

**Thomas Jefferson to James Monroe, January 12, 1812,
Dated January 11 or 12, from The Works of Thomas
Jefferson in Twelve Volumes. Federal Edition. Collected
and Edited by Paul Leicester Ford.**

TO JAMES MONROE J. MSS.

Monticello, January 11, 1812.

Dear Sir, —I thank you for your letter of the 6th. It is a proof of your friendship, and of the sincere interest you take in whatever concerns me. Of this I have never had a moment's doubt, and have ever valued it as a precious treasure. The question indeed whether I knew or approved of General Wilkinson's endeavors to prevent the restoration of the right of deposit at New Orleans, could never require a second of time to answer. But it requires some time for the mind to recover from the astonishment excited by the boldness of the suggestion. Indeed, it is with difficulty I can believe he has really made such an appeal; and the rather as the expression in your letter is that you have "casually heard it," without stating the degree of reliance which you have in the source of information. I think his understanding is above an expedient so momentary and so finally overwhelming. Were Dearborne and myself dead, it might find credit with some. But the world at large, even then, would weigh for themselves the dilemma, whether it was more probable that, in the situation I then was, clothed with the confidence and power of my country, I should descend to so unmeaning an act of treason, or that he in the wreck now threatening him, should wildly lay hold of any plank. They would weigh his motives and views against those of Dearborne and myself, the tenor of his life against that of ours, his Spanish mysteries against my open cherishment of the Western interests; and, living as we are, and ready

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to purge ourselves by any ordeal, they must now weigh, in addition, our testimony against his.

All this makes me believe he will never seek this refuge. I have ever and carefully restrained myself from the expression of any opinion respecting General Wilkinson, except in the case of Burr's conspiracy, wherein, after he had got over his first agitations, we believed his decision firm, and his conduct zealous for the defeat of the conspiracy, and although injudicious, yet meriting, from sound intentions, the support of the nation. As to the rest of his life, I have left it to his friends and his enemies, to whom it furnishes matter enough for disputation. I classed myself with neither, and least of all in this time of his distresses, should I be disposed to add to their pressure. I hope, therefore, he has not been so imprudent as to write our names in the pannel of his witnesses.

Accept the assurances of my constant affections.