion. Indulge them in any other subject rather than that of religion. It is too important, & the consequences of error may be too serious. On the other hand shake off all the fears & servile prejudices under which weak minds are servilely crouched. Fix reason firmly in her seat, and call to her tribunal every fact, every opinion. Question with boldness even the existence of a god; because, if there be one, he must more approve the homage of reason, than that of blindfolded fear. Scan of the original page at The Library of Congress.

"You will naturally examine first, the religion of your own country. Read the Bible, then as you would read Livy or Tacitus. The facts which are within the ordinary course of nature, you will believe on the authority of the writer, as you do those of the same kind in Livy and Tacitus. The testimony of the writer weighs in their favor, in one scale, and their not being against the laws of nature, does not weigh against them. But those facts in the Bible which contradict the laws of nature,
must be examined with more care, and under a variety of faces. Here you must recur to the pretensions of the writer to inspiration from God. Examine upon what evidence his pretensions are founded, and whether that evidence is so strong, as that its falsehood would be more improbable than a change in the laws of nature, in the case he relates.

» Examine upon what evidence his pretensions are founded, and whether that evidence is so strong as that its falsehood would be more improbable than a change in the laws of nature in the case he relates. For example in the book of Joshua we are told the sun stood still several hours. Were we to read that fact in Livy or Tacitus we should class it with their showers of blood, speaking of statues, beasts, etc. But it is said that the writer of that book was inspired. Examine therefore candidly what evidence there is of his having been inspired. The pretension is entitled to your inquiry, because millions believe it. On the other hand you are astronomer enough to know how contrary it is to the law of nature that a body revolving on its axis as the earth does, should have stopped, should not by that sudden stoppage have prostrated animals, trees, buildings, and should after a certain time have resumed its revolution, & that without a second general prostration. Is this arrest of the earth’s motion, or the evidence which affirms it, most within the law of probabilities?

» You will next read the new testament. It is the history of a personage called Jesus. Keep in your eye the opposite pretensions 1. of those who say he was begotten by god, born of a virgin, suspended & reversed the laws of nature at will, & ascended bodily into heaven: and 2. of those who say he was a man of illegitimate birth, of a benevolent heart, enthusiastic mind, who set out without pretensions to divinity, ended in believing them, & was Punished capitally for sedition by being gibbeted according to the Roman law which punished the first commission of that offence by whipping, & the second by exile or death in furcà.

» Do not be frightened from this inquiry by any fear of its consequences. If it ends in a belief that there is no god, you will find incitements to virtue in the comfort and pleasantness you feel in its exercise, and the love of others which it will procure you. If you find reason to believe there is a God, a consciousness that you are acting under his eye, and that he approves you, will be a vast additional incitement; if that there be a future state, the hope of a happy existence in that increases the appetite to deserve it; if that Jesus was also a god, you will be comforted by a belief of his aid and love.

» In fine, I repeat, you must lay aside all prejudice on both sides, and neither believe nor reject anything, because any other persons, or description of persons, have rejected or believed it. Your own reason is the only oracle given you by heaven, and you are answerable, not for the rightness, but uprightness of the decision.

» [W]hen speaking of the new testament that you should read all the histories of Christ, as well of those whom a council of ecclesiastics have decided for us to be Pseudo-evangelists, as those they named Evangelists. Because these Pseudo-evangelists pretended to inspiration as much as the others, and you are to judge their pretensions by your own reason, & not by the reason of those ecclesiastics. Most of these are lost. There are some however still extant, collected by Fabricius which I will endeavor to get & send you.
First Inaugural Address (March 4, 1801)

» We are all Republicans — we are all Federalists. If there be any among us who would wish to dissolve this Union or to change its republican form, let them stand undisturbed as monuments of the safety with which error of opinion may be tolerated where reason is left free to combat it.

» All, too, will bear in mind this sacred principle, that though the will of the majority is in all cases to prevail, that will, to be rightful, must be reasonable; that the minority possess their equal rights, which equal law must protect, and to violate which would be oppression.

» But would the honest patriot, in the full tide of successful experiment, abandon a government which has so far kept us free and firm, on the theocratic and visionary fear that this government, the world’s best hope, may by possibility want energy to preserve itself?

» Sometimes it is said that man cannot be trusted with the government of himself. Can he, then, be trusted with the government of others? Or have we found angels in the forms of kings to govern him? Let history answer this question.

» Still one thing more, fellow citizens — a wise and frugal government, which shall restrain men from injuring one another, which shall leave them otherwise free to regulate their own pursuits of industry and improvement, and shall not take from the mouth of labor the bread it has earned. This is the sum of good government, and this is necessary to close the circle of our felicities.

» Equal and exact justice to all men, of whatever state or persuasion, religious or political; peace, commerce, and honest friendship with all nations, entangling alliances with none...Freedom of religion; freedom of the press, and freedom of person under the protection of the habeus corpus, and trial by juries impartially selected. These principles form the bright constellation which has gone before us, and guided our steps through an age of revolution and reformation. The wisdom of our sages and the blood of our heroes have been devoted to their attainment. They should be the creed of our political faith, the text of civil instruction, the touchstone by which we try the services of those we trust; and should we wander from them in moments of error or alarm, let us hasten to retrace our steps and to regain the road which alone leads to peace, liberty, and safety.

On religious matters

» Christianity neither is, nor ever was, a part of the common law.


» In the middle ages of Christianity opposition to the State opinions was hushed. The consequence was, Christianity became loaded with all the Romish follies. Nothing but free argument, raillery & even ridicule will preserve the purity of religion.

Compulsion in religion is distinguished peculiarly from compulsion in every other thing. I may grow rich by art I am compelled to follow, I may recover health by medicines I am compelled to take against my own judgment, but I cannot be saved by a worship I disbelieve & abhor.


Locke denies toleration to those who entertain opinions contrary to those moral rules necessary for the preservation of society; as for instance, that faith is not to be kept with those of another persuasion, … that dominion is founded in grace, or who will not own & teach the duty of tolerating all men in matters of religion, or who deny the existence of a god (it was a great thing to go so far—as he himself says of the parliament who framed the act of toleration … He says ‘neither Pagan nor Mahomedan nor Jew ought to be excluded from the civil rights of the Commonwealth because of his religion.’ Shall we suffer a Pagan to deal with us and not suffer him to pray to his god? Why have Christians been distinguished above all people who have ever lived, for persecutions? Is it because it is the genius of their religion? No, it’s genius is the reverse. It is the refusing toleration to those of a different opinion which has produced all the bustles and wars on account of religion. It was the misfortune of mankind that during the darker centuries the Christian priests following their ambition and avarice combining with the magistrate to divide the spoils of the people, could establish the notion that schismatics might be ousted of their possessions & destroyed. This notion we have not yet cleared ourselves from.


Well aware that the opinions and belief of men depend not on their own will, but follow involuntarily the evidence proposed to their minds; that Almighty God hath created the mind free, and manifested his supreme will that free it shall remain by making it altogether insusceptible of restraint; that all attempts to influence it by temporal punishments, or burthens, or by civil incapacitations, tend only to beget habits of hypocrisy and meanness, and are a departure from the plan of the holy author of our religion, who being lord both of body and mind, yet choose not to propagate it by coercions on either, as was in his Almighty power to do, but to exalt it by its influence on reason alone; that the impious presumption of legislature and ruler, civil as well as ecclesiastical, who, being themselves but fallible and uninspired men, have assumed dominion over the faith of others, setting up their own opinions and modes of thinking as the only true and infallible, and as such endeavoring to impose them on others, hath established and maintained false religions over the greatest part of the world and
through all time: That to compel a man to furnish contributions of money for
the propagation of opinions which he disbelieves and abhors, is sinful and
tyrranical; \ldots that our civil rights have no dependence on our religious
opinions, any more than our opinions in physics or geometry; and therefore
the proscribing any citizen as unworthy the public confidence by laying upon
him an incapacity of being called to offices of trust or emolument, unless he
profess or renounce this or that religions opinion, is depriving him injudiciously
of those privileges and advantages to which, in common with his fellow-citizens,
he has a natural right; that it tends also to corrupt the principles of that very
religion it is meant to encourage, by bribing with a monopoly of worldly honours
and emolument, those who will externally profess and conform to it; that
though indeed these are criminals who do not withstand such temptation, yet
neither are those innocent who lay the bait in their way; that the opinions of men
are not the object of civil government, nor under its jurisdiction; that to suffer
the civil magistrate to intrude his powers into the field of opinion and to restrain
the profession or propagation of principles on supposition of their ill tendency is
a dangerous fallacy, which at once destroys all religious liberty, \ldots and finally,
that truth is great and will prevail if left to herself; that she is the proper and
sufficient antagonist to error, and has nothing to fear from the conflict
unless by human interposition disarmed of her natural weapons, free
argument and debate; errors ceasing to be dangerous when it is permitted
freely to contradict them.

\textit{A Bill for Establishing Religious Freedom}, Chapter 82 (1779). Published in \textit{The
Comparison of Jefferson’s proposed draft and the bill enacted

\textit{I never submitted the whole system of my opinions to the creed of any party
of men whatever in religion, in philosophy, in politics, or in anything else
where I was capable of thinking for myself.} Such an addiction is the last
degradation of a free and moral agent.

\textit{Letter to Francis Hopkinson (March 13, 1789)}

\textit{I am for freedom of religion, & against all manoeuvres to bring about a legal
ascendancy of one sect over another.}

\textit{Letter to Elbridge Gerry (1799)}

\textit{[W]hen the clergy addressed General Washington on his departure from the
government, it was observed in their consultation that he had never on any
occasion said a word to the public which showed a belief in the Christian religion
and they thought they should so pen their address as to force him at length to
declare publicly whether he was a Christian or not. They did so. However
[Dr. Rush] observed the old fox was too cunning for them. He answered every
article of their address particularly except that, which he passed over without
notice. Rush observes he never did say a word on the subject in any of his public
papers except in his valedictory letter to the Governors of the states when he
resigned his commission in the army, wherein he speaks of the benign influence
of the Christian religion. I know that Gouverneur Morris, who pretended to be in
his secrets & believed himself to be so, has often told me that General
Washington believed no more of that system than he himself did.}

\textit{The Anas (February 1, 1800). Published in \textit{The Works of Thomas Jefferson in
Putnam’s Sons, 1904, \textit{Vol. 1}, pp. 352–353.}
They believe that any portion of power confided to me, will be exerted in opposition to their schemes. And they believe rightly; for I have sworn upon the altar of god eternal hostility against every form of tyranny over the mind of man. But this is all they have to fear from me: and enough, too, in their opinion.

On members of the clergy who sought to establish some form of “official” Christianity in the U.S. government. Letter to Dr. Benjamin Rush (September 23, 1800)

This has commonly been quoted as “I have sworn upon the altar of God Eternal, hostility against every form of tyranny over the mind of man”, “I have sworn upon the altar of God eternal hostility against every form of tyranny over the mind of man”, and “I have sworn upon the altar of God, eternal hostility against every form of tyranny over the mind of man.” Neither capitalization of “god” and “eternal”, nor a comma before or after “eternal” are apparent in the original. Photograph of the original manuscript at the Library of Congress – LOC transcription

The first portion of this statement has also been widely paraphrased as “The clergy believe that any power confided in me will be exerted in opposition to their schemes, and they believe rightly.”

Those who live by mystery & charlatanerie, fearing you would render them useless by simplifying the Christian philosophy, — the most sublime & benevolent, but most perverted system that ever shone on man, — endeavored to crush your well-earnt & well-deserved fame.

Letter to Dr. Joseph Priestley (March 21, 1801). This may be the source of the (somewhat misleading) quote: “[Christianity is] the most … perverted system that ever shone on man”.

Believing with you that religion is a matter which lies solely between man and his God, that he owes account to none other for his faith or his worship, that the legislative powers of government reach actions only, and not opinions, I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their legislature should make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof,” thus building a wall of separation between church and State.

Letter to Danbury Baptist Association, CT. (Jan. 1, 1802) This statement is the origin of the often used phrase “separation of Church and State”.

His parentage was obscure; his condition poor; his education null; his natural endowments great; his life correct and innocent: he was meek, benevolent, patient, firm, disinterested, & of the sublimest eloquence.

The disadvantages under which his doctrines appear are remarkable.
1. Like Socrates & Epictetus, he wrote nothing himself.
2. But he had not, like them, a Xenophon or an Arrian to write for him. On the contrary, all the learned of his country, entrenched in its power and riches, were opposed to him, lest his labors should undermine their advantages; and the committing to writing his life & doctrines fell on the most unlettered & ignorant men; who wrote, too, from memory, & not till long after the transactions had passed.
3. According to the ordinary fate of those who attempt to enlighten and reform mankind, he fell an early victim to the jealousy & combination of the altar and the throne, at about 33. years of age, his reason having not yet attained the maximum of its energy, nor the course of his preaching, which was but of 3.
years at most, presented occasions for developing a complete system of morals.

4. Hence the doctrines which he really delivered were defective as a whole, and fragments only of what he did deliver have come to us mutilated, misstated, & often unintelligible.

5. They have been still more disfigured by the corruptions of schismatizing followers, who have found an interest in sophisticating & perverting the simple doctrines he taught by engrafting on them the mysticisms of a Grecian sophist, frittering them into subtleties, & obscuring them with jargon, until they have caused good men to reject the whole in disgust, & to view Jesus himself as an impostor.

Notwithstanding these disadvantages, a system of morals is presented to us, which, if filled up in the true style and spirit of the rich fragments he left us, would be the most perfect and sublime that has ever been taught by man.

The question of his being a member of the Godhead, or in direct communication with it, claimed for him by some of his followers, and denied by others, is foreign to the present view, which is merely an estimate of the intrinsic merit of his doctrines.

1. He corrected the Deism of the Jews, confirming them in their belief of one only God, and giving them juster notions of his attributes and government.

2. His moral doctrines, relating to kindred & friends, were more pure & perfect than those of the most correct of the philosophers, and greatly more so than those of the Jews; and they went far beyond both in inculcating universal philanthropy, not only to kindred and friends, to neighbors and countrymen, but to all mankind, gathering all into one family, under the bonds of love, charity, peace, common wants and common aids. A development of this head will evince the peculiar superiority of the system of Jesus over all others.

3. The precepts of philosophy, & of the Hebrew code, laid hold of actions only. He pushed his scrutinies into the heart of man; erected his tribunal in the region of his thoughts, and purified the waters at the fountain head.

4. He taught, emphatically, the doctrines of a future state, which was either doubted, or disbelieved by the Jews; and wielded it with efficacy, as an important incentive, supplementary to the other motives to moral conduct.


» I never will, by any word or act, bow to the shrine of intolerance, or admit a right of inquiry into the religious opinions of others.

» Letter to Edward Dowse (April 19, 1803)

» My religious reading has long been confined to the moral branch of religion, which is the same in all religions; while in that branch which consists of dogmas, all differ[.]


» He who steadily observes the moral precepts in which all religions concur, will never be questioned at the gates of heaven as to the dogmas in which they all differ.

» Letter to William Canby (September 18, 1813)
Of all the systems of morality, ancient or modern, which have come under my observation, none appear to me so pure as that of Jesus. He who follows this steadily need not, I think, be uneasy, although he cannot comprehend the subtleties and mysteries erected on his doctrines by those who, calling themselves his special followers and favorites, would make him come into the world to lay snares for all understandings but theirs. These metaphysical heads, usurping the judgment seat of God, denounce as his enemies all who cannot perceive the Geometrical logic of Euclid in the demonstrations of St. Athanasius, that three are one, and one is three; and yet that the one is not three nor the three one.

— Letter to William Canby (September 18, 1813)

History, I believe, furnishes no example of a priest-ridden people maintaining a free civil government. This marks the lowest grade of ignorance of which their civil as well as religious leaders will always avail themselves for their own purposes.

— Letter to Alexander von Humboldt (Dec. 6, 1813)

Religion is a subject on which I have ever been most scrupulously reserved. I have considered it as a matter between every man and his Maker in which no other, and far less the public, had a right to intermeddle.

— Letter to Richard Rush (1813)

The whole history of these books is so defective and doubtful that it seems vain to attempt minute enquiry into it: and such tricks have been played with their text, and with the texts of other books relating to them, that we have a right, from that cause, to entertain much doubt what parts of them are genuine. In the New Testament there is internal evidence that parts of it have proceeded from an extraordinary man; and that other parts are of the fabric of very inferior minds. It is as easy to separate those parts, as to pick out diamonds from dunghills.

— Letter to John Adams, on Christian scriptures (January 24, 1814)

Christianity neither is, nor ever was a part of the common law.

— Letter to Dr. Thomas Cooper (February 10, 1814)

In every country and in every age, the priest has been hostile to liberty. He is always in alliance with the despot, abetting his abuses in return for protection to his own.

— Letter to Horatio G. Spafford (March 17, 1814)

If we did a good act merely from love of God and a belief that it is pleasing to Him, whence arises the morality of the Atheist? ...Their virtue, then, must have had some other foundation than the love of God.

— Letter to Thomas Law (June 13, 1814)

The Christian priesthood, finding the doctrines of Christ levelled to every understanding, and too plain to need explanation, saw in the mysticism of Plato, materials with which they might build up an artificial system, which might, from its indistinctness, admit everlasting controversy, give employment for their
order, and introduce it to profit, power and pre-eminence. The doctrines which
flowed from the lips of Jesus himself are within the comprehension of a child;
but thousands of volumes have not yet explained the Platonisms engrafted on
them; and for this obvious reason, that nonsense can never be explained.

» Letter to John Adams (July 5, 1814). Published in The Works of Thomas

Our particular principles of religion are a subject of accountability to our
god alone. I enquire after no man’s and trouble none with mine; nor is it given
to us in this life to know whether yours or mine, our friend’s or our foe’s, are
exactly the right.

» Letter to Miles King (September 26, 1814)

I agree ... that a professorship of Theology should have no place in our
institution. But we cannot always do what is absolutely best. Those with
whom we act, entertaining different views, have the power and the right of
carrying them into practice. Truth advances, and error recedes step by step
only; and to do to our fellow men the most good in our power, we must lead
where we can, follow where we cannot, and still go with them, watching
always the favorable moment for helping them to another step.

» Comment on establishing the University of Virginia, in a letter to Thomas
Cooper (October 7, 1814); published in The Writings of Thomas Jefferson
(1905) edited by Andrew Adgate Lipscomb and Albert Ellery Bergh, Vol VII,
p. 200

The priests have so disfigured the simple religion of Jesus that no one who reads
the sophistications they have engrafted on it, from the jargon of Plato, of
Aristotle & other mystics, would conceive these could have been fathered on the
sublime preacher of the sermon on the mount.

» Letter to Benjamin Waterhouse (October 13, 1815). Published in The Works of
Thomas Jefferson in Twelve Volumes, Federal Edition, Paul Leicester Ford,

I, too, have made a wee-little book from the same materials, which I call the
Philosophy of Jesus; it is a paradigm of his doctrines, made by cutting the texts
out of the book, and arranging them on the pages of a blank book, in a certain
order of time or subject. A more beautiful or precious morsel of ethics I have
never seen; it is a document in proof that I am a real Christian, that is to say, a
disciple of the doctrines of Jesus, very different from the Platonists, who call me
infidel and themselves Christians and preachers of the gospel, while they draw all
their characteristic dogmas from what its author never said nor saw. They have
compounded from the heathen mysteries a system beyond the comprehension
of man, of which the great reformer of the vicious ethics and deism of the Jews,
were he to return on earth, would not recognize one feature.

» Letter to Charles Thomson (January 9, 1816), on his The Life and Morals of
Jesus of Nazareth (the “Jefferson Bible”), which omits all Biblical passages
asserting Jesus’ virgin birth, miracles, divinity, and resurrection. Published in
499.

It is in our lives, and not from our words, that our religion must be read. By
the same test the world must judge me. But this does not satisfy the priesthood. They must have a positive, a declared assent to all their interested absurdities. My opinion is that there would never have been an infidel, if there had never been a priest.

» Letter to Mrs. Harrison Smith (August 6, 1816).

You ask if I mean to publish anything on the subject of a letter of mine to my friend Charles Thompson? Certainly not. I write nothing for publication, and last of all things should it be on the subject of religion. On the dogmas of religion as distinguished from moral principles, all mankind, from the beginning of the world to this day, have been quarrelling, fighting, burning and torturing one another, for abstractions unintelligible to themselves and to all others, and absolutely beyond the comprehension of the human mind. Were I to enter on that arena, I should only add an unit to the number of Bedlamites.


I may say Christianity itself divided into its thousands also, who are disputing, anathematizing and where the laws permit burning and torturing one another for abstractions which no one of them understand, and which are indeed beyond the comprehension of the human mind.[.]


One of our fan-coloring biographers, who paints small men as very great, inquired of me lately with real affection too, whether he might consider as authentic, the change of my religion much spoken of in some circles. Now this supposed that they knew what had been my religion before, taking for it the word of their priests, whom I certainly never made the confidants of my creed. My answer was “say nothing of my religion. It is known to my God and myself alone. Its evidence before the world is to be sought in my life; if that has been honest and dutiful to society, the religion which has regulated it cannot be a bad one.”


The Pennsylvania legislature, who, on a proposition to make the belief in God a necessary qualification for office, rejected it by a great majority, although assuredly there was not a single atheist in their body. And you remember to have heard, that when the act for religious freedom was before the Virginia Assembly, a motion to insert the name of Jesus Christ before the phrase, “the author of our holy religion,” which stood in the bill, was rejected, although that was the creed of a great majority of them.


You say you are a Calvinist. I am not. I am of a sect by myself, as far as I know.

» Letter to Ezra Stiles (June 25, 1819) [Note: This attribution from Dickinson W. Adams, ed., The Papers of Thomas Jefferson, Second Series (Princeton
But the greatest of all the reformers of the depraved religion of his own country, was Jesus of Nazareth. Abstracting what is really his from the rubbish in which it is buried, easily distinguished by its lustre from the dross of his biographers, and as separable from that as the diamond from the dunghill...

... The establishment of the innocent and genuine character of this benevolent moralist, and the rescuing it from the imputation of imposture, which has resulted from artificial systems,[footnote: e.g. The immaculate conception of Jesus, his deification, the creation of the world by him, his miraculous powers, his resurrection and visible ascension, his corporeal presence in the Eucharist, the Trinity; original sin, atonement, regeneration, election, orders of Hierarchy, etc. —T.J.] invented by ultra-Christian sects, unauthorized by a single word ever uttered by him, is a most desirable object, and one to which Priestley has successfully devoted his labors and learning. It would in time, it is to be hoped, effect a quiet euthanasia of the heresies of bigotry and fanaticism which have so long triumphed over human reason, and so generally and deeply afflicted mankind; but this work is to be begun by winnowing the grain from the chaff of the historians of his life.


As you say of yourself, I too am an Epicurian. I consider the genuine (not the imputed) doctrines of Epicurus as containing everything rational in moral philosophy which Greece and Rome have left us.

Letter to William Short (Oct. 31, 1819) on his admiration of the principles of Epicurus.

Among the sayings and discourses imputed to him [Jesus] by his biographers, I find many passages of fine imagination, correct morality, and of the most lovely benevolence; and others again of so much ignorance, so much absurdity, so much untruth, charlatanism, and imposture, as to pronounce it impossible that such contradictions should have proceeded from the same being. I separate, therefore, the gold from the dross; restore to Him the former, and leave the latter to the stupidity of some, and roguery of others of His disciples. Of this band of dupes and impostors, Paul was the great Coryphaeus, and first corruptor of the doctrines of Jesus. These palpable interpolations and falsifications of His doctrines, led me to try to sift them apart.

Letter to William Short (April 13, 1820)

My aim in that was, to justify the character of Jesus against the fictions of his pseudo-followers, which have exposed him to the inference of being an impostor. For if we could believe that he really countenanced the follies, the falsehoods and the charlatanisms which his biographers father on him, and admit the misconstructions, interpolations and theorizations of the fathers of the early, and fanatics of the latter ages, the conclusion would be irresistible by every sound mind, that he was an impostor. I give no credit to their falsifications of his actions and doctrines, and to rescue his character, the postulate in my letter asked only what is granted in reading every other historian. … I say, that this free exercise of reason is all I ask for the vindication of the character of Jesus. We find in the writings of his biographers matter of two distinct
descriptions. First, a groundwork of vulgar ignorance, of things impossible, of superstitions, fanaticisms and fabrications. Intermixed with these, again, are sublime ideas of the Supreme Being, aphorisms and precepts of the purest morality and benevolence, sanctioned by a life of humility, innocence and simplicity of manners, neglect of riches, absence of worldly ambition and honors, with an eloquence and persuasiveness which have not been surpassed.

These could not be inventions of the groveling authors who relate them. They are far beyond the powers of their feeble minds. They shew that there was a character, the subject of their history, whose splendid conceptions were above all suspicion of being interpolations from their hands. Can we be at a loss in separating such materials, and ascribing each to its genuine author? The difference is obvious to the eye and to the understanding, and we may read as we run to each his part; and I will venture to affirm, that he who, as I have done, will undertake to winnow this grain from its chaff, will find it not to require a moment’s consideration. The parts fall asunder of themselves, as would those of an image of metal and clay. … There are, I acknowledge, passages not free from objection, which we may, with probability, ascribe to Jesus himself; but claiming indulgence from the circumstances under which he acted. His object was the reformation of some articles in the religion of the Jews, as taught by Moses. That sect had presented for the object of their worship, a being of terrific character, cruel, vindictive, capricious and unjust. Jesus, taking for his type the best qualities of the human head and heart, wisdom, justice, goodness, and adding to them power, ascribed all of these, but in infinite perfection, to the Supreme Being, and formed him really worthy of their adoration. Moses had either not believed in a future state of existence, or had not thought it essential to be explicitly taught to his people. Jesus inculcated that doctrine with emphasis and precision. Moses had bound the Jews to many idle ceremonies, mummeries and observances, of no effect towards producing the social utilities which constitute the essence of virtue; Jesus exposed their futility and insignificance. The one instilled into his people the most anti-social spirit towards other nations; the other preached philanthropy and universal charity and benevolence. The office of reformer of the superstitions of a nation, is ever dangerous. Jesus had to walk on the perilous confines of reason and religion: and a step to right or left might place him within the gripe of the priests of the superstition, a blood thirsty race, as cruel and remorseless as the being whom they represented as the family God of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob, and the local God of Israel. They were constantly laying snares, too, to entangle him in the web of the law. He was justifiable, therefore, in avoiding these by evasions, by sophisms, by misconstructions and misapplications of scraps of the prophets, and in defending himself with these their own weapons, as sufficient, ad homines, at least. That Jesus did not mean to impose himself on mankind as the son of God, physically speaking, I have been convinced by the writings of men more learned than myself in that lore. But that he might conscientiously believe himself inspired from above, is very possible.


To talk of immaterial existences is to talk of nothings. To say that the human soul, angels, god, are immaterial, is to say they are nothings, or that there is no god, no angels, no soul. I cannot reason otherwise: but I believe I am supported in my creed of materialism by Locke, Tracy, and Stewart. At what age of the Christian
church this heresy of immaterialism, this masked atheism, crept in, I do not know. But heresy it certainly is.

» Letter to John Adams (Aug. 15, 1820)

» Where the preamble declares, that coercion is a departure from the plan of the holy author of our religion, an amendment was proposed by inserting “Jesus Christ,” so that it would read “A departure from the plan of Jesus Christ, the holy author of our religion;” the insertion was rejected by the great majority, in proof that they meant to comprehend, within the mantle of its protection, the Jew and the Gentile, the Christian and Mohammedan, the Hindoo and Infidel of every denomination.

» Autobiography (1821), in reference to the Virginia Act for Religious Freedom

» No historical fact is better established, than that the doctrine of one God, pure and uncompounded, was that of the early ages of Christianity ... Nor was the unity of the Supreme Being ousted from the Christian creed by the force of reason, but by the sword of civil government, wielded at the will of the Athanasius. The hocus-pocus phantasm of a God like another Cerberus, with one body and three heads, had its birth and growth in the blood of thousands of martyrs ... The Athanasian paradox that one is three, and three but one, is so incomprehensible to the human mind, that no candid man can say he has any idea of it, and how can he believe what presents no idea? He who thinks he does, only deceives himself. He proves, also, that man, once surrendering his reason, has no remaining guard against absurdities the most monstrous, and like a ship without rudder, is the sport of every wind. With such person, gullibility which they call faith, takes the helm from the hand of reason, and the mind becomes a wreck.

» Letter to James Smith (1822)

» They might need a preparatory discourse on the text of ‘prove all things, hold fast that which is good,’ in order to unlearn the lesson that reason is an unlawful guide in religion. They might startle on being first awaked from the dreams of the night, but they would rub their eyes at once, and look the spectres boldly in the face.


» The doctrines of Jesus are simple, and tend all to the happiness of man.

1. That there is one only God, and he all perfect.
2. That there is a future state of rewards and punishments.
3. That to love God with all thy heart and thy neighbor as thyself, is the sum of religion.

These are the great points on which he endeavored to reform the religion of the Jews. But compare with these the demoralizing dogmas of Calvin.

1. That there are three Gods.
2. That good works, or the love of our neighbor, are nothing.
3. That faith is every thing, and the more incomprehensible the proposition, the more merit in its faith.
4. That reason in religion is of unlawful use.
5. That God, from the beginning, elected certain individuals to be
saved, and certain others to be damned; and that no crimes of the former can damn them; no virtues of the latter save.

Now, which of these is the true and charitable Christian? He who believes and acts on the simple doctrines of Jesus? Or the impious dogmatists, as Athanasius and Calvin? Verily I say these are the false shepherds foretold as to enter not by the door into the sheepfold, but to climb up some other way. They are mere usurpers of the Christian name, teaching a counter-religion made up of the deliria of crazy imaginations, as foreign from Christianity as is that of Mahomet. Their blasphemies have driven thinking men into infidelity, who have too hastily rejected the supposed author himself, with the horrors so falsely imputed to him. Had the doctrines of Jesus been preached always as pure as they came from his lips, the whole civilized world would now have been Christian. I rejoice that in this blessed country of free inquiry and belief, which has surrendered its creed and conscience to neither kings nor priests, the genuine doctrine of one only God is reviving, and I trust that there is not a young man now living in the United States who will not die an Unitarian.


> In our university [of Virginia] you know there is no Professorship of Divinity. A handle has been made of this, to disseminate an idea that this is an institution, not merely of no religion, but against all religion. Occasion was taken at the last meeting of the Visitors, to bring forward an idea that might silence this calumny, which weighed on the minds of some honest friends to the institution.


> I can never join Calvin in addressing his god. He was indeed an Atheist, which I can never be; or rather his religion was Daemonism. If ever man worshipped a false god, he did. The being described in his 5 points is not the God whom you and I acknowledge and adore, the Creator and benevolent governor of the world; but a daemon of malignant spirit. It would be more pardonable to believe in no god at all, than to blaspheme him by the atrocious attributes of Calvin. Indeed I think that every Christian sect gives a great handle to Atheism by their general dogma that, without a revelation, there would not be sufficient proof of the being of a god.

> Letter to John Adams (April 11, 1823) (Scan at The Library of Congress)

> The truth is, that the greatest enemies of the doctrine of Jesus are those, calling themselves the expositors of them, who have perverted them to the structure of a system of fancy absolutely incomprehensible, and without any foundation in his genuine words. And the day will come when the mystical generation of Jesus, by the supreme being as his father in the womb of a virgin will be classed with the fable of the generation of Minerva in the brain of Jupiter ... But may we hope that the dawn of reason and freedom of thought in these United States will do away with this artificial scaffolding, and restore to us the primitive and genuine doctrines of this most venerated reformer of human errors.
I thank you, Sir, for the copy you were so kind as to send me of the revd. Mr. Bancroft’s Unitarian sermons. I have read them with great satisfaction, and always rejoice in efforts to restore us to primitive Christianity, in all the simplicity in which it came from the lips of Jesus. Had it never been sophisticated by the subtleties of Commentators, nor paraphrased into meanings totally foreign to its character, it would at this day have been the religion of the whole civilized world. But the metaphysical abstractions of Athanasius, and the maniac ravings of Calvin, tinctured plentifully with the foggy dreams of Plato, have so loaded it with absurdities and incomprehensibilities, as to drive into infidelity men who had not time, patience, or opportunity to strip it of its meretricious trappings.[1]

Letter to John Adams (April 11, 1823) (Scan at The Library of Congress)

It is between fifty and sixty years since I read it, and I then considered it merely the ravings of a maniac, no more worthy nor capable of explanation than the incoherences of our own nightly dreams. ... what has no meaning admits no explanation.


The religion-builders have so distorted and deformed the doctrines of Jesus, so muffled them in mysticisms, fancies and falsehoods, have caricatured them into forms so monstrous and inconceivable, as to shock reasonable thinkers... Happy in the prospect of a restoration of primitive Christianity, I must leave to younger athletes to encounter and lop off the false branches which have been engrafted into it by the mythologists of the middle and modern ages.

Letter to General Alexander Smyth, on the book of Revelation (or The Apocalypse of St. John the Divine) (Jan. 17, 1825)[1]


[edit] On race

I advance it, therefore, as a suspicion only, that the blacks, whether originally a distinct race, or made distinct by time and circumstance, are inferior to the whites in the endowment both of body and mind.

Notes on the State of Virginia (1787)

Nothing was or is farther from my intentions, than to enlist myself as the champion of a fixed opinion, where I have only expressed doubt.

Letter to Joel Barlow (8 October 1809); Jefferson here expresses an aversion to supporting the “fixed opinion” that blacks were not equal to whites in general mental capacities, which he asserts in his Notes on the State of Virginia he had advanced as “a suspicion only”.

Nothing is more certainly written in the book of fate, than that these people are to be free; nor is it less certain that the two races, equally free, cannot live in the same government. Nature, habit, opinion have drawn indelible lines of distinction between them.

Autobiography (1821) in notes describing some of the debates of 1779 on slavery. These comments reflect biases and assumptions about race that were common in his era.
Whatever be their degree of talents, it is no measure of their rights.


[edit] On the judiciary branch of government

The Constitution . . . meant that its coordinate branches should be checks on each other. But the opinion which gives to the judges the right to decide what laws are constitutional and what not, not only for themselves in their own sphere of action but for the Legislature and Executive also in their spheres, would make the Judiciary a despotic branch.

Letter to Abigail Adams (1804)

You seem to consider the federal judges as the ultimate arbiters of all constitutional questions, a very dangerous doctrine, indeed, and one which would place us under the despotism of an oligarchy. Our judges are as honest as other men, and not more so. They have with others the same passions for the party, for power and the privilege of the corps. Their power is the more dangerous, as they are in office for life and not responsible, as the other functionaries are, to the elective control. The Constitution has erected no such single tribunal, knowing that to whatever hands confided, with the corruptions of time and party, its members would become despots. It has more wisely made all departments co-equal and co-sovereign within themselves.

Letter to William C. Jarvis (1820)

The judiciary of the United States is the subtle corps of sappers and miners constantly working under ground to undermine the foundations of our confederated fabric. They are construing our constitution from a co-ordination of a general and special government to a general and supreme one alone. This will lay all things at their feet, and they are too well versed in English law to forget the maxim, *boni judicis est ampliare juris-dictionem*. We shall see if they are bold enough to take the daring stride their five lawyers have lately taken. If they do, then, with the editor of our book, in his address to the public, I will say, that “against this every man should raise his voice,” and more, should uplift his arm. Who wrote this admirable address? Sound, luminous, strong, not a word too much, nor one which can be changed but for the worse. That pen should go on, lay bare these wounds of our constitution, expose the decisions seriatim, and arouse, as it is able, the attention of the nation to these bold speculators on its patience. Having found, from experience, that impeachment is an impracticable thing, a mere scare-crow, they consider themselves secure for life; they sculk from responsibility to public opinion, the only remaining hold on them, under a practice first introduced into England by Lord Mansfield. An opinion is huddled up in conclave, perhaps by a majority of one, delivered as if unanimous, and with the silent acquiescence of lazy or timid associates, by a crafty chief judge, who sophisticates the law to his mind, by the turn of his own reasoning.

Letter to Thomas Ritchie December 25, 1820 – Google Books

[edit] On financial matters

This section was added by an editor primarily citing *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson* Memorial Edition (Lipscomb and Bergh, editors) (ME) 20 Vols., Washington, D.C., (1903-04) as the source.
Banking Institutions

» That we are overdone with banking institutions which have banished the precious metals and substituted a more fluctuating and unsafe medium, that these have withdrawn capital from useful improvements and employments to nourish idleness, that the wars of the world have swollen our commerce beyond the wholesome limits of exchanging our own productions for our own wants, and that, for the emolument of a small proportion of our society who prefer these demoralizing pursuits to labors useful to the whole, the peace of the whole is endangered and all our present difficulties produced, are evils more easily to be deplored than remedied.

» Letter to Abbe Salimankis, 1810. ME 12:379

» The system of banking we have both equally and ever reprobated. I contemplate it as a blot left in all our constitutions, which, if not covered, will end in their destruction, which is already hit by the gamblers in corruption, and is sweeping away in its progress the fortunes and morals of our citizens.


» Nearly all of it is now called in by the banks, who have the regulation of the safety-valves of our fortunes, and who condense and explode them at their will.

» Letter to John Adams, 1819. ME 15:224

» The States should be urged to concede to the General Government, with a saving of chartered rights, the exclusive power of establishing banks of discount for paper.

» Letter to John W. Eppes, 1813. ME 13:431

A National Bank

» The incorporation of a bank and the powers assumed [by legislation doing so] have not, in my opinion, been delegated to the United States by the Constitution. They are not among the powers specially enumerated.

» Opinion on the Constitutionality of the Bill for Establishing a National Bank., 1791. ME 3:146

» It has always been denied by the republican party in this country, that the Constitution had given the power of incorporation to Congress. On the establishment of the Bank of the United States, this was the great ground on which that establishment was combated; and the party prevailing supported it only on the argument of its being an incident to the power given them for raising money.

» Letter to Dr. Maese, 1809. ME 12:231

» The idea of creating a national bank I do not concur in, because it seems now decided that Congress has not that power (although I sincerely wish they had it exclusively), and because I think there is already a vast redundancy rather than a scarcity of paper medium.

» Letter to Thomas Law, 1813. FE 9:433
[The] Bank of the United States... is one of the most deadly hostility existing, against the principles and form of our Constitution... An institution like this, penetrating by its branches every part of the Union, acting by command and in phalanx, may, in a critical moment, upset the government. I deem no government safe which is under the vassalage of any self-constituted authorities, or any other authority than that of the nation, or its regular functionaries. What an obstruction could not this bank of the United States, with all its branch banks, be in time of war! It might dictate to us the peace we should accept, or withdraw its aids. Ought we then to give further growth to an institution so powerful, so hostile?

» Letter to Albert Gallatin, 1803. ME 10:437

Meeting the Banking Problem

» The monopoly of a single bank is certainly an evil. The multiplication of them was intended to cure it; but it multiplied an influence of the same character with the first, and completed the supplanting the precious metals by a paper circulation. Between such parties the less we meddle the better.

» Letter to Albert Gallatin, 1802. ME 10:323

» In order to be able to meet a general combination of the banks against us in a critical emergency, could we not make a beginning towards an independent use of our own money, towards holding our own bank in all the deposits where it is received, and letting the treasurer give his draft or note for payment at any particular place, which, in a well-conducted government, ought to have as much credit as any private draft or bank note or bill, and would give us the same facilities which we derive from the banks?

» Letter to Albert Gallatin, 1803. ME 10:439

» If treasury bills are emitted on a tax appropriated for their redemption in fifteen years, and (to insure preference in the first moments of competition) bearing an interest of six per cent, there is no one who would not take them in preference to the bank paper now afloat, on a principle of patriotism as well as interest; and they would be withdrawn from circulation into private hoards to a considerable amount. Their credit once established, others might be emitted, bottomed also on a tax, but not bearing interest; and if ever their credit faltered, open public loans, on which these bills alone should be received as specie. These, operating as a sinking fund, would reduce the quantity in circulation, so as to maintain that in an equilibrium with specie. It is not easy to estimate the obstacles which, in the beginning, we should encounter in ousting the banks from their possession of the circulation; but a steady and judicious alternation of emissions and loans would reduce them in time.

» Letter to John W. Eppes, 1813. ME 13:275

» Bank paper must be suppressed, and the circulating medium must be restored to the nation to whom it belongs. It is the only fund on which they can rely for loans; it is the only resource which can never fail them, and it is an abundant one for every necessary purpose. Treasury bills, bottomed on taxes, bearing or not bearing interest, as may be found necessary, thrown into circulation will take the place of so much gold and silver, which last, when crowded, will find an efflux into other countries, and thus keep the quantum of medium at its salutary level. Let banks continue if they please, but let them discount for cash alone or for treasury notes.
Put down the banks, and if this country could not be carried through the longest war against her most powerful enemy without ever knowing the want of a dollar, without dependence on the traitorous classes of her citizens, without bearing hard on the resources of the people, or loading the public with an indefinite burden of debt, I know nothing of my countrymen. Not by any novel project, not by an charlatanerie, but by ordinary and well-experienced means; by the total prohibition of all private paper at all times, by reasonable taxes in war aided by the necessary emissions of public paper of circulating size, this bottomed on special taxes, redeemable annually as this special tax comes in, and finally within a moderate period.

Letter to Albert Gallatin, 1815. ME 14:356

Our people... will give you all the necessaries of war they produce, if, instead of the bankrupt trash they now are obliged to receive for want of any other, you will give them a paper promise funded on a specific pledge, and of a size for common circulation.

Letter to James Monroe, 1815. ME 14:228

Instead of funding issues of paper on the hypothecation of specific redeeming taxes (the only method of anticipating, in a time of war, the resources of times of peace, tested by the experience of nations), we are trusting to tricks of jugglers on the cards, to the illusions of banking schemes for the resources of the war, and for the cure of colic to inflations of more wind.

Letter to M. Correa de Serra, 1814. ME 14:224

It is literally true that the toleration of banks of paper discount costs the United States one-half their war taxes; or, in other words, doubles the expenses of every war. Now think but for a moment, what a change of condition that would be, which should save half our war expenses, require but half the taxes, and enthrall us in debt but half the time.

Letter to John W. Eppes, 1813. ME 13:364

The State legislatures should be immediately urged to relinquish the right of establishing banks of discount. Most of them will comply, on patriotic principles, under the convictions of the moment; and the non-complying may be crowded into concurrence by legitimate devices.

Letter to Thomas Cooper, 1814. ME 14:190

**The Issuance of Treasury Notes**

Necessity, as well as patriotism and confidence, will make us all eager to receive treasury notes, if founded on specific taxes. Congress may borrow of the public, and without interest, all the money they may want, to the amount of a competent circulation, by merely issuing their own promissory notes, of proper denominations for the larger purposes of circulation, but not for the small. Leave that door open for the entrance of metallic money.

Letter to Thomas Cooper, 1814. ME 14:189

Treasury notes of small as well as high denomination, bottomed on a tax which would redeem them in ten years, would place at our disposal the whole circulating medium of the United States... The public... ought never more to
permit its being filched from them by private speculators and disorganizers of the circulation.

» Letter to William H. Crawford, 1815. ME 14:242

» There can be no safer deposit on earth than the Treasury of the United States.

» Letter to Lafayette, 1825. ME 19:281

» The government of the United States have no idea of paying their debt in a depreciated medium, and... in the final liquidation of the payments which shall have been made, due regard will be had to an equitable allowance for the circumstance of depreciation.

» Letter to Jean Baptiste de Ternant, 1791. ME 8:247

**Commercial Banking**

» The art and mystery of banks... is established on the principle that 'private debts are a public blessing.' That the evidences of those private debts, called bank notes, become active capital, and aliment the whole commerce, manufactures, and agriculture of the United States. Here are a set of people, for instance, who have bestowed on us the great blessing of running in our debt about two hundred millions of dollars, without our knowing who they are, where they are, or what property they have to pay this debt when called on; nay, who have made us so sensible of the blessings of letting them run in our debt, that we have exempted them by law from the repayment of these debts beyond a give proportion (generally estimated at one-third). And to fill up the measure of blessing, instead of paying, they receive an interest on what they owe from those to whom they owe; for all the notes, or evidences of what they owe, which we see in circulation, have been lent to somebody on an interest which is levied again on us through the medium of commerce. And they are so ready still to deal out their liberalities to us, that they are now willing to let themselves run in our debt ninety millions more, on our paying them the same premium of six or eight per cent interest, and on the same legal exemption from the repayment of more than thirty millions of the debt, when it shall be called for.

» Letter to John W. Eppes, 1813. ME 13:420

» The bank mania... is raising up a moneyed aristocracy in our country which has already set the government at defiance, and although forced at length to yield a little on this first essay of their strength, their principles are unyielded and unyielding. These have taken deep root in the hearts of that class from which our legislators are drawn, and the sop to Cerberus from fable has become history. Their principles lay hold of the good, their pelf of the bad, and thus those whom the Constitution had placed as guards to its portals, are sophisticated or suborned from their duties.

» Letter to Josephus B. Stuart, 1817. ME 15:112

» Put down all banks, admit none but a metallic circulation that will take its proper level with the like circulation in other countries, and then our manufacturers may work in fair competition with those of other countries, and the import duties which the government may lay for the purposes of revenue will so far place them above equal competition.

» Letter to Charles Pinckney, 1820. ME 15:280

» But it will be asked, are we to have no banks? Are merchants and others to be
deprived of the resource of short accommodations, found so convenient? I
answer, let us have banks; but let them be such as are alone to be found in any
country on earth, except Great Britain. There is not a bank of discount on the
continent of Europe (at least there was not one when I was there) which offers
anything but cash in exchange for discounted bills.

» Letter to John W. Eppes, 1813. ME 13:277

No one has a natural right to the trade of a money lender, but he who has the
money to lend. Let those then among us who have a moneyed capital and who
prefer employing it in loans rather than otherwise, set up banks and give cash or
national bills for the notes they discount. Perhaps, to encourage them, a larger
interest than is legal in the other cases might be allowed them, on the condition
of their lending for short periods only.

» Letter to John W. Eppes, 1813. ME 13:277

If the debt which the banking companies owe be a blessing to anybody, it is to
themselves alone, who are realizing a solid interest of eight or ten per cent on it.
As to the public, these companies have banished all our gold and silver medium,
which, before their institution, we had without interest, which never could have
perished in our hands, and would have been our salvation now in the hour of
war; instead of which they have given us two hundred million of froth and
bubble, on which we are to pay them heavy interest, until it shall vanish into
air… We are warranted, then, in affirming that this parody on the principle of ‘a
public debt being a public blessing,’ and its mutation into the blessing of private
instead of public debts, is as ridiculous as the original principle itself. In both
cases, the truth is, that capital may be produced by industry, and accumulated
by economy; but jugglers only will propose to create it by legerdemain tricks
with paper.

» Letter to John W. Eppes, 1813. ME 13:423

Everything predicted by the enemies of banks, in the beginning, is now coming to
pass. We are to be ruined now by the deluge of bank paper. It is cruel that such
revolutions in private fortunes should be at the mercy of avaricious adventurers,
who, instead of employing their capital, if any they have, in manufactures,
commerce, and other useful pursuits, make it an instrument to burden all the
interchanges of property with their swindling profits, profits which are the price
of no useful industry of theirs.

» Letter to Thomas Cooper, 1814. ME 14:61

Certainly no nation ever before abandoned to the avarice and jugglings of private
individuals to regulate according to their own interests, the quantum of
circulating medium for the nation — to inflate, by deluges of paper, the nominal
prices of property, and then to buy up that property at 1s. in the pound, having
first withdrawn the floating medium which might endanger a competition in
purchase. Yet this is what has been done, and will be done, unless stayed by the
protecting hand of the legislature. The evil has been produced by the error of
their sanction of this ruinous machinery of banks; and justice, wisdom, duty, all
require that they should interpose and arrest it before the schemes of plunder
and spoliation desolate the country.


It is said that our paper is as good as silver, because we may have silver for it at
the bank where it issues. This is not true. One, two, or three persons might have
it; but a general application would soon exhaust their vaults, and leave a ruinous proportion of their paper in its intrinsic worthless form.

» Letter to John W. Eppes, 1813. ME 13:426

To the existence of banks of discount for cash… there can be no objection, because there can be no danger of abuse, and they are a convenience both to merchants and individuals. I think they should even be encouraged, by allowing them a larger than legal interest on short discounts, and tapering thence, in proportion as the term of discount is lengthened, down to legal interest on those of a year or more. Even banks of deposit, where cash should be lodged, and a paper acknowledgment taken out as its representative, entitled to a return of the cash on demand, would be convenient for remittances, travelling persons, etc. But, liable as its cash would be to be pilfered and robbed, and its paper to be fraudulently re-issued, or issued without deposit, it would require skilful and strict regulation.

» Letter to John W. Eppes, 1813. ME 13:431

I am an enemy to all banks discounting bills or notes for anything but coin.

» Letter to Thomas Cooper, 1814. ME 14:61

Regulating Banking Institutions

» The principle of rotation… in the body of [bank] directors… breaks in upon the esprit de corps so apt to prevail in permanent bodies; it gives a chance for the public eye penetrating into the sanctuary of those proceedings and practices, which the avarice of the directors may introduce for their personal emolument, and which the resentments of excluded directors, or the honesty of those duly admitted, might betray to the public; and it gives an opportunity at the end of the year, or at other periods, of correcting a choice, which on trial, proves to have been unfortunate.

» Letter to Albert Gallatin, 1803. ME 10:437

[edit] Unsourced

» I wish it were possible to obtain a single amendment to our Constitution — taking from the federal government their power of borrowing.”

» Quoted in the 1995 video ‘The Money Masters’ (google video)

» A little revolution now and then is a good thing; the tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots and tyrants. (1787)

» Letter to William Stephens Smith, 13 November 1787


» As pure a son of liberty as I have ever known.

» About Tadeusz Kościuszko

» Enlighten the people generally, and tyranny and oppressions of vanish like evil spirits at the dawn of day.

» Good wine is a necessity of life for me.
Honesty is the first chapter of the book of wisdom.

I’m a great believer in luck, and I find the harder I work the more I have of it.

   Variant: I find that the harder I work, the more luck I seem to have.

I know of no safe depository of the ultimate powers of the society but the people themselves; and if we think them not enlightened enough to exercise their control with wholesome discretion, the remedy is not to take it from them, but to inform their discretion by education. This is the true corrective of abuses of constitutional power.

I like the dreams of the future better than the history of the past.

It is not by the consolidation or concentration, of powers, but by their distribution that good government is effected.

Let those flatter, who fear: it is not an American art.

On matters of style, swim with the current. On matters of principle, stand like a rock.

So inscrutable is the arrangement of causes and effects in this world that a two-penny duty of tea, unjustly imposed in a sequestered part of it, changes the condition of all its inhabitants.

The acquisition of Canada this year, as far as the neighborhood of Quebec, will be a mere matter of marching, and will give us the experience for the attack on Halifax, the next and final expulsion of England from the American continent. (1812)

The price of freedom is eternal vigilance.

   It is really from Wendell Phillips, who said,”Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty.”

There is not a truth existing which I fear or would wish unknown to the whole world.

Truth will do well enough if left to shift for herself…She has no need of force to procure entrance into the minds of men.

War is an instrument entirely inefficient toward redressing wrong; and multiplies, instead of indemnifying losses.

We have the wolf by the ears, and we can neither hold him nor safely let him go. Justice is in one scale, self-preservation in the other.

   On slavery.

Where the press is free, and every man able to read, all is safe. (-Thomas Jefferson to Charles Yancey, 1816. ME 14:384)

[edit] Disputed

I believe that banking institutions are more dangerous to our liberties than standing armies. If the American people ever allow private banks to control the issue of their currency, first by inflation, then by deflation, the banks and corporations that will grow up around [the banks] will deprive the people of all political influence.
property until their children wake-up homeless on the continent their fathers conquered. The issuing power should be taken from the banks and restored to the people, to whom it properly belongs.

» This is cited as from a letter to Secretary of the Treasury Albert Gallatin (1802) in *Flight to Financial Freedom – Fasten Your Finances* (2007) by Nathan A. Martin, and earlier appears in *How to Take Advantage of the People Who Are Trying to Take Advantage of You* (2006) by Joseph Stephen Breese Morse, p. 51. It appears to be a concoction of some actual statements by Jefferson, and others that may not be. It has not yet been found to appear earlier in precisely this form.

» Variant: I believe that banking institutions are more dangerous to our liberties than standing armies. Already they have raised up a monied aristocracy that has set the Government at defiance. The issuing power should be taken from the banks and restored to the people, to whom it properly belongs.

» This is an earlier variant which contains a portion of the above statement and appears in *Life Work of Thomas L. Nugent* (1896) compiled by Catharine Nugent. Both of these expressions appear to mix a well documented statement that is to be found in Jefferson’s published letters, and poorly documented ones which do not. The only portions of them thus far definitely sourced to Jefferson occur in a letter to John Taylor (28 May 1816) [ME 15:23]: “I sincerely believe, with you, that banking establishments are more dangerous than standing armies.” This is quoted more extensively in the sourced section.

(edit) Misattributed

» A society that will trade a little liberty for a little order will lose both, and deserve neither.

» This has actually become a common paraphrase of a statement that is believed to have originated with Benjamin Franklin: *Those who would give up Essential Liberty to purchase a little Temporary Safety, deserve neither Liberty nor Safety.*

» Resistance to tyranny is obedience to God.

» This statement has often been attributed to Jefferson, as well as to Benjamin Franklin, who has been said to have proposed it as the motto of the United States, and sometimes to English theologian William Tyndale, or Susan B. Anthony, who used it, but cited it as an “old revolutionary maxim” — it was widely used as an abolitionist and feminist slogan in the 19th century. The earliest definite citations of a source yet found in research for Wikiquote indicates that it was declared by Massachusetts Governor Simon Bradstreet after the overthrow of Dominion of New England Governor Edmund Andros in relation to the “Glorious Revolution” of 1688, as quoted in *Official Report of the Debates and Proceedings in the State Convention: assembled May 4th, 1853* (1853) by the Massachusetts Constitutional Convention, p. 502. It is also quoted as a maxim that arose after the overthrow of Andros in *A Book of New England Legends and Folk Lore* (1883) by Samuel Adams Drake. p.426

» Dissent is the highest form of patriotism.

» Historian Howard Zinn said this in an interview with TomPaine.com in July 2002. It has been widely misattributed to Thomas Jefferson. The interview
can be found here: http://www.tompaine.com/Archive/scontent/5908.html. The quote can be found in the first sentence of Mr. Zinn’s first answer. (Nowhere in that article does Howard Zinn attribute that quote to Jefferson.)

» Law professor Jim Lindgren of The Volokh Conspiracy has traced the possible origin of this saying back as far as the 11 November 1984 obituary of pacifist activist Dorothy Hewitt Hutchinson in the Philadelphia Inquirer, quoting a 1965 interview. The direct quote there is: “Dissent from public policy can be the highest form of patriotism,” she said in an interview in 1965. “I don’t think democracy can survive without it, even though you may be crucified by it at times.” According to the professor’s research, the misattribution was popularized in the 1990’s by ACLU president Nadine Strossen. Bill Mullins of the American Dialect Society did further research.

» Government big enough to supply everything you need is big enough to take everything you have … The course of history shows that as a government grows, liberty decreases.

» Commonly quoted on many websites, this quotation is actually from Gerald Ford’s August 12th, 1974 address to Congress. [2]

» That government is best which governs least.

» Attributed to Jefferson by Henry David Thoreau, this statement is cited in his essay on civil disobedience, but the quote has not been found in Jefferson’s own writings. The statement may well have originated with Thoreau himself. It is also commonly attributed to Thomas Paine, perhaps because of its similarity in theme to many of his well-documented expressions such as “Society in every state is a blessing, but government even in its best state is but a necessary evil; in its worst state an intolerable one.”

» The Christian god can easily be pictured as virtually the same god as the many ancient gods of past civilizations. The Christian god is a three headed monster; cruel, vengeful and capricious. If one wishes to know more of this raging, three headed beast-like god, one only needs to look at the caliber of people who say they serve him. They are always of two classes: fools and hypocrites.

» See the Positive Atheism site on the extreme unlikelihood of this quote being authentic. It actually contains some known phrases of Jefferson’s, but they are compounded with almost certainly false statements into a highly misrepresentative whole. Jefferson’s own opinions on Jesus, God, Christianity and general opinions about them were far more complex than is indicated in this almost certainly bogus tirade.

» When governments fear the people, there is liberty. When the people fear the government, there is tyranny. The strongest reason for the people to retain the right to keep and bear arms is, as a last resort, to protect themselves against tyranny in government.

» According to the Jefferson Library, this is among the many statements misattributed to Jefferson.

[edit] Primary sources

one-volume collections; this is perhaps the best place to start.

» Thomas Jefferson, Political Writings ed by Joyce Appleby and Terence Ball. Cambridge University Press. 1999

» Lipscomb, Andrew A. and Albert Ellery Bergh, eds. The Writings Of Thomas Jefferson 19 vol. (1907) not as complete nor as accurate as Boyd edition, but covers TJ from 1801 to his death. It is out of copyright, and so is online free.


» The Jefferson Cyclopedia (1900) large collection of TJ quotations arranged by 9000 topics; searchable; copyright has expired and it is online free.

» The Thomas Jefferson Papers, 1606-1827, 27,000 original manuscript documents at the Library of Congress. online collection

» Jefferson, Thomas. Notes on the State of Virginia (1787), London: Stockdale. This was Jefferson's only book.

» online edition


[edit] External links

» Brief biography at The White House

» “The Thomas Jefferson Papers” at the Library of Congress

» Jefferson Digital Archive at The University of Virginia

» The Works of Thomas Jefferson (12 Vols. 1905), Edited by Paul Leicester Ford

» Monticello – Jefferson's Home (with extensive Quicktime panoramic images)

» Thomas Jefferson A film by Ken Burns at PBS

» The Thomas Jefferson Memorial in Washington D.C.

» Jefferson biography

» “The Declaration of Independence” at Wikisource
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» Henry Adams, “History of the United States 1801-09” (1889-90)
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- Message to the House of December 30, 1802 – Transmitting a letter from Manuel de Salcedo, Governor of Louisiana to William Claiborne Regarding the Treaty with Spain of 1795
- Message to the Senate of January 11, 1803 – Regarding Louisiana
- Message to Congress of January 18, 1803 – Secret message regarding the Lewis & Clark Expedition to explore the West all the way to the Pacific Ocean.
- Message to the Senate of October 17, 1803 – Regarding the Louisiana Purchase
- Message to the Senate and House of October 21, 1803 – Regarding the Louisiana Purchase
- Message to the Senate and House of January 16, 1804 – Regarding the Louisiana Purchase
Purchase

» The Burr Conspiracy – Regarding the conspiracy led by the former Vice President Aaron Burr

[edit] Addresses to the Indians

» To Brother John Baptist de Coigne – (June 1781)
» To Brother Handsome Lake – (3 November 1802)
» To the Brothers of the Choctaw Nation – (17 December 1803)
» To the Chiefs of the Cherokee Nation – (10 January 1806)
» To the Wolf and People of the Mandan Nation – (30 December 1806)

[edit] Other Works

» Letters of Thomas Jefferson
» Draft of the Declaration of Independence – (28 June 1776)
» The Declaration of Independence of the United States – (July 1776)
» The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth, also known as the Jefferson Bible (1820)

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English: Thomas Jefferson was one of the Founding Fathers of the United States, the 1st Secretary of the State, the 2nd Vice President of the United States and the 3rd President of the United States.

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Official White House Portrait
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on a 2007 dollar coin.

**Thomas Jefferson**

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<th>1st United States Secretary of State</th>
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<td><strong>In office</strong></td>
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Thomas Jefferson (April 13, 1743 – July 4, 1826) was the third President of the United States (1801–1809), the principal author of the Declaration of Independence (1776), and one of the most influential Founding Fathers for his promotion of the ideals of Republicanism in the United States. Major events during his presidency include the Louisiana Purchase (1803) and the Lewis and Clark Expedition (1804–1806).

As a political philosopher, Jefferson was a man of the Enlightenment and knew many intellectual leaders in Britain and France. He idealized the independent yeoman farmer as exemplar of republican virtues, distrusted cities and financiers, and favored states’ rights and a strictly limited federal government. Jefferson supported the separation of church and state and was the author of the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom (1779, 1786). He was the eponym of Jeffersonian democracy and the co-founder and leader of the Democratic-Republican Party, which dominated American politics for a quarter-century. Jefferson served as the wartime Governor of Virginia (1779–1781), first United States Secretary of State (1789–1793) and second Vice President (1797–1801).
A polymath, Jefferson achieved distinction as, among other things, a horticulturist, statesman, architect, archaeologist, paleontologist, author, inventor and founder of the University of Virginia. When President John F. Kennedy welcomed forty-nine Nobel Prize winners to the White House in 1962 he said, “I think this is the most extraordinary collection of talent and of human knowledge that has ever been gathered together at the White House — with the possible exception of when Thomas Jefferson dined alone.”[2]

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» 9 Religious views
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[edit] Early life and education

Thomas Jefferson was born on April 13, 1743[1] into a family closely related to some of the most prominent individuals in Virginia, the third of eight children. His mother was Jane Randolph, daughter of Isham Randolph, a ship’s captain and sometime planter, and first cousin to Peyton Randolph. Jefferson’s father was Peter Jefferson, a planter and surveyor who owned plantations in Albemarle County (Shadwell, then Edge Hill, Virginia.) He was of English descent and belonged to the Haplogroup K2.
In 1752, Jefferson began attending a local school run by William Douglas, a Scottish minister. At the age of nine, Jefferson began studying Latin, Greek, and French. In 1757, when he was 14 years old, his father died. Jefferson inherited about 5,000 acres (20 km²) of land and dozens of slaves. He built his home there, which eventually became known as Monticello.

After his father’s death, he was taught at the school of the learned minister James Maury from 1758 to 1760. The school was in Fredericksville Parish near Gordonsville, Virginia, twelve miles (19 km) from Shadwell, and Jefferson boarded with Maury’s family. There he received a classical education and studied history and science.

In 1760 Jefferson entered The College of William & Mary in Williamsburg at the age of 16; he studied there for two years, graduating with highest honors in 1762. At William & Mary, he enrolled in the philosophy school and studied mathematics, metaphysics, and philosophy under Professor William Small, who introduced the enthusiastic Jefferson to the writings of the British Empiricists, including John Locke, Francis Bacon, and Isaac Newton (Jefferson called them the “three greatest men the world had ever produced”). He also perfected his French, carried his Greek grammar book wherever he went, practiced the violin, and read Tacitus and Homer. A keen and diligent student, Jefferson displayed an avid curiosity in all fields and, according to the family tradition, frequently studied fifteen hours a day. His closest college friend, John Page of Rosewell, reported that Jefferson “could tear himself away from his dearest friends to fly to his studies.”
While in college, Jefferson was a member of a secret organization called the Flat Hat Club, now the namesake of the William & Mary student newspaper. He lodged and boarded at the College in the building known today as the Sir Christopher Wren Building, attending communal meals in the Great Hall, and morning and evening prayers in the Wren Chapel. Jefferson often attended the lavish parties of royal governor Francis Fauquier, where he played his violin and developed an early love for wines. After graduating in 1762 with highest honors, he studied law with his friend and mentor, George Wythe, and was admitted to the Virginia bar in 1767.

In 1772, Jefferson married a 23-year-old widow, Martha Wayles Skelton Jefferson. They had six children: Martha Jefferson Randolph (1772–1836), Jane Randolph (1774–1775), a stillborn or unnamed son (1777), Mary Wayles (1778–1804), Lucy Elizabeth (1780–1781), and Lucy Elizabeth (1782–1785). Martha died on September 6, 1782 and Jefferson never remarried. Jefferson may also have been the father of several children with his slave Sally Hemings, though the father may also have been one of his male relatives (see Jefferson DNA data).

[edit] Political career from 1774 to 1800

Rudolph Evans' statue of Jefferson with the Declaration of Independence preamble to the right.

[edit] Colonial legislator

Jefferson practiced law and served in the Virginia House of Burgesses. In 1774, he wrote, *A Summary View of the Rights of British America* which was intended as
instructions for the Virginia delegates to a national congress. The pamphlet was a powerful argument of American terms for a settlement with Britain. It helped speed the way to independence, and marked Jefferson as one of the most thoughtful patriot spokesmen.

[edit] The Second Continental Congress

In an uncanny twist of fate Richard Henry Lee, who authored the July 2, 1776 resolution declaring independence from Great Britain, was called home to Virginia due to the illness of his wife.[6] Thomas Jefferson was appointed by the Continental Congress of the United Colonies in his place as the Committee of Five’s Chairman to prepare a draft of the proposed Declaration of Independence. Congress also chose John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, Robert Livingston, and Roger Sherman. The committee assigned Thomas Jefferson the task of producing a draft Declaration for its consideration. Jefferson’s creation of the original draft took place in seventeen days between his appointment on the committee until the report of draft to Congress on June 28, 1776. Jefferson drew heavily on George Mason’s Virginia Declaration of Rights (passed on June 12, 1776), state and local calls for independence, and his own work on the Virginia Constitution. 26 changes were made from Jefferson’s original draft by the Committee of Five.[7] On July 4, 1776, the resolution was passed two days after Independence was declared. Jefferson is considered to be the primary author.

[edit] State legislator

In September 1776, Jefferson returned to Virginia and was elected to the new Virginia House of Delegates. During his term in the House, Jefferson set out to reform and update Virginia’s system of laws to reflect its new status as a democratic state. He drafted 126 bills in three years, including laws to abolish primogeniture, establish freedom of religion, and streamline the judicial system. In 1778, Jefferson’s “Bill for the More General Diffusion of Knowledge” led to several academic reforms at his alma mater, including an elective system of study — the first in an American university.

John Trumbull’s famous painting is usually incorrectly identified as a depiction of the signing of the Declaration. What the painting actually depicts is the five-man drafting committee presenting their work to the
Congress. Trumbull’s painting can also be found on the back of the U.S. $2 bill[^8]

**[edit] Governor of Virginia**

Jefferson served as governor of Virginia from 1779–1781. As governor, he oversaw the transfer of the state capitol from Williamsburg to the more central location of Richmond in 1780. He continued to advocate educational reforms at the College of William and Mary, including the nation’s first student-policing honor code. In 1779, at Jefferson’s behest, William and Mary appointed George Wythe to be the first professor of law in an American university. Dissatisfied with the rate of changes he wanted to push through, he later became the founder of the University of Virginia, which was the first university in the United States at which higher education was completely separate from religious doctrine.

Virginia was invaded twice by the British during Jefferson’s term as governor. He, along with Patrick Henry and other leaders of Virginia, were but ten minutes away from being captured by Banastre Tarleton, a British colonel leading a cavalry column that was raiding the area in June 1781.[^9] Public disapproval of his performance delayed his future political prospects, and he was never again elected to office in Virginia.[^10]

**[edit] Minister to France**

Memorial plaque on the Champs-Élysées, Paris, France, marking where Jefferson lived while he was Minister to France. The plaque was erected after World War I to commemorate the centenary of Jefferson’s founding of the University of Virginia.
Because Jefferson served as minister to France from 1785 to 1789, he was not able to attend the Philadelphia Convention. He generally supported the new constitution despite the lack of a bill of rights and was kept informed by his correspondence with James Madison.

While in Paris, he lived in a residence on the Champs-Élysées.

[edit] Secretary of State

After returning from France, Jefferson served as the first Secretary of State under George Washington (1789–1793). Jefferson and Alexander Hamilton began sparring over national fiscal policy, especially the funding of the debts of the war, with Hamilton believing that the debts should be equally shared, and Jefferson believing that each state should be responsible for its own debt (Virginia had not accumulated much debt during the Revolution). In further sparring with the Federalists, Jefferson came to equate Hamilton and the rest of the Federalists with Tories and monarchists who threatened to undermine republicanism. He equated Federalism with “Royalism,” and made a point to state that “Hamiltonians were panting after…and itching for crowns, coronets and mitres.”[11] Jefferson and James Madison founded and led the Democratic-Republican Party. He worked with Madison and his campaign manager John J. Beckley to build a nationwide network of Republican allies to combat Federalists across the country.

Jefferson strongly supported France against Britain when war broke out between those nations in 1793. Historian Lawrence S. Kaplan notes Jefferson’s “visceral support for the French cause,” while agreeing with Washington that the nation should not get involved in the fighting.[12] The arrival in 1793 of an aggressive new French minister, Edmond-Charles Genêt, caused a crisis for the Secretary of State, as he watched Genêt try to violate American neutrality, manipulate public opinion, and even go over Washington’s head in appealing to the people; projects that Jefferson helped to thwart. According to Schachner, Jefferson believed that political success at home depended on the success of the French army in Europe:[13]

![Thomas Jefferson, aquatint by Tadeusz Kościuszko.](image)

Jefferson still clung to his sympathies with France and hoped for the success...
of her arms abroad and a cordial compact with her at home. He was afraid that any French reverses on the European battlefields would give “wonderful vigor to our monocrats, and unquestionably affect the tone of administering our government. Indeed, I fear that if this summer should prove disastrous to the French, it will damp that energy of republicanism in our new Congress, from which I had hoped so much reformation.”

[edit] A break from office

Jefferson at the end of 1793 retired to Monticello where he continued to orchestrate opposition to Hamilton and Washington. However, the Jay Treaty of 1794, orchestrated by Hamilton, brought peace and trade with Britain — while Madison, with strong support from Jefferson, wanted, Miller says, “to strangle the former mother country” without actually going to war. “It became an article of faith among Republicans that ‘commercial weapons’ would suffice to bring Great Britain to any terms the United States chose to dictate.” Jefferson, in retirement, strongly encouraged Madison.[14]

[edit] The 1796 election and Vice Presidency

As the Republican candidate in 1796 he lost to John Adams, but had enough electoral votes to become Vice President (1797–1801). He wrote a manual of parliamentary procedure, but otherwise avoided the Senate.

Portrait of Thomas Jefferson by Rembrandt Peale, 1800

With the Quasi-War, an undeclared naval war with France, underway, the Federalists under John Adams started a navy, built up the army, levied new taxes, readied for war, and enacted the Alien and Sedition Acts in 1798. Jefferson interpreted the Alien and Sedition Acts as an attack on his party more than on dangerous enemy aliens; they were used to attack his party, with the most notable attacks coming from Matthew Lyon, congressman of Vermont. He and Madison rallied support by anonymously writing the Kentucky and Virginia Resolutions, which declared that the federal government had no right to exercise powers not specifically delegated to it
by the states. The Resolutions meant that, should the federal government assume such powers, its acts under them could be voided by a state. The Resolutions presented the first statements of the states’ rights theory, that later led to the concepts of nullification and interposition.

[edit] The election of 1800

Working closely with Aaron Burr of New York, Jefferson rallied his party, attacking the new taxes especially, and stood for the Presidency in 1800. Consistent with the traditions of the times, he did not formally campaign for the position. Prior to the passage of the 12th Amendment, a problem with the new union’s electoral system arose. He tied with Burr for first place in the Electoral College, leaving the House of Representatives (where the Federalists still had some power) to decide the election.

After lengthy debate within the Federalist-controlled House, Hamilton convinced his party that Jefferson would be a lesser political evil than Burr and that such scandal within the electoral process would undermine the still-young regime. The issue was resolved by the House, on 17 February 1801 after thirty-six ballots, when Jefferson was elected President and Burr Vice President. Burr’s refusal to remove himself from consideration created ill will with Jefferson, who dropped Burr from the ticket in 1804 after Burr killed Hamilton in a duel.

[edit] Presidency 1801–1809

Main article: Presidency of Thomas Jefferson

[edit] Administration and cabinet

The Jefferson Cabinet

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<td>Thomas Jefferson</td>
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<td>Vice President</td>
<td>Aaron Burr</td>
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<td>George Clinton</td>
<td>1805–1809</td>
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<td>Secretary of State</td>
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[edit] Supreme Court appointments

Jefferson appointed the following Justices to the Supreme Court of the United States:

William Johnson – 1804

Henry Brockholst Livingston – 1807

Thomas Todd – 1807

[edit] States admitted to the Union

Ohio – March 1, 1803

[edit] Father of a university
After leaving the Presidency, Jefferson continued to be active in public affairs. He also became increasingly concerned with founding a new institution of higher learning, specifically one free of church influences where students could specialize in many new areas not offered at other universities. Jefferson believed educating people was a good way to establish an organized society, and also felt schools should be paid for by the general public, so less wealthy people could obtain student membership as well. A letter to Joseph Priestley, in January, 1800, indicated that he had been planning the University for decades before its establishment.

His dream was realized in 1819 with the founding of the University of Virginia. Upon its opening in 1825, it was then the first university to offer a full slate of elective courses to its students. One of the largest construction projects to that time in North America, it was notable for being centered about a library rather than a church. In fact, no campus chapel was included in his original plans. Until his death, Jefferson invited students and faculty of the school to his home; Edgar Allan Poe was among those students.

Jefferson is widely recognized for his architectural planning of the UVA campus, an innovative design that is a powerful representation of his aspirations for both state sponsored education and an agrarian democracy in the new Republic. His educational idea of creating specialized units of learning is physically expressed in the configuration of his campus plan, which he called the “Academical Village.” Individual academic units are expressed visually as distinct structures, represented by Pavilions, facing a grassy quadrangle, with each Pavilion housing classroom, faculty office, and residences. Though unique, each is visually equal in importance, and they are linked together with a series of open air arcades that are the front facades of student accommodations. Gardens and vegetable plots are placed behind surrounded by serpentine walls, affirming the importance of the agrarian lifestyle.

His highly ordered site plan establishes an ensemble of buildings surrounding a central rectangular quadrangle, named The Lawn, which is lined on either side with the academic teaching units and their linking arcades. The quad is enclosed at one end with the library, the repository of knowledge, at the head of the table. The remaining side opposite the library remained open-ended for future growth. The lawn rises gradually as a series of stepped terraces, each a few feet higher than the
last, rising up to the library set in the most prominent position at the top, while also suggesting that the Academical Village facilitates easier movement to the future.

Stylistically, Jefferson was a proponent of the Greek and Roman styles, which he believed to be most representative of American democracy by historical association. Each academic unit is designed with a two story temple front facing the quadrangle, while the library is modeled on the Roman Pantheon. The ensemble of buildings surrounding the quad is an unmistakable architectural statement of the importance of secular public education, while the exclusion of religious structures reinforces the principal of separation of church and state. The campus planning and architectural treatment remains today as a paradigm of the ordering of manmade structures to express intellectual ideas and aspirations. A survey of members of the American Institute of Architects identified Jefferson’s campus as the most significant work of architecture in America.

The University was designed as the capstone of the educational system of Virginia. In his vision, any citizen of the commonwealth could attend school with the sole criterion being ability.

[edit] Jefferson’s death

Jefferson’s gravesite.

Jefferson died on the Fourth of July, 1826, the 50th anniversary of the adoption of the Declaration of Independence. He died a few hours before the death of John Adams, co-signer of the Declaration of Independence, one time political rival and later friend and correspondent.

Although he was born into one of the wealthiest families in the United States, Thomas Jefferson was deeply in debt when he died. His possessions were sold at auction. In 1831, Jefferson’s 552 acres (223 hectares) were sold for $7,000 to James T. Barclay. Thomas Jefferson is buried on his Monticello estate, in Charlottesville, Virginia. In his will, he left Monticello to the United States to be used as a school for orphans of navy officers. His epitaph, written by him with an insistence that only his words and “not a word more” be inscribed, reads:

HERE WAS BURIED THOMAS JEFFERSON
AUTHOR OF THE DECLARATION OF AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE
THE STATUTE OF VIRGINIA FOR RELIGIOUS FREEDOM
AND FATHER OF THE UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

Below the epitaph on a separate panel is written:

BORN APRIL 2 1743 O.S.
DIED JULY 4 1826

The initials O.S. are a notation for Old Style and that is a reference to the change of dating that occurred during Jefferson’s life time from the Julian calendar to the Gregorian calendar under the British Calendar (New Style) Act 1750.[16]

[edit] Appearance and temperament

Jefferson has been described by many people as a thin, tall man, who stood at approximately six feet and remarkably straight.[17]

“The Sage of Monticello” cultivated an image that earned him the other nickname, “Man of the People.” He affected a popular air by greeting White House guests in homespun attire like a robe and slippers. Dolley Madison, wife of James Madison (Jefferson’s secretary of state), and Jefferson’s daughters relaxed White House protocol and turned formal state dinners into more casual and entertaining social events. [18] Although a foremost defender of a free press, Jefferson at times sparred with partisan newspapers and appealed to the people.[19]

Jefferson’s writings were utilitarian and evidenced great intellect, and he had an affinity for languages. He learned Gaelic in order to translate Ossian, and sent to James Macpherson for the originals.

As President, he discontinued the practice of delivering the State of the Union Address in person, instead sending the address to Congress in writing (the practice was eventually revived by Woodrow Wilson); he gave only two public speeches during his Presidency. Jefferson had a lisp[20] and preferred writing to public speaking partly because of this. He burned all of his letters between himself and his wife at her death, creating the portrait of a man who at times could be very private. Indeed, he preferred working in the privacy of his office than the public eye.[21]

[edit] Interests and activities

Jefferson was an accomplished architect who was extremely influential in bringing the Neo-Palladian style—popular among the Whig aristocracy of Britain—to the United States. The style was associated with Enlightenment ideas of republican civic virtue and political liberty. Jefferson designed his famous home, Monticello, near Charlottesville, Virginia; it included automatic doors, the first swivel chair, and other convenient devices invented by Jefferson. Nearby is the only university ever to have been founded by a U.S. president, the University of Virginia, of which the original curriculum and architecture Jefferson designed. Today, Monticello and the University of Virginia are together one of only four man-made World Heritage Sites.
in the United States of America. Jefferson also designed Poplar Forest, near Lynchburg, in Bedford County, Virginia, as a private retreat from a very public life. Jefferson is also credited with the architectural design of the Virginia State Capitol building, which was modeled after the Maison Carrée at Nîmes in southern France, an ancient Roman temple. Jefferson’s buildings helped initiate the ensuing American fashion for Federal architecture.

Jefferson’s interests included archeology, a discipline then in its infancy. He has sometimes been called the “father of archeology” in recognition of his role in developing excavation techniques. When exploring an Indian burial mound on his Virginia estate in 1784, Jefferson avoided the common practice of simply digging downwards until something turned up. Instead, he cut a wedge out of the mound so that he could walk into it, look at the layers of occupation, and draw conclusions from them.

Monticello.

Thomas Jefferson enjoyed his fish pond at Monticello. It was around three feet (1 m) deep and mortar lined. He used the pond to keep fish that were recently caught as well as to keep eels fresh. This pond has been restored and can be seen from the west side of Monticello.

In 1780, he joined Benjamin Franklin’s American Philosophical Society. He served as president of the society from 1797 to 1815.

Jefferson was an avid wine lover and noted gourmet. During his years in France (1784–1789) he took extensive trips through French and other European wine regions and sent the best back home. He is noted for the bold pronouncement: “We could in the United States make as great a variety of wines as are made in Europe, not exactly of the same kinds, but doubtless as good.” While there were extensive vineyards planted at Monticello, a significant portion were of the European wine grape Vitis vinifera and did not survive the many vine diseases native to the Americas.


After the British burned Washington, D.C. and the Library of Congress in August 1814, Jefferson offered his own collection to the nation. In January 1815, Congress accepted his offer, appropriating $23,950 for his 6,487 books, and the foundation was laid for a great national library. Today, the Library of Congress’ website for federal legislative information is named THOMAS, in honor of Jefferson. His two-volume 1764 edition of the Qur’an was used by Rep. Keith Ellison in 2007 for his swearing in to the House of Representatives.
In his May 28, 1818 letter to Mordecai Manuel Noah, Jefferson expressed his faith in mankind and his views on the nature of democracy.

Jefferson was a leader in developing republicanism in the United States. He insisted that the British aristocratic system was inherently corrupt and that Americans’ devotion to civic virtue required independence. In the 1790s he repeatedly warned that Hamilton and Adams were trying to impose a British-like monarchical system that threatened republicanism. He supported the War of 1812, hoping it would drive away the British military and ideological threat from Canada. Jefferson’s vision for American virtue was that of an agricultural nation of yeoman farmers minding their own affairs. It stood in contrast to the vision of Alexander Hamilton, who envisioned a nation of commerce and manufacturing, which Jefferson said offered too many temptations to corruption. Jefferson’s deep belief in the uniqueness and the potential of America made him the father of American exceptionalism. In particular, he was confident that an under-populated America could avoid what he considered the horrors of class-divided, industrialized Europe.

Jefferson’s republican political principles were heavily influenced by the Country Party of 18th century British opposition writers. He was influenced by John Locke (particularly relating to the principle of inalienable rights). Historians find few traces of any influence by his French contemporary, Jean-Jacques Rousseau. [24]

His opposition to the Bank of the United States was fierce: “I sincerely believe, with you, that banking establishments are more dangerous than standing armies; and that the principle of spending money to be paid by posterity, under the name of funding, is but swindling futurity on a large scale.” [25] Nevertheless Madison and Congress,
seeing the financial chaos caused by the lack of a national bank in the War of 1812, disregarded his advice and created the **Second Bank of the United States** in 1816.

Jefferson believed that each individual has “certain inalienable rights.” That is, these rights exist with or without government; man cannot create, take, or give them away. It is the right of “liberty” on which Jefferson is most notable for expounding. He defines it by saying “rightful liberty is unobstructed action according to our will within limits drawn around us by the equal rights of others. I do not add ‘within the limits of the law,’ because law is often but the tyrant’s will, and always so when it violates the rights of the individual.”[26] Hence, for Jefferson, though government cannot *create* a right to liberty, it can indeed violate it. And the limit of an individual’s rightful liberty is not what law says it is but is simply a matter of stopping short of prohibiting other individuals from having the same liberty. A proper government, for Jefferson, is one that not only prohibits individuals in society from infringing on the liberty of other individuals, but also restrains *itself* from diminishing individual liberty.

Jefferson’s commitment to equality was expressed in his successful efforts to abolish primogeniture in Virginia, the rule by which the first born son inherited all the land.[27]

Jefferson believed that individuals have an innate sense of **morality** that prescribes right from wrong when dealing with other individuals—that whether they choose to restrain themselves or not, they have an innate sense of the natural rights of others. He even believed that moral sense to be reliable enough that an **anarchist** society could function well, provided that it was reasonably small. On several occasions, he expressed admiration for tribal, communal way of living of **Native Americans**.[28] In fact, Jefferson is sometimes seen as a **philosophical anarchist**.[29]

He said in a *letter to Colonel Carrington*: “I am convinced that those societies (as the Indians) which live without government, enjoy in their general mass an infinitely greater degree of happiness than those who live under the European governments.” However, Jefferson believed anarchism to be “inconsistent with any great degree of population.”[30] Hence, he did advocate government for the American expanse provided that it exists by “consent of the governed.”

In the Preamble to his original draft of the Declaration of Independence, Jefferson wrote:

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We hold these truths to be sacred & undeniable; that all men are created equal & independant, that from that equal creation they derive rights inherent & inalienable, among which are the preservation of life, & liberty, & the pursuit of happiness; that to secure these ends, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed; that whenever any form of government shall become destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, & to institute new government, laying its foundation on such principles & organising its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety & happiness.\[31]
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Jefferson’s dedication to “consent of the governed” was so thorough that he believed that individuals could not be morally bound by the actions of preceding generations. This included debts as well as law. He said that “no society can make a
perpetual constitution or even a perpetual law. The earth belongs always to the living
generation.” He even calculated what he believed to be the proper cycle of legal
revolution: “Every constitution then, and every law, naturally expires at the end of
nineteen years. If it is to be enforced longer, it is an act of force, and not of right.”
He arrived at nineteen years through calculations with expectancy of life tables,
taking into account what he believed to be the age of “maturity”—when an
individual is able to reason for himself.[32] He also advocated that the national debt
should be eliminated. He did not believe that living individuals had a moral
obligation to repay the debts of previous generations. He said that repaying such
debts was “a question of generosity and not of right.”[33]

Jefferson’s very strong defense of States’ rights, especially in the Kentucky and
Virginia Resolutions of 1798, set the tone for hostility to expansion of federal powers.
However, some of his foreign policies did in fact strengthen the government. Most
important was the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, when he used the implied powers to
annex a huge foreign territory and all its French and Indian inhabitants. His
enforcement of the Embargo Act of 1807, while it failed in terms of foreign policy,
demonstrated that the federal government could intervene with great force at the
local level in controlling trade that might lead to war.

[edit] View on the carrying of arms

Jefferson’s commitment to liberty extended to many areas of individual freedom. In
his “Commonplace Book,” he copied a passage from Cesare, Marquis of Beccaria
related to the issue of gun control. The quote reads, “Laws that forbid the carrying
of arms … disarm only those who are neither inclined nor determined to commit
crimes … Such laws make things worse for the assaulted and better for the
assailants; they serve rather to encourage than to prevent homicides, for an
unarmed man may be attacked with greater confidence than an armed
man.”[34][35][36]

[edit] View on corporations

Jefferson’s quote, “I hope we shall crush … in its birth the aristocracy of our
moneyled corporations, which dare already to challenge our government to a trial of
strength and bid defiance to the laws of our country”[37] is often attributed to being
a strong warning against corporations and their function in American government
and society (although there is debate of this point because at the time of the quote
the term corporation was used differently than it is today[citation needed]).

[edit] Views on the judiciary

Trained as a lawyer, Jefferson was a great writer but never a good speaker or
advocate and never comfortable in court. He believed that judges should be
technical specialists but should not set policy. He denounced the 1801 Supreme
Court ruling in Marbury v. Madison as a violation of democracy, but he did not have
enough support in Congress to propose a Constitutional amendment to overturn it.
He continued to oppose the doctrine of judicial review:

“To consider the judges as the ultimate arbiters of all
constitutional questions [is] a very dangerous doctrine indeed,
and one which would place us under the despotism of an oligarchy. Our judges are as honest as other men and not more so. They have with others the same passions for party, for power, and the privilege of their corps. Their maxim is boni judicis est ampliare jurisdictionem [good justice is broad jurisdiction], and their power the more dangerous as they are in office for life and not responsible, as the other functionaries are, to the elective control. The Constitution has erected no such single tribunal, knowing that to whatever hands confided, with the corruptions of time and party, its members would become despots. It has more wisely made all the departments co-equal and co-sovereign within themselves.[38]

[edit] Views on political violence

Concerning the Shays’ Rebellion after he had heard of the bloodshed, Jefferson wrote to William S. Smith, John Adams’s son-in-law, “What signify a few lives lost in a century or two? The tree of liberty must from time to time be refreshed with the blood of patriots and tyrants. It is its natural manure.”[39] Several anti-government groups have pointed to these words to justify their movement. Timothy McVeigh, the Oklahoma City bomber, was wearing a T-shirt when arrested bearing the words, “The tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots and tyrants.”[40]

[edit] View on self-esteem

In a letter to Francis Hopkinson of March 13, 1789, Jefferson wrote:[41]

“I never had an opinion in politics or religion which I was afraid to own. A costive reserve on these subjects might have procured me more esteem from some people, but less from myself.

[edit] Religious views

Though his religious views diverted widely from the orthodox Christianity of his day, throughout his life Jefferson was intensely interested in theology, spirituality, and biblical study.[42] His religious commitment is probably best summarized in his own words as he proclaimed that he belonged to a sect with just one member.

Jefferson’s conclusions about the Bible are noteworthy. He considered much of the new testament of the Bible to be lies. He described these as “so much untruth, charlatanism and imposture”. He described the “roguey of others of His disciples”, and called them a “band of dupes and impostors” describing Paul as the “first corruptor of the doctrines of Jesus”, and wrote of “palpable interpolations and falsifications”. He also described the Book of Revelation to be “merely the ravings of a maniac, no more worthy nor capable of explanation than the incoherences of our own nightly dreams”. While living in the White House, Jefferson began to make his own condensed version of the Gospels, omitting Jesus’ virgin birth, miracles, divinity, and resurrection, primarily leaving only Jesus’ moral philosophy, of which he approved. This compilation was published after his death and became known as the
[edit] Youth

Jefferson was raised in the Church of England at a time when it was the established church in Virginia and only denomination funded by Virginia tax money. Avery Dulles, a leading Catholic theologian reports, “In his college years at William and Mary [Jefferson] came to admire Francis Bacon, Isaac Newton, and John Locke as three great paragons of wisdom. Under the influence of several professors he converted to the deist philosophy.” Dulles concludes:

“In summary, then, Jefferson was a deist because he believed in one God, in divine providence, in the divine moral law, and in rewards and punishments after death; but did not believe in supernatural revelation. He was a Christian deist because he saw Christianity as the highest expression of natural religion and Jesus as an incomparably great moral teacher. He was not an orthodox Christian because he rejected, among other things, the doctrines that Jesus was the promised Messiah and the incarnate Son of God. Jefferson's religion is fairly typical of the American form of deism in his day.”

Before the Revolution, Jefferson was a vestryman in his local church, a lay position that was informally tied to political office at the time. He also had friends who were clergy, and he supported some churches financially.

[edit] Second Continental Congress

The Declaration of Independence incorporates concepts from Deism.

It appears that Jefferson employed deist terminology in the United States Declaration of Independence where he wrote the words “Creator” and “Nature’s God.” Jefferson believed, furthermore, it was this Creator that endowed humanity with a number of inalienable rights, such as “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”
In 1776 Jefferson also proposed a motto for the United States Seal. His proposal was, “Rebellion to tyrants is Obedience to God.” He suggested that the seal should feature an image of the Biblical Hebrews being rescued by God via the Red Sea.

[edit] Separating Church and State

Jefferson is portrayed on the United States two-dollar bill.

For Jefferson, separation of church and state was a necessary reform of the religious “tyranny” whereby a religion received state endorsement, and those not of that religion were denied rights, and even punished.

Following the Revolution, Jefferson played a leading role in the disestablishment of religion in Virginia. Previously the Anglican Church had tax support. As he wrote in his Notes on Virginia, a law was in effect in Virginia that “if a person brought up a Christian denies the being of a God, or the Trinity ...he is punishable on the first offense by incapacity to hold any office ...; on the second by a disability to sue, to take any gift or legacy ..., and by three year’ imprisonment.” Prospective officer-holders were required to swear that they did not believe in the central Roman Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation.

From 1784 to 1786, Jefferson and James Madison worked together to oppose Patrick Henry’s attempts to again assess taxes in Virginia to support churches. Instead, in 1786, the Virginia General Assembly passed Jefferson’s Bill for Religious Freedom, which he had first submitted in 1779 and was one of only three accomplishments he put in his own epitaph. The law read:

"No man shall be compelled to frequent or support any religious worship, place, or ministry whatsoever, nor shall be enforced, restrained, molested, or burdened in his body or goods, nor shall otherwise suffer, on account of his religious opinions or belief; but that all men shall be free to profess, and by argument to maintain, their opinions in matters of religion, and that the same shall in no wise diminish, enlarge, or affect their civil capacities."[45]

In his 1787 Notes on the State of Virginia, Jefferson stated: “Millions of innocent
men, women and children, since the introduction of Christianity, have been burned, tortured, fined and imprisoned. What has been the effect of this coercion? To make half the world fools and half hypocrites; to support roguery and error all over the world…"

Jefferson sought what he called a “wall of separation between Church and State,” which he believed was a principle expressed by the First Amendment. This phrase has been cited several times by the Supreme Court in its interpretation of the Establishment Clause.[46] In an 1802 letter to the Danbury Baptist Association, he wrote:

“Believing with you that religion is a matter which lies solely between man and his God, that he owes account to none other for his faith or his worship, that the legislative powers of government reach actions only, and not opinions, I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their legislature should “make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof,” thus building a wall of separation between church and State.[47]”

Jefferson refused to issue proclamations calling for days of prayer and thanksgiving during his Presidency, yet he did do so as Governor in Virginia. His private letters indicate he was skeptical of too much interference by clergy in matters of civil government. His letters contain the following observations: “History, I believe, furnishes no example of a priest-ridden people maintaining a free civil government,”[48] and, “In every country and in every age, the priest has been hostile to liberty. He is always in alliance with the despot, abetting his abuses in return for protection to his own.”[49] “May it be to the world, what I believe it will be, (to some parts sooner, to others later, but finally to all), the signal of arousing men to burst the chains under which monkish ignorance and superstition had persuaded them to bind themselves, and to assume the blessings and security of self-government.”[50]

While opposed to the institutions of organized religion, Jefferson invoked the notion of divine justice in his opposition to slavery: “Can the liberties of a nation be thought secure when we have removed their only firm basis, a conviction in the minds of the people that these liberties are of the gift of God? That they are not to be violated but with his wrath? Indeed I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just: that his justice can not sleep forever: that considering numbers, nature and natural means only, a revolution of the wheel of fortune, an exchange of situation is among possible events: that it may become probable by supernatural interference!”[51]

While the debate over Jefferson’s understanding over the separation of Church and state is far from being settled, as are his particular religious tenets, his dependence on divine Providence is not nearly as ambiguous. As he stated, in his second inaugural address:

“I shall need, too, the favor of that Being in whose hands we are, who led our fathers, as Israel of old, from their native land and planted them in a country flowing with all the necessaries and comforts of life; who has covered our infancy with His providence and our riper years with His wisdom and power, and to whose goodness I ask you to join in supplications with me that He will so enlighten the minds of your servants, guide their councils, and prosper their measures that whatsoever they do
shall result in your good, and shall secure to you the peace, friendship, and approbation of all nations.[52]

[edit] Presidency

During the presidential campaign of 1800, the Federalists attacked Jefferson as an infidel, claiming that Jefferson's intoxication with the religious and political extremism of the French Revolution disqualified him from public office. But Jefferson wrote at length on religion and many scholars agree with the claim that Jefferson was a deist, a common position held by intellectuals in the late 18th century, at least for much of his life.

During his Presidency, Jefferson attended the weekly church services held in the House of Representatives. He also permitted church services in executive branch buildings throughout his administration, believing that Christianity was a prop for republican government.[53]

"[The Jefferson Bible] is a document in proof that I am a real Christian, that is to say, a disciple of the doctrines of Jesus, very different from the Platonists, who call me infidel and themselves Christians and preachers of the gospel, while they draw all their characteristic dogmas from what its author never said nor saw."[54]

[edit] As Ex-President

His experience in France just before the French Revolution made him deeply suspicious of Catholic priests and bishops as a force for reaction and ignorance. Similarly, his experience in America with inter-denominational intolerance served to reinforce this skeptical view of religion. In an 1820 letter to William Short, Jefferson wrote: “the serious enemies are the priests of the different religious sects, to whose spells on the human mind its improvement is ominous.”[55]

Jefferson also expressed general agreement with his friend Joseph Priestley's Unitarianism, that is the rejection of the doctrine of Trinity. In an 1822 letter to a pioneer in Ohio he wrote, “I rejoice that in this blessed country of free inquiry and belief, which has surrendered its conscience to neither kings or priests, the genuine doctrine of only one God is reviving, and I trust that there is not a young man now living in the United States who will not die a Unitarian.”[56]

Jefferson did not believe in the divinity of Jesus, but he had high esteem for Jesus’ moral teachings, which he viewed as the “principles of a pure deism, and juster notions of the attributes of God, to reform [prior Jewish] moral doctrines to the standard of reason, justice & philanthropy, and to inculcate the belief of a future state.”[57] Jefferson did not believe in miracles. Biographer Merrill Peterson summarizes Jefferson’s theology:

"First, that the Christianity of the churches was unreasonable, therefore unbelievable, but that stripped of priestly mystery, ritual, and dogma, reinterpreted in the light of historical evidence and human experience, and substituting the Newtonian cosmology for the discredited Biblical one, Christianity could be
Jefferson portrayed
on the U.S. Nickel

1938–2004

2005

2006–present

Jefferson portrayed
on the U.S. Nickel

[edit] Jefferson and slavery

Jefferson owned many slaves over his lifetime. Some find it baffling that Thomas Jefferson owned slaves yet was outspoken in saying that slavery was immoral and it should be abolished. Biographers point out that Jefferson was deep in debt and had encumbered his slaves by notes and mortgages; he chose not to free them until he finally was debt-free, which he never was.[59] Jefferson seems to have suffered pangs and trials of conscience as a result.[60] He wrote about slavery, “We have the wolf by the ears; and we can neither hold him, nor safely let him go. Justice is in one scale, and self-preservation in the other.”[61]

During his long career in public office, Jefferson attempted numerous times to abolish or limit the advance of slavery. According to a biographer, Jefferson “believed that it was the responsibility of the state and society to free all slaves.”[62] In 1769, as a member of the House of Burgesses, Jefferson proposed for that body to emancipate slaves in Virginia, but he was unsuccessful.[63] In his first draft of the Declaration of Independence, Jefferson condemned the British crown for sponsoring the importation of slavery to the colonies, charging that the crown “has waged cruel war against human nature itself, violating its most sacred rights of life and liberty in the persons of a distant people who never offended him, captivating & carrying them into slavery in another hemisphere.” However, this language was dropped from the Declaration at the request of delegates from South Carolina and Georgia.

In 1778, the legislature passed a bill he proposed to ban further importation of slaves into Virginia; although this did not bring complete emancipation, in his words, it “stopped the increase of the evil by importation, leaving to future efforts its final eradication.” In 1784, Jefferson’s draft of what became the Northwest Ordinance stipulated that “there shall be neither slavery nor involuntary servitude” in any of the new states admitted to the Union from the Northwest Territory.[64] In 1807, he signed a bill abolishing the slave trade. Jefferson attacked the institution of slavery in his Notes on the State of Virginia (1784):

“There must doubtless be an unhappy influence on the manners of our people produced by the existence of slavery among us. The whole commerce between master and slave is a perpetual exercise of the most boisterous passions, the most unremitting despotism on the one part, and degrading submissions on the other.”[65]
In this same work, Jefferson advanced his suspicion that black people were inferior to white people “in the endowments both of body and mind.” However, Jefferson did also write in this same that a black person could have the right to live free in any country where people judge them by their nature and not as just being good for labor as well. He also wrote, “Nothing is more certainly written in the book of fate than that these people are to be free. [But] the two races…cannot live in the same government. Nature, habit, opinion has drawn indelible lines of distinction between them.” According to historian Stephen Ambrose: “Jefferson, like all slaveholders and many other white members of American society, regarded Negroes as inferior, childlike, untrustworthy and, of course, as property. Jefferson, the genius of politics, could see no way for African-Americans to live in society as free people.” His solution seems to have been for slaves to be freed then deported peacefully, failing which the same result would be imposed by war and that, in Jefferson's words, “human nature must shudder at the prospect held up [by war]. We should in vain look for an example in the Spanish deportation or deletion of the Moors. This precedent [the Spanish deportation or deletion] would fall far short of our case.”

On February 25, 1809, Jefferson repudiated his earlier view, writing in a letter to Abbé Grégoire:

Sir,—I have received the favor of your letter of August 17th, and with it the volume you were so kind to send me on the “Literature of Negroes.” Be assured that no person living wishes more sincerely than I do, to see a complete refutation of the doubts I have myself entertained and expressed on the grade of understanding allotted to them by nature, and to find that in this respect they are on a par with ourselves. My doubts were the result of personal observation on the limited sphere of my own State, where the opportunity for the development of their genius were not favorable and those of exercising it still less so. I expressed them therefore with great hesitation; but whatever be their degree of talent it is no measure of their rights. Because Sir Isaac Newton was superior to others in understanding, he was not therefore lord of the person or property of others. On this subject they are gaining daily in the opinions of nations, and hopeful
advances are making toward their re-establishment on an equal footing with the other colors of the human family. I pray you therefore to accept my thanks for the many instances you have enabled me to observe of respectable intelligence in that race of men, which cannot fail to have effect in hastening the day of their relief; and to be assured of the sentiments of high and just esteem and consideration which I tender to yourself with all sincerity.[70]

The downturn in land prices after 1819 pushed Jefferson further into debt. Jefferson finally emancipated his five most trusted slaves; the others were sold after his death to pay his debts.[71]

**[edit] The Sally Hemings controversy**

Whether Jefferson fathered children with Sally Hemings is the subject of considerable controversy. Regarding marriage between blacks and whites, Jefferson wrote that “[t]he amalgamation of whites with blacks produces a degradation to which no lover of his country, no lover of excellence in the human character, can innocently consent.”[72] In addition, Hemings was likely the half-sister of Jefferson’s deceased wife Martha Wayles Skelton Jefferson. The allegation that Jefferson fathered children with Hemings first gained widespread public attention in 1802, when controversial journalist James T. Callender, wrote in a Richmond newspaper, “…[Jefferson] keeps and for many years has kept, as his concubine, one of his slaves. Her name is Sally.” Jefferson never responded publicly about this issue but is said to have denied it in his private correspondence.[73]

A 1998 DNA study concluded that there was a DNA link between some of Hemings descendants and the Jefferson family, but it did not conclusively prove that Jefferson himself was their ancestor. Three studies were released in the early 2000s, following the publication of the DNA evidence. In 2000, the Thomas Jefferson Foundation, which runs Monticello, appointed a multi-disciplinary, nine-member in-house research committee of Ph.D.s and an M.D. to study the matter of the paternity of Hemings’s children. The committee concluded “it is very unlikely that any Jefferson other than Thomas Jefferson was the father of [Hemings’s six] children.”[74]

In 2001, the Thomas Jefferson Heritage Society[75] commissioned a study by an independent 13-member Scholars Commission. The commission concluded that the Jefferson paternity thesis was not persuasive. On April 12, 2001, they issued a report; at 565 pages, it was far longer than the Foundation report, though many of those pages were devoted to a review of the evidence that the Thomas Jefferson Foundation study examined. The conclusion of most of the Scholars Commission was that “the Jefferson-Hemings allegation is by no means proven”; those members’ individual conclusions ranged from “serious skepticism about the charge” to “a conviction that it is almost certainly false.” The majority suggested the most likely alternative is that Randolph Jefferson, Thomas’s younger brother, was the father of Eston.

The National Genealogical Society Quarterly then published articles reviewing the evidence from a genealogical perspective and concluded that the link between Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings was valid.[76]

**[edit] Monuments and memorials**
The Jefferson Memorial in Washington, D.C.

Jefferson on Mount Rushmore

Further information: List of places named for Thomas Jefferson

» April 13, 1943, the 200th anniversary of Jefferson’s birth, the Jefferson Memorial was dedicated in Washington, D.C. The interior includes a 19-foot (6 m) statue of Jefferson and engravings of passages from his writings. Most prominent are the words which are inscribed around the monument near the roof: “I have sworn upon the altar of God eternal hostility against every form of tyranny over the mind of man”.

» Jefferson, together with George Washington, Theodore Roosevelt and Abraham Lincoln, was chosen by sculptor Gutzon Borglum to be depicted in stone at the Mount Rushmore Memorial.

» Jefferson’s portrait appears on the U.S. $2 bill, nickel, and the $100 Series EE Savings Bond.

» July 8, 2003, the NOAA ship Thomas Jefferson was commissioned in Norfolk, Virginia. This was done in commemoration of his establishment of a Survey of the Coast, the predecessor to NOAA’s National Ocean Service.

» In 2005, a bronze monument was placed in Jefferson Park, Chicago at the entrance to the Jefferson Park Transit Center along Milwaukee avenue.

[edit] See also

» Jeffersonian

» Monticello Association

» The Rotunda (University of Virginia)
Plan for Establishing Uniformity in the Coinage, Weights, and Measures of the United States

Jeffersonia

Thomas Jefferson and Haitian Emigration

Maria Cosway

List of coupled cousins

Jefferson disk

[edit] Notes

1. ^ ab The birth and death of Thomas Jefferson are given using the Gregorian calendar. However, he was born when Britain and her colonies still used the Julian calendar, so contemporary records record his birth (and on his tombstone) as 2 April 1743. The provisions of the Calendar (New Style) Act 1750, implemented in 1752, altered the official British dating method to the Gregorian calendar with the start of the year on January 1 — see the article on Old Style and New Style dates for more details.


4. ^ Merrill D. Peterson, Thomas Jefferson: Writings, p. 1236


7. ^ Declaration of Independence A Brief History By [Stanley L. Klos] 2002


10. ^ (Ferling, p. 26)

11. ^ (Ferling, p. 59)


13. ^ (Schachner, 1: 495)


18. ^ ab ‘Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826)’ at the University of Virginia


46. ^ Reynolds (98 U.S. at 164, 1879); Everson (330 U.S. at 59, 1947); McCollum (333 U.S. at 232, 1948)

47. ^ Letter to Danbury Baptist Association, CT, January 1, 1802

48. ^ Letter to Alexander von Humboldt, December 6, 1813

49. ^ Letter to Horatio G. Spafford, March 17, 1814

50. ^ Letter to Roger C. Weightman June 24, 1826

51. ^ Notes on the State of Virginia, Q.XVIII, 1782.

52. ^ Jefferson’s Second Inaugural Address


54. ^ Letter to Charles Thomson 9 January 1816

55. ^ Letter to William Short, April 13, 1820

56. ^ Letter to Dr. Benjamin Waterhouse June 26, 1822


58. ^ (Peterson 1975, p. 50–51)


60. ^ (Hitchens 2005, p. 48)


64. ^ Ordinance of 1787 Lalor Cyclopædia of Political Science

65. ^ Notes on the State of Virginia, Ch 18.

66. ^ Notes on the State of Virginia Query 14


68. ^ Flawed Founders by Stephen E. Ambrose.

69. ^ (Hitchens 2005, pp. 34–35)

70. ^ Letter of February 25, 1809 from Thomas Jefferson to French author Monsieur Gregoire, from *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson* (H. A. Worthington, ed.), Volume V, p. 429. Citation and quote from Morris
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» The Jefferson Cyclopedia (1900) large collection of TJ quotations arranged by 9000 topics; searchable; copyright has expired and it is online free.

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[edit] Jefferson and religion


[edit] External links and sources
Find more about Thomas Jefferson on Wikipedia's sister projects:

- Dictionary definitions
- Textbooks
- Quotations
- Source texts
- Images and media
- News stories
- Learning resources

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» Jefferson legacy website

**Political offices**

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<td><strong>John Jay</strong></td>
<td>United States Secretary of State</td>
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<td><strong>John Adams</strong></td>
<td>March 4, 1797 – March 4, 1801</td>
<td><strong>Aaron Burr</strong></td>
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<td><strong>James Madison</strong></td>
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**Party political offices**

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<td><strong>Benjamin Franklin</strong></td>
<td>1785 – 1789</td>
<td><strong>William Short</strong></td>
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Notes and references

1. Prior to the passage of the Twelfth Amendment in 1804, each Presidential elector would cast two ballots; the highest vote-getter would become President and the runner-up would become Vice President. Thus, in 1796, the Republican Party fielded Jefferson as a Presidential candidate, but he came in second and therefore became Vice President.
2nd President of the United States

In office
March 4, 1797 – March 4, 1801

Vice President Thomas Jefferson

Preceded by George Washington

Succeeded by Thomas Jefferson

1st Vice President of the United States

In office
April 21, 1789 – March 4, 1797

President George Washington

Preceded by None

Succeeded by Thomas Jefferson

Born October 30, 1735
Quincy, Massachusetts, British America

Died July 4, 1826 (aged 90)
Quincy, Massachusetts, USA

Political party Federalist

Spouse Abigail Smith Adams
Abigail Jr. (Nabby), John Quincy Adams, Susanna, Charles, Thomas and Elizabeth [stillborn]

Alma mater Harvard College

Occupation Lawyer

Religion Unitarian

Signature

[Signature]
John Adams, Jr. (October 30, 1735 – July 4, 1826) was the second President of the United States (1797–1801). He also served as America’s first Vice President (1789–1797). He was defeated for re-election in the “Revolution of 1800” by Thomas Jefferson. Adams was also the first President to reside in the newly built White House in Washington, D.C., which was completed in 1800.

Adams, a sponsor of the American Revolution in Massachusetts, was a driving force for independence in 1776; Jefferson called him the “Colossus of Independence”. He represented the Continental Congress in Europe. He was a major negotiator of the eventual peace treaty with Great Britain, and chiefly responsible for obtaining the loans from the Amsterdam money market necessary for the conduct of the Revolution. His prestige secured his two elections as Washington’s Vice President and his election to succeed him. As President, he was frustrated by battles inside his own Federalist party against a faction led by Alexander Hamilton, but he broke with them to avert a major conflict with France in 1798, during the Quasi-War crisis. He became the founder of an important family of politicians, diplomats and historians, and in recent years his reputation has improved.

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    » 11.6.1 Inaugural Addresses
    » 11.6.2 State of the Union Address
[edit] Early life

John Adams was the oldest of three brothers, born on October 30, 1735 (October 19, 1735 by the Old Style, Julian calendar), in Braintree, Massachusetts, though in an area which became part of Quincy, Massachusetts in 1792. His birthplace is now part of Adams National Historical Park. His father, a farmer and a Deacon, also named John (1690-1761), was a fourth-generation descendant of Henry Adams, who immigrated from Barton St David, Somerset, England, to Massachusetts Bay Colony in about 1636, from a Welsh male line called Ap Adam.[1] His mother was Susanna Boylston Adams[2], a descendant of the Boylstsos of Brookline, one of the colony’s most vigorous and successful families.

Young Adams went to Harvard College at age sixteen (in 1751).[3] His father expected him to become a minister, but Adams had doubts. After graduating in 1755, he taught school for a few years in Worcester, allowing himself time to think about his career choice. After much reflection, he decided to become a lawyer, and studied law in the office of James Putnam, a prominent lawyer in Worcester. In 1758, he was admitted to the bar. From an early age, he developed the habit of writing descriptions of events and impressions of men. These litter his diary. He put the skill to good use as a lawyer, often recording cases he observed so that he could study and reflect upon them. His report of the 1761 argument of James Otis in the superior court of Massachusetts as to the legality of Writs of Assistance is a good example. Otis’s argument inspired Adams with zeal for the cause of the American colonies.[4]

In 1764, Adams married Abigail Smith (1744–1818), the daughter of a Congregational minister, Rev. William Smith, at Weymouth, Massachusetts. Their children were Abigail (1765–1813); future president John Quincy (1767–1848); Susanna (1768–1770); Charles (1770–1800); Thomas Boylston (1772–1832); and Elizabeth (1775) who was stillborn.

Adams was not a popular leader like his second cousin, Samuel Adams; instead, his influence emerged through his work as a constitutional lawyer and his intense analysis of historical examples,[5] together with his thorough knowledge of the law and his dedication to the principles of republicanism. Adams often found his inborn contentiousness to be a restraint in his political career.
Adams wanted to secure approval from the people, and he saw his chance in the British/colonial conflict. He became well known for his essays and energetic resolutions against British taxation and regulation. In 1774 Massachusetts sent him to the Continental Congress. In 1775 war broke out between the colonies and Great Britain. Adams was one of the first few delegates to recognize that a compromise with the British was pointless. In 1776 he worked hard to break away from Britain by using a formal declaration of independence. On July 2, 1776 Congress voted for the resolution, “these colonies are and of right ought to be free and independent states.” Two days later, they passed the Declaration of Independence.

[edit] Politics

[edit] Opponent of Stamp Act 1765

Adams first rose to prominence as an opponent of the Stamp Act of 1765. Popular resistance, he later observed, was sparked by an oft reprinted sermon of the Boston minister, Jonathan Mayhew, interpreting Romans 13 so as to elucidate the principle of just insurrection.[6].

In 1765, Adams drafted the instructions which were sent by the inhabitants of Braintree to its representatives in the Massachusetts legislature, and which served as a model for other towns to draw up instructions to their representatives. In August 1765, he anonymously contributed four notable articles to the Boston Gazette (republished in The London Chronicle in 1768 as True Sentiments of America and also known as A Dissertation on the Canon and Feudal Law). In the letter he suggested that there was a connection between the Protestant ideas that Adams’ Puritan ancestors brought to New England and the ideas that suggested they resist the Stamp Act. In the former he explained that the opposition of the colonies to the Stamp Act was because the Stamp Act deprived the American colonists of two basic rights guaranteed to all Englishmen, and which all free men deserved: rights to be taxed only by consent and to be tried only by a jury of one’s peers. The “Braintree Instructions” were a succinct and forthright defense of colonial rights and liberties, while the Dissertation was an essay in political education.

In December 1765, he delivered a speech before the governor and council in which he pronounced the Stamp Act invalid on the ground that Massachusetts, being without representation in Parliament, had not assented to it.[7]

[edit] Boston Massacre: 1770

In 1770, a street confrontation resulted in British soldiers killing five civilians in what became known as the Boston Massacre.[8] The soldiers involved, who were arrested on criminal charges, had trouble finding legal counsel. Finally, they asked Adams to defend them. Although he feared it would hurt his reputation, he agreed. One of the
soldiers, Captain Thomas Preston gave Adams a symbolic “single guinea” as a retaining fee,[9] the only fee he received in the case. Or, as stated in the biography of John Adams by David McCullough, Adams received nothing more than a retainer of eighteen guineas.[10]

Six of the soldiers were acquitted. Two who had fired directly into the crowd were charged with murder but were convicted only of manslaughter.

Despite his previous misgivings, Adams was elected to the Massachusetts General Court (the colonial legislature) in June of 1770, while still in preparation for the trial.[11]

[edit] Dispute concerning Parliament’s authority

In 1772, Massachusetts Governor Thomas Hutchinson announced that he and his judges would no longer need their salaries paid by the Massachusetts legislature, because the Crown would henceforth assume payment drawn from customs revenues. Boston radicals protested and asked Adams to explain their objections. In “Two Replies of the Massachusetts House of Representatives to Governor Hutchinson” Adams argued that the colonists had never been under the sovereignty of Parliament. Their original charter was with the person of the king and their allegiance was only to him. If a workable line could not be drawn between parliamentary sovereignty and the total independence of the colonies, he continued, the colonies would have no other choice but to choose independence.

In Novanglus; or, A History of the Dispute with America, From Its Origin, in 1754, to the Present Time Adams attacked some essays by Daniel Leonard that defended Hutchinson’s arguments for the absolute authority of Parliament over the colonies. In Novanglus Adams gave a point-by-point refutation of Leonard’s essays, and then provided one of the most extensive and learned arguments made by the colonists against British imperial policy. It was a systematic attempt by Adams to describe the origins, nature, and jurisdiction of the unwritten British constitution. Adams used his wide knowledge of English and colonial legal history to show the provincial legislatures were fully sovereign over their own internal affairs, and that the colonies were connected to Great Britain only through the King.

[edit] Continental Congress

Massachusetts sent Adams to the first and second Continental Congresses in 1774 and from 1775 to 1778.[12] In June 1775, with a view of promoting the union of the colonies, he nominated George Washington of Virginia as commander-in-chief of the army then assembled around Boston. His influence in Congress was great, and almost from the beginning, he sought permanent separation from Britain. On October 5, 1775, Congress created the first of a series of committees to study naval matters.[13][14]

On May 15, 1776 the Continental Congress, in response to escalating hostilities which had climaxed a year prior at Lexington and Concord, urged that the states begin constructing their own constitutions.
John Trumbull's famous painting depicts the five-man drafting committee presenting their work to the Congress. John Adams is standing in the center of the painting.

Today, the Declaration of Independence is remembered as the great revolutionary act, but Adams and most of his contemporaries saw the Declaration as a mere formality. The resolution to draft independent constitutions was, as Adams put it, "independence itself."[15]

Over the next decade, Americans from every state gathered and deliberated on new governing documents. As radical as it was to actually write constitutions (prior convention suggested that a society’s form of government needn’t be codified, nor should its organic law be written down in a single document), what was equally radical was the nature of American political thought as the summer of 1776 dawned.[16]

[edit] Thoughts on Government

At that time several Congressmen turned to Adams for advice about framing new governments. Adams tired of repeating the same thing, and published the pamphlet Thoughts on Government (1776), which was subsequently influential in the writing of many state constitutions. Many historians argue that Thoughts on Government should be read as an articulation of the classical theory of mixed government. Adams contended that social classes exist in every political society, and that a good government must accept that reality. For centuries, dating back to Aristotle, a mixed regime balancing monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy, or the monarch, nobles, and people was required to preserve order and liberty.[17]

Using the tools of Republicanism in the United States the patriots believed it was corrupt and nefarious aristocrats, in the English Parliament and stationed in America, who were guilty of the British assault on American liberty. Unlike others, Adams thought that the definition of a republic had to do with its ends, rather than its means. He wrote in Thoughts on Government, "there is no good government but what is republican. That the only valuable part of the British constitution is so; because the very definition of a republic is ‘an empire of laws, and not of men.’" Thoughts on Government defended bicameralism, for “a single assembly is liable to all the vices, follies, and frailties of an individual.”[18] He also suggested that the executive should be independent, as should the judiciary. Thoughts on Government’
was enormously influential and was referenced as an authority in every state-constitution writing hall.

[edit] Declaration of Independence

On June 7, 1776, Adams seconded the resolution introduced by Richard Henry Lee that “these colonies are, and of a right ought to be, free and independent states,” acting as champion of these resolutions before the Congress until their adoption on July 2, 1776.\[19\]

He was appointed on a committee with Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, Robert R. Livingston and Roger Sherman, to draft a Declaration of Independence. Although that document was largely drafted by Jefferson, Adams occupied the foremost place in the debate on its adoption. He deferred the writing to Jefferson believing it would be better received having been written by him. Adams believed Jefferson wrote profoundly better than any man in Congress, and he himself was “obnoxious and disliked.” Many years later, Jefferson hailed Adams as, “The Colossus of that Congress—the great pillar of support to the Declaration of Independence, and its ablest advocate and champion on the floor of the House.”\[20\]

In 1777, Adams resigned his seat on the Massachusetts Superior Court to serve as the head of the Board of War and Ordinance, as well as many other important committees.\[21\]

John Adams, as depicted on a two-cent American president postage stamp.

[edit] In Europe

Congress chose Adams to represent the fledgling union in Europe in 1777, and again in 1779. On the second trip, he was appointed as minister plenipotentiary charged with the mission of negotiating a treaty of peace and a treaty of commerce with Great Britain; he went to Europe in September 1779. The French government, however, did not approve of Adams’s appointment and subsequently, on the insistence of the French foreign minister, the Comte de Vergennes, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, John Jay and Henry Laurens were appointed to
cooperate with Adams. In the event Jay, Adams and Franklin played the major part in the negotiations. Overtaking Franklin, Jay and Adams decided not to consult with France; instead, they dealt directly with the British commissioners.[22]

Throughout the negotiations, Adams was especially determined that the right of the United States to the fisheries along the Atlantic coast should be recognized. The American negotiators were able to secure a favorable treaty, which gave Americans ownership of all lands east of the Mississippi, except Florida, which was transferred to Spain as its reward. The treaty was signed on November 30, 1782.

After these negotiations began, Adams had spent some time as the ambassador in the Netherlands, then the only other well-functioning Republic in the world. In July 1780, he had been authorized to execute the duties previously assigned to Laurens. With the aid of the Dutch patriot leader Joan van der Capellen tot den Pol, Adams secured the recognition of the United States as an independent government at The Hague on April 19, 1782.[23] During this visit, he also negotiated a loan of five million guilders. It was floated by Nicolaas van Staphorst and Wilhelm Willink.[24] In October 1782, a treaty of amity and commerce, the second such treaty between the United States and a foreign power (after the 1778 treaty with France). The house that Adams purchased during this stay in The Netherlands became the first American embassy on foreign soil anywhere in the world.

In 1785, John Adams was appointed the first American minister to the Court of St. James's (that is, ambassador to Great Britain). When he was presented to his former sovereign, George III, the King intimated that he was aware of Adams’s lack of confidence in the French government. Adams admitted this, stating: “I must avow to your Majesty that I have no attachment but to my own country.”

Queen Elizabeth II of Great Britain referred to this episode in July 7, 1976 at the White House. She said, “John Adams, America’s first Ambassador, said to my ancestor, King George III, that it was his desire to help with the restoration of “the old good nature and the old good humor between our peoples.” That restoration has long been made, and the links of language, tradition, and personal contact have maintained it.”[25]

**[edit] Constitutional ideas**

Massachusetts’s new constitution, ratified in 1780 and written largely by Adams himself, structured its government most closely on his views of politics and society.[26] It was the first constitution written by a special committee and ratified by the people. It was also the first to feature a bicameral legislature, a clear and distinct executive with a partial (2/3) veto (although he was restrained by an executive council), and a distinct judicial branch.

While in London, Adams published a work entitled *A Defence of the Constitutions of Government of the United States* (1787)[27]. In it he repudiated the views of Turgot and other European writers as to the viciousness of the framework of state governments. Turgot argued that countries that lacked aristocracies needn’t have bicameral legislatures. He thought that republican governments feature “all authorities into one center, that of the nation.”[28] In the book, Adams suggested that “the rich, the well-born and the able” should be set apart from other men in a senate—that would prevent them from dominating the lower house. Wood (2006) has maintained that Adams had become intellectually irrelevant by the time the Federal
Constitution was ratified. By then, American political thought, transformed by more than a decade of vigorous and searching debate as well as shaping experiential pressures, had abandoned the classical conception of politics which understood government as a mirror of social estates. Americans’ new conception of popular sovereignty now saw the people-at-large as the sole possessors of power in the realm. All agents of the government enjoyed mere portions of the people’s power and only for a limited period of time. Adams had completely missed this concept and revealed his continued attachment to the older version of politics. Yet Wood overlooks Adams’ peculiar definition of the term “republic,” and his support for a constitution ratified by the people. He also underplays Adams’ belief in checks and balances. “Power must be opposed to power, and interest to interest,” Adams wrote. Adams did as much as anyone to put the idea of “checks and balances” on the intellectual map.

Adams never bought a slave and declined on principle to employ slave labor. Abigail Adams opposed slavery and employed free blacks in preference to her father’s two domestic slaves. He spoke out against a bill to emancipate slaves in Massachusetts, opposed use of black soldiers in the Revolution, and tried to keep the issue out of national politics.

[edit] Vice Presidency

While Washington was the unanimous choice for president, Adams came in second in the electoral college and became Vice President in the presidential election of 1789. He played a minor role in the politics of the early 1790s and was reelected in 1792. Washington never asked Adams for input on policy and legal issues.

One of the best known Adams quotes concluded of the institution of the Vice Presidency: This is the most unimportant position human ever made. His main task while in this office was presiding over Senate. Most Vice Presidents after him were not regarded as powerful or significant members of Presidential administrations, with some exceptions (such as Martin Van Buren, Richard Nixon, Walter Mondale, Al Gore or Dick Cheney, who were regarded as influential members of their President’s teams).

In the first year of Washington’s administration, Adams became deeply involved in a month-long Senate controversy over what the official title of the President would be,
favoring grandiose titles such as “His Majesty the President” or “His High
Mightiness” over the simple “President of the United States” that won the issue. The
pompousness of Adams’s stance, and his being overweight, led to the nickname “His
Rotundity.”

As president of the Senate, Adams cast 29 tie-breaking votes—a record that only
John C. Calhoun came close to tying, with 28. His votes protected the president’s
sole authority over the removal of appointees and influenced the location of the
national capital. On at least one occasion, he persuaded senators to vote against
legislation that he opposed, and he frequently lectured the Senate on procedural and
policy matters. Adams’s political views and his active role in the Senate made him a
natural target for critics of the Washington administration. Toward the end of his
first term, as a result of a threatened resolution that would have silenced him except
for procedural and policy matters, he began to exercise more restraint. When the
two political parties formed, he joined the Federalist Party, but never got on well
with its dominant leader Alexander Hamilton. Because of Adams’s seniority and the
need for a northern president, he was elected as the Federalist nominee for
president in 1796, over Thomas Jefferson, the leader of the opposition Democratic-
Republican Party. His success was due to peace and prosperity; Washington and
Hamilton had averted war with Britain by the Jay Treaty of 1795.

Adams’ two terms as Vice President were frustrating experiences for a man of his
vigor, intellect, and vanity. He complained to his wife Abigail, “My country has in its
wisdom contrived for me the most insignificant office that ever the invention of man
contrived or his imagination conceived.”

[edit] Election of 1796

Main article: United States presidential election, 1796

During the presidential campaign of 1796 Adams was the presidential candidate of
the Federalist Party and Thomas Pinckney, the Governor of South Carolina, his
running mate. The federalists wanted Adams as their presidential candidate to crush
Thomas Jefferson’s bid. Most federalists would have preferred Hamilton to be a
candidate. Although Hamilton and his followers supported Adams, they also held a
grudge against him. They did consider him to be the lesser of the two evils. However,
they thought Adams lacked the seriousness and popularity that had caused
Washington to be successful, and also feared that Adams was too vain, opinionated,
unpredictable, and stubborn to follow their directions. Adams’ opponents were
former Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson of Virginia, who was joined by Senator
Aaron Burr of New York on the Democratic-Republican ticket.

As was customary, Adams stayed in his home town of Quincy rather than actively
campaign for the Presidency. He wanted to stay out of what he called the silly and
wicked game. His party, however, campaigned for him, while the Republicans
campaigned for Jefferson.

It was expected that Adams would dominate the votes in New England, while
Jefferson was expected to win in the Southern states. In the end, Adams won the
election by a narrow margin of 71 electoral votes to 68 for Jefferson (who became
the vice president).

[edit] Presidency: 1797-1801
[edit] Foreign Policy

When Adams entered office, he realized that he needed to protect Washington’s policy of staying out of the French and British war. Because the French helped secure American independence from Britain they had greater popularity with America. After the Jay treaty with Great Britain the French became angry and began seizing American merchant ships that were trading with the British. In order for Adams to avoid war he sent a commission to negotiate an understanding with France. In case the negotiation did not work Adams urged the Congress to augment the navy and army.

[edit] Domestic Policies

President Dollar of John Adams

See also: John Adams’ First State of the Union Address

As President Adams followed Washington’s lead in making the presidency the example of republican values and stressing civic virtue, he was never implicated in any scandal. Some historians consider his worst mistake to be keeping the old cabinet, which was controlled by Hamilton, instead of installing his own people, confirming Adams’s own admission he was a poor politician because he “was unpractised in intrigues for power.”[38] Yet, there are those historians who feel that Adams retention of Washington’s cabinet was a statesman-like step to soothe worries about an orderly succession. As Adams himself explained, “I had then no particular object of any of them.”[39] That would soon change. Adams’s combative spirit did not always lend itself to presidential decorum, as Adams himself admitted in his old age: “[As president] I refused to suffer in silence. I sighed, sobbed, and groaned, and sometimes screeched and screamed. And I must confess to my shame and sorrow that I sometimes swore.”[40]

Adams’s four years as president (1797–1801) were marked by intense disputes over foreign policy. Britain and France were at war; Adams and the Federalists favored Britain, while Jefferson and the Democratic-Republicans favored France. An undeclared naval war between the U.S. and France, called the Quasi-War, broke out in 1798. The humiliation of the XYZ Affair, in which the French demanded huge bribes before any discussions could begin, led to serious threats of full-scale war with France and embarrassed the Jeffersonians, who were friends to France. The Federalists built up the army under George Washington and Alexander Hamilton, built warships, such as the USS Constitution, and raised taxes. They cracked down on
political immigrants and domestic opponents with the **Alien and Sedition Acts**, which were signed by Adams in 1798.

These Acts were composed of four separate and distinct units:

» **The Naturalization Act**, passed on June 18
» **The Alien Act**, passed on June 24
» **The Alien Enemies Act**, passed on July 6
» **The Sedition Act**, passed on July 14

These 4 acts were brought about to suppress Republican opposition. The Naturalization Act doubled the period required to naturalize the foreign born to American citizenship to 14 years. Since most immigrants voted republican they thought by initiating this act it would decrease the proportion of people who voted republican. The Alien Friends Act and the Alien Enemies Act allowed the president to deport any foreigner that he thought was dangerous to the country. The Sedition Act criminalized anyone who publicly criticized the federal government. Some of the punishments included 2-5 years in prison and fines of $2,000 to $5,000. Adams had not designed or promoted any of these acts but he did sign them into law because he had no problem punishing those who abused the government.

Those Acts, and the high-profile prosecution of a number of newspaper editors and one Congressman by the Federalists, became highly controversial. Some historians have noted that the Alien and Sedition Acts were relatively rarely enforced, as only 10 convictions under the **Sedition Act** have been identified and as Adams never signed a deportation order, and that the furor over the Alien and Sedition Acts was mainly stirred up by the Democratic-Republicans. However, other historians emphasize that the Acts were highly controversial from the outset, resulted in many aliens leaving the country voluntarily, and created an atmosphere where opposing the Federalists, even on the floor of Congress, could and did result in prosecution. The election of 1800 became a bitter and volatile battle, with each side expressing extraordinary fear of the other party and its policies.[41]

The deep division in the Federalist party came on the army issue. Adams was forced to name Washington as commander of the new army, and Washington demanded that Hamilton be given the second position. Adams reluctantly gave in. Major General Hamilton virtually took control of the War department. The rift between Adams and the High Federalists (as Adams’s opponents were called) grew wider. The High Federalists refused to consult Adams over the key legislation of 1798; they changed the defense measures which he had called for, demanded that Hamilton control the army, and refused to recognize the necessity of giving key Democratic-Republicans (like Aaron Burr) senior positions in the army (which Adams wanted to do in order to gain some Democratic-Republican support). By building a large **standing army** the High Federalists raised popular alarms and played into the hands of the Democratic-Republicans. They also alienated Adams and his large personal following. They shortsightedly viewed the Federalist party as their own tool and ignored the need to pull together the entire nation in the face of war with France.[42]

For long stretches, Adams withdrew to his home in Massachusetts. In February 1799, Adams stunned the country by sending diplomat William Vans Murray on a peace mission to France. Napoleon, realizing the animosity of the United States was doing no good, signaled his readiness for friendly relations. The **Treaty of Alliance of 1778** was superseded and the United States could now be free of foreign entanglements, as Washington advised in his own Farewell Letter. Adams avoided war, but deeply
split his own party in the process. He brought in John Marshall as Secretary of State and demobilized the emergency army.[43]

[edit] Re-election campaign 1800

Main article: United States presidential election, 1800

The death of Washington, in 1799, weakened the Federalists, as they lost the one man who symbolized and united the party. In the presidential election of 1800, Adams ran and lost the electoral vote narrowly. Among the causes of his defeat was distrust of him by “High Federalists” led by Hamilton, the popular disapproval of the Alien and Sedition Acts, the popularity of his opponent, Thomas Jefferson, and the effective politicking of Aaron Burr in New York State, where the legislature (which selected the electoral college) shifted from Federalist to Republican on the basis of a few wards in New York City controlled by Burr’s machine.[44]

In the election of 1800 John Adams and his running mate, Charles Cotesworth Pinckney went against the Republican duo of Jefferson and Burr. Hamilton tried his hardest to sabotage Adams campaign in hopes of boosting Pinckney’s chances of winning the presidency. In the end, Adams lost narrowly to Jefferson by 65 to 73 electoral votes.

[edit] Midnight Judges

As his term was expiring, Adams appointed a series of judges, called the “Midnight Judges” because most of them were formally appointed days before the presidential term expired. Most of the judges were eventually unseated when the Jeffersonians abolished their offices. But John Marshall remained, and his long tenure as Chief Justice of the United States represents the most lasting influence of the Federalists, as Marshall refashioned the Constitution into a nationalizing force and established the Judicial Branch as the equal of the Executive and Legislative branches.[45]

[edit] Major presidential actions

» Built up the U.S. Navy
» Fought the Quasi War with France
» Signed Alien and Sedition Acts of 1798
» Ended war with France through diplomacy

[edit] Speeches

[edit] Inaugural Addresses

» Inaugural Address (March 4, 1797)

[edit] State of the Union Address

» First State of the Union Address (November 22, 1797)
» Second State of the Union Address, (December 8, 1798)
[edit] Administration and Cabinet
The Adams Cabinet

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<th>OFFICE</th>
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<td>1797–1801</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vice President</td>
<td>Thomas Jefferson</td>
<td>1797–1801</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Timothy Pickering</td>
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<td>John Marshall</td>
<td>1800–1801</td>
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<td>Oliver Wolcott, Jr.</td>
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<td>Samuel Dexter</td>
<td>1801</td>
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<td>Secretary of War</td>
<td>James McHenry</td>
<td>1796–1800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Samuel Dexter</td>
<td>1800–1801</td>
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<tr>
<td>Attorney General</td>
<td>Charles Lee</td>
<td>1797–1801</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secretary of the Navy</td>
<td>Benjamin Stoddert</td>
<td>1798–1801</td>
</tr>
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</table>

[edit] Supreme Court appointments
Adams appointed the following Justices to the Supreme Court of the United States:

» Bushrod Washington – 1799
» Alfred Moore – 1800
» John Marshall (Chief Justice) – 1801

[edit] States admitted
None

[edit] Post Presidency

Portrait of an elderly John Adams by Gilbert Stuart (1823).
Following his 1800 defeat, Adams retired into private life. Depressed when he left office, he did not attend Jefferson’s inauguration. He went back to farming in the Quincy area.

In 1812, Adams reconciled with Jefferson. Their mutual friend Benjamin Rush, who had been corresponding with both, encouraged Adams to reach out to Jefferson. Adams sent a brief note to Jefferson, which resulted in a resumption of their friendship, and initiated a correspondence which lasted the rest of their lives. Their letters are rich in insight into both the period and the minds of the two Presidents and revolutionary leaders. Their correspondence lasted fourteen years, and consisted of 158 letters. It was in these years that the two men discussed “natural aristocracy.” Jefferson said that “The natural aristocracy I consider as the most precious gift of nature for the instruction, the trusts, and government of society. And indeed it would have been inconsistent in creation to have formed man for the social state, and not to have provided virtue and wisdom enough to manage the concerns of society. May we not even say that the form of government is best which provides most effectually for a pure selection of these natural aristoi into the offices of government?” Adams wondered if it ever would be so clear who these people were, “Your distinction between natural and artificial aristocracy does not appear to me well founded. Birth and wealth are conferred on some men as imperiously by nature, as genius, strength, or beauty. . . . When aristocracies, are established by human laws and honour wealth and power are made hereditary by municipal laws and political institutions, then I acknowledge artificial aristocracy to commence.”

It would always be true, Adams argued, that fate would bestow influence on some men for reasons other than true wisdom and virtue. That being the way of nature, he thought such “talents” were natural. A good government, therefore, had to account for that reality.

Sixteen months before his death, his son, John Quincy Adams, became the sixth President of the United States (1825–1829), the only son of a former President to hold the office until George W. Bush in 2001.

His daughter Abigail (“Nabby”) was married to Congressman William Stephens Smith and died of cancer in 1816. His son Charles died as an alcoholic in 1800. His son Thomas and his family lived with Adams and Louisa Smith (Abigail’s niece by her brother William) to the end of Adams’s life.

[edit] Death

Tombs of Presidents John Adams (distance) and John Quincy Adams (foreground) and their wives, in a family crypt beneath the United First Parish Church.
On July 4, 1826, the 50th anniversary of the adoption of the Declaration of Independence, Adams died at his home in Quincy. His last words are often quoted as “Thomas Jefferson survives.” Only the words “Thomas Jefferson” were clearly intelligible among his last, however. Adams was unaware that Jefferson, his great political rival — and later friend and correspondent — had died a few hours earlier on that same day.

United First Parish Church

The fact that Adams and Jefferson, both of whom had been so instrumental in creating the Declaration of Independence, died on the fiftieth anniversary of the date of its publication, is one of the more remarkable coincidences in history.

His crypt lies at United First Parish Church (also known as the Church of the Presidents) in Quincy. Until his record was broken by Ronald Reagan in 2001, he was the nation’s longest-living President (90 years, 247 days) maintaining that record for 175 years. The record is currently held by former President Gerald Ford, who served less than one term, and who died December 26, 2006 at 93 years, 165 days.

John Adams remains the longest-lived person ever elected to both of the highest offices in the United States.

[edit] Religious views

Adams was raised a Congregationalist, becoming a Unitarian at a time when most of the Congregational churches around Boston were turning to Unitarianism. Everett (1966) argues that Adams was not a deist, but he used deistic terms in his speeches and writing. He believed in the essential goodness of the creation, but did not believe in the divinity of Christ or that God intervened in the affairs of individuals. Although not anti-clerical, he advocated the separation of church and state. He also believed that regular church service was beneficial to man’s moral sense. Everett concludes
that “Adams strove for a religion based on a common sense sort of reasonableness” and maintained that religion must change and evolve toward perfection.[51]

Adams often railed against what he saw as overclaiming of authority by the Catholic church.[52]

In 1796, Adams denounced the deism of political opponent Thomas Paine, saying, “The Christian religion is, above all the religions that ever prevailed or existed in ancient or modern times, the religion of wisdom, virtue, equity and humanity, let the Blackguard Paine say what he will.”[53]

The Unitarian Universalist Historical Society sheds some light on Adams’s religious beliefs.[54] They point out that Adams was clearly no atheist by quoting from his letter to Benjamin Rush, an early promoter of Universalist thought, “I have attended public worship in all countries and with all sects and believe them all much better than no religion, though I have not thought myself obliged to believe all I heard.” The Society also relates how Rush reconciled Adams to his former friend Thomas Jefferson in 1812, after many bitter political battles. This resulted in correspondence between Adams and Jefferson about many topics, including philosophy and religion. In one of these communications, Adams told Jefferson, “The Ten Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount contain my religion.” In another letter, Adams reveals his sincere devotion to God, “My Adoration of the Author of the Universe is too profound and too sincere. The Love of God and his Creation; delight, Joy, Tryumph, Exaltation in my own existence, tho’ but an Atom, a molecule Organique, in the Universe, are my religion.” He continues by revealing his Universalist sympathies, rejection of orthodox Christian dogma, and his personal belief that he was a true Christian for not accepting such dogma, “Howl, Snarl, bite, Ye Calvinistick! Ye Athenasian Divines, if You will. Ye will say, I am no Christian: I say Ye are no Christians: and there the Account is ballanced. Yet I believe all the honest men among you, are Christians in my Sense of the Word.” The Society also demonstrates that Adams rejected orthodox Christian doctrines of the trinity, predestination, yet equated human understanding and the human conscience to “celestial communication” or personal revelation from God. It is also shown that Adams held a strong conviction in life after death or otherwise, as he explained, “you might be ashamed of your Maker.”[54]

[edit] Notes

1. ^ Ancestors of John ADAMS
2. ^ Ferling (1992) ch 1
3. ^ MSN Encarta, John Adams
4. ^ Ferling (1992) ch 2
5. ^ Ferling (1992) p 117
9. ^ Chinard, John Adams, 58-60
10. ^ McCullough, John Adams, pg. 66


12. ^ In 1775 he was also appointed the chief judge of the Massachusetts Superior Court.


15. ^ Ferling (1992) ch 8 p 146


19. ^ Ferling (1992) ch 8. An 1813 letter by Adams, in which he said that one-third of the people supported the revolution, refers to the French revolution in the 1790s.[1]

20. ^ Lipscomb & Bergh, eds. Writings of Thomas Jefferson (1903), vol 13, p xxiv

21. ^ Marquis 1607-1896

22. ^ Ferling (1992) ch 11-12

23. ^ In February 1782 the Frisian states had been the first Dutch province to recognize the United States, while France had been the first European country to grant diplomatic recognition, in 1778).

24. ^ Up till 1794 a total of eleven loans were granted in Amsterdam to the United States with a value of 29 million guilders.


27. ^ John Adams: Defence of the Constitutions, 1787


30. ^ Thompson,1999

31. ^ Works of John Adams, IV:557


34. ^ Ferling (1992) ch 15


36. ^ Ferling (1992) p 311
37. ^Ferling (1992) pp 316-32
39. ^McCullough p 471
40. ^Ellis (1998) p 57
41. ^Ferling (1992) ch 17
42. ^Kurtz (1967) p 331
43. ^Ferling (1992) ch 18
45. ^Ferling (1992) p 409
46. ^Cappon (1988)
47. ^Cappon, ed., 387
48. ^Cappon, ed. 400
49. ^Ferling (1992) ch 20
52. ^See TeachingAmericanHistory.org: ” A Dissertation on the Canon and Feudal Law”, John Adams, 1765

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**[edit] Primary sources**


John Adams, *Novanglus; or, A History of the Dispute with America* (1774) online version


[edit] External links

Wikisource has original works written by or about:

John Adams

Wikiquote has a collection of quotations related to:

John Adams

Wikimedia Commons has media related to:

John Adams

» Official NPS website: Adams National Historical Park

» John Adams Biography as well as quotes, gallery and speeches

» John Adams @ the Jewish Encyclopedia

» John Adams

» White House biography

» State of the Union Addresses: 1797, 1798, 1799, 1800

» Inaugural Address,

» John Adams Quotes at Liberty-Tree.ca

» “Thoughts on Government” Adams, April 1776

» The Papers of John Adams from the Avalon Project (includes Inaugural Address, State of the Union Addresses, and other materials)


» Works by John Adams at Project Gutenberg

» Medical and Health History of John Adams

» Quotes on the preservation of freedom: [3]

» The John Adams Library, housed at the Boston Public Library, contains Adams’s
personal collection of more than 3,500 volumes in eight languages, many of which are extensively annotated by Adams.

» Official NPS website: Adams National Historical Park

» Extensive essay on John Adams and shorter essays on each member of his cabinet and First Lady from the Miller Center of Public Affairs

» Quotes from John Adams on the proper role, and divine purpose of government at Our Republic

» Works by or about John Adams in libraries (WorldCat catalog)

Political offices

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>New title</th>
<th>Vice President of the United States</th>
<th>April 21, 1789¹ – March 4, 1797</th>
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President of the United States

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Party political offices

Federalist Party vice presidential candidate

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Federalist Party presidential candidate

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Diplomatic posts

United States Minister to the Netherlands

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United States Minister to Great Britain

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Honorary titles

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<tr>
<td>Succeeded by</td>
<td>James Madison</td>
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Notes and references

1. Adams’ term as Vice President is sometimes listed as starting on either March 4 or April 6. March 4 is the official start of the first vice presidential term. April 6 is the date on which Congress counted the electoral votes and certified a Vice President. April 21 is the date on which Adams took the oath of office.

2. While Adams won the Vice Presidency in 1789 as well, he was not the candidate of the Federalist Party, which had not yet formed.

3. Technically, Adams was a presidential candidate in 1792 and Pinckney was a presidential candidate in 1796. Prior to the passage of the Twelfth Amendment in 1804, each presidential elector could cast two ballots; the highest vote-getter would become President and the runner-up would become Vice President. Thus, in 1792, with George Washington as the prohibitive favorite for President, the Federalist party fielded Adams as a presidential candidate, with the intention that he be elected to the Vice Presidency. Similarly, in 1796 and 1800, the Federalist party fielded two candidates, Adams and Thomas Pinckney in 1796 and Adams and Charles Cotesworth Pinckney in 1800, with the intention that Adams be elected President and Pinckney be elected Vice President.

Tags: president, Vice President
**George Washington**

*March 1, 2008*

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### 1st President of the United States

**In office**

April 30, 1789 – March 4, 1797

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Vice President</th>
<th>John Adams</th>
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### Commander-in-Chief of the Continental Army

**In office**

June 15, 1775 – December 23, 1783

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<td>Henry Knox²</td>
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</tbody>
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**Born**

Westmoreland County, Colony of Virginia, British America

December 14, 1799 (aged 67)

**Died**

Mount Vernon, Virginia, United States

**Nationality**

British (at birth)

American (at death)
George Washington (February 22, 1732[1][2][3] – December 14, 1799) was the first President of the United States, (1789–1797),[4] after leading the Continental Army to victory over the Kingdom of Great Britain in the American Revolutionary War (1775–1783).

Washington was chosen to be the commander-in-chief of the American revolutionary forces in 1775. The following year, he forced the British out of Boston, but was defeated when he lost New York City later that year. He revived the patriot cause, however, by crossing the Delaware River in New Jersey and defeating the surprised enemy units. As a result of his strategy, Revolutionary forces captured the two main British combat armies — Saratoga and Yorktown. Negotiating with Congress, the colonial states, and French allies, he held together a tenuous army and a fragile nation amid the threats of disintegration and failure. Following the end of the war in 1783, Washington retired to his plantation on Mount Vernon.

Alarmed in the late 1780s at the many weaknesses of the new nation under the Articles of Confederation, he presided over the Philadelphia Convention that drafted the United States Constitution in 1787. Washington became President of the United States in 1789 and established many of the customs and usages of the new government’s executive department. He sought to create a great nation capable of surviving in a world torn asunder by war between Britain and France. His unilateral Proclamation of Neutrality of 1793 provided a basis for avoiding any involvement in foreign conflicts. He supported plans to build a strong central government by funding the national debt, implementing an effective tax system, and creating a national bank. Washington avoided the temptation of war and began a decade of peace with Britain via the Jay Treaty in 1795; he used his prestige to get it ratified over intense opposition from the Jeffersonians. Although never officially joining the Federalist Party, he supported its programs and was its inspirational leader. Washington’s farewell address was a primer on republican virtue and a stern warning against involvement in foreign wars.

Washington is seen as a symbol of the United States and republicanism in practice.[5] His devotion to civic virtue made him an exemplary figure among early American politicians.[5][6] Washington died in 1799, and in his funeral oration, Henry Lee said that of all Americans, he was “first in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his countrymen.” Washington has been consistently ranked by scholars as one of the greatest U.S. Presidents.
[edit] Early life

Main article: George Washington's early life
Washington presents message at Fort Le Boeuf in 1753

George Washington was born on February 22, 1732 [O.S. February 11, 1731][1] the first son of Augustine Washington and his second wife, Mary Ball Washington, on the family’s Pope’s Creek Estate near present-day Colonial Beach in Westmoreland County, Virginia. He was educated in the home by his father and older brother.[7]

In his youth, Washington worked as a surveyor, and acquired what would become invaluable knowledge of the terrain around his native state of Virginia.[8] Washington embarked upon a career as a planter and in 1748 was invited to help survey Baron Fairfax’s lands west of the Blue Ridge. In 1749, he was appointed to his first public office, surveyor of newly created Culpeper County,[7][9] and through his half-brother, Lawrence Washington, he became interested in the Ohio Company, which aimed to exploit Western lands. In 1751, George and his half-brother travelled to Barbados, staying at Bush Hill House, hoping for an improvement in Lawrence’s tuberculosis. This was the only time George Washington travelled outside what is now the United States.[10] After Lawrence’s death in 1752, George inherited part of his estate and took over some of Lawrence’s duties as adjutant of the colony.[11]

Washington was appointed a district adjutant general in the Virginia militia in 1752,[7] which made him Major Washington at the age of 20. He was charged with training the militia in the quarter assigned him.[12] At age 21, in Fredericksburg, Washington became a Master Mason in the organization of Freemasons, a fraternal organization that was a lifelong influence.[13][14]

In December 1753, Washington was detailed by Governor Robert Dinwiddie of Virginia to carry a British ultimatum to the French on the Ohio frontier.[7] Washington assessed French military strength and intentions, and to delivered the message to the French at Fort Le Boeuf in present day Waterford, Pennsylvania. The message, which went unheeded, called for the French to abandon their development of the Ohio country, setting in motion two colonial powers toward worldwide conflict. Washington’s report on the affair was widely read on both sides of the Atlantic.

[edit] French and Indian War (Seven Years War)

Main article: George Washington in the French and Indian War
The earliest known portrait of Washington, painted in 1772 by Charles Willson Peale, showing Washington in uniform as colonel of the Virginia Regiment.

In 1754, Dinwiddie commissioned Washington a lieutenant colonel and ordered him to lead an expedition to Fort Duquesne to drive out the French. With his American Indian allies led by Tanacharison, Washington and his troops ambushed a French scouting party of some 30 men, led by Joseph Coulon de Jumonville. Washington and his troops were overwhelmed at Fort Necessity by a larger and better positioned French and Indian force. The terms of surrender included a statement that Washington had assassinated the scouts and their leader at the Battle of Jumonville Glen. Released by the French, Washington returned to Virginia, where he resigned rather than accept demotion.

In 1755, Washington was an aide to British General Edward Braddock on the ill-fated Monongahela expedition. This was a major effort to retake the Ohio Country. While Braddock was killed and the expedition ended in disaster, Washington distinguished himself as the Hero of the Monongahela. While Washington’s role during the battle has been debated, biographer Joseph Ellis asserts that Washington rode back and forth across the battlefield, rallying the remnant of the British and Virginian forces to a retreat. Subsequent to this action, Washington was given a difficult frontier command in the Virginia mountains, and was rewarded by being promoted to colonel and named commander of all Virginia forces.

In 1758, Washington participated as a brigadier general in the Forbes expedition that prompted French evacuation of Fort Duquesne, and British establishment of Pittsburgh. Later that year, Washington resigned from active military service and spent the next sixteen years as a Virginia planter and politician.
A mezzotint of Martha Dandridge Custis, based on a 1757 portrait by John Wollaston.

George Washington was introduced to Martha Dandridge Custis, a widow who was living at the White House Plantation on the south shore of the Pamunkey River in New Kent County, Virginia, by friends of Martha when George was on leave from the French and Indian War. George only visited her home twice before proposing marriage to her 3 weeks after they met. George and Martha were each 27 years old when they married on January 6, 1759 at her home, known as The White House, which shared its name with the future presidential mansion. The newlywed couple moved to Mount Vernon, where he took up the tuckahoe life of a genteel planter and political figure. They had a good marriage, and together they raised her two children by her previous marriage to Daniel Parke Custis, John Parke Custis and Martha Parke Custis, affectionately called “Jackie” and “Patsy.”[19] George and Martha never had any children together — an earlier bout with smallpox followed by
tuberculosis may have left him sterile.\[^{20}\] Later the Washingtons raised two of Mrs. Washington's grandchildren, Eleanor Parke Custis ("Nelly") and George Washington Parke Custis ("Washy") after their father died in 1781.\[^{21}\]

Washington's marriage to a wealthy widow greatly increased his property holdings and social standing. He acquired one-third of the 18,000 acre (73 km²) Custis estate upon his marriage, and managed the remainder on behalf of Martha's children. He frequently purchased additional land in his own name, and was granted land in what is now West Virginia as a bounty for his service in the French and Indian War. By 1775, Washington had doubled the size of Mount Vernon to 6,500 acres (26 km²), with over 100 slaves. As a respected military hero and large landowner, he held local office and was elected to the Virginia provincial legislature, the House of Burgesses, beginning in 1758,\[^{22}\] and he served as a justice of Fairfax, and held court in Alexandria, Virginia between 1760 and 1774.\[^{7}\]

Washington first took a leading role in the growing colonial resistance in 1769, when he introduced a proposal drafted by his friend George Mason which called for Virginia to boycott imported English goods until the Townshend Acts were repealed. Parliament repealed the Acts in 1770. Washington also took an active interest in helping his fellow citizens. On September 21, 1771 Washington wrote a letter to Neil Jameson on behalf of Jonathan Plowman Jr., a merchant from Baltimore whose ship had been seized for exporting non-permitted items by the Boston Frigate, and requested his help toward recovery of Plowman's ship.\[^{23}\] Washington regarded the passage of the Intolerable Acts in 1774 as "an Invasion of our Rights and Privileges." In July 1774, he chaired the meeting at which the Fairfax Resolves were adopted, which called for, among other things, the convening of a Continental Congress. In August, he attended the First Virginia Convention, where he was selected as a delegate to the First Continental Congress.\[^{24}\]

[edit] American Revolution

Main article: George Washington in the American Revolution
After fighting broke out in April 1775, Washington appeared at the Second Continental Congress in military uniform, signaling that he was prepared for war. Washington had the prestige, the military experience, the charisma and military bearing, the reputation of being a strong patriot, and he was supported by the South, especially Virginia. Although he did not explicitly seek the office of commander and even claimed that he was not equal to it, there was no serious competition. Congress created the Continental Army on 1775–06-14; the next day, on the nomination of John Adams of Massachusetts, Washington was appointed Major General and elected by Congress to be Commander-in-chief.\[7\]

Washington assumed command of the Continental Army in the field at Cambridge, Massachusetts in July 1775,\[7\] during the ongoing siege of Boston. Realizing his army’s desperate shortage of gunpowder, Washington asked for new sources. British arsenals were raided (including some in the Caribbean) and some manufacturing was attempted; a barely adequate supply (about 2.5 million pounds) was obtained by the end of 1776, mostly from France.\[25\] Washington reorganized the army during the long standoff, and forced the British to withdraw by putting artillery on Dorchester Heights overlooking the city. The British evacuated Boston and Washington moved his army to New York City.

Although negative toward the patriots in the Continental Congress, British newspapers routinely praised Washington's personal character and qualities as a military commander.\[26\] Moreover, both sides of the aisle in Parliament found the American general's courage, endurance, and attentiveness to the welfare of his troops worthy of approbation and examples of the virtues they and most other Britons found wanting in their own commanders. Washington’s refusal to become involved in politics buttressed his reputation as a man fully committed to the
Washington Crossing the Delaware River depicted by Emanuel Leutze

Depiction by John Trumbull of the surrender of Lord Cornwallis’s army at Yorktown

In August 1776, British General William Howe launched a massive naval and land campaign designed to seize New York and offer a negotiated settlement. The Continental Army under Washington engaged the enemy for the first time as an army of the newly-declared independent United States at the Battle of Long Island, the largest battle of the entire war. This and several other British victories (despite some American victories at the Battle of Harlem Heights and elsewhere) sent Washington scrambling out of New York and across New Jersey, leaving the future of the Continental Army in doubt. On the night of December 25, 1776, Washington staged a counterattack, leading the American forces across the Delaware River to capture nearly 1,000 Hessians in Trenton, New Jersey.

Washington was defeated at the Battle of Brandywine on September 11, 1777. On September 26, Howe outmaneuvered Washington and marched into Philadelphia unopposed. Washington’s army unsuccessfully attacked the British garrison at Germantown in early October. Meanwhile Burgoyne, out of reach from help from Howe, was trapped and forced to surrender his entire army at Saratoga, New York. As a result of this battle, France entered the war as an open ally of the Americans, turning the Revolution into a major world-wide war. Washington’s loss of Philadelphia prompted some members of Congress to discuss removing Washington.
from command. This episode failed after Washington’s supporters rallied behind him.[27]

Washington’s army encamped at Valley Forge in December 1777, where it stayed for the next six months. Over the winter, 2,500 men (out of 10,000) died from disease and exposure. The next spring, however, the army emerged from Valley Forge in good order, thanks in part to a full-scale training program supervised by Baron von Steuben, a veteran of the Prussian general staff. The British evacuated Philadelphia in 1778 and returned to New York City. Meanwhile, Washington remained with his army outside New York, and in the summer of 1779, at Washington’s direction, General John Sullivan, in retaliation for Iroquois and Tory attacks against American settlements earlier in the war, carried out a decisive scorched earth campaign that destroyed at least forty Iroquois villages throughout what is now upstate New York. He delivered the final blow in 1781, after a French naval victory allowed American and French forces to trap a British army in Virginia. The surrender at Yorktown on October 17, 1781 marked the end of fighting. Though known for his successes in the war and of his life that followed, Washington only won three of the nine battles that he fought.[28]

![Depiction by John Trumbull of Washington resigning his commission as commander-in-chief.](image)

In March 1783, Washington used his influence to disperse a group of Army officers who had threatened to confront Congress regarding their back pay. The Treaty of Paris (signed that September) recognized the independence of the United States. Washington disbanded his army and, on November 2, gave an eloquent farewell address to his soldiers.[29] On November 25, the British evacuated New York City, and Washington and the governor took possession. At Fraunces Tavern on December 4, Washington formally bade his officers farewell and on December 23, 1783, he resigned his commission as commander-in-chief, emulating the Roman general Cincinnatus, an exemplar of the republican ideal of citizen leadership who rejected power. During this period, the United States was governed under the Articles of Confederation without a President; governmental organization was different from the present form.

Washington’s retirement to Mount Vernon was short-lived. He made an exploratory trip to the western frontier in 1784,[7] was persuaded to attend the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia in the summer of 1787, and was unanimously elected president of the Convention. He participated little in the debates involved (though he did vote for or against the various articles), but his high prestige maintained
collegiality and kept the delegates at their labors. The delegates designed the presidency with Washington in mind, and allowed him to define the office once elected. After the Convention, his support convinced many, including the Virginia legislature, to vote for ratification; the new Constitution was ratified by all 13 states.

[edit] Presidency: 1789–1797

Main article: Presidency of George Washington

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Washington Cabinet</th>
<th>NAME</th>
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<tr>
<td>President</td>
<td>George Washington</td>
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<td>Vice President</td>
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<td>Secretary of State</td>
<td>Thomas Jefferson</td>
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<td>Timothy Pickering</td>
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<td>Secretary of Treasury</td>
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<td>Oliver Wolcott, Jr.</td>
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<td>Henry Knox</td>
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<td>Secretary of War</td>
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<td>Edmund Randolph</td>
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<td>Attorney General</td>
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<td>Charles Lee</td>
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The Electoral College elected Washington unanimously in 1789, and again in the 1792 election; he remains the only president to receive 100% of electoral votes. John Adams was elected vice president. Washington took the oath of office as the first President under the Constitution for the United States of America on April 30, 1789 at Federal Hall in New York City although, at first, he had not wanted the position.\footnote{30}

The 1st United States Congress voted to pay Washington a salary of $25,000 a year—a large sum in 1789. Washington, already wealthy, declined the salary, since he valued his image as a selfless public servant. At the urging of Congress, however, he ultimately accepted the payment. A dangerous precedent could have been set otherwise, as the founding fathers wanted future presidents to come from a large pool of potential candidates – not just those citizens that could afford to do the work for free.

Washington attended carefully to the pomp and ceremony of office, making sure that the titles and trappings were suitably republican and never emulated European royal courts. To that end, he preferred the title “Mr. President” to the more majestic names suggested.

Washington proved an able administrator. An excellent delegator and judge of talent and character, he held regular cabinet meetings to debate issues before making a final decision. In handling routine tasks, he was “systematic, orderly, energetic, solicitous of the opinion of others but decisive, intent upon general goals and the consistency of particular actions with them.”\footnote{31}

Washington reluctantly served a second term as president. He refused to run for a third, establishing the customary policy of a maximum of two terms for a president which later became law by the 22nd Amendment to the Constitution.\footnote{32}

[edit] Domestic issues

States admitted to Union

- North Carolina – November 21, 1789 12th state
- Rhode Island – May 29, 1790 13th state
- Vermont – May 4, 1791 14th state
- Kentucky – June 1, 1792 15th state
- Tennessee – June 1, 1796 16th state

Washington was not a member of any political party, and hoped that they would not be formed out of fear of the conflict and stagnation they could cause governance. His closest advisors, however, formed two factions, setting the framework for the future First Party System. Secretary of Treasury Alexander Hamilton had bold plans to establish the national credit and build a financially powerful nation, and formed the basis of the Federalist Party. Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson, founder of the Jeffersonian Republicans, strenuously opposed Hamilton's agenda, but Washington favored Hamilton over Jefferson.

In 1791, Congress imposed an excise on distilled spirits, which led to protests in frontier districts, especially Pennsylvania. By 1794, after Washington ordered the protesters to appear in U.S. district court, the protests turned into full-scale riots known as the Whiskey Rebellion. The federal army was too small to be used, so Washington invoked the Militia Law of 1792 to summon the militias of Pennsylvania,
Virginia and several other states. The governors sent the troops and Washington took command, marching into the rebellious districts. There was no fighting, but Washington's forceful action proved the new government could protect itself. It also was one of only two times that a sitting President would personally command the military in the field: the other was after President James Madison fled the burning White House in the War of 1812. These events marked the first time under the new constitution that the federal government used strong military force to exert authority over the states and citizens.

[edit] Foreign affairs

A statue of George Washington in the Place d'Iéna, Paris, France

In 1793, the revolutionary government of France sent diplomat Edmond-Charles Genêt, called “Citizen Genêt,” to America. Genêt issued letters of marque and reprisal to American ships so they could capture British merchant ships. He attempted to turn popular sentiment towards American involvement in the French war against Britain by creating a network of Democratic-Republican Societies in major cities. Washington rejected this interference in domestic affairs, demanded the French government recall Genêt, and denounced his societies.

To normalize trade relations with Britain, remove them from western forts, and resolve financial debts left over from the Revolution, Hamilton and Washington designed the Jay Treaty. It was negotiated by John Jay, and signed on November 19, 1794. The Jeffersonians supported France and strongly attacked the treaty. Washington and Hamilton, however, mobilized public opinion and won ratification
by the Senate by emphasizing Washington’s support. The British agreed to depart their forts around the Great Lakes, the Canadian-U.S. boundary was adjusted, numerous pre-Revolutionary debts were liquidated, and the British opened their West Indies colonies to American trade. Most importantly, the treaty avoided war with Britain and instead brought a decade of prosperous trade with Britain. It angered the French and became a central issue in political debates.

[edit] Supreme Court appointments

George Washington appointed the following Justices to the Supreme Court:[34]

» John Jay (Chief Justice) – 1789
» William Cushing (Associate Justice) – 1789
» John Rutledge (Associate Justice) – 1789
» James Wilson – 1789
» John Blair – 1789
» James Iredell – 1790
» Thomas Johnson – 1792
» William Paterson – 1793
» John Rutledge (Chief Justice) – 1795
» William Cushing (Chief Justice, disputed) – 1796
» Samuel Chase – 1796
» Oliver Ellsworth (Chief Justice) – 1796

[edit] Farewell Address
A bust of Washington by Giuseppe Ceracchi.

**Washington’s Farewell Address** (issued as a public letter in 1796) was one of the most influential statements of American political values.[35] Drafted primarily by Washington himself, with help from Hamilton, it gives advice on the necessity and importance of national union, the value of the Constitution and the rule of law, the evils of political parties, and the proper virtues of a republican people. In the address, he called morality “a necessary spring of popular government.” He said, “reason and experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle” – making the point that the value of religion is for the benefit of society as a whole.[36]

Washington’s public political address warned against foreign influence in domestic affairs and American meddling in European affairs. He warned against bitter partisanship in domestic politics and called for men to move beyond partisanship and serve the common good. He called for an America wholly free of foreign attachments, saying the United States must concentrate primarily on American interests. He counseled friendship and commerce with all nations, but warned against involvement in European wars and entering into long-term “entangling” alliances. The address quickly set American values regarding religion and foreign affairs.

[edit] Retirement and death

After retiring from the presidency in March 1797, Washington returned to Mount Vernon with a profound sense of relief. He devoted much time to farming and, in that year, constructed a 2,250 square foot (75-by-30 feet, 200 m²) distillery, which
was one of the largest in the new republic, housing five copper stills, a boiler and 50 mash tubs, at the site of one of his unprofitable farms. At its peak, two years later, the distillery produced 11,000 gallons of corn and rye whiskey worth $7,500, and fruit brandy.\[^{37}\][\(^{38}\)]

On **July 13, 1799**, Washington was appointed by President **John Adams** to be **Lieutenant General** and **Commander-in-chief** of all armies raised or to be raised for service in a prospective war with France. He served as the senior officer of the United States Army between **July 13, 1798** and **December 14, 1799**. He participated in the planning for a Provisional Army to meet any emergency that might arise, but did not take the field.\[^{7}\]

Mount Vernon.

On **December 12, 1799**, Washington spent several hours inspecting his farms on horseback, in snow and later hail and freezing rain. He sat down to dine that evening without changing his wet clothes. The next morning, he awoke with a bad cold, fever and a throat infection called **quinsy** that turned into acute **laryngitis** and **pneumonia**. Washington died on the evening of **December 14, 1799**, at his home aged 67, while attended by Dr. **James Craik**, one of his closest friends, and **Tobias Lear V**, Washington’s personal secretary. Lear would record the account in his journal, writing that Washington’s last words were **Tis well**.

Modern doctors believe that Washington died largely because of his treatment, which included **calomel** and **bloodletting**, resulting in a combination of **shock** from the loss of five pints of blood, as well as **asphyxia** and **dehydration**.\[^{39}\] Washington’s remains were buried at Mount Vernon. To protect their privacy, Martha Washington burned the correspondence between her husband and herself following his death. Only three letters between the couple have survived.

After Washington’s death, Mount Vernon was inherited by his nephew, **Bushrod Washington**, a justice of the U.S. Supreme Court.

During the **United States Bicentennial** year, George Washington was posthumously appointed to the grade of **General of the Armies of The United States** by the congressional joint resolution **Public Law 94-479** of **January 19, 1976**, approved by President **Gerald R. Ford** on **October 11, 1976**, and formalized in Department of the Army Order Number 31-3 of **March 13, 1978** with an effective appointment date of **July 4, 1976**.\[^{7}\] This restored Washington’s position as the highest ranking military officer in U.S. history, which had been undone when General **John J. Pershing** was made **General of the Armies** at the end of World War I.
Legacy

Main article: George Washington's legacy
Further information: Cultural depictions of George Washington

The statue of Washington outside Federal Hall in New York City, looking on Wall Street.

Congressman Henry Lee, a Revolutionary War comrade and father of the Civil War general Robert E. Lee, famously eulogized Washington as:

First in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his countrymen, he was second to none in humble and enduring scenes of private life. Pious, just, humane, temperate, and sincere; uniform, dignified, and commanding; his example was as edifying to all around him as were the effects of that example lasting…Correct throughout, vice shuddered in his presence and virtue always felt his fostering hand. The purity of his private character gave effulgence to his public virtues…Such was the man for whom our nation mourns.

Lee’s words set the standard by which Washington's overwhelming reputation was impressed upon the American memory. Washington set many precedents for the national government and the presidency in particular.

As early as 1778, Washington was lauded as the “Father of His Country.”[40]

He was upheld as a shining example in schoolbooks and lessons: as courageous and farsighted, holding the Continental Army together through eight hard years of war
and numerous privations, sometimes by sheer force of will; and as restrained: at war’s end taking affront at the notion he should be King; and after two terms as President, stepping aside.

Washington manifested himself as the exemplar of republican virtue in America. More than any American he was extolled for his great personal integrity, and a deeply held sense of duty, honor and patriotism. He is seen more as a character model than war hero or founding father. One of Washington’s greatest achievements, in terms of republican values, was refraining from taking more power than was due. He was conscientious of maintaining a good reputation by avoiding political intrigue. He rejected nepotism or cronyism. Jefferson observed, “The moderation and virtue of a single character probably prevented this Revolution from being closed, as most others have been, by a subversion of that liberty it was intended to establish.” [41]

[edit] Monuments and memorials

Washington on Mount Rushmore
Today, Washington's face and image are often used as national symbols of the United States, along with the icons such as the flag and great seal. Perhaps the most prominent commemoration of his legacy is the use of his image on the one-dollar bill and the quarter-dollar coin. Washington, together with Theodore Roosevelt, Thomas Jefferson, and Abraham Lincoln, is depicted in stone at the Mount Rushmore Memorial. The Washington Monument, one of the most well-known American landmarks, was built in his honor. The George Washington Masonic National Memorial in Alexandria, Virginia, constructed entirely with voluntary contributions from members of the Masonic Fraternity, was also built in his
Many things have been named in honor of Washington. Washington’s name became that of the nation’s capital, Washington, D.C., and the State of Washington, the only state to be named after an American (Maryland, the Virginias, the Carolinas and Georgia are named in honor of British monarchs). George Washington University and Washington University in St. Louis were named for him, as was Washington and Lee University (once Washington Academy), which was renamed due to Washington’s large endowment in 1796.

The Confederate Seal prominently featured George Washington on horseback, in the same position as a statue of him in Richmond, Virginia.

[edit] Washington and slavery

Main article: George Washington and slavery

For most of his life, Washington operated his plantations as a typical Virginia slave owner. In the 1760s, he dropped tobacco (which was prestigious but unprofitable) and shifted to hemp and wheat growing and diversified into milling flour, weaving cloth, and distilling brandy. By the time of his death, there were 317 slaves at Mount Vernon.

Before the American Revolution, Washington expressed no moral reservations about slavery, but, by 1778, he had stopped selling slaves without their consent because he did not want to break up slave families.

In 1778, while Washington was at war, he wrote to his manager at Mount Vernon that he wished to sell his slaves and “to get quit of negroes,” since maintaining a large (and increasingly elderly) slave population was no longer economically efficient. Washington could not legally sell the “dower slaves,” however, and because these slaves had long intermarried with his own slaves, he could not sell his slaves without breaking up families.

After the war, Washington often privately expressed a dislike of the institution of slavery. Despite these privately expressed misgivings, Washington never criticized slavery in public. In fact, as President, Washington brought nine household slaves to the Executive Mansion in Philadelphia. By Pennsylvania law, slaves who resided in the state became legally free after six months. Washington rotated his household slaves between Mount Vernon and Philadelphia so that they did not earn their freedom, a scheme he attempted to keep hidden from his slaves and the public and one which was, in fact, against the law. Two slaves escaped while in Philadelphia: one of these, Oney Judge, was discovered in New Hampshire. Judge could have been captured and returned under the Fugitive Slave Act of 1793, which Washington had signed into law, but this was not done so as to avoid public controversy.

Washington was the only prominent, slaveholding Founding Father to emancipate his slaves. He did not free his slaves in his lifetime, however, but instead included a provision in his will to free his slaves upon the death of his wife. It is important to understand that not all the slaves at his estate at Mt. Vernon were owned by him. His wife Martha owned a large number of slaves and Washington did not feel that he could unilaterally free slaves that came to Mt. Vernon from his wife’s estate. His actions were influenced by his close relationship with the Marquis de La Fayette. Martha Washington would free slaves to which she had title late in her own life. He
did not speak out publicly against slavery, argues historian Dorothy Twohig, because he did not wish to risk splitting apart the young republic over what was already a sensitive and divisive issue.\[46\]

**[edit] Religious beliefs**

*Main article: George Washington and religion*

Washington was [baptized](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baptism) into the Church of England.\[47\][48] In 1765, when the Church of England was still the [state religion](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/State_church),\[49\] he served on the [vestry](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vestry) (lay council) for his local church. Throughout his life, he spoke of the value of righteousness, and of seeking and offering thanks for the “blessings of Heaven.”

In a letter to George Mason in 1785, Washington wrote that he was not among those alarmed by a bill “making people pay towards the support of that [religion] which they profess,” but felt that it was “impolitic” to pass such a measure, and wished it had never been proposed, believing that it would disturb public tranquility.\[50\]

His adopted daughter, Nelly Custis Lewis, stated: “I have heard her [Nelly’s mother, Eleanor Calvert Custis, who resided in Mount Vernon for two years] say that General Washington always received the sacrament with my grandmother [Martha Washington] before the revolution.”\[51\] After the revolution, Washington frequently accompanied his wife to Christian church services; however, there is no record of his ever taking communion, and he would regularly leave services before communion—with the other non-communicants (as was the custom of the day), until he ceased attending at all on communion Sundays. Prior to communion, believers are admonished to take stock of their spiritual lives and not to participate in the ceremony unless he finds himself in the will of God.\[52\][53] Historians and biographers continue to debate the degree to which he can be counted as a Christian, and the degree to which he was a [deist](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deism).

He was an early supporter of [religious toleration](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religious_toleration) and [freedom of religion](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Freedom_of_religion). In 1775, he ordered that his troops not show anti-Catholic sentiments by burning the pope in [effigy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Effigy) on [Guy Fawkes Night](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guy_Fawkes_Night). When hiring workmen for Mount Vernon, he wrote to his agent, “If they be good workmen, they may be from Asia, Africa, or Europe; they may be [Mohammedans](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muslim), Jews, or Christians of any sect, or they may be Atheists.”\[52\]

In 1790, he wrote a response to a letter from the [Touro Synagogue](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Touro_Synagogue), in which he said that as long as people remain good citizens, their faith does not matter. This was a relief to the Jewish community of the United States, since the Jews had been either expelled from or prejudiced against in many European countries.

**[edit] Personal life**
In 1796, Gilbert Stuart painted this famous portrait of Washington from life, and then used the unfinished painting to create numerous others, including the image used on the U.S. one-dollar bill.
Statue of George Washington, with a medallion of his French ancestor Nicolas Martiau, born in Île de Ré, France

Though Washington had no children, he did have two nephews. Bushrod Washington became an Associate Justice, and Burwell Bassett was a long-time congressman in both Virginia and the United States government.

Washington suffered from problems with his teeth throughout his life. He lost his first tooth when he was twenty-two and had only one left by the time he became President. According to John Adams, he lost them because he used them to crack Brazil nuts, although modern historians suggest it was probably the mercury oxide he was given to treat illnesses such as smallpox and malaria. He had several sets of false teeth made, four of them by a dentist named John Greenwood. Contrary to popular belief, none of the sets were made from wood. The set made when he became President was carved from hippopotamus and elephant ivory, held together with gold springs. The hippo ivory was used for the plate, into which real human teeth and also bits of horses and donkeys teeth were inserted. Dental problems left Washington in constant discomfort, for which he took laudanum, and this distress may be apparent in many of the portraits painted while he was still in office, including the one still used on the $1 bill.

As a young man, Washington had red hair. A popular myth is that he wore a wig, as was the fashion among some at the time. Washington did not wear a wig;
instead he powdered his hair,[58] as represented in several portraits, including the well-known unfinished Gilbert Stuart depiction.[59]

One of the most enduring myths about George Washington involves him as a young boy chopping down his father’s cherry tree and, when asked about it, using the famous line “I cannot tell a lie, I did it with my little hatchet.” In fact, there is no evidence that this ever occurred.[60] It, along with the story of Washington throwing a silver dollar across the Potomac River was part of a book of stories authored by Mason Weems that made Washington somewhat of a legendary figure.

[edit] See also

» American Revolution
» Military career of George Washington
» Town Destroyer, a nickname given Washington by the Iroquois
» Betty Washington, his sister

[edit] References: biographies


» Cunliffe, Marcus. George Washington: Man and Monument (1958), explores both the biography and the myth


» Grizzard, Frank E., Jr. George Washington: A Biographical Companion. ABC-


Stritof, Sheri and Bob. “George and Martha Washington” *http://marriage.about.com/od/presidentialmarriages/p/gwashington.htm*


**[edit] Further reading**

Further information: *George Washington bibliography*

**[edit] Notes**

1. ^a b The birth and death of George Washington are given using the Gregorian calendar. However, he was born when Britain and her colonies still used the Julian calendar, so contemporary records record his birth as February 11, 1731-32. The provisions of the *Calendar (New Style) Act 1750*, implemented in 1752, altered the official British dating method to the Gregorian calendar with the start of the year on January 1.


4. ^a Under the Articles of Confederation Congress called its presiding officer “President of the United States in Congress Assembled.” He had no executive powers, but the similarity of titles has confused people into thinking there were other presidents before Washington. Merrill Jensen, *The Articles of Confederation* (1959), 178-9


8. At the time Virginia included West Virginia and the upper Ohio Valley area around present day Pittsburgh.


19. Martha married Daniel Parke Custis on May 15, 1750 when she was 18. Daniel died on July 26, 1757. Martha had four children with Custis:

   1. Daniel Parke Custis: Daniel was born in 1751. He died when he was 3 in 1754.

   2. Frances Parke Custis: Frances was born in 1753. She died when she was 4 in 1757.

   3. Martha Parke Custis (“Patsy”): Patsy was born in 1756 and died when she
was 17 of an epileptic seizure on June 19, 1773. She is buried at Mount Vernon.

4. John Parke Custis (“Jacky”): Jacky was born on November 27, 1754. He died at Yorktown at 26 years of age on November 5, 1781 of “camp fever” (typhoid fever) while he was serving as an aide to George.

20. John K. Amory, M.D., “George Washington’s infertility: Why was the father of our country never a father?” *Fertility and Sterility*, Vol. 81, No. 3, March 2004. (online, PDF format)

21. George and Martha had seven grandchildren from Martha’s biological children.

1. Baby girl Custis, died in 1775.

2. Eliza Parke Custis was born on August 21, 1776 at Mount Airy Plantation in Maryland. She married an Englishman, Thomas Law, on March 21, 1796 at her mother and stepfather’s home, Hope Park Plantation, Virginia.

3. Martha Parke “Patty” Custis was born on December 3, 1777 at Mount Vernon. On January 6, 1795, she married Thomas Peter at her mother and stepfather’s home, Hope Park Plantation, Virginia.

4. Eleanor “Nelly” Parke Custis. She was born on March 21, 1779. She married Lawrence Lewis, George’s nephew, on February 22, 1799 at Mount Vernon. She died in 1852.

5. George Washington “Washy, Wash, or Tub” Parke Custis. He was born on April 30, 1781. He remained at Mount Vernon after his mother’s second marriage. He died in 1857.

6. Two set of twins died at birth.


23. John C. Fitzpatrick, *The Writings of George Washington from the Original Manuscript Sources, 1745-1799*


After Franklin Delano Roosevelt was elected to an unprecedented four terms, the two-term limit was formally integrated into the Federal Constitution by the 22nd Amendment. 


George Washington’s Distillery.


He has gained fame around the world as a quintessential example of a benevolent national founder. Gordon Wood concludes that the greatest act in his life was his resignation as commander of the armies—an act that stunned aristocratic Europe. Gordon Wood, The Radicalism of the American Revolution (1992), pp 105-6; Edmund Morgan, The Genius of George Washington (1980), pp 12-13; Sarah J. Purcell, Sealed With Blood: War, Sacrifice, and Memory in Revolutionary America (2002) p. 97; Don Higginbotham, George Washington (2004); Ellis, 2004. The earliest known image in which Washington is identified as such is on the cover of the circa 1778 Pennsylvania German almanac (Lancaster: Gedruckt bey Francis Bailey).


www.gwmemorial.org/.

Brooks, John (2000–02-10) . marijuana . Stanford University School of Medicine. Retrieved on 2007–12-14. “As an aside, George Washington had large fields of cannabis on his plantation, which were used for fiber production.”


See Wiencek, ch. 9; Hirschfeld, pp. 187–88; Ferling, p. 479.

47. ^ Family Bible entry http://www.cr.nps.gov/history/online_books/hh/26/hh26f.htm

48. ^ Image of page from family Bible http://gwpapers.virginia.edu/project/faq/bible.html

49. ^ Colonial Williamsburg website has several articles on religion in colonial Virginia


51. ^ ushistory.org Eleanor Parke Custis Lewis’ letter written to Jared Sparks, 1833

52. ^ a b The Religious Beliefs of Our Presidents by Franklin Steiner.

53. ^ [1] Eleanor Parke Custis Lewis’ letter written to Jared Sparks, 1833


57. ^ Ross, John F (October 2005), Unmasking George Washington, Smithsonian Magazine


[edit] External links
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<td>April 30, 1789 – December 14, 1799</td>
<td>John Adams</td>
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Notes and references

1. Washington’s term as President is sometimes listed as starting on either March 4 or April 6. March 4 is the official start of the first presidential term. April 6 is the date on which Congress counted the electoral votes and certified a winner. April 30 is the date on which Washington took the oath of office.

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