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Gouverneur Morris and the Foreign Service
Influence on Issuance of the Proclamation of Neutrality of 1793

A thesis
presented to
the faculty of the Department of History
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In partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
Masters of Arts in History

by
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ABSTRACT

Gouverneur Morris and the Foreign Service Influence on Issuance of the Proclamation of Neutrality of 1793

by

Andrew Adler

Gouverneur Morris had an influence on the foreign policy of the Washington administration. This thesis will be focusing Morris' career as foreign minister to France. Morris served as the American minister to France during the French Revolution and reported to the Washington Administration on the events that transpired during that event. This thesis intends to show what impact Gouverneur Morris had in keeping the Washington administration neutral during this tumultuous time from his own point of view and various others with whom he corresponded with during his time as minister, most notably, George Washington.

Morris' private diaries and letters will be used to show the information that Morris was relaying to Washington during the revolution. Along with this, Washington's diaries and letters will show how that information influenced his decision on how to pursue a foreign policy in regards to Europe, in particular France.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the Adler and Givens families for all the support they have given me all my life.

CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT.....	2
DEDICATION.....	3
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION.....	5
2. GOUVERNEUR MORRIS: A SHORT HISTORY.....	9
3. GOUVERNEUR MORRIS: HIS WRITINGS AND THOUGHTS ON THE SITUATION IN FRANCE.....	19
4. MORRIS' INFLUENCE ON WASHINGTON AND THE ADMINISTRATION'S POLICY TOWARD EUROPE.....	37
5. CONCLUSION.....	57
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	60
VITA.....	63

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

One of the most forgotten of the generation known as the founding fathers is Gouverneur Morris. There is no real reason why Morris should be overlooked, but for most of the course of American History, no real work has been done on him. However, this has changed over the last few years as authors such as William Adams, Richard Brookhiser, and many others have started to take an interest in this New York aristocrat to whom the United States is more indebted than its citizens realize. He penned the final draft of the Constitution and was one of the more outspoken advocates for that document's acceptance.

However, little is truly known about Morris. William Adams believes this was due to a conscious effort by Morris himself. Unlike many of the founding fathers, Morris did not care how history would see him and spent little of his life trying to secure a lasting legacy.¹ Despite his lack of concern for how future generations looked upon him, Morris was very involved in the important events of his own day. He was one of the major players on the American political scene and knew many in the pantheon of gods who are now worshipped. He and Washington were friends for nearly twenty years, forming a close bond. He also eulogized the former president as well as the first Secretary of the Treasury, Alexander Hamilton, another close friend, but also an unknown enemy.²

The influence of Morris in the era of the American Revolution, while important, provides only the background for one of his most lasting achievements. This thesis

¹ William Howard Adams, *Gouverneur Morris: An Independent Life* (New Haven, CT.: Yale University Press, 2003), xiii.

² Richard Brookhiser, *Gentleman Revolutionary: Gouverneur Morris, The Rake Who Wrote the Constitution* (New York: Free Press, 2003), xvi.

focuses on a time when Gouverneur Morris was not within three thousand miles of his home country. From February 1792 until July 1794 Morris served as the American foreign minister to France. Only one man came before Morris in that capacity and that was Thomas Jefferson, who had left the post to become Secretary of State. Morris served during a tumultuous time for France and her people. The French Revolution had begun almost at the same time that Morris had arrived in France in 1789. Although it would be almost three more years before he became the official minister to France, Morris took note of the events swirling around him.

Many observers in both America and France believed that the French Revolution would follow the same path as the one America had experienced a little over a decade before. Morris, however, did not believe this to be true. He did not believe that the American form of government could work in France and he was concerned that there were distinct differences between the two peoples that would doom any attempt to implement such a government.³ Morris wrote down his thoughts and opinions, relaying them back to close confidants in America.

One of his closest confidants was the new President of the United States, George Washington. Throughout the French Revolution, Washington was torn over what to do. He felt an obligation to aid the French in anyway necessary because of the invaluable aid that they had lent to the American colonies during their revolution. However, he was also concerned because he did not know what involvement in foreign affairs would do to the new nation and he did not want to endanger the safety of the United States by an irresponsible promotion of democracy in France. World events would eventually force

³ Adams, xv.

the Washington Administration to take a position. This is where Morris became one of, if not the most, important people in the making of American foreign policy.

The second chapter of the present work will detail Morris' early life and provide a short biography of the man. Throughout the chapter, his beliefs and political ideas are examined to show what Morris believed about government and the people. One can see the changes in Morris' basic conservative viewpoint during the course of the American Revolution. While he never became a wholehearted democrat, he did believe in a strong representative republican government and advocated that position throughout debates over what the form of American government should be. Along with this, the reader is introduced to the most important connection that Morris ever made in his life. That person was George Washington and a description is given of how a budding friendship began and developed over time.

The third chapter is devoted to the writings of Gouverneur Morris. It demonstrates his thoughts not only on the situation in France during the revolution but also of the people and their leaders. Included are the problems that Morris saw with the French Revolution and his fears of what might come from the disruption in France. Also discussed is another situation that started to trouble Morris. As the French Revolution continued to evolve, Morris became more and more concerned that France was going to start a war with all of Europe, including England. He felt that if it occurred the United States would be sucked into the fight and have no way out.

Finally, attention is given to the special relationship between Morris and Washington. The beginning of the fourth chapter attempts to demonstrate the friendship between the two men and show how strong their bond actually was. One example of this

is when Washington sent Morris to England on a secret mission that he could only entrust Morris to carry out with any hopes of reconciliation between the two countries, which did not occur because of the disrespect of the English envoys. The rest of the fourth chapter describes the influence that Morris' writings had on Washington and others in America and their thoughts on the situation in France. It will be shown that throughout 1792-1793, Morris' writings heavily influenced Washington and eventually played a significant role in the Proclamation of Neutrality in April 1793.

Gouverneur Morris has never received his due for his role of setting America's foreign policy. Developed originally during the Washington Administration, that policy guided virtually every presidential administration until Woodrow Wilson decided to enter World War I in 1917. Morris' belief, expressed so vigorously during his time as Minister to France that America should not involve itself in the problems of Europe because it might endanger the American way of life left an indelible mark on American History for years to come.

CHAPTER 2

GOUVERNEUR MORRIS: A SHORT HISTORY

Two men rode through the forest of New York with the job to investigate the fall of Fort Ticonderoga. On July 14, 1777, Abraham Yates arrived in Albany with his companion to oversee the defense of New York from the British force under John Burgoyne. Soon both men were underway to meet with Generals Arthur St. Clair and Philip Schuyler to discuss the defenses and the strategy to defeat the advancing British. The man who rode with Yates on those summer days was none other than Gouverneur Morris.¹

Who is this man who was riding out to coordinate the defenses of New York against the advancing British with Yates. He was a member of the New York aristocracy, his Dutch ancestors having arrived in the New World before the British. As his maternal ancestors settled in New Amsterdam, his paternal forefathers arrived in the West Indies. Eventually, both sides arrived in New York, where Lewis Morris, his grandfather, became involved in colonial politics, becoming the governor of New Jersey.²

Gouverneur Morris was born on January 31, 1752. He was hated by his half-brothers almost immediately because his arrival meant their inheritance was to be further split.³ The young Morris paid this animosity little mind as he grew into his lifestyle. He was one of the few “Founding Fathers” to be recognized as part of the colonial elite, living that lifestyle to the fullest. He received a superb education, entering King’s College, present day Columbia, at age twelve. At age fourteen, he suffered an injury that set back his graduation a year. He upset a boiling pot of water that seared the flesh on his

¹ Samuel Willard Crompton, *Gouverneur Morris* (Berkeley Heights, NJ.: Enslow, 2004), 8-9.

² Brookhiser, 1-4.

³ Brookhiser, 6-7.

right side and right arm. Morris, showing the fortitude he gained a reputation for later in life, did not yell out in pain, but the injury did force him to take a sabbatical from King's for a year.⁴

As he grew, Morris' stature came to befit him as the leader he was to become. He grew to be over six feet tall and developed generous proportions. When he finished his education, he studied law, eventually being admitted to the New York bar in 1771. Morris gained success in his practice and made useful connections who aided him in the future, including John Jay and R. R. Livingston.⁵ Although his family had a history in politics, Morris felt no need to engage in them in his early age, being too busy with his law firm and trying to woo William Livingston's daughters, Sally and Kitty. He paid little attention to the closure of the port of Boston; his only fear was the downfall of the "old" system, of which his family was one of the leaders. His first reactions to the American Revolution were lukewarm at best. He feared mob rule, and while he believed that the colonies had the right to govern themselves, the British Empire should have the last say in the governing of trade. Eventually, Morris' patriot sympathies won out, as he became a member of the New York Provincial Congress along with his half-brother Lewis. This decision hurt some in his family. His mother and other half-brother remained loyal to the crown. Even without their support, Morris became one of the leading members of the Congress, dazzling the delegates with his intelligence, while being a voice for tolerance and reconciliation.⁶

⁴ Brookhiser, 10-11.

⁵ Brookhiser, 16.

⁶ Howard Swiggett, *The Extraordinary Mr. Morris* (Garden City, NY.: Doubleday, 1952), 16-17. : Brookhiser, 20-25.

His voice for moderation and his disagreement over the invasion of Canada won him few friends and guaranteed his defeat, as he was not re-elected to the congress. When he was removed from the political arena, Morris applied for a commission with the New York militia. When he received a commission as a Lieutenant Colonel, he refused to serve. Class was the issue to Morris as he felt he was deserving of a colonelship befitting his social rank. His refusal to serve under a man “who was a shoemaker in private life,” was a foreboding sentiment of his political views. By 1775, Morris had not completely grasped the ideals of the revolution, wanting a conservative rebellion, or even reconciliation with Britain. Morris did not want a change to occur in the social system.⁷

Without a commission, Morris returned to politics. He was re-elected to the Provincial Congress in 1776, immediately being elected to a commission to deal with the new commander of the Continental Army, George Washington. Morris’ assignment was to work with Washington on a plan of defense for New York City. Almost immediately the two became friends, remaining close for the remainder of their lives, a relationship that aided them both. The men respected and enjoyed one another, but, unlike many others, Morris was not intimidated by the general. The friendship and the confiscation of his family estate by the British gave more light to Morris’ patriot beliefs, which led him to realize that it was the inevitable right for all Americans to be free.⁸

As he became more of a radical, Morris became a fast mover on the American political scene. He was elected to the Continental Congress, but before he could depart for Philadelphia, his job with the New York Congress kept him in that state. He investigated the fall of Fort Ticonderoga and laid out a defensive plan for General

⁷ Adams, 59-60.

⁸ Brookhiser, 26-30.

Schulyer to follow that allowed for reinforcements to come to his aid to eventually defeat Burgoyne at Saratoga.⁹ When he arrived in Philadelphia, he was again placed on a commission that dealt with the Army, becoming the intermediary between Congress and Washington. He reported on the situation at Valley Forge and became the driving force to fully supply the Continental Army and demand the payment of soldiers and secured a guarantee of half-pay pensions to soldiers following the war.

While in Congress, Morris was unimpressed with his fellow members. He believed that most of the members were disinterested and undedicated to the cause of freedom.¹⁰ During this time, Morris turned wholly against his original stance on the revolution, coming to reject any peace overtures from Britain, knowing America could only survive with complete freedom. Even with this sentiment, he lost his seat in Congress in 1779 as he sided with Ethan Allen and others making an argument for Vermont statehood.¹¹

Once he was defeated, Morris did not return to New York. He decided to remain in Philadelphia because of one of his many love interests he would have throughout his life. He also thought that he could achieve a good career in the city but experienced yet another setback soon after. Following his decision to stay, Morris suffered the second of his life-changing injuries. He had planned a trip to the country with George Plater for a few days, but never made the trip. Morris was thrown from his carriage, catching his leg in one of the wheels, breaking it in many places. The attending physicians suggested amputation of the leg, a decision Morris concurred with. Later, he was informed by his personal physician that the leg could have possibly been saved. He did not let the injury

⁹ Adams, 88-89.

¹⁰ Brookhiser, 44-45, 48.

¹¹ Adams, 121.

dampen his spirits, however, as the peg leg that replaced the original became a source of jokes not only for the wearer but for friends as well.¹²

Once he recovered from his injuries, Gouverneur became an assistant to Robert Morris, chief financial officer of the government. Their first task was overwhelming as they were assigned to fix the economic situation of the fledgling country that had just won its independence from England. Of course, both of the men were unable to devise a system that worked effectively and the new nation fell deeper into debt, as the leaders looked for a new form of government. Morris, while he remained active in politics, soon became more focused on building a fortune of his own in Philadelphia.¹³ Even though he wanted to focus on his own affairs, Morris returned to the political scene as one of the framers of the Constitution.

As the Constitutional Convention convened in 1787, Morris was surprised to find that he had been elected as a delegate from Pennsylvania; but he accepted the nomination nonetheless. The convention was a coming of age for Morris. He spoke more than any other delegate, although some saw him as fickle. He attacked some of the delegates for being disinterested, but he left the convention himself for a time to deal with personal business. But upon his return, he worked even more diligently for a new form of government.¹⁴ As the convention wore on, Morris spoke out for only letting the rich vote because separating the rich and the poor was the only way to keep mistrust between them, assuring that government could work. He attacked slavery during the convention as well. “Slavery,” he began, “was the curse of heaven on the states where it prevailed.”¹⁵ He was

¹² Adams, 126.

¹³ Brookhiser, 68 & 76.

¹⁴ Adams, 148.

¹⁵ Brookhiser, 85.

one of the enemies of counting slaves as representation in any form, although he did not win that fight.

Some things Morris was a supporter of did find their way into the Constitution. He was the loudest supporter of a strong executive. Although he did not gain every one of his initiatives he wanted to be included in the document, he was an anomaly at the convention. He did not brood like others when he was defeated, taking his defeats in stride, quickly moving on to the next issue.¹⁶ For all his ideas and thoughts, Morris' greatest contribution to the convention was that of writer. He was appointed to the Committee of Style that would write the Constitution. After deliberation, the other four members decided to give Morris the task of writing the document. He produced a copy in four days. He succeeded in giving the Constitution its prose, removing many superfluous words left in by the Committee of Detail. He was still attacked, however, as his nationalist tendencies were evident in many sections, but the document still gained approval from the convention. The document became Morris' greatest legacy, but he refrained from participating in the fight for its ratification. He was ready to finally move on from public service to tend to his own matters.¹⁷

Following the convention, Gouverneur traveled to Europe on behalf of Robert Morris to work on the latter's financial plans with France and attend to some of Robert's personal affairs on the continent. Over the next six years, Morris observed French culture and life, commenting on everything from their form of government to what he thought of the people. He became ensconced in French social circles almost as soon as he arrived.

¹⁶ Brookhiser, 86-87.

¹⁷ Theodore Roosevelt, *Gouverneur Morris*, American Statesmen Series (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1899: reprint, New York: Chelsea House, 1983), 121 (page citations are to the reprint edition). : Brookhiser, 89-90, 93.

His ties with Thomas Jefferson, the current minister to France, and the Marquis de Lafayette gained him access in the higher social strata of pre-revolution Paris. He befriended some of the more influential nobles and ladies of France, often debating politics with them. Morris' arrival coincided with the first meeting of the Estates General since 1614. The divisions and opinions he observed at the assembly led Morris to believe that the government of France would experience a radical change in the near future. No longer could King Louis XVI keep control of the reform movement. The prideful king would not allow the demands for a constitution and government based on the American form to materialize, however. When the Bastille was stormed on July 14, 1789, Morris' opinion was that no large scale revolt was imminent. Soon, however, Morris observed the violence that became synonymous with the French Revolution. The body of Monsieur de Foulon was dragged through the street and his head was placed on a pike. This incident led Morris to see a different face of the mob of France.¹⁸

Morris served as Washington's eyes and ears on events in France even before he became the minister to France. He reported to the President that the French lacked true leadership, following whoever was making the popular point at the time. Washington used Morris in dealing with the British as well. The President had sent Morris to England to find British sentiments toward the Americans and to see if there was hope for reconciling trade agreements between the two countries.¹⁹ When Morris returned to France, he found the country and the government in disarray. All titles of nobility had been dissolved and a new revolution was on the horizon. Morris feared for the future of the country, thinking it would devolve into mob rule. When Thomas Paine arrived in

¹⁸Adams, 176-177.: Brookhiser, 98, 101, 108-110.

¹⁹ Adams, 209-221.

Paris, the two men hotly debated what was going to happen to the country. Morris believed the common man was unable to govern himself and the only way to save the country was by force, which was impossible. Louis XVI had become a prisoner in his palace in Paris and Lafayette's own troops refused to obey orders. A change in France was coming, Morris believed. He thought, incorrectly, that the royalty and nobility were safe because they were a longstanding French institution. As Robespierre incited a new revolution, Morris sided with nobility and royalty to try and save the government of France in any possible way. He aided in drafting a constitution for the country that was based on America's. Until this time, Morris had been merely an observer of these events with no official ties to the United States. This changed in 1792 as he was officially named minister to France.²⁰

When his name was put forward for the appointment, a harsh debate began in the Senate because of Morris' known sentiments as an "aristocracy man" with little support of the revolution.²¹ Jefferson, now Secretary of State, attacked Morris on the basis that his letters to Washington were planting skepticism in the President's thoughts and were not giving an unbiased report of the events in France. In conjunction, Morris was attacked by the leaders of the revolution because he was not their ally. Even with these attacks, Morris was confirmed by the Senate, gaining the ministership. In his letters and dispatches, Morris warned both Jefferson and Washington that a new, bloodier version of the French Revolution was coming to fruition. By August, these predictions had come to pass.²²

²⁰ Brookhiser, 120-127.

²¹ Adams, 231.

²² Adams, 237.: Roosevelt, 169.

On August 10, 1792, Louis XVI was deposed, and the entire government of France was in upheaval. The entire diplomatic corps abandoned their post, except for Morris, who remained at his post throughout the Reign of Terror, often giving aid to his friends who were considered enemies to the state of France. He watched helplessly as the ones he could not aid were executed or arrested.²³ When the terror began, communications broke down throughout France, leaving Morris to operate without instructions on how to proceed with guidance from the Washington administration. He decided to leave Paris, buying an estate at Siene-Port, south of the capital, making trips to work when the need arose. His relationship with the French government soured as the French began to demand his recall. Washington remained loyal to his old friend, but following the Genet incident, he had no choice. With the United States demanding the recall of Genet, the French would only comply so long as Morris was removed from his post as well. Morris did not want to lose his post but was relieved when James Monroe arrived to replace him.²⁴

Following his dismissal, Morris toured Europe for four years, returning to the United States in 1798. Upon his return, Alexander Hamilton tried to entice him to enter into governmental service, but Morris was ready to attend to his personal affairs that had been neglected while he was away. He did remain active in politics as he became a Federalist out of his admiration of Washington. His involvement in politics led to his selection to fulfill the senatorial term of James Watson, who resigned in 1800. Two years later, Morris was unable to gain the seat in his own right. He tried to return to private life,

²³ Brookhiser, 131.

²⁴ Adams, 248-249.

but soon became involved in the debate over the Louisiana Purchase and served on the Erie Canal commission.²⁵

For the next ten years, Morris believed that the Constitution was failing and the American government was falling apart. His political beliefs and actions centered in New York for the rest of his life. He was an outspoken opponent of the War of 1812 and supported the Hartford Convention. The War of 1812 and the political situation surrounding it led him to believe that America soon would split. Following the war, however, his faith was restored in the Constitution and the government. He tried to guide the Federalists in political matters, trying to convince them that they need not attack the Republicans because they would destroy themselves from the inside. He did not live to see the death of the Jeffersonians, however, as he succumbed to diseases and illness on November 16, 1816 at the age of sixty-four.²⁶

²⁵ Brookhiser, 161, 162, 169, 170, 173.

²⁶ Brookhiser, 172-211.

CHAPTER 3

GOUVERNEUR MORRIS: HIS WRITINGS AND THOUGHTS ON THE SITUATION IN FRANCE

Gouverneur Morris sailed for France on December 18, 1788 on the ship *Henrietta*. He had little idea what the next three and a half years held for him. He landed at the port of Le Havre on January 27, 1789. As soon as he set foot in France, he set about doing the business of Robert Morris right away. Morris had come to France as a business agent of Robert Morris to deal with some of the accounts that Robert had in Europe. With this simple mission in mind, Morris never thought that he would become a witness to one of the most violent revolutions in Europe. Morris did know what was happening in France before his arrival, but never expected to be more than a passive observer, as evidenced by his social activities in the high life of Paris.¹

After landing, Morris set out for Paris to try and make inroads to the higher society in that city. He thought a lot of Paris and the city's beauty but felt that the political situation in the city bordered on dangerous. He let it be known that everyone was afraid of the situation. "Indulge me also, I pray, I conveying the opinion that until that issue is known, every arrangement both foreign and domestic must feel a panic."²

Although many of his earlier biographers and biographers of his enemies portray him as being anti-French, Gouverneur Morris agreed with Thomas Jefferson at the outset of the French Revolution. Both men felt that the French deserved freedom and that the nobles of France were uneducated and doomed to failure. Morris, however, was unlike Jefferson and Thomas Paine in one respect. He believed that they gave the French too

¹ Morris, Gouverneur. *The Diary and Letters of Gouverneur Morris Vol. 1.* (ed. Anne Cary Morris. New York: Scribner's & Sons, 1888.) 18-19.

² Morris, *Diary and Letters* I. 1, 21.

much credit. According to Morris, the French were uneducated and did not understand the type of government they were trying to form. They were too illiterate to understand the American form of government enough to implement it in France. Morris predicted that any attempt to do so would end in brutality and terror.³

Before the French Revolution turned for the worse, Morris believed that France was one of the finer countries in the world. He believed that the Americans and the French were kindred peoples. He wrote, “An American has a stronger sympathy with this Country than any other observer.”⁴ Morris was dismayed because the revolution was tearing France apart and destroying what was once a beautiful country.⁵

Although he loved the French people, Morris was afraid of how the revolution would end. He suspected they were incapable of self-government because of their lack of education. He was afraid that they were merely worshipping idols, their leaders, too much. Morris feared that the French were being led down a path of destruction by their leaders. He believed that the nobles in France were uninterested in politics and revolution because they were not interested in solving the problems that were truly confronting France.⁶

Morris was a true republican who believed that everyone should enjoy living in a democracy. As he knew the cosmopolitan French lifestyle, he believed they were not serious enough or ready for a republican form of government. They had no self-restraint and would not be sufficient enough watchdogs over their liberty, giving rise to despotism.

³ Swiggett, 149, 166-168.: Brookhiser, 122-123.

⁴ Gouverneur Morris, *Papers of Gouverneur Morris*, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. (Washington, D.C.: Letterbook Official (United States Minister to France), Aug. 8, 1792-Apr. 8, 1793), microfilm, Reel 2.

⁵ Morris, *Papers*, Reel 2.

⁶ Gouverneur Morris, *The Diary and Letters of Gouverneur Morris*, vol. 2, ed. Anne Cary Morris (New York: Scribner, 1888), 7-8.: Crompton, 92.: Gouverneur Morris, *A Diary of the French Revolution: 1789-1793*, vol. 1, ed. Beatrix Cary Davenport (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1939), 22.

They needed the monarchy to tell them what they needed to do and that the monarchy and aristocracy were the only things keeping order in France. Although he believed these ideas were correct, Morris rarely imposed his views on his friends in France.⁷

In April 1789, Morris told George Washington that the American and French people were intertwined. The French struggle for freedom was just as important to Americans as themselves because their revolution was an extension of the American Revolution. While many believed that it had begun because of the ideals of the American Revolution, this was not the case. The French were restless and angry at a government that had weakened their economy and country to aid the Americans in their struggle for freedom and were ready for a change. He knew the French would be free and would stop at nothing to gain that right. They would suffer setbacks to be sure, but the revolution would eventually succeed.⁸

As an observer of the revolution, Morris knew what was happening and that things would soon get out of hand. He knew that the American and French Revolutions had different goals. The American struggle had been for liberty while the French were seeking equality for all. With a different set of goals and beliefs, Morris knew the American style of government that the French were trying to establish would never work.⁹

The French and American Revolutions were two different types of revolts that were focused on different ends. The French wanted to have a Roman Republic feel to

⁷ Theodore Roosevelt, *Gouverneur Morris*, 2 ed. American Statesman Series, ed. Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. (New York: Chelsea House, 1983), 160-162.: Brookhiser, 102.

⁸ Crompton, 85 & Morris, *French I*, 60.: *Gouverneur Morris, A Diary of the French Revolution: 1789-1793*, vol. II, ed. Beatrix Cary Davenport (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1939), 6-7.

⁹ Susan Dunn, *Sister Revolutions: French Lightning, American Light* (New York: Faber and Faber, c1999), 24.

their government, but they also strove to establish the perfect democracy, which is incompatible with a republican form of government. They were going to try to experiment with new theories and philosophies with France. However, the leaders of the revolution did not realize that different groups in the country could have, and did have, dissenting opinions. Morris believed that imagination in politics was not a positive. He saw the leaders of France as uneducated men who had acquired their knowledge of what freedom was through books and had no real world experience. Their ideas and philosophies would not work in the real world, undermining their revolution and destroying France in the process.¹⁰

Morris believed the French were too involved with the rights of man. In America, the Bill of Rights was being added to the Constitution as a compromise, but it would not be a stumbling block to the document if it could not be agreed upon. He believed that the Constitution protected the rights that America had fought for in their revolution and the Bill of Rights were merely there to gain the last few states' ratification of the document. The rights protected by the Bill of Rights were not what the Americans had gone to war over, Morris believed. However, while the French wanted a constitution based on the United States, the document could never work because the liberties in the Bill of Rights were the whole reason for their revolution. He saw that they would not sacrifice these rights for the good of their country.¹¹

Morris foresaw the coming of a new, more violent revolution as the French were becoming more and more incensed. He noticed the warning signs before anyone else and tried his best to help the French government before things got out of hand. He tried to

¹⁰ Dunn, 39-40.: Morris, *French I*, 130.: Morris, *French II*, 275.

¹¹ Dunn, 141.: Albert Hart, *The Foundations of American Foreign Policy* (New York: DaCapo, 1970), 24.: Morris, *French II*, 275.

strengthen the monarchy any way he could and devised a constitution for the French that preserved the power of the monarchy while giving more freedom to the commoners in France. He warned French leaders of their impending doom and tried to convince them that an American form of government would not work in France. He knew the royal family was doomed from the outset and the only hope for the remaining aristocracy was that the higher class was such an ingrained part of the French lifestyle.¹²

Morris predicted France would be ripped apart after the fall of the Bastille in 1789. He believed acts of violence would increase and events in France would spiral even more out of control. On July 21, 1789, his fears were realized and his entire mindset about the French Revolution changed. On that day, he saw the head of Monsieur de Foulon, a local politician, placed on a pike and paraded through the streets of Paris in front of a “liberty” parade.¹³

As things were becoming more radical, Morris saw his predictions of a bloodier revolution coming to fruition. He already suspected what was going to happen to Louis XVI and the royal family. Too many allegations had been levied against the king and his family and the anti-aristocratic faction of the revolution wanted him dead. They believed that his death would send a shock through the country and set an example that would be followed throughout the world. Although he did hold out some hope for the royal family, it was not to be. He had heard of a plan to send the king and his family to America, thus sparing their lives. He believed the plan would be passed because it was to be voted on by

¹² Swiggett, 163, 168-169.

¹³ Swiggett, 170-172.; Brookhiser, 109-110.

the people, but it never came to pass. Without hope of rescue, the king was put to death on January 21, 1793.¹⁴

With the king dead and no one really in control of the government, Morris feared things were only going to get worse. No one could control the military and the people of the country were running wild. He believed that no matter who was in charge, they had to have a huge military to be able to maintain control and provide for the defense of France, otherwise they would be overthrown. The military was needed because the French people were not open to persuasion or agreement to settle the situation, so force was going to have to be used.¹⁵

As no one party could maintain power after Louis XVI's death, Morris became increasingly worried. The revolutionaries had to devise a plan to stabilize France soon because there was trouble on the horizon. Morris knew as the situation in France worsened, foreign powers were preparing to invade. With no one to stand in their way, these foreign powers would be able to march across France and pick the country apart, dividing up whatever they wanted. As this outcome appeared more and more likely, Morris said the revolutionaries had to form a republic or some form of government soon that the French people could give their allegiance to. If they did, no exterior force could ever destroy it.¹⁶

Morris believed that if someone could take control of the revolution, the worst could be over, but he feared that this was not to be. More devastation was to come. While he saw the reasoning behind the revolution, he could not understand why it needed to be so bloody. He could not sense why the French wanted to tear their country apart without

¹⁴ Morris, *Diary and Letters* II, 18-19, 32.

¹⁵ Morris, *Papers*, Reel 2.

¹⁶ Morris, *Papers*, Reel 2.

rectifying the situation. Morris wrote to Washington telling him that the situation in France was getting increasingly worse. The French people had been misled into the revolution, Morris thought, and had no idea what was going on around them. They were grasping at straws and were looking for leaders wherever and whenever any arose, no matter what they were saying. As things got worse, people were in constant fear for their lives as the government and society were breaking down. Every day France was moving closer to war with the monarchies of Europe but the army was disintegrating, as was the whole of France. The people wanted independence, just like the Americans, but the French were not benefiting from the revolution and any opportunities they had were being lost.¹⁷

Although he knew the people of France were losing control, Morris did not blame them. The nobles and various leaders of the revolution were the ones who were the most at fault for the situation. They were weak and were not smart enough to control the revolution to the end, and no one could ever maintain power long enough to be of any importance to the movement. The leaders of the revolution were devoid of morals and had no depth of thought and were leading the French to destruction according to Morris.¹⁸

Morris thought too many factions were fighting over too many unimportant things and no one was paying attention to the events and problems of France. He believed this about the National Assembly as well. With them, he saw a body that was working by the seat of their pants with no idea what was going on. He believed that their main interest was arguing amongst one another, never addressing the problems that faced them.¹⁹

¹⁷ Morris, *French II*, 68, 332-335, 582-584.: Roosevelt, 158-159.

¹⁸ William Adams, *Gouverneur Morris: An Independent Life* (New Haven, CT.: Yale University Press, 2003), 228.: Roosevelt, 151, 159-160.

¹⁹ Swiggett, 184.

While many groups knew what goals they wanted to obtain from the revolution, few agreements could be made by the varying parties. Pretty much the only thing all the various leaders of each faction did agree on was the death of Louis XVI, although none of them recognized it would doom them because all the monarchies of Europe had started to take more notice of events in France. Morris believed that the most republican minded force in the country could rule, but they had to move quickly and face the problems that were mounting against them. One such problem was external forces. He predicted that if an invading army moved fast enough, it could conquer the whole of France before a defense could even be mounted. However, should the army move slowly, the party in power could unify the country and perhaps hold on to power for a long time. It was thought, not just by Morris, that invasion of an outside force might be the thing that could spur French unification, bringing an end to the revolution. The hope was that Britain would declare war on France, bringing unification and peace.²⁰

While Morris did not care for the leaders of the French Revolution in general, there was one in particular whom he distrusted. The main person that the French and American Revolutions had in common was Le Marquis de Lafayette. Although he was not a true leader in either of the revolutions, he was an important figure in both, especially to the people of the respective countries. As time went on, Morris tried to advise Lafayette as to what should be done to keep the situation under control but was often disappointed. He discovered that Lafayette was not intelligent or strong enough to maintain control of his troops, much less the ever worsening situation in France. Morris believed him to be vain and out for self-gratification above all else and not interested in the problems that were facing France. However, Morris observed that during the French

²⁰ Morris, *Papers*, Reel 2.: Morris, *Diary and Letters* II , 11, 20, 23, 26.: Roosevelt, 166-167.

Revolution the leaders were almost unimportant anyway since it was truly a people's revolution with leaders serving more as instruments than guides. However, Morris knew the people of France would soon need leadership, which he could not see forthcoming.²¹

In February 1792, Morris was appointed as the Minister to France. His appointment was hotly contested, however, as many thought he was a proponent of the monarchy of France and was not a supporter of the French Revolution. To a certain point this was true. He feared mob rule and believed the French needed a monarchy to maintain order, but he also believed that all men deserved freedom.²²

Morris had been predicting that a new revolution was going to occur at any time in France. Beginning in 1792, he was correct. When France was invaded by the joint Prussian and Austrian forces, a new, bloodier revolution erupted in Paris and spread throughout the country. As the new revolution began, Morris wrote that the main question that remained was whether France would be a republic or a monarchy. There was no middle ground as he saw it and the people were beginning to take the lead in deciding what France would become. Morris noted his belief that the question must be answered by force or the country would continue to spiral out of control.²³

As the revolution intensified, Morris requested new orders on how to conduct himself from President Washington. He did not want to make any mistakes because he did not want to embroil America in the problems of France. However, the instructions were late in coming, so for much of the time Morris had to make his own decisions as to what he thought was right at the risk of alienating the French from the Americans. He

²¹ Brookhiser, 103, 114-115.: Dunn 12-13, 21-22.: Morris, *French II* 75-76.: Morris, *Papers*, Reel 2.

²² Brookhiser, 127-129.

²³ Morris, *Papers*, Reel 2.

still did not know how to deal with the ever changing French government and was starting to become frustrated at his own as well.²⁴

Morris believed that the revolution would lead to the ruin of France because the people did not know how to handle themselves. As the Reign of Terror rolled on throughout 1793-1794, Morris predicted to Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson, his predecessor in France and supporter of the French Revolution, that a whole new string of bloodier, more violent events was going to keep taking place so long as no one took control. As the French were without leaders, he warned that Americans should be leery of France and should not enter into any dealings with her. He feared the anarchy that was beginning to rule since the monarchy had been deposed in August. He was appalled by the sights that he saw but feared that things were only going to get worse.²⁵

While Morris believed that the people of France strove to be free, the events taking place during the Reign of Terror were not what the majority wanted. They had not wanted Louis XVI murdered and had mourned his death heavily, although he was the most hated person in France at the time few wished his death. His death had driven a wedge between the different factions of France and had led to the downfall of the government that had put him to death, creating more instability. Along with this, his death left the French with no real leader and the people started to look for one anywhere they could. Soon they began crying for a dictator to take control and restore order and protect them because the army was on the retreat from Flanders and war with Britain seemed imminent. Morris, however, was unsympathetic. He believed the French had made a huge mistake by killing the king and were going to pay the price in the imminent

²⁴ Morris, *Diary and Letters* II.

²⁵ Morris, *Papers*, Reel 2 & Brookhiser, 131-134 & Adams, 235, 239-240 & Morris, *Diary and Letters* II, 15.

war with England. He was becoming increasingly frustrated with the French government as well, as he was being kept out of the loop as to what they were considering doing. He wanted to know all the information possible so that he could make an informed decision about what to do so that he would not involve the United States in a situation from which there was no escape. Along with this, Morris began to see that there was no easy way that order would ever be restored to France again.²⁶

As things worsened in France, friends and family implored Morris to leave Paris for a safer haven. Morris' pride, however, would not allow him to do so. He said quitting ones' post was "not always a very proper conduct."²⁷ Although he knew he was in danger, Morris endured at his unpleasant post longer than any other minister from any other country, doing his duty to the best of his ability and upholding his honor. However, his sense of duty was soon challenged.²⁸

By September 1792, Morris was in fear of his life and started to change the tone of his diary. Now instead of giving detailed entries on the politics of France and his opinions on the events that were occurring, Morris stuck mostly to giving weather reports. When he did speak of politics, it was usually only rumors that he had heard from some source and then later he would write whether the rumor was unsubstantiated or not. He was still in Paris, however, as things were looking bleaker and bleaker for the French. Morris finally decided that the time was nearing that he should at least have a safe haven outside of Paris should anything happen. As war with England looked even more

²⁶ Morris, *Diary and Letters* II, 32-35, 37.

²⁷ Morris, *Diary and Letters* II, 28.

²⁸ Morris, *Diary and Letters* II, 28.

imminent, Morris bought a house in Seine-Port so that he could have a safe house in case of more chaos in Paris.²⁹

Morris' decision to remain in Paris was important. By staying closer to the events that were swirling in the city, he could take the population's temperature and predict what would happen next. Along with this, many people implored him to help in the government. These invitations were declined by Morris. While he would have loved to aid the French in establishing a new government, he was more intelligent than that. He knew that if he helped one government, when it was out of power, he would be an enemy of whichever government followed. Morris technically had immunity from reprisal, but in a chaotic country such as France, he knew that anything could happen. He also knew that the government of France must be allowed to make its own mistakes so that it could learn from them. The biggest concern that Morris had was the lack of leadership in France. During its own revolution, America had had Washington, Adams, Jefferson, and countless more men to look to for guidance and reassurance. This was not the case in France. Lafayette had fled and fear permeated the countryside as the combined Prussian and Austrian armies stood ready to invade to stabilize the country and reinstitute the monarchy. Still, Morris stood strong and relayed the events that he saw to Jefferson and Washington as best he could, but time was running out. As his opinions became more anti-French, he lost allies both at home and abroad and the French began to look for a way to get rid of him. Finally, following the Genêt incident, they had their chance. Although he spent a little over two years as official minister to France, Morris wielded

²⁹ Morris, *Diary and Letters* II, 36.

heavy influence over American decisions and thoughts regarding the French Revolution.³⁰

As the French Revolution began, Morris was indispensable to Washington. He became Washington's eyes and ears in Paris. Through his personal correspondence with Morris, Washington gained a clearer picture of what was going on in Paris, but he also gained the opinions of a trusted confidant as to what type of action the Americans should take concerning the situation. The accurate reports of the situation greatly aided Washington in making informed choices on what to do and how to act accordingly. Morris did his best to give Washington the best, unbiased information he could to help the President along. Eventually, the reports began to sink into the President. He had supported the French Revolution from the beginning and had thought about lending support to the French in anyway possible. He had thought that the French Revolution would be relatively bloodless and would take on a tone much like the American Revolution had. However, the President was wrong and began to change his mind as he was getting more and more discouraging reports from Morris.³¹

While Morris believed that the French deserved to be free, he did not hide the truth. He reported to Washington that things in France would end badly. He said that the United States should take no part in French problems because he was afraid that the problems could spread to America, corrupting that perfect system. He believed that the United States should cut off all ties with the French government, including the repayment of the war debt. Morris said that since the original agreement had been between the United States and the monarchy of France, the deal was now void. He did not say,

³⁰ Adams, 240-243.

³¹ Roosevelt, 164, 168-169.; Brookhiser, 115.

however, that the United States should not repay its debt. He told Washington that the time was right to strike a new deal with whatever government came to power. Of course, the plan should be more favorable to the United States since it would be one of the first countries in the world to lend credence to the new government of France.³²

Morris wrote to Washington as the situation in France and the rest of Europe deteriorated. The other monarchies of Europe would find it necessary to stabilize France themselves, by force, if things did not change. They did not want the revolution spreading beyond the borders of France, endangering their own countries.³³

Another facet that Morris was telling Washington about was the hopes for France once the revolution was over. He said that the French people, being uneducated and illiterate in government, had no idea what was going on and they would not know what to do once everything was finished. As he was writing to Washington about the situation in France, Morris was also writing to others as well. Hamilton, Jefferson, Madison, and various other governmental leaders at this time were receiving letters from Morris. Pretty soon, Morris began to gain converts to his position that the French were unintelligent and that America needed to stay out of French problems. As he gained converts, Morris began to think that almost all the Cabinet members were behind him and they too would start to bring their influence to bear on President Washington.³⁴

However, Morris wasn't just giving his own opinion. He also allowed the French to speak for themselves. Along with his correspondence, Morris sent gazettes that were also talking about the events in France to the different leaders in New York, mainly Jefferson. He knew Jefferson was pro-French and would never believe what he was

³² Morris, *Diary and Letters* II, 34-35, 37.: Morris, *Papers*, Reel 2.

³³ Morris, *French* I, 573-575.

³⁴ Swiggett, 164.: Morris, *Diary and Letters* II.

telling him, so Morris decided to let the French do all the convincing for him. However, it did not work. As the number of personal letters to Washington increased, bypassing his office, Jefferson began to attack Morris and his stance on the French Revolution. He believed that Morris was being less than truthful about the situation in France, merely planting skepticism in Washington's head, influencing him away from supporting France.³⁵

Washington had been contemplating neutrality as early as 1790. He was concerned that if America did remain neutral, France, no matter the revolution's outcome, would never forgive the Americans and would refuse to trade with them. Morris, however, assured Washington not to worry about that. The French knew that America was too important of a trade outlet to ignore, no matter who emerged victorious. Finally, by October 1792, Morris' influence started to show more. Washington knew no commercial treaty could be made with France in the shape that the country was in. As he drifted more and more toward the Proclamation of Neutrality, Washington distanced himself from direct dealings with France. He informed Morris from then on to do whatever he thought was proper, so long as it did not endanger the United States or her interests. He was giving Morris almost free rein to deal with the French, knowing that Morris' dislike of the methods of revolution would keep him from making a huge mistake and endangering relations between the two countries.³⁶

Two things pushed the relationship between France and the United States to the breaking point. The Proclamation of Neutrality in April 1793 angered the French and hurt them deeply, but did not do enough to really endanger good feelings between the two

³⁵ Morris, *Papers*, Reel 2.: Adams, 232.

³⁶ Morris, *French I*, 603-604.: Morris, *French II*, 584-585.

countries. The other incident almost brought an end to relations altogether and led to the recall of two ministers from the respective countries.

Morris personally liked Edmond Genêt but did not like the events that surrounded his appointment as minister to the United States and informed Washington of his misgivings about the whole situation. He was angry that the French had appointed a new minister to his country without telling him. He took the slight as a personal slap in the face and knew that it was just a sign of what was to come. He knew that Genêt had been dispatched with three hundred commissions for privateers and felt that this move was disrespectful to the United States and her neutral position. He sensed that this was the first step toward a breakdown of goodwill between the countries. From this point on, Morris changed his mind about the French, sensing that they did not realize they had more to gain from American neutrality than having them as allies. With America holding true to its neutral position, she could not aid either of the belligerents, but the Genêt incident had pushed her closer to dealing with the British.³⁷

As if the backdoor appointment of Genêt and disrespect of American neutrality were not enough, Morris became even more disgusted with the French. In March 1793, he was arrested for no reason on the streets of Paris. He felt he had been singled out because of his position and opinion, but was told that the event was merely standard procedure. He was becoming increasingly more disgusted with the French government because of their treason and their corruption. He began to see France as more tyrannical than ever as people could not even express their opinions freely for fear of reprisal. He

³⁷ Morris, *Diary and Letters* II, 15-16, 38-39.: Brookhiser, 137.

relayed these events to Washington, adding more thoughts to weigh on the President's mind as to what to do concerning the French.³⁸

Morris had started out as an aristocrat and supporter of the monarchy. During the early days of the French Revolution, he had done everything in his power to preserve the French monarchy, but by 1792 he had decided that France should be free. He was appalled by the methods that the French were using to free themselves and knew that the true goals of the French Revolution could never be obtained. As things got more and more out of hand, Morris' opinions changed again. He argued that the French people needed a monarch to maintain control and keep order because they could not do it themselves. He saw no leadership in France and became increasingly dismayed over what was happening to the country. He soon became alarmed at the excesses of the revolution and warned against them, painting him in a pro-monarchy light. Morris always supported the French movement but not the methods being employed.³⁹

More important to Morris than French freedom was the preservation of American independence. He was afraid that if America became involved in the French Revolution and ensuing events, it would doom the young nation. He tried everything in his power to convince the leaders of the United States, particularly George Washington, that the Americans had no business in the business of France. While they could support the French struggle for freedom, it was better to officially keep out of the fray because it would cause more harm than good.

What got Morris in trouble were his opinions. Over time he let his opinions against the leaders of the revolution and their methods and ideologies be known, gaining

³⁸ Morris, *Diary and Letters* II, 41.

³⁹ Morris, *Diary and Letters* II, 7.: Roosevelt, 165-166.

him enemies not only in the French government but the American government as well. Soon, as pressure mounted against him and with his popularity dwindling, Morris would be recalled in exchange for the recall of Edmond Genêt.⁴⁰

While some thought Morris was not the best choice for the ministership of France, they were incorrect. His voice of moderation and calm gave President Washington the most unbiased, true information on the revolution and helped him to his decision of neutrality. While Theodore Roosevelt said that Morris was too pessimistic to see any good coming out the revolution, William Adams disagrees. Morris was a realist who knew that excesses of any kind were a bad thing. He saw that the failed revolution could have laid a foundation for future prosperity in France had things been handled correctly.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Roosevelt, 165-166.

⁴¹ Swiggett, 186.; Roosevelt, 150.; Adams, 227.

CHAPTER 4

MORRIS' INFLUENCE ON WASHINGTON AND THE ADMINISTRATION'S POLICY TOWARD EUROPE

Since 1775 Gouverneur Morris and George Washington had been friends. As time went on, the two men became closer and closer. Morris was a member of the committee that observed the Continental Army for the Continental Congress and had intimate dealings with Washington throughout the American Revolution. Following the war, the two men continued to exchange letters and served in the Constitutional Convention together. As they aged, their relationship continued through letters and other correspondence. This relationship would soon give rise to Morris' importance during the French Revolution.

The friendship between Gouverneur Morris and George Washington aided both men throughout their lives. Their bond gave Washington a trusted confidant and outlet for his thoughts and ideas. Morris was one of the few men whom Washington trusted and listened to, often heeding his advice. They had a good relationship, so each could be honest with the other, both giving and receiving advice from the other. Morris was one of the leading advocates for Washington to become president because he felt that Washington was the only man for the job and the only one who could possibly lead the country. He told Washington that he had the most experience and was loved by the people of the country but feared by her enemies. His selection as President would solidify the country and give it standing on the international stage.¹

¹ George Washington, *The Papers of George Washington, Presidential Series*. Vol. 1 September 1788-March 1789. eds. W.W. Abbot and Dorothy Twohig (Charlottesville, VA.: University Press of Virginia, 1987), 165.

Gouverneur Morris left for France in December 1788. In a letter to Washington, he offered his services in any way that Washington might choose to use them, an offer he soon lived up to in more ways than one. Always concerned with social standing, Morris wanted to gain letters of introduction from Washington to those people he felt were the most important and could aid him moving into the higher social circles of Paris. Washington obliged Morris in this endeavor and tried his best to establish a fair opinion of Morris because he felt Morris could be of great use to him in garnering information about the situation in Paris. In a letter dated November 27, 1788, Washington wrote to Alfred Chastellux, telling him of Morris' coming. In his letter, Washington told Chastellux that Morris was a good man to be trusted and that he would leave a good opinion about Americans and their character wherever he went.²

In February 1789, Morris wrote to Washington from France to tell him of the situation in Paris, but said he would not report on the political situation in the country because Thomas Jefferson was the official voice for the Americans in Paris, so his opinion was the only one that mattered. Although he said this, Morris and Washington both knew that the former's reports would be forthcoming. Morris reiterated that Washington should be the President because his acceptance of the office would only give more credence to the American style of government and assured him that Europeans respected him. To emphasize the fact, Morris conveyed stories of the madness of King George III, saying that the king thought himself to be George Washington and assured Washington that when he became President that the English would deal with him. "And

² Washington, *Papers*, vol. 1, 103, 131.

the Prince of Wales, I am told, intends to be very good friends (sic) with the Country and the Man who have turned his fathers Head.”³

Morris was lucky enough to arrive in France just in time to witness something historic. He was able to write to Washington about the end of the elections for the Estates General and the success of Lafayette, saying that Lafayette was the most popular man in the country, and that he felt that the French were on the way to gaining a semblance of freedom.⁴ Along with this, Morris told Washington that the United States did have an interest in the liberty of France because the leaders of France were friends of America and that the people were acting upon the example of the Americans. This is in contrast to what he would be saying five years later.⁵

While Morris was on his trip to Europe, Washington wrote to Morris to see how the British would feel about resuming trade negotiations with the United States and if they possibly would finally hold up their end of the Treaty of Paris.⁶ He had already indicated that he wanted to tie American trade more with the British than any other European country because he felt that they were the strongest country in Europe and that America could gain the advantage over others if Morris could broker a deal.⁷ However, Washington stressed that he did not want the United States to ever have to ask for anything from anyone and that he did not want Great Britain meddling in American affairs with Indians and that it was time for them to remove their soldiers from the forts

³ Washington, *Papers*, vol. 1, 339.

⁴ George Washington, *The Papers of George Washington, Presidential Series*, Vol. 2 April-June 1789. eds. W.W. Abbot and Dorothy Twohig (Charlottesville, VA.: University Press of Virginia, 1987), 146.

⁵ Washington, *Papers*, vol. 2, 146.

⁶ George Washington, *Diaries of George Washington*. Vol. 4. ed. John Fitzpatrick (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1925), 20.

⁷ George Washington, *Writings of Washington from the original manuscript sources*. Vol. 32. ed. John Fitzpatrick (Washington: Government Printing Office, c. 1931-1944), 172-173.

of the Northwest Territory.⁸ With these instructions in hand, Morris went to England in 1789 as an unofficial emissary of the United States government to discover if the British were amicable to a resumption of trade agreements between the two countries. Morris' reports on his mission showed that the English were ready for a commercial treaty, but had no intention of ever living up to their end of the Treaty of Paris. He believed that Spain and Great Britain were about to end their alliance, and when they did, England would take New Orleans for use as a base to control the American west. If the two powers did go to war, Morris advised that the United States should side with the Spanish because they were the lesser threat to the Americans and together they could possibly beat the English, ending any threat to the American people. Morris advised Washington that he had to have the popular support for whichever action he chose because if he did not, it was doomed to failure.⁹

Even with this warning from Morris, on Thursday July 8, 1790, Lord Dorchester, who was the Governor-in-chief of British North America, relayed a message that the Americans would be better suited to support the English in the upcoming war. However, Washington took this as a slap in the face as he felt that the British treated Morris with disdain because they did not respect the Americans and felt that the United States needed Britain instead of the relationship being reversed. Washington did not take this lightly. He felt the British were dangling a commercial treaty in front of his face in return for support in a war against the Spanish and that they were not going to hold up their end of the Treaty of Paris if the United States did not support them against the Spanish. Before he made a rash decision, Washington wanted to hear from his cabinet and get their

⁸ Washington, *Writings*, vol. 32, 61-62.

⁹ Washington, *Diaries*, vol. 4, 131-132.

opinions, a tactic he would repeat time and time again.¹⁰ After conferring with his cabinet, Washington decided to play it slow, treating the communication from George Beckwith, Dorchester's aide de camp, as unofficial. He entrusted Alexander Hamilton to deal with Dorchester rather than Thomas Jefferson because of the latter's distrust of the British. He told the Secretary of Treasury to extract as much information from Beckwith as he could and see exactly for sure what the British wanted from the United States.

As events in France began to heat up, Washington started to receive even more disparaging reports from Morris. These reports began to influence Washington and his thoughts as to what America's policy toward Europe, especially France, should be. It is clear through an entry in his diary on Thursday October 8, 1789 that President Washington was thinking about appointing a new foreign minister to replace Thomas Jefferson. No true replacement had been appointed since Jefferson left the post to become Secretary of State, but William Short was acting as the unofficial emissary in Paris. Washington had thought about making Short the official minister, but his pro-French leanings put doubts in his mind. Washington needed to get Short out of Paris so that he could not bring his opinions to bear on others. To alleviate the situation, in 1792, Washington appointed Short as the minister to The Netherlands. Short was out of France, but he still had influence over French affairs with the Americans, leading to problems for Morris.¹¹ Though he was beginning to think that the post might not need to be filled because of the events in France, Washington asked his advisers and friends if Morris was the right man for the post. John Jay felt that Morris often spoke before he thought something through and that his "manners" preceded him so that many formed an opinion

¹⁰ Washington, *Diaries*, vol. 4, 137-139.

¹¹ Washington, *Papers*, vol. 2, 498.

of him before they ever met Morris. Jay did feel, however, that even though the opinion was often incorrect, it might hurt his relationship with the French.¹²

Still, by 1790, Washington had come to rely more on the reports Morris sent him on the situation in France than those sent by William Short. Even though both Morris and Short seemed to be saying the same thing about the French and their approach to the situation, Washington trusted the former more because of their strong relationship. Morris was quickly becoming Washington's eyes and ears on the French Revolution giving him, to the best of his knowledge, the most unbiased information on the events, which were quickly deteriorating.¹³ Washington was also more apt to heed the advice and information from Morris because he knew that Morris had access to the inner circles of French society and was shrewder at garnering information than Jefferson or Short.¹⁴

As time went on, Washington felt he could trust his friend more than anyone else in France because he believed that Morris saw the French Revolution as a dangerous situation and spared no detail in explaining his thoughts to Washington in letter after letter. He described the shortcomings of the men who were leading France into the revolution and that they were merely copying ideas they had read in books, a tactic that had been shown to be unsuccessful.¹⁵

Morris was not the only one who was starting to see the bad side of the French Revolution. By 1792, William Short started to see the flaws in the revolution as well. He had not been informed of his appointment to The Hague and still sent official dispatches

¹² Washington, *Diaries*, vol. 4, 17.

¹³ Washington, *Writings*, vol. 32, 87.

¹⁴ Louis Martin Sears, *George Washington and the French Revolution* (Detroit: Wayne State University, 1960), 46, 49, 65.

¹⁵ Sears, 65-66.

on the events in France to the Washington Administration. He felt the French were being too brazen by challenging other nations to war while their own country was involved in a revolution. Even after his appointment to The Hague had been made official, the headaches for Short were not over. He still had control over the payments of the loan installments to the French, which caused problems for Morris. Short still supported the French but was becoming angrier over their objections to how the loan was to be repaid. The French wanted three million of the annual four million dollar payment to come directly to France instead of how it had been divided previously. Before this, the lion's share of the payment had been sent to the island of Santo Domingo to help the French that were embroiled in a revolution on the island. As things worsened in France, the leaders of the government wanted the money to help finance their schemes in attempts to maintain power. However, the representatives of the United States knew that if that happened, they would be paying money to many different, successive governments in France and that the money would be squandered, or worse, records would be lost and the money would not be used for the good of France. The American ministers, Morris and Short, were both afraid that if the repayment plan was changed the United States would end up paying too much back to the French.¹⁶

Even though Short was becoming more anti-French, it was Morris who had the ear and confidence of the president. Morris started to become more vehement on his attacks of the leaders of the revolution. In his letters, he showed that they were less than credible and that the United States should not deal with them. He believed them to be “a Fleet at Anchor in the Fog,” but gave credit to the Jacobins by saying that their cause was

¹⁶ William Short, “William Short to Gouverneur Morris” in *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*. Vol. XII November 1792-February 1793, ed. Harold Syrett (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967), 366.

for a liberal constitution and not for personal advantage.¹⁷ On the whole, however, Morris believed that the leaders of the “new” revolution that was beginning, known as the Reign of Terror, did not have the best interests of France in mind and were only out for personal gain. Even worse, they did not know what they were doing and did not have any idea on how to run the government after the revolution was done. The government was disjointed, not talented, and had no faith in the constitution they served under. The French Revolution was nothing like the American Revolution; “the American Revolution ... had been guided by experience and light, while the French were obsessed with experiment and lightning.”¹⁸ Morris cautioned Washington that the French were running headlong into war with the European superpowers so fast that they could not see what would happen to the country once they did go to war. He felt the leaders of the revolution were willing to sacrifice their own country and their government to prove that democracy could work in Europe.¹⁹ His writings were continuing to put thoughts into Washington’s mind that America needed to have a comprehensive foreign policy to protect itself from the problems in France. While he said he would not give his opinions on the situation, from 1789-1792, Morris had been another unofficial minister to France, but this was soon to change.

In March 1792, Morris’ role in the French Revolution changed. Once he knew that he was the minister to France, Morris tried even harder to influence Washington’s opinions on the situation in France. In that same month, Morris wrote to Washington to tell him of the failed mission of Charles Maurice de Talleyrand-Périgord to England. Talleyrand was an emissary sent by the government of France to try to secure an alliance

¹⁷ Joseph Ellis, *His Excellency: George Washington*. (New York: Alfred Knopf, 2004), 210.

¹⁸ Ellis, *Excellency*, 210.

¹⁹ Sears, 123-129.

with the English against the Prussians who were threatening the eastern border of France. However, Talleyrand was unable to gain such alliance, a damning fact according to Morris. The reasoning behind it was because no European country wanted to deal with France while there was such a state of governmental limbo with no foreseeable end in sight. Morris believed that the United States should heed this advice as well. "Now you will observe that no Court could prudently treat with France in her present Situation, seeing that no body can promise in her name otherwise that as Godfathers and Godmothers do at a Christening, and how such Promises are kept every Body knows."²⁰ Morris knew the French Revolution was so unpopular in Europe and if the United States supported the French in any war against the European monarchies, she would find herself with numerous enemies.²¹

By this time, Morris' opinion about the French and their revolution were well known. He believed that the French did not know what they were doing, but still, they should be dealt with as they were before. In 1792, he wrote that although the king had been deposed, the French government still existed and the United States should continue to pay its debt to the French, just not in the way France desired.²² While he believed this, his thoughts would change. He still warned Washington that events in France were not as they seemed. He minced no words to show Washington that he was serious and the situation was out of hand.²³ In early 1793, Morris reported to Washington about negotiations between French and Prussian generals and their inability to reach a

²⁰ Sears, 130.

²¹ Sears, 128-131.

²² George Washington, *The Papers of George Washington: The Journal of the Proceedings of the President: 1793-1797*. ed. Dorothy Twohig (Charlottesville, VA.: University Press of Virginia, 1981), 12-13.

²³ Ellis, *Excellency*, 210.

settlement following the Battle of Valmy in September 1792. The information that Morris was supplying on the negotiations was different from reports that Washington had been given, showing that things were not going as well in France as Short was reporting.²⁴

Despite his belief that the government of France still functioned, Morris wanted to go to England to run the embassy. He began to feel as an outsider in France and was not receiving the information he needed to properly run the embassy in Paris in a way he felt comfortable with. He felt that his running the embassy from England would better benefit both countries because the situation was more stable and he could get clearer, quicker information. Along with this, Morris was the last of the diplomatic corps in Paris and as he was becoming more alienated from the successive governments of France, he felt that his life was in danger. The French did not agree, however. Pierre Henri Marie LeBrun-Tonde, minister of Foreign Affairs in France, believed that the government of France had not been dissolved and that Morris should be able to operate in Paris. Washington believed that the reasoning behind the movement lay more with the estrangement from the French government than fear for his life. Washington felt that Morris should remember that the French had aided the United States in gaining independence, and now the United States should reciprocate the favor. He told him to use his own judgment if he was unable to receive instructions from the government, trusting him to make the correct decision.²⁵ He believed that when Morris thought more about it, he would decide to remain in Paris, but he provided Morris with a passport to England if he ever needed to use it.²⁶ This situation showed that the friendship between the two men was strong

²⁴ Washington, *Journal*, 5.

²⁵ Washington, *Writings*, vol. 32, 64.

²⁶ Washington, *Journal*, 13-14.

enough for Washington to hand the reins of America's foreign policy concerning France over to Morris, allowing him to act almost independently.

Although Morris decided to remain in Paris to run foreign affairs with the French, LeBrun became even more upset with Morris in September 1792 because he began dealing more with the ousted monarchy than the government in power and they began to feel he did not show them the proper respect. They felt he was going behind their backs to reinstate the monarchy and that his conduct was improper and should be reported to Jefferson and should culminate with removal from his post.²⁷

However, Morris' decision to remain in France instead of leaving his post in Paris made Washington believe that he was starting to support the French Revolution a little more. Morris' dispatches began to show that he believed that all people had the right to be free and govern themselves any way they chose. Although this was the opinion of many Americans at the time, Washington did not allow public opinion to influence him. He had already learned that public opinion and the press should not influence governmental decisions because they did not have the most accurate information.²⁸ It was this thought process that led him to develop his own policy toward France, be it unpopular or not. He merely wanted to preserve America in any way possible.

Still, as quickly as the wind changes, so did the revolutionary government in France. By 1793, the Girondist government was in place, and Morris' woes continued. By March, Washington was aware of the problems that Morris encountered with the changing governments of France, but he wanted the minister to be patient as the people of France had the same right as the people of America to govern themselves. Morris was

²⁷ Washington, *Journal*, 60.

²⁸ Washington, *Writings*, vol. 32, 188-189.

being more practical. He felt that payments on the loan the United States had taken from France during the American Revolution should be suspended and not resumed until a new, stable form of government arose and was firmly established. Morris knew the French were getting payments of four million dollars annually that were going to Santo Domingo to aid the French planters who had been hurt by a slave insurrection on that island in 1791. Now the French wanted to change the policy and have three million of the payment be sent directly to France. Contrary to Morris' wishes, Washington had no problem with this new payment plan as he wanted to aid democracy wherever he could. Even though he was concerned with overpayment of the loan, he felt the United States should stay current with its payments.²⁹

The situation was now beginning to become more heated and far more dangerous. France was about to begin a war with the whole of Europe, whose leaders felt that if they won, they could reinstitute the monarchy in France, stemming democracy all across the continent. The other monarchies of Europe feared the French Revolution because they believed it might expand outside of France at any time. Morris knew that if America threw in with the French, and they lost, there was no telling what would happen to the United States, including the loss of its own freedom from a possible English backlash.

In the United States, President Washington now faced a dilemma. He was torn between remaining loyal to the treaty of 1778, which held that the United States would aid the French government in warfare should it be threatened. His dilemma was the question of validity. Was the treaty now null and void since the government that had signed it was dissolved? Trade was already breaking down between the two countries and the commercial treaty agreed to in 1778 was almost dead as the French had begun to

²⁹ Washington, *Journal*, 85-86.

impose higher taxes on American tobacco.³⁰ The President was beset on all sides by voices for the two arguments. Secretary of State Jefferson and James Madison tried to influence the President to side with the French, while Alexander Hamilton did his best to convince him otherwise. Even with these differing opinions, Washington's own choice would be heavily influenced by the reports coming from Morris in France, and from those he formulated his strategy.

The decision was not an easy one for Morris. As has been contended, Morris did not like the English over the French, or vice versa. His political opinions more closely mirrored those of the English, but he also believed in the right of self governance for all people, so long as they chose the system they would live under. Nor was he a monarchist as many people believed. Economics was the question for Morris. He felt that by tying themselves too closely with the French or the English, the United States would alienate themselves from Europe on the whole. If that situation occurred, the country would be in dire straits because she would not have viable trade outlets in Europe because no one would want to deal with them.

Neutrality was the paramount issue for the Americans during this situation. If it did not declare themselves neutral and sided with the French, it ran the risk of alienating the country from all the great powers of Europe. On the other hand, if she did declare neutrality, the French would be angered at the new nation that she had helped solidify during their revolution. Washington never wanted the United States to become involved in the affairs of Europe. He believed that Americans should not lose sight of domestic affairs at the expense of foreign affairs. He did not want any diplomatic entanglements with European nations and definitely did not want to tie America's fate with a possibly

³⁰ Washington, *Writings*, vol. 32, 24.

doomed country. He knew that America's reputation would be hurt if it was tied to a lesser European country, so the relationship must be advantageous to both.³¹ Still, the events in Europe and the actions of Edmond Genêt led Washington to issue the Proclamation of Neutrality in April 1793.³²

In February 1793, Morris warned that Edmond Genêt, the new foreign minister to the United States, had been given 300 commissions by the French government to give to privateers that were to become factors in the diplomatic relations of the United States, Great Britain, and France in 1793. He said these commissions were to authorize ships to prey on British commerce ships and destroy them. He was implying that the French were desperate to do whatever was necessary to defeat her enemies, even at the risk of alienating her friends. His warnings were realized when four ships left Charleston harbor to do just that.³³

In the end, Washington issued the Neutrality Proclamation on April 22, 1793. In the proclamation, Washington states:

“Whereas it appears that a state of war exists between Austria, Prussia, Sardinia, Great Britain, and the United Netherlands, of the one part, and France on the other; and the duty and interest of the United States require, that they should with sincerity and good faith adopt and pursue a conduct friendly and impartial toward the belligerent (sic) Powers;

I have therefore thought fit by these presents to declare the disposition of the United States to observe the conduct aforesaid towards those Powers respectfully; and to exhort and warn the citizens of the United States carefully to avoid all acts and proceedings whatsoever, which may in any manner tend to contravene such disposition.

And I do hereby also make known, that whatsoever of the

³¹ Washington, *Writings*, vol. 31, 327-328.

³² Sears, 163-164

³³ Washington, *Journal*, n132

citizens of the United States shall render himself liable to punishment or forfeiture under the law of nations, by committing, aiding, or abetting hostilities against any of the said Powers, or by carrying to any of them those articles which are deemed contraband by the modern usage of nations, will not receive the protection of the United States, against such punishment or forfeiture; and further, that I have given instructions to those officers, to whom it belongs, to cause prosecutions to be instituted against all persons, who shall, within the cognizance of the courts of the United States, violate the law of nations, with respect to the Powers at war, or any of them.

In testimony whereof, I have caused the seal of the United States of America to be affixed to these presents, and signed the same with my hand. Done at the city of Philadelphia, the twenty-second day of April, one thousand seven hundred and ninety-three, and of the Independence of the United States of America the seventeenth.”³⁴

However, there was a serious backlash against the proclamation among some of the leading Americans of the day. John Marshall thought that the proclamation and Morris’ appointment showed that the United States did not have confidence in the French government or the people and that it was hostile to France.³⁵ James Madison wrote to Thomas Jefferson that he disapproved of the United States beginning to favor Great Britain over France, which is exactly what he believed that the Proclamation of Neutrality had done and that it had been unfortunate Morris had been granted his ministership.³⁶ Madison also mentioned that he felt Morris had undue influence over George Washington and exercised it because he was hostile to the revolutionary government of France.

³⁴ George Washington, *The Proclamation of Neutrality 1793*. (<http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/neutra93.htm> (accessed November 11, 2006)).

³⁵ John Marshall, *The Papers of John Marshall*. Vol. 2, ed. Irwin Rhodes (Norman, OK.: University of Oklahoma Press, c1969) 222-223.

³⁶ James Madison, *The Papers of James Madison*. Vol. 15, ed. Irving Brant (Charlottesville, VA.: University Press of Virginia, 1983), 94.

However, the most vehement opponent was Thomas Jefferson. Although he supported neutrality in theory, Jefferson had some serious doubts about a proclamation and how it would play with the rest of the world, especially France. From his post as Secretary of State, Jefferson was in charge of foreign affairs for the new government, but was a strong supporter of the French Revolution, a position that influenced his policies. Jefferson had been minister to France at the beginning of the revolution. The events he witnessed were relatively peaceful and he believed that was the way the entire revolution would be. However, after he left France, he saw the revolution through an American looking glass and his thoughts kept him from seeing the truth, something he would not see until the rise of Napoleon Bonaparte. Along with this, he believed that Morris was a snake that was out to implement his own anti-French policy.³⁷ He had long thought that the royal family of France was unfit for rule and that American liberty was going to spread to Europe. He truly believed that the French Revolution would end without bloodshed, as he had seen it begin.³⁸ He believed that the success of the French Revolution would prove that republicanism could work and would show the monarchists in America that their governmental system was wrong.³⁹ As Secretary of State, it was up to Jefferson to ensure that the neutrality policy would be abided by and that it would be implemented. However, there had been a rift forming between Washington and Jefferson. Washington had begun to lose confidence in Jefferson and knew of his hostilities toward Morris, so he began to take tighter control over foreign affairs and dispatches.⁴⁰ On April

³⁷ Melanie Randolph Miller, *Envoy to the Terror: Gouverneur Morris & the French Revolution*. (Dulles, VA.: Potomac Books, 2005), xiii.

³⁸ Joseph Ellis, *American Sphinx: The Character of Thomas Jefferson*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1998), 126-127.

³⁹ Dumas Malone, *Jefferson and the Ordeal of Liberty*. Jefferson and His Time Series (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1962), 50.

⁴⁰ Washington, *Writings*, vol. 32, 415.

28, 1793, Jefferson took a bold step to show his opposition to the Neutrality Proclamation.

Before issuance of the policy, Washington had asked for his cabinet members' opinions on neutrality and if the United States had the right to declare their treaty of 1778 with France void. Jefferson's opinion had been a definite rebuttal of that published by Alexander Hamilton, who said that the treaty was with the monarchy of France, not the people. Jefferson in his argument used different facts to try to persuade his readers that the treaty with France was not with Louis Capet, but with the people of France. "The reception of the minister at all ... is an acknowledgement of the legitimacy of their government," was one of the arguments that Jefferson cited, saying that if United States recognized the government of France, why not the treaties made with her?⁴¹ Jefferson said that the United States had a moral obligation to France and that no country or person could shirk such obligations without good reason. He said that the treaty did not tie the United States with France if she did go to war. However, the United States should try its best to foster a republican form of government in Europe. He was afraid that if the United States did enforce a neutral policy it would surely bring it to the brink of war with all the countries of Europe.⁴²

Washington had already been receiving reports from Morris, but an aide closer to him than anyone began to exert his influence as well. Alexander Hamilton, Secretary of the Treasury, had been trying to influence foreign policy since the fires of revolution had been stoked in France. Morris, because of his distrust of Jefferson, had been sending diplomatic dispatches through Hamilton's office since he had been given his post in

⁴¹ Thomas Jefferson, "Opinion on Treaties with France" in *The Thomas Jefferson Reader* (Old Saybrook, CT.: Konecky & Konecky, unknown), 319.

⁴² Jefferson, "Opinion," 316-320.

Paris, believing that the dispatches might not reach Washington's desk otherwise.

Hamilton had questioned the legitimacy of the French republic and felt that this new government was dangerous.⁴³ In his opinion on neutrality, Hamilton said, "France was a monarchy when we entered into treaties with it; but it had declared itself a republic, and is preparing a republican form of government."⁴⁴ Hamilton believed that since France had changed its form of government, all treaties with that country were null and void.⁴⁵

Jefferson believed that the questions that were posed before the cabinet meeting on April 19, 1793, were not written by Washington, but by Hamilton. Jefferson believed that Hamilton had phrased the questions in his own words and thoughts so that he could make sure that the United States declared its neutrality. Hamilton was afraid of the mob rule that was occurring in France and feared that if the United States involved herself in France it could possibly spread across the Atlantic. Much like Morris, it was question of preserving America.⁴⁶

This proclamation assured that the relationship between the United States and France would become even more strained. Genêt continued with his mission to enlist pro-French Americans and ships to strike against Spanish Florida in blatant disregard of American neutrality. Soon, Washington, backed by Hamilton, disallowed these ships to use American ports and started to demand the recall of Genêt from his post. Even with these demands, the French continued to blatantly disregard American neutrality. They used ships to prey on American ships throughout the Atlantic, disrupting trade between

⁴³ Malone, 51.

⁴⁴ Jefferson, "Opinion," 316.

⁴⁵ Alexander Hamilton, *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*. Vol. XIV February 1793-June 1793, ed. Harold Syrett (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), n329.

⁴⁶ Hamilton, *Papers*, vol. XIV, n328-329.

America and England.⁴⁷ The recall soon came, but not because of America's outrage at Genêt. The Girondists had fallen out of power. Although the new government was sure to recall Genêt itself, it made one demand before they agreed to recall the foreign minister.⁴⁸

It demanded the recall of Gouverneur Morris in return. The leaders of the new French government knew that it was Morris who had influenced Washington's opinion toward neutrality and that he was hostile to the French government. The new French leaders also assured the United States that if they did recall Morris that their embargo against American goods would be lifted. Washington had stood by Morris as long as he could, but his outspoken disagreements over the French Revolution, his protection of royal and noble enemies of France and the hope of resumption of trade with France forced Washington to replace him.⁴⁹ Still, the President was not going to be played as a puppet by the French, who wanted Joel Barlow, a known pro-French advocate and poet living in Paris, to replace Morris. Instead, Washington decided to send James Monroe. Monroe was also pro-French, but Washington knew him better and felt that he could trust him.⁵⁰

The decision to name Morris as the minister to France had been an intelligent decision by Washington. While many people did not like Morris or trust his judgment, he never let his own personal opinion get in the way of his job. Washington knew that Morris could be trusted to give him the most accurate information possible and that his opinions would be invaluable. Morris' writings, both personal and professional, brought

⁴⁷ Alexander Hamilton, *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*. Vol. XV June 1793-January 1794, ed. Harold Syrett (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), n401.

⁴⁸ Unknown. *Genêt, Edmond Charles Edouard* (<http://www.bartleby.com/65/ge/Genet-Ed.html> (accessed November 11, 2006)).

⁴⁹ Thomas Bailey, *A Diplomatic History of the American People*. (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1964), 79.

⁵⁰ Sears, 291.

considerable information to Washington, showing him the ugly side of the French Revolution that men like Jefferson and Madison either could not, or refused to, see. Over the years from 1789-1793, Morris wrote hundreds of letters to his colleagues in America, telling them of what was going wrong in France and that America should watch her dealings with the French and not sacrifice herself for a friend. Along with this, Morris understood economics and knew that Britain would be a more valuable trade partner for America, no matter the outcome of the war. His influence was more concerned with economics than keeping a friendship with the French. Through his efforts, Morris cemented his name as one of the most important figures in a diplomatic policy that dominated the United States for almost one hundred twenty years.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Few Americans played a more important role in developing American foreign policy than did Gouverneur Morris. He should be viewed as being as important, if not more so, than Dean Acheson or John Quincy Adams. His contributions during his stay in France during the French Revolution, in particular during the Reign of Terror, have long been overlooked. In terms of diplomatic history, the period 1790-1794 is the formative time of the new American nation and needs to be studied more.

Morris was an important man in the middle of all of this. Perhaps the most important man to George Washington on the diplomatic front, Morris knew this and wielded his opinions heavily. Morris feared the French Revolution and what was going to come out of it. He did not, as he has often been painted, believe that it was incorrect. He believed that all people had the right to be free and choose any form of government that they wanted. However, as a study of his writings makes clear, Morris did not believe this was possible in France. According to Morris, the people of France were merely pawns in a larger power struggle among the leaders of the French Revolution who often had very conflicting ideas about what they wanted to do.

Many historians have blamed Morris for the hostile relations that developed during this time between the French and the Americans. While this is true to a certain extent, it is not wholly correct. It can be argued that Morris was probably the reason that hostilities between the two countries did not become even more inflamed. Many Americans in France wanted Morris to take a tougher stance against the French because of the transgressions that had occurred to them. Time after time he refused because he

knew that to do so would risk war with France, which was something that the United States could not afford.¹

While Morris' activities in France were important, his reports back to America proved to be even more significant. This work has focused on the information that was being transmitted back to leaders in America, George Washington in particular. Morris' relationship with Washington put him into a perfect spot to exert influence on the President and tell him his innermost thoughts on the situation in France. Through writings and dispatches, Morris did just that. While these opinions and thoughts did not take immediate effect, over time, they began to sink in. It was Morris who had the ear of the President on matters of diplomacy in Europe. While Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and others were Francophiles, Morris was a realist.

He did not want to tie the United States too closely with one nation over the other. He was not a lover of the British, as has been contended, but a man who understood that by alienating the foremost power in Europe, America could never recover. He also knew that U.S. neutrality, along with his own actions as minister, would alienate the French from the Americans, but he did not care. Morris knew that the French needed the Americans more than the Americans needed the French.

It was Morris who knew the workings of the French Revolution and the dangers of involving the United States in it. He did not want to risk American independence just to hold true to a treaty that many believed to be null and void. Morris saw the revolution for what it was, not what people, such as Jefferson, wanted it to be. His realist views of the revolution, leaders, and people of France had more influence on the Washington Administration than any thing else at that time, be it writings of Jefferson, Short,

¹ Miller, 240-241.

Hamilton, or newspapers. The period 1790-1794 was a dangerous time for the United States, a fact that Morris understood. Had the new nation become involved in the situation in Europe, it may have come through unscathed, but more probable was that the United States would have fallen victim to either the runaway democracy of France or fallen back into the monarchial sphere of influence of a European power because it would have been weakened through the fighting. Morris did not want either of these events to happen and set out to make sure that they would not happen.

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