“The English Papers bring their Lies very fresh”: Thomas Jefferson, Information Warfare, and the Early American State in the Atlantic World, 1783-1793

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In early April 1790, Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson spent countless hours wondering what Europeans thought of the young American republic. Monitoring foreign news, Jefferson wrote to William Short, then stationed as the United States' representative in revolutionary France. "The Leyden Gazettes furnishing so good Information of the interesting Scenes now passing in Europe, I must ask your particular Attention to the forwarding them as frequently as it is possible," Jefferson requested. "The English Papers bring their Lies very fresh; and it is very desirable to be provided with an authentic Contradiction in the first Moment." He also sent Short numerous editions of the federal government's organ, John Fenno's *Gazette of the United States*. Because of its international reputation as a pro-American publication of record, Jefferson regularly imported the Dutch *Gazette de Leyde,* comparing it to the ubiquitous British newspapers circulating the U.S. and Atlantic world after the American Revolution. He rarely trusted British information sources, believing them hostile to American republicanism and commerce. By exchanging newspapers, Jefferson and Short meant to keep each other informed about transatlantic affairs. But Jefferson also relied on his protégé—one set of dependable eyes and ears he stationed abroad—to supplant British "lies" by injecting pro-republican sources into the Europeans' information ecosystem.[1]

This essay argues that in the wake of the American Revolution, the United States engaged Great Britain in an ideological competition to define the American republic through contested information. Jefferson's efforts to combat British disinformation without state backing in Europe during the 1780s led to the creation of a state-supported instrument to challenge

[1] "From Thomas Jefferson (hereafter TJ) to William Short, 6 April 1790," *Founders Online*, National Archives (hereafter *FO*). On the *Gazette de Leyde* and its editor, Jean Luzac, see Jeremy D. Popkin, *News and Politics in the Age of Revolution: Jean Luzac's* Gazette de Leyde (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989). On early American printers' distrust of the British press, see Jordan E. Taylor, *Misinformation Nation: Foreign News and the Politics of Truth in Revolutionary America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2022), 87-94.

disinformation abroad: the Contingency Fund. In particular, the harnessing of this resource—which facilitated American diplomats' information gathering overseas during the 1790s—to executive power better enabled early U.S. policymakers to confront foreign rivals by projecting American influence beyond the republic's borders.

Historians have often grounded the early American state's projection through westward continental expansion. After the ratification of the Constitution, U.S. policymakers expanded their bureaucratic and military apparatuses to establish sovereignty over the trans-Appalachian West, prevent European empires from disrupting American settlements and trade, and violently displace Indigenous nations. But American policymakers looked east *and* west when projecting state capacity; in fact, they thought about their world in transnational terms, linking their republic to far-flung countries across the globe. State-building exercises allowed policymakers to expand their influence financially overseas by facilitating a diplomatic corps more capable of shaping global knowledge. Resources such as the Contingency Fund, then, enabled Jefferson to exchange information to overcome commercial and diplomatic shortcomings that otherwise impeded the state's power to influence perceptions of the U.S. abroad. State-supported information conflicts directed by Secretary Jefferson also challenge the notion that the early federal government was helplessly weak even without a formidable military. Compared to the nineteenth- or twentieth-century U.S., the early American state seems powerless. Yet, recent scholarship argues that given the context and the agenda set by policymakers, the early federal government accomplished more than modern-day scholars and eighteenth-century Europeans gave them credit for. The early American state remained active, even in foreign contexts, by collecting and disseminating information.[2]

[2] Studies covering the *active* early American state include Richard R. John, *Spreading the News: The American Postal System from Franklin to Morse* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995); Max M.

This essay explores information as much as it does early state development. Scholars have begun surveying the process by which policymakers communicated political and commercial information through unreliable transatlantic epistolary channels. Specifically, they have analyzed the interdependence that existed between American and European news presses, Atlantic information networks during the French Revolution, American printers' frustrations regarding British disinformation, and efforts sought by Britain and the U.S. to circulate "facts." In the context of transatlantic information warfare, few printers and politicians cared about accuracy. Building on these works, this essay maintains that these information ecosystems weighed heavily on the minds of early American policymakers because their diplomatic and commercial successes relied on the new nation's reputation abroad. Jefferson habitually collected information about foreign and domestic foes, both in the form of letters or on scraps of paper. He especially craved news from Europe, and he did not hesitate to manipulate information for

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Edling, *A Revolution in Favor of Government: Origins of the U.S. Constitution and the Making of the American State* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); William J. Novak, "The Myth of the 'Weak' American State," *The American Historical Review* 113, no. 3 (June 2008): 752-772; Brian Balogh, *A Government Out of Sight: The Mystery of National Authority in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Max M. Edling, *A Hercules in the Cradle: War, Money, and the American State, 1783-1867* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2014); Bethel Saler, *The Settlers' Empire, Colonialism and State Formation in America's Old Northwest* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015); Gautham Rao, *National Duties: Custom Houses and the Making of the American State* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016); Paul Frymer, *Building an American Empire: The Era of Territorial and Political Expansion* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017); Rachel St. John, "State Power in the West in the Early American Republic," *Journal of the Early Republic* 38, no. 1 (Spring 2018): 87-97; Richard R. John, "The State Is Back In: What Now?" *Journal of the Early Republic* 38, no. 1 (Spring 2018): 105-118; Gautham Rao, "The New Historiography of the Early Federal Government: Institutions, Context, and the Imperial State," *The William & Mary Quarterly* 77, no. 1 (January 2020): 97-128; Hannah Farber, *Underwriters of the United States: How Insurance Shaped the American Founding* (Williamsburg, VA: Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, 2021); Max M. Edling and Peter J. Kastor, "Introduction: Creating the Federal Government," in *Washington's Government: Charting the Origins of the Federal Administration*, ed. Max M. Edling and Peter J. Kastor (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2021), 1-27; Max M. Edling, *Perfecting the Union: National and State Authority in the US Constitution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), chapter 4. For early Americans' global state of mind, see Eliga Gould, Paul Mapp, Carla Gardina Pestana, "Introduction: What Does America and the World 'Mean' Before 1825?" in *The Cambridge History of America and the World, vol. 1: 1500-1820* (hereafter *CHAW*), ed. Eliga Gould, Paul Mapp, and Carla Gardina Pestana (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 8-33 and Jay Sexton and Kristin Hoganson, "Introduction to Volume II," in *CHAW, vol. 2: 1820-1900*, ed. Kristin Hoganson and Jay Sexton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 8-32.

contemporaries or posterity. That Jefferson used a government fund as state secretary to facilitate informational conflicts abroad introduces the American state and diplomacy into this scholarship, further illuminating the behaviors of statesmen anxious about their fragile experiment in self-government.[3]

When Jefferson served as state secretary and then president, he usually exercised outsized influence from his federal office, especially if doing so could undermine Great Britain. However, scholars have traditionally maintained that Jefferson abhorred an empowered central government. But Jeremy D. Bailey claims that Jefferson accepted executive power and strong federal policies because he planned to temper them with democratic institutions – specifically, by acknowledging public opinion. Historian Mark Smith also contends that while Jeffersonians clung to "strict [constitutional] constructionism," their ideology did not prevent them from adopting policies strengthening the central government's dominion, particularly when Jefferson's

[3] See Will Slauter, "The Paragraph as Information Technology: How News Traveled in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World," *Annales HSS* 67, no. 2 (April-June 2012): 253-278, esp. 253-255, 270, 274, 277; Will Slauter, "Forward-Looking Statements: News and Speculation in the Age of the American Revolution," *The Journal of Modern History* 81, no. 4 (December 2009): 759-792, esp. 764-765; Joseph M. Adelman and Victoria E. M. Gardner, "News in the Age of Revolution," in *Making News: The Political Economy of Journalism in Britain and American from the Glorious Revolution to the Internet*, ed. Richard R. John and Jonathan Silberstein-Loeb (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 47-72; Jean Ann Bauer, "Republicans of Letters: The Early American Foreign Service as Information Network, 1775-1825" (PhD diss., University of Virginia, 2015), 1-14, chs. 2-3, LibraETD. For more on Bauer's visual reconstruction of this information world, see Jean Bauer, "The Early American Foreign Service Database," http://www.eafsd.org. Walter B. Smith's survey of the U.S. Foreign Service's early history supplied Bauer with necessary data for her dissertation and database project. See Walter B. Smith II, *America's Diplomats and Consuls of 1776-1865: A Geographic and Biographic Directory of the Foreign Service from the Declaration of Independence to the End of the Civil War*, Occasional Paper No. 2 (Washington, D.C.: Center for the Study of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Service Institute, U.S. Department of State, U.S. Government Printing Office, 1986). See also Cyrus Peterpaul, Milen Ivanov, and Simeon Simeonov, "Mapping the Early American Foreign Service," https://eafsmap.org. Jordan E. Taylor, "The Reign of Error: North American Information Politics and the French Revolution, 1789-1795," *Journal of the Early Republic* 39, no. 3 (Fall 2019): 437-466; Taylor, *Misinformation Nation*, ch. 4, esp. 90-93; Robert G. Parkinson, *The Common Cause: Creating Race and Nation in the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2016). For the domestic side of early American printers and print culture, see Jeffrey L. Pasley, *"The Tyranny of Printers": Newspaper Politics in the Early American Republic* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2001), 48-78; Andrew Shankman, *Original Intents: Hamilton, Jefferson, and Madison, and the American Founding* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 113-138. For entry into the world of international newspapers, see *Press, Politics and the Public Sphere in Europe and North America, 1760-1820*, ed. Hannah Barker and Simon Burrows (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). For Jefferson's relationship with information, see Joanne B. Freeman, *Affairs of Honor: National Politics in the New Republic* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), 62-104.

presidential administration purchased Louisiana and enforced the Embargo Act. Applying a similar framework to Jefferson's relationship with the Fund dispenses with the notion that he rejected executive power and American state building.[4]

Jefferson's preoccupation with the U.S.'s image in the Atlantic world was also far from exceptional. As Peter S. Onuf reminds us, Americans' connections to Europe "multiplied and intensified" after the Revolution, with Jefferson advancing pro-American "counter-narrative[s]" to correct prevailing European astigmatism. U.S. policymakers understood that to become an equal partner with European powers, they had to build and protect a reputation of domestic and international stability. International respect was not a preordained conclusion of the 1783 Treaty of Paris or the Federal Constitution; instead, earning European recognition was a process whose accomplishment relied on conforming to European legal norms, state building, and weaponizing transatlantic information. Eliga Gould argues the Revolution and its aftermath witnessed "the Union's quest to be accepted as…a treaty-worthy nation," and he traces how "Americans sought to make themselves appear worthy of peaceful relations with other nations." In so doing, Jefferson and his contemporaries also revealed their belief in the power of public opinion and their ability to shape it in favor of America's image.[5]

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[4] For historians convinced Jeffersonian logic and statecraft were not mutually exclusive, see "Introduction," in *Jeffersonians in Power: The Rhetoric of Opposition Meets the Realities of Governing*, ed. Joanne B. Freeman and Johann N. Neem (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2019), 2-3 and Mark Smith, "Beyond Strict Construction: Jeffersonians in the 1790s," in *Jeffersonians in Power*, 80-102, esp. 80, 97. See Jeremy D. Bailey, *Thomas Jefferson and Executive Power* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 6-7, 9-15. See also, Leonard J. Sadosky, "How Jeffersonians Learned to Love the State: Consumption, Finance, and Empire in the Madison Administration," in *Jeffersonians in Power*, 148-177. For more on Jefferson's foreign policy as secretary of state, see Francis D. Cogliano, *Emperor of Liberty: Thomas Jefferson's Foreign Policy* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014), 76-114; Paul A. Varg, *Foreign Policies of the Founding Fathers* (Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 1963); Robert W. Tucker and David C. Hendrickson, *Empire of Liberty: The Statecraft of Thomas Jefferson* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); Doron S. Ben-Atar, *The Origins of Jeffersonian Commercial Policy and Diplomacy* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993).

[5] Peter S. Onuf, "Introduction," in *Old Word, New World: America and Europe in the Age of Jefferson*, ed. Leonard J. Sadosky, Peter Nicolaisen, Peter S. Onuf, and Andrew J. O'Shaughnessy (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2010), 3. Eliga H. Gould, *Among the Powers of the Earth: The American Revolution and the Making of a New World Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), esp. 2, 7, 12 and 111-144. On

British "Lies" and Incredulous Americans

After the Revolutionary War, Americans struggled to extricate themselves informationally from Great Britain. Commerce ensured that European and American information sources frequently crisscrossed the Atlantic Ocean. As they disseminated international news, English newspapers contributed to transatlantic information exchanges, filling American as well as European columns. A fair number of Americans, however, rejected British sources because they believed their papers misrepresented the incipient republic's reputation through exaggerated accounts or outright fabrications. Whether or not British printers misrepresented the U.S., though, was hardly the point to embittered, postwar Americans.[6]

Often, London printers highlighted the United States' humiliating commercial situation. *Felix Farley's Bristol Journal* emphasized Americans' reliance on British goods: "British merchants…underselling" competing Europeans traders boosted commerce between the U.S. and England, with the publisher claiming that for six months, "There has not been a vessel from Europe [in American ports], excepting those of Britain" due to "the great superiority of the British goods," which "procured them the preference thro' all the Thirteen States." When Americans threatened to shut their ports if Great Britain did not agree to a commercial treaty, one British printer boasted: "They know their own Interest too well to put these Threats into Execution." Moreover, British papers warned their merchants against granting credit to the U.S.,

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Jefferson's beliefs about public opinion and the partisan newspaper conflicts of the 1790s, see Michael Lienesch, "Thomas Jefferson and the American Democratic Experience: The Origins of the Partisan Press, Popular Political Parties, and Public Opinion," in *Jeffersonian Legacies*, ed. Peter S. Onuf (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993), 316-339, esp. 321; Colleen A. Sheehan, *James Madison and the Spirit of Republican Self-Government* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Shankman, *Original Intents*; Christopher J. Young, "Contests of Opinion: The Public Sphere in Post-Revolutionary America" (PhD diss., University of Illinois at Chicago, 2001), ILLiad; Todd Estes, *The Jay Treaty Debate, Public Opinion, and the Evolution of Early American Political Culture* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2006).

[6] On the international press, see Hannah Barker and Simon Burrows, "Introduction," in *Press, Politics and the Public Sphere*, 6-7, 8, ch. 1.; Taylor, *Misinformation Nation*, chs. 3 and 4.

which had "proved nearly fatal to several considerable houses in London." As British printers promoted the prosperity of Great Britain, they contrasted their country with the U.S. "Instead of that security, solvency, publick prosperity and domestick felicity, which they enjoyed as English colonies," independent Americans endured "insults from abroad." Indeed, merchants and sailors struggled to navigate the Mediterranean "without becoming a prey to the Barbary pirates" and traverse the Caribbean without escaping privateers. Due to a lack of consistent trade, the printer assured, Congress could not pay its debts.[7]

British printers falsely stressed that a lack of trade caused U.S. policymakers to propose audacious schemes to repay the nation's debts. One printer claimed Americans resolved to sell Rhode Island "to the highest bidder" to "pay off the national debt to foreigners." Under a column entitled, "American Ways and Means," another paper reported that a "writer in the independant [*sic*] Gazetteer of Philadelphia" suggested an "infallible scheme for paying off" American debts and funding the national government: "A moderate tax on *Vices*…" Instead of taxing their trade in agriculture, state legislatures should resort to taxing their citizens on what they truly had in abundance: alcohol, profanity, "conjugal infidelity," and "perjury" (Americans' "staple vice"). If the U.S. adopted this plan, the printer believed, it could raise L 117,656 in revenue a month.[8]

Others reported that disunity between the states had caused America's financial woes. "According to letters from New Jersey," London's *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser* reported the U.S. could attribute its lack of funds to the fact that it remained "thirteen independent provinces" unwilling to unite in the interest of fiscal stability. But, the publisher warned his readers, should land-hungry Americans organize their states into "one independent sovereignty,"

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[7] *Felix Farley's Bristol Journal* (London), February, 16, 1788; *St. James's Chronicle or the British Evening Post*, December 15-17, 1785; *Whitehall Evening Post* (London), July 5-7, 1785; *Morning Chronicle* (London), December 7, 1786.

[8] *Public Advertiser* (London), October 29, 1787; *Times* (London), June 28, 1788.

European empires risked losing their colonial enterprises. “It is therefore the interest of all the European states to prevent America from becoming one consolidated empire.” Aware of the U.S. government’s weaknesses, some British printers still feared American ambitions.[9]

British policymakers also undermined the new U.S., determined to hasten its supposedly impending collapse. Lord Sheffield presumed Americans had fickle loyalties and that the weak Confederation Congress could never exact its authority over its citizens, especially when it pretended to claim such an expansive postwar landscape. British foreign minister Lord Grenville fomented western secession, believing the U.S. too weak to preserve the bonds of a republican union. Still other Britons contemptuously prayed for Americans’ downfall. In the aftermath of the United States’ expected implosion, European empires would move in and take over the once arrogant Americans and reassert dominion over its people and trade. British leaders completely doubted Americans nation-building experiment.[10]

When American leaders sought to remedy the issues in the Articles of Confederation, the British press denigrated their independence and republican form of government. The *Public Advertiser* prophesied for 1786 that the U.S. would curse its independence. Every nation would insult, distrust, and laugh at America, for they exemplified “rebellion and ingratitude!!!” After elites met in Annapolis, Maryland, in September 1786, a British printer complained, “the evils of a Republican Constitution, in the tardiness of its movements, and reflect[ed] with satisfaction on the superior blessings of a British Government.” “A letter from Boston” lamented that since national independence, the U.S. was so weak that if Great Britain and France agreed, they could “partition” the new republic in “one campaign.” Another British printer remarked, “the United

[9] *The Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser* (London), January 2, 1784.

[10] Alan Taylor, *American Revolutions: A Continental History, 1750-1804* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2016), 346-349.

States are far from enjoying that tranquility on which they once so fondly plumed themselves…Almost every Congressional decree appears to be treated with marked contempt." To anti-American Britons, republicanism and independence only bred discontent.[11]

After British presses received news that the Philadelphia Convention agreed on a new national constitution, London papers mocked the United States' partisan and sectional conflicts during the constitutional ratification process. One newspaper emphasized that Rhode Island and North Carolina rejected the federal union, remaining, then, "in a state of independence comparable to that of Great Britain and France." Another English paper claimed that a "gentleman from Glocestershire, lately returned from America, has brought with him a collection of newspapers from every part of the United States." "Their spirit of liberty…has not given them peace and content," the gentleman alleged. "The new constitution meets with violent opposition from a party, who decry it with the same virulence that was employed against dependance on" Great Britain. "This turbulent disposition is chiefly prevalent in the Northern States. Towards the Southward, a more moderate temper reigns." One British paper asserted that South Carolina objected to the new Constitution because it granted the Federal Congress power to "regulate or prevent the importation of Slaves." "Pennsylvania…Rhode-Island and Massachusetts, who consider Slaves as freed by coming into their jurisdiction, can never expect to agree with the Gentlemen in Carolina, who oppose such principles." According to British prints, Americans had enjoyed much more stability within the British Empire.[12]

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[11] *Public Advertiser* (London), August 12, 1786; *Public Advertiser* (London), December 22, 1786; *Public Advertiser* (London), July 26, 1787; *London Chronicle*, June 28-30, 1787.

[12] *London Chronicle*, May 22, 1789. For an introduction to early Americans' geographic insecurities, see Alan Taylor, *American Republics: A Continental History of the United States, 1783-1850* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2021), xxiii-xxiv, 5-7, 19-22, 27-41. *Bath Chronicle*, May 22, 1788; *Morning Chronicle* (London), June 28, 1788.

English newspapers may have taken some cheap shots, but their news was not entirely untrue, and Americans knew as much. During the 1780s, the U.S. dealt with political and economic crises that encouraged leaders to form a new government. One British paper correctly concluded convention delegates produced a new American constitution because they "desire to have their new form of Government respected by foreign nations, and made salutary for domestic peace and security." Building an international reputation of stability "appears to have been the grand object of their endeavors."[13]

The amount of British disinformation circulating the Atlantic world alarmed and enraged Americans, who sought to counter such falsehoods through the same information medium. *The State Gazette of South-Carolina* published under a column entitled, "American Intelligence," that Americans starved "for want of the common necessaries of life" and lacked both credit and trade. Such information sat under the heading: "*Lies collected from British News-Papers*." Beneath "A specimen of English abuse," a pro-American correspondent named "Scourge" related that London's *Public Advertiser* depicted Americans as "contemners of public faith, bankrupts to their wounded soldiers & to those who have advanced them money in time of their distress, and lastly, as makers of laws calculated purposely to skreen [*sic*] themselves from the just pursuits of their injured creditors." Here, British printers rightly underscored Congress's inability to honor its domestic and foreign debts after the war. Regardless of its truth, though, Americans called foul. Moreover, Americans also spread dubious news about Great Britain to U.S. audiences. One paper from Newport, Rhode Island, related that "By the late English papers we find executions are so frequent in London, that it is no[t] [an] uncommon sight to behold from ten to twenty taken from Newgate in a morning, to satiate their sanguinary laws." When American papers

[13] Merrill Jensen, *The New Nation: A History of the United States during the Confederation, 1781-1789* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1950); *The World* (London), November 19, 1787.

reprinted news from London about foreign affairs, they cautioned their readers to question its veracity. In 1788, New York City's *Daily Advertiser* warned that some of their reports on French incidents "are vague and contradictory, being principally collected from the British papers."[14]

American diplomats stationed abroad also dwelled on British mistruths about their newly independent republic. Stationed in Paris as secretary to American commissioners Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin, Continental Army officer Colonel David Humphreys often recounted European affairs to his former boss, General George Washington. In early November 1785, Humphreys notified Washington about the "humiliating" seizure of American vessels by Barbary pirates. But the number of ships seized had been "exaggerated by English lies." Returning from Prussia, the Marquis de Lafayette similarly warned Humphreys, "the English papers have inculcated almost universally reports very much to the prejudice of the American character & politicks." According to Humphreys, America's fledgling international reputation depended on their cleansing British falsehoods with "lye." [15]

Under the Articles of Confederation, Congress lacked the ability to regulate national commerce or tax its citizens. Furthermore, the United States' economic relationship with its wartime ally France as well as the outstanding prewar debts owed to British creditors provided Britons with ammunition for their anti-American diatribes. Foreign trade generated the funds states needed to pay the interest and principal on their debts, and, when they wanted, to send funds to Congress. Commerce produced, in part, the wealth Americans hoped to earn during the complicated postwar period, and so U.S. policymakers understood that trade deals with European countries might keep the new nation financially afloat. By preserving the new republic's

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[14] *The State Gazette of South-Carolina*, December 22, 1785 and Taylor, *Misinformation Nation*, 92; *The Connecticut Gazette*, May 11, 1787; Edling, *A Revolution in Favor of Government*, ch. 10, esp. 150-154; *The Newport Mercury*, April 10, 1786; *The Daily Advertiser* (New York), September 1, 1788.

[15] "To George Washington from David Humphreys, 1 November 1785," *FO*.

reputation, three American representatives in Europe at the war's end – John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, and Thomas Jefferson – hoped for political recognition from and commercial agreements with European nation-states, and they believed that challenging British knowledge makers could accomplish these goals.[16]

On September 8, 1783, Adams alerted Congress from Paris about the dangers European printers posed to the U.S. European newspapers, Adams quipped, "have all their attention fixed upon us, & very often honour us with their animadversions, Sometimes with their Grave Councils, but oftener still with very sly and subtle Insinuations." He especially protested the ubiquity of British newspapers on the continent. "The English Papers," Adams complained, "are an engine, by which every thing is scattered all over the world. They are open and free, the eyes of Mankind are fixed upon them. They are taken by all Courts and all Politicians and by almost all Gazetteers…They insert in them Things which they wish to have circulated far and wide—Some of the Paragraphs inserted in them, will do to circulate through all Europe," Adams continued. "The most artfull [*sic*] Paper in the World," London's *Courier de l'Europe* alarmed Adams the most because its editors printed "many Things translated from the English Papers." Finally, both British and French policymakers, including Louis XVI, favored the *Courier*.[17]

Beginning in 1776, the *Courier* cultivated a large audience throughout Europe during its fifty-year run. Based primarily in London, the *Courier* eventually established reprinting operations in Boulogne, France, as editors saw the need to expand information throughout the continent. Additionally, the influence of the paper and the early-modern practice of editors freely

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[16] Gordon S. Wood, *Empire of Liberty: A History of the Early Republic, 1789-1815* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 15; Jensen, *The New Nation*, 43-44, 73, 74-76, 68, 39. For more on postwar American debts, credit, and commerce, see Jensen, *The New Nation*, chs. 7-9 and ch. 19.

[17] "From John Adams to the President of Congress, 8 September 1783," *FO*; Simon Burrows, "The Cosmopolitan Press, 1759-1815," in *Press, Politics and the Public Sphere in Europe and North America*, 28.

exchanging the news meant thousands of Europeans read what emanated from the *Courier*. "[F]rom the English Papers and the *Courier de l'Europe*, many things are transferred into various other Gazettes," Adams explained. Read by politicians, educated commoners, and diplomats, "[T]he *Courier du Bas Rhin* [printed in Prussia and distributed in France, Germany, Austria, Bohemia, the Low Countries, Switzerland, and France], the *Gazette des Deux Ponts* [printed in Mannheim, Germany and distributed in London, Versailles, the Rhineland, Berlin, Rome, and Vienna], the *Courier d'Avignon* [France] and the *Gazette des Pays Bas* [the Netherlands]" all had the mark of the *Courier de l'Europe* in their columns. If British abuses did not frustrate Adams enough, he also struggled to "trace…from whence Insinuations and Projects flow." European diplomacy and the countless "Channels of Communications" spawned by eighteenth-century print culture left Adams unable to discern fact from fiction or to confidently confront misrepresentations about U.S. stability.[18]

During his time in Europe, Franklin also perused British newspapers, many of which denounced and humiliated America. To anyone consuming these reports, the Americans' experiment in self-government would appear to have failed. Certainly, as scholars have noted, "Franklin and his colleagues" believed British "stories posed a threat to the fragile peace, to the reputation of the United States, and to America's ability to forge trade agreements with European nations." When Franklin encountered this disinformation during the war, he earnestly tried to counter it with pro-American news, but British disinformation proved too ubiquitous for a one-man operation.[19]

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[18] Burrows, "The Cosmopolitan Press," 24-27, 32; "From John Adams to the President of Congress, 8 September 1783," *FO*.

[19] [American Philosophical Society,] "Lies Respecting the Americans, [c. August 1784?]," *FO*.

In August 1784, Franklin confronted British disinformation by drafting an outline of British falsehoods, reminding European audiences of their "Lies Respecting the Americans." Franklin split British "lies" into two separate categories: lies circulated before the war, and those circulated after the Revolution "*to encourage a Renewal of the Wars.*" Summarizing postwar falsehoods, Franklin observed British newspapers depicting Americans "in the greatest Distress." Their apparent "Want of Provisions," "of Money and Credit," and "of Good Government" caused many Americans to tire of the Articles of Confederation, "of Independence," and "of Congress." With such a bleak portrait of the U.S., British printers presumed Americans all desired "to cut one another's Throats." Franklin's outline provides more than simply a sketch of his imagined defense, however. It confirms that early American policymakers viewed information manipulation as a grave threat to the new nation's international stature, and thus a reasonable cause for political crisis and military conflict. Franklin feared the renewal of hostilities between Great Britain and the U.S. should the former continue publicly abusing the latter's reputation. In the end, however, Franklin never published his list, and no evidence exists as to why he never sent it to pro-American printers, nor does evidence survive explaining why Jefferson ultimately took over Franklin's project after his arrival in Paris.[20]

With Franklin's influence, Jefferson hoped to disrupt British epistemic assaults by spreading his own contrived information. Writing as a French soldier, newly returned to Europe after fighting with the Americans during their Revolution, Jefferson blamed present European opinion about the U.S. on British falsehoods. After composing this account from a Frenchman, Jefferson sent it to Charles W. F. Dumas in the Hague on November 20, 1784, who then

[20] [American Philosophical Society,] "Lies Respecting the Americans, [c. August 1784?]," *FO*; [Benjamin Franklin,] [American Philosophical Society,] "Lies Respecting the Americans, [c. August 1784?]," *FO* [added emphasis on postwar "lies"].

forwarded it to both Jean Luzac, editor of the *Gazette de Leyde*, and to the *Courier de l'Europe*. Luzac included a preface to the testimony, reminding readers that English papers daily spread reports of Americans' dissatisfaction with Congress and growing factionalism in the republic. Jefferson's letter, Luzac swore, refuted these lies. The British published "scandalous" reports about the U.S., which Europeans, Luzac presumed, had encountered regularly. Revealing the common practice of attesting to the truth of one's report, he assured consumers of the letter's veracity.[21]

Published in the *Gazette de Leyde* on December 7 and 10, 1784, Jefferson – posing as a French officer – shared his "astonishment to find all the public papers of Europe filled with accounts of the anarchy and destractions [*sic*] supposed to exist in" the U.S. "I have received serious condolances [*sic*] from all my friends on the bitter fruits of so prosperous a war. These friends I know to be so well disposed towards America that they wished the reverse of what they repeated from the public papers." Since the Europeans had "not yet got into the habit of taking the American newspapers," all of their information came from the English, who only printed "very unfavourable account[s]…of the transactions in America." Jefferson proposed two main reasons why the British were so hostile toward Americans: "1. deep-rooted hatred, springing from an unsuccesful [*sic*] attempt to injure; 2. a fear that their island will be depopulated by the emigration of it's [*sic*] inhabitants to America." Responding to reports of popular revolts and high taxation, Jefferson flatly denied or refuted such claims. Finally, Jefferson appealed to Europeans to remember the lies British papers spread about their own respective countries, and, thus, "It is hoped that Europe will be as wise and as just now; that they will not consider the

[21] [American Philosophical Society,] "Lies Respecting the Americans, [c. August 1784?]," *FO*; "Jefferson's Reply to the Representations of Affairs in America by British Newspapers, [before 20 November 1784]," *FO*.

fabricated papers of England as any evidence of truth; but that they will continue to judge of causes from effects."[22]

Jefferson's letter likely had little impact on European minds. However, his attempt to counter negative images of the U.S. abroad reflects eighteenth-century Americans' anxieties about the fate of their republic and its perceived fragility. Jefferson's efforts additionally highlight the ways early modern people judged the creditability of information they received. Despite the spurious identity of its author, Jefferson hid his authorship to preserve the objectivity of the report, believing the ends justified the means. Only having recently arrived in Europe, the speed with which Jefferson countered British disinformation with Franklin also suggests they considered information warfare as a pressing and significant concern.

In this climate, Jefferson produced *Notes on the State of Virginia*. Originally a manuscript answering the Secretary of the French ligation Francois Marbois's queries about Virginia, Jefferson sent additional copies of what would become *Notes* to contacts throughout America and Europe. James Madison, James Monroe, the Marquis de Lafayette, Englishman Richard Price, Franklin, Adams, and William Carmichael, American charge d'affaires in Madrid, Spain, all received early copies, and the work had widely circulated throughout the Atlantic world by 1787 (indeed, the *London Chronicle* advertised Jefferson's work in late July 1787). Because Virginia was the largest state in the new union, *Notes* could serve as an example of the U.S. as a whole at the vanguard of political, social, cultural, and environmental development. As a collection of pro-American information intended for transnational audiences, it is an example of

[22] The *Courier de l'Europe* did not publish Jefferson's disinformation. [American Philosophical Society,] "Lies Respecting the Americans, [c. August 1784?]," *FO*; "Jefferson's Reply to the Representations of Affairs in America by British Newspapers, [before 20 November 1784]," *FO*. On the irony of high postwar taxes in America, see Alan Taylor, "The Late Loyalists: Northern Reflections of the Early American Republic," *Journal of the Early Republic* 27, vol. 1 (Spring 2007): 7-8. Gordon S. Wood explained eighteenth-century Americans' logic of judging causes from their effects in "Conspiracy and the Paranoid Style: Causality and Deceit in the Eighteenth Century," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 39, vol. 3 (July 1982): 401-441.

Jefferson's early efforts to challenge prevailing misperceptions—exacerbated by the British—about the U.S. By disseminating disinformation and by publishing *Notes*, Jefferson sought to set the record straight about America.[23]

Between 1749 and 1800, French scientist George Louis Leclerc, comte de Buffon published observations essentially criticizing the climate and size of flora and fauna unique to America. Americans acquainted with Buffon's observations feared that should his conclusions ring true, the United States could not possibly foster any successes, environmentally, ideologically, culturally, or otherwise. Responding to Buffon (who also received an early copy of *Notes*), Jefferson compared several types of animals, including bears, beavers, horses, squirrels, and cows in Query VI of *Notes*. Even hamsters merited comparison. Based on his scientific conclusions, Jefferson assailed Buffon's analyses by claiming America's animals were much larger, and therefore healthier, than those inhabiting Europe. When Jefferson met Buffon, he questioned Buffon about his information sources concerning America's primitive reality. Despite intending *Notes* as responses to Frenchmen, Jefferson's work displayed his zealousness for refuting any European claims concerning American backwardness.[24]

Throughout the text, Jefferson touted an exceptional America. He claimed Virginia alone was "one third larger" than Great Britain and Ireland combined and asserted Virginia's population "yields a duplication once in every 27 ¼ years." "Should this rate of increase continue," Jefferson promised, Virginia "shall have between six and seven millions of

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[23] William Peden, ed., "Introduction," in Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* (London: 1787; repr. Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1954), xi; *London Chronicle*, July 24-26, 1787. Dumas Malone notes that we do Jefferson's reputation harm by "regard[ing] him as a mere promoter of American interests," and not as someone energetically invested in keeping Europeans properly informed about America. Malone, *Jefferson and the Rights of Man*, 93-95. See also Dustin Gish and Daniel Klinghard, *Thomas Jefferson and the Science of Republic Government: A Political Biography of* Notes on the State of Virginia (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017). Gish and Klinghard argue that Jefferson had always desired for a wide distribution of *Notes*, and he worked hard to introduce it into the public sphere.

[24] Wood, *Empire of Liberty*, 386-387, 391-392; Thomas Jefferson, *Notes*, 47-58.

inhabitants within 95 years." A large portion of that demographic increase, he believed, would consist of European immigrants. Outlining his political economy to Europeans, Jefferson argued for principles of agricultural production and free trade. America had abundant land for white settlers to cultivate and, thus, perpetuate a virtuous citizenry capable of preserving a republic. Their surplus raw materials would travel to Europe while Europeans shipped manufactured goods to America, maintaining a lucrative commercial balance between transatlantic nations. America's free trade principles would also usher in a period of peace and stability in the world: "Our interest," Jefferson proclaimed, "will be to throw open the doors of commerce, and to knock off all its shackles, giving perfect freedom to all persons for the vent of whatever they may chuse [*sic*] to bring into our ports, and asking the same in theirs." Jefferson's comparisons between America and Europe served to illuminate for information consumers the ridiculous notion that the U.S. neared collapse or that America lagged Europe in any way. According to Jefferson, the promise of American growth exceeded that of a decrepit Europe. On *Notes*, Jefferson's friend Joel Barlow stated, Americans "are flattered with the idea of seeing ourselves vindicated from those despicable aspersions which have long been thrown upon us and echoed from one ignorant Scribbler to another in all the languages in Europe."[25]

Americans at home and abroad regularly confronted British disinformation. At the center of this informational contest stood Jefferson, Franklin, and Adams, who circulated their own truths to upset the British. Indeed, Jefferson's experiences influencing European minds abroad in the 1780s shaped his later approach to controlling information during the 1790s, realizing that a major role of a diplomat overseas included manipulating foreign opinion. Furthermore, his essay, letters, and book reflect Americans' concerns about as well as their aspirations for their new

[25] Jefferson, *Notes*, 4, 83, 87, 164-165, 174-175; "To TJ from Joel Barlow, 15 June 1787," *FO*.

country and indicate that they believed their commercial and political successes rested upon favorable European opinions. But Americans lacked a structured diplomatic apparatus, leaving Jefferson and his allies to challenge disinformation individually and ad hoc. To dispute British lies and strengthen their political and commercial relationships with the outside world, American leaders needed to expand and coordinate their information-gathering capacity in Europe by channeling resources into a structured diplomatic corps. Only through a refashioning of their national government, though, could they hope to achieve such goals.

The Contingency Fund and Information Gathering in the Early Republic

The Confederation Congress's domestic and international weaknesses finally prompted political leaders to reform the national government. Throughout the summer of 1787, delegates to the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia devised a new plan of government, one in which a centralized, federal republic could more fully project U.S. interests abroad. Ratifying the drafted constitution, nationalists argued, would inaugurate a new era in American diplomacy and trade. The U.S. could then rehabilitate its credit by paying off war loans through government revenue from excise taxes and land sales, but mostly from tariffs on imported goods. Authorized by the Constitution to expand its extractive capabilities, on July 4, 1789, Congress began passing revenue laws for the collection of import duties. With money and overseas credit increasing, U.S. policymakers directed financial attention toward domestic and international concerns. They began important state-building exercises such as the establishment of an Army to suppress indigenous resistance and enlarging their capacity to project influence in the Atlantic world by expanding their diplomatic corps.[26]

[26] See Edling, *A Revolution in Favor of Government*, 8, ch. 3, ch. 10-11, 219-220, 222; *A Hercules in the Cradle*, 1, 6, 19-21, 26, 49-50, 121-122; and *Perfecting the Union*, 4-6, 10-11, 13-14, ch. 4; *An Act for laying a Duty on Goods, Wares, and Merchandises imported into the United States*, Public Law 2, *U.S. Statutes at Large* 1 (1789): 24-27; *An Act imposing Duties on Tonnage*, Public Law 3, *U.S. Statutes at Large* 1 (1789): 27-28.

To administer the executive functions of the new government, newly elected President Washington chose experienced statesmen to head his cabinet departments, including Jefferson as state secretary. Washington insisted he serve in the new executive branch, confident that Jefferson could help his presidential administration begin successfully. Indeed, he told Jefferson in late January 1790 that "I consider the successful Administration of the general Government as an object of almost infinite consequence to the present and future happiness of the Citizens of the United States. I consider the Office of Secretary for the Department of State as *very* important on many accts: and I know of no person, who, in my judgment, could better execute the Duties of it than yourself." Washington added that Jefferson's "appointment has given very extensive and very great satisfaction to the Public." An imploring Washington and a welcoming public meant Jefferson took over the state department on March 22, 1790.[27]

President Washington delivered his first State of the Union address to a joint session of Congress in January 1790. In part, Washington asked Congress to financially support relationships between foreign powers and the United States. "Our intercourse with other nations should be facilitated by such provisions as will enable me to fulfil [*sic*] my duty in that respect," he advised, "And to this end, that the compensations to be made to the persons, who may be employed, should, according to the nature of their appointments, be defined by law; and a competent fund designated for defraying the expenses incident to the conduct of foreign affairs." Washington hoped Congress would animate their new revenues for diplomatic purposes. In the context of European convulsions overseas and its need to keep abreast of international developments, the federal government could barely afford not to codify foreign policy.[28]

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[27] Lindsay M. Chervinsky, *The Cabinet: George Washington and the Creation of an American Institution* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2020), 5; "From GW to TJ, 21 January 1790," *FO*.

[28] "From GW to the United States Senate and House of Representatives, 8 January 1790," *FO*.

Given preexisting political and commercial tensions between the U.S. and Spain and Great Britain, as well as the onset of the French Revolution, Congress acknowledged the need for a diplomatic fund. The Senate responded to Washington that a "provision for the support of the department of foreign affairs…shall receive such early attention as [its] respective importance requires." From January to June 1790, Congress debated the foreign intercourse bill, contemplating how much they should appropriate to a foreign affairs fund, and how much control Congress should retain over the president's appointment of American diplomatic representatives abroad. Answering the latter question, Jefferson submitted his views on the matter to Congress in April, arguing that "The transaction of business with foreign nations is Executive altogether." To Jefferson and Washington, large, deliberative bodies usually hindered rather than promoted decisive actions needed for conducting foreign affairs. They also believed the Constitution explicitly granted executive control over the diplomatic corps. While Washington and Jefferson politicked for executive control over appointments and increased funding for the bill, some policymakers believed the U.S. was better off without any connection to monarchical Europe, including Pennsylvania senator William Maclay, who recorded:

> The Intercourse bill…increased the salaries and added ten thousand dollars to the appropriations…and they were voted with an air of perfect indifference by the affirmants, although I consider the money as worse than thrown away, for I know not a single thing that we have for a minister to do at a single court in Europe…the less political connection the better with any European power…I voted against every part of it.

Despite his objections, the bill became law on July 1, 1790. Although Maclay claimed the bill was "well spoken against," the Senate, jealous of its secrecy, did not publish his peers' protests against the bill, relegating their opinions to the historical dustbin. Fearful of Europe's corruptive influence on Americans, the republican Maclay rejected any direct connection between the U.S. and the Old World. In the early years of the republic, however, Americans recognized the import

of keeping abreast of diplomatic developments and countering anti-American British claims. Divorce from the wider international community, then, was a dangerous fantasy, and Maclay remained in the minority as policymakers voted to fund the executive's foreign policy initiatives.[29]

The Foreign Intercourse Act authorized the president to keep a contingency fund for foreign affairs, annually withdrawing "from the treasury…a sum not exceeding" $40,000, "paid out of the monies arising from the duties on imports and tonnage." The Fund would pay the salaries and incidental expenses of American diplomats dispatched overseas. However, the act only mandated the disclosure of expenditure *amounts*. Washington did not have to report exactly what he paid for. With Congress's self-imposed restriction on executive oversight, the Washington administration could spend the money for whatever purposes it deemed fit, a freedom that streamlined information-gathering activities abroad and confined American diplomatic politicking to the Washington administration rather than a large assembly of argumentative policymakers. Lawmakers also set a temporary limit of two years on the Fund, either because they remained nervous about executive power and expenses, or, aware of the changing demands international relations consistently thrust upon them, they anticipated that they would soon revisit and amend the law. Certainly, Jefferson acknowledged the costs of

[29] Linda Grant De Pauw et al., eds. *Documentary History of the First Federal Congress of the United States of America, March 4, 1789-March 3, 1791*, vol. 1, *Senate Legislative Journal* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972), 219-20; For more on the congressional debate of the Contingency Fund, see Henry Merritt Wriston, *Executive Agents in American Foreign Relations* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1929), 208-209; Stephen F. Knott, *Secret and Sanctioned: Covert Operations and the American Presidency* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 49-54 and Chervinsky, *The Cabinet*, 171-176; "Jefferson's Opinion on the Powers of the Senate Respecting Diplomatic Appointments, 24 April 1790," *FO*; William Maclay, *Journal of William Maclay: United States Senator from Pennsylvania, 1789-1791*, ed. Edgar S. Maclay (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1890), 304.

diplomacy, and his efforts to maximize the Fund at $50,000 during congressional debates reveal such convictions.[30]

Moreover, Jefferson's expansive interpretation of the Fund against possible objections from nationalists and, later, ardent Federalists, reveals Jefferson's endorsement of state building. The Foreign Intercourse Act stipulated the president could use the Fund to pay ministers' and charge d'affaires' salaries and to finance "the expense incident to the business in which they may be employed." Interpreting such language as "vague," Jefferson convened "gentlemen heretofore employed as ministers in Europe," Chief Justice John Jay and Vice President John Adams, to confer on what those incidental expenses might include. After some initial disagreement, they agreed to distinguish between ministers' salaries and communications expenses, stipulating American diplomats should *not* use their salaries to finance "Couriers, gazettes, translating necessary papers, printing necessary papers…Postage. Stationary. Court fees." Jefferson, Jay, and Adams also agreed incidental expenses included "Ceremonies; such as diplomatic and public dinners, galas, and illuminations." Drawing from their previous experiences as U.S. diplomats in European courts, they imparted their expertise to the formation of the new diplomatic corps, outlining its financial parameters based on what they expected diplomats would encounter overseas. In this way, Jefferson sought to both give form to the inchoate character of the state department and to ease the burdens of diplomatic politicking and representation in Europe. In sum, the executive branch expanded early American state capacity through foreign diplomacy.[31]

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[30] *An Act providing the means of intercourse between the United States and foreign nations*, Public Law 22, *U.S. Statutes at Large* 2 (1790): 128-129; Chervinsky, *The Cabinet*, 172, 174.

[31] *An Act providing the means of intercourse between the United States and foreign nations*, Public Law 22, *U.S. Statutes at Large* 2 (1790): 128-129; "III. Observations on the Diplomatic Establishment as provided for by Congress, [17 July 1790]," *FO*. Jefferson noted in his "Observations" that there appeared some dispute about whether postage, stationaries, and court fees should be included as incidental expenses. Those who believed they *did* count as incidental expenses won the day. See "From TJ to Thomas Pinckney, 11 June 1792," *FO*.

Jefferson, Jay, and Adams's agreement also reflected broader trends in state building and political culture occurring in the early republic. Newspapers and letters remained the dominant physical mediums through which people learned about the world in the late eighteenth century. Despite the relative slowness and unreliability with which paper moved from sender to recipient, networks of information through correspondence constantly flowed across the Atlantic and throughout the early republic. Richard R. John's observations help contextualize this "informational environment," in which the growing state sought to streamline communication as much as possible. Washington supported the improvement of communications and believed letters and news circulating among the people would bind them closer in a rapidly expanding republic. To encourage the cheap and reliable transmission of information, U.S. policymakers enacted the Post Office Act of 1792, revealing the federal government's support for an informed citizenry. If the postal system was an expression of the state's *transcontinental* projection, then the Fund and the U.S. diplomatic corps were the state's *transatlantic* attempt to project influence abroad by institutionalizing information circulation.[32]

Americans also evaluated the credibility of the information they received. Despite much scholarly focus on print culture, the eighteenth century remained a highly oral culture. Most of the information early modern people received and transmitted came by word of mouth. As Joanne Freeman argues, the "most valuable" information was "eyewitness (or ear-witness) testimony," which then had to meet unique criteria before people could trust what they heard or read. As Freeman further explains, "Proof painted gossip as objective fact. The reputation of the gossiper counted for much: gossip gained credibility when it came from an informed and

[32] Konstantin Dierks, *In My Power: Letter Writing and Communications in Early America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009); Lindsay O'Neill, *The Opened Letter: Networking in the Early Modern British World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014); John, *Spreading the News*, 31, 60-63.

reputable insider." Contemporaries "evaluated a rumor before passing it on, appraising its source and substantiating evidence." Jefferson spent a considerable amount of time assessing the credibility of rumors, and often noted the "detailed genealogies of rumors."[33]

Informants mentioned the human sources from which their information emanated. After Jefferson sent David Humphreys to London on an intelligence-gathering mission, Humphreys reported, "The facts, according to subsequent informations, were pretty justly stated…Leaving you to deduce such conclusions as your better judgment shall enable you to form." Humphreys further remarked to Jefferson, "As it is so difficult on the spot to know what to believe, I will name my authors, in some instances, that you may have the fairer opportunity of deciding the degree of credit is due to the reports: especially as you are generally acquainted with the persons themselves." As Humphreys's letter indicates, intelligence filtered through stages of verification, from European contacts to American diplomats and from those diplomats to Jefferson, who further examined the information's trustworthiness. Naming names, Humphreys abided the cultural rules associated with verbal intelligence and gave the secretary of state an opportunity to authenticate relevant information. When state actors purchased rumors to advance policy agendas, they validated rumor and transformed it into official government intelligence.[34]

By validating rumor, American political actors at home and abroad acted as, what Freeman calls, "anecdote-hunter[s]," or those who collected political information in private or public spaces through conversation or eavesdropping. After Washington's inauguration, Robert R. Livingston suggested the president domestically "select men of…distinguished abilities with

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[33] Joanne B. Freeman, *Affairs of Honor: National Politics in the New Republic* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), 72; Gregory Evans Dowd, *Groundless: Rumors, Legends, and Hoaxes on the Early American Frontier* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015). For a sociological approach to rumors, see Tamotsu Shibutani, *Improvised News: A Sociological Study of Rumor* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Educational Publishing, 1966).

[34] "To TJ from David Humphreys, 20 October 1790," *FO*.

whom he will entrust important & weighty concerns—He may also retain in his service young men of gentle manners—who will mix in every polite circle &…to speak with freedom of what they have seen & heard." Washington often employed middlemen to collect political intelligence for him during his public career, so he certainly agreed with Livingston's suggestion and dispatched trustworthy Americans' overseas to communicate information back to him. Livingston, however, revealed an important aspect of intelligence gathering in the eighteenth century, in which trustworthy physical links to sources of information were necessary to use that information for policy formation and execution. By using the Fund to finance and send "anecdote-hunters" to vet and transmit information, the American state gave an official gloss to gossip.[35]

Appreciating the commercial and political importance of stationing American representatives overseas, Washington and Jefferson expanded the diplomatic corps and lobbied to increase the amount of money Congress granted for foreign affairs. Jefferson also ensured that the executive remained unencumbered by congressional oversight of diplomacy, which he and the president viewed as an executive activity. With the formation of the state came the expansion of the United States' diplomatic capacity overseas. Jefferson and Washington knew having Americans abroad also meant information collection and manipulation both inside and outside European ministries. The Fund, then, ultimately guaranteed Secretary Jefferson could sustain his information war with Great Britain, even allowing him to expand the enterprise with a growing and trusted diplomatic corps. And Jefferson did just that, using the Fund to finance information collection trips and ensuring each resident minister could receive newspapers and diplomatic intelligence to funnel pro-American information into European papers and courts.

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[35] Freeman, *Affairs of Honor*, 68; "To GW from Robert R. Livingston, 2 May 1789," *FO*; Chervinsky, *The Cabinet*, 137-138.

All the Secretary's Men

By late 1790, the federal government had sent or prepared to send numerous American representatives abroad. At this point, the Department of State consisted of two international branches: the U.S. Consular Service and the formal diplomatic corps. While the consular service enlisted men of various backgrounds and nationalities to represent the U.S., the diplomatic corps employed presidentially-appointed and congressionally-approved American ministers and chargé d'affaires. Those belonging to the diplomatic corps had served with distinction in overseas posts in the past and, most of the time, Jefferson and Washington could vouch for their credentials, honesty, and character. Other important distinctions between the consular service and the diplomatic corps included sources of payment. While policymakers created and augmented the Fund to finance salaries in the diplomatic corps, consular officials ordinarily relied on their personal fortunes (if they had any) or business enterprises in their host countries.[36]

Activities between the two varied as well. Since many consular officials doubled as merchants, they remained important to U.S. commercial interests abroad, while diplomats shaped and implemented U.S. foreign policy, engaging in "high politics" within European capital cities. Generally, as Nicole M. Phelps explains, "Consular officials…dealt with the everyday practicalities of keeping people, goods, and capital moving through the proper channels across national and imperial borders." However, consular agents could be "prone to corruption." Since policymakers afforded no financial compensation to consular officials, they often socialized with

[36] William Barnes and John Heath Morgan, *The Foreign Service of the United States: Origins, Development, and Functions* (Washington, D.C: Historical Office, Bureau of Public Affairs, Department of State, 1961), 41-44, 57-65; Nicole M. Phelps, "One Service, Three Systems, Many Empires: The US Consular Service and the Growth of US Global Power, 1789-1924," in *Crossing Empires: Taking U.S. History into Transimperial Terrain*, ed. Kristin Hoganson and Jay Sexton (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020), 135-142 and Phelps, "A Brief Introduction to the US Consular Service," https://blog.uvm.edu/nphelps/a-brief-introduction-to-the-us-consular-service.

foreign politicians and local merchants to make ends meet. Consular agents dispatched to European ports could have slippery allegiances.[37]

Conversely, diplomats received a regular salary from the Fund, and due to their financial attachments to the state, U.S. policymakers could better rely on resident ministers' allegiances and trust their diplomatic intelligence. Despite differences, the consular and diplomatic services grew together (sometimes overlapping in activities) and expanded both their Atlantic information networks and, thus, the state's diplomatic scope. Policymakers expected both to protect American citizens, seamen, and diplomatic and commercial interests abroad. As access to more overseas markets grew, and opportunities for an American presence increased, consular posts rose from 17 in 1790 to 52 in 1800, and ministers resided in 15 foreign capital cities by 1830.[38]

On the Fund's payroll, six state actors stationed in Europe proved particularly useful to Jefferson during his attempts to combat disinformation and promote American foreign policy between 1790 and 1793: Gouverneur Morris in London and Paris; David Humphreys in Portugal; William Carmichael in Spain; William Short in France and then at the Hague; Thomas Pinckney in Great Britain; and in the Dutch Republic, the Swiss Charles W. F. Dumas, who had been planting pro-American stories in the *Gazette de Leyde* since the American Revolution. Together, they represented Jefferson's early diplomatic network, and he trusted them to help promote the new United States' reputation overseas. Additionally, these agents shaped elites' perceptions in

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[37] Cogliano, *Emperor of Liberty*, 44; Phelps, "A Brief Introduction to the US Consular Service"; Phelps, "One Service, Three Systems, Many Empires," 137; Barnes and Morgan, *The Foreign Service*, 57, 65. For commentary on the matter of executive control over (foreign-born) consular appointments, see Chervinsky, *The Cabinet*, 172-173.

[38] Barnes and Morgan, *The Foreign Service*, 42-43, for quote, see also 44. Jefferson advised and Washington allocated salaries to these listed American ministerial posts by January 1792, see "To GW from TJ, 24 January 1792," *FO*; Barnes and Morgan, *The Foreign Service*, 63.

private circles including ministerial courts and lavish, European dinner parties, where diplomatic politicking and intelligence collection went hand in hand.[39]

But the federal government's creation alone did not immediately grant Americans international recognition, and British printers continued denigrating the U.S. throughout the 1790s. During the Nootka Sound Crisis between 1789 and 1790, when Spain and Britain almost came to blows over sovereignty rights in northwest North America, one English paper suspected Spain and the U.S. would ally together against England. Conversely, the *English Chronicle* reported, "The United States of America are anxious to see Spain involved in a war—Spanish America, almost ripe for a revolt, would, by separating from" Spain, "open to the" U.S. "a source of commerce and treasure." After the French Revolution began, British presses claimed the U.S. had 15,000 soldiers prepared to help the French win conflicts either in Europe or the West Indies. On December 28, 1792, the *Star and Evening Advertiser* published the French National Convention's address to the U.S., wherein its author thanked Americans for their example and implored the two republics to join as exemplars of liberty in a hostile world. British printers widely republished this address likely because it drew the French Revolution and its convulsive, chaotic nature closer to the Americans' own revolution. *The World* agreed, "The French Convention is using subtlety to win the United States of America to their cause, as appears by their late address to them" and so did Members of Parliament supporting alien bills to limit foreign immigration and the importation of radical views into Britain. After Washington issued

[39] Philipp Ziesche, *Cosmopolitan Patriots: Americans in Paris in the Age of Revolution* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2010), esp. chs. 1-3. "From TJ to Alexander Hamilton, with estimate of the expences of the Department of State, 17 June 1790," *FO*; "To Alexander Hamilton from TJ, 24 January 1792," *FO*; "Enclosure II: Statement of the Foreign Salaries and Disbursements of the Department of State, 22 October 1792," *FO*; Knott, *Secret and Sanctioned*, 21.

his Neutrality Proclamation in April 1793, Britons remained suspicious of Americans' stance during the war between Great Britain and France.[40]

European conflicts also upset already unstable transatlantic communications. Rather than tolerate interruptions, Jefferson and his overseas agents preserved their information exchanges by transmitting encrypted and duplicate documents through secure or express channels. Jefferson and his men often wrote "Private" on their letters to label its secretive nature. Furthermore, they coded their correspondence to avoid the prying eyes of European postmasters and government inspectors. Jefferson sent U.S. ministers his own special encryption system, which he expected them to use. Different codes meant different keywords, so he and his men specified the code they employed for each letter. For example, if the keyword for code no. 100 was "macaroni," and the message contained the word "British Lies," users wrote "No. 100" at the top of the message and presented a series of jumbled letters, which, once properly decoded using an alphabetic table with the keyword, spelled, "British Lies." Codes proved so important that Thomas Pinckney panicked when he lost his encryption key. He quickly notified Jefferson with several letters in quick succession and contacted Gouverneur Morris in Paris to ask for his assistance. Thankfully, Pinckney had accidentally sent his cipher *to* Morris, who returned it, and Jefferson received Pinckney's letters, sending him a new key.[41]

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[40] *St. James's Chronicle or the British Evening Post* (London), August 21-24, 1790; *English Chronicle* (London), September 4-7, 1790; *The Morning Chronicle* (London), April 5, 1791; *Whitehall Evening Post* (London), August 11-13, 1791; *The Star and Evening Advertiser* (London), December 28, 1792; *The World* (London), January 10, 1793; *The Morning Post* (London), January 5, 1793; "Neutrality Proclamation, 22 April 1793," *FO*.

[41] See "Coded Messages," Monticello, accessed January 11, 2023, https://www.monticello.org/thomas-jefferson/louisiana-lewis-clark/preparing-for-the-expedition/coded-messages/ and "Jefferson's Cipher for Meriwether Lewis," Monticello, accessed January, 11, 2023, https://www.monticello.org/thomas-jefferson/louisiana-lewis-clark/preparing-for-the-expedition/coded-messages/jefferson-s-cipher-for-meriwether-lewis/. For an example of "Private" written above letters, see editorial notes in, "To TJ from William Short, 4 August 1790," *FO*; The editors of the *Papers of Thomas Jefferson* decoded many of his letters. For examples, see "From TJ to William Short, 9 August 1790," *FO* and "To TJ from William Short, 22 August 1790," *FO*; "To TJ from Thomas Pinckney, 21 January 1793," *FO* and 5 February 1793, 10 February 1793, 11 February 1793, 13 March 1793, 19 March 1793, and "From TJ to Thomas Pinckney, 12 April 1793," *FO*.

But Pinckney's anxieties reflected more than his inability to conceal his missives. The realities of epistolary communication–especially during the French revolutionary wars–meant that letters sometimes did not make it to their recipients. As Great Britain and France attacked ships they believed favored their enemy, newspapers and letters could be lost or destroyed. Jefferson sometimes relied on his diplomats to forward information to each other, as he asked of Pinckney: "I trouble you with a letter to be forwarded to [Humphreys] by the packet. The one inclosed to Messrs. Carmichael and Short being of peculiar importance, I must beg your endeavors to find some conveyance for it in which you shall have full confidence." Jefferson and his men also wrote "duplicate" or related the dates of the letters they had already received (and sent) to ensure the recipient understood the important nature of the letter or merely that they should expect a particular message. Regardless of his distrust toward the British, Jefferson understood that they still controlled the seas, so he often relied on their swift packet (mail) ships to transport his correspondence quickly and safely across the Atlantic.[42]

The first to receive (retroactive) payment from the Fund was New York conservative and libertine Gouverneur Morris. In October 1789, Washington appointed Morris to establish a diplomatic rapport with the British. The relatively famous Morris already lived in Paris at the time, making him a convenient candidate for negotiating diplomatic and commercial connections between the U.S. and Great Britain. Instructing Morris to learn the "Sentiments and Intentions" of the British, Washington tasked him to meet with their representatives and discuss several outstanding issues connected to the end of the Revolutionary War, including the establishment of diplomatic channels through the exchange of ambassadors, the British presence in northwestern forts, and, generally, official British opinion about the U.S. However, the United States still

[42] Taylor, *Misinformation Nation*, 94-96; "From TJ to Thomas Pinckney, 6 November 1792," *FO*; "From TJ to William Short, 27 April 1790," *FO*.

owed prewar debt to English merchants and reparations to Loyalists from the war. Morris also had too many French friends, casting him as an untrustworthy individual in the eyes of British foreign secretary, the Duke of Leeds, and Prime Minister William Pitt. In the end, they left Morris out to dry for months before he finally returned to France. Anglo-American relations and information exchanges remained frustratingly precarious considering such disagreements.[43]

Later, Washington drew from the Contingency Fund to reimburse Morris for his services. Regardless of when Morris was paid, a closer look at his actions overseas highlights the expanded use of the Fund to finance more than simply a salary. Dinner parties often produced the diplomatic information Washington and Jefferson craved. No stranger to the social realities of political maneuvering, Morris dined with those he intended to persuade on matters relevant to American commercial policy. In a letter to Washington on January 22, 1790, Morris reported, "Yesterday I went to dine with the Count de Montmorin and exprest [*sic*] to him my Wish that France might seize the present Moment to establish a liberal System of Commercial Policy for her Colonies. I observed that her Interest was deeply at Stake, because America…would naturally wish to see them in Possession of that Power under whose Government they would be most advantageous to her." Morris later related in his diary that the French foreign minister agreed France "ought to permit a much freer Commerce with us than with any other Nation because…the Fate of those Colonies must depend upon" U.S. trade. The dining room table remained an adequate and oft-chosen setting to discuss political affairs, and Jefferson understood that during his consideration of the Contingency Fund's functional uses.[44]

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[43] O'Toole, *Honorable Treachery*, 97; Knott, *Secret and Sanctioned*, 55-56; Cogliano, *Emperor of Liberty*, 80-81.

[44] "To GW from Gouverneur Morris, 22 January 1790," *FO* and n2. On the dining room as a political space, see Jacob E. Cooke, "The Compromise of 1790," *The William & Mary Quarterly* 27, no. 4 (October 1970): 523-545 and Merry Ellen Scofield, "The Fatigues of His Table: The Politics of Presidential Dining during the Jefferson Administration," *Journal of the Early Republic* 26, no. 3 (Fall 2006): 449-469.

The free trade principle that Morris and the count discussed aligned with Jefferson's beliefs about American commercial policy. Certain the British would continue their discriminatory policies against American shipping in the West Indies, Morris reiterated Jefferson's free trade policy in 1790, hoping to encourage freer commerce between the U.S. and French West Indian colonies. Diplomatic activities required a certain degree of social élan, a quality Morris rarely lacked. That he could transmit Jefferson's commercial beliefs overseas in the proper setting and descriptively relay financial and political intelligence back to the administration likely contributed to his trustworthiness in Jefferson's and Washington's eyes; eventually, Morris earned a permanent station there as Minister to France in 1792. As the resident American minister in Paris, Morris kept the U.S. abreast of revolutionary developments in France while the Washington administration continued to pay him from the Fund.[45]

In the summer of 1790, as news about Nootka Sound quickly reached urban ports throughout the world, diplomatic amity between the U.S. and the two European powers remained uncertain. The Washington administration also had few options for understanding the escalating situation from a safe vantage point. But for the American republic—sans navy—to survive in a world of hostile monarchies, policymakers needed to find safe and inexpensive ways to navigate international crises. Anxious that Great Britain might send its troops through the U.S. to fight Spain in North America, ignoring American sovereignty, Washington requested advice on what to do should the British request to march across. Seeking to understand and exploit the crisis further, Jefferson suggested they could extract concessions from their European rivals.[46]

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[45] Wood, *Empire of Liberty*, 622-623; "Enclosure II: Statement of the Foreign Salaries and Disbursements of the Department of State, 22 October 1792," *FO*; William Howard Adams, *Gouverneur Morris: An Independent Life* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 171-249; James J. Kirschke, *Gouverneur Morris: Author, Statesman, and Man of the World* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2005), 201-247.

[46] "Enclosure: To John Adams, 27 August 1790," *FO*; Cogliano, *Emperor of Liberty*, 80, 86, 91-92; Ben-Atar, *Jeffersonian Commercial Policy*, 94-97.

In August 1790, Jefferson ordered Washington's then-secretary David Humphreys to sail to London, Lisbon, and then Madrid, where he should meet with American charge d'affaires William Carmichael. Through Humphreys, Jefferson instructed Carmichael to press for navigation rights of the Mississippi River with Spanish diplomats. "Thro' the whole of this business it will be best that you avoid all suspicion of being on any public business," Jefferson urged Humphreys. Additionally, Jefferson asked that once Humphreys arrived in London, he "communicate to us from thence any interesting public intelligence you may be able to obtain." Jefferson stipulated that Humphreys would receive from the Fund "two thousand two hundred and fifty dollars a year for your services and expences [*sic*], and moreover what you may incur for the postage of letters; until [the president] shall otherwise order."[47]

Jefferson considered the Mississippi River vital to American commercial interests. Given his conviction that depriving American foodstuffs could bring powerful European empires to heel, Jefferson gambled on coercive tactics with the Spanish to press for the free navigation of the Mississippi. Should Spain respond favorably to such commercial negotiations, the Americans would remain neutral but partial to Spain in the coming war. But if Spain refused, the U.S. would use the conflict between Britain and Spain to launch a continental war against Spanish America. Wasting little time mobilizing state resources to establish yet another connection and expand their diplomatic information network, Jefferson ordered Humphreys and Carmichael to implement America's foreign policy agendas in Europe.[48]

Yet, when Humphreys stopped in Lisbon to meet with Portugal's foreign minister the Chevalier de Pinto, he learned that Great Britain and Spain had resolved their issues over Nootka

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[47] "VII. Secretary of State to David Humphreys, 11 August 1790," *FO*; Stephen F. Knott, *Secret and Sanctioned: Covert Operations and the American Presidency* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 50; Edward M. Cifelli, *David Humphreys* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1982), 46-50, 81.

[48] Ben-Atar, *Jeffersonian Commercial Policy*, 94-96; Cogliano, *Emperor of Liberty*, 88-91.

Sound. Although the Nootka Sound Convention quashed Jefferson's exploitative hopes to secure access to the Mississippi, Humphreys trudged on anyway. As Humphreys relayed his superiors' instructions, however, the chevalier informed him that his sovereign, Queen Maria, appointed a *minister* to the United States instead of what American policymakers preferred, a less costly chargé d'affaires. Humphreys understood the diplomatic import of officially connecting the U.S. to European countries, so he offered himself to Washington as American Minister to Portugal under a chargé d'affaires' salary. Washington accepted his pecuniary sacrifice and nominated Humphreys to the post to secure a commercial connection to Portugal and Portuguese naval protection from the Barbary corsairs harassing American trade in the Mediterranean. In May 1791, Humphreys—drawing his salary from the Fund—became U.S. Minister to Portugal.[49]

From that post, Humphreys continued to provide invaluable services as the state's resources and international presence grew. Though U.S.-Portuguese relations faltered after Humphreys's appointment, the diplomatic establishment facilitated by the Fund still provided the U.S.—but specifically Jefferson—with commercial intelligence regarding possible Brazilian political independence from Portugal. Brazil's resources kept Portugal financially solvent, and with growing American animosity toward the Portuguese monarchy, Humphreys and Jefferson hoped for a Brazilian revolution that might result in free trade with the U.S.[50]

Jefferson also believed he could thwart the British with information inspired by the first federal census. Jefferson awaited the completion of the 1790 census with great anticipation, for the numbers suggested America's population had grown to about four million, much higher than

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[49] "To TJ from David Humphreys, 19 November 1790," *FO*; France could not commit military aid to Spain, forcing the Spanish to acquiesce to a British presence in Nootka Sound, and settle for peace. Humphreys did deliver his orders from Jefferson to Carmichael, but Jefferson's policies had no effect on the Spanish. Jefferson would not get his wish until after his 1793 resignation, when the U.S. ratified the Treaty of San Lorenzo in 1795. See Cogliano, *Emperor of Liberty*, 92 and Cifelli, *David Humphreys*, 82-83.

[50] Tyson Reeder, *Smugglers, Pirates, and Patriots: Free Trade in the Age of Revolution* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019), 88, 116-118.

his estimate of three million and much greater than the 2.5 million Americans who inhabited the U.S. during the Revolution. Those numbers reaffirmed to Jefferson that the United States' environment and rural spaces had incubated its citizens, causing extraordinary demographic improvement. He could hardly contain the good news and sent Madison the state population returns as they came in. Of course, their home state of Virginia boasted the highest count with "seven hundred and forty odd thousand…exclusive of Kentucky." By late October, Jefferson had a near complete census, with data leaving little doubt about the United States' growth.[51]

Madison quickly drafted an essay distinguishing the U.S. from Europe. In November 1791, Freneau published Madison's "Population and Emigration" in the *National Gazette*. Madison noted that war, disease, famine, emigration, or infanticide often caused European population decline. "It has been computed that under the most favorable circumstances possible," though, a country's population "would double itself in ten years." In fact, the U.S. proved "that nature would require for the purpose, a less period than twenty years." Moreover, America owed its growth, in part, to British, Irish, and French people flooding U.S. docks, for "the course of emigrations being always, from places where living is more difficult, to places where it is less difficult…and as a more numerous progeny is another effect of the same cause…more individuals are created to partake of it." To Madison, immigration not only contributed to natural demographic increase but to morals as well. Tightly packed, urban cities encouraged premarital sex, but not "thin settlements," such as in the U.S. In America, "marriages will be increased in proportion. Every four or five emigrants will be the fruit of a legitimate union." Lastly, Madison summarized that "The object of" emigration from Europe "is evidently to exchange a less easy for a more easy subsistence. The effect of them must therefore be to quicken the aggregate

[51] "From TJ to William Short, 28 July 1791," *FO*; Taylor, *American Revolutions*, 155; "From TJ to James Madison, 18 August 1791," *FO*. On exact state counts, see "Report on Census, 24 October 1791," *FO*.

population of" the U.S., and he calculated that for every three Americans who died, five were born, pleasing every discerning "*patriot*" who could perform simple arithmetic. With settler farms and abundant produce, the U.S. cultivated a healthy and virtuous citizenry, luring Europeans away from their homes, where war, starvation, and tyranny reigned supreme.[52]

Back in July, Short wrote to Jefferson, minutely relating foreign affairs on the European continent and noting the growing tensions between revolutionary France and her neighbors. Troop numbers and movements aside, Short also expressed his confusion to Jefferson about relations between Spain and the U.S. "The English papers," Short revealed, had reported that war was "inevitable" between Spain and America and that both countries had made "preparations" for military conflict. When the French foreign minister, the Comte de Montmorin, asked Short about what the British newspapers had published, an embarrassed Short admitted ignorance about the subject. Even de Montmorin and Short lent credibility to British newspapers while they stumbled through a world of informational darkness.[53]

Jefferson responded to Short's July letter three days after Freneau printed Madison's essay on November 21, 1791. Forwarding that issue to Short in Paris, Jefferson answered:

> It would be an Augean task for me to go through the London newspapers and formally contradict all their lies, even those relating to America. On our side, there have been certainly no preparations for war against Spain, nor have I heard of any on their part but *in the London newspapers*…Our best newspapers are sent you from my office, with scrupulous exactness…On these I rely for giving you information of all the facts possessed by the public; and as to those not possessed by them, I think there has not been a single instance of my leaving you uninformed…In Freneau's paper of the 21st. inst. you will see a small essay on population and emigration, which I think it would be well if the newswriters of Paris would translate and insert in their papers. The sentiments are too just not to make impression.

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[52] James Madison, "For the *National Gazette*, 19 November 1791," *FO*.
[53] "To TJ from William Short, 24 July 1791," *FO*.

Though Jefferson acknowledged Short's message about American and Spanish relations, his concern about U.S reputation, British "lies," and confidence in Madison's essay impelled him to send pro-American news, which he expected Short to have translated and diffused among Europeans. Moreover, Jefferson's letters and packages to Short reveal that Madison did not exclusively write his essays for Americans. Instead, he and Jefferson sought to enlighten Europeans too. "The remarks which have been made, though in many respects little applicable to the internal situation of the United States," Madison concluded, "may be of use as far as they tend to prevent mistaken and narrow ideas on an important subject." Bearing in mind the harm British newspapers posed to America's international reputation, Jefferson and Madison sought to counter their falsehoods by spreading news about the United States' attractiveness through Short. While Jefferson had circulated information promoting America in years past, state funds now purchased newspapers, translations, and postage, ensuring that he could expand his information war against the British as state secretary. Finally, the *National Gazette* may have had domestic beginnings, but Jefferson clearly used the paper to combat transatlantic threats as well. While paying Freneau government money to ostensibly translate for the state department, Jefferson turned him into a transatlantic state operator.[54]

In November 1791, the Washington administration continued to expand state capacity by appointing South Carolinian Thomas Pinckney resident minister in London. Soon, Jefferson asked Pinckney to promote American "commerce, and it's liberation from embarrasments [*sic*] in all the British dominions; but most especially in the West Indies." Jefferson also listed for

[54] James Madison, "For the *National Gazette*, 19 November 1791," *FO*; "From TJ to William Short, 24 November 1791," *FO*. Short received Jefferson's letter and November 21 issue of the *National Gazette* on January 25, 1792. See "To TJ from William Short, 25 January 1792," *FO*. See Pasley, *"Tyranny of Printers,"* 60, 65-66; George Green Shackelford, *Jefferson's Adoptive Son: The Life of William Short, 1759-1848* (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 1993), 42-110.

Pinckney the men who would provide him with information and representation throughout the British Isles: "Mr. Joshua Johnson is Consul for us at London, James Maury at Liverpool, Elias Vanderhorst at Bristol, Thomas Auldjo Vice Consul at Pool (resident at Cowes) and William Knox consul at Dublin." Importantly, Jefferson reminded Pinckney of "The peculiar custom in England of impressing seamen on every appearance of war," which "will occasionally expose our seamen to peculiar oppressions and vexations…It will be expedient that you take proper opportunities in the mean time of conferring with the minister on this subject in order to form some arrangement for the protection of our seamen on those occasions." Lastly, Jefferson told Pinckney he would receive congressional laws and journals, and, in return, Pinckney would send him European newspapers and notify him of affairs in England.[55]

In August 1792, Pinckney arrived in London. He immediately touched base with Morris and Short, and communicated to Jefferson that the English were readying its navy given the disruptive scenes in revolutionary France. A southern gentleman, Pinckney understood much as Morris had that the British court expected diplomats to follow strict social etiquette. A clique of sorts, Pinckney reported to Jefferson that "all the foreign Ministers seem to consider the Americans as united in principles with the French and as having by example at least assisted in exciting the commotions with which great part of Europe is convulsed and consequently as not very desireable [*sic*] associates. Some of the foreign ministers with whom I am most intimate have told me that this idea prevails…it serves to keep me at a greater distance from those with whom it is my business to have most intercourse than would otherwise be the case." Even George III tried to bait Pinckney into a conversation about "the differing circumstances of the

[55] Frances Leigh Williams, *A Founding Family: The Pinckneys of South Carolina* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1978), 296-303; "From TJ to Thomas Pinckney, 6 November 1791," *FO*; "From TJ to Thomas Pinckney, 11 June 1792," *FO*.

northern and southern parts of [the U.S.] as tending to produce disunion." Political conversation with European ministers and royalty had revealed their opinions on America to Pinckney. Indeed, they likely learned such information from reading British papers. About disunion, Pinckney "declined" to discuss it, indicating the South Carolinian's penchant for self-control.[56]

Regardless of Pinckney's protests, the British increased their harassment of neutral American vessels and impressment of sailors throughout 1793. Jefferson fumed when he learned the British officially determined to seize neutral cargo, declaring it:

> so manifestly contrary to the law of nations…when two nations go to war, those who chuse to live in peace retain their natural right to pursue their agriculture, manufactures and other ordinary vocations, to carry the produce of their industry, for exchange, to all nations, belligerent or neutral, as usual, to go and come freely without injury or molestation, and in short, that the war among others shall be for them as if it did not exist.

Imploring Pinckney to "obtain…full indemnification to any Citizens," such seizures likely reminded Jefferson of the yoke of British tyranny. Unable to discuss such matters with Lord Grenville in person, Jefferson relied on Pinckney to relay his commercial philosophy to the British government, essentially communicating to them that on this matter, his views and the U.S. government's were one and the same.[57]

Jefferson, however, did not singularly depend on court conversations to secure American interests. Later during his tenure, he returned to the dissemination of pro-American news to promote the United States' image overseas. On February 2, 1793, Jefferson asked Charles W. F. Dumas, then residing at the Hague in the Dutch Republic—and paid from the Fund as an "Agent" of the U.S.—to spread plans of the future national capital on the Potomac. He hoped the plans "may be exhibited…in such shops, houses, or other places, where they may be most seen

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[56] "To TJ from Thomas Pinckney, 29 August 1792," *FO*; "To TJ from Thomas Pinckney, 13 December 1792," *FO*.

[57] Williams, *A Founding Family*, 301-302; "From TJ to Thomas Pinckney, 7 September 1793," *FO*.

by those descriptions of people who would be the most likely to be attracted to it, and who would be worth attracting," suggesting Dumas circulate them in "sea-port towns" since those locations "are the most likely to possess persons of this description." Publicizing the future capital to well-connected Europeans, Jefferson hoped the Dutch (their most loyal creditors), and whomever else they interacted with on the continent, might spread the news that the fledgling U.S. had taken steps to realize such grand ambitions. Regardless of whether laborers began building the Capitol and the Executive Mansion or paved its streets, the U.S. could benefit from the display and discussion of their planned capital. More importantly, Jefferson's intentions reveal a desire to join European powers by imitating their own practice of constructing large, attractive, centralized capital cities. Ultimately, Jefferson wanted Europeans to know that the U.S. would not remain a weak periphery on the Atlantic world's margins.[58]

To strengthen their reputation, claim legitimacy among other nations, and fend off their foreign rivals, Jefferson and Washington sent these men because, at their core, they were trustworthy and experienced in politicking and diplomacy. Jefferson and Washington did not make their decisions lightly, even disagreeing about where specific statesmen should be stationed so as to cultivate the most favorable alliances. In an age of seemingly ceaseless global conflict that threatened the young United States' very existence, the Washington administration could ill afford to leave diplomatic stations up to chance. Britain, Spain, and France could realistically absorb the U.S. into their orbit as a supplemental ally, enemy, or colony, risking their entire project in republican self-government, a reality for which Americans fought a revolution.

[58] "To TJ from C. W. F. Dumas, 5 April 1793," *FO*; "Enclosure II: Statement of the Foreign Salaries and Disbursements of the Department of State, 22 October 1792," *FO*.

Conclusion

In late June 1792, Irish author John Carey requested from Jefferson copies of official papers from the Department of State. Carey intended to publish American diplomatic communiques for European audiences. Ever the informational node, Jefferson collected unclassified letters between him and his resident ministers. However, Carey's request could not have come at a more precarious time for transatlantic communications. In the spring of 1793, mere days after Washington announced America's neutrality during the French revolutionary wars, Jefferson sent packets of diplomatic letters to Thomas Pinckney, requesting the minister forward them to Carey. Fortunately, Pinckney received the papers without incident.[59]

Yet, Jefferson's gamble underscores the effect he believed this book might have on Europeans. The new republic was weak, but still sought to actively promote its reputation abroad. Jefferson and U.S. policymakers understood that to succeed in a world of hostile monarchies, without a navy, they had to engage Europe in a war of information. Believing British printers deluded European opinions about the U.S., Jefferson deployed pro-American information throughout the Atlantic world during the 1780s and 1790s. The inauguration of a new, well-funded government, though, enabled Jefferson to ramp up his challenge against British disinformation as state secretary, hoping to upset America's anti-republican enemy through a swelling diplomatic corps. Compared to his individual efforts in the 1780s, Jefferson could now rely on the early American state's diplomatic resources to widely combat foreign disinformation. Jefferson's assemblage of state papers also highlights that in the early years of the republic, with its incipient institutions, the men who headed the executive departments personally collected

[59] "To TJ from John Carey, 30 June 1792," *FO*; "From TJ to John Carey, 3 July 1792," *FO*; "From Thomas Jefferson to Thomas Pinckney, 27 April 1793," *FO*; "From TJ, 8 May 1793," *FO*.

state papers. In the sense that European governments' collection of knowledge characterized the existence of a state, Jefferson and his colleagues *constituted* the early American state.

Despite the Fund and his diplomatic corps, Jefferson's efforts likely had little effect. European papers continued to laud or criticize the new republic based on their preconceptions and biases, regardless of whether American printers or policymakers complained, challenged them, or reformed their government. State-funded information manipulation did not end with Jefferson though. On the eve of the War of 1812, President James Madison drew from the Fund, paying $50,000 for intelligence he believed would injure the British and his domestic enemies, the Anglophile Federalists. Far more than the original allocation, the Fund had grown substantially since 1790. Congress re-enacted the Foreign Intercourse Act and its Fund in 1793, 1794, and 1796, the last of which saw the Fund increase to $60,000. Those financial investments highlight the importance with which American policymakers viewed U.S. presence overseas. And their efforts to gather and shape information grew in tandem with the American state.[60]

In directing state funds to expand and deploy their new diplomatic corps, early American policymakers, including Jefferson, could now engage in informational conflicts on a broader scale compared to previous experiences during the 1780s. In the 1790s, Jefferson and American policymakers could not foretell whether their efforts would generate success, yet they continued to grow the Fund and diplomatic corps anyway. In such efforts, we can see a tenacious new

[60] Knott, *Secret and Sanctioned*, 101; See *An Act to continue in force for a limited time, and to amend the act intituled "An act providing the means of intercourse between the United States and foreign nations."* Public Law 4, *U.S. Statutes at Large* 2 (1793): 299-300; *An Act making further provision for the expenses attending the intercourse of the United States with foreign nations; and further to continue in force the act intituled "An act providing the means of intercourse between the United States and foreign nations."* Public Law 7, *U.S. Statutes at Large* 1 (1794): 345; *An Act making further provision for the expenses attending the intercourse of the United States with foreign nations; and to continue in force the act, intituled "An act providing the means of intercourse between the United States and foreign nations."* Public Law 41, *U.S. Statutes at Large* 1 (1796): 487-488. The 1794 reenactment granted $1,000,000 to settle disputes between the U.S. and the Barbary nations, an action Jefferson opposed but that underscored the United States' growth as a credit-worthy nation after constitutional ratification.

nation seeking to emulate the powerful fiscal-military states located in Europe. The U.S. had to perform accordingly, seeking to legitimate their country in the eyes of the world. Expanding early American state capacity, then, articulated political, cultural, and diplomatic qualities recognized and accepted by other countries. Despite the absence of any measurable success in influencing European public opinion, the process by which Americans sought to earn global recognition and bolster their reputation through diplomacy and statecraft proves that the Fund was well worth the Washington administration's politicking in 1790.

This essay does not argue that American interference in the Europeans' information ecosystem led to a detectable change in opinion toward the U.S.; rather, it emphasizes that contemporaries truly believed information interference could change opinion, and in their efforts, Jefferson and the federal government increased early state capacity. It is worth noting, too, that in the years immediately following Jefferson's December 1793 departure from the state department, the U.S. began to achieve international recognition by foreign powers. Perhaps American diplomats' conformity to European cultural practices earned them social credit in monarchical courts, or pro-American information infected European minds. Certainly, David Humphreys believed in an ascendant U.S.: "While the Powers of Europe are in such a political ferment," he wrote Jefferson in 1790, "America is daily growing of more importance in their view."[61]

[61] "To TJ from David Humphreys, 20 October 1790," *FO*.