

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 Arriquirar, 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