

**"I Am Not a Cautious Man"
Gouverneur Morris and France**

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I have been asked to discuss the impact of Gouverneur Morris on the development of French-American relations. Morris was our minister to France during the height of the French Revolution, an event that has been described as drawing a "red hot plough-share through the history of America as well as that of France,"² and it continues to be the source of contentious debate in the study of American history and foreign relations. Morris arrived in Paris three months before the opening of the Estates General in 1789, and served as minister from 1792 until he received notice of his recall on August 2, 1794, just four days after Thermidor, the end of the Terror, when Robespierre and many other members of the Committee of Public Safety went to the guillotine.

I'd like to begin by quoting the comments of a few of Morris's contemporaries, starting with Thomas Jefferson, Morris's predecessor. In 1792, shortly after Morris's confirmation, Jefferson had a meeting with Washington concerning a letter that Jefferson wanted to send to France, congratulating Louis XVI on the new Constitution of 1791. This was a Constitution that Morris, who had thoroughly reviewed it, considered "ridiculous," an opinion which some of its

1. In September 1790, Morris wrote to William Short that it was "perfectly natural" that their opinions about France should differ. "It will be very long before political Subjects will be reduced to geometric Certitude," he continued. "At present the Reasoning on them is a kind of Arithmetic of Infinities, where the best Information, the wisest Head, and clearest Mind, can only approach the Truth. A cautious Man should, therefore, give only Sibylline Predictions, if indeed he should hazard any. But I am not a cautious Man." Gouverneur Morris (hereafter cited as GM) to William Short, Sept. 18, 1790, Private Letterbook, Gouverneur Morris Papers, Library of Congress.

authors held and with which modern historians agree.³ Although Jefferson personally rejoiced in the new constitution, Washington had directed him to avoid "saying a word in approbation of the constitution, not knowing whether the King in his heart approved it." The president's comment confounded the Secretary of State, and Washington must have noticed his chagrin. "Why indeed says he I begin to doubt very much the affairs of France," Jefferson recorded. "There are papers from London as late as the 10th. of Jan. which represent them as going into confusion." Jefferson was in a cold rage. "This is one of many proofs I have had of his want of confidence in the event of the French revolution," he wrote.

The fact is that Gouverneur Morris, a high flying Monarchy-man, shutting his eyes and his faith to every fact against his wishes, and believing every thing he desires to be true, has kept the President's mind constantly poisoned with his forebodings.⁴

At about the same time, James Monroe wrote to St. George Tucker to explain that he had opposed Morris's appointment because of his

general moral character wh. precluded all possibility of confidence in his morals. 2ndly his known attachment to monarchic govt. & contempt of the Republicans, rendering him unfit to represent us & especially at the French court in the present happy turn of their affairs. 3d. his general brutality of manners & indiscretion giving him a wonderful facility in

2. Charles Hazen, *Contemporary American Opinion of the French Revolution* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1897), ix–x.

3. Gouverneur Morris, *A Diary of the French Revolution*, ed. Beatrix Cary Davenport, 2 vols. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1939) (hereafter cited as *Diary*), entry of Aug. 6, 1791, 2:234. John Hardman agrees, noting that many of its clauses were either "too general to be applicable or too topical to endure," and endorses Marie-Antoinette's comment that it was a "tissue of absurdities." Hardman, *Louis XVI* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 207. Etienne Dumont said it needed a bicameral legislature and a stronger executive, and that it contained "too much of republicanism for a monarchy, and too much of monarchy for a republic." Dumont, *Recollections of Mirabeau and of the Two First Legislative Assemblies of France* (London: Edward Bull, 1832) 278, 285–86.

4. Julian Boyd, Charles T. Cullen, John Catanzariti, and Barbara B. Oberg, eds., *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1950–) (hereafter cited as TJP), 23:260–61.

making enemies & losing friends & of course unfit for a negotiator—4thly his being at present abroad as a vendor of public securities & back lands.⁵

William Short, Jefferson's secretary in Paris, who acted as interim chargé after Jefferson left and desperately wanted the position of minister himself, attacked Morris in many letters sent to Jefferson, though Morris regarded Short as a friend. In a typical letter, he wrote that Morris's "aristocratical principles, his contempt of the French revolution and of the French nation expressed in all societies without reserve, and his dogmatizing manner and assumed superiority has exposed him generally to ill will and often to ridicule."⁶

Similar remarks were made by Thomas Paine, William Stephens Smith (John Adams's son-in-law), and Joel Barlow (the Connecticut Wit)—he told Jefferson in 1798, on the brink of the Quasi-War, that US-French relations had started their breakdown with the appointment of Morris. For three years, he said, Morris "misled the president with respect to the principles and events of the Revolution, insulted the French nation and as far as possible betrayed it."⁷

Let me skip ahead to the views of some modern historians. Julian Boyd, long-time editor of the Jefferson Papers, said "however talented in business or brilliant in repartee Morris might be, his gifts did not include a mastery of the arts of diplomacy."⁸ Alexander DeConde, author of the classic diplomatic history textbook *Entangling Alliance: Politics and Diplomacy under George*

5. Monroe to St. George Tucker, letter of Jan. 24, 1792, Papers of James Monroe, 1771–1818, Tracy W. McGregor Library, University of Virginia.

6. TJP, 22:194. See Chap. 7 of Melanie R. Miller, *Envoy to the Terror: Gouverneur Morris and the French Revolution* (Dulles, Va.: Potomac Books, 2005), for more on William Short's demands on Jefferson, and his effort to demolish Morris's candidacy for the position of minister.

7. James Woodress, *A Yankee's Odyssey: The Life of Joel Barlow* (New York: Lippincott, 1958), 159.

8. TJP, 18:322–24.

Washington,⁹ devoted a chapter to Morris titled "Gouverneur Morris, Anachronism in Paris." That gives you a subtle indication of his opinion. There are many others in the same vein.¹⁰

These remarks don't depict a very flattering picture of Morris's performance. But what I found, in doing my research for my dissertation and my book, was that his contemporaries had motives that make their criticisms of limited value in assessing Morris. I concur instead with Theodore Roosevelt's assessment that Morris's tenure as minister is "one of the most brilliant chapters in our diplomatic annals."¹¹

Because of our limited time, I can only give you a rough outline of the four principal loci of criticism concerning Morris and France: Morris's involvement in French affairs; his handling of diplomatic relations just after the King fell; his performance during the Terror; and his recall.

First, the issue of Morris's involvement in French affairs. Morris went to France in 1789. He was there on business, but he quickly became acquainted with the reformers, led by Lafayette. Jefferson was still there—he and Morris got along quite well and spent a fair amount of time together. Jefferson was giving Lafayette advice, helping him draft a Bill of Rights, and discussing the form of a

9. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1958.

10. Albert Soboul asserts without explanation that Morris harmed relations. *Dictionnaire historique de la Révolution française* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1989), 768. Frank Reuter calls Morris a "poor choice." Reuter, *Trials and Triumphs: George Washington's Foreign Policy* (Fort Worth: Tex.: Christian University Press, 1983), 142. However, the French for the most part have expressed considerable admiration for Morris and what they consider to be his remarkably accurate predications about the Revolution. They did a mini-series about him in the 1980s, and a well-known French economic historian, Jean-Jacques Fiechter, produced an outstanding and positive book about his years in Europe. *Un diplomate américain sous la Terreur: Les années européennes de Gouverneur Morris, 1789–1798* (Paris: Fayard, 1983).

11. Theodore Roosevelt, *Gouverneur Morris* (Cambridge, Mass.: Houghton Mifflin, 1898), 223.

new constitution. Was this an appropriate activity for an American minister?¹² Jefferson felt a little uncomfortable, but he didn't hesitate, and it's fair to observe that Morris was simply following his lead when he too was asked for advice. The requests came from Lafayette and other reformers, as well as the counselors of Louis XVI, particularly the Comte de Montmorin, minister of foreign affairs. Morris was not nearly as optimistic as Jefferson that the French could handle rapid reform and, unlike Jefferson, he quickly concluded that Lafayette was a weak reed, too ambitious and not wise enough to lead the country safely through a political metamorphosis. He thought things were moving too quickly, and that the new constituent assembly was too undisciplined and ignorant to be able to design an effective government. In the summer of 1789 he predicted that unless there was more restraint, and an effort made to reconcile the privileged aristocracy with the changes, they would turn on the new government and attack it, leading to anarchy and eventual despotism. He was quite right, but few people wanted to hear this.

The issue of his involvement becomes more problematic when Morris was appointed minister in 1792, because he didn't stop giving advice to the King, who was by this time almost entirely without power. He joined a small group of trusted counselors who came up with one escape plan after another to try and get Louis out of Paris to a safer location from which to re-establish royal authority and issue a new and better constitution. The American government never knew what he was up to—he couldn't write about it in letters because even diplomatic pouches were not secure by this time; and it took too many months to

12. The editors of his papers concede Jefferson was "too much involved in the internal affairs of the

communicate to America. He certainly was doing what he thought was right. He felt America owed a huge debt to France for the success of its own revolution, and believed that the only hope for France's revolution lay with an enlightened constitutional monarchy. He didn't have a lot of faith in Louis's abilities, however, and he was never optimistic.

Because of the distances involved and the lack of communications, a minister like Morris was not simply a mouthpiece of the American government; he was more of a one-man satellite office, because he had to make his own decisions about what seemed to be the best policy for America. It had been the French monarchy with which America had signed its treaties, and the French monarchy that had provided money and troops to America. Morris clearly believed he had a duty to help the monarchy, and, in view of Jefferson's own activities as minister, it's legitimate to speculate that he might well have done the same had he still been there. Moreover, it is quite possible the American government would have assisted Morris's efforts if it had been aware of them and able to do so. The English government was also hiring agents and laying plans in the summer of 1792 to help Louis escape.

It all failed, of course, and on August 10, 1792, Morris, in his legation across the river from the royal palace of the Tuileries, heard "the Cannon begin." The palace was attacked and the King's Swiss Guard slaughtered, and Louis and his family took refuge in the Assembly; from there they went to prison and eventually, execution. The Comte de Montmorin was seized and would later die in the September Massacres; another one of Morris's co-conspirators was beaten

sovereign to whom he was accredited." Editorial note, TJP, 15:388.

to death in the street, and a third would be one of the first to die on the guillotine.¹³

This brings me to the second issue concerning Morris and France: his handling of the diplomatic crisis caused by these events. The King's fall threw the game pieces to the floor, and left Morris to grapple alone with the proper tack to take with the new revolutionary government, the one that had overthrown the government to which he was accredited. There were many immediate concerns: Should he make a payment on the American revolutionary war debt to France, a payment which had been arranged for just days before the king fell? Did his credentials, which were to the court of France, still apply? Were the treaties of 1776 of amity and commerce still in effect? Would the United States choose to recognize the new government?

In view of the complaints about Morris with which I began, one might assume that he demanded his passports and left. The new Girondin ministry, which disliked Morris already, for reasons that had a lot to do with money—nearly drove him to leave by insulting him in a meeting concerning repayments on the American debt. William Short thought Morris should show American outrage at the overthrow of Louis by leaving. Morris, after thinking it over—and writing to Jefferson for instructions which he knew he couldn't get for many months—decided otherwise. He wrote to Jefferson:

Going hence however would look like taking Part against the late Revolution and I am not only unauthoriz'd in this Respect but I am bound to suppose that if the great Majority of the Nation adhere to the

13. See Miller, *Envoy to the Terror*, Chap. 10.

new Form the United States will approve thereof because in the first Place we have no Right to prescribe to this Country the Government they shall adopt and next because the Basis of our own Constitution is the indefeasible Right of the People to establish it.¹⁴

So he didn't leave, even though all the other diplomats from the rest of Europe did.

When Jefferson's response finally arrived, it confirmed Morris's views, although both Jefferson and Washington agreed that formal recognition should be delayed until the new National Convention was assembled.

Morris also endorsed the continued validity of America's treaty of commerce and friendship with France.¹⁵ Morris wrote Jefferson that it was his wish "that all our Treaties (however onerous) may be strictly fulfilled according to their true Intent and meaning. The honest Nation is that which like the honest Man 'hath to its plighted Faith and vow forever firmly stood, and tho it promise to its Loss yet makes that Promise good."¹⁶ Jefferson received this letter in April 1793, a time when the issue was of great concern to the United States because of the war between France and England; many feared that honoring the treaty would require the United States to go to war on France's behalf. A week later, Jefferson submitted an opinion to Washington advocating that the treaty continue to be considered valid, and obtained his concurrence. Hamilton disagreed strongly, and wrote letters in opposition during the spring of 1793 to the *Gazette of the United States*.¹⁷

14. GM to TJ, Aug. 22, 1792, TJP, 24:314.

15. Hamilton urged that even if a treaty did survive a change in government, it could not be considered in force during the turbulent interim. *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, ed. Harold C. Syrett, 27 vols. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961–1987) (hereafter cited as AHP), 14:268–69.

16. GM to TJ, Dec. 21, 1792, TJP, 24:773–74. Alexander DeConde inaccurately asserts that Morris wanted to "jettison" the alliance with France. *Entangling Alliance*, 313–14.

17. Jefferson's Opinion on the Treaties with France, Apr. 28, 1793, TJP, 25:608–18. AHP, 13:267–68.

This exchange of opinions relates to a third area of contention, the frequent charge against Morris was that his reports to America were unfair and misrepresented the facts to France's disadvantage. Ironically, this was a concern about Morris throughout his stay in France, through all the changes in government, from Lafayette through Robespierre. Pro-French Americans believed this, too. The American Senate, led by James Monroe, demanded to see Morris's dispatches in the belief that they were full of anti-French propaganda. But when they read them, they decided otherwise. As Edmund Randolph said, "After the impression which I had received from others . . . I am really astonished to find so little of what is exceptionable, and so much of what the most violent would call patriotic"18

Morris's reports make remarkable reading; and given the accuracy of his detailed predictions about what would happen in France, it is hard to see how they can be considered biased or inaccurate. They also show his feeling for France and the depth of his grief for the country as its high hopes were shattered. Here is an excerpt that I particularly admire, from a letter to Thomas Pinckney in December 1792, while the King was being tried for treason. The war in Europe had swung in France's direction, temporarily, and several major battles had been won. Here's what he said:

Success as you will see, continues to crown the French Arms, but it is not our Trade to judge from Success You will soon learn that the Patriots hitherto adored were but little worthy of the Incense they received. The Enemies of those who now reign treat them as they did their Predecessors and as their Successors will be treated. Since I have been in this Country, I have seen the Worship of many Idols and but little [illegible] of the true God. I have seen many of those Idols broken, and

¹⁸ AHP, 15:667n.

some of them beaten to Dust. I have seen the late Constitution in one short Year admired as a stupendous Monument of human Wisdom and ridiculed as an egregious Production of Folly and Vice. I wish much, very much, the Happiness of this inconstant People. I love them. I feel grateful for their Efforts in our Cause and I consider the Establishment of a good Constitution here as the principal Means, under divine Providence, of extending the blessings of Freedom to the many millions of my fellow Men who groan in Bondage on the Continent of Europe. But I do not greatly indulge the flattering Illusions of Hope, because I do not yet perceive that Reformation of Morals without which Liberty is but an empty Sound.¹⁹

The French government was worried not just because of what Morris might be saying about the political circumstances in France, but also what he was reporting as their war with Europe and the civil war within began to affect Americans in France. French privateers began seizing American ships and cargoes, in violation of the American treaty and in violation of French law. Americans were thrown in jail under the Law of Suspects. These people naturally came to Morris—along with British and French citizens who had nowhere else to turn. He did what he could but it was an incredibly frustrating task: France was in convulsions and the fate of a single American or an American ship was hardly a priority to the people in power; and those people in power in Paris often had no leverage over officials outside of Paris. Here is a quick example of a couple of episodes.

In June 1793, Morris received a plea for help from the captain and crew of the American vessel the *Little Cherub*. The ship had departed Havre with a passport from the executive council, but it was boarded by the crew of the privateer *Le Vrai Patriote* and taken to Dunkirk. The captain declared to Morris

¹⁹ GM to Pinckney, Dec. 3, 1792, Official Letterbook, Gouverneur Morris Papers, Library of Congress. Robespierre was to make a remarkably similar point about the need for morals in his famous speech of

that they had been "very ill treated, although they made no resistance; and that the French having entire possession of the American ship, one of them seized the second mate by the collar, and without the slightest provocation blew his brains out."²⁰

Morris promptly wrote to foreign minister Lebrun, asking the boat's release and action against the murderer of the second mate. Lebrun forwarded the protest to the Committee of Public Safety, which ordered that the murderer should be punished and the captain indemnified.²¹ Nothing had happened by the time the next minister, Deforgues, arrived. He would be disappearing too, before long, arrested about 8 months later, with the fall of Danton. Deforgues informed Morris on July 3 that the Convention had ordered that the captors of the *Little Cherub* be tried.²² "The Conduct of the Government on the Occasion was perfectly proper," Morris wrote to Jefferson.²³ "The Person who committed the Murder has however been acquitted on the Testimony of his Companions in direct Contradiction to that of the American Master and Crew. . . ." He recommended the American consul in Dunkirk, Frances Coffyn, who had "behav'd with much Sense Spirit and Industry" in the matter, and pointed out the personal danger connected with these affairs. In fact, Coffyn was later arrested in retaliation for his efforts for the *Little Cherub*.

Ventose (Feb. 5, 1794) regarding the aims of the Revolution. R. R. Palmer, *Twelve Who Ruled: The Year of the Terror in the French Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941), 275–76.

20. GM to Lebrun, June 19, 1793, Jared Sparks, *The Life and Correspondence of Gouverneur Morris*, 3 vols. (Boston: Gray and Bowen, 1832) (hereafter cited as Sparks), 2:325.

21. Lebrun to GM, June 21, 1793, Sparks, 2:326–27.

22. Sparks, 2:341.

23. GM to TJ, Aug. 13, 1793, TJP, 26:662–63.

Morris continued making regular protests, but it was not until the following spring that the *Cherub* was released and compensation for the cargo was provided.²⁴

Another example of the terrible difficulties produced by the Terror was the embargo of the port city of Bordeaux. In early June 1793, Bordeaux, which had strong ties to the Girondins, declared its opposition to the National Convention. The rebellion continued throughout the summer, but by September they had surrendered to the authority of the Montagnards. In retaliation, the National Convention prohibited vessels from carrying cargoes out of the port. By late November, there were 92 American ships trapped. Morris sent repeated requests to Deforgues to ask the Committee of Public Safety for relief, but, as he told Jefferson, "Situation of that City has prevented the *Comité de Salut Public* from a direct Interference."²⁵ During the fall and early spring, Morris met twice with a deputation of captains from the ships, who insisted that Morris make demands to the French government and who also went directly to the National Convention and the Committee for Public Safety. Morris warned them that even if they got a decree passed it wouldn't stay in place, and that the situation in Bordeaux involved pressures the Paris authorities could not control.²⁶ He was quite right, but that was not what the captains wanted to hear, and they apparently complained about him in letters to America and also repeated to the French

24. Extract of the proceedings of the provisory executive council, 18 pluvoise an II and 12 ventose an II (Feb. 8, 1793 and Mar. 2, 1793), Foreign Copying Project, France, Manuscripts Division, Library of Congress. *Archives des Affaires Etrangères, Etats-Unis*, vol. 40, part ii.

25. GM to TJ, Nov. 26, 1793, Official Letterbook.

officials that Morris had told them that the overwhelmed government, "omnipotent in some Cases, in others not merely feeble but enslaved" could not deliver relief. As you can imagine, the French were quite angry at these comments, although of course they were true, and it hurt his effectiveness as a representative.²⁷

Nonetheless, Morris kept up his petitions and met several times with Deforgues, who also agreed to forward the captains' petitions to the Committee and Convention. As he told one of the captains, Foreign Minister Deforgues was

already convinced but has no Power to act. The Deputies sent into the Departments seem to be possessed of unlimited Authority and those who would incline to interfere at this Distance are told that they cannot be as well informed as their Brethren who are on the Spot and whose *Patriotism* is approv'd. . . . No man feels more for this State of Things and its Consequences than I do. No man would do more, and few I believe so much, to remedy them, but I find myself doomed to act and to suffer in vain. God send us soon an End of all those Confusions in the way most agreeable to his divine Providence and in the meantime grant us Patience to bear them.²⁸

It is difficult to imagine what Morris could have done to break the Bordeaux embargo. His papers establish that he was as diligent as Thomas Paine accused him of being negligent. The embargo had nothing to do with Morris or with America; it had to do with the political situation in France, as the war within and without grew increasingly desperate. It was not until April 1794 that the embargo was lifted.²⁹ In the meantime, Morris was utterly frustrated, and in one letter to Jefferson he made a rare admission of frustration:

26. GM to Jonathan Jones, letter of Oct. 16, 1793, Official Letterbook.

27. GM to TJ, Oct. 10, 1793, Official Letterbook.

28. GM to Captain Henry Johnson, Dec. 11, 1793, Official Letterbook.

29. GM to Edmund Randolph, Apr. 15, 1794, Sparks, 2:425.

Every Post brings me Piles of Letters about it from all Quarters, and I see no Remedy. You have a Copy of the Minister's Answer to my Letter, holding out the Hope of a speedy Decision; but it may be very long before it can be obtained. And, in the mean time, if I would give way to the Clamors of the injured Parties, I ought to make Demands very like a Declaration of War.³⁰

He had heard *nothing* from his government for five months, and he was to hear nothing until the summer of 1794, a gap of about nine months.³¹ Jefferson did not write to Morris between November 7, 1792, and March 12, 1793, a gap of four months;³² or between October 3, 1793, and January 3, 1794, when he simply announced his resignation. The gap was approximately co-extensive with the Terror, a time during which the need for support and affirmation from his own government could not have been more critical. As he told Jefferson in the same letter:

What am I to do in such Cases? It is impossible for me to guess the Intentions of Government, and indeed, sir, the Responsibility is great and distressing. Our Countrymen here find that it is the easiest thing in the world to carry any point with the Committees *until they have tried*. In the mean time I am exposed to their Clamors in this country and most probably to their Censures in my own for not performing impossibilities. In order to complete the Business, nothing more is necessary than that the Rulers of this Republic, wearied with my Complaints, should apply for my Recall in order to get rid of a troublesome Fellow. I think it is very likely to happen if it be not already done. I beg your pardon, Sir, for saying so much of myself but it is a troublesome Thing to navigate in the Dark between Scylla and Charybdis, without Chart or Compass.

Morris was therefore feeling his way in the dark; but the path he followed was one of moderation, resolution, and intelligence in the face of the worst

30. GM to TJ, Mar. 6, 1794, Official Letterbook.

31. GM to Edmund Randolph, May 31, 1794, Official Letterbook.

32. His papers contain a letter to Morris dated Dec. 30, 1792, but the editors believe he did not send it and note that Morris did not receive it. TJP, 24:801n–802n. It was an important letter, acknowledging that Morris must have been at a loss about how to treat with the French, and giving further instruction on drawing the two nations together.

paroxysms of the Revolution. He was afraid that French and British depredations on American shipping might undermine America's determination to be neutral, by causing "Heart burnings" which would "plunge our Country into the Troubles by which Europe is desolated."³³ When the captains and merchants called for threats and retaliation, Morris refused, even though, as he told Swan, "the Sufferings of my unfortunate countrymen who are brought into the french ports give me very great pain."³⁴ His letters to the captains and to the American government urged temperance.³⁵ These expressions of moderation had an effect in America, for they influenced Jefferson and Washington to tone down a speech given by Washington in December 1793 regarding French violations of neutrality.³⁶

Along the way, one set of revolutionary actors after another were overthrown. When one of the ringleaders of the attack on the Tuileries was guillotined with Danton, Morris wrote:

Some one observed the other day, in conversation, that all the men of the tenth of August have passed away already. . . . Oliver Cromwell understood well the value of mob sentiment, when he replied to his chaplain, vain of the applauding crowd which thronged round his master's coach, 'there would be as many, and as glad, to attend me at the gallows.' I do not believe that a good man in America can feel all the force of that expression; and, therefore, I believe it is very difficult to form on certain subjects a just opinion.³⁷

Morris also received pleas for help from people in jail. He had no authorized means to help the French and British citizens who contacted him, but he sent

33. GM to David Humphreys, Sept. 21, 1793, Official Letterbook.

34. GM to Swan, May 19, 1794, Official Letterbook.

35. Letter of Mar. 22, 1794, Official Letterbook; GM to TJ, June 12, 1793, TJP, 26:266.

36. TJ to Washington, Nov. 30, 1793, TJP, 27:466. Morris noted this result as well; GM to Leray de Chaumont, July 25, 1794, Official Letterbook.

them money, if they needed it, and sent news to their relatives. There's a memoir in the Madison library by a French woman whose husband was arrested saying that Morris was the kindest of all the people she went to for help.

Morris could protest on behalf of Americans, however, and it generally had results, though not immediately. I'd like to refer you here to the Smith Family Collection at the American Philosophic Society if you would like to read more; it's an amazing collection, those "piles of letters" Morris referred to when he wrote to Jefferson, of cries for help. A typical case was that of American William Hoskins. Young Hoskins was in the Luxembourg Prison when he wrote to Morris in December 1793.³⁸ He had landed in an American ship at Calais, where he was arrested and taken to Paris. This is what he wrote to Morris:

I hope you will have the kindness to attend to my subject without delay, this I flatter myself of; yes, Sir, when you imagine to yourself my present situation, lodged in a chamber with two persons who are extremely sick of a fever & nothing to sleep on the last evening, without a farthing to purchase the necessaries of life, when this fact is told you I am persuaded the sympathy for a fellow countryman will excite your exertions as well as your pity. . . . do not delay for I am already sick ----

And, at the bottom of the page, in a little scrawl: "please to excuse my bad writing."

Morris had already written Deforgues to seek Hoskins's release, having heard from him first from Calais.³⁹ Morris kept Hoskins abreast of his efforts, and told him it was "the first Instance I have met with where an American arriving in a French port has been arrested."⁴⁰ Indeed, two Americans traveling

37. GM to Edmund Randolph, Apr. 15, 1794, Sparks, 2:424–25.

38. Letter of Jan. 10, 1794, Smith Family Papers, American Philosophical Society.

39. GM to Deforgues, Jan. 14, 1794, Official Letterbook.

40. Hoskins to GM, Dec. 24, 1793, Smith Family Papers; GM to Deforgues, Dec 29, 1793, and GM to Hoskins, Dec. 30, 1793, Official Letterbook.

with Hoskins had been released immediately and allowed to go on their way, giving you an idea of how arbitrary the arrests could be.

Hoskins was wild to get out, and prepared petitions for the Convention and Committee of Public Safety and sent them to Morris to forward. On January 18, 1794, Morris wrote him that he had made his fourth effort to secure his freedom through Deforgues, and that his secretary had tried to get in to the Luxembourg to see him. "You can rest assured," he told the miserable young man, "that I will neglect nothing."⁴¹ Still he was not released, and on January 21 Hoskins begged Morris to "inform me the progress you have made toward the accomplishment of my release from this horrid this corroding captivity, for," he wailed, "it already seems that three quarters of my existence has completely passed within these walls." Morris wrote back to assure him that he had

made the minister fully acquainted with all the particulars of your Case from the first moment and had you not been removed from Calais you would have been liberated long ago but the vast accumulation of Business in the Comite de Sureté generale prevents their attention to the case of individuals. . . . I was yesterday at the minister's to speak to him on your subject. He is sensible that you ought not to be detained and has already applied several times for your release.⁴²

Sometime within the next ten days, Hoskins was finally released; in the approximately one month of his confinement, Morris had made at least six approaches to the government on his behalf.⁴³

41. GM to Hoskins, Jan 18, 1794, in French, Official Letterbook.

42. GM to Hoskins, Jan. 24, 1794, Official Letterbook. Here again, Morris demonstrated his unwillingness to castigate the government for unresponsiveness; he told Jefferson that Hoskins's release was delayed "merely because the Multiplicity of Business before the Committee prevents them from attending to anything." GM to TJ, Jan. 21, 1794, Official Letterbook.

43. Morris told Jefferson on March 6 he was out, but he was certainly free before February 3, for on that date he signed a petition relating to the French seizure of the American ship *Enterprise*. GM to TJ, Mar. 6, 1794, Sparks, 2:407; petition dated Feb. 3, 1794, Smith Family Papers.

Finally, I am going to speak briefly about Morris's recall. A recall, of course, would seem to indicate disgrace; that Morris had failed his government. Certainly that was the view of many, including James Monroe, who replaced him—but he too would be recalled in a couple of years. Morris himself was stung by it, for he felt that the United States should not have agreed to the request of the Committee as long as Morris's behavior was "proper in regard to the United States;" he felt strongly about this and wrote to Randolph to suggest that his successor have better treatment in this regard. His reasoning was simple: if the French had known they could not easily have him recalled, they would have been far more conciliatory and cooperative in their dealings with him. In fact, when they saw that the earlier "hints" that Morris should be recalled had failed, Morris *was* treated better and they listened with more respect to his protests on behalf of his country and his countrymen.

The ostensible reason for Morris's recall was a *quid pro quo* for the recall of Edmund Genet, the young Girondin rascal who was welcomed with open arms in America but soon outraged everyone by his efforts to get America to violate its own neutrality in favor of France against Britain. But there was a lot more to it than this, and I can only touch on it briefly here. Morris had enemies from the outset, whose antagonism wore a public face of despising his politics but in fact had far different roots. The first request for his recall came from the Girondin ministry, who were trying to get Morris out of the way so they could cash in on a French-sponsored venture to conquer Spanish territories, including Venezuela, and share the spoils. Thomas Paine and especially Joel Barlow had hoped to

profit from this venture. A related group consisted of William Stephens Smith, mentioned before, who was furious when Washington didn't appoint him as minister to Britain, and his associates Francisco de Miranda, a Venezuelan general who wanted his country freed, and a man named Stephen Sayre, an adventurer who was also in on the Venezuela project. They circulated pamphlets in France against Morris, and Smith reported to Washington and Jefferson that Morris was being snubbed by the French ministry and was eager to be recalled, which was not true. Another former French foreign minister, General Dumouriez, asked Lebrun to have Morris recalled because of his supposed criticism of the Revolution, even though Dumouriez was a closet royalist, who later defected. *He* didn't like Morris because in the summer of 1792 Morris had objected to the appointment of one of Dumouriez's minions, someone known for being extremely corrupt, as French minister to America.

There were several others who sent back damaging reports to America, but the one that probably did the final trick was a letter from an odd fellow named John Cusack, an American mercenary in the French army. The letter was found in Robespierre's effects after the Terror ended. The memorandum began with protests of Cusack's devotion to the French "sacred cause" and willingness to die a thousand deaths should it be required. He attacked the American Society of the Cincinnatus, and then moved on to Morris, whom he had never met; this was apparently no obstacle, nor was the fact that Morris did not belong to the Cincinnatus. He informed Robespierre that Washington had named Morris, a man "*gangrené*" by the aristocracy, to achieve the Cincinnatus goal of destroying French-American *fraternité*. "The public outcry was such that there was talk of

retiring Washington once his first term was ended," he told Robespierre, and the aristocratic party had been forced to "pacify the public by giving out the rumor of Morris's recall, hoping that the affair would be forgotten." Morris obeyed the orders of those who obtained his nomination, Cusack went on, and did nothing to improve French-American relations.

He displays a pretended humanity for those who have been the subject of French vengeance for their crimes; he frightened others by proclaiming the power of England and predicting that if the Americans imperiled their neutrality by purveying provisions to France, the combined powers after replacing Louis XVI on the throne would take vengeance on America, putting them once more under England. . . .

In spite of these efforts, Cusack assured Robespierre, the American public "continues to celebrate the revolution and the news of each new French triumph against slavery." It is very likely that Robespierre showed this letter to his confederates, and its accusations would have been an intolerable goad to the inflamed suspiciousness of the Committee of Public Safety. This letter is right next to the direct request for Morris's recall in the French archives. In a bit of irony that is very typical of the French Revolution, two months after Cusack wrote to Robespierre, he was in jail in Paris, and asking Morris to help him get out.⁴⁴

I should mention as well that the Committee was already very uneasy because of a situation the previous fall in which a woman staying at Morris's house was arrested under the Law of Suspects. The authorities entered Morris's house over his protest, violating the law of nations regarding his diplomatic status, and he had repeatedly requested redress from the government. The

Committee knew the violation had been significant, and were very worried that Morris would use the incident to incite the United States to break diplomatic relations with France.

I will close this paper by noting that during the thirty-two months of Morris's ministry, there were seven different heads of foreign affairs in France. Four were condemned as traitors, three died on the guillotine, and one defected to the Austrians. As Morris pointed out, "to stand well with all Parties is impossible,"⁴⁵ especially since by standing "well" with the first government to which he was accredited (the monarchy), he was certain to be distrusted by every succeeding regime. With this kept in mind, it is clear that he did an extraordinary job. Again, I will agree with Theodore Roosevelt: "We have never had a foreign minister who deserved more honor than Morris. . . . In his whole attitude towards the revolution, Morris represents better than any other man the clear-headed, practical statesman, who is genuinely devoted to the cause of constitutional freedom."⁴⁶ It's an assessment that my research confirmed.

44. "As I do not have the honor of knowing you, sir," the unsuspecting Morris wrote back, "it is necessary that you do me the goodness of providing proof of your status as a citizen before I can transmit a request to obtain your release." GM to Cusack, Mar. 22, 1794 (my translation), Official Letterbook.

45. GM to Robert Morris, Feb. 15, 1792, Diary, 2:367.

46. Roosevelt, *Gouverneur Morris*, 256, 259.