

Thomas Jefferson's Enlightenment

*Background Notes*



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By

James C. Thompson

Boothbay Harbor, Maine

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To

Margaret Porch Thompson Lounsbury

Patron of the Arts





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## Opening Comment

*M*y earlier book, *Thomas Jefferson's Enlightenment – Paris 1785* was set in the final years of France's Ancien Régime. In it, I explained that Jefferson went to France to start his life over. I explained that he planned to reconstruct himself in the image of the marquis de Chastellux, and that as he groomed himself to join the refined company of men like Chastellux, millions of destitute French peasants starved and the decrepit French monarchy drifted into bankruptcy. They were, as Charles Dickens famously said, the best of times and the worst of times.

Jefferson met the marquis during a visit the exemplary Frenchman paid to Monticello in the spring of 1782. The visit took place in the tension-filled month prior to the birth of his sixth child. On 6 September 1782, four months after the child's birth, his wife Martha died and his world collapsed. Twenty-two months later, Jefferson departed for France. In a letter he sent to a friend in Williamsburg, Virginia on September 30, 1785, he confirmed that his private purpose for going was "to examine more nearly the condition of the great [and] to appreciate the true value of the circumstances in their situation." The world these remarkable people lived in collapsed shortly after Jefferson returned home. Some of his closest friends were murdered during the upheaval that ensued.

The story I tell in *Thomas Jefferson's Enlightenment* is about how the self-described savage from the mountains of America became immersed in the world's most cultivated and elegant society. This was not something he accomplished by himself. Even a brilliant man like Jefferson needed assistance in learning the manners, the values, and the ideas of the best people of France. I put him in the hands of an equally brilliant guide. In my reconstruction, Jefferson developed into a man of the world in the company of someone he actually knew. Pierre Cabanis was the one man in Paris who was familiar with all the details of the French Enlightenment, acquainted with all of the city's *lumieres*, and close enough to Jefferson to serve as his instructor.

I believe the political campaigns Jefferson undertook later in the 1790s were conducted by a man who was significantly different from the circumspect political loner who drafted the *Declaration of Independence* without consultation in his Philadelphia rooms. I trace his transformation from political solipsist into

progressive political activist in a series of excursions in which the man who is aspiring to restart his life learns from the man who knows everything about the society he wishes to join.

Pierre Cabanis lived in the household of Madame Helvétius. Madame was also a close personal friend of Benjamin Franklin. I believe Jefferson met Cabanis through Franklin at some point before he received the printed copies of his book, *Notes on the State of Virginia*. These books arrived on 10 May 1785. In my non-fiction narrative, Jefferson's adventures with Cabanis begin shortly after that.

In their third excursion, I have Cabanis introduce Jefferson the leader of an elite circle of reformers. Jefferson's first audience with Louis Alexandre, duc de la Rochefoucauld appears to have taken place in the fall of 1785. Prominent members of his circle were the marquis de Lafayette and the marquis de Condorcet. I believe that Jefferson's conversations with these "chateau reformers" rekindled the sentiments that underpinned his revolutionary-era mission to dismantle Virginia's colonial hierarchy.

In my narrative, the duc and the members of his circle hold the author of the *Declaration of Independence* in high esteem because they believe he knows how to frame a constitutional government with a properly structured bill of rights. As they deliberate on what rights are inherent and how to protect them in a new representative government, they consult the American expert. As they are doing this, the monarchy bumbles toward its fateful end.

Jefferson allows himself to be diverted in the fall of 1786 when American artist John Trumbull joins his household. Trumbull introduces the recently enlightened American Ambassador to English artist Richard Cosway and his charming wife. Perhaps it is because Maria Cosway is married that Jefferson ends their budding romance after only a few enchanted outings.

In the winter of 1787, Jefferson leaves Paris on a three month mind-clearing tour through the south of France and northern Italy. When he returns to the French capital in mid-June, the Assembly of Notables has completed its historic meeting and the effort is underway to replace France's bankrupt monarchy with a constitutional government. I believe it is during this eleventh hour effort to liberate the French people from monarchical tyranny that Jefferson comes into his own. In these frantic moments, the circumspect political loner blossoms into the enlightened progressive activist. I believe the experience Jefferson gained in this effort to deliver the French people from tyranny continued to guide him after he returned home.

The first seventeen commentaries in this book contain details and supplemental information that I was unable to weave into my narrative. In the final comment, I trace the evolution of Jeffersonian historiography through its two hundred year

existence. I have included it because I want readers understand me when I say that the man they read about today is a manufactured product. During the last seventy years, the person who lived once in the real world has been largely replaced by an invention that now forms the center of a massive social engineering program.

A decade or so before the beginning of the 21st century, Jeffersonian historiographers devoted themselves to what I call legacy management. It is understandable that the managers of the new Jeffersonian legacy would avoid a man who, it seems, kept his own children as slaves. I think there is more to it, however. The business of today's Jeffersonians is to create a better world, not to remember the man. This world is based on a Jeffersonian Philosophy of Human Rights that his legacy managers have substantially manufactured. Whether it was Jefferson's is a good less clear.

I present my comments on the changing Jeffersonian template because I want to distinguish the real world, day-to-day person I find interesting, from the distillations that concern contemporary Jeffersonians. Also, I want to distinguish my day-to-day approach for understanding an historical figure from big picture analyses that are used to explain Jefferson's manufactured legacy.

As a Philosopher, I think the way to learn about Jefferson is to investigate how he acquired his bright ideas: where did he encounter them, who conveyed them to him, how did he interpret them, and why did he think they were important? Analyzing Jefferson's "legacy" is not part of this enterprise. Nor is it useful for understanding the man in his time. I say that those who want to understand Thomas Jefferson should not spend their time reading about his "legacy".

Jefferson is worth knowing, in my opinion, because he interacted with creative people. Men he associated with helped to invent the modern world. He made a number of significant contributions to the enterprises himself. When we investigate how he interacted with these extraordinary individuals in his day-to-day affairs, we meet the real Thomas Jefferson. This is the person I follow through Paris in *Thomas Jefferson's Enlightenment*, and it is the person I discuss in the pages of this book.

James C. Thompson  
Boothbay Harbor, Maine  
August 2014



## chapter one

# Thomas Jefferson: Political Loner

*I*t may sound strange to Jeffersonians who think of Thomas Jefferson as the author of what is arguably the most important political document ever written, but during his first political career (which extended from September 1769, when Jefferson entered the Virginia House of Burgesses, to June of 1781 when his second term as Governor of the State of Virginia ended) Jefferson harbored a variety of opinions and preferences that separated him from his peers in the hierarchy of Virginia and in the patriotic party that orchestrated America's formal political separation from England in 1776.

Three Jeffersonian heterodoxies are particularly significant in the story of Thomas Jefferson's Enlightenment:

- 1) Jefferson was a man of Reason not a man of Faith. His reason led him to object to the orthodoxies of Virginia's Anglican Church and to its exercise of political power in the colony. Jefferson was, in other words, a "Dissenter". His peers in Virginia were not.
- 2) In the debate that culminated in the separation of the American colonies from England, Jefferson did not share his fellow Patriots' enthusiasm for Natural Law either as a foundation for Public Right as justification for political independence.

Yes, the author of the *Declaration of Independence* invoked the Natural Rights of Man as justification for severing political bands with England, but Jefferson was a Lawyer, not a Philosopher. He was trained to defend his clients by building cases on legal precedents. He was not trained to defend or advance theories by elucidating valid entailments and establishing logically necessary relationships between premises and conclusions.

The concept of Natural Law was in Jefferson's eyes vague and malleable compared to Common Law. As an authority in the Common Law, Jefferson found Natural Law unnecessary to accomplish the political objectives of the independence movement. He made this clear in his first political tract, which he drafted alone at Monticello in the summer of 1774.

- 3) Jefferson spent much of the American Revolution alone on his mountaintop devising ways to dismantle the hierarchical system that channeled the wealth and political power of Virginia into the hands of a privileged few.

In his private crusade to disempower Virginia's colonial ruling class and to make way for Virginia's new republican government and society, Jefferson was working directly against the social and financial interests of own class.

Jefferson was aware that these positions might undermine his social relationships and political opportunities. He was therefore careful to keep them to himself. Jefferson was like the Wizard of Oz, out of sight on his mountaintop, pulling levers to change the world. No one was to know what he really thought, what he was doing, or why he was doing it. Operating as he did with a Wizard-of-Oz mentality, he drafted all the notable public papers he wrote during the revolutionary period—by himself with virtually no input from others.

Let us consider his four most celebrated Revolutionary-era texts:

- 1) Jefferson wrote what is known today as “The Summary View of the Rights of British America” in seclusion at Monticello in July 1774. In it, Jefferson argued from precedent that Americans were a sovereign people and that the English King and English Parliament had no right to meddle in their affairs. His peers in the House of Burgesses considered his argument and rejected his claim.
- 2) Jefferson drafted his *Constitution for the State of Virginia* in his Philadelphia rooms in May and June of 1776. He incorporated into it a “Bill of Rights”, which included the right of settlers to free and full ownership of the land they settled. He also incorporated into it a plan for proportional representation.

Giving settlers direct ownership of the land they settled was a creative way to undermine the feudal land laws that sustained Virginia's Tidewater land barons during colonial times. Proportional representation would, over time, transfer political power away from the Tidewater's aristocrats to the yeoman farmers who were filling Virginia's vacant western lands.

Jefferson was privately outraged that the members of the Virginia Convention, which met in Williamsburg while he sat in the Second Continental Congress in Philadelphia, approved George Mason's constitution instead of his late-arriving alternative. He later vented the anger this aroused in him in Chapter 13 of his *Notes on the State of Virginia*.



- 3) Jefferson drafted the *Declaration of Independence* alone in his Philadelphia rooms in June 1776.

He began his draft by restating the first three propositions in George Mason's *Virginia Declaration of Rights* in which Mason referred to "the Natural Rights of enjoyment of Life and Liberty, and the means for acquiring property and pursuing Happiness."

Jefferson followed these with the 28 precedents he had used to support the argument he presented in his *Summary View of the Rights of British America*. He reused them in the preamble of his plan for the new government of Virginia. Now he used them a third time to support declaring independence from England.

The Congress revised Jefferson's preamble, crossed out a couple of Jefferson's precedents, and added a couple other notable lines before approving the document.

- 4) As a member of the Committee of Revisors, on which he served from January 1777 until June 1779, Jefferson drafted sixty-six Bills alone on his Charlottesville mountaintop.

Among these measures was a bill cleverly designed to change the political order in the new State of Virginia. Jefferson devised his plan for a system of public education to raise up a governing class he referred to as a "Natural Aristoi".

The members of Virginia's third General Assembly refused to enact a single one of the measures Jefferson drafted or any of the sixty-six bills his fellow committeemen drafted.

Amazingly, for only one of these four documents did Jefferson seek input—he may have consulted with George Wythe on one or two fine points for his Constitution for the State of Virginia.

This circumspect political loner was the man who sailed to France in July of 1784. I explain in *Thomas Jefferson's Enlightenment* how this political solipsist transformed during his five years in France into a progressive political leader. This new man, after he returned home, waged and won the 2nd American Revolution in the Presidential election of 1800.



## Chapter Two

# Why Did Thomas Jefferson Go to France?

There are two kinds of answers to this question. What I call “the historical report answer” provides information that is factually correct, but incomplete in respect to providing a full understanding of the matter. What I call “the beyond-the-veil answer” considers the factual record in terms of the circumstances of the people involved. Because it encompasses the action, the actor(s), their circumstances, and their intentions, it presents the most complete account of the event. Not surprisingly, the historical report answers the question of why Jefferson went to France differently from how the beyond-the-veil answer does.

Those who examine the historical record will find that on four occasions the “Congress of the States Assembled” invited Jefferson to be one of its agents in France:

- The Congress sent its first invitation in September of 1776 immediately after Jefferson resigned his seat in the Second Continental Congress and returned to Virginia. Writing many years later in his *Autobiography*, Jefferson explained:  
*Such was the state of my family that I could not leave it, nor could I expose it to the dangers of the sea, and capture by British ships.*

- The Congress sent a second invitation immediately after Jefferson finished his second term as Governor of the State of Virginia in June 1781. In his *Autobiography*, Jefferson observed:  
*The same reasons obliged me still to decline.*

- Congress sent a third invitation in November 1782, two months after the death of Jefferson’s wife. Jefferson quickly accepted this invitation. After making his arrangements, he set out in the company of his eldest daughter to confer with the Congress in Philadelphia. He proceeded from there to Baltimore. While waiting to get under way, he received word that England had signed a treaty of peace in Paris. The reason for his mission being resolved, Jefferson returned home.

- In March 1784, Congress sent a fourth request. Would Jefferson join John Adams and Benjamin Franklin in negotiating treaties of commerce? Again Jefferson accepted. On 5 July, he boarded a ship in Boston and departed for France in the company of his daughter Martha.

The historical report answer is therefore: Jefferson went to France as a representative of the Congress of the States United to negotiate commercial agreements with its European Trading Partners.

This is not the conclusion we reach when we peer beyond the veil. We are then able to connect the dots in the written record with the circumstances in which these events occurred. This shows us a picture of a man acting in the moment.

The first thing we notice is the event that changed Jefferson's life: the death of his wife. In her final hours, in her weak hand, Martha penned these words from *Tristram Shandy*: "the days and hours . . . are flying . . . like clouds of windy day never to return . . ."

Jefferson completed the line:

*. . . every time I kiss thy hand to bid adieu, every absence which follows it, are preludes to that eternal separation which we are shortly to make.*

Not long after her death, Jefferson sent a letter to the marquis de Chastellux. In it, he observed:

*A single event wiped away all my plans and left me a blank, which I had not the spirits to fill up.*

Jefferson inscribed on his wife's grave this wistful line from *The Iliad*:

*Nay if even in the house of Hades the dead forget their dead,  
yet will I even there be mindful of my dear comrade.*

Why would Jefferson notify Chastellux of his wife's passing? A few weeks before Martha Jefferson delivered her 6th child [Lucy Elizabeth was born on 8 May 1782], the marquis paid Jefferson a weeklong visit at Monticello. Chastellux was a member of the prestigious French Academy and had been third in command of the French forces at Yorktown. Jefferson was mesmerized by his guest's erudition and brilliant conversation, which were welcome distractions in the tension-filled weeks preceding Martha's delivery.

These considerations in mind, the beyond-the-veil answer is: Congress's third and fourth requests reached Jefferson after his world collapsed. He was in a state of despair and facing the depressing task of starting his life over alone. He thought back on the Renaissance man who had filled his gloomy home with light. Contemplating his lonely future, Jefferson decided to rebuild his life in the society that produced the marquis de Chastellux. Jefferson went to France, I believe, to become a citizen of the world like the worldly French academician. He went to France, in other words, in pursuit of personal happiness.



## Chapter Three

# Jefferson's Plan

Conversations about Jefferson today tend to divide between Jefferson the father-of-Human-Rights and Jefferson the-father-of-his-slave's-children. These conversations should not prevent us from noticing how Jefferson conducted his daily affairs and accomplished his larger purposes.

Jefferson may have been a skilled patriotic draftsman and lonely after the death of his wife, but he was not an abstract thinker like, for example, John Locke or Jean-Jacques Rousseau. He exhibited instead the traits of a scientist, observing Nature and measuring, enumerating, and organizing things that he observed. Jefferson sought to create right order, precise order, where he thought things were not in proper order. Four examples of this are:

- 1) In the summer of 1774, alone on his mountaintop, Jefferson crystalized his objection to British rule in America. He asserted that British Americans were a sovereign people, that the hierarchical government of King George III violated the natural order, that the English king had no right to meddle in the affairs of America, and that, by right, Americans should govern themselves.

He carried this idea to the next logical step during the winter and spring of 1776 by incorporating a collection of regulations and procedures into his plan for the government for the State of Virginia.

He completed the cycle a week later by drafting a rationale for separating from England and creating independent governments in the American colonies. His argument began with the appeal to the Author of Nature that George Mason invoked in his *Virginia Declaration of Rights*. Jefferson supplemented Mason's Natural Law claims with the same list of the King and Parliament's transgressions against English and colonial law he had used in the two previously mentioned documents.

- 2) After declaring independence, Jefferson joined the first Virginia Assembly. As a member of this assembly, he conducted a carefully planned legislative campaign to fix what he perceived as flaws in his state's new constitution. In eight weeks, Jefferson drafted, aided in drafting, and revised more than fifteen bills. These measures included:

- A plan to change the land laws of this State
  - A plan to disestablish the Church of England,
  - A plan to promote westward migration,
  - Plans for implementing the State's new court system, and
  - A plan for revising Virginia's outdated Colonial Code.
- 3) Toward the end of the first session of the First General Assembly, he was appointed to the Committee of Revisors. Jefferson spent the next two and a half years writing dozens of pieces of legislation, which he deemed necessary for the new State of Virginia to become "a well-ordered republic."
- 4) When Jefferson returned from France in the fall of 1789, he redesigned and reconstructed his mountaintop home and gardens to meet the needs of the Renaissance man he became in France. This enterprise occupied him for 25 years.

In this last undertaking Jefferson's true genius blossomed—as an architect and engineer. He created and implemented complex plans for some of our country's most beautiful buildings.

With the same care and precision, in the summer of 1781 Jefferson commenced work on what became his only book. His *Notes on the State of Virginia*, was a detailed, comprehensive collection of facts pertaining to the natural, social, and political characteristics of his state.

Jefferson built his book around a set of responses he developed for a questionnaire circulated by the French consul in Philadelphia, marquis de Barbé-Marbois. Abandoning his revolutionary-era practice, Jefferson reached out to several individuals whom he considered knowledgeable on these matters. First among these was his compatriot in the Independence Party and fellow member of the American Philosophical Society, Charles Thomson.

On his way to board his France-bound ship in the spring of 1784, Jefferson stopped in Philadelphia. He was unable to locate his friend, but during a shopping excursion he was able to purchase "an uncommonly large panther skin." "By this means," Dumas Malone observed, "he hoped to convince Buffon that this animal and the cougar were not identical."

What was Malone referring to? Jefferson publicly praised the arrogant French naturalist as "the best informed of any naturalist who has ever written." Privately, Jefferson was outraged by an amazing error he found in Buffon's work. According to Buffon, Jefferson observed, the animals common both to the old and new world



were smaller in the latter. Buffon gave two reasons for this: 1) the heat in America was less; and 2) water covered more land in North America than in Europe.

Offended by the French scientist's slight to his homeland, Jefferson dedicated himself to refuting Buffon's erroneous theory. While assembling the facts of the matter, it dawned on him that he could use his work to support his private mission. By gifting copies of his finished critique to individuals in Chastellux's lettered circle, Jefferson might establish himself as a peer in their eyes.

When the self-described "savage from the mountains of America" reached Paris, his first call was on his former congressional colleague, Benjamin Franklin, who was then American Ambassador to the Court of King Louis XVI. During this visit, Jefferson acquired from Franklin the name of his printer. Nine months later, having transformed the loose pages of information he had been accumulating for two and half years into a manuscript, Jefferson had Franklin's printer print 200 copies.

He gifted about thirty of these to French cognoscenti and to acquaintances elsewhere in Europe. He sent 145 copies to friends in America—more than half in boxes to Madison and Wythe. Some of these appear to have been sold. Others were apparently distributed to selected students at Jefferson's alma mater in Williamsburg, Virginia.

Jefferson replaced Franklin as American Ambassador in July of 1785. As America's new ambassador, Jefferson was welcomed into the best circles of Parisian society. In this mundane way, the savage from the American mountains achieved his private objective. His book passed out of his mind as his social connections solidified. In a letter to the marquis de Chastellux on 7 June 1785, he confirmed that he was having second thoughts about his book. Would his comments on slavery and Virginia's constitution "do more harm than good?" he wondered. He later acknowledged that the project that had occupied so much of his time during his first nine months in France, produced more headaches than benefits.



## *chapter four*

# A Brief History of 18th Century France

France's monarchy was in dire straits when Jefferson landed at La Harve in the summer of 1784. It had been bankrupted by a century of periodic wars and the uninterrupted profligacy of its kings. To understand the circumstances of France when Jefferson arrived, it is sufficient to trace events from the year 1756. In that year, war broke out between France and England over the boundaries that separated their North American territories.

Known as "The French and Indian War" in America, the conflict quickly spread to Europe where it was known as "The Seven Years War". In this theater of the conflict, Austria aligned with France against Prussia. English imperialist William Pitt, then Secretary of the Northern Department, perceived this an opportunity to advance Britain's colonial interests and solicited Parliament to supply Prussia with 16,000 troops from George II's Hanoverian homeland. These troops arrived in Prussia in 1757. When France turned east to battle the wily king of Prussia, Pitt unleashed England's powerful navy to attack France's colonies in the four corners of the world—Canada, the East Indies and the Philippines, India, and Africa. Miraculously, the English assaults on all of these French colonies were successful.

The conflict was raging when England's old king died in 1760. German-born George II was succeeded by his English-born grandson. Seeing no advantage in pursuing Pitt's diversion on the European Continent, George III immediately set about making peace. Negotiations between France and England culminated in the Treaty of Paris, which brought an end to the French and Indian War in February 1763. The Treaty of Hubertusburg, signed by Prussia and Austria, ended the Seven Years War in the same month.

England emerged from this global conflict the most powerful nation in the world. The Mistress of the Seas controlled Canada in North America, The Philippines, and other French possessions in Africa, India, and the East Indies. While this ignited an economic boom in England, France languished under massive war debts, which it had no prospects for settling.

Profligate King Louis XV died at Versailles in May 1774. He was succeeded by his grandson. Louis XVI was not yet twenty when he ascended to the French throne.

Minister of Marine, comte de Maurepas, advised the new king in forming his first government. The jaded old courtier had developed an extensive network of connections during his twenty-four years in service to Louis XV. His first recommendation was to place the comte de Vergennes at the head of the Ministry of State. In this post, Vergennes would direct France's foreign affairs. Maurepas then recommended that abbé de Terray be retained as Comptroller General and that Monsieur Turgot be made the Minister of Marine. Two other recommendations that are consequential to the story of Jefferson's enlightenment were that Georges Louis Leclerc, comte de Buffon, be confirmed as Intendant of the King's Garden and that Buffon be given authority to expand that institution into a center of scientific research.

When the new government was first established, Vergennes answered to Maurepas. This changed, however, as Vergennes gained influence with the young king. The realignment became permanent soon after adventurous Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais sent his famous missive to the king. In it, the anonymous author implored the young monarch to aid the floundering American rebellion against England. Delivered in the summer of 1775, the letter read in part:

*You will only preserve the peace you desire, Sire, by preventing an accord from being made between England and America, and by preventing one of these from completely triumphing over the other. The only means for attaining this end is to give assistance to the Americans that allows them to put their forces on an equal footing with those of England. Believe me, Sire, the economy of a few millions now will, before long, cost a great deal more in the blood and money of France.* [Louis de Loménie. *Beaumarchais and his times: Sketches of French society in the eighteenth century*. Translated by Henry S. Edwards. Addey & Company. London. 1856. 122.]

During the fall of 1775, a direct correspondence opened between Vergennes and Monsieur Beaumarchais. The question now became: how should France assist the American rebellion? The minister suggested that one million livres might find their way into a trading company that might buy surplus French arms, but he made it clear that Beaumarchais would have to direct the business and bear all the risk. In the spring of 1776, Beaumarchais formed Roderigue Hortalez et Cie and began to funnel arms and military supplies to the American insurgents using funds provided by the nearly bankrupt French government.

Abbé Terray had kept his post in the old government by supplying King Louis XV with whatever money the king wished to spend. Terray covered the yearly deficits

with loans that grew in size each year. This was the way things had been done for many decades and Maurepas was satisfied to let it continue. He might have allowed Terray to mismanage the country's finances forever had his wife not forced Turgot upon him. After resisting for a month, Maurepas gave in and recommended that Turgot be moved from Minister of Marine to Comptroller General of Finance.

During his brief tenure as Minister of Marine, Turgot acquainted himself with the King's grave financial circumstances. In a memorandum he wrote before accepting the new post, Turgot warned the king that "the first gunshot" would force the state into bankruptcy. Turgot agreed to accept the post, however, and lead the nation away from its financial cliff if the King would grant him the power to implement a far-reaching plan. Then, Turgot vowed, he would solve France's financial problems without increasing taxes or borrowing more money. Said Turgot: "No bankruptcy, No new taxes, No new loans!"

Young King Louis XVI promised his steadfast support. "Fear nothing," the young king assured Turgot. "I will always sustain you!" Turgot began his service as France's chief financial officer in August 1774.

During thirteen years as Intendant of France's impoverished Limoge district, Turgot had applied economic concepts that he borrowed from Jacques Claude Marie Vincent de Gournay and Francois Quesnay.

As Louis XV's physician, Quesnay had the king's ear. In addition to giving him advice on matters relating to his personal health, Quesnay counseled the impetuous monarch on his mounting financial difficulties. Wealth would be created and the kingdom returned to economic health, Quesnay advised, by lifting regulations that restricted free trade in corn. He distilled his recommendation into this famous maxim: "poor peasant, poor kingdom; poor kingdom, poor king!"

As Comptroller General, a significant part of Turgot's program to restore France to economic health involved implementing Quesnay's ideas, which were being refined by a group of economists who called themselves *Physiocrats*. Prominent among these men was Pierre Samuel du Pont de Nemours. As a younger man, du Pont had been Quesnay's protégé. When Turgot became Comptroller General, he appointed du Pont as his deputy. Du Pont would perform "quantitative analyses" on the policies Turgot proposed so the Comptroller General could understand their financial impact on the economy and government revenue.

Turgot intended to restore France to economic health by reducing expenditures below revenues enough to realize an annual saving of twenty million *livres*. To accomplish this, he directed His Majesty to order the heads of all departments of the royal government to "concert" with the Minister of Finance. As his ministerial

colleagues brought their budgets into fiscal order, Turgot planned to introduce a series of reforms, which he would implement by the authority of the King. First, he would simplify the operation of the government by eliminating redundant and conflicting regulations. Then he would remove corrupt officials, abolish monopolistic practices and institutions, and replace the existing method of taxation and tax collection.

Once these measures to streamline and purify the government were under way, Turgot intended to implement a set of positive policies to promote the flow of public and private capital into economically productive areas. Doing these things would unfetter the nation's entrepreneurial *bourgeoisie*, which would rush forward in pursuit of its own prosperity. Physiocrats called this approach *laissez-faire*: when industrious people are permitted to pursue their own interests, they produce things, whether in agriculture, industry, or commerce, that enhance the well-being of the community.

Not surprisingly, Turgot's plan met with opposition from those with "vested interests". Unfortunately, this group included *everyone* in the hierarchy of the kingdom. By the summer of 1776, the clamor had become so great that the King could no longer endure it. Buckling under relentless pressure from the queen, he requested Turgot's resignation.

Turgot's fall accelerated Vergennes' rise. The shift had been foreshadowed in the spring of the previous year when Vergennes wrote the King about France's naval relations with Spain. "I am aware, sire of the state of your navy, but I have no idea of the situation of your finances." By the summer of 1776, in other words, it was no longer possible to conduct France's foreign policy without also engaging in its domestic finances.

Maurepas' last consequential act was to nominate Swiss banker Jacques Necker to fill Turgot's empty chair. The king consented to this, and Necker was called to direct the nation's finances. Necker went on to scrap most of Turgot's program and return to the policy of borrowing that abbe Terray had followed. Necker took up his duties as clouds gathered over North America.

Over the next four years, France appears to have contributed nearly 300 million livres to the American war effort. J. B. Perkins offered this assessment in *France in the American Revolution*:

*France had just gotten through the third campaign of the alliance at an outlay of one hundred and fifty million livres, and the fourth campaign bade fair to cost much more. At this era of discouragement, the Spanish were strenuous in their*

*advice that France should get such terms as she could for her American allies and make peace without more delay.* [Perkins. New York. Houghton Mifflin. 1911. 326–327.]

Whether it was 150 million livres or twice that amount, Vergennes understood that the financial burden was beyond France's ability to support. He was therefore determined to secure its repayment. He imagined this could be done with a combination of loan liquidation and new revenue derived from trade.

Vergennes enlisted du Pont to analyze the economies of the thirteen states and to prepare an estimate of the revenues France might generate through trade with the new American states. Du Pont had not yet set foot in America, but he had applied Quesnay's analytical methods for the intendant of Soissons and for Turgot. Now he applied them in his most consequential project.

Du Pont began by preparing an outline for his analysis in which he listed the components involved. He called on the reigning expert on matters pertaining to geography, climate, and zoology—comte de Buffon. Du Pont's analyses, in keeping with his training under Quesnay, were heavily weighted toward agriculture and the movement of grains and other agricultural products. Structures of government, government regulations, modes of transportation, population size, and population distribution were germane to these analyses. To acquire this information about America, du Pont, perhaps with assistance from Buffon's staff, developed a questionnaire. Vergennes then directed that this questionnaire be sent to the governors of the American states. Jefferson was among the men who responded to this questionnaire.

Bear in mind that when Jefferson arrived in France the monarchy was bankrupt. Its ability to function depended on the repayment of the loans it made to America during its revolution and on an expansion of trade with its American ally. By 1784, hope for repayment of the loans had dwindled and the revenues from trade remained miniscule. Reformers viewed the revolution in America as step in the march of human progress and contemplated ways to duplicate it in France. By the winter of 1786, Thomas Jefferson was counseling the duc de la Rochefoucauld and the members of his small circle on how a new constitutional government would embody the unalienable rights of the people. As he did, *petit bourgeoisie malcontents* in the political clubs of the Palais Royal began developing their own plans.





## chapter five Jefferson's Paris

Two thousand years before Jefferson arrived in France, natives established the first settlement in the area of what is now the French capital. It was an encampment on the island that 2,000 years later is the center of the largest metropolis in Europe. Through most of its history, the community was walled. With each phase of its expansion, from encampment to hamlet, from hamlet to village, from village to town, from town to city, its defensive wall was rebuilt and enlarged. In the 1630s, Louis XIII enlarged the wall again, extending the barrier Charles V had built in the 1370s. Louis XIII's addition encompassed growth that took place in the first half of the 17th century. Growth continued after Louis XIII's addition. By the beginning of the 18th century, the population of Paris had risen toward 450,000 and was again beyond the city's wall.

Fearing that continued growth would undermine the balance he perceived between the city's physical beauty and its social order, Louis XIII's son developed a plan to prevent it from expanding further. As Louis XIV moved to limit his capital's growth, he commenced an ambitious urban beautification program. This program began early in the 1700s with the removal of Louis XIII's barrier. The wall-builder's son did this in the belief that his military successes had made the city safe from invasion. When Jefferson reached Paris, a beautiful boulevard, known as le Cours ou le Boulevard, filled the space that Louis XIII's wall had formerly occupied. Louis XIV's no-growth decree notwithstanding, the population of the city had risen to 550,000, and its thoroughfares were clogged with vehicles, goods, and people.

Two years before Jefferson's arrival, Louis XVI authorized the directors of his tax agency to erect yet another barrier. Unlike its predecessors, the Wall of the Farmers-General was not intended as a system of defense. Its purpose was to facilitate the collection of public revenue. Construction of this *cloture* began shortly after Jefferson took up residence at the Hôtel Landron in October of 1784. What Jefferson referred to as a "wall of circumvallation" was to consist of sixteen elegant toll-collection stations situated between the city's forty-seven "gates." Had it been completed, this barrier would have doubled the size of the city to approximately 3440 hectares, thirteen square English miles.

Viewed on a map, the Wall of the Farmers-General looks something like an egg. This egg was bisected on its North-South axis by two conjoining avenues—rue Saint Martin meets rue Saint Jacques at the Seine. It was bisected on its East-West axis by a sequence of three avenues: rue de Roule on the west, rue Saint-Honoré in the center, and rue Saint Antoine on the right. The oldest part of Paris lies near the intersection of the two axes.

When Jefferson arrived, Ile de la Cite was home to the city's court system and its Bureau of Police. Le Palais de Justice occupied the western end of the island. "The mother of the church of France" occupied its eastern end. Adjacent to the Cathedral of Notre Dame was the Hôtel Dieu, the city's oldest hospital.

In 1702, Louis XIV divided his capital into twenty *quartiers*. This plan was not amended until the eve of the Revolution when it was updated to facilitate the nomination and election of deputies to the Estates-General. The city was then repartitioned into sixty districts. (The year after Jefferson's departure, the city was redistricted into forty-eight sections. In 1795, these sections were consolidated into the first twelve of the city's current *arrondissements*.)

Le Quartier Ile de la Cite was the first of Louis XIV's twenty *quartiers*. During Jefferson's time, it was ringed by eleven *faubourgs*. The word "faubourg" is derived from the Latin words *foris burgem*, which means "outside the city". Eight of these *faubourgs* lay on the north side of the Seine. The remaining three were on its south side. The city's northwestern quadrant included Faubourg de Saint Honoré, Faubourg de Le Roule, Faubourg de Montmartre, Faubourg de Poinsoniere, and Faubourg de Saint Denis. Its northeastern quadrant included Faubourg de Saint Martin, Faubourg de Temple, and Faubourg de Saint Antoine. Its southeastern quadrant contained Faubourg de Saint Jacques and Faubourg de Saint Marcel. Its southwestern quadrant consisted of Faubourg de Saint Germain.

Like most other high-ranking government officials and foreign dignitaries, Jefferson chose to live in the city's northwestern sector. During the two decades preceding Jefferson's arrival, much of the open ground in the northern tier of this sector was developed—both of Jefferson's Parisian residences were built during this period. Hôtel Landron on cul de sac Taitbout was built on the northern edge of what had been Louis XIII's wall. Hôtel Langeac on the Champs Elysees was built on the western edge of this barrier. Construction on Hôtel Langeac began in 1768 and was completed around 1780. Jefferson relocated there on 17 October 1785. He maintained his residence there until departing for home on 28 September 1789.

While vacant fields were being filled with neighborhoods on the outskirts of Quartiers du Palais Royal, Montmartre, and Saint Denis, several impressive

projects were begun and completed in the center of Paris. The most significant of these were in the precincts near the king's city residence.

First among these was the Place de Louis XV at the western end of the Tuileries Garden. Approval had been secured in 1748 to create an equestrian statue of the aging King. His Highness donated a parcel of land a few years later. In 1757, royal architect Jacques-Ange Gabriel drew the plan for a plaza. After numerous delays, it finally opened with the statue of Louis XV at its center in 1775. This park completed an elaborate western entrance into heart of the city by linking the Champs Elysees with the Tuileries Garden and Palace.

As Gabriel was drawing his plan for la Place de Louis XV, the king commissioned him to design a pair of buildings to adorn its northern perimeter. Alexandre-Jean Noël pictured these two striking neo-classical structures in his 1772 portrait of the park. The building on the left became the residence of the duc de Aumont, who soon sold it to architect Louis-François Trouard. In this building on 6 February 1778, Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, and Silas Deane signed the treaty in which France recognized the United States and formalized their relations. The building on its right is the Hôtel de la Marine, which from its beginning provided offices for the French Navy. The avenue between them, rue Royale, links Gabriel's plaza to the Church of Saint Marie-Madeleine, which was completed a few years after the plaza.

A second notable project was undertaken by the king's distant cousin, Joseph Louis-Philippe, 6th duc d'Orleans. The duc inherited his title and the Palais Royal from his father in 1780. The following year he began to renovate and expand it. This work was in its final stages when Jefferson took up his brief residence there in August of 1784.

The duc's regal home faced the Louvre from across rue Saint-Honoré. His garden filled the block behind his palace. The addition he added consisted of an inner ring of buildings around this garden. When finished, its three four-storied arcades housed 145 cafes, shops, clubs, and theatres. One of the duc's first tenants was Dr. Philippe Curtius who leased two spaces in galerie de Montpensier to house his wax works. In the galerie de Valois, which enclosed the north end of the garden, aviator Pilâtre de Rosier opened the world's first museum of flight, which he called the Musée du Comte d'Artois in honor of its sponsor. Jefferson patronized both establishments.

A timbered pavilion known as le Camp des Tartares separated the garden from the duc's residence. This notorious mall featured an array of lewd spectacles and salacious exhibits that lured voyeurs from across Parisian society. Among the popular attractions were Mademoiselle Lapierre, a bearded Prussian woman who stood seven feet tall, and Labelle Zulima, a wax effigy of a nude woman that passers by were free to ogle. For the payment of a few sous, the more inquisitive could lift the

veil that covered her lower extremities and explore the charms hidden there. They could continue their investigations in the upper floors of the other galleries, where bevyes of prostitutes received visitors.

The disreputable behavior encouraged by the Barbarian's Camp was not the emporium's only idiosyncrasy. The duc, who had become the focal point of opposition to the monarchy at the time of Louis XVI's coronation, quietly encouraged disaffected philosophes from the city's teeming lower classes to gather under his roofs. By the time of Jefferson's arrival, the Palais Royal had become a center for political intrigue and sedition. Strolling through its arcades, Jefferson would have heard a stream of political harangues. He probably perused more than one handbill denouncing the monarchy and demanding its replacement. France's revolution would start with such a harangue in front of the Café du Foy (in the far corner of the galerie de Montpensier) a few weeks before Jefferson's departure.

A third project that bears mention was the grain warehouse where Jefferson met Maria Cosway in August of 1786. La Halle aux Blés was the largest structure in the produce marketing section east of the Palais Royal. It was built between 1763 and 1767. Its dome, which Jefferson admired, was added in 1782. This market area was one of the few places in the city where upper crusts from the western suburbs interacted with tradesmen and laborers from the city's proletarian eastern quarters.

Before he visited la Halle aux Blés, Jefferson made two excursions into the city's northeastern sector. The first of these took place a month after Jefferson moved to Hôtel Landron. On this occasion, Jefferson attended an art auction conducted by a Monsieur Paillet. Monsieur Paillet's gallery appears to have been one of several in a sprawling mansion built in the late-1620s by Claude de Bullion, Minister of Finance under Louis XIII. Hôtel Bullion was a block north of la Halle aux Blés on rue Patriere. This street was later renamed rue Jean-Jacques Rousseau in honor of the *philosophe* who lived there between 1770 and 1778. Jefferson bought two paintings from M. Paillet.

Jefferson attended a second art auction in February of 1785. This outing took him to within a block or two of the Bastille. His destination was the former home of "deceased collector" Dupille de Saint-Severin on rue Saint Louis. Jefferson bought five paintings at this auction. Whether he paused to inspect the nearby fortress is not known.

This quarter of the city had been fashionable when Bullion and Saint-Severin built their mansions. Henry IV had attracted such wealthy peers by settling the city's first public square, la Place Royale, in the heart of its Marais district. Several grand maisons were built on and near this plaza. Among these were the Hôtel de Sens, the

Hôtel de Sully, the Hôtel de Beauvais, and the Hôtel de Guénégauds. The Hôtel de Carnavalet was built during the 16th century. During the sector's 17th century salad days, it became the home of celebrated letter writer, the marquise de Sévigné. In 1866 the city of Paris transformed her home into the Musée de Carnavalet, which continues to conserve the art and history of Paris.

The Bastille was a block to the east of le Place Royale. Built in earlier centuries, Charles V transformed it into the city's fortified eastern gate in the 1300s. Beyond this gate lay Faubourg Saint Antoine. In Jefferson's time, tourists did not venture into it unless they had "a particular interest in manufacturing." It seems Jefferson did not. Bakeries, furniture shops, and other manufactories were attracted to this drab suburb by tax exemptions and other regulatory measures devised to draw industry to the city. By the time Jefferson reached Paris, the artisans and laborers who operated these enterprises had replaced the idle rich who brightened the city's northeastern quadrant in the previous century. The city's Jewish community was also there, at the center of what had once been a swamp.

One 18th century courtier who bucked the trend to locate in Quartier du Saint Germain des Pres in the city's southwestern corner was Pierre Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais. During the American Revolution, Beaumarchais conducted the clandestine business of Roderigue Hortalez and Company from the library of his hôtel at 47 rue Vielle du Temple. In 1787, he purchased an acre of inexpensive real estate between le Place Royale and the Bastille. On it, he built one of the grandest villas in Paris. Jefferson attended a performance of Beaumarchais' celebrated comedy. He also received a visit from the man his country refused to pay for the arms that turned the tide of the American Revolution. Whether Jefferson ever visited the playwright-turned-arms dealer's spectacular home his not known.

The southeastern sector of Jefferson's Paris featured a number of distinguished public and philanthropic institutions. The Hall of Wine still overlooks the Seine opposite Ile Saint Louis. Beside it are the King's Gardens. Jefferson had reasons for visiting both places and is said to have been "a frequent visitor to the Jardin du Roi." To the east of the gardens was la Hospice de la Salpêtrière, which began its long life as a gunpowder factory in the 16th century. In the mid-17th century, Louis XIII converted it into a repository for the poor. In the next century, Louis XIV added to its functions that of a prison for prostitutes and as an asylum for the mentally ill and criminally insane. When Jefferson reached Paris, this "hospital" is said to have had 10,000 patients. There is no record that Jefferson visited it.

A far grander institution, one that Jefferson did visit, was named after the patron saint of Paris. Planning for the Church of Saint Genevieve began in 1755. Two years

later, Jacques-Germain Soufflot completed his astonishing plan for a church that could be seen from every point in the city. Construction was still in progress when Jefferson inspected it (date unknown). The revolution had begun by the time the work was completed in 1790. Soufflot's masterpiece was then seized and put to use as a secular mausoleum for the city's greatest sons. Among the remains interred there are those of Voltaire and Rousseau. The body of Jefferson's friend Pierre Cabanis was also interred there, but his heart was buried in the garden of Madame Helvétius's estate in Auteuil.

Next to the Church of Saint Genevieve was one of the city's most treasured institutions. The colleges of the University of Paris spread through the neighborhoods north of Soufflot's awe-inspiring landmark. In earlier times, instruction at the Sorbonne and the university's other colleges was conducted in Latin, hence the name Latin Quarter, which is still used to identify this section of Paris.

The city's southwestern sector was mostly open ground at the beginning of the 18th century. Much of its land was owned by the Princes Condé who inherited their title from the uncle of Bourbon King Henry IV. In the decade before Jefferson reached France, the reigning Prince began to develop the grounds of Hôtel de Condé. La Théâtre-Français was the flagship structure in this development. Built between 1779 and 1782 in the garden of his hôtel, it featured the Palladian design of Charles De Wailly and his schoolmate, Marie-Joseph Peyre. Jefferson attended five performances at this theatre, including *The Marriage of Figaro*, which he saw on August 4, 1786.

Behind the theatre, across rue de Vaugirard, is the Palais du Luxembourg. The palace and its garden complex were built in the mid-1600s as a residence for Louis XIII's mother, Marie de' Medici. In 1750, its galleries were opened two days a week for public viewing. This policy appears to have ended after Louis XVI gifted the property to his brother, the comte de Provence, which he did in 1778. There is no record that Jefferson visited the palace or its ground, but given the number of performances he attended across the street, it seems likely that he at least toured the palace's magnificent gardens.

L'Hôtel national des Invalides was built for Louis XIV in the last decades of the 17th century to provide a hospital and home for the veterans of his many wars. Its dome was completed in 1708. No record shows that Jefferson visited it.

As the 18th century wore on, this quarter of Paris grew more appealing to aristocrats obliged to accompany the king to and from Versailles. The Palais de Bourbon was among the first of their magnificent structures. Completed in 1728, it was the residence of Louise Françoise de Bourbon, duchesse de Bourbon. The

duchesse was the daughter of Louis XIV and his mistress, marquise of Montespan. The marquis de Lafayette's townhome was on rue de Bourbon a few blocks to its east. A few blocks further east, on rue de Seine, was Hôtel la Rochefoucauld. Jefferson went there often to commune with the duc and his thoughtful mother, duchesse d'Anville.

Adjacent to the duc de la Rochefoucauld's residence was le Hôtel de Monnaies, which housed the royal Mint. The building was completed in 1773. The following year, the marquis de Condorcet, having become Inspector General of the Mint, moved into one of its apartments. Midway between the Palais de Bourbon and the Hôtel de Monnaies was the Hôtel de Salm. Construction on this mesmerizing building began in 1782 and finished under Jefferson's watchful eye five years later. A few blocks south of this structure, on rue de Grenelle, was the Abbaye royale de Panthéon. The church and the school Jefferson's daughters attended there had been rebuilt and expanded in the 1740s.

Early in the 13th century, Phillippe Auguste placed the first pavers on streets in Paris. A few of these streets reportedly had drains that conveyed collected fluids into the Seine. Over the next six centuries, the city expanded much faster than its drainage system. In Jefferson's time, Parisian streets had gutters that ran along at their centers. Lacking drains, filth—including human waste—lingered in these troughs even through dry weather. The stench was by all accounts awful. Since few streets had sidewalks, pedestrians faced the hazard of being sprayed when carriages raced by. Foot travelers might also be run over. Injury and death from such accidents were commonplace in Jefferson's time.

Louis XIV's improvement projects included expanding his capital's primitive sewer system. Under his direction, a tunneled circuit was built beneath the faubourgs on the right bank of the Seine. This circuit emptied into the river between Pont au Change and Pont Notre Dame across from Ile de la Cite. A similar circuit was built south of the river. This circuit drained into Riviere Bièvre, which emptied into the Seine between the King's Garden and the Hospital de la Salpêtrière. Besides the sewage and run off, le Manufacture des Gobelins and the area's tanning factories poured pollutants into this poor creek. It must have been the most poisonous waterway in the world. There is no record that Jefferson inspected this unnatural wonder. He did frequently cross the Seine, however, which must have been just as polluted. When he did, he would have seen some of the 2000 washerwomen who made their livings pounding clothes "clean" in its tainted water.

During his first weeks in Paris, Jefferson avoided the city's filth by staying near his lodgings. Philippe Mazzei claimed that Jefferson brought a phaeton with him from Virginia. Traveling by horse-drawn vehicle would have helped him to avoid being soiled. About the time he signed his lease for the Hôtel Landron, he reportedly purchased "a handsome carriage with green morocco lining that put the old phaeton to shame." [Lawrence S. Kaplan. *Thomas Jefferson: Westward the Course of Empire*. Rowman & Littlefield. 1998. 211.] Where Jefferson kept these vehicles and the horses he needed to convey them during his first year in Paris is not clear. This uncertainty resolved when he moved to Hôtel Langeac, which, unlike Hôtel Landron, had a spacious garden and stables.

Jefferson had several reasons to move to this elegant mansion. It was better suited for entertaining. It placed him nearer to the Court at Versailles. And it had the stables he needed to maintain his conveyances. But also, Jefferson went to France to mingle with the best and brightest people. Living in this stylish mansion on the Champs Elysees allowed him to do this while avoiding the filth, the stench, and the meaner sorts who filled the French capital.