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Thomas Jefferson, **Message to Congress on the Burr Conspiracy** (1807)

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*President Thomas Jefferson on January 22, 1807, announced that he intended to prosecute Aaron Burr for treason. Jefferson's message to Congress set out what he believed was the evidence against Burr and the nature of the conspiracy. The rendezvous at the mouth of the Cumberland took place on Blennerhasset Island. Blennerhasset Island was the home of Harman Blennerhasset, an alleged member of the Burr conspiracy. What happened on that island was the crucial issue in the Burr trial. Jefferson insisted that Burr was organizing an army aimed at conquest. Burr insisted that a meeting of armed men may have taken place, but that no unlawful act was committed.*

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Some time in the latter part of September I received intimations that designs were in agitation in the Western country unlawful and unfriendly to the peace of the Union, and that the prime mover in these was Aaron Burr, heretofore distinguished by the favor of his country. . . .

It was not till the latter part of October that the objects of the conspiracy began to be perceived. . . . By this time it was known that many boats were under preparation, stores of provisions collecting, and an unusual number of suspicious characters in motion on the Ohio and its waters. . . . [W]e learnt that a confidential agent of Aaron Burr had been deputed to him with communications, partly written in cipher and partly oral, explaining his designs, exaggerating his resources, and making such offers of emolument and command to engage him and the army in his unlawful enterprise as he had flattered himself would be successful. . . .

. . . It appeared that [Burr] contemplated two distinct objects, which might be carried on either jointly or separately, and either the one or the other first, as circumstances should direct. One of these was the severance of the Union of these States by the Alleghany Mountains; the other an attack on Mexico. . . .

He found at once that the attachment of the Western country to the present Union was not to be shaken; that its dissolution could not be effected with the consent of its inhabitants, and that his resources were inadequate as yet to effect it by force. He took his course then at once, determined to seize on New Orleans, plunder the bank there, possess himself of the military and naval stores, and proceed on his expedition to Mexico, and to this object all his means and preparations were now directed. . . .

In Kentucky a premature attempt to bring Burr to justice without sufficient evidence for his conviction had produced a popular impression in his favor and a general disbelief of his guilt. This gave him an unfortunate opportunity of hastening his equipments. . . . Some boats (accounts vary from five to double or treble that number) and persons (differently estimated from 100 to 300) had . . . passed the Falls of Ohio to rendezvous at the mouth of Cumberland with others expected down that river.

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