

## EXCERPTS FROM A LETTER BY THOMAS JEFFERSON TO WILLIAM CHARLES JARVIS, 28 SEPTEMBER 1820

*Jefferson is explaining to his friend William Jarvis why there should be a balance of power among the three branches of government. He also talks about the education of youth and why he is in favor of education of all citizens. The Constitution had been ratified in 1788.*

Monticello Sep. 28. 20.

I thank you, Sir, for the copy of your Republican which you have been so kind as to send me; and I should have acknowledged it sooner, but that I am just returned home after a long absence. I have not yet had time to read it seriously: but in looking over it cursorily I see much in it to approve, and shall be glad if it shall lead our youth to the practice of thinking on such subjects & for themselves. that it will have this tendency may be expected, and for that reason I feel an urgency to note what I deem an error in it, the more requiring notice as your opinion is strengthened by that of many others. you seem in pages 84. & 148. to consider the judges as the ultimate arbiters of all constitutional questions: a very dangerous doctrine indeed and one which would place us under the despotism of an Oligarchy. our judges are as honest as other men, and not more so. they have, with others, the same passions for party, for power, and the privileges of their corps...their power the more dangerous as they are in office for life, and not responsible, as the other functionaries are, to the elective countrol. the constitution has erected no such single tribunal knowing that, to whatever hands confided, with the corruptions of time & party it's members would become despots. it has more wisely made all the departments co-equal and co-sovereign within themselves...

...I know no safe depository of the ultimate powers of the society, but the people themselves: and if we think them not enlightened enough to exercise their control with a wholesome discretion, the remedy is, not to take it from them, but to inform their discretion by education. this is the true corrective of abuses of constitutional power. Pardon me, Sir, for this difference of opinion. my personal interest in such questions is entirely extinct; but not my wishes for the longest possible continuance of our government on it's pure principles. if the three powers maintain their mutual independence on each other, it may last long: but not so if either can assume the authorities of the other. I ask your candid reconsideration of this subject, and am sufficiently sure you will form a candid conclusion. Accept the assurance of my great respect.

TH: Jefferson

*Source: Jefferson, T. (1820, Sept. 28). [Letter to William Charles Jarvis]. Founders Online, National Archives. Retrieved from <http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/98-01-02-1540>.*