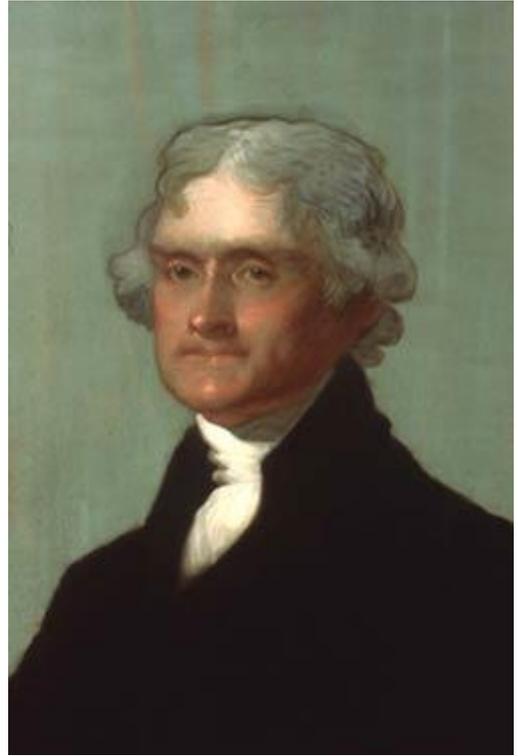


# Through Jefferson's Eyes: The Embargo of 1807



## Prompt:

Was Thomas Jefferson's Embargo of 1807 Necessary? Were there consequences and/or benefits? Lastly, was the Embargo Successful in achieving its aims? (Explain fully)

## Background to Embargo

On June 22<sup>nd</sup> 1807, The Chesapeake–Leopard Affair occurred. This was a naval engagement that occurred off the coast of Norfolk, Virginia between the British warship HMS Leopard and American frigate USS Chesapeake, when the crew of the Leopard pursued, attacked and boarded the American frigate looking for deserters from the Royal Navy. The Chesapeake was caught unprepared and surrendered his vessel to the British. Four crew members were removed from the American vessel and were tried for desertion, one of whom was subsequently hanged. The Chesapeake was allowed to return home and the incident immediately created uproar with strident calls for war with Great Britain. These bellicose calls for war quickly subsided but the problem of impressment and hostilities with the British and French Navies continued.

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chesapeake%E2%80%93Leopard\\_Affair](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chesapeake%E2%80%93Leopard_Affair)

[Type here]

## Thomas Jefferson to United States Congress, January 17, 1806

To the Senate and House of Representatives of the US,

In my message to both houses of Congress, I **submitted to their attention the oppression of our commerce & navigation by the irregular practices of armed vessels public and private and by the introduction of new principles, derogatory of the rights of Neutrals...which is producing the most ruinous effects on our lawful commerce and navigation.**

The **right of a Neutral to carry on commercial intercourse** with every part of the dominions of a belligerent, permitted by the municipal laws of the country (with the exception of blockaded ports & Contraband of war) was believed to have been decided between Great Britain & the US...by **the actual payment of the damages** awarded by them [US merchants] against Great Britain for the infractions of that right. [I] therefore [instruct Congress] to urge this subject anew, to bring it more fully to the bar of reason, & to insist on rights too evident, & too important to be surrendered.

On the **impressment of our Seamen, our remonstrances [pleas] have never been intermitted [stopped]**. A hope existed, at one moment, of an arrangement which might have been submitted to but it soon passed away, & the practice, tho' relaxed at times in the distant seas, has been constantly pursued in those in our neighborhood.

[HTTP://ROTUNDA.UPRESS.VIRGINIA.EDU/FOUNDERS/DEFAULT.XQY?KEYS=FOEA-CHRON-1800-1806-01-17-4](http://rotunda.upress.virginia.edu/founders/default.xqy?keys=FOEA-chron-1800-1806-01-17-4)

## LETTER FROM JOHN PAGE TO THOMAS JEFFERSON (RICHMOND, JULY 12, 1807)

I have this moment received your favor of the 9th & You will find that you were not mistaken when you supposed that “the Ardor of our fellow Citizens is not satisfied by your Proclamation.” I have **heard it repeatedly said “that an immediate Embargo is necessary**, because before the usual meeting of Congress all the British Ships etc. will have left us, & even our own Vessels, & Sailors, who will be impressed or detained in British Ports throughout their Empire: & that their Ships of War & Privatiers without further Notice will sweep our vessels which may be at Sea, from the Surface of the Seas. ...that an immediate stop to all intercourse with Britain is indispensibly necessary, to retrieve our lost honor, & to **bring the mad King to his senses**, & that that measure alone would be of more consequence than any naval & military preparations we can ever make. I by no means object to the Doctrine that Reparation ought to be demanded & an Opportunity granted for making, but I see no Impropriety in your immediate Call of Congress for the necessary means of redress should your Efforts to procure Reparation entirely fail, as they may, or, **for the means of defence should the British Tyrant be determined to strike away, & follow up his blows....** we would return blow for blow, & for that on the Chesapeake he may well expect repeated blows well laid on. **Could Congress meet immediately it is said they might prevent a war by an Embargo, & Suspension of all Intercourse with Britain & her Dominions....**

<http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/99-01-02-5946>

[Type here]

## LETTER FROM SECRETARY OF TREASURY ALBERT GALLATIN TO THOMAS JEFFERSON (WASHINGTON DC, DECEMBER 2, 1807)

Reflecting on the proposed embargo and all its bearings, I think it essential that foreign vessels may be excepted so far at least as to be permitted to depart in ballast or with such cargoes as they may have on board at this moment. I also think that an embargo, **for a limited time** will at this moment be preferable in itself & less objectionable in Congress. In every point of view, privations, sufferings, revenue, effect on the enemy, politics at home etc., **I prefer war to a permanent embargo**. Governmental prohibitions do always more mischief than had been calculated; and it is not without much hesitation that a statesman should hazard to regulate the concerns of individuals as if he could do it better than themselves. The measure being of a doubtful policy & hastily adopted on the first view of our foreign intelligence, I think that we had better recommend it with modifications **& at first for such a limited time as will afford us all time for re-consideration &**, if we think proper, for an alteration in your course without appearing to retract. As to the hope that it may have an effect on the negotiations with Mr Rose, or induce England to treat us better, I think it entirely groundless.

<http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/99-01-02-7020>

## Jefferson Confidential Message to Congress (Washington DC, December 7, 1807)

...on the 7th. of Sep. mr Monroe addressed a note to mr Canning [British Prime Minister] in consequence of his instructions by the Revenge complaining of **the aggression on the Chesapeake, calling on that government [Great Britain] for reparation of the wrong and for a final discussion & understanding on their claim to take whomsoever they chuse to call their seamen**, wherever found; & assuring him at the same time that he was authorised to concur in arrangements liberally calculated to take away all ground for that practice. It is now rumored **that the answer was that by the President's proclamation we had taken the business of satisfaction for the aggression on the Chesapeake so far into our own hands**; that still however the British government was ready to enter into a discussion of that act, if it could be done separately, leaving their general claim to future negotiation.... **Whether this is a mere manœuvre to avoid a settlement, & lose the subject altogether in the endless mazes of negotiation, is to be judged of by the promptitude or the delay of this mission.**

In the mean time, **our peace is left at the mercy of their officers whose interest & wish is war with all mankind**. and how can it be pretended that the subjects have no connection? **they claim a right to take those whom they call their seamen (and, under that cover, ours also) wherever they can find them, even without their own jurisdiction**. and 1. their officers are in the daily practice of taking them from on board our merchant vessels, & with them many more of ours than of theirs. 2. they **have repeatedly done the same in foreign ports and countries**, &... the next step may be to patrol, by their pressgangs the streets of New York & Norfolk, & take from thence all those who may suit them. their principle evidently goes to this extent.

...certain it is **there never can be friendship, nor even a continuance of peace with England so long as no American citizen can leave his own shores without danger of being seized by the first British officer he meets & made to serve as a common seaman on board their ships of war**....

<http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/99-01-02-6926>

[Type here]

## Jefferson Message to Congress (Washington DC, December 18, 1807)

To the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States:

The communications now made, showing the **great and increasing dangers with which our vessels, our seamen, and merchandise are threatened on the high seas** and elsewhere, from the belligerent powers of Europe, and it being of great importance to keep in safety these essential resources, I deem it my duty **to recommend the subject to the consideration of Congress, who will doubtless perceive all the advantages which may be expected from an inhibition of the departure of our vessels from the ports of the United States**. Their wisdom will also see the necessity of making every preparation for whatever events may grow out of the present crisis.

<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=65742>

### Excerpts from the Embargo Act of 1807

...entitled "An act laying an, embargo on all ships and vessels in the ports and harbors of the United States..." the bill is as follows:

Be it enacted, by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America, in Congress assembled, That **an embargo on all ships and vessels in the ports and harbors of the United States, no vessels of any description** whatever, and wherever bound, whose employment is confined to the navigation of bays, sounds, rivers, and lakes, within the jurisdiction of the United States, **shall be allowed, to depart from any port of the United States [unless it shall prove] the landing of the whole of such cargo in a port of the United States....**

Sec. 2. And be it farther enacted, That if any vessel described in the next preceding section, shall depart from a port of the United States **without a clearance, ,or before the manifest of the cargo shall have been delivered...such vessel and cargo shall be forfeited, and the owner or owners...pay a sum [of a] thousand dollars....**

Sec. 6. And be it further enacted, That **the commanders of the public armed vessels, and gunboats of the United States, shall be authorized, to stop and examine any vessel**, either on the high seas or within the jurisdiction of the United States, which there may be reason to suspect to be engaged in any traffic or commerce contrary to the provisions of this act. ...If upon examination it shall appear that such vessel is thus engaged [in smuggling], it shall be the duty of the commander to seize every such vessel and send [them]to the nearest port of the United States for trial.

Sec. 8. And be it further enacted, That during the continuance of [this] act laying an embargo on all ships and vessels in the ports and harbors of the United States, **no foreign ship shall go from one port in the United States to another**. [If] any foreign ship [if found to be doing this] the leer cargo shall be wholly forfeited, and the owner or owners of such vessel, shall forfeit and pay a [penalty].

[http://www.napoleon-series.org/research/government/us/c\\_embargo.html](http://www.napoleon-series.org/research/government/us/c_embargo.html)

[Type here]

## **Thomas Jefferson Proclamation on the Embargo (Washington DC, April 19, 1808)**

By the President of the United States,

...information has been recieved that **sundry persons confederating together on Lake Champlain for the purposes of forming insurrections against the authority of the laws of the US. for opposing & obstructing their execution**, and that such combinations are too powerful to be suppressed by the ordinary course of judicial proceedings, or by the powers vested in the Marshals by the laws of the US.

**Now that the authority of the laws may be maintained, & that those concerned directly in any insurrection against the same may be duly warned, I have issued this, hereby commanding such insurgents [to] instantly & without delay to disperse & retire peacably to their respective abodes. I do further require & command all officers having authority, civil or military, and by all the means in their power by force of arms or otherwise to quell & subdue such insurrections** or combinations, to seize upon all those therein concerned who shall not instantly and without delay disperse & retire to their respective abodes, and to deliver them over to the civil authority of the place to be proceeded against according to law.

<http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/99-01-02-7861>

## **Jefferson Letter to Albert Gallatin (Monticello, July 29, 1808)**

I am perfectly satisfied that if the embargo must be persisted in any longer, two principles must necessarily be adopted in order to make it sufficient:

First, that not a **single vessel shall be permitted to move without the special permission of the Executive**;

Second, that the **collectors be invested with the general power of seizing property anywhere**, and taking the rudders, or otherwise effectually preventing the departure of any vessel in harbor, though ostensibly intended to remain there,—and that without being liable to personal suits.

I am sensible that such arbitrary powers are equally dangerous and odious; but a restrictive measure of the nature of the embargo, applied to a nation under such circumstances as the United States, cannot be enforced without the assistance of means as strong as the measure itself. To that legal authority to prevent, seize, and detain, must be added a sufficient physical force to carry it into effect; and although I believe that in our seaports little difficulty would be encountered, **we must have a little army along the Lakes and British lines generally**. . . . That in the present situation of the world **every effort should be attempted to preserve the peace of this nation**, cannot be doubted; **but if the criminal party-rage of Federalists and Tories shall have so far succeeded as to defeat our endeavors to obtain that object by the only measure that could possibly have effected it, we must submit and prepare for war.**"

[http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/History\\_of\\_the\\_United\\_States\\_During\\_the\\_Administrations\\_of\\_Thomas\\_Jefferson/Second/II:11](http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/History_of_the_United_States_During_the_Administrations_of_Thomas_Jefferson/Second/II:11)

[Type here]

## **Jefferson Letter to Albert Gallatin (Monticello, August 11, 1808)**

This embargo law is certainly the most embarrassing one we have ever had to execute. I did not expect a crop of so sudden & rank growth of fraud & open opposition by force could have grown up in the U.S. **I am satisfied with you that if orders & decrees are not repealed, and a continuance of the embargo is preferred to war (which sentiment is universal here), Congress must legalize all means which may be necessary to obtain its end.** I am clearly of opinion this law ought to be enforced at any expense, *which may not exceed our appropriation.* As to ordering out militia, you know the difficulty without another proclamation.

<http://www.yamaguchy.com/library/jefferson/1808b.html>

## **Jefferson Letter to Levi Lincoln (Washington DC, November 12, 1808)**

The Congressional campaign is just opening. Three alternatives alone are to be chosen from.

1. Embargo
2. Formal Declaration of War
3. Submission & tribute

The real question however will lie between the two first, on which there is considerable division. As yet the first seems to prevail; but opinions are by no means yet settled down. **On this occasion I think it fair... to be myself but a spectator.** Our situation is truly difficult. We have been pressed by the belligerents to the very all, & further retreat impracticable.

<http://rotunda.upress.virginia.edu/founders/default.xqy?keys=FOEA-chron-1800-1808-11-13-5>

[Type here]

<http://www.history.com/topics/us-presidents/thomas-jefferson/pictures/thomas-jefferson/cartoon-a-smuggler-during-the-embargo-act-1807-1809>



[Type here]

Barringer Fellowship—Monticello—2014—Kolasa

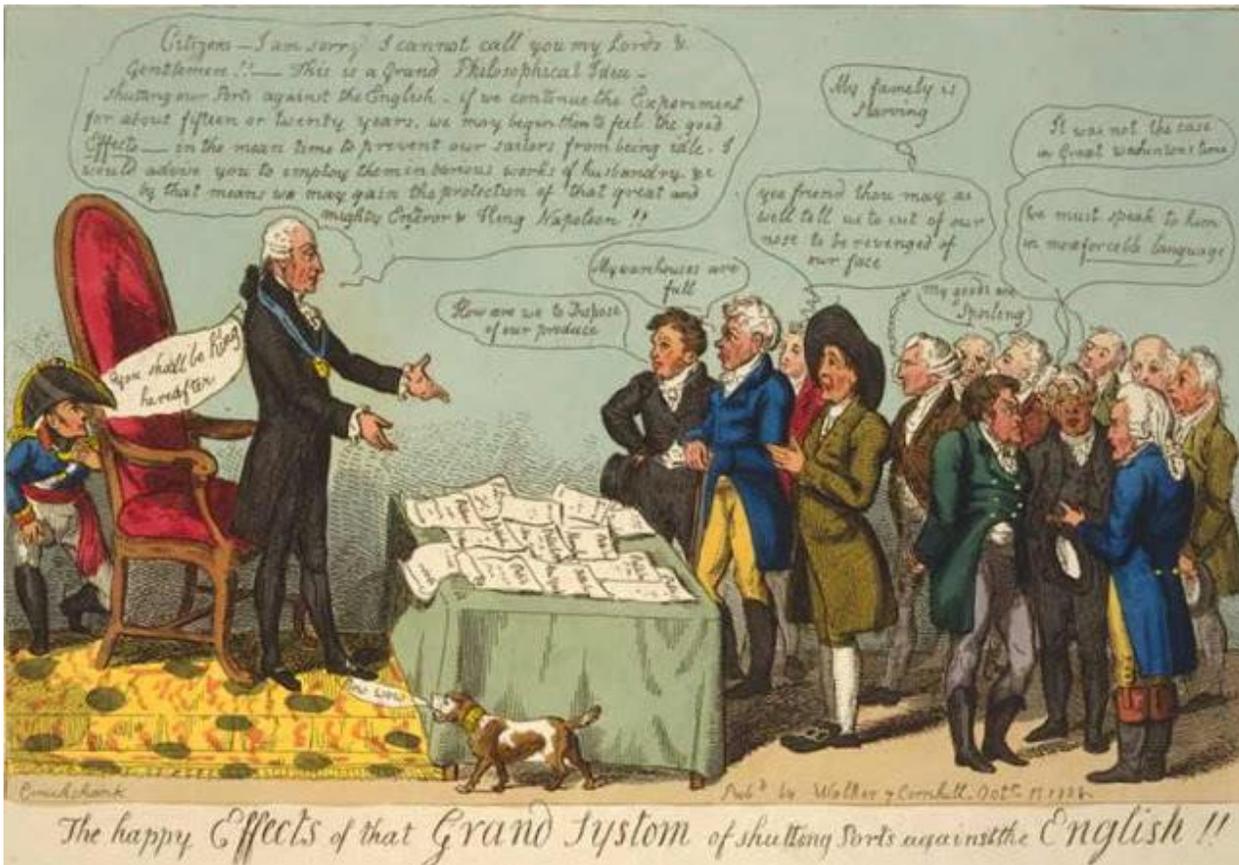


**T. JEFFERSON CARTOON, 1809. 'Intercourse or Impartial Dealings.' An American cartoon of 1809 by "Peter Pencil"**

<http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/jefferson/jeffworld.html>

[Type here]

Barringer Fellowship—Monticello—2014—Kolasa



## Cruikshank, The Happy Effects of that Grand System of Shutting Ports against the English, 1808

Before Jefferson is a table covered with papers inscribed 'Petition and Pettition New York'

Napoleon is hiding behind Jefferson's presidential chair whispering; "You shall be King hereafter".

Jefferson addresses the assembly: "Citizens - I am sorry I cannot call you my Lords Gentlemen!! - This is a Grand Philosophical Idea - shutting our Ports against the English - if we continue the Experiment for about fifteen or twenty years, we may begin then to feel the good 'Effects' - in the mean time to prevent our sailors from being idle, I would advise you to imploy them in various works of husbandry and by that means we may gain the protection of that great and mighty Emperor King Napoleon!!

A small dog, John 'Bull' (its collar so inscribed), barks "Bow Wow" at the President. The

Congressmen say: "How are we to Dispose of our produce;

- a. My warehouses are full;
- b. Yea friend thou may as well tell us to cut of our nose to be revenged of our face [a Quaker in a broad-brimmed hat];
- c. My famely is Starving';
- d. my Goods are Spoiling;
- e. It was not the case in Great Washington's time;
- f. we must speak to him in more 'forceble language'.

<http://www.humanitiestexas.org/archives/digital-repository/cruikshank-happy-effects-grand-system-shutting-ports-against-english>

[Type here]

## **Jefferson Letter to Elijah Brown (Washington DC, October 11, 1808)**

I have duly received the [letter from] the citizens of Stockbridge [Massachusetts] who have declared their approbation of the present suspension of our commerce, and their dissent from the representation of those of the same place who wished its removal. **A division of sentiment was not unexpected.** On no question can a perfect unanimity be hoped, or certainly it would have been on that between war and embargo, **the only alternatives presented to our choice; for the general capture of our vessels would have been war on one side**, which reason and interest would repel by war and reprisal on our part. Of the several interests composing those of the United States, **that of manufactures would of course prefer war**, a state of non-intercourse, so favorable to their rapid growth and prosperity. Agriculture, although sensibly feeling the loss of market for its produce, would find many aggravations in a state of war. 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: but whether war would to them be a preferable alternative, is a question their patriotism would never hastily propose.**

It is to be regretted, however, that overlooking **the real sources of their sufferings, the British and French Edicts**, which constitute the actual blockade of our foreign commerce and navigation, they 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 Embargo, **giving time to the belligerent powers to revise their unjust proceedings and to listen to the dictates of justice**, [we] equally urge the correction of their wrongs. [The Embargo Act] has **availed our country the only honorable expedient for avoiding war**: and should a repeal of these Edicts supersede the cause for it, our commercial brethren will become sensible that it has consulted their interests, however against their own will.

**It will be unfortunate for their country if, in the mean time, these, their expressions of impatience, should have the effect of prolonging the very sufferings which have produced them, by exciting a fallacious hope that we may, under any pressure, relinquish our equal right of navigating the ocean, go to such ports only as others may prescribe**, and there pay the tributary exactions they may impose; an abandonment of national independence and of essential rights revolting to every manly sentiment: While these Edicts are in force, **no American can ever consent to a return of peaceable intercourse with those who maintain them.** 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 [and] I hear with pleasure from all, those who approve, [and those] who disapprove of the present measures.... I beg leave through you to communicate this answer to the address on which your signature held the first place...

<http://gilderlehrman.org/collections/a0b3698e-1084-412b-9073-485164806320>

## **Non-Intercourse Act - March 1, 1809**

An ACT to interdict the commercial intercourse between the United States and Great Britain and France....

Be it enacted . . . , That from and after the passing of this act, the entrance of the harbors and waters of the United States and of the territories thereof, be, and the same is hereby interdicted to all public ships and vessels belonging to Great Britain or France, excepting vessels only which may be forced in by distress, or which are charged with despatches or business from the government to which they belong, and also packets having no cargo nor merchandise on board And if any public ship or vessel as aforesaid, not being included in the exception above mentioned, shall enter any harbor or waters within the jurisdiction of the United States. or of the territories thereof, it shall be lawful for the President of the United States, or such

[Type here]

other person as he shall have empowered for that purpose, to employ such part of the land and naval forces, or of the militia of the United States, or the territories thereof, as he shall deem necessary, to compel such ship or vessel to depart.

SEC. 2. And be it further enacted, That it shall not be lawful for any citizen or citizens of the United States or the territories thereof, to have any intercourse with, or to afford any aid or supplies to any public ship or vessel as aforesaid, which shall, contrary to the provisions of this act, have entered any harbor or waters within the jurisdiction of the United States or the territories thereof; and ...every person so offending, shall forfeit and pay a sum not less than one hundred dollars, nor exceeding ten thousand dollars; and shall also be imprisoned for a term not less than one month, nor more than one year.

SEC. 4. And be it further enacted, That from and after the twentieth day of May next, it shall not be lawful to import into the United States or the territories thereof, any goods, wares or merchandise whatever, from any port or place situated in Great Britain or Ireland, or in any of the colonies or dependencies of Great Britain, nor from any port or place situated in France, or in any of her colonies or dependencies, nor from any port or place in the actual possession of either Great Britain or France.

SEC. 12. And be it further enacted, That so much of the . . .

[The Embargo Act] . . . and the several acts supplementary thereto, as forbids the departure of vessels owned by citizens of the United States, and the exportation of domestic and foreign merchandise **to any foreign port or place, is hereby repealed**, after . . . [March 15, 1809.] . . . **except so far as they relate to Great Britain or France, or their colonies or dependencies, or places in the actual possession of either....**

SEC. 19. And be it further enacted, That this act shall continue and be in force until the end of the next session of Congress, and no longer....

<http://www.rkci.org/library/gsp/early/nonintercourseact.htm>

## **Letter from Jefferson to P. S. DuPont de Nemours (Washington DC, March 2, 1809)**

After using every effort which could prevent or delay our being entangled in the war of Europe, that seems now our only resource. **The edicts of the two belligerents, forbidding us to be seen on the ocean, we met by an embargo.** This gave us time to call home our seamen, ships and property, to levy men and put our sea ports into a certain state of defence. **We have now taken off the embargo, except as to France and England and their territories, because fifty millions of exports, annually sacrificed, are the treble of what war would cost us; besides, that by war we should take something, and lose less than at present.** But all these concerns I am now leaving to be settled by my friend Mr. Madison. Within a few days I retire to my family, my books and farms; and having gained the harbor myself, **I shall look on my friends still buffeting the storm, with anxiety indeed, but not with envy. Never did a prisoner, released from his chains, feel such relief as I shall on shaking off the shackles of power.** Nature intended me for the tranquil pursuits of science, by rendering them my supreme delight. But the enormities of the times in which I have lived, have forced me to take a part in resisting them, and to commit myself on the boisterous ocean of political passions. I thank God for the opportunity of retiring from them without censure.

<http://classroom.monticello.org/images/handouts/DocumentA.pdf>

[Type here]

## **Jefferson letter to P. S. DuPont de Nemours (Monticello, June 28, 1809)**

The interruption of our commerce with England, produced by our embargo and non-intercourse law, and the general indignation excited by her barefaced attempts to make us accessories and tributaries to her usurpations on the high seas, have **generated in this country an universal spirit for manufacturing for ourselves, and of reducing to a minimum the number of articles for which we are dependent on her.** The advantages, too, of lessening the occasions of risking our peace on the ocean, and of planting the consumer in **our own soil by the side of the grower of produce,** are so palpable, that no temporary suspension of injuries on her part, or agreements founded on that, will now prevent our continuing in what we have begun. **The spirit of manufacture has taken deep root among us, and its foundations are laid in too great expense to be abandoned.** I can add my own as to the country, where the principal articles wanted in every family are now fabricated within itself. This mass of household manufacture, so much greater than what is seen, is such at present, that let our intercourse with England be opened when it may, not one half the amount of what we have heretofore taken from her will ever again be demanded. These [goods] are now made in our families, and **the advantage is too sensible ever to be relinquished.** It is one of those obvious improvements in our condition which needed only to be once **forced on our attention, never again to be abandoned.**

Among the arts which have made great progress among us is **that of printing. Heretofore we imported our books, and with them much political principle from England. We now print a great deal,** and shall soon supply ourselves with most of the books of considerable demand.

[http://classroom.monticello.org/images/handouts/SpiritofManufactures to%20Nemours 28June1809.pdf](http://classroom.monticello.org/images/handouts/SpiritofManufactures%20Nemours%2028June1809.pdf)

[Type here]