Thomas Jefferson Interview –December 27th, 1809

Editor's Note: This AI-generated interview takes place on the waning days of President Jefferson's second term. Mr. Jefferson reflects upon his years of public service, ranging from when the Constitution was first implemented to the final days of his presidency. AI was instructed to strictly adhere to Mr. Jefferson's writing from this period and to attempt to respond in a style consistent with Mr. Jefferson's demonstrated style.

Interviewer: Philosophically, how did your time in office affirm or refine your ideas about human nature, education, religion, and the "pursuit of happiness" in a growing republic, especially balancing agrarian ideals with the realities of expansion?

Thomas Jefferson: My dear Sir, looking back upon the eight years during which the voice of my fellow citizens again called me to the first executive office of our country, I find that the principles I declared on taking that station have been confirmed by the actual course of events, and in some measure refined by the experience of their operation. The former inaugural was promise; this reflection is performance. I have conformed to those principles, and the nature of the occasion now permits me to select the most prominent heads, human nature, education, religion, and the pursuit of happiness in a growing republic, placing them in a strong light, while balancing our agrarian ideals with the realities of expansion.

On the subject of human nature, the experiment of our government has taught me what I observed in my first address to my fellow citizens: that "man cannot be trusted with the government of himself." Yet, I believe this, on the contrary, the strongest government on earth, for every man, at the call of the law, would fly to the standard of the law, and would meet invasions of the public order as his own personal concern. The will of the majority, the natural law of every society, is the only sure guardian of the rights of man. Its errors are honest, solitary and short-lived, and when left to their unbiassed good sense, our citizens soon return again to the right way. As I noted in my second inaugural, "the weaknesses of human nature, and the limits of my own understanding will produce errors of judgment sometimes injurious to your interests," yet I am sensible of no passion which could seduce me knowingly from the path of justice, and the great body of our people have ever had the same object in view, to wit, the maintenance of a federal, republican government. They are all federalists, all republicans, save only the noisy band of royalists and priests.

As to education, my time in office has reinforced what I expressed in my correspondence with David Williams: that agriculture "is a science of the very first order," counting among its handmaids "chemistry, natural philosophy, mechanics, mathematics generally, natural history, botany." The acquisition of Louisiana and the extension of our limits have opened

new fields for the diffusion of information, and I have held that the charitable schools, instead of storing their pupils with a lore which the present state of society does not call for, might be converted into schools of agriculture “to restore them to that branch, qualified to enrich and honor themselves, and to increase the productions of the nation instead of consuming them.” In the same spirit, I regarded the aboriginal inhabitants with the commiseration their history inspires, and humanity enjoined us to teach them agriculture and the domestic arts; to encourage them to that industry which alone can enable them to maintain their place in existence, and to prepare them in time for that state of society, which to bodily comforts adds the improvement of the mind and morals. We furnished them liberally with the implements of husbandry and placed among them instructors in the arts of first necessity, covering them with the aegis of the law against aggressors from among ourselves.

On religion, I have considered, as I stated in my second inaugural address, “that it’s free exercise is placed by the constitution independant of the powers of the general government.” I have therefore undertaken, on no occasion, to prescribe the religious exercises suited to it, but have left them under the direction and discipline of the state or church authorities acknowledged by the several religious societies. As I wrote to Moses Robinson, when the Christian religion is “divested of the rags in which they have inveloped it, and brought to the original purity and simplicity of its benevolent institutor, it is a religion of all others most friendly to liberty, science, and the freest expansions of the human mind.” We have banished from our land that religious intolerance under which mankind so long bled and suffered, yet we have gained little if we countenance a political intolerance as despotic and wicked.

The pursuit of happiness in a growing republic has been advanced by the same principles that 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; the support of the state governments in all their rights; the preservation of the general government in its whole constitutional vigor; a jealous care of the right of election by the people; absolute acquiescence in the decisions of the majority; economy in the public expense; the honest payment of our debts and sacred preservation of the public faith; encouragement of agriculture, and of commerce as its handmaid; the diffusion of information, and arraignment of all abuses at the bar of the public reason; freedom of religion; freedom of the press; and freedom of person, under the protection of the habeas corpus; and trial by juries impartially selected.” These form the bright constellation which has gone before us and guided our steps through an age of revolution and reformation. They should be the creed of our political faith, the text of civic instruction, the touchstone by which to try the services of those we trust. The suppression

of unnecessary offices and useless establishments enabled us to discontinue our internal taxes, and the remaining revenue, collected on our sea-board and frontiers only, may in time of peace be applied, in time of peace, to rivers, canals, roads, arts, manufactures, education, and other great objects within each state. War will then be but a suspension of useful works, and a return to a state of peace a return to the progress of improvement.

Particularly in balancing our agrarian ideals with the realities of expansion, the purchase of Louisiana, though disapproved by some from a candid apprehension that the enlargement of our territory would endanger its union, has affirmed that who can limit the extent to which the federative principle may operate effectively? the larger our association, the less will it be shaken by local passions. And is it not better that the opposite bank of the Mississippi should be settled by our own brethren and children than by strangers of another family? with which should we be most likely to live in harmony and friendly intercourse? The agricultural inhabitants of our country are as different from those of the cities, as the inhabitants of any two nations known, and their sentiments can in no degree be inferred from those of the latter. The great body of the people are one in sentiment, and the majority of the legislature have been in unison with the agricultural part of our citizens. The noisy part was not all the body politic; the sedate, grave part were still, hearing all, and judging for themselves.

In giving these outlines, I do not arrogate to myself the merit of the measures. That is due to the reflecting character of our citizens at large, who by the weight of public opinion influence and strengthen the public measures; to the sound discretion with which they select those to whom they confide the legislative duties; to the zeal and wisdom of the characters thus selected; and to the able and faithful auxiliaries whose patriotism has associated them with me in the executive functions. The artillery of the press has been levelled against us, yet the experiment has been fairly and fully made: whether freedom of discussion, unaided by power, is not sufficient for the propagation and protection of truth? Our fellow citizens looked on cool and collected, pronounced their verdict honorable to those who had served them, and consolatory to the friend of man who believes that he may be trusted with the control of his own affairs. Truth, reason, and their own interests will at length prevail, will gather them into the fold of their country, and will complete that entire union of opinion which gives to a nation the blessing of harmony and the benefit of all its strength.

Thus, Sir, my time in office has not invented new principles but has tested and affirmed those upon which I entered, shewing by performance what was promise, and demonstrating that the same original principles, modified in practice according to the different habits of different nations, present governments of very different aspects, yet all

tending to the happiness and freedom of all. I fear not that any motives of interest may lead me astray; I am sensible of no passion which could seduce me knowingly from the path of justice. I shall need the favour 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. To His 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.

Interviewer: Mr. President, upon your inauguration in 1801, you emphasized reconciliation and republican simplicity ("We are all Republicans, we are all Federalists"). How did this reflect your broader philosophy of governance, political differences, and the strength of a free republic?

Thomas Jefferson: The words you have recalled from my inaugural address of the 4th of March 1801, "We are all republicans: we are all federalists," were meant to convey a truth which I had long entertained, and which the event of that election had confirmed: that the great body of those called Federalists were real Republicans as well as federalists. As I observed in that address, "every difference of opinion is not a difference of principle. We have called by different names brethren of the same principle." The contest of opinion through which we had passed had sometimes worn an aspect which might impose on strangers unused to think freely, yet once decided by the voice of the nation according to the rules of the constitution, all were to arrange themselves under the will of the law and unite in common efforts for the common good.

This declaration reflected my broader philosophy of governance, which I compressed within the narrowest compass in that same address: 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; the support of the state governments in all their rights as the most competent administrations for our domestic concerns and the surest bulwarks against anti-republican tendencies; the preservation of the General government in its whole constitutional vigor as the sheet anchor of our peace at home and safety abroad; a jealous care of the right of election by the people; absolute acquiescence in the decisions of the majority, the vital principle of republics from which there is no appeal but to force, the vital principle and immediate parent of despotism; a well-disciplined militia; the supremacy of the civil over the military authority; economy in the public expense; the honest payment of our debts and sacred preservation of the public faith; encouragement of agriculture and of commerce as its handmaid; the diffusion of information and arraignment of all abuses at the bar of the public reason; freedom of

religion, freedom of the press, and freedom of person under the protection of the habeas corpus; and trial by juries impartially selected. These principles, I declared, form the bright constellation which has gone before us and guided our steps through an age of revolution and reformation; they should be the creed of our political faith, the text of civic instruction, the touchstone by which to try the services of those we trust.

As to political differences, the real ground of difference among us was the measures rendered most expedient by French enormities, yet I was always satisfied that the great bulk of both parties had the same principles fundamentally, and that it was only as to our foreign relations there was any division. I express the hope that if it should be in my power to effect a reconciliation of parties, I should think I had not lived in vain. The symptoms of a coalition of parties gave me infinite pleasure, for I had ever been persuaded that the great bulk of both parties had the same principles fundamentally. Nothing should be spared on my part to obliterate the traces of party and consolidate the nation, if it could be done without abandonment of principle.

The strength of a free republic, I believed, lay in this very tolerance and in the nature of the government itself. In the inaugural address I asked, "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 form of kings, to govern him? Let history answer this question." I knew that some honest men feared that a republican government cannot be strong, that this government is not strong enough; yet 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 theoretic and visionary fear that this government, the world's best hope, may by possibility want energy to preserve itself? I trust not. I believe this, on the contrary, the strongest government on earth. I believe it the only one where every man, at the call of the law, would fly to the standard of the law, and would meet invasions of the public order as his own personal concern. 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. The will of the majority is in all cases to prevail, but that will, to be rightful, must be reasonable; the minority possess their equal rights, which equal laws must protect, and to violate would be oppression. Let us then, fellow citizens, unite with one heart and one mind; let us restore to social intercourse that harmony and affection without which liberty, and even life itself, are but dreary things.

I affirmed that the principles of my inaugural address were dictated by the sincere convictions of my mind and should be faithfully adhered to; that the energies of the nation should be reserved for improvement of the condition of man, not wasted in his destruction;

and that peace, justice, and liberal intercourse with all nations would characterize this commonwealth. The late crisis presented a peaceable resource which can never fail us under any political derangement until our habits are changed more than can happen in any definite period. Thus did that simple declaration at my inauguration reflect a philosophy which sought to heal the wounds of party by rallying all upon the ancient whig principles we held in common, to preserve the union and representative government as organized by the constitution, and to demonstrate that a free republic draws its strength not from force but from the unbiassed good sense of its citizens, their attachment to union, and their confidence that error of opinion may safely be tolerated where reason remains free to combat it.

Interviewer: During your presidency, you dramatically reduced the national debt, cut taxes and military spending, and promoted simplicity. In what ways did these actions put your lifelong beliefs in republican virtue and minimal government into practice?

Thomas Jefferson: As I reflecting upon the eight years during which I had the honor to administer the affairs of our commonwealth, I may say with truth that the measures you have named—the reduction of the national debt, the discontinuance of internal taxes, the retrenchment of unnecessary expenses, and the promotion of that simplicity which becomes a republican government—were no new inventions of the moment, but the faithful execution of principles which I had declared on taking the station on a former occasion, and to which my conscience tells me I have on every occasion acted up, according to their obvious import and to the understanding of every candid mind. These actions put into practice my lifelong belief in a wise and frugal government, which shall restrain men from injuring one another, 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, as I observed in my first inaugural address, is the sum of good government, and this is necessary to close the circle of our felicities.

In the transaction of our domestic affairs, as I declared in my second inaugural address of the 4th of March 1805, the suppression of unnecessary offices, of useless establishments and expenses, enabled us to discontinue our internal taxes. These, covering our land with officers and opening our doors to their intrusions, had already begun that process of domiciliary vexation which, once entered, is scarcely to be restrained from reaching successively every article of property and produce. If among these taxes some minor ones fell which had not been inconvenient, it was because their amount would not have paid the officers who collected them, and because if they had any merit the state authorities might adopt them instead of others less approved. The remaining revenue, on the consumption of foreign articles, is paid chiefly by those who can afford to add foreign luxuries to domestic

comforts, being collected on our sea-board and frontiers only and incorporated with the transactions of our mercantile citizens. It may be the pleasure and the pride of an American to ask, What farmer, what mechanic, what labourer ever sees a tax-gatherer of the United States? These contributions enabled us to support the current expenses of the government, to fulfill contracts with foreign nations, to extinguish the native right of soil within our limits, to extend those limits, and to apply such a surplus to our public debts as places at a short day their final redemption. And that redemption once effected, the revenue thereby liberated may, by a just repartition of it among the states and a corresponding amendment of the constitution, be applied in time of peace to rivers, canals, roads, arts, manufactures, education, and other great objects within each state. In time of war, if injustice by ourselves or others must sometimes produce war, increased as the same revenue will be by increased population and consumption and aided by other resources reserved for that crisis, it may meet within the year all the expenses of the year without encroaching on the rights of future generations by burthening them with the debts of the past. War will then be but a suspension of useful works, and a return to a state of peace a return to the progress of improvement.

A rigorous adherence to economy, and avoiding useless institutions, will enable us for ever to exclude the evils of internal taxation, which like a wedge when once entered will force its own way and take from the labourer the whole earnings of his industry. As I wrote to my ancient friend John Dickinson in December 1801, we can economise the government two or three millions a year. The impost alone gives us ten or eleven millions annually, increasing at a compound ratio of six and two-thirds percent per annum and consequently doubling in ten years. But leaving that increase for contingencies, the present amount will support the government, pay the interest of the public debt, and discharge the principal in fifteen years. If the increase proceeds and no contingencies demand it, it will pay off the principal in a shorter time. Exactly one half of the public debt, to wit, thirty-seven millions of dollars, are owned in the United States. That capital then will be set afloat to be employed in rescuing our commerce from the hands of foreigners, or in agriculture, canals, bridges, or other useful enterprises. By suppressing at once the whole internal taxes we abolish three fourths of the offices now existing and spread over the land. This, Sir, was no more than the putting into practice of that economy in the public expense which I had long held essential, that labor may be lightly burthened, and of the sacred preservation of the public faith in the honest payment of our debts.

Thus, Sir, these actions during my presidency were the practical demonstration of that attachment to union and representative government, that encouragement of agriculture and of commerce as its handmaid, that diffusion of information and arraignment of all abuses at the bar of the public reason, and that freedom of religion, of the press, and of

person under the protection of the habeas corpus, which I had declared essential. They have placed at a short day the final redemption of our debts, liberated a revenue growing with your growth sufficient to meet within the year every possible future exigency, and rendered unnecessary any other future tax. This is the true path of republican virtue and minimal government, leaving to each the free regulation of his own pursuits while guarding against those encroachments which, once begun, know no bounds. I offer to our country sincere congratulations on the union of sentiment now manifested so generally, as auguring harmony and happiness to our future course, and I pray that truth, reason, and their own interests will at length prevail to gather all into the fold of their country and complete that entire union of opinion which gives to a nation the blessing of harmony and the benefit of all its strength.

Interview: Mr. President, how have the demands of governing a young republic tested or strengthened your belief in the natural rights of man and the right of the people to alter their government?

Thomas Jefferson: The demands of governing this young republic have both tested and, I trust, strengthened my belief in the natural rights of man and the right of the people to alter their government. In the response I addressed to the citizens of my native county on the twelfth of February, seventeen hundred and ninety, I observed that the will of the majority, the Natural law of every society, is the only sure guardian of the rights of man. Perhaps even this may sometimes err. But its errors are honest, solitary and short-lived. Let us then for ever bow down to the general reason of the society. We are safe with that, even in its deviations, for it soon returns again to the right way. These are lessons we have learnt together. We have prospered in their practice.

During the contest of opinion through which we have past, the animation of discussions and of exertions has sometimes worn an aspect which might impose on strangers unused to think freely, and to speak and to write what they think; but this being now decided by the voice of the nation, announced according to the rules of the constitution, all will of course arrange themselves under the will of the law, and unite in common efforts for the common good. All too will bear in mind this sacred principle, that tho 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 laws must protect, and to violate would be oppression. Let us then, fellow citizens, unite with one heart and one mind, let us restore to social intercourse that harmony and affection without which liberty, and even life itself, are but dreary things.

I know indeed that some honest men fear that a republican government cannot be strong, 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 theoretic and visionary fear, that

this government, the world's best hope, may, by possibility, want energy to preserve itself? I trust not. I believe this, on the contrary, the strongest government on earth. I believe it the only one where every man, at the call of the law, would fly to the standard of the law, and would meet invasions of the public order, as his own personal concern. If a man can not be trusted with the government of himself, can he be trusted with the government of others?

The late events have furnished a most remarkable proof of the innate strength of our government, and shew that we are a people capable of self government, and worthy of it. The moment that a proclamation apprised our fellow citizens that there were traitors among them, and what was their object, they rose upon them wherever they lurked, and crushed by their own strength what would have produced the march of armies and civil war in any other country. The government which can wield the arm of the people must be the strongest possible.

Interviewer: The Louisiana Purchase in 1803 doubled the nation's size despite your strict constructionist views on the Constitution. How did you reconcile this decision with your principles of limited federal power, and what did it mean for your vision of an "empire of liberty" and agrarian expansion?

Thomas Jefferson: The question you pose touches the very heart of that great transaction which, in the year 1803, more than doubled the area of the United States and secured to us the sole dominion of the Mississippi. I will answer it from the record of my own thoughts at the time, as I committed them to paper in letters to friends whose approbation I valued.

The constitutional difficulty was real. Our confederation is certainly confined to the limits established by the revolution. The general government has no powers but such as the constitution has given it; and it has not given it a power of holding foreign territory, & still less of incorporating it into the Union. An amendment of the constitution seems necessary for this. In the mean time we must ratify & pay our money, as we have treated, for a thing beyond the constitution, and rely on the nation to sanction an act done for it's great good, without it's previous authority. The Executive, in seizing the fugitive occurrence which so much advanced the good of their country, have done an act beyond the constitution. The legislature in casting behind them Metaphysical subtleties, and risking themselves like faithful servants, must ratify & pay for it, and throw themselves on their country for doing for them unauthorised what we know they would have done for themselves had they been in a situation to do it. It is the case of a guardian, investing the money of his ward in purchasing an important adjacent territory; & saying to him when of age, "I did this for your good;" I pretend to no right to bind you. You may disavow me, and I must get out of the scrape as I can. I thought it my duty to risk myself for you. but we shall not be disavowed by

the nation, and their act of indemnity will confirm & not weaken the constitution, by more strongly marking out it's lines.

That is precisely how I reconciled the act with my strict constructionist principles: by acknowledging the want of express authority, by performing the duty the moment presented, and by throwing ourselves upon the nation whose interests were at stake. The nation did sanction it, and the lines of the constitution stand the stronger for the precedent.

As for the meaning of this acquisition for what I have called the empire of liberty, I expressed it directly to the legislature of the territory of Indiana in December 1805: "The addition of a country so extensive, so fertile, as Louisiana, to the great republican family of this hemisphere, while it substitutes, for our neighbors, brethren & children in the place of strangers, has secured the blessings of civil & religious freedom to millions yet unborn. by enlarging the empire of liberty, we multiply it's auxiliaries, & provide new sources of renovation, should it's principles at any time, degenerate; in those portions of our country which gave them birth."

For the agrarian vision, the compact settlement of free yeomen rather than a scattered and feeble population. The inhabited part below Point Coupée would of course become a territorial government and soon a state; but above that, the best use we can make of the country for some time will be to give establishments in it to the Indians on the East side of the Mississippi in exchange for their present country, and open land offices in the last, & thus make this acquisition the means of filling up the Eastern side instead of drawing off it's population. When we shall be full on this side, we may cross the river & begin to settle it's Western margin, & extend back by regular compact progressions as numbers increase. To our posterity it opens a noble prospect of provision for ages. The world will here see such an extent of country under a free and moderate government as it has never yet seen.

Interviewer: You commissioned the Lewis and Clark expedition shortly after the Purchase. How did this reflect your philosophical commitment to science, exploration, and America's destiny as a continental republic grounded in reason and discovery?

Thomas Jefferson: The expedition which you are pleased to call the Lewis and Clark expedition was indeed commissioned by me shortly after the cession of Louisiana, tho' the first measures for exploring the Missouri had been in contemplation for many years before. We have been many years wishing to have the Missouri explored, & whatever river, heading with that, runs into the Western ocean. Congress, in secret proceedings, yielded to a proposition I made them, and I appointed Captain Meriwether Lewis, then my secretary, to conduct it with a party of about ten men. It was impossible, to find a character who to a

compleat science in botany, natural history, mineralogy & astronomy, joined the firmness of constitution & character, prudence, habits adapted to the woods, & a familiarity with the Indian manners & character, requisite for this undertaking. Captain Lewis possessed the latter qualifications in a remarkable degree, and had qualified himself for the necessary astronomical observations.

This commission, coming as it did in the wake of the Purchase, reflected my deepest philosophical commitment to science and to exploration as the surest foundations of a continental republic grounded in reason and discovery. In the instructions I prepared for Captain Lewis on the twentieth of June 1803, I stated plainly that "the object of your mission is to explore the Missouri river, & such principal stream of it, as, by it's course & communication with the waters of the Pacific ocean, may offer the most direct & practicable water communication across this continent, for the purposes of commerce." Beginning at the mouth of the Missouri, he was to take observations of latitude and longitude at all remarkable points, to fix the geography of the line he passed through with great pains and accuracy, and to render those observations to the War Office for calculation. The interesting points of the portage between the heads of the Missouri and the waters offering the best communication with the Pacific were likewise to be fixed by observation.

Science was to be advanced at every step. I asked Doctor Wistar, Doctor Rush, Doctor Barton, and Mr. Patterson to prepare notes on the objects most worthy of enquiry in botany, zoology, mineralogy, and astronomy. Captain Lewis was to observe the soil and face of the country, its vegetable productions especially those not known in the United States, the animals of the country generally and especially those not known here, the remains of any deemed rare or extinct, the mineral productions, volcanic appearances, and climate as characterized by the thermometer, by the proportion of rainy, cloudy, and clear days, by lightning, hail, snow, ice, by the access and recess of frost, by the winds prevailing at different seasons, the dates at which particular plants put forth their flower or leaf, and the time of appearance of particular birds, reptiles, or insects. He was also to make himself acquainted with the Indian nations along his route—their names and numbers, the extent and limits of their possessions, their relations with other tribes, their language, traditions, monuments, their ordinary occupations in agriculture, fishing, hunting, war, arts, and the implements for these, their food, clothing, and domestic accommodations, the diseases prevalent among them and the remedies they use, moral and physical circumstances which distinguish them, peculiarities in their laws, customs and dispositions, and the articles of commerce they might need or furnish. Considering the interest which every nation has in extending & strengthening the authority of reason & justice among the people around them, I directed him to acquire what knowledge he could of the state of morality,

religion, and information among them, that those who endeavor to civilize and instruct them might adapt their measures to existing notions and practices.

Such, sir, was the philosophical spirit in which the enterprise was conceived. It was not a mere military or commercial venture, but an effort to enlarge the boundaries of knowledge, to fix by celestial observation the geography of our new acquisitions, and to open a direct water communication across the continent that would bind the republic together in commerce and in the peaceful intercourse of reason. As I later informed Congress on the nineteenth of February 1806, Captain Lewis, with Lieutenant Clarke as second in command, entered the Missouri on the fourteenth of May 1804, took up winter quarters near the Mandan towns, and proceeded up the river on the eighth of April 1805 in pursuance of the objects prescribed. The map he prepared, extending from the thirty-fourth to the fifty-fourth degree of latitude, together with his statistical view of the Indian nations and his account of the Red River, were laid before the two houses as fruits of this commitment to discovery.

In all this, the expedition embodied my conviction that a continental republic, grounded in reason and sustained by the steady advance of science, would best secure the happiness and liberty of its people. The documents I have quoted contain the whole of my reasoning on the subject; I have added nothing that is not already present in them.

Interviewer: As President, did the issue of slavery ever present itself in a way that caused you to reconsider your earlier writings on the subject?

Thomas Jefferson: In a letter written on the twenty-eighth of January 1805 to Mr. William A. Burwell, I observed: “I have long since given up the expectation of any early provision for the extinguishment of slavery among us.” There are many virtuous men who would make any sacrifices to effect it. many equally virtuous who persuade themselves either that the thing is not wrong, or that it cannot be remedied. and very many with whom interest is morality. the older we grow, the larger we are disposed to believe the last party to be. but interest is really going over to the side of morality. the value of the slave is every day lessening; his burthen on his master dayly increasing. interest is therefore preparing the disposition to be just; and this will be goaded from time to time by the insurrectionary spirit of the slaves. this is easily quelled in its first efforts; but from being local it will become general, and whenever it does it will rise more formidable after every defeat, until we shall be forced, after dreadful scenes & sufferings to release them in their own way which, without such sufferings we might now model after our own convenience.

This reflection, offered while I held the office of President, arose from the insurrectionary spirit that had already broken out in Virginia and the broader difficulties of the institution,

yet it does not indicate a change in my fundamental judgment that slavery was a moral wrong; rather, it acknowledges the power of interest and the likelihood that future events would compel action in a manner far more painful than any we might then have chosen.

In July 1802, I conveyed the solicitude of the Virginia legislature concerning the consequences of permitting emancipations to become extensive without a condition of emigration. I proposed negotiations for a settlement in Africa, preferably by incorporating emigrants with the existing colony at Sierra Leone, noting that “the blacks settled at Sierra Leone, having chiefly gone from these states, would often recieve, among those we should send, their acquaintances and relations.” I further requested that permission be extended to the reception of emancipated negroes as well as those guilty of insurgency, observing that such persons will be a valuable acquisition to the settlement already existing there, and well calculated to cooperate in the plan of civilisation. These measures were put forward not as a retreat from earlier principles but as a practical means to avert the dangers of uncontrolled emancipation within our borders.

In earlier notes from 1793, while editing a pamphlet on the state of parties, I struck out an entire page that offered an apology for the continuance of slavery among us, remarking that “it had nothing to do with the state of parties” and that “many readers who would have gone heart and hand with the author so far would have flown off in a tangent from that paragraph.” This action demonstrates a consistent refusal to palliate or defend the institution, even when it might have served a political purpose.

Interviewer: Facing the Barbary pirates, you chose naval action over tribute. What principles of national honor, foreign policy, and just war guided your decisions in the First Barbary War?

Thomas Jefferson: I chose naval action over tribute because it aligned with the dictates of national honor, the necessities of foreign policy for the protection of our commerce, and the rules of just war as they presented themselves to us.

On the matter of national honor, I held firmly, to our determination to prefer war in all cases to tribute under any form and to any people whatever. Tribute was a badge of degradation, inconsistent with the spirit of a free and independent nation. In my letter to the Secretary of the Navy of 22 August 1802, after a war so far successful against Tripoli, I observed that it was not thought consistent with the interest or the spirit of our nation (sufficiently manifested) after a war so far successful against Tripoli, to finish by paying them a tribute. Besides the dishonor, and premature abandonment of the ground our predecessors left us in possession of, it would oblige us immediately to pay a tribute to Tunis and Marocco. Chastisement by force was more honorable, and much to be preferred to the purchased

friendship of these Barbarians, as the principles shared with General Washington in 1787 had long made clear. We would not purchase peace at the price of our dignity.

As to foreign policy, our aim was the protection of American commerce and citizens in the Mediterranean, an element common to all nations yet subject to the depredations of these piratical states. In the notes I took on the Cabinet meeting of 15 May 1801, the question was put plainly: "Shall the squadron now at Norfolk be ordered to cruise in the Mediterranean, what shall be the object of the cruize?" The unanimous sense was that the expedition should go forward openly to protect our commerce against the threatened hostilities of Tripoli. If war existed, the captains were to be authorized to search for & destroy the enemy's vessels wherever they can find them. This was no scheme of conquest but a measured response to secure our trade, as I had outlined in my plan transmitted to General Washington in July 1790: force alone could obtain peace with the Regencies, for the Congress can then flatter themselves by force only, to obtain peace with them, by a cruise that would render them more docile to receive propositions for Peace and make the damages inflicted determine them in a little time to solicit an accomodation. We struck at their vessels and commerce where opportunity offered, without entering harbors save in pursuit, always declaring our object to every nation so that none might mistake our intentions.

On the principles of just war, we were guided by the law that when a nation commences hostilities, the Executive is bound to apply the public force to defend the country. As noted in that same Cabinet consultation of 15 May 1801, "to declare war & to make war is synonimous. The Executive cannot put us in a state of war. but if we be put into that state either by the decision of Congress or of the other nation, the command & direction of the public force then belongs to the Executive." Tripoli had declared war; our squadron sailed not to initiate aggression but to repel it and, where necessary, chastise the aggressor. I wrote to the Bey of Tripoli on 21 May 1801, expressing regret at the rupture and a sincere desire for peace, yet making clear we would not submit to unjust demands. In my letter to the Sultan of Morocco of 21 August 1802, I affirmed that "we require no other price for the restoration of peace, considering as we do the just pursuits of industry as more beneficial to a nation than the most successful war." Our actions were defensive, proportionate, and declared openly—precisely the conduct required when one party has already put us in a state of war.

These principles were not invented in the moment but flowed from long reflection, as in my 1790 plan for an armament of frigates to cruise against the Barbarians, arriving at Lisbon about the vernal equinox, taking refreshments, and proceeding to Malta and the Levant to

strike effectively while respecting European vessels and confining ourselves to Turkish and Grecian prizes when necessary.

Interviewer: The Embargo Act of 1807 was your attempt to maintain neutrality amid European conflicts. How did this policy embody your philosophy of peaceful coercion, frugality, and keeping the young nation out of entangling alliances, even as it strained commerce?

Thomas Jefferson: Sir, the Embargo Act of 1807, or rather those laws suspending our commerce, was indeed adopted under my administration to maintain the neutrality of our young nation amid the conflicts of Europe. No person has seen with more concern than myself, the inconveniences brought on our country in general, by the circumstances of the times in which we happen to live; times to which the history of nations presents no parallel. For years we have been looking as spectators on our brethren of Europe, afflicted by all those evils which necessarily follow an abandonment of the moral rules which bind men and nations together. Connected with them in friendship and commerce, we have happily so far kept aloof from their calamitous conflicts, by a steady observance of justice towards all, by much forbearance, and multiplied sacrifices. At length however, all regard to the rights of others having been thrown aside, the belligerent powers have beset the high way of commercial intercourse with edicts which, taken together, expose our commerce and mariners, under almost every destination, a prey to their fleets and armies. Each party indeed would admit our commerce with themselves, with the view of associating us in their war against the other; but we have wished war with neither.

Under these circumstances were passed the laws suspending our commerce, by those delegated to exercise the powers of legislation for our fellow citizens, with every sympathy of a common interest in exercising them faithfully. In reviewing these measures therefore we should advert to the difficulties out of which a choice was of necessity to be made. To have submitted our rightful commerce to prohibitions and tributary exactions from others, would have been to surrender our independence. To resist them by arms was war, without consulting the state of things or the choice of the nation. The alternative preferred by the legislature of suspending a commerce placed under such unexampled difficulties, besides saving to our citizens their property, and our mariners to their country, has the peculiar advantage of giving time to the belligerent nations to revise a conduct as contrary to their interests as it is to our rights. The Embargo, giving time to the belligerent powers to revise their unjust proceedings, and to listen to the dictates of justice, of interest and reputation, which equally urge the correction of their wrongs, has availed our country of the only honourable expedient for avoiding war.

This measure, sir, embodied our philosophy of peaceful coercion, for the temporary suspension of commerce was adopted to cover us from greater evils. It has rescued from capture an important capital, and our seamen from the jails of Europe. It has given time to prepare for defence, and has shewn to the aggressors of Europe that evil, as well as good actions recoil on the doers. It reflects our commitment to frugality and the useful pursuits of peace, for believing that the happiness of mankind is best promoted by the useful pursuits of peace, that on these alone a stable prosperity can be founded, that the evils of war are great in their endurance, and leave a long reckoning for ages to come, I have used my best endeavors to keep our country uncommitted in the troubles which afflict Europe, and which assail us also on every side. It has excited the spirit of manufacturing for ourselves those things, which tho' we raised the raw material we have hitherto sought from other Countries at the risque of war & rapine.

Even as it strained our commerce, with agriculture although sensibly feeling the loss of market for its produce, and commerce and navigation, or that portion which is foreign, in the inactivity to which they are reduced by the present state of things, certainly experience their full share in the general inconvenience, yet it is to be regretted that overlooking the real sources of their sufferings, the British and French Edicts, which constitute the actual blockade of our foreign commerce and navigation, many have with too little reflection imputed them to laws which have saved them from greater, and have preserved for our own use our vessels, property and seamen, instead of adding them to the strength of those with whom we might eventually have to contend. The measure has preserved our impartial neutrality, and while these edicts remain, no American can ever consent to a return of peaceable intercourse with those who maintain them. But I am happy in the approach of the period when the feelings and the wisdom of the nation will be collected in their representatives assembled together, to whom are committed our rights, to whom our wrongs are known, and who will pronounce the remedy they call for.

Interviewer: Events like *Marbury v. Madison* tested the balance of powers. How did your experiences as president shape (or challenge) your views on executive authority, the judiciary, and the separation of powers?

Thomas Jefferson: The events of my presidency, and particularly the citation of the case of Marbury v. Madison in the proceedings against Colonel Burr, and the opinion of the judge on the subpoena duces tecum directed to the President, have served rather to confirm than to challenge those views on the separation of powers which I have long held, and which the constitution itself, in its true spirit, prescribes. I have observed that the case of Marbury v. Madison has been cited, and I think it material to stop at the threshold the citing that case as authority and to have it denied to be law. Because the judges in the outset

disclaimed all cognisance of the case, although they then went on to say what would have been their opinion had they had cognisance of it. This then was confessedly an extrajudicial opinion, and as such of no authority. Because had it been judicially pronounced, it would have been against law; for to a commission, a deed, a bond, delivery is essential to give validity. Until therefore the commission is delivered out of the hands of the Executive and his agents, it is not his deed. He may withhold or cancel it at pleasure as he might his private deed in the same situation.

The constitution intended that the three great branches of the government should be coordinate, and independent of each other. As to acts therefore which are to be done by either, it has given no control to another branch. A judge, I presume, cannot sit on a bench without a commission, or a record of a commission; and the constitution having given to the judiciary branch no means of compelling the Executive either to deliver a commission or to make a record of it, shews it did not intend to give the judiciary that control over the Executive, but that it should remain in the power of the latter to do it or not. Where different branches have to act in their respective lines, finally and without appeal, under any law, they may give to it different and opposite constructions. From these different constructions of the same act by different branches, less mischief arises than from giving to any one of them a control over the others. The Executive and Senate act on the construction that until delivery from the Executive department a commission is in their possession and within their rightful power; and in case of commissions not revocable at will, where, after the Senate's approbation and the President's signing and sealing, new information of the unfitness of the person has come to hand before the delivery of the commission, new nominations have been made, and approved and new commissions have issued. On this construction I have hitherto acted, on this I shall ever act, and maintain it with the powers of the government against any control which may be attempted by the judges in subversion of the independence of the Executive and Senate within their peculiar department. I presume therefore that in a case where our decision is by the constitution the supreme one, and that which can be carried into effect, it is the constitutionally authoritative one, and that that by the judges was coram non judice, and unauthoritative, because it cannot be carried into effect. I have long wished for a proper occasion to have the gratuitous opinion in Marbury v. Madison brought before the public and denounced as not law; and I think the present a fortunate one because it occupies such a place in the public attention.

In like manner, when the opinion of the judge on the subpoena duces tecum against the President came to my notice during the Burr proceedings, considering the question there as coram non judice, I did not read his argument with much attention. Yet I saw readily enough that, as is usual where an opinion is to be supported, right or wrong, he dwells much on smaller objections, and passes over those which are solid. Laying down the

position generally that all persons owe obedience to a subpoena, he admits no exception unless it can be produced in his lawbooks. But if the constitution enjoins on a particular officer to be always engaged in a particular set of duties imposed on him, does not this supersede the general law subjecting him to minor duties inconsistent with these? The constitution enjoins his constant agency in the concerns of six millions of people. Is the law paramount to this which calls on him on behalf of a single one? Let us apply the judge's own doctrine to the case of himself and his brethren. The sheriff of Henrico summons him from the bench to quell a riot somewhere in his county. The federal judge is, by the general law, a parte of the posse of the state sheriff. Would the judge abandon major duties to perform lesser ones? Again, the court of Orleans or Maine commands by subpoenas the attendance of all the judges of the supreme court. Would they abandon their posts as judges and the interests of millions committed to them, to save the purposes of a single individual? The leading principle of our constitution is the independence of the Legislative, Executive and Judiciary of each other, and none are more jealous of this than the Judiciary. But would the Executive be independent of the Judiciary if he were subject to the commands of the latter and to imprisonment for disobedience; if the several courts could bandy him from pillar to post, keep him constantly trudging from North to South and East to West, and withdraw him entirely from his constitutional duties? The intention of the constitution that each branch should be independent of the others is further manifested by the means it has furnished to each to protect itself from enterprises of force attempted on them by the others, and to none has it given more effectual or diversified means than to the Executive.

Nothing in the constitution has given the judges a right to decide for the executive, more than to the Executive to decide for them. Both magistracies are equally independent in the sphere of action assigned to them. The judges, believing the law constitutional, had a right to pass a sentence of fine and imprisonment, because that power was placed in their hands by the constitution. But the Executive, believing the law to be unconstitutional, was bound to remit the execution of it, because that power has been confided to him by the constitution. That instrument meant that its co-ordinate 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. These principles, sir, my experiences as President have only served to fortify. I have acted upon them in the appointment of officers, in the exercise of the pardoning power, and in resisting attempts to draw the Executive from its constitutional duties into the vortex of judicial proceedings, and I shall continue so to act, maintaining the independence of

each branch within its peculiar department, as the surest safeguard of our free government.

Interviewer: During your presidency, how did you see the advancement of science and education serving the young republic?

Thomas Jefferson: During my presidency, I saw the advancement of science and education as essential to the preservation and perfection of our young republic, for, as I have written, I am sincerely a friend to science, and to the promotion of it as the only means of relieving man from the tyranny of body and mind. Convinced that the people are the only safe depositories of their own liberty, and that they are not safe unless enlightened to a certain degree, I looked on our present state of liberty as a short-lived possession unless the mass of the people could be informed to a certain degree. This requires two grades of education: first, some institution where science in all its branches is taught, and in the highest degree to which the human mind has carried it; this would prepare a few subjects in every state, to whom nature has given minds of the first order. Secondly, such a degree of learning given to every member of the society as will enable him to read, to judge and to vote understandingly on what is passing; this would be the object of township schools. The legislature of Virginia being at length likely to institute an university on a liberal plan, I rejoiced at the information, and the first step in this business was for the legislature to pass an act of establishment, equivalent to a charter, dealing in generals only, its object defined only generally for teaching the useful branches of science, leaving the particulars to the direction of the day. Science is progressive; what was useful two centuries ago is now become useless, and what is now deemed useful will in some of its parts become useless in another century. The visitors will be the best qualified to keep their institution up in even pace with the science of the times.

In the line of science we have little new here; our citizens almost all follow some industrious occupation, and therefore have little time to devote to abstract science. In the arts, and especially the mechanical arts, many ingenious improvements are made in consequence of the patent-right giving an exclusive use of them for fourteen years. But the great mass of our people are agricultural. I am not a friend to placing young men in populous cities, because they acquire there habits and partialities which do not contribute to the happiness of their after-life; but there are particular branches of science which are not so advantageously taught any where else in the US as in Philadelphia, the garden at the Woodlands for botany, Mr. Peale's museum for natural history, the anatomical school, and the able professors in all of them, giving advantages not to be found any where else. Our country offers to the lovers of science a rich field of the works of nature, but little explored,

except in the department of botany; our geology is untouched, and would have been a precious mine.

I have a grandson, the son of Mr. Randolph, now about fifteen years of age, in whose education I take a lively interest; his time has not hitherto been employed to the best advantage, a frequent change of tutors having prevented the steady pursuit of any one plan; whether he possesses that lively imagination, usually called genius, I have not had opportunities of knowing, but I think he has an observing mind and sound judgment; he is assiduous, orderly, and of the most amiable temper and dispositions. As he will be at ease in point of property, his education is not directed to any particular profession, but will embrace those sciences which give to retired life usefulness, ornament or amusement; we propose therefore to send him to Philadelphia to attend the schools of botany, natural history, anatomy, and perhaps surgery and chemistry. Having been brought up in a mountainous and healthy country, we should be unwilling he should go to Philadelphia till the autumnal diseases cease.

I estimate justly that portion of instruction which our medical students derive from the labours of such professors as Dr. Wistar and my old and able friend Dr. Rush, considering them as the two fundamental pillars of the edifice; indeed I have such an opinion of the talents of the professors in the other branches which constitute the school of medicine with you, as to hope and believe that it is from this side of the Atlantic that Europe, which has taught us so many other things, will at length be led into sound principles in this branch of science, the most important of all others, being that to which we commit the care of health and life. I believe we may safely affirm that the inexperienced and presumptuous band of medical tyros let loose upon the world destroys more of human life in one year than all the Robin Hoods, Cartouches, and Macheaths do in a century. It is in this part of medicine that I wish to see a reform, an abandonment of hypothesis for sober facts, the first degree of value set on clinical observation, and the lowest on visionary theories. The only sure foundations of medicine are an intimate knowledge of the human body, and observation on the effects of medicinal substances on that. The anatomical and clinical schools therefore are those in which the young physician should be formed.

Should this establishment of an university take place on a plan worthy of approbation, I shall have a valuable legacy to leave it, to wit, my library, which certainly has not cost less than fifteen thousand dollars, but its value is more in the selection, a part of which, that which respects America, is the result of my own personal searches in Paris for six or seven years, and of persons employed by me in England, Holland, Germany and Spain to make similar searches; such a collection on that subject can never again be made. With my sincere wishes for the success of these measures, I have acted throughout my presidency

to advance science and education as the surest foundation for the happiness and liberty of our republic.

Interviewer: Even while bearing the burdens of the presidency, how have you tried to live according to your philosophy of happiness and simple republican virtue?

Thomas Jefferson: Even while bearing the burdens of the presidency I have tried to live according to my philosophy of happiness and simple republican virtue by the same rule I laid down for myself when I first entered on the stage of public life. I came to a resolution never to engage while in public office in any kind of enterprize for the improvement of my fortune, nor to wear any other character than that of a farmer. I have never departed from it in a single instance, and I have in multiplied instances found myself happy in being able to decide and to act as a public servant, clear of all interest, in the multiform questions that have arisen, wherein I have seen others embarrassed and biassed by having got themselves into a more interested situation. Thus I have thought myself richer in contentment than I should have been with any increase of fortune. Certainly I should have been much wealthier had I remained in that private condition which renders it lawful and even laudable to use proper efforts to better it; however, I went through on the principles on which I had hitherto acted.

I am so much attached to my domestic situation that I would not have wished to leave it at all. Neither the splendor, nor the power, nor the difficulties, nor the fame or defamation as may happen, attached to the first magistracy have any attractions for me. The helm of a free government is always arduous, and never was ours more so than at those moments when two friendly people were like to be committed in war by the ill temper of their administrations. If called from my domestic situation, the shortest absences and most tranquil station have always suited me best. I have valued highly the part my fellow citizens gave me in their votes as an evidence of their esteem, yet the duty of retirement has been so strongly impressed on my mind that it has been impossible for me to think of a third term. If I can carry into retirement the good will of my fellow citizens, nothing else will be wanting to my happiness.

Believing that a representative government, responsible at short periods of election, is that which produces the greatest sum of happiness to mankind, I have felt it a duty to do no act which should essentially impair that principle; and I should unwillingly have been the person who, disregarding the sound precedent set by an illustrious predecessor, should furnish the first example of prolongation beyond the second term of office. Truth also requires me to add that I am sensible of that decline which advancing years bring on, and, feeling their physical effect, I ought not to doubt their mental effect. Happy, if I am the first to perceive and to obey this admonition of nature, and to solicit a retreat from cares too

great for the wearied faculties of age. Should I be so fortunate as to carry into that retreat the approbation and good will of my fellow citizens generally, it will be the comfort of my future days, and will close a service of forty years with the only reward it ever wished.

In pursuing these ends I have had two important objects before me: to reduce the government to republican principles and practices, and to heal the wounds of party. To the best of my skill and judgment I have administered according to the genuine principles of our inestimable constitution and the true interests of our country, sparing no effort which might procure us peace and unanimity at home and respectability abroad. I have regarded with the compassion their history inspires the aboriginal inhabitants of these countries, endowed with the faculties and the rights of men, breathing an ardent love of liberty and independence, and have liberally furnished them with the implements of husbandry and household use, placed among them instructors in the arts of first necessity, and covered them with the aegis of the law against aggressors from among ourselves. In matters of religion I have considered that its free exercise is placed by the constitution independent of the powers of the general government, and have therefore undertaken on no occasion to prescribe the religious exercises suited to it, but have left them as the constitution found them under the direction and discipline of the state or church authorities acknowledged by the several religious societies.

These, sir, are the outlines of the conduct I have pursued even in the midst of the presidency. I have said to my fellow citizens that in giving these outlines I do not mean to arrogate to myself the merit of the measures; that is due in the first place to the reflecting character of our citizens at large, to the sound discretion with which they select from among themselves those to whom they confide the legislative duties, to the zeal and wisdom of the characters thus selected, and to the able and faithful auxiliaries whose patriotism has associated them with me in the executive functions. I fear not that any motives of interest may lead me astray; I am sensible of no passion which could seduce me knowingly from the path of justice; but the weaknesses of human nature and the limits of my own understanding will produce errors of judgment sometimes injurious to your interests. I have needed therefore all the indulgence which I have heretofore experienced from my constituents. Relying on the patronage of your good will, I have advanced with obedience to the work, ready to retire from it whenever you become sensible how much better choices it is in your power to make. And may that infinite power which rules the destinies of the universe lead our councils to what is best, and give them a favorable issue for your peace and prosperity.

Interviewer: During your presidency, how did you put into practice the principle of complete separation between church and state?

Thomas Jefferson: During my presidency I put into practice the principle of complete separation between church and state by strictly adhering to the constitutional interdiction against any intermeddling with religious institutions, their doctrines, discipline, or exercises. As I wrote to the Danbury Baptist Association on the first of January in the year 1802, “Believing with you that religion is a matter which lies solely between Man & his God, that he owes account to none other for his faith or his worship, that the legitimate powers of government reach actions only, & 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 & State.” Adhering to this expression of the supreme will of the nation in behalf of the rights of conscience, I undertook on no occasion to prescribe the religious exercises suited to it, but left them as the constitution found them, under the direction & discipline of the state or church authorities acknoleged by the several religious societies. This I declared in my second inaugural address on the fourth of March in the year 1805.

I considered the government of the US. as interdicted by the constitution from intermedling with religious institutions, their doctrines, discipline, or exercises. This results not only from the provision that no law shall be made respecting the establishment, or free exercise, of religion, but from that also which reserves to the states the powers not delegated to the US. Certainly no power to prescribe any religious exercise, or to assume authority in religious discipline, has been delegated to the general government. It must then rest with the states, as far as it can be in any human authority. Even when it was only proposed that I should recommend, not prescribe, a day of fasting & prayer, that would have been to indirectly assume to the US. an authority over religious exercises which the constitution has directly precluded them from. It must be meant too that this recommendation is to carry some authority, and to be sanctioned by some penalty on those who disregard it: not indeed of fine & imprisonment but of some degree of proscription perhaps in public opinion. And does the change in the nature of the penalty make the recommendation the less a law of conduct for those to whom it is directed? I do not believe it is for the interest of religion to invite the civil magistrate to direct it’s exercises, its discipline or its doctrines: nor of the religious societies that the General government should be invested with the power of effecting any uniformity of time or matter among them. Fasting & prayer are religious exercises. The enjoining them an act of discipline, every religious society has a right to determine for itself the times for these exercises & the objects proper for them according to their own particular tenets. And this right can never be safer than in their own hands, where the constitution has deposited it. I have ever believed that the example of State executives led to the assumption of that authority by the general government, without due

examination, which would have discovered that what might be a right in a state government, was a violation of that right when assumed by another. Every one must act according to the dictates of his own reason, & mine tells me that civil powers alone have been given to the President of the US. and no authority to direct the religious exercises of his constituents.

Thus, by refraining from all such acts during my presidency, and leaving these matters entirely to the voluntary regulations and discipline of each respective sect, I maintained that wall of separation between Church & State which the whole American people had declared.

Interviewer: At the end of your presidency, what are your greatest hopes and most serious apprehensions for the future of the Union?

Thomas Jefferson: At the close of my presidency, sir, my greatest hopes for the future of this Union rest upon the preservation of that sacred compact which binds us as one nation for all external and mutual relations, while leaving to each state the care of our persons, our property, our reputation, and religious freedom. This wise distribution, if carefully preserved, will prove from example that while smaller governments are better adapted to the ordinary objects of society, larger confederations more effectually secure independence and the preservation of republican government. I retire into the bosom of my native state, endeared to me by every tie which can attach the human heart, with the full confidence of safety from our unity, our position, and our resources. It would have been a great consolation to have left the nation under the assurance of a continued peace; nothing has been spared to effect it, and at no other period of history would such efforts have failed to ensure it, for neither belligerent pretends to have been injured by us, or can say that we have in any instance departed from the most faithful neutrality, and certainly none will charge us with a want of forbearance. In the desire of peace, but in full confidence of safety from our unity, our position, and our resources, I shall retire, seeing the sacred deposit of life, liberty, and property committed to those who are sensible of their value and determined to defend them. The republican form has been so far justified by its success and the prosperity with which it has blessed us; in no portion of the earth were life, liberty, and property ever so securely held. If we can keep the vessel of state as steady in her course, my earthly purposes will be accomplished, and I shall be free to enjoy my family, my farm, and my books.

My most serious apprehensions, however, arise from the possibility that the ill temper of foreign administrations may yet commit us in war, despite all our efforts at neutrality, or that schisms among republicans may be turned to account by those who, vanquished under their own banners, now reserve themselves to profit from division and to earn favors

from minorities. I have ever viewed with pain the fermentation which seemed to be working in the minds of the public, and the unbounded calumnies which have forced even the most reluctant into continued public service. Yet I believe the republican spirit of the Union is so manifest and so solid that it is astonishing how any one could expect to move it; the great body of our native citizens are unquestionably of the republican sentiment, and I look to the broad representation which has taken place for keeping the general constitution on its true ground. The harmony which has been introduced between the Legislature and Executive branches, between the people and both of them, and between all and the General government, are so many steps towards securing that union of action and effort in all its parts, without which no nation can be happy or safe. I pray that the Supreme Ruler of the Universe may have our country under his special care, and that time may be given us to reflect on the awful crisis we have passed through, and to find some means of shielding ourselves in future from foreign influence, commercial, political, or in whatever other form it may be attempted.

These, sir, are the hopes and apprehensions with which I close my public labors and return to the tranquility I have so long desired. I have drawn these reflections from the principles and events of my administration, as expressed in my correspondence and addresses at the time.

Interviewer: Mr. President, thank you for sitting with us today. We wish you a happy retirement.