

Thomas Jefferson to William C. C. Claiborne, December 20, 1806, from The Works of Thomas Jefferson in Twelve Volumes. Federal Edition. Collected and Edited by Paul Leicester Ford.

TO THE GOVERNOR OF LOUISIANA J. MSS. (WILLIAM CHARLES COLE CLAIBORNE.)

Washington, Dec. 20, 06.

Dear Sir, —You will receive your formal instructions from Genl. Dearborn. This is private of course & merely for your more full information. You already have a general knowledge of the insurrection prepared by Colo. Burr. His object is to take possession of N. Orleans, as a station from whence to make an expedition against Vera Cruz & Mexico. His party began their formation at the mouth Beaver, from whence they started the 1st or 2d of this month, and would collect all the way down the Ohio. We trust that the opposition we have provided at Marietta, Cincinnati, Louisville & Massac will be sufficient to stop him; but we are not certain because we do not know his strength. It is therefore possible he may escape & then his great rendezvous is to be at Natchez. You can judge as well as I when he can be there, leaving Pittsburg or Beaver Dec. 1. We send our present orders by both the Tennessee & Athens routes, in expectation they will reach Natchez & N. Orleans in time for the whole force of both countries to be collected & to take the best point for opposition. The orders are to the governor of Missipi to bring forward the whole force of his militia instantly to act in conjunction with the force at Fort Adams: to the commanding officer of the gunboats &c. to move with his whole force immediately up the river & to take the station which shall be thought best: we presume it will be a little above Fort Adams or Fort Coupee, but within reach of them, that he may fall back under the protection of

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their guns if in danger from superior numbers. We expect you will collect all your force of militia, act in conjunction with Colo. Freeman & take such a stand as shall be concluded best. These orders are given to the several officers distinctly, because Genl. Wilkinson is believed to be kept at bay on the west side of the Misipi by the

Spanish force under advice from Yrujo, who has been duped by Burr to believe he means only the capture of N. Orleans & the separation of the western country. This is a summary of the orders given; but, if they vary in any point from what the Secretaries of war and of the navy direct, you are to suppose that I recite them incorrectly, & that theirs are the real orders, which it is my intention should be followed. Do not suffer yourself to be lulled into a moment's delay by any information which shall not come to you in the most unquestionable form. Should he get possession of N. Orleans measures are now taking for it's immediate recovery, and for calling forth such a force as will be sufficient. He has been able to decoy a great proportion of his people by making them believe the government secretly approves of this expedition against the Spanish territories. We are looking with anxiety to see what exertions the western country will make in the first instance for their own defence; and I confess that my confidence in them is entire.¹

¹ Endorsed by Jefferson: "This letter was left to be finished on the 21st, but the mail went off at 2 a. m., which was earlier than I expected: so it was not sent. It is kept, as containing the sum of what was agreed upon at a meeting of heads of Departments, (except Mr. Gallatin who was not present) on the 19th of Dec. 1806."