

# Jefferson's Views of the Press

## Resource Packet

### Extract from Thomas Jefferson to John Jay

Paris Jan. 25. 1786

It is really to be lamented that after a public servant has passed a life in important and faithful services, after having given the most plenary satisfaction in every station, it should yet be in the power of every individual to disturb his quiet, by arraigning him in a gazette and by obliging him to act as if he needed a defence, an obligation imposed on him by unthinking minds which never give themselves the trouble of seeking a reflection unless it be presented to them. However it is a part of the price we pay for our liberty, which cannot be guarded but by the freedom of the press, nor that be limited without danger of losing it.

<https://founders.archives.gov/?q=freedom%20AND%20press%20Author%3A%22Jefferson%2C%20Thomas%22&s=1111311113&sa=&r=14&sr=>



### Extract from Thomas Jefferson to James Currie

Paris Jan. 28. 1786

I observe by the public papers that he has brought on a very disagreeable altercation with mr Jay, in which he has given to the character of the latter a colouring which does not belong to it. these altercations, little thought of in America, make a great impression here. in truth it is afflicting that a man who has past his life in serving the public, who has served them in every the highest stations with universal approbation, & with a purity of conduct which has silenced even party opprobrium, who tho' poor has never permitted himself to make a shilling in the public employ, should yet be liable to have his peace of mind so much disturbed by any individual who shall think proper to arraign him in a newspaper. it is however an evil for which there is no remedy. our liberty depends on the freedom of the press, and that cannot be limited without being lost. to the sacrifice, of time, labor, fortune, a public servant must count upon adding that of peace of mind and even reputation.

<http://tjrs.monticello.org/letter/2141>

# Jefferson's Views of the Press

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### Extract from Thomas Jefferson to John Cartwright

Monticello in Virginia. June 5. 1824

...the constitutions of most of our states assert that all power is inherent in the people; that they may exercise it by themselves, in all cases to which they think themselves competent, (as in electing their functionaries executive and legislative, and deciding by a jury of themselves, both fact and law, in all judiciary cases in which any fact is involved) or they may act by representatives, freely and equally chosen; that it is their right and duty to be at all times armed; that they are entitled to freedom of person; freedom of religion; freedom of property; and freedom of the press.

<http://tjrs.monticello.org/letter/1422>



### Extract from Thomas Jefferson to Lafayette

Monticello Nov. 4. 1823

...but the only security of all is in a free press. the force of public opinion cannot be resisted, when permitted freely to be expressed. the agitation it produces must be submitted to. it is necessary to keep the waters pure.

<http://tjrs.monticello.org/letter/425>



### Extract from Thomas Jefferson to David Howell

Monticello Dec. 15. 1810

... my object too at present is peace and tranquility, neither doing nor saying any thing to be quoted, or to make me the subject of newspaper disquisitions.

<http://tjrs.monticello.org/letter/267>

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### Extract from Thomas Jefferson to Charles Yancey

Monticello Jan. 6. 1816

...if a nation expects to be ignorant & free, in a state of civilisation, it expects what never was & never will be. the functionaries of every government have propensities to command at will the liberty & property of their constituents. there is no safe deposit for these but with the people themselves; nor can they be safe with them without information. where the press is free and every man able to read, all is safe.

<http://tjrs.monticello.org/letter/327>



### Extracts from Thomas Jefferson to John Norvell

Washington June 11. 1807

... To your request of my opinion of the manner in which a newspaper should be conducted so as to be most useful, I should answer 'by restraining it to true facts & sound principles only.' yet I fear such a paper would find few subscribers ... nothing can now be believed which is seen in a newspaper. I really look with commiseration over the great body of my fellow citizens, who, reading newspapers live & die in the belief that they have known something of what has been passing in the world in their time.

<http://tjrs.monticello.org/letter/1339>



### Extract from Thomas Jefferson to James Madison re: Hamilton

July 7. 1793

...for gods sake, my dear Sir, take up your pen, select the most striking heresies, and cut him to peices [sic] in the face of the public.

<http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/jefferson/jeffed.html#116>

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### Extract from Thomas Jefferson to Nathaniel Macon

Monticello Jan. 12. 1819

I read no newspaper now but Ritchie's, and in that chiefly the advertisements, for they contain the only truths to be relied on in a newspaper. I feel a much greater interest in knowing what passed two or three thousand years ago, than in what is now passing. I read nothing therefore but of the heroes of Troy, of the wars of Lacedaemon & Athens, of Pompey and Caesar, and of Augustus too, the Bonaparte and parricide scoundrel of that day. I have had, and still have such entire confidence in the late and present Presidents, that I willingly put both soul & body into their pockets. while such men as yourself and your worthy colleagues of the legislature, and such characters as compose the Executive administration, are watching for us all, I slumber without fear, and review in my dreams the visions of antiquity

<http://tjrs.monticello.org/letter/1595>



### Extract from Thomas Jefferson to Josef Ignacio de Viar and Josef de Jaudenes

Philadelphia July 14. 1793

GENTLEMEN

I have laid before the President your letters of the 11th. and 13th. instant. Your residence in the United States has given you an opportunity of becoming acquainted with the extreme freedom of the Press in those States. Considering it's great importance to the public liberty, and the difficulty of subjecting it to very precise rules, the laws have thought it less mischievous to give greater scope to it's freedom, than to the restraint of it. The President has therefore no authority to prevent publications of the nature of those you complain of in your favor of the 11th. I can only assure you that the Government of the United States has no part in them, and that all it's expressions of respect towards his Catholic Majesty, public and private, have been as uniform, as their desire to cultivate his friendship has been sincere.

<https://founders.archives.gov/?q=freedom%20AND%20press%20Author%3A%22Jefferson%2C%20Thomas%22&s=1111311113&sa=&r=50&sr=>