

# ESSAY ON THE CABINET

When General George Washington became the first President of the United States, unlike all Presidents who would serve after him, there was no US government to speak of. When the first session of the First Federal Congress convened in New York City in 1789, some of their first legislative actions provided for the establishment of federal departments, with three being named: State, War, and Treasury. This brought about great debate, as there were no notices in the US Constitution on such cabinet-level agencies or heads of them. Rep. Egbert Benson of New York noted, “Without a confidence in the executive department, its operation would be subject to perpetual discord.” Rep. Fisher Ames of Massachusetts echoed his concerns, stating that “the only bond between him [the President] and those he employs is the confidence he has in their integrity and talents; when that confidence ceases, the principal ought to have power to remove those whom he can no longer trust with safety.” Elbridge Gerry, who would later serve as Vice President, said, “These officers, bearing the titles of minister at war, minister of state, minister for the finances, minister of foreign affairs, and how many more ministers I cannot say, will be made necessary to the President.” In a debate on the formation of the Department of the Treasury, Gerry told the House, “We are now called upon, Mr. Speaker, to deliberate, whether we shall place this all-important department in the hands of a single individual, or in a Board of Commissioners. I presume the gentleman, who has brought forward this strong of propositions, means, that this officer shall have the power to examine into the state of public debt and expenses, to receive and disburse the revenue, to devise plans for its improvement and expansion, and, in short, to superintend and direct the receipts and expenditure, and govern the finances of the United States; having under him officers to do the subordinate business of registering and recording his transactions, and a Comptroller to control his operations with respect to the accounts and vouchers.” In the end, the Congress acceded and established these three cabinet departments.

In September 1789, Washington named Thomas Jefferson as the first Secretary of State, Alexander Hamilton as the first Secretary of the Treasury, and Henry Knox as the first Secretary of War. There was no “department” for a judicial advisor to the President, but he named Edmund Randolph as the first Attorney General. (The Department of Justice was not officially formed until 1870; prior to that time, the Office of the Attorney General was its official name.) Like the cabinet offices of Great Britain, these men were more advisors than true leaders; for their first months in office, they spent more time assembling their departments than carrying out real policy. According to historian

George Gibbs, who collected and edited the papers of Oliver Wolcott, who later served as Secretary of the Treasury under Washington and his successor, John Adams, "It was not until November that the business of the Treasury was entered upon in earnest."

The trials and tribulations of these first cabinet members overwhelmed them, as they would have anyone at the time. Washington had named a small team of those he felt were the finest in their areas of expertise, fit and ready to combat the enormous challenges presented to the newly-formed government. Secretary Hamilton worked to end the huge debt incurred by the colonies during the war against England; at the same time, he worked with Secretary Jefferson to get Southern approval for the federal government to assume state debts in exchange for support for allowing a new federal capital to be built carved out of land from Virginia. Jefferson himself had to initiate a foreign policy of a nation that just a few years earlier had existed only as a batch of colonies; in doing so, he worked in a position that he had, when he first heard of his being named to it, desired to decline. He had worked hard to get the Declaration of Independence done in 1776, in the years since had worked as a writer and diplomat in the service of his country. Now home, he desired to take time off. His friend James Madison visited him at his estate, "Monticello," and convinced that his country needed him more than ever. At the end of March 1790, after long deliberations, he traveled to New York, where he took up the duties of Secretary of State with a small office and one aide. Secretary Knox literally had to put together a military that had basically dissolved after the war against England had been won. Knox himself had served as Secretary at War (not of War as the new title was called) under the Articles of Confederation, and his selection for the position under the new Constitution was almost a given. When Edmund Randolph accepted the Attorney Generalship, he did so with much reluctance, as his own personal accounts were in disarray and he was loathe to accept a low-paying position, even it is was serving his country. At the same time, he was working on a revision of all of the laws of Virginia, and he did not wish to take time off from that task.

In a letter to the Count de Moustier, penned from New York on 25 May 1789, Washington wrote about the men who were serving in his cabinet, whom he saw more as assistants than advisors or counsellors: "The impossibility that one man should be able to perform all the great business of the state, I take to have been the reason for instituting the great departments, and appointing officers therein, to assist the supreme magistrare in discharging the duties of his trust. And perhaps I may be allowed to say of myself, that the supreme magistrare of no state can have a greater variety

of important business to perform in person, than I have at this moment."

In an 1844 oration delivered in Philadelphia on the life of Washington, William B. Reed spoke of the men who served in Washington's cabinet:

"And by whose agency did he administer the government? Who were the counsellors whom Washington called to assistance? Hamilton and Knox, Jefferson and Randolph, the statesmen and soldiers whom the Revolution knew, the leader of the Revolution now selected. He chose them for their well-trying patriotism and merit, without a thought of personal aggrandizement or political advancement. He selected them for the public service they could render."

**References:** Speeches of Benson, Ames, and Gerry in "The Debates and Proceedings in the Congress of the United States; With an Appendix, Containing Important State Papers and Public Documents, and all the Laws of a Public Nature; with a Copious Index" (Washington: Printed and Published by Gales and Seaton, 1834), 400, 403, 492-93, 527; Gibbs, George, "Memoirs of the Administrations of Washington and John Adams, Edited from the Papers of Oliver Wolcott, Secretary of the Treasury" (New York: Printed for the Subscribers; two volumes, 1846), II:18; Jackson, Donald; and Dorothy Twohig, eds., "The Diaries of George Washington" (Charlottesville, Virginia: University Press of Virginia; six volumes, 1976-79), V:455; Washington to Count de Moustier, 25 May 1789, in Washington Chauncy Ford, ed., "The Writings of George Washington" (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons; 14 volumes, 1889-93), XI:397-98; Reed, William B., "'The Model Administration': An Oration, Delivered Before the Whig Citizens of Philadelphia, on the Twenty-Second of Federal, 1844" (Philadelphia: J. Crissy, Printer, 1845), 13-14.

## John Jay (1745 – 1829)

### Secretary of State

30 April 1789 – 21 March 1790

Although perhaps one of the most important members of the US and New York governments in the last two decades of the 18th century, the name of John Jay, not to mention his numerous accomplishments, have been nearly forgotten to historians. A member of the Continental Congress (he served as the fifth President of that body, a sort of “Speaker” who had extremely limited powers), he also served as the first Chief Justice of the US Supreme Court (1789-95) and the second Governor of New York (1795-1801). His short tenure as the first Secretary of State, from 30 April to 26 September 1789, has slipped into obscurity as well.

### Early Years

The scion of famed family, Jay was born on 12 December 1745 in what is now New York City, the sixth son of Peter Jay, a merchant, and Mary (née van Cortlandt) Jay. According to his son, William Jay, who penned a two-volume biography of his father in 1833, John Jay sat down in his last years and wrote down his reminiscences of his family history. He explained, “I have been informed that our family is of Poitou, in France, and that the branch of it to which we belong removed from thence to Rochelle. Of our ancestors anterior to Pierre Jay, who left France on the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, I know nothing that is certain. Pierre Jay was an active and opulent merchant, extensively and profitably engaged in commerce...Mr. Jay seemed to have been solicitous to have one of his sons educated in England. He first sent his eldest son, but he unfortunately died on the passage...” Despite this background, most historians of John Jay write that he was of Dutch extraction. According to Jay’s genealogy, only one of his ancestors traveled to Amsterdam, and this for a short time before he emigrated to the American colonies in 1692. As for Mary Van Cortlandt, according to Jay, her mother was one of many who fled Bohemia due to “popish persecution” and took refuge in Holland, after which she came to New York.

John Jay received private tutoring, after which he entered King’s College (now Columbia University) in New York City, earning a Bachelor’s degree in 1764. He then began the study of the law in offices of one Benjamin Kissam. Admitted to the New York bar, Jay began a private legal practice in New York City in 1768.

In 1774, Jay married Sarah van (also spelled Vail) Brugh Livingston, the daughter of a member of one of New York’s great early families (which included Brockholst Livingston, who also served on the US Su-

preme Court, as well as Philip Livingston, a signer of the Declaration of Independence, William Livingston, who signed the US Constitution), whose descendants include Eleanor Roosevelt, George H.W. Bush, the 41st President of the United States, as well as his son, George W. Bush, the 43rd President of the United States, and New York Governor Hamilton Fish (1808-1893), who served as Secretary of State (1869-77) under President Ulysses S Grant. Never involved in the controversies of the time, most notably the agitation of revolutionary fervor against the British crown in the colonies, Jay was influenced by Sarah’s brother, Robert Livingston, as well as several other noted speakers including Gouverneur Morris and Philip Schuyler, and he lent his name - and his pen - to the cause of American independence.

When the British began their initial moves to stop this burgeoning independence movement, which came after the Boston Tea Party in December 1773, Jay joined the Committee of Correspondence in New York and was elected as one of New York’s five delegates to the First Continental Congress. When war broke out in April 1775, Jay was elected to the Second Continental Congress, where he served as President (10 December 1778-28 September 1779), succeeding Henry Laurens. In fact, the election that replaced Laurens with Jay was a contentious one, leading a number of states to move from Laurens to Jay and setting off the controversial election. As President of the Continental Congress, Jay was in fact the *de facto* leader of the colonial government, or in effect a President of the American Colonies. The position was not like the American presidency, and its powers were extremely limited. In 1777, Jay was a major force behind the writing of New York’s state constitution; for his work, he was named as Chief Justice of the state, holding both offices and serving in the latter position until 1779.

On 28 September 1779, Jay resigned as President of the Continental Congress when he was named as the Colonial Minister to Spain. With the war against Britain still raging, Jay was one of a number of American delegates sent to various European capitals to raise funds for the beleaguered colonial army while also gaining diplomatic recognition of the fledgling American government. When he arrived on 22 January 1780, Spain refused to officially receive Jay as the Minister, believing that its colonial holdings in Florida were in danger if war spread; however, Jay was able to gain a loan of \$170,000 for the colonies. Jay found the Spanish Foreign Minister, José Moñino y Rodondo, Conde de Floridablanca, to be an arrogant man who dismissed the goals of American independence. Jay remained in Spain in an attempt to gain official recognition, but,

unable to break the Spanish government's will, he left on 20 May 1782 and returned to America.

### Named to the Cabinet

When the colonists won the crucial victory over the British at Yorktown on 19 October 1781, the end of the war was in sight. Benjamin Franklin, the American Minister to Paris, realized that a peace treaty would have to be signed and he reached out to several men, including Jay, to participate in the peace talks with the British. Jay left for France and arrived in Paris on 23 June 1782, becoming one of three men on the negotiating committee along with Franklin and John Adams. Under their leadership, a treaty which was highly favorable to the Americans was ironed out, and Jay returned to the United States in triumph, landing on 24 July 1784. When he arrived, he found that he had been elected as Secretary for Foreign Affairs under the Articles of Confederation, the loosely-held together "constitution" that was the first blueprint for the new American government. Thus, in effect, Jay was the first Secretary of State of the infant United States, although his role in this position is little discussed and was extremely weak as compared to his successors. During his tenure, which lasted until 22 March 1790, Jay tried to negotiate the payment of debts owed to European nations for loans that had sustained the colonial fight against the British during the entire war for independence. At the same time, without a Secretary of Commerce or any government entity of that type, Jay was left alone to try to coax open foreign markets for American goods. Because of his service in Spain, Jay held extensive negotiations with Don Diego de Gardoqui Arriquibar, the Spanish Finance Minister who served as the first Spanish Ambassador to the United States, but these went nowhere and nothing was accomplished during Jay's tenure. The weak federal government hampered any chance Jay had of getting strong backing for any initiative he wished to carry out. This led to his joining the movement backing a strong central government to be established by a new constitution. Under the Articles of Confederation, the states dominated; Jay joined with Alexander Hamilton and James Madison in writing a series of articles under the *nom de guerre* "Publius" which appeared in "The Federalist," arguing for the establishment of a new government with powers centered in three distinct branches: executive, legislative, and judicial. Of the 85 essays which were written, Jay wrote five which dealt with foreign affairs.

Jay did not participate in the Constitutional Convention held in 1787 in Philadelphia, nor did he take part in its ratification movement, instead merely acting as a man behind the scenes. In 1789, the new government was established, with General George Washington

elected as the first President of the United States, and Jay was retained in his position, this time named as Secretary of State. This time was short, however, as Jay was tired from years of fighting for the interests of the nation and achieving little. On 22 March 1790, he resigned when Washington nominated him as the first Chief Justice of the new Supreme Court and he was confirmed by the US Senate. (Histories of Jay's life, and of the US Supreme Court, use the date of 26 September 1789 when Jay first went on the court, but in fact he remained at the State Department until his nomination was confirmed.) Jay was on the court until his resignation on 29 June 1795. Many of the court's decisions were groundbreaking, laying the foundation of precedents in the law for a new nation. Perhaps the most important decision during Jay's tenure was *Chisholm v. Georgia* (2 Dallas 419 [1793]), which held that citizens of one state could sue the government of another state. While there was no identified author who wrote the court's opinion (the four justices in the majority wrote without an author being identified, while Justice James Iredell dissented), the case did set a precedent that was overruled by the passage of the Eleventh Amendment to the US Constitution in 1798.

### After Leaving Office

But Jay apparently tired quickly of the court - in those days, in addition to their court duties, justices had to ride "circuit" and go to local courts in their jurisdiction, a tiring characteristic of the court before the establishment of the appeals court system that left many justices weary and broken. In 1792, desiring to leave the court, Jay put himself up for Governor of New York, but he was defeated by the Democratic-Republican candidate, George Clinton. Instead, on 19 April 1794, Washington appointed him as Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary to Great Britain.

By 1794, relations between the United States and Britain were near the breaking point, and it appeared that war would come between the two nations. While British exports were allowed into the United States, British ships blocked all American products from landing in Europe, and British ships impressed, or kidnapped, American sailors on ships they stopped on the seas. While many demanded war, Washington instead sent Jay to London to iron out a new treaty. In March 1795, Jay returned with what was officially called "A Treaty of Amity, Commerce, and Navigation Between his Britannic Majesty and the United States of America," but which is known better as "Jay's Treaty." The British agreed to stop blocking American products from European markets as well end British control over forts in what is now the American northwest. The

agreement did not address the impressment question, making it highly controversial. Nevertheless, Washington signed it, and the Senate, acting in its treaty-confirming mode, approved it by a vote of 20-10 on 24 June 1795. The treaty was highly unpopular with the American public, but it deferred the threat of war with England for nearly 20 years.

Jay had remained as Chief Justice while serving in Britain; however, in May 1795, he was once again put up as the Federalist candidate for Governor of New York, this time defeating Governor Clinton. On 29 June 1795 (Jay's congressional biography uses the date of 8 April 1795), Jay resigned from the US Supreme Court and went to work as the second Governor of New York. He served two terms (1795-1801), which had few events remembered by historians.

A strong opponent of slavery, John Jay freed any slave who was sold to him or came to him through marriage or business; in 1777, when writing New York's constitution, he tried to insert a provision calling for the emancipation of all slaves held in the state. In November 1800, after having refused to run for a third term, Jay also declined an offer from President John Adams, with whom he had served on the peace commission in 1783, to once again serve as Chief Justice of the US Supreme Court. Instead, John Marshall received the appointment, going on to become one of the most important chiefs of that vaunted court in American history.

Soon after leaving office in 1801, Jay's wife Sarah, with whom he had 10 children (seven of whom lived to adulthood, including his son William, and his eldest son, Peter Augustus Jay, who served as his father's secretary), died, and he spent the last three decades of his life as a widower. Although he could have reinserted himself into the politics and questions of the time, Jay instead purchased a small farm at Bedford, near Westchester north of New York City, living quietly and leaving public life behind him. In his last years he suffered from a palsy, perhaps Parkinson's disease, which led to his death on 17 May 1829 at the age of 83. He was laid to rest in what is now called John Jay Cemetery, in Rye, New York. The cemetery is closed to the public, and is only viewable by appointment.

In 2005, in one of the first major biographies of Jay in a long time, historian Walter Stahr wrote of Jay's contributions to the United States. He compares him with Adams, Jefferson, and others. These other men highlighted their accomplishments, Stahr notes, but he realizes that Jay never did despite what he did for his country. "He was the principal author of the first constitution of New York State, the most balanced of the early state constitutions. He drafted and negotiated the extensive American boundaries secured by the Paris

Peace Treaty. He played a critical role in forming the federal Constitution and securing its ratification. He negotiated the treaty which bears his name, Jay's Treaty, which avoided a disastrous war with Britain." Stahr adds, "He made several contributions which are more elusive but also important. He was not as gifted an author as Thomas Jefferson or Thomas Paine...His year as President of the Continental Congress was not a good year for the Congress, but perhaps his act prevented even more damage. During his five years as Secretary for Foreign Affairs, he provided crucial continuity and solidity to the confederation government. His prominent anti-slavery stance helped not only to end slavery in New York but also to establish the moral foundation for its end throughout America. He did not make the Supreme Court the power it would become under John Marshall, but he helped define what federal courts could do, such as review statutes for constitutionality, and what they could not do, such as decide abstract questions." Much of the earliest history of America should include the name of John Jay, but it does not, despite his contributions to its creation and establishment.

**References:** Jay, William, *The Life of John Jay: With Selections from His Correspondence and Miscellaneous Papers* (New York: Printed and Published by J. & J. Harper; two volumes, 1833), I:3-20; Morris, Richard B., "John Jay: The Making of a Revolutionary: Unpublished Papers, 1745-1780" (New York: HarperCollins, 1975); Monaghan, Frank, *John Jay: Defender of Liberty against Kings & Peoples, Author of the Constitution & Governor of New York, President of the Continental Congress, Co-Author of the Federalist, Negotiator of the Peace of 1783 & the Jay Treaty of 1794, First Chief Justice of the United States* (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1935); Morris, Richard, *Witnesses at the Creation: Hamilton, Madison, Jay and the Constitution* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1985); Bemis, Samuel Flagg, "Jay's Treaty: A Study in Commerce and Diplomacy" (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1923); Combs, Jerald A., "The Jay Treaty: Political Battleground of the Founding Fathers" (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970); Stahr, Walter, *John Jay: Founding Father* (New York: Hambledon, 2005), 386-87.

## Thomas Jefferson (1743 – 1826)

### Secretary of State

21 March 1790 – 3 March 1793

Few if any persons have had the impact on the formation of government and culture in American society during its more than two centuries of existence as has Thomas Jefferson. From the educational enrichment of his stately mansion, "Monticello" ("hillock" or "little mountain" in Italian), in Virginia, to his authorship of the Declaration of Independence and two terms as President of the United States, he changed the landscape of America in ways that are still being measured today. Yet his tenure as the second Secretary of State re-

mains one of the few periods of his life seldom explored or examined. Indeed, some historians consider him the first, because John Jay served but a short time as Secretary, and started off as the Secretary for Foreign Affairs under the Articles of Confederation.

### Early Years

Jefferson, born on 2 April 1743 (by the Julian calendar; other sources use the Gregorian calendar date of 13 April) at his father's estate, "Shadwell," in Goochland (now Albemarle) county, about three miles east of Charlottesville, Virginia, was the third child and eldest son of Peter Jefferson, a planter and surveyor, and his wife Jane (née Randolph) Jefferson. Peter Jefferson, who died when his son Thomas was 14, was descended from a long line of Jeffersons who originally immigrated to England from Mount Snowden, Wales, and then came to America as some of the first settlers of Virginia. Jane Randolph Jefferson was born in London in 1720, and had married Peter Jefferson when she was 19. Shortly after his son Thomas was born, Peter Jefferson was appointed as one of the Justices of the Peace for the area of Albemarle. His home, at Shadwell, was a fine estate, but the home burnt down in 1770, and the original site of the estate is unknown to this day, although the Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation is, as of this writing, conducting an archaeological examination to find the exact spot. Thomas Jefferson attended a preparatory school, then at William and Mary's College (now the College of William and Mary) in Williamsburg, Virginia, but left in 1762 without taking a degree. He studied the law under George Wythe, and, after being appointed to two of his father's posts, Justice of the Peace and vestryman, he was admitted to the Virginia bar in 1767 and engaged in a practice that same year. His father's death in 1757 had left him with an inheritance of the estate and 1,000 slaves.

On 11 May 1769, Jefferson was elected to the Virginia House of Burgesses, and was re-elected six times until 1775. The same year he took his seat he began construction on perhaps one of the most famous homes in America, Monticello. He formally moved into the home three miles from Charlottesville, Virginia, in 1770, and soon turned it into a center of learning and agricultural pursuits unparalleled in American history. Having married Martha Wayles Skelton in 1772, the death of his father-in-law, John Wayles, in 1772, left him with another tract of land of some 40,000 acres and an additional 135 slaves, doubling his estate.

Prior to 1774, Thomas Jefferson was merely a small time Virginia politician. That year, however, he wrote a series of instructions to the delegates of the First Continental Congress regarding their arguments for the independence of the United States; it was published that

year as *A Summary View of the Rights of British America* (and reprinted in England in 1774 under the same title), establishing him as a noted speaker on the rights of colonists. That same year, Jefferson was elected to Virginia's first provincial convention. The following year, he was elected to the Second Continental Congress, where he served until 1776. On 11 June 1776, he was appointed to a five-man committee established to draw up a document which called for the independence of the colonies from England. Jefferson wrote the first draft, a four-page document which was then altered and improved by the other committee members, which included Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, Robert Livingston, and Roger Sherman. Jefferson's initial draft included the famed phrase, "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." On 2 July 1776, this document was accepted by the Continental Congress, and proclaimed that same day as the Declaration of Independence. (It was not until a German printer in Philadelphia printed it, on 4 July, that it was made public; this date, rather than 2 July, is the celebratory date of American independence.) On 2 September Jefferson resigned from the Continental Congress, but on 7 October was elected a second time to the Virginia House of Burgesses. That same year, he assisted in the drafting of Virginia's first constitution.

The day after he was elected to the House of Burgesses, Jefferson was notified that he was elected by the Continental Congress as America's first Commissioner to France, to serve with Benjamin Franklin and Silas Deane, but on 11 October he declined the honor. In 1777, he authored "A Bill for Establishing Religious Freedom," which was enacted by the Virginia Assembly in 1786. In it, he wrote, "Almighty God hath created the mind free. All attempts to influence it by temporal punishments or burthens...are a departure from the plan of the Holy Author of our religion...No man shall be compelled to frequent or support any religious worship or ministry or shall otherwise suffer on account of his religious opinions or belief, but all men shall be free to profess and by argument to maintain, their opinions in matters of religion. I know but one code of morality for men whether acting singly or collectively." In January 1779, he was elected by the House of Burgesses as the Governor of Virginia, to succeed the patriot Patrick Henry. After he took office that June, he was instrumental in moving the state capital to Richmond. That

same year, he also founded the first professorship of law at William and Mary's College, his alma mater. He was re-elected in 1780, but declined a third term in 1781. In his two years as governor, he was forced to flee the capital four times because of the approach of British troops who threatened to invade. After he left the governor's mansion, he was elected a third time to the House of Burgesses.

On 13 November 1782, Jefferson was once again appointed by Congress as a commissioner to France, along with Benjamin Franklin and John Adams, to negotiate a treaty of peace, but he was stuck on a ship because of ice, and on 1 April 1783 his orders and appointment were canceled. On 6 June 1783, he was elected for a second time to Congress, and took his seat that November as the chairman of the committee on currency. On 7 May 1784, he was elected, for the third time, as a commissioner to France, with Franklin and Adams, this time with the goal of negotiating treaties of amity and commerce with the European powers. Jefferson accepted the commission and sailed to Europe on 5 July 1784. He arrived in Paris in August 1784, and, on 2 May 1785, he was appointed as Minister to Paris, to replace Franklin. In his *Autobiography*, Jefferson wrote:

*Mr. Adams being appointed Min. Plen. of the U. S. to London, left us in June, and in July 1785, Dr. Franklin returned to America, and I was appointed his successor at Paris. In Feb. 1786, Mr. Adams wrote to me pressingly to join him in London immediately, as he thought he discovered there some symptoms of better disposition towards us. Colo. Smith, his Secretary of legation, was the bearer of his urgencies for my immediate attendance. I accordingly left Paris on the 1st. of March, and on my arrival in London we agreed on a very summary form of treaty, proposing an exchange of citizenship for our citizens, our ships, and our productions generally, except as to office. On my presentation as usual to the King and Queen at their levees, it was impossible for anything to be more ungracious than their notice of Mr. Adams & myself. I saw at once that the ulcerations in the narrow mind of that mulish being left nothing to be expected on the subject of my attendance; and on the first conference with the Marquis of Caermarthen, his Minister of foreign affairs, the distance and disinclination which he betrayed in his conversation, the vagueness & evasions of his answers to us, confirmed me in the belief of their aversion to have anything to do with us.*

Jefferson remained at his post until 1789. During his time in France, Jefferson spent much time observing

European mannerisms and culture, especially governmental institutions. It was during this period that he penned *Notes on the State of Virginia*, which was published in Paris in 1785, in which he wrote, "God who gave us life gave us liberty. Can the liberties of a nation be secure when we have removed a conviction that these liberties are the gift of God? Indeed I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just, that his justice cannot sleep forever. Commerce between master and slave is despotism. Nothing is more certainly written in the book of fate that these people are to be free. Establish the law for educating the common people. This it is the business of the state to effect and on a general plan." Considered even by the French as a leading spokesman on religious and political freedom, they requested that he serve as an advisor to the French Assembly, but because of his diplomatic obligations he was forced to decline. Near the end of his tenure, he reported home in numerous letters the unfolding revolution which would sweep through France and result in the end for a time of the monarchy. A study of his letters at the time show that he came to detest the excesses of the revolution, and despised it more once Napoleon Bonaparte had taken command of the country.

### Named to the Cabinet

After working non-stop for four years, Jefferson was granted a six month's leave of absence, and he left France on 22 October 1789, landing in the United States on 23 November. When he arrived, he received a letter from President George Washington, dated 13 October, asking him to join his cabinet to serve as the Secretary of State. In the missive, Washington penned, "In the selection of Characters to fill the important offices of Government in the United States I was naturally led to contemplate the talents and disposition which I knew you to possess and entertain for the Service of your Country. And without being able to consult your inclination, or to derive any knowledge of your intentions from your letters either to myself or to any other of your friends, I was determined, as well by motives of private regard as a conviction of public propriety, to nominate you for the Department of State, which, under its present organization, involves many of the most interesting objects of the Executive Authority. But grateful as your acceptance of this Commission would be to me, I am at the same time desirous to accommodate to your wishes, and I have therefore forborne to nominate your successor at the Court of Versailles until I should be informed of your determination." Jefferson himself wrote, "On my way home...I received a letter from the President, General Washington, by express, covering an appointment to be Secretary of State. I received it with real regret. My wish had been to return to

Paris...and to send of the revolution, which I then thought would be certainly and happily closed in less than a year. I then meant to return home, to withdraw from public life, into which I had been impressed by the circumstances of the times, to sink into the bosom of my family and friends, and to devote myself to studies more congenial to my mind..." Jefferson accepted the post, and moved into quarters in New York City, then the administrative capital of the United States. Abigail Adams, wife of the then-Vice President (and later President) John Adams, wrote to her sister, "Mr. Jefferson is here, and adds much to the social circle." She called him "one of the choicest ones on Earth." On 16 June 1789, President Washington had sent to the Senate his first letter of nomination, naming William Short to replace Jefferson in Paris.

Almost from the moment that he accepted the State portfolio, Jefferson was mired in the work of moving the department from New York City to the new government home in Philadelphia. Once the move was underway, he wrote to William Temple Franklin, son of Benjamin, to acquire for him and the department in Philadelphia the quarters and offices which he wanted: "On further reflection it appears to me that the houses you mentioned of Mrs. Buddin', would suit me so perfectly that I must beg the favor of you to insure me the refusal of two of them adjoining to each other, on the best terms that you can...My object in taking two houses is to assign the lower floor of both to my public offices, and the first floor and both gardens entirely to my own use. Perhaps the third floor of one of them might also be necessary for dead office papers, machines, &c. I should wish for such a gallery on the back of the building as I erected here...A good neighbor is a very desirable thing. Mr. Randolph the Attorney Genl. is probably now in Philadelphia, & I think would like the same part of the town. I wish the 3d. house (my two being secured) could be proposed to him."

On 24 May 1790, Senator William Maclay of Pennsylvania met Jefferson for the first time, and described the Secretary of State in his *Journal*:

*Jefferson is a slender Man; has rather the Air of Stiffness in his manner; his cloaths [sic] seem too small for him; he sits in a lounging Manner on one hip, commonly, and with one of his shoulders elevated much above the other. His face has a scrumpy [sic; possibly scrawny] aspect. His Whole figures has a loose shackling Air. He had a rambling Vacant look & and nothing of that firm collected deportment which I expected would dignify the presence of a Secretary or Minister. I looked for gravity, but a laxity of Manner seemed shed about him. He spoke almost without ceasing. But even his discourse partook of his personal demeanor. It*

*was lax & rambling and Yet he scattered information wherever he went, and some even brilliant sentiments sparkled from him. The information which he Us respecting foreign Ministers & ca. Was all high Spiced. He had been long enough abroad to catch the tone of European folly.*

During his tenure as Secretary of State, a period which lasted from 22 March 1790 until he left office on 31 December 1793, Jefferson was plagued with migraine headaches and fought the influence of Alexander Hamilton in the cabinet. Historian Margaret Christman writes, "Patent applications, rather than foreign affairs, occupied the greatest share of his time. Under the law enacted in 1790, a three-man board composed of the secretaries of state and wars, together with the attorney general, examined all inventions. To Jefferson fell the task of determining whether or not a patent was justified. 'Many of them indeed are trifling,' Jefferson wrote on 27 June 1790, 'but there are some of great consequence which have been proved by practice, and others which if they stand the same proof will produce great effect.'" As per his mandate instructed from Congress, Jefferson submitted a report to the House of Representatives for a uniform system of weights and measures to be used nationwide, but his plan was never adopted. However, perhaps one of the early Republic's greatest documents was a state paper composed by Jefferson on the matter of the recognition of the Republic of France. In a letter to Gouverneur Morris, who was serving at the time as the United States Minister to France in Jefferson's place, Jefferson wrote, "We surely cannot deny to any nation that right whereon our own government is founded - that everyone may govern itself according to whatever form it pleases and change these forms at its own will; and that it may transact its business with foreign nations through whatever organ it thinks proper, whether king, convention, assembly, committee, president, or anything it may choose. The will of the nation is the only thing essential to be regarded." In a report to Congress, dated 16 December 1793, shortly before he left office, he laid out a plan of "Commercial Privileges and Restrictions."

Historian Graham Stuart writes of Jefferson's tenure as Secretary of State, "It was well that Jefferson was a natural administrator, because the Department of State was the catchall of duties which were definitely not assigned elsewhere. In fact, Jefferson himself described the Department of State as embracing the whole domestic administration (war and finance excepted). President Washington deposited official letters, even those concerning other departments, in the State Department; and all applications for office were turned over to it. When civil appointments were made by the President, he used the Secretary of State as the agency for

the transmission of the commissions of appointment. Originally, Jefferson expected the postal service to be under his jurisdiction, and with Postmaster General Pickering worked out a scheme to accelerate the mail service; but Washington preferred the post office to be under the Treasury Department. On the other hand, the mint, which seemingly was closer to the Treasury Department, was definitely assigned to the Department of State.” Stuart concludes, “In evaluating Jefferson’s work as the ‘first’ Secretary of State, despite his being official considered as the second man to hold that office, it must be conceded that he does not perhaps rate a position as one of the greatest who has held the office.” Nonetheless, historian David S. Patterson explains, “Jefferson deserves high marks for his thoughtful and innovative administration of the Department of State, but he was less successful as a diplomat. In part, Jefferson was eclipsed by President Washington, who often served as his own Secretary of State. The President also consulted Treasury Secretary Alexander Hamilton on foreign policy. Hamilton’s strong preference for an Anglophile, aristocratic, mercantile elite increasingly clashed with Jefferson’s Francophile sentiments and identification with the democratic, agrarian masses.” Jefferson’s fame rests on other parts of his life, both public and private.

What marked the end of Jefferson’s cabinet service was his constant feud with Secretary of the Treasury Alexander Hamilton. Hamilton considered Jefferson to be a radical demagogue; Jefferson, on the other hand, thought of Hamilton as a threat to democratic government. The two argued vociferously in an attempt to sway Washington’s foreign and domestic policies. Finally, angered by the unceasing quarrels over policy with Hamilton, who left the cabinet before Jefferson did, Jefferson formally resigned by sending a letter to Washington on 31 December 1793. In his reply, the president wrote, “I cannot suffer you to leave your station, without assuring you, that the opinion which I had formed of your integrity and talents, and which dictated your original nomination, has been confirmed by the fullest experience; and that both have been eminently displayed in the discharge of your duties.” Washington selected Attorney General Edmund Randolph to succeed Jefferson.

### After Leaving Office

As for the first Secretary of State, he retired to his home at Monticello for three years, remodeling his spacious home and experimenting with numerous agricultural pursuits, including a winery. “Architecture is my delight,” he wrote to a friend of his work, “and putting up and pulling down, one of my favorite amusements.” But he remained constantly involved in local and na-

tional politics, writing to numerous friends and exchanging ideas. His concern over the impressment of American soldiers by British ships led him to write on 2 June 1794 to George Hammond, the British minister to the United States, “the impressions cannot be counteracted too soon...But let these facts be as they may...ought they ultimately produce a state of war?”

In 1796, Jefferson was selected as a candidate for President to succeed Washington; in the House of Representatives, he received the second highest number of electoral votes, and because at that time there were no “tickets” with presidential and vice presidential candidates, electoral competitors stood on their own. Vice President John Adams came in first with 71 electoral votes, and was elected President, while Jefferson was a close second with 68. Thus Thomas Jefferson, who had resigned from the cabinet three short years earlier and had gone into retirement at his home in Virginia, was elected as the second Vice President of the United States. During his single four-year term in the position, Jefferson disagreed with Adams over numerous issues. When Adams’ Federalist Party enacted the Alien and Sedition Acts in 1798 to stifle dissent, Jefferson, working with James Madison, drafted the so-called Kentucky and Virginia resolutions, in which they asserted that states could nullify certain federal laws if they were clearly unconstitutional. Because of the unpopularity of the acts Adams was defeated for reelection in 1800, with Jefferson tied with Aaron Burr for the office of President with 73 electoral votes apiece, necessitating a vote in the House of Representatives in which Jefferson was selected as president and Burr as vice president. Thomas Jefferson thus took office as the third president of the United States on 4 March 1801, the first president to be sworn into office in Washington, D.C. In his inaugural address, he said, “Friends and Fellow-Citizens: Called upon to undertake the duties of the first executive office of our country, I avail myself of the presence of that portion of my fellow-citizens which is here assembled to express my grateful thanks for the favor with which they have been pleased to look toward me, to declare a sincere consciousness that the task is above my talents, and that I approach it with those anxious and awful presentiments which the greatness of the charge and the weakness of my powers so justly inspire. A rising nation, spread over a wide and fruitful land, traversing all the seas with the rich productions of their industry, engaged in commerce with nations who feel power and forget right, advancing rapidly to destinies beyond the reach of mortal eye - when I contemplate these transcendent objects, and see the honor, the happiness, and the hopes of this beloved country committed to the issue, and the auspices of this day, I shrink from the contemplation, and humble

myself before the magnitude of the undertaking. Utterly, indeed, should I despair did not the presence of many whom I here see remind me that in the other high authorities provided by our Constitution I shall find resources of wisdom, of virtue, and of zeal on which to rely under all difficulties. To you, then, gentlemen, who are charged with the sovereign functions of legislation, and to those associated with you, I look with encouragement for that guidance and support which may enable us to steer with safety the vessel in which we are all embarked amidst the conflicting elements of a troubled world.”

Jefferson was reelected in 1804, and served as president until he left office on 4 March 1809. A discussion of his presidency would show that while he was not one of the most successful presidents in American history, several important events occurred. Perhaps the most significant was Jefferson’s acquisition in 1803, from Napoleonic France, of the Louisiana Territory in a deal for \$15 million dollars (about 3 cents an acre for the 512 million acres involved), ending French influence in America and doubling the size of the nation as a whole. In 1804, he sent explorers Meriwether Lewis and William Clark to explore and investigate the areas which today are part of the northwestern United States. Working closely with an eminent cabinet, including Secretary of State James Madison and Secretary of the Treasury Albert Gallatin, he slashed expenditures for the army and navy, and did away with a tax on whiskey which had led to internal discontent. By the conclusion of his first term, the national deficit had been cut by a third. He ran for a second term to vindicate his first, concentrating more in the second four years on foreign affairs. In 1805, he helped conclude a peace in the Tripolitan War (1801-05), in which the United States Navy had been used for the first time. Vice President Aaron Burr, who had killed former Secretary of the Treasury Alexander Hamilton in a duel in 1804, was later tried (but acquitted) for treasonously attempting to establish an independent republic inside the borders of the United States. Jefferson dealt swiftly with the Chesapeake Affair (1807), in which a British ship, the *Leopard*, attacked an American ship, the *Chesapeake*. However, Jefferson closed his administration by passing the Embargo Act in December 1807, in which all British and French exports were prohibited from American ports in an effort to get those two nations to recognize American rights on the sea. The act backfired on Jefferson, and led to the resurgence of the moribund Federalist party. Jefferson signed into law the decree repealing the Embargo Act just prior to his leaving office; in the short term, the action crippled the economy of the United States and contributed to the bad feelings which led to the War of 1812 with Britain. The act’s long-term

consequences, however, led to a spirit of independence amongst American industries, leading to the Industrial Revolution just a few years later. Jefferson came to hate the presidency, as its minuscule salary cost him more than \$11,000 during his terms in office. As he left office, he wrote, “Never did a prisoner released from his chains feel such relief as I shall on shaking off the shackles of power.” He offered his large library of books to the nation after the British invaded and burned down the Capitol; this collection became the foundation of the Library of Congress.

In what became the last two decades of his life, Jefferson remained at Monticello, and helped to establish the University of Virginia at Charlottesville in 1819, with his design and conceptions, and he assisted in the construction and the hiring of faculty for the school. He also made peace with Adams, and their correspondence to each other in the last years of both men’s lives is one of the most important in our nation’s history. In a letter to one Samuel Kercheval on 12 July 1826, Jefferson wrote, “I am not an advocate for frequent changes in laws and constitutions, but laws and institutions must go hand in hand with the progress of the human mind. As that becomes more developed, more enlightened, as new discoveries are made, new truths discovered and manners and opinions change, with the change of circumstances, institutions must advance also to keep pace with the times. We might as well require a man to wear still the coat which fitted him when a boy as civilized society to remain ever under the regimen of their barbarous ancestors.”

In January 1826, at the age of 82, Jefferson found himself broke. Although he was at one time one of the largest land owners in Virginia, he lived extravagantly, and spent more money than he ever made. The money which Congress paid him for his library - \$23,950 - was quickly spent. Eventually he was in debt for more than \$107,000. He then came up with an idea for a national lottery, run by his grandson, Jefferson Randolph. Two of Jefferson’s political enemies, John Randolph and John Marshall, purchased batches of tickets; because, Randolph wrote, “Out of pity that the author of Declaration of Independence has suffered public humiliation.” The lottery - called the “Jefferson Lottery” - was a bust, and brought in only half of the needed \$107,000. Jefferson died on 4 July 1826 - the 50th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration - still in debt. His home was sold at auction, and it took the machinations of one Uriah Levy to purchase the home and donate it to the nation as a gift. It is now a major tourist attraction.

Jefferson was buried on the grounds of his beloved Monticello. His epitaph, which he desired should neglect to mention that he ever served as President of the