

**Thomas Jefferson's Disapproval of a Third Term as President.
He will follow Washington's precedent.**

January 10, 1808. To the General Assembly of North Carolina.

"I learn, with the liveliest sentiments of gratitude & respect, your approbation of my conduct in the various charges which my country has been pleased to confide to me at different times. And especially that the administration of our public affairs, since my accession to the chief magistracy, has been so far satisfactory, that my continuance in that office, after its present term, would be acceptable to you. But that I should lay down my charge at a proper period, is as much a duty, as to have borne it faithfully. If some termination to the services of the Chief magistrate, be not fixed by the constitution, or supplied by practice, his office, nominally for years, will in fact become for life; and history shows how easily that degenerates into an inheritance. Believing that a representative government, responsible at short periods of election, is that which produces the greatest sum of happiness to mankind, I feel it a duty to do no act which shall essentially impair that principle; and I should unwillingly be the person who, disregarding the sound precedent set by an illustrious predecessor, should furnish the first example of prolongation beyond the second term of office...

Declining a re-election on grounds which cannot but be approved, it will be the great comfort of my future days, & the satisfactory reward of a service of forty years, to carry into retirement such testimonies as you have been pleased to give, of the approbation and good will of my fellow citizens generally and I supplicate the Being in whose hands we all are, to preserve our country in freedom & independence, & to bestow on yourselves the blessings of His favor.

TH. JEFFERSON

Jan. 10 1808.

Source: Rare Book Collection, Library of Congress.
