Name: _____ Period: _____ Date: _____
Advanced Placement United States History Mr. Gallucci

THOMAS JEFFERSON INSTRUCTS ROBERT LIVINGSTON (1802)

Questions:

1) **Why is Jefferson so concerned about the cession of Louisiana Territory by Spain to France? Why is New Orleans especially important?**
2) **How did the Louisiana Purchase challenge the principles of governing that Jefferson espoused in his 1801 inaugural address?**
3) **Was Jefferson right to exercise a loose interpretation of the Constitution in pursuing the Louisiana Purchase? Support your answer.**

The Louisiana Purchase, Jefferson's greatest achievement as president, challenged his political principles. Wary of foreign entanglements, Jefferson was alarmed when Spain signed the Treaty of San Ildefonso (1800) returning the vast Louisiana Territory to France. While the Spanish empire was rapidly declining, the French dictator Napoleon Bonaparte posed a much bigger threat to the United States. Over the last decade, thousands of Americans had moved westward and become highly reliant on shipping their goods down the Mississippi River to the port of New Orleans. In 1802, when Spain revoked the right to store items bound for export in the city, Jefferson wrongly assumed that France was responsible. Determined to protect U.S. interests, Jefferson dispatched Robert Livingston and James Monroe to negotiate with the French for the purchase of New Orleans and as much of the Floridas as possible.

Jefferson's timing proved fortuitous. Having decided to abandon his efforts to recreate a French empire in the Caribbean, Napoleon wanted to resume war with the British on the European mainland. Desperate for funds, he offered to sell the entire Louisiana Territory. With Jefferson's blessing, the envoys agreed to pay the French government $15 million for the vast territory. At approximately three cents an acre, the deal was a fantastic bargain that nearly doubled the size of the United States. Nonetheless, the agreement gave Jefferson pause. A strict constructionist, he was uncertain that the Constitution gave him the authority to acquire territory. He seriously considered introducing an amendment granting the president such power, but rejected the idea in order to avoid a long ratification debate with the Federalists. Recognizing the tremendous value of the Louisiana Purchase, the Senate quickly approved it by a 24-7 vote.

In this letter, Jefferson directs Livingston, then the U.S. minister to France, to approach the French about acquiring New Orleans.

The cession of Louisiana and the Floridas by Spain to France works most sorely on the U.S. On this subject the Secretary of State has written to you fully. Yet I cannot forbear recurring to it personally, so deep is the impression it makes in my mind. It completely reverses all the political relations of the U.S. and will form a new epoch in our political course. Of all nations of any consideration France is the one which hitherto has offered the fewest points on which we could have any conflict of right, and the most points of a communion of interests. From these causes we have ever looked to her as our natural friend, as one with which we never could have an occasion of difference. Her growth therefore we viewed as our own, her misfortunes ours. There is on the globe one single spot, the possessor of which is our natural and habitual enemy. It is New Orleans, through which the produce of three-eighths of our territory must pass to market, and from its fertility it will ere long yield more than half of our whole produce and contain more than half our inhabitants. France placing herself in that door assumes to us the attitude of defiance. Spain might have retained it quietly for years. Her pacific dispositions, her feeble state, would induce her to increase our facilities there, so that her possession of the place would be hardly felt by us, and it would not perhaps be very long before some circumstance might arise which might make the cession of it to us

the price of something of more worth to her. Not so can it ever be in the hands of France. The impetuosity of her temper, the energy and restlessness of her character, placed in a point of eternal friction with us, and our character, which though quiet, and loving peace and the pursuit of wealth, is high-minded, despising wealth in competition with insult or injury, enterprising and energetic as any nation on earth, these circumstances render it impossible that France and the U.S. can continue long friends when they meet in so irritable a position. They as well as we must be blind if they do not see this; and we must be very improvident if we do not begin to make arrangements on that hypothesis. The day that France takes possession of N. Orleans fixes the sentence which is to restrain her forever within her low water mark. It seals the union of two nations who in conjunction can maintain exclusive possession of the ocean. From that moment we must marry ourselves to the British fleet and nation. We must turn all our attentions to a maritime force, for which our resources place us on very high grounds: and having formed and cemented together a power which may render reinforcement of her settlements here impossible to France, make the first cannon, which shall be fired in Europe the signal for tearing up any settlement she may have made, and for holding the two continents of America in sequestration for the common purposes of the united British and American nations. This is not a state of things we seek or desire. It is one which this measure, if adopted by France, forces on us, as necessarily as any other cause, by the laws of nature, brings on its necessary effect. It is not from a fear of France that we deprecate this measure proposed by her. For however greater her force is than ours compared in the abstract, it is nothing in comparison of ours when to be exerted on our soil. But it is from a sincere love of peace, and a firm persuasion that bound to France by the interests and the strong sympathies still existing in the minds of our citizens, and holding relative positions which ensure their continuance we are secure of a long course of peace. Whereas the change of friends, which will be rendered necessary if France changes that position, embarks us necessarily as a belligerent power in the first war of Europe….

If France considers Louisiana however as indispensable for her views she might perhaps be willing to look about for arrangements which might reconcile it to our interests. If anything could do this it would be the ceding to us the island of New Orleans and the Floridas. This would certainly in a great degree remove the causes of jarring and irritation between us, and perhaps for such a length of time as might produce other means of making the measure permanently conciliatory to our interests and friendships. It would at any rate relieve us from the necessity of taking immediate measures for countervailing such an operation by arrangements in another quarter. Still we should consider N. Orleans and the Floridas as equivalent for the risk of a quarrel with France produced by her vicinage. I have no doubt you have urged these considerations on every proper occasion with the government where you are. They are such as must have effect if you can find the means of producing thorough reflection on them by that government. The idea here is that the troops sent to St. Domingo [modem Haiti and the Dominican Republic], were to proceed to Louisiana after finishing their work in that island. If this were the arrangement, it will give you time to return again and again to the charge, for the conquest of St. Domingo will not be a short work. It will take considerable time to wear down a great number of soldiers. Every eye in the U.S. is now fixed on this affair of Louisiana. Perhaps nothing since the revolutionary war has produced more uneasy sensations through the body of the nation. Not withstanding temporary bickerings have taken place with France, she has still a strong hold on the affections of our citizens generally. I have thought it not amiss, by way of supplement to the letters of the Secretary of State to write you this private one to impress you with the importance we affix to this transaction….Accept assurances of my affectionate esteem and high consideration.