

# Center *for the Study of the* American Constitution

## NO. 8: THE MARQUIS DE LAFAYETTE\* (1757-1834)

Thomas Jefferson, perhaps more than anyone else, captured the essence of Lafayette when he described him as having “a canine appetite for popularity and fame.” James Madison agreed that Lafayette had “a strong thirst of praise and popularity.” Lafayette, himself, would not have denied these assessments. While others might worry about Lafayette’s unbridled ambition, Jefferson and Madison felt that this unique Frenchman would use virtue to “get above” his ambition and that many more “favorable traits presented themselves in a stronger light.” Madison saw in Lafayette “as sincere an American as any Frenchman can be.”

Lafayette was willing to die for his adopted country. He actively sought opportunities to engage the enemy, though never at the expense of the soldiers who served under his command. He regularly defended his soldiers’ interests, often at the cost of his own fortune, and instilled in them an esprit d’corps that made them a formidable fighting force.

Lafayette had a special relationship with George Washington. The commander in chief thought of the young Frenchman as the son he never had. Only Alexander Hamilton came close to Lafayette in Washington’s affection. Hamilton, however, always pictured Washington as a stepping stone to power for himself—upon Washington’s death, Hamilton referred to him as a necessary aegis [i.e., shield] to his own rule. Lafayette, on the other hand, always had a profound love and awe for the man he knew held the disunited states together and who kept an outnumbered, ill-fed, sick, and largely unpaid army in the field for eight long years. Lafayette unabashedly proclaimed his love for Washington in letter and in person by embracing him—things that other men would never think to do. Washington intentionally kept other men distant from him, but not so with Lafayette.

After the war, Lafayette successfully lobbied in favor of America with the French, Spanish, and German governments. He visited America in 1784 and again for thirteen months in 1824–1825 to universal acclaim. He was made a citizen by three states—Connecticut, Maryland, and Virginia. He continued to support America’s revolutionary principles in the early stages of the French Revolution, but the unleashed forces were too powerful for him to control. Exiled from France by the radicals, he was captured and imprisoned for five years by the Germans and Austrians who fought against Napoleon. Because Lafayette lived his life and died adhering to the principles that he fought for during America’s struggle for independence, he felt it only right to be buried next to his wife in a small cemetery on the outskirts of Paris in soil he brought back from Bunker Hill. ■

\*This biographical introduction is largely taken from John P. Kaminski’s *Lafayette: The Boy General* (Madison, Wis.: Parallel Press, 2007), which is on our website free of charge or can be purchased in book form for \$12 from either the Center or Parallel Press.

## QUOTATIONS

### Silas Deane: Agreement with the Marquis de Lafayette, Paris, 7 December 1776

The desire which Mr. the Marquis de la Fayette shows of serving among the Troops of the United States of North America, and the Interest which he takes in the Justice of their Cause making him wish to distinguish himself in this war and to render himself as useful as he possibly can; but not thinking that he can obtain leave of his Family to pass the seas and serve in a foreign Country till he can go as a General Officer; I have thought I could not better serve my Country and those who have entrusted me than by granting to him in the name of the very honorable Congress the Rank of Major General which I beg the States to confirm to him, to ratify and deliver to him the Commission to hold and take Rank, to count from this Day, with the General Officers of the same degree. His high Birth, his Alliances, the

great Dignities which his Family holds at this Court, his considerable Estates in this Realm, his personal merit, his Reputation, his Disinterestedness, and above all his Zeal for the Liberty of our Provinces, have only been able to engage me to promise him the Rank of Major General in the name of the United States.

**Silas Deane to President of Congress John Hancock, Paris, c. 16 March 1777**

At length, the Marquis de la Fayette, a young Nobleman of the first family and connections at Court, viz. that of Noailles, has equipped a vessel, at his own expense, to transport him and the Baron [de Kalb], with other Officers, to America. As my letters were very particular at the time, and as we shall write express by Capt. Hammond in a few days, will not detain you more than to recommend this young Nobleman to your particular notice and attention. His family are of the first influence here, and have, for ages, been celebrated in the affairs of this Country, as well in peace as war. His fortune puts him above all pecuniary considerations, and he desires none, but wishes to rank with Gentlemen of the first character in the Army.

**Marquis de Lafayette to William Carmichael, On board *La Victorie*, 19 April 1777**

The only favor that I ask is that they give me every possible opportunity to make use of my fortune, my labors, and all the resources of my imagination, and to shed my blood for my brothers and my friends. The only recompense that I shall request, after success, is to obtain new means of being useful to them.

**Richard Henry Lee to Landon Carter, Philadelphia, 19 August 1777**

Among other curiosities there, I saw the young Marquis de la Fayette, a Nobleman of the first fortune and family in France, the favorite of Court and Country. He left behind him a most beautiful young wife, and all the soft enjoyments that such a situation, with an immense fortune in a polished Country can furnish to fight in American wilderness for American Liberty! After this can there be a Tory in the World? He has rank of Major General in the Continental Army & fights without pay. He is thirsty for glory but the Commissioners at Paris wish the General [i.e., George Washington] may restrain the ardor of youth and not suffer his exposure but on some signal occasion. He is sensible, polite, and good natured. How this example ought to gall the worthless Nobility & Gentry of England, who meanly creep into the Tyrant's service to destroy that liberty which a generous Frenchman quits every delight to defend through every difficulty!

**Marquis de Lafayette to Adrienne de Noailles de Lafayette, Bethlehem, Pa., 1 October 1777**

Do not be concerned, sweetheart, about the care of my wound. All the physicians in America are paying close attention to me. I have a friend who has spoken to them in such a way that I can be assured of the best care. That friend is General Washington. This estimable man, whom I at first admired for his talents and qualities and whom I have come to venerate as I know him better, has become my intimate friend. His affectionate interest in me soon won my heart. I am a member of his household and we live together like two brothers in mutual intimacy and confidence. This close friendship makes me as happy as I could possibly be in this country. When he sent his chief surgeon to care for me, he told him to care for me as though I were his son, for he loved me in the same way.

**Henry Laurens to John Lewis Gervais, York, Pa., 8 October 1777**

[Laurens came to assist a wounded Lafayette.] I . . . returned once more into the City [Philadelphia] . . . to take charge of the Marquis delafayette who lay wounded by a ball through his Leg. . . . I had the honor of conducting the Marquis who is possessed of the most excellent funds of good sense & inexhaustible patience to Bethlehem where the Second day after our arrival I left him in Bed anxious for nothing but to be again in our Army as he always calls it.

**Baron de Kalb to Pierre de Saint-Paul, With the American Army, 7 November 1777**

The friendship with which he has honored me since I made his acquaintance, and that which I have vowed to him because of his personal qualities, oblige me to have that deference for him. No one is more deserving than he of the consideration he enjoys here. He is a prodigy for his age; he is the model of valor, intelligence, judgment, good conduct, generosity, and zeal for the cause of liberty for this continent. His wound is healing very well. He has just rejoined the army, so as not to miss any chances for glory and danger.

**George Washington to President of Congress Henry Laurens, White Marsh, Pa., 1 November 1777**

I would take the liberty to mention, that I feel myself in a delicate situation with respect to the Marquis La Fayette. He is extremely solicitous of having a Command equal to his rank, & professes very different Ideas as to the purposes of his appointment from those Congress have mentioned to me. He certainly did not understand them. I do not know in what light they will view the matter, but it appears to me, from a consideration of his illustrious and important connections—the attachment which he has manifested to our cause, and the consequences, which his return in disgust might produce, that it will be advisable to gratify him in his wishes—and the more so, as several Gentlemen from France, who came over under some assurances, have gone back disappointed in their expectations. His conduct with respect to them stands in a favorable point of view, having interested himself to remove their uneasiness and urged the impropriety of their making any unfavorable representations upon their arrival at home, and in all his letters has placed our affairs in the best situation he could. Besides, he is sensible—discreet in his manners—has made great proficiency in our Language, and from the disposition he discovered at the Battle of Brandy Wine, possesses a large share of bravery and Military ardor.

**James Lovell to John Adams, York, Pa., 1 December 1777**

We have nothing of much Importance this morning. Fayette being with Genl. Greene in the Jerseys fell upon a Picket of the Enemy, killed 20, took 20 & wounded many without loss. He is delighted with the Militia; and Genl. Greene says the Marquis seems determined to court Danger. I wish more were so determined.

**Marquis de Lafayette to Adrienne de Noailles de Lafayette, Camp near Valley Forge, Pa., 6 January 1778**

If I depart, many Frenchmen who are useful here will follow my example. General Washington will be truly unhappy if I speak to him of leaving. His confidence in me is greater than my age allows me to admit. In his position, he is surrounded by flatterers and secret enemies. He finds in me a trustworthy friend to whom he can open his heart, and who always tells him the truth. Not a day passes that he does not have long conversations with me or write me long letters, and he likes to consult me about the most important matters. At this very moment there is a particular matter in which my presence is of some use to him; this is not the moment to speak of leaving.

**Gouverneur Morris to President of Congress Henry Laurens, Camp, 26 January 1778**

I am deeply surprised at the mature Judgment & solid Understanding of this *Young Man* for such he certainly is.

**Robert Troup to Horatio Gates, Bethlehem, Pa., 6 February 1778**

I left the Marquis at Lancaster. He seems to be strongly tinctured with the Fabian Principles of Head-Quarters.

**James McHenry: Journal, 25 June 1778**

The Marquis de la Fayette is detached to support Scott with 2000 men—with orders to take command of the whole detached troops.

The young Frenchman in raptures with his command and burning to distinguish himself moves towards the enemy who are in motion.

**Marquis de Lafayette to President of Congress, Camp near Warren, R.I., 23 September 1778**

The moment I heard of America, I loved her. The moment I knew she was fighting for freedom, I burnt with the desire of bleeding for her—and the moment I shall be able of serving her in any time or any part of the world, will be among the happiest ones in my life.

**President of Congress Henry Laurens to Louis XVI, King of France, Philadelphia, 21 October 1778**

The Marquis de la Fayette having obtained our leave to return to his Native Country, we could not suffer him to depart without testifying our deep sense of his Zeal, Courage and attachment.

We have advanced him to the rank of Major General in our Armies, which, as well by his prudent as spirited conduct he hath manifestly merited.

We recommend this young Nobleman to Your Majesty's notice, as one whom we know to be Wise in Council, gallant in the Field and patient under the Hardships of War. His Devotion to his Sovereign hath led him in all things to demean

himself as an American, acquiring thereby the confidence of these United States, Your Majesty's good and faithful Friends and Allies, and the Affection of their Citizens.

**Samuel Adams to Samuel Cooper, Philadelphia, 26 October 1778**

The Marquis De la Fayette does me the Honor of taking the Care of this Letter. His disinterested Friendship to Mankind, his particular Attachment to our Country and his Zeal, Activity and Bravery in its Service are so well known to you that I flatter myself I cannot gratify you more than by introducing him to your Acquaintance.

**Richard Henry Lee to Arthur Lee, Philadelphia, 27 October 1778**

The Marquis Fayette left us today for Boston where he is to embark. This letter will follow him with our dispatches. I wish that a true friendship may take place between you and the Marquis, because I discern in this young Nobleman those principles that I think cannot fail to render him a great Man. And his virtue is such as will make him superior to all those mean and selfish considerations which mark too many.

**Marquis de Lafayette: Memoir of 1779**

You ask me when I first longed for glory and liberty; I can recall no time in my life when I did not love stories of glorious deeds, or have dreams of traveling the world in search of fame.

**Marquis de Lafayette to President of Congress John Jay, St. Jean d'Angely near Rochefort, 13 June 1779**

How happy I shall think Myself whenever a Safe opportunity of writing to Congress will be offered, I Cannot Better any way express But in Reminding them of that unbounded Affection and Gratitude I Shall ever feel for them—So deeply are those sentiments Engrav'd in my heart, that I every day lament upon that distance which Separates me from them, and that never any thing was so warmly and passionately wish'd for, as I desire to Return again to that Country of which I shall ever Consider myself as a Citizen. . . .

The affairs of America I shall ever look upon as My first Business while I am in Europe—any Confidence from the King and ministers, any popularity I May have among My Country men, any Mean in My power, shall be to the Best of My skill, and till the end of My life exerted in Behalf of an interest I have so much at heart.

**Benjamin Franklin to the Marquis de Lafayette, Passy, 24 August 1779**

The Congress, sensible of your merit towards the United States, but unable adequately to reward it, determined to present you with a sword as a small mark of their grateful acknowledgment. They directed it to be ornamented with suitable devices. Some of the principal actions of the war, in which you distinguished yourself by your bravery and conduct, are therefore represented upon it. These, with a few emblematic figures, all admirably well executed, make its principal value. By the help of the exquisite artists France affords I find it easy to express everything but the sense we have of your worth and our obligations to you; for this, figures and even words, are found insufficient. I therefore only add that, with the most perfect esteem, I have the honor to be, etc.

**John Adams to Elbridge Gerry, Braintree, Mass., 11 September 1779**

On the first Arrival of the Marquis De la Fayette in Paris, I made him a Visit and finding him alone, had two Hours Conversation with him, in which I entered into all these Things, and had the Pleasure to find him well acquainted with our Affairs, and heartily disposed to serve Us. He told me, he would represent every one of my Arguments as from himself to the Ministry, which was what I desired, because I knew that his Character was so high and he was so beloved at Court, that he would be always there, and constantly in Conversation on our affairs.

**Marquis de Lafayette to President of Congress Samuel Huntington, L'Havre, 7 October 1779**

As from their Minister in France, any European intelligence will be properly conveyed to Congress, I beg only the leave of paying them a due tribute of my respect and a heartfelt assurance of my unbounded zeal, love, and gratitude. So sensible I am of their goodness towards me, that I flatter myself they will kindly receive this letter from one, who will ever boast in the name of an American soldier, and whose delight has been long ago, in sharing the same fortune as the American people, never to be considered but as a countryman of theirs. . . .

The inestimable sword which Congress have generously added to their so many favors, I have received from their Minister with such honorable devices, as by far exceeds any merit I may ever boast of. This present has been also graced by

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Mr. Franklin's politeness in offering it, and I could not help repeating again to Congress some assurances of those sentiments which forever will animate my grateful heart.

With the warm feelings of one whose first ambition and delight is to be known in this, and to be called in ages to come A lover of America, who is bound to his Representatives by the most respectful tender attachment and gratitude, and with the highest regard for your Excellency.

**Marquis de Lafayette to Benjamin Franklin, L'Havre, 14 October 1779**

I hope that in concert with my heroic friend, he [Admiral d'Estaing] will rather contract the arms of the British tyrant and his faithful incendiary soldiers, so that our people may perhaps be by this time in possession of New York. When I say *ours*, I mean the Americans, and under that same denomination I used in America to mean the French, so that whatever of both countries I am in, I am at once both speaking as a foreigner, and spoken of as a citizen.

**John Adams to Abigail Adams, Paris, 28 February 1780**

If the Marquis should make you a Visit You will treat him with all Distinction that is due to his Merit and Character, as well as his Birth and Rank which are very high.

He has been the invariable and indefatigable Friend of America, in all Times, Places and Occasions, and his Assiduity have done Us much service. He is my particular Friend, and therefore deserves from mine, the greatest Respect, on my private Account as well as on the public.

**John Adams to James Lovell, Paris, 29 February 1780**

I cannot let the Marquis go off without a Line to you. He took leave of the King a few days ago, in the Uniform of an American Major General, and attracted the Eyes of the whole Court more than ever. He had on no doubt his American Sword which is indeed a Beauty, and which he shows with great Pleasure, upon proper Occasions. The workmanship is exquisite, and there are Emblems on it, representing him, in all the most remarkable Situations he has been in America. He goes out in a Frigate of the King the Hermione from Rochfort, he carries with him Cloaths enough for the Army to make him welcome to them, if they had not known him before.

**Benjamin Franklin to George Washington, Passy, 5 March 1780**

I have received but lately the Letter your Excellency did me the honor of writing to me in Recommendation of the Marquis de la Fayette. His modesty detained it long in his own Hands. We became acquainted, however, from the time of his Arrival at Paris; and his Zeal for the Honor of our Country, his Activity in our Affairs here, and his firm Attachment to our Cause and to you, impressed me with the same Regard and Esteem for him that your Excellency's Letter would have done, had it been immediately delivered to me.

**Mercy Otis Warren to John Adams, Boston, 8 May 1780**

But we have yet some virtues among us, and gratitude is none of the least. It was remarkably displayed on the return of the Marquis La Fayette to this place. A general satisfaction was diffused through each countenance, and every expression of respect manifested on his arrival. And while the heroic character of this accomplished young nobleman, engages universal esteem and admiration, his easy manners, his affable demeanor, and his polite address, win him the hearts of all who have the honor of his acquaintance. Yet when I hear him converse, I cannot but waft a sigh across the Atlantic for his most amiable lady, as well as for the many others who by the cruel necessity of the times are obliged to suffer the interruption of domestic felicity.

**Alexander Hamilton to James Duane, Morristown, N.J., 14 May 1780**

The Marquis has a title to all the love of all America; but you know he has a thousand little whims to satisfy—one of these he *will have* me to write to some friend in Congress about. He is desirous of having the Captain of the Frigate in which he came complimented and gives several pretty instances of his punctuality & disinterestedness. He wishes Congress to pass some resolutions of thanks & to recommend him to their Minister in France, to be recommended to the French Court. The first of these is practicable. The last I think might have an officious appearance. The *essential* services the Marquis has rendered America in France give him a claim for all that can be done with propriety; but Congress must not commit themselves.

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**Samuel Cooper to John Adams, Boston, 23 May 1780**

The Marquis de la Fayette did me the Honor to deliver me the Letter you kindly wrote by Him. As his arrival diffused a general Joy, every Expression of it was given here that circumstances would allow, and particular Respects were paid by the Government as well as the People at large to this prudent and gallant young Nobleman who keeps the Cause of America so warm at his Heart.

**George Washington to the Comte de Rochambeau, 16 July 1780**

As a General officer I have the greatest confidence in him; as a friend he is perfectly acquainted with my sentiments and opinions; he knows all the circumstances of our army and the country at large; all the information he gives and all the positions he makes, I entreat you will consider as coming from me.

**Marquis de Lafayette to Alexander Hamilton, Light Camp, N.J., 21 October 1780**

Have you yet any thing new, My dear Sir, any thing that May put me in spirits? You know I am not of a desponding, dark temper.

**Nathanael Greene to Griffin Greene, Camp at Precaness, N.J., 22 October 1780**

All I meant by mentioning the Marquis was, to make use of his interest to obtain goods in France; being persuaded that he would be willing to serve me from motives of friendship; and because I have it in my power to gratify his military pride. He is an exceeding good hearted youth; and highly deserving the love and confidence of America.

**George Washington to Governor of Virginia Thomas Jefferson, New Windsor, N.Y., 8 December 1780**

I have the honor of introducing to your Excellency the Marquis de la Fayette, Major General in our army and an officer of Rank in those of France. This Gentleman's character, illustrious birth and fortune, cannot be unknown to you, though you may be unacquainted with his person. I should be wanting in that justice which is due his great merit, to his early attachment to the American Cause, and to his powerful support of it here and at the Court of Versailles; was I to permit him to depart for the Southern Army without this testimony of the sense I entertain of his worth, and recommendations of him to your attention.

**Sarah Bache to Benjamin Franklin, Philadelphia, 14 January 1781**

The Marquis de Fayette did us the honor of a Visit when in Town. He is expected here again to stay some time. He is greatly admired and beloved wherever he goes.

**Marquis de Lafayette to the Prince de Poix, New Windsor, N.Y., 30 January 1781**

My situation with the army and the American people is as pleasant as one can possibly imagine. They overwhelm me with kindness here, and the trust and friendship they are so good as to evince for me makes my service here delightful.

**Nathanael Greene to the Marquis de Lafayette, Camp near Rugeley's Mill, S.C., 1 May 1781**

I have only one word of advice to give you (having entire confidence in your ability, zeal and good conduct), that is not to let the love of fame get the better of your prudence and plunge you into a misfortune, in too eager a pursuit after glory. This is the voice of a friend, and not the caution of a General.

**Marquis de Lafayette to Alexander Hamilton, Richmond, Va., 23 May 1781**

I request you will write me if you approve of my conduct. The command of the waters, the superiority in cavalry, and the great disproportion of forces, gave the enemy such advantages that I durst not venture out and listen to my fondness for enterprise. To speak the truth I was afraid of myself as much as of the enemy. Independence\* has rendered me the more cautious, as I know my own warmth; but if the Pennsylvanians come, Lord Cornwallis shall pay some thing for his victory.

\*By "Independence" Lafayette refers to being the commander of all forces in Virginia with no officer above him.

**Marquis de Lafayette to George Washington, 24 May 1781**

Was I to fight a battle I'd be cut to pieces, the militia dispersed, and the arms lost. Was I to decline fighting the country would think herself given up. I am therefore determined to skirmish, but not to engage too far, and particularly to take care against their immense and excellent body of horse whom the militia fears like they would so many wild beasts.

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**James McHenry to Nathanael Greene, Headquarters, 23 miles from Richmond, Va., 20 June 1781**

[Anthony] Wayne was impetuous, and the Marquis loved glory, but then, he was reasonable, and possessed a prudence which the other thinks he can do without.

**Marquis de Lafayette to the Vicomte de Noailles, Williamsburg, Va., 9 July 1781**

This devil Cornwallis is much wiser than the other generals with whom I have dealt. He inspires me with a sincere fear, and his name has greatly troubled my sleep. This campaign is a good school for me. God grant that the public does not pay for my lessons.

**William Carmichael to Benjamin Franklin, Madrid, 13 July 1781**

[The Marquis] was well in the middle of May & greatly respected & beloved by his Troops.

**Anthony Wayne to Robert Morris, Williamsburg, Va., 14 September 1781**

The Marquis Lafayette one of the best of Officers and first of men. . . .

**Richard Bache to Benjamin Franklin, Philadelphia, 27 November 1781**

The Marquis, during his command in Virginia, has shown all the Abilities of a Veteran, he is universally beloved on this side the Atlantic, & we hope to see him again in the Spring, should his Services be wanted in another Campaign—

**French Minister of War, the Marquis de Ségur, to the Marquis de Lafayette, Versailles, c. 5 December 1781**

You have made a most glorious campaign, Monsieur le Marquis. Our old warriors admire you; the young ones want to take you as a model, without, however, your having excited among them the least impulse of jealousy. You add to perfect conduct a modesty that enhances the value of your virtues.

**Matthew Ridley: Diary, 1782**

I find the Marquis to be meddling in the Affairs of Peace. He is continually inquisitive as to what is passing wishes to be present at all Mr. Jay's Interviews with those appointed to treat on the part of England wants to know everything passing and as regularly conveys all to Comte de Vergennes and without doubt to the Marquis de Castries as he is his Relation. In short he is a politician who seeks to profit of time and Circumstances in order to advance himself in France. Full of Ambition and not without Intrigue. Feels his consequence and Influence and profits of it to force himself into the knowledge of what relates to us under the character of an American.

**William Carmichael to Benjamin Franklin, Madrid, 22 February 1782**

We think differently of French Gallantry in America, I never can think of it without thinking of the Marquis De la Fayette.

**Benjamin Franklin to U.S. Secretary for Foreign Affairs Robert R. Livingston, Passy, 4 March 1782**

The Marquis de la Fayette was at his Return hither received by all Ranks with all possible Distinction. He daily gains in the General Esteem and Affection and promises to be a great Man here. He is warmly attached to our Cause; we are on the most friendly and confidential footing with each other, and he is really very serviceable to me in my Applications for additional Assistance.

**John Jay to U.S. Secretary for Foreign Affairs Robert R. Livingston, Paris, 28 June 1782**

Agreeably to the desire of Congress, as well as my own wishes, I have had the satisfaction of conferring with the Marquis de Lafayette on several interesting subjects. He is as active in serving us in the cabinet as he has been in the field, and (there being great reason to believe that his talents could be more advantageously employed here than an inactive campaign in America would admit of there) Dr. Franklin and myself think it advisable that he should postpone his return for the present. The Marquis inclines to the same opinion, and, though anxious to join the army, will remain here a little longer.

**Benjamin Franklin to Marquis de Lafayette, Passy, 17 September 1782**

In naming your Children I think you do well to begin with the most ancient State.\* And as we cannot have too many of so good a Race I hope you & Madame de la Fayette will go through the Thirteen. . . .

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\*Lafayette's second daughter was named "Virginia."

**John Adams to James Warren, Paris, 16 April 1783**

The Marquis de la Fayette is an amiable Nobleman and has great Merit. I enjoy his Friendship and wish a Continuance of it; But I will conceal nothing from you. I see in that Youth the seeds of Mischief to our Country if we do not take Care. He was taken early into our Service and placed in an high Command, in which he has behaved well, but he has gained more applause than human nature at twenty-five can bear. It has enkindled in him an unbounded Ambition which it concerns Us much to watch. . . .

The Marquis may live these fifty years. Ten years may bring him by the order of Succession to the Command of your Army. You have given him a great deal too much of Popularity in our own Country. He is connected with a Family of vast Influence in France. He rises fast in the French Army. He may be soon in the Ministry. This Mongrel Character of French Patriot and American Patriot cannot exist long, and if hereafter it should be seriously the Politicks of the French Court to break our Union, Imagination cannot conceive a more Proper Instrument for the Purpose than the Marquis. He is now very active, everlastingly busy, ardent to distinguish himself every Way, especially to increase his Merit towards America, aiming as I believe at some Employment from Congress. Pains are taken to give him the Credit of every Thing. Believe me it is of infinite Importance that you yourselves and your Servants should have the Reputation of their own Measures and of doing your Service.

**Marquis de Lafayette to George Washington, Nancy, France, 8 September 1783**

As to the American trade, it has been represented that my presence here might serve the United States, and to me, that consideration shall ever be a determining one. I hope My Dear General will approve my conduct, which approbation, I confess, in every instance will ever prove necessary to my happiness and self satisfaction. But I grieve to be so long from you, such a distance, such an interval of time cannot agree with the tender feelings of a heart who had taken the happy habit to live in your family, among my American friends, who, in any part of the world, never felt himself so much at home, as when he was at headquarters. Until I return to America, My dear General, until I see you and our fellow supporters of our noble cause, my mind cannot be properly easy, and every mention, every remembrance of America makes me sigh for the moment when I may enjoy the sight of our free and independent shores.

**Marquis de Lafayette to William Temple Franklin, Paris, 19 November 1783**

The object of my wanting a Declaration of Independence is to have it engraved in golden letters at the most conspicuous part of my cabinet, and when I wish to put myself in spirits, I will look at it, and most voluptuously read it over—So that you will oblige me to procure it for me, printed if you can, in order that a French workman may be less apt to make blunders.\*

\*Lafayette eventually placed his engraved copy of the Declaration of Independence on one side of a double frame, leaving the other side empty, waiting for a parallel declaration of French rights to hang beside it.

**Samuel Osgood to John Adams, Annapolis, 7 December 1783**

The Marquis LaFayette has zealously interested himself in all our important Matters. He assumes the Language of a true born American, & is a very popular Character in the Country. But if I Mistake not he is deeply immersed in European Politicks, which are the worst that can possibly exist for America. When he last left this Country he went with an evident Design to assist our Commissioners in negotiating the Peace. It was pretty plainly intimated that he wish'd to be one of the Number. Had he been added to them, it would not have been more extraordinary, than some other Matters that have taken Place. An Instruction however to you, to consult and advise with him, was carried. I do not apprehend you were much the wiser for the Information you might have obtain'd from that Quarter. Few Americans are worthy to be trusted in some of the most important concerns of the United States—& *not a single Foreigner*.

**Marquis de Lafayette to John Adams, Paris, 8 March 1784**

As to my democratic principles, let it be remembered that at a time when your situation was to the worst and my disobeying this Court might be ruinous, I went over a Volunteer in the cause from which others could not recede unless they were deserters.

**Marquis de Lafayette to George Washington, Paris, 9 March 1784**

You will be my compass, My dear General.

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**Marquis de Lafayette to George Washington, Paris, 9 March 1784**

I don't Say that I Have Merit—But I Say I Have Consequences—viz.—Enemies—My Popularity is Great throughout the Kingdom, and in this City—But Amongst the Great folks I Have a large party Against me, Because they are jealous of my Reputation.

**Marquis de Lafayette to John Adams, Paris, 9 April 1784**

As to my going to America, I first went for the Revolution, and not for the war, and warfaring was truly a secondary incident, which in support of the rights of mankind had become necessary. Now I am going for the people, and my motives are, that I love them, and they love me—that my arrival will please them, and that I will be pleased with the sight of those whom I have early joined in our noble and successful cause. I may add, that opinions of honest men, when they have some influence, do more or less prove serviceable—and how could I refrain from visiting a nation whose I am an adoptive son, and where, particularly among your fellow citizens, I have experienced so many marks of affection and confidence.

**James Madison to Thomas Jefferson, Philadelphia, 17 October 1784**

The time I have lately passed with the M. has given me a pretty thorough insight into his character. With great natural frankness of temper he unites much address with very considerable talents, a strong thirst of praise and popularity. In his politics he says his three hobby horses are the alliance between France and the United States, the union of the latter and the manumission of the slaves. The two former are the dearer to him as they are connected with his personal glory. The last does him real honor as it is a proof of his humanity. In a word I take him to be as amiable a man as can be imagined and as sincere an American as any Frenchman can be; one whose past services gratitude obliges us to acknowledge, and whose future friendship prudence requires us to cultivate.

**Joseph Barrell to Samuel Blachley Webb, Boston, 21 October 1784**

The Marquis is with us, & has been treated with a friendship *unknown* by the dishonest, & with a Respect that could not be exceeded if he was a Crown'd head, read Adams & Nourse Paper [Boston *Independent Chronicle*] of this day, & depend the description is not in the least exaggerated.

**Resolution of Congress, 10 December 1784**

Resolved, That the Secretary in the War Office do in the name of the United States in Congress Assembled present to Major General the Marquis de Lafayette a standard of those captured at the surrender of . . . Cornwallis . . . as a testimonial of the high sense Congress entertain of the great bravery and prowess evinced on many occasions by the Marquis and particularly during the siege of Yorktown, by carrying, sword in hand with the American column of troops which he commanded in person [against] one of the enemy's redoubts, completely garrisoned, and in an entire state of Military defense.

**Thomas Jefferson to James Madison, Paris, 18 March 1785**

Your character of the M. Fayette is precisely agreeable to the idea I had formed of him. I take him to be of unmeasured ambition but that the means he uses are virtuous. He is returned [to France from America] fraught with affection to America and disposed to render every possible service.

**Abigail Adams to Mary Smith Cranch, Auteuil, France, 8 May 1785**

I shall lose part and the greatest part of American intelligence by quitting France, for no person is so well informed from all the states as the Marquis de la Fayette. He has Established a correspondence in all the states and has the News Papers from every quarter.

**Abigail Adams to Mercy Otis Warren, Auteuil, France, 10 May 1785**

The Marquis you know. He is dangerously amiable, sensible, polite, affable insinuating pleasing hospitable indefatigable and ambitious. Let our Country Guard let them watch let them fear his virtues and remember that the summit of perfection is the point of declension.

**James Madison to Thomas Jefferson, Orange, Va., 20 August 1785**

Subsequent to the date of mine in which I gave my idea of Fayette I had further opportunities of penetrating his character. Though his foibles did not disappear all the favorable traits presented themselves in a stronger light. On closer inspection he certainly possesses talents which might figure in any line. If he is ambitious it is rather of the praise which virtue dedicates to merit than of the homage which fears renders to power. His disposition is naturally warm and affectionate and his attachment to the United States unquestionable. Unless I am grossly deceived you will find his zeal sincere & useful whenever it can be employed in behalf of the United States without opposition to the essential interests of France.

**U.S. Secretary for Foreign Affairs John Jay to Marquis de Lafayette, New York, 16 June 1786**

I can easily conceive that, at the German courts you visited, you have done us service, because I know how able, as well as how willing, you are to do it. I wish all who speak and write of us were equally well-informed and well-disposed. It is a common remark in this country that wherever you go you do us good. For my part, I give you credit, not merely for doing us good, but also for doing it uniformly, constantly, and upon system.

**Thomas Jefferson to James Madison, Paris, 30 January 1787**

The Marquis de Lafayette is a most valuable auxiliary to me. His zeal is unbounded, & his weight with those in power great. His education having been merely military, commerce was an unknown field to him. But his good sense enabling him to comprehend perfectly whatever is explained to him. His agency has been very efficacious. He has a great deal of sounder genius, is well remarked by the king & rising in popularity. He [i.e., the king] has nothing against him but the suspicion [of] republican principles. I think he will one day be of the ministry. His foible is a canine appetite for popularity and fame. But he will get above this.

**Alexander Hamilton to the Marquis de Lafayette, New York, 6 January 1799**

I have been made happy my dear friend by the receipt of your letter of the 12th of August last. No explanation of your political principles was necessary to satisfy me of the perfect consistency and purity of your conduct. The interpretation may always be left to my attachment for you. Whatever difference of opinion may on any occasion exist between us can never lessen my conviction of the goodness both of your head and heart. . . . Neither have I abandoned the idea that 'tis most advisable for you to remain in Europe 'till the difference is adjusted [between France and America]. It would be very difficult for you here to steer a course which would not place you in a party and remove you from the broad ground which you now occupy in the hearts of all. It is a favorite point with me that you shall find in the universal regard of this country all the consolations which the loss of your own (for so I consider it) may render requisite.

**John Quincy Adams to William Vans Murray, Berlin, 26 March 1799**

I am glad you have seen La F[ayette], and not surprised that you found him full of the same fanaticism from which he has already suffered so much, a great part of which, however, with him is what it always was, ungovernable ambition in disguise. He is willing to look upon himself as a martyr of liberty, because five years of imprisonment lose almost all their credit and reputation, when they are considered as having been the result of folly or wickedness. There is therefore more address and subtlety in his enthusiasm, than you think. His character, at least as far as judgment combined with honesty is concerned, has long since been irretrievable with thinking men. By recanting he would gain nothing in their opinion, and he would lose most of his personal partisans. I believe he thinks his intentions as good as you allow them to be, but he is a man extremely apt to mistake the operations of his heart as well as those of his head. You will very probably discover before he quits your neighborhood, that he deals largely in a sort of minute intrigue not calculated to inspire confidence.

**Marquis de Lafayette to George Washington, Vianen, 9 May 1799**

I have from my youth, head, heart, & hand been devoted to American independence and freedom.

**George Washington to Timothy Pickering, Mount Vernon, 3 November 1799**

I have not a doubt of General Lafayette's being *now* on his passage to the United States. I have done every thing in my power to induce him to suspend this determination; by representing the delicate situation in which he would be placed

here, and the embarrassment it might occasion. Mr. Murray has enforced my observations with all his might; in vain I believe.

He replies, Poor fellow!—with too much truth I fear!—that there is no asylum for him in Europe. That he is determined (without knowing himself, I conceive) to be perfectly neutral. That his wish is to possess a small farm where he can enjoy ease & quiet. Little believing, although he has been told, that he will be assailed by the opposition party in this Country, and that it is hardly possible for him to avoid taking *a side*, without being suspected by *both sides*. That if he joins the Government party, he must relinquish all hope, & expectation of countenance from his own Country, under its present form; and if he joins the opposition, he will of course be frowned upon by the Government under whose protection he is settling.

**Marquis de Lafayette to Alexander Hamilton, LaGrange, France, 10 February 1801**

I was on the day of my arrival [back to France after his imprisonment in Austria] and am more every day determined for a life of perfect retirement. It has been said I was going to America as an ambassador. My feelings and my habits in the United States I could not well reconcile to the acting a foreign character, however friendly, nor could I with ease to myself, either within or without put off my American regimentals. I may be a happy visitor, and so I shall one day or another, but am not fit to be an ambassador of one country to the other. I feel it better than it can be expressed.

**John Adams to Thomas Jefferson, Quincy, Mass., 13 July 1813**

When LaFayette harangued You and me, and John Quincy Adams, through a whole evening in your Hotel in the Cul de Sac, at Paris; and developed the plans then in Operation to reform France: though I was as silent as you was, I then thought I could say something new to him. In plain Truth I was astonished at the Grossness of his Ignorance of Government and History.

**President John Quincy Adams: Speech on the Departure of Lafayette, Washington, D.C., 23 February 1825**

We shall look upon you always as belonging to us, during the whole of our life, as belonging to our children after us. You are ours by more than patriotic self-devotion with which you flew to the aid of our fathers at the crisis of our fate; ours by that unshaken gratitude for your services which is a precious portion of our inheritance; ours by that tie of love, stronger than death, which has linked your name for endless ages of time with the name of Washington. . . . Speaking in the name of the whole people of the United States, and at a loss only for language to give utterance to that feeling of attachment with which the heart of the nation beats as the heart of one man, I bid you a reluctant and affectionate farewell.

**Marquis de Lafayette: Response to President Adams's Speech, Washington, D.C., 23 February 1825**

[After a long pause necessary for Lafayette to compose himself, the departing hero, responded] God bless you, Sir, and all who surround you. God bless the American people, each of their states and the federal government. Accept this patriotic farewell of a heart that will overflow with gratitude until the moment it ceases to beat. ■

