

The Politics of Friendship: Du Pont, Jefferson, Madison, and the Physiocratic Dream for the New World

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ALTHOUGH the name of his family's company is now recognized around the world, the *pater familias* of the Du Pont clan, Pierre Samuel Du Pont de Nemours, remains little known outside of his native France. When he is mentioned at all within the context of American history, it is usually just to identify him as one of Thomas Jefferson's many friends with a penchant for political economy. As we shall see, his connection to and interest in the United States ran much deeper, and his desire to play a major role in pushing America in a distinctly physiocratic direction was much greater than has hitherto been recognized. Du Pont, in fact, viewed the United States in its infancy as a *tabula rasa*, a place where the best ideas from Europe might win acceptance.¹ Through his friendship with Thomas Jefferson, which dated from the 1780s, and the latter's influence over his presidential successor, James Madison, he hoped, even expected, to be able to bring to fruition in America projects that were both near and dear to his heart.

By closely examining three works—Du Pont's plan for a system of national education in the United States, which was written in 1800 and published in Paris in 1812, but not translated into English for more than a century; the treatise on taxation, which he sent to Jefferson in

¹ See, for instance, Du Pont to Jefferson, 5 Nov. 1787 (Julian P. Boyd, et al., eds., *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, 34 vols. to date [1950–], 12:326). In this, Du Pont was representative of a wider trend. The historian Allan Potofsky has noted that “[t]he image of the young Republic that emerges from the discourse on commerce is that of a nation in dire need of economic tutelage. . . . the United States was rendered by French commercial ideologies from the end of the ancient regime to the Terror as a vast economic experiment for the philosophes and revolutionaries to remake the world” (“The Political Economy of the French-American Debt Debate: The Ideological Uses of Atlantic Commerce, 1787 to 1800,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 63 [July 2006]: 514).

the summer of 1810; and his essay on American agriculture and manufacturing, which he submitted to President Madison in January 1816—we will be able to determine both the nature and impact of his plans for the New World. The first of these works has long been known to scholars interested either in Du Pont or in educational reform. Although the second was translated into English and published in a Philadelphia newspaper in 1815, it has received scant attention from the scholarly community. Indeed, to date, the only recognition of its existence is contained in a brief article printed in the short-lived *French-American Review* in the fall of 1982.² The third has been published, albeit only in French, and is a part of a well-known collection, the James Madison Papers at the Library of Congress; even so, historians have taken little notice of it.³

FROM ÉCONOMISTE TO ECONOMIC ADVISER

Pierre Samuel Du Pont de Nemours, the eldest son of a Parisian watchmaker and related, through his mother, to an impoverished noble family, was born in December 1739.⁴ He attended the school of a M. Viard in Paris as a young man, but was removed from it when his practical-minded father learned that he was spending much of his time writing poetry. The termination of his formal education did nothing to restrain Du Pont's love of learning, however. During the years that followed, he diligently studied everything from agriculture and political economy to medicine and military science.⁵ By the time he reached his early twenties, Du Pont had begun putting his ideas down on paper and seeing them into print. Two of his earliest publications, *Réflexions sur l'écrit intitulé: Richesse de l'Etat* and *De l'exportation et l'importation des Grains*, published in 1763 and 1764 respectively, came to the attention of the noted French economists François Quesnay and Anne Robert Jacques Turgot. Impressed by his skill as a writer and recognizing that his opinions dovetailed neatly with their own, Quesnay convinced Du Pont to join their attempt to bring their ideas into the French mainstream.⁶

²Daryl M. Hafter, "DuPont's America as a Physiocratic Ideal," *French-American Review* 6 (Fall 1982): 234–45.

³The essay Du Pont sent to Madison in 1816 was published, interestingly enough, in *The Correspondence of Jefferson and Du Pont de Nemours*, edited by Gilbert Chinard (Baltimore, 1931), 240–50.

⁴As a young man, Du Pont spelled his name "Dupont," like his father. Upon entering the French National Assembly in 1789, he altered his last name to "Du Pont de Nemours" to distinguish himself from three other unrelated Duponts serving with him (Ambrose Saricks, *Pierre Samuel Du Pont de Nemours* [1965], 360).

⁵Pierre Jolly, *Du Pont de Nemours: Apostle of Liberty and the Promised Land*, trans. Elise du Pont Elrick (1956), 10.

⁶James McLain, *The Economic Writings of Du Pont de Nemours* (1977), 30.

The most important principles of “physiocracy,” the name given by Quesnay, Turgot, and Du Pont to their particular brand of political economy, may be summarized briefly. According to the physiocrats, value comes from what we now call primary production: the raising of crops, harvesting of timber, catching of fish, and extraction of minerals from the earth. Wealth, therefore, is increased only by making agriculture, forestry, fishing, and mining more efficient. Growing out of this basic belief is the notion that the only just tax is one levied on the net revenue from cultivated land. While taxes on goods, capital, and labor drive up prices and interest rates and, thus, discourage productivity, limiting taxation to the net revenue from land would, they thought, eliminate such market distortions and be much less expensive to collect.⁷ The physiocrats also provided a solution to the perennial problem created by the farmers’ need for sufficiently high prices and society’s demand for cheap, abundant crops. Both requirements might be met, they argued, through the removal of restrictions and taxes on trade. Expanded markets at home and abroad would ensure both stable prices for farmers and abundance, even during hard economic times.⁸ Finally, the physiocrats contended that industrial production should be dispersed throughout the countryside and that large-scale manufacturing should be limited to a handful of industries.⁹

Between 1763 and 1773, Du Pont published voluminously in support of such policies and gradually won recognition as one of the clearest communicators and principal popularizers of physiocratic economic thought.¹⁰ By the mid-1770s, however, he had grown tired of the group’s inability to win widespread public support and decided to join the one institution that had the power to effect social change quickly: the government.¹¹ On the recommendation of his friend and fellow physiocrat Turgot, Du Pont was named inspector-general of French commerce in 1775.¹² Four years later, the comte de Vergennes appointed him

⁷ McLain, *Economic Writings of Du Pont*, 25–26, 168–69, 180–81; Augustin F. Silvestre, *Notice biographique sur M. Dupont* (1818), 5; Pierre Samuel Du Pont de Nemours, *On Economic Curves* (1955), 3, 6–7; Jolly, *Du Pont*, 28–31.

⁸ Hafter, “DuPont’s America,” 234–35. As Du Pont wrote Madame De Stael on 26 Feb. 1805, “If farmers are not certain of being able to sell abroad, they cultivate only what is necessary for average consumption. And if bad weather harms the harvests, the result is famine. . . . When one cultivates, on the contrary, in order to sell abroad, there is always enough left to eat, even in bad years” (James F. Marshall, ed. and trans., *De Stael-Du Pont Letters: Correspondence of Madame De Stael and Pierre Samuel Du Pont de Nemours* [1968], 266–67).

⁹ Hafter, “DuPont’s America,” 236.

¹⁰ Gustave Schelle, *Du Pont de Nemours et l’école physiocratique* (1971), 1; McLain, *Economic Writings of Du Pont*, 221, 224.

¹¹ McLain, *Economic Writings of Du Pont*, 222.

¹² One scholar has called Du Pont’s appointment “the first important case of a professional economist turned government policy maker” (McLain, *Economic Writings of Du Pont*, 225).

inspector-general of manufactures. In the latter capacity, Du Pont collected and disseminated economic data to those in positions of power.¹³ Nor was that all. In January and again in November 1782, he urged Vergennes to link a commercial agreement to the treaty restoring peace between France and Great Britain. Although Du Pont's influence on this issue is difficult to gauge, what is beyond dispute is that the Treaty of Paris of 1783 did, in fact, provide for the appointment of commissioners to negotiate a new commercial arrangement between the two countries. While not directly participating in the negotiations leading up to the Anglo-French commercial treaty of 1786 or, apparently, having much of a say as to its provisions, Du Pont performed an important supporting role as a "collector and interpreter of statistics, an organizer of information needed by the treaty-makers," and a staunch supporter of the liberalization of France's commercial laws.¹⁴ In time, he hoped, the advantages arising out of the treaty—expanded markets for French goods, reduced smuggling, increased royal revenues, the dissipation of international tensions and commercial rivalries, and the added impetus given to native manufacturing, among others—would convince the masses of the benefits of free trade. In this, he was to be sorely disappointed. By the time the agreement came into effect in the summer of 1787, France was in the midst of a severe economic downturn, which was unfairly blamed by many of Du Pont's countrymen on the new commercial treaty.¹⁵

DU PONT, JEFFERSON, AND AMERICA

It was at this time that Du Pont first came to the notice of the American minister to France, Thomas Jefferson. In fact, the first mention of him in the Virginian's extant correspondence, a description of Du Pont as a gentleman "of great worth and knowlege, and holding a very distinguished office in the department of Commerce," dates from early October 1787.¹⁶ One month later, Du Pont sent Jefferson a short piece he

Another claims he can be viewed as "a crude prototype of the modern adviser on economic affairs found today in the policy-making councils of every major state in the world" (Orville T. Murphy, "DuPont de Nemours and the Anglo-French Commercial Treaty of 1786," *Economic History Review* 19 [1966]: 569).

¹³Murphy, "DuPont and the Anglo-French Commercial Treaty," 569–73; McLain, *Economic Writings of Du Pont*, 41.

¹⁴Murphy, "DuPont and the Anglo-French Commercial Treaty," 573–76. According to Murphy, Du Pont's role has often been exaggerated by historians (*ibid.*, 569). Gustave Schelle, for instance, refers to Du Pont as "the author of the commercial treaty of 1786 with England" (Schelle, *Du Pont et l'école physiocratique*, 1). Author's translation.

¹⁵Murphy, "DuPont and the Anglo-French Commercial Treaty," 577–80.

¹⁶Jefferson to Robert R. Livingston, 6 Oct. 1787 (Boyd, *Jefferson Papers*, 12:213).

had written on hospitals for the poor living in large cities. Jefferson, who was apparently quite impressed by this work, complimented the author by saying that he had found it to include “that geometric exactitude of thought that characterizes everything that flows from your pen.”¹⁷ Furthermore, in late July 1788, Jefferson forwarded to his friend James Madison a copy of Du Pont’s recently published *Lettre à la Chambre de Commerce de Normandie*, a defense of the 1786 commercial treaty, with the comment that it contains “such excellent principles and observations as will richly repay the trouble of reading it.”¹⁸

A number of things drew Du Pont and Jefferson together. As Du Pont’s ultimate political goal since the 1770s seems to have been to place himself at the side of persons of influence, and as he could not help but recognize Jefferson as an individual possessing the ability to reach the highest offices in the American government, the Frenchman had much to gain from the relationship. By becoming Jefferson’s trusted confidante and counselor, Du Pont might hope to play a role in his decision making, if the American chose to stay in politics after his return home from France.¹⁹ This is not to say that Du Pont’s reasons for entering into the friendship were entirely mercenary. He truly admired Jefferson’s intelligence and many talents and believed him to be “among the great governors of nations.”²⁰ For his part, Jefferson thought Du Pont “one of the very great men of the age” and “the ablest man in France.”²¹ They found much common ground, moreover, in their shared love of learning, humanity, and justice, and in their desire to be useful to those around them.²²

Du Pont’s rapport with Jefferson also deepened his interest in a subject that had long fascinated him: the New World. While editor of the physiocratic journal *Ephémérides du citoyen* during the late 1760s and early 1770s, he had often published book reviews, articles, and letters about America. Shortly before France’s entrance into the Revolutionary War on the American side, Du Pont had offered to travel across the

¹⁷Du Pont to Jefferson, 5 Nov. 1787; Jefferson to Du Pont, 6 Nov. 1787 (*ibid.*, 326, 329). Jefferson’s compliment, which he rendered in French, reads “cette exactitude geometrique d’idée qui caracterise tout ce qui sort de votre plume.” Author’s translation.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 13:441.

¹⁹Saricks, *Du Pont*, 358; Jolly, *Du Pont*, 1; Raymond Betts, “Du Pont de Nemours in Napoleonic France, 1802–1815,” *French Historical Studies* 5 (Autumn 1967): 194.

²⁰Du Pont to De Stael, 8 Apr. 1801 (Marshall, *De Stael-Du Pont Letters*, 70).

²¹First quote, Jefferson to James Madison, 4 Apr. 1800 (William T. Hutchinson, et al., eds., *The Papers of James Madison*, 1st ser., 17 vols. [1962–91], 17:379). Second quote, Jefferson to Thomas Mann Randolph, 17 Jan. 1799 (Boyd, *Jefferson Papers*, 30:626).

²²Jefferson to Madison, 20 Apr. 1800 (Hutchinson, *Madison Papers*, 16:381); Jefferson to Eleuthère I. du Pont, 9 Sept. 1817 (Library of Congress [hereafter, DLC]: Jefferson Papers); Washington *National Intelligencer*, 15 Aug. 1817; Schelle, *Du Pont et l’école physiocratique*, 4.

Atlantic as an agent of the French government to gather information about its potential ally. While not uncritical of its shortcomings, he had long viewed the United States as a land of opportunity and freedom.²³ Unfortunately, both Du Pont's opportunity for advancement and his personal freedom were increasingly jeopardized by the radicalization of French politics that followed the fall of the Bastille.

Although Du Pont had been elected to the Estates General in 1789 and served in both the Constituent and National assemblies during the years that followed the outbreak of the French Revolution, he found the extremism of many of his revolutionary counterparts highly unsettling. In the fall of 1790, after having spoken out against the issuance of increasingly valueless paper money, for instance, "he was pursued and surrounded by the [Parisian] mob. They had not gone further than injurious epithets, and menaces," Jefferson's former private secretary and the current United States chargé d'affaires in Paris, William Short, reported, "before the garde nationale" fortuitously "came to his relief."²⁴ Du Pont left public life soon thereafter and rejoined the Revolution only in a nominal way by taking a seat on the powerless *Conseil des Anciens* in 1795. Two years later, he and his son Irénée were unjustly accused of conspiring to overthrow the Republic and restore the Bourbon monarchy. Although they were released from prison after two days, the newspaper Du Pont had been editing was suppressed, and, within a week, he had resigned his seat on the *Conseil*.²⁵

Although Du Pont apparently decided at about this time to immigrate to the United States, it would be two years before he left France. He feared, with good reason, that if he decamped suddenly and without securing permission from the government, he might be viewed as an émigré, which would place both his property in France and his family at risk. To make his flight from revolutionary France seem a bit more patriotic, Du Pont hit upon a number of happy expedients. First, he finagled an appointment as an explorer for the *Institut National*. Second, Du Pont curried favor with the ruling Directory by offering to negotiate more advantageous trade relations with the United States during his sojourn in America. Third, he founded a trading company that would ease the way for Frenchmen (and others) who wished to do business in the United States. Last, Du Pont proposed the establishment of a small, self-contained colony—and perhaps even a college—on Virginia's western frontier. When investors doubted the practicality of the

²³Mack Thompson, "Causes and Circumstances of the DuPont Family's Emigration," *French Historical Studies* 6 (Spring 1969): 62–64.

²⁴William Short to Jefferson, 26 Sept. 1790 (Boyd, *Jefferson Papers*, 17:524).

²⁵Thompson, "Causes . . . of the DuPont Family's Emigration," 60–62.

latter scheme, he was not above using his friendship with Vice President Jefferson to attempt to assuage their fears. Although Du Pont's efforts to get his "Compagnie d'Amérique" off the ground ultimately proved unsuccessful, he was able over time to reestablish his credit with the powers that be in Paris.²⁶ When he set sail for America in the fall of 1799, it was with the full knowledge, consent, and support of the French government.²⁷

Du Pont arrived in the United States giddy with enthusiasm and sincerely intending, as he wrote prior to his departure from France, "to prolong this voyage" for the rest of his life.²⁸ His chief wish, he said, was "to die in a country where liberty is not only in the laws, always more or less well, more or less poorly executed; but is principally in the constant habits of the nation."²⁹ For Du Pont, the United States was "the only free country in the Universe, [and] the only one that can hope to be, hereafter, an example to the world."³⁰

DU PONT'S PROPOSED SYSTEM OF NATIONAL EDUCATION

One area in which both Jefferson and Du Pont hoped that the United States would set a good example was education. In mid-April 1800, shortly after Du Pont's arrival in America, Jefferson wrote asking for his ideas about which branches of science should be included in an academic curriculum. A week later, Du Pont sent the vice president a work on French education that he had written a decade earlier and promised to forward his thoughts on the subject.³¹ Although Jefferson had explicitly stated that he did not "mean to trouble" him "with writing a treatise," it soon became clear that this was precisely what the Frenchman intended to do. Du Pont declared that it was vital that his analysis consider childhood education, because a "plan of education that does not begin with the elementary schools is what is called in France 'putting the plow before the oxen.'"³²

For Du Pont, the stakes were extremely high. In his view, the United States and its republican principles would not be safe "so long as your power is not shaped by a general education, by civil and military habits,

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 67–69, 74, 76.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 76.

²⁸ Du Pont to Jefferson, 27 Aug. 1798 (translation in Boyd, *Jefferson Papers*, 30:502).

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Du Pont to Jefferson, 12 May 1803 (DLC: *Jefferson Papers*). Author's translation.

³¹ Jefferson to Du Pont, 12 Apr. 1800; Du Pont to Jefferson, 21 Apr. 1800 (both DLC: *Jefferson Papers*).

³² Jefferson to Du Pont, 12 Apr. 1800; Du Pont to Jefferson, 6 May 1800 (both DLC: *Jefferson Papers*). Author's translation.

by good little classic books, studied, learned, copied, sung, and aiming even at the dances of childhood, animating those of youth and manhood, which out of respect for law, patriotism, zeal for liberty, from the most heroic devotion to the country, make a *Religion*.”³³

In consequence, he wasted no time in putting pen to paper. Between 6 May, when he informed Jefferson that he was ready to commence work, and 15 June, when he announced its completion, Du Pont composed a veritable volume.³⁴ The work was divided into three parts: “Primary Schools,” “Secondary Schools or Colleges,” and “The University.” In the first section, Du Pont laid down a rigorous course of study for students between the ages of seven and ten. All were to take classes in cosmology, agriculture, geography, natural history, hygiene, science, geometry, arithmetic, and the mechanic arts.³⁵ The last was particularly emphasized. Du Pont believed that it was necessary for every American family to “have at least one well-informed member; for a trained mechanic is not always within reach.”³⁶ The best students were to be rewarded by being allowed to study history.³⁷

Throughout their schooling, they were to be taught to be industrious, love learning, pursue excellence, and practice good citizenship.³⁸ According to Du Pont, the primary schools had an obligation as well to teach those under their care to respect the liberty and property of others; to be true to their word; to exhibit benevolence, empathy, and forbearance; and to understand that “the *repayment* to children, the aged and the infirm of the kindness we ourselves received in our infancy when we were also feeble and helpless” is a social duty.³⁹ If the plan was successful, future generations would be saved “from the temptation of treating others unjustly and from the weakness of submitting to oppression,”⁴⁰ and the primary schools would have fulfilled their goal of being a “rich source of intelligence, morals and happiness for the nation.”⁴¹

One thing standing in the way of these laudable objectives was the lack of appropriate primary school textbooks in America. To meet this need, Du Pont proposed that prizes be offered for suitable works for

³³ Du Pont to Jefferson, 25 May 1808 (DLC: Jefferson Papers). Author’s translation.

³⁴ Du Pont to Jefferson, 21 Apr., 6 May, 15 June 1800 (DLC: Jefferson Papers).

³⁵ Pierre Samuel Du Pont de Nemours, *National Education in the United States of America*, translated from the second French edition of 1812 (1923), 16–17, 21, 31.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 21.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 27.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 4–6, 12–13, 24, 85.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 16–17.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 154.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 117–18.

schoolchildren: \$2,000 for the best primer; \$1,000 for the finest physics and mathematics text; \$500 for a proper general history; and \$500 for the most useful collection of historical anecdotes. The resulting schoolbooks, which he hoped would be written within four years, might be sold just over cost to every primary-school-age child. The profits from their sale, which Du Pont estimated at around \$50,000 a year, could then be dedicated to paying teacher salaries, providing scholarships for the most deserving students, and meeting other educational expenses.⁴²

The second branch of Du Pont's plan was intended to prepare selected individuals between the ages of ten and seventeen for employment in the learned professions and the literary and scientific fields.⁴³ All secondary school students were consequently to take one course a year in the following sequence:⁴⁴

- Year 1: Greek language and literature
- 2: Latin language and literature
- 3: French and moral philosophy
- 4: German and logic
- 5: Geometry, algebra, and "physico-mathematics," which included mapmaking, architecture, navigation, optics, mechanics, and hydraulics
- 6: Chemistry and the natural sciences, such as zoology and botany
- 7: Natural and national law, political economy, geography, and history

In addition to their normal coursework, they were to attend refresher classes twice a week to cover material from the preceding year.⁴⁵ Students who hoped to attend the university were to continue taking courses for another one to three years, depending on their areas of interest. Those who wished to study either medicine or the social sciences had to stay three extra years; the school of mines required two additional years, while the school of science and mathematics called for either one or two years past the age of seventeen.⁴⁶

Du Pont believed that Virginia's population justified ten secondary schools, each with around 60 students, and with full scholarships awarded to 140 of the best primary school graduates in the state. The cost to the commonwealth, Du Pont estimated, would be about \$56,000

⁴² *Ibid.*, 37–38, 40.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 54.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 63–65, 78.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 77.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 90, 127.

in all.⁴⁷ This did not seem excessive to him, as of “all the things that one can buy, knowledge is the one that will most surely be worth the price.”⁴⁸

At the apex of Du Pont’s system was to be a national university in Washington, D.C., which was to be constructed at the public expense for the education of approximately 1,000 students, one-third of whom were to receive full tuition scholarships from their home states.⁴⁹ In contrast to European universities, which emphasized theology, law, medicine, and the arts, Du Pont favored the creation of schools of medicine, mines, social science and legislation, and “higher geometry and the sciences that it explains.”⁵⁰ Medical students were to receive training in anatomy, animal pathology, surgery, childbirth, materia medica, pharmaceutical chemistry, and botany. Those enrolled in the school of mines were to study mineralogy, docimastic chemistry, subterranean geometry, and the machinery associated with mining.⁵¹ Aspiring social scientists and legislators were to take courses in government, administration, politics, international law, statistics, and civil and criminal law. Last, those pursuing a scientific degree were to explore the intricacies of transcendental geometry, astronomy, hydrography, navigation, the construction and rigging of ships, and civil and military engineering.⁵²

Finally, it should be noted that although those who wished to teach their children at home or send them to private schools had the right to do so under Du Pont’s plan, the state retained an important oversight role. Education committees were to be appointed by each state legislature to ensure that only approved books were used in the home and at private schools; that they taught “nothing harmful to morals or likely to inspire atheism”; and that their students were tested regularly to make sure that they were keeping up with their public school counterparts.⁵³ Furthermore, a national council composed of representatives from the various state committees was to serve as “the agent of the Government for the administration of everything concerned with education,” and both the state committees and the national council were to have the power to appoint principals, dismiss teachers, and serve as “the proper

⁴⁷Ibid., 94, 98, 102–05.

⁴⁸Ibid., 91.

⁴⁹Ibid., 141, 143. According to Du Pont, the cost of the scholarships to a state like Virginia would be around \$10,000 (ibid., 94).

⁵⁰Ibid., 126.

⁵¹Du Pont’s inclusion of a school of mines arose from his belief that “in a country where the population is not great compared with its immense territory” and “the price of labor will probably be high for two or three centuries,” mines “can be worked only when science and intelligence overcome the difficulties of labor and expense” (ibid., 133).

⁵²Ibid., 128, 133–34, 137, 139–41.

⁵³Ibid., 148–49; quote on 149.

petitioners for laws and appropriations that may contribute to the progress of their work.”⁵⁴

In his conclusion, Du Pont expressed the hope that “these ideas, explained more rapidly and less carefully than I could wish, satisfy in part the intentions of the excellent citizen who has asked me to write them! May they pay a part of the debt of friendship that I owe him, and for the hospitality that his country has offered me!”⁵⁵

The best way, in Du Pont’s opinion, for him to repay both Jefferson and America was to have his work on education reach a large—or at least an informed—audience.⁵⁶ Before receiving the completed manuscript, Jefferson had promised Du Pont that his “efforts will not be wanting to avail my country of your ideas.”⁵⁷ After seeing the work in its entirety, however, he became a bit less enthusiastic about its publication, at least in the English language.⁵⁸ Nevertheless, Du Pont continued to have high hopes that his educational proposals would secure a hearing and have an impact on the public discourse. In 1805, he bragged to Madame De Stael that he had “made, and had approved by Jefferson and Madison, both of whom had asked me for them, all the plans for national education; and . . . we shall carry them out.”⁵⁹ Four years later, Du Pont wrote President Madison that his greatest desire was to see his scholastic ideas brought to fruition.⁶⁰ By dint of patient perseverance, he finally persuaded Jefferson to recommend a translator in 1811; had the work published in French in Paris in 1812; and secured Jefferson’s agreement to correct his own translation of it in 1815.⁶¹ Even so, as late as August 1816, just one year prior to his own death, Du Pont was still complaining to Jefferson that an English translation of his book had not been published in America during the sixteen years since its composition.⁶²

THE QUEST FOR INFLUENCE ON BOTH SIDES OF THE ATLANTIC, 1802–16

That it had not been published was due, at least in part, to Du Pont’s return to France in 1802. By that point, he had become disenchanted

⁵⁴Ibid., 151–53, 161; both quotes on 161.

⁵⁵Ibid., 161.

⁵⁶In Du Pont’s letter to Jefferson of 24 Aug. 1800 he admitted that “[t]here is nothing for the [casual] reader. I did my work only for the statesman” (DLC: Jefferson Papers). Author’s translation.

⁵⁷Jefferson to Du Pont, 11 Aug. 1800 (DLC: Jefferson Papers).

⁵⁸Jefferson to Du Pont, 12 Dec. 1800 (DLC: Jefferson Papers).

⁵⁹Du Pont to De Stael, 26 Feb. 1805 (Marshall, *De Stael-Du Pont Letters*, 267).

⁶⁰Du Pont to Madison, 11 July 1809 (DLC: Madison Papers).

⁶¹Du Pont to Jefferson, 12 Dec. 1811, 7 Dec. 1815 (both DLC: Jefferson Papers).

⁶²Du Pont to Jefferson, 18 Aug. 1816 (DLC: Jefferson Papers).

—perhaps even a little bored—with life in America. Du Pont's inability to master the English language and the knowledge that he was viewed in the United States as merely an elder statesman, not an active political figure, induced him to return to the land of his birth. Regrettably, the next decade of his life was marred by a series of reverses and disappointments. Du Pont failed to secure appointments to either the Senate or the Legion of Honor; his son Victor's mercantile house collapsed in 1805; he was tainted by unfounded charges of speculation; and many of his former patrons—Jacques Necker, Madame De Stael, and Charles Maurice de Talleyrand—fell into disfavor with Napoleon, who had little sympathy for the principles of the physiocratic school in any case.⁶³

Although increasingly frustrated by his inability to get ahead within the Napoleonic regime, Du Pont remained as active as ever. He served as secretary and vice president of the Parisian Chamber of Commerce between 1803 and 1810; retained his seat at the *Institut National*; and was appointed a librarian at the local arsenal in 1807 and the head of household relief in the French capital in 1810. Du Pont also prepared a multivolume edition of his mentor Turgot's papers, which was published between 1808 and 1811 and which he sent to both Jefferson and Madison. Upon Napoleon's fall from power in 1814, Talleyrand appointed Du Pont secretary general of the provisional government, and he was admitted into the Legion of Honor, the *Conseil d'État*, and the Bureau of Commerce soon thereafter. None of these were positions of any real responsibility, however, and by the time the news reached Paris in early 1815 that Napoleon had escaped from Elba and was marching north intent on regaining his throne, Du Pont was quite willing to leave France once again for greener pastures in America.⁶⁴ Upon his arrival in the New World, he wrote President Madison to offer his services to his adopted country: "If she has need, by chance, of my labor and my pen, she will have my pen and my labor. If she needs the blood, which still runs in my veins, she will have my blood."⁶⁵

This is not to say that Du Pont had not been applying both his mind and his pen to the problems facing the United States between 1802 and 1815. Indeed, during this period, he passed along a prodigious amount of advice and a large number of policy proposals to President Jefferson

⁶³Raymond F. Betts, "Du Pont de Nemours in Napoleonic France, 1802–1815," *French Historical Studies* 5 (Autumn 1967): 189–90, 193, 195–96, 198; Saricks, *Du Pont*, 301–02, 313.

⁶⁴Betts, "Du Pont in Napoleonic France," 193–94, 201–03; Saricks, *Du Pont*, 314, 316–17, 327, 329, 337–39, 341, 344; Du Pont to Madison, 6 Sept. 1811, John Stagg, ed., *Papers of James Madison, Presidential Series*, 4 vols. to date (1984–), 3:444; Jefferson to Du Pont, 29 Nov. 1813 (DLC: Jefferson Papers).

⁶⁵Du Pont to Madison, May 1815 (DLC: Madison Papers). Author's translation.

and President Madison. The number and variety of his suggestions are rather astounding. Du Pont argued, for instance, that the United States needed to acquire both the Floridas and Canada. The former, he believed, “which have only a small area, whose soil is only a sterile sand, and which have no importance for the American confederation except for the outlets which a few rivers can offer,” should be either purchased from Spain or conquered militarily.⁶⁶ With regard to Canada, Du Pont begged Jefferson to “employ force, or craftiness, or reason, or money, or all of them at the same time” to eliminate what he saw as a real threat. Securing Canada was as important to national security as “air is to breathe and bread to live,”⁶⁷ because “it will be only by way of Canada that one will be able to make a dangerous attack on you.”⁶⁸

Territorial expansion was not the only way in which the American republic might be strengthened. Du Pont repeatedly impressed upon Jefferson the need for increasing the size and improving the quality of the nation’s armed forces.⁶⁹ In his estimation, America needed more of almost everything: muskets, artillery, cavalry, forts, and military training.⁷⁰ Although supporting industrial growth, Du Pont cautioned the United States against undertaking “any manufacturing that is not absolutely necessary for your defense.”⁷¹ Like many of his physiocratic colleagues, he feared that the concentration of industry would produce “a class of feeble, unhealthy, and stupid men . . . who live constantly exposed to falling into all the horrors of misery.”⁷² Those suffering from the horrors of chattel slavery should, moreover, be freed for the good of the country. “It has been proven by [Benjamin] Franklin and in even greater detail by the French philosophes,” Du Pont wrote, “that the work and output of the slave, compared with the cost of his acquisition and upkeep, during the whole of his life, is less profitable to his owner” than that of a free laborer.⁷³ In addition, he favored “granting full rights of citizenship to men of red or mixed blood; or at least to such of them as are landowners or will become so.”⁷⁴ Beyond these, and other like

⁶⁶Du Pont to Necker de Germany, 28 Feb. 1804 (Marshall, *De Stael-Du Pont Letters*, 204). See also, Du Pont to Jefferson, 5 Sept. 1808 (DLC: Jefferson Papers).

⁶⁷Du Pont to Jefferson, 10 Mar. 1806 (DLC: Jefferson Papers). Author’s translation.

⁶⁸Du Pont to Jefferson, 13 Aug. 1807 (DLC: Jefferson Papers). Author’s translation. See also, Du Pont to Jefferson, 25 May 1808 (DLC: Jefferson Papers) and Du Pont to Madison, 20 Jan. 1812 (Stagg, *Madison Papers*, 4:141).

⁶⁹See, for instance, Du Pont to Jefferson, 6 May, 12 July 1807, 25 May, 5 Sept. 1808 (all at DLC: Jefferson Papers).

⁷⁰Du Pont to Jefferson, 6 May, 13 Aug. 1807 (DLC: Jefferson Papers).

⁷¹Du Pont to Jefferson, 23 July 1808 (DLC: Jefferson Papers). Author’s translation.

⁷²Du Pont to Jefferson, 17 May 1812 (DLC: Jefferson Papers). Author’s translation.

⁷³Du Pont to Jefferson, 25 Jan. 1812 (DLC: Jefferson Papers). Author’s translation.

⁷⁴Du Pont to Jefferson, 18 Aug. 1816 (DLC: Jefferson Papers). Author’s translation.

suggestions, Du Pont composed two pieces of much greater length in an attempt to influence the course of American politics. He sent the first to Jefferson from France in the summer of 1810 and the second to Madison in early 1816 after his final voyage to the United States.

SELLING THE SINGLE TAX TO THE NEW WORLD

Although Du Pont had intended to address the American people on the subject of taxation since at least the 1780s, the impetus behind the treatise he wrote during the spring and summer of 1810 came, as had been the case with his book on education in the United States, from Jefferson.⁷⁵ The ex-president's offhand remark in June 1809 on the "universal spirit of manufacturing" that had arisen in the United States due to the commercial disruptions of the Napoleonic Wars inspired Du Pont to action. By the following January, he had decided that "[t]his is something that calls for serious attention, which, I believe, will require that I write a small book for submission to your enlightened judgment. Happily, I do not know how to write large ones."⁷⁶ He returned to the subject three months later, explaining that he owed America "some rather extended reflections and observations" on its bold decision to establish enough factories "to become completely independent from Europe; and on the wholesale changes to your financial system that must result" from that determination.⁷⁷

The resulting composition, which Du Pont completed by the end of July 1810 and mailed to Jefferson in mid-September, is a *tour de force* of physiocratic writing. The central problem, for Du Pont, arose from this fact: in 1810 close to 90 percent of the monies collected by the American government came from taxes on the importation and exportation of goods. Although it would take decades for the United States to meet all of its manufacturing needs domestically, the resolution to move away from a reliance on foreign imports ensured the eventual loss of the bulk of these revenues. Consequently, it was, or soon would be, necessary for the government to choose a new financial system.

History, unfortunately, provided few palatable alternatives. The so-called "English System" had initially consisted of an equitable tax that was "proportional to the revenue that the land produces." However,

⁷⁵ On 5 Nov. 1787, Du Pont had written Jefferson that although the United States was "farthest from the truth [on the subject of taxation] . . . if I risk writing on it, I will wait for fifteen years before publishing my work" (Boyd, *Jefferson Papers*, 12:326; author's translation).

⁷⁶ TJ to Du Pont, 28 June 1809; Du Pont to TJ, 20 Jan. 1810 (both DLC: Jefferson Papers). Author's translation.

⁷⁷ Du Pont to TJ, 10 Apr. 1810 (DLC: Jefferson Papers). Author's translation.

because the decision was later made to freeze the land tax at an arbitrary level, it “diminishes from year to year in real value” and “provides the government with a reduced income.” Not surprisingly, the state had been forced to raise funds by other means, such as excise taxes and customs duties, to make up the shortfall. These new taxes were, in Du Pont’s estimation, “incompatible with the freedom to work,” and brought “about not only a nominal but a quite real increase in the price of production, merchandise and salaries, an increase that profits neither producers and manufacturers, nor salaried workers, but is such as to cause a notable injury to buyer-consumers and employers.” The cost to society was further increased by the necessity of employing a multitude of highly paid tax collectors.⁷⁸ Beyond the financial outlay, giving “great authority” to “people whose function is to torment others about the details of their private business” produced a “string of small tyrannies multiplied without end,” reduced personal freedom, and concentrated an excessive amount of power in the executive branch of government.

To make ends meet, the English had introduced a progressive income tax. For Du Pont, however, there were several problems with this. The minimum level at which people began to pay taxes had been set arbitrarily, and the establishment of a maximum above which the proportional tax did not increase was unjust. Furthermore, as it was in everyone’s interest to report as little income as possible, the only way for the state to ensure that it received its fair share was for it to hire yet another group of officials to ferret out hidden earnings. Finally, and, according to Du Pont, worst of all, taxes on manufacturing, commerce, consumption, income, and labor ultimately fell onto the backs of landowners. Workers paid their taxes by insisting on higher wages. Merchants recouped their losses by raising their prices and charging higher interest rates to those who borrowed money from them. Only landowners found it impossible to pass along their increased costs, which operated “to the detriment of agriculture and land ownership.”⁷⁹

The financial systems of antiquity, while preferable to the “English system,” were just as unworthy of emulation. The “Egyptian system,” which involved setting aside a portion of the country to fund national expenditures, would not work in North America. Although the United States owned a great deal of land, its government did not have the capital

⁷⁸Du Pont estimated the cost, over and above taxes, at around 20 percent in America and even greater in nations like England and France “that multiply precautions, watchmen, and surveillance.” Author’s translation.

⁷⁹On this subject, Du Pont was quite out of touch. Jefferson knew full well that farmers were entirely capable of passing rising costs along to their consumers, as they had done, for instance, during the American Revolution.

to farm it. Even if it had, Du Pont contended, “it could not make a worse use of it than to try and cultivate such a vast territory. No government can direct and supervise agricultural work well, and every government pays its workers more than do ordinary citizens.” Nor was the “Hebrew system,” which required farmers to give one-tenth of their crops after deducting the cost of production, suitable. Although it appeared equitable on the surface, in reality it was not. Fertile tracts were taxed at the same rate as those of lesser quality, thus ensuring that only the best land would be farmed. Great effort and expense were required to preserve the goods collected prior to their sale, and the government was forced to sell its share in the public marketplace, which presented “a fearsome competition [to the citizenry], upset all natural prices, [and] depreciated the value of the crops.” Although the Chinese had brought this system of taxation “to the highest state of perfection to which” it “is capable” by levying higher taxes on better land, little was, or could be, done to mitigate the other problems inherent in the tithe.

Having “gone through all the bad systems of finance,” Du Pont turned to one that, in his opinion, “has in its favor reason, economy, and justice”: a tax on the net revenue from land after deducting all of the costs of farming, including the payment of interest on capital investments. Du Pont believed that in Europe “a reasonable government” could meet its needs with one-fifth of the net revenue. In the United States, “which does not have much cause to fear an external war, or at least a war of aggression, [and] which, if it became a threat, could easily be foreseen well in advance,” one-seventh or one-eighth “would be quite sufficient.”⁸⁰ To be safe, the government might retain, at least for a time, one-sixth of the net revenue so as to be able to increase the number of its artillery pieces, gunboats, and floating batteries, “improve the defense of its shores and the mouths of its rivers with fortresses,” and stock its arsenals.⁸¹ In peacetime and during periods of prosperity, such funds might be used to improve the nation’s infrastructure: for example, for “the construction of roads, canals, bridges, ports, wharves, landings, and locks . . . the improvement of riverbeds . . . the purchase and reproduction of beautiful breeds of cattle or draft animals, the introduction and invention of machines that spare manual labor in factories . . . libraries, prizes, awards, and the encouragement of every kind of agriculture, industry, science, and the arts.” When “earthquakes, floods, droughts, hail storms, fires, epidemic diseases . . . or worse yet,

⁸⁰ Du Pont wrote one-seventh at one place in the manuscript and one-eighth at another.

⁸¹ The historian Daryl Hafer somehow gets this basic point wrong, saying that Du Pont recommended a tax of about one-fifth of the value of land (Hafer, “DuPont’s America,” 242).

war, urgently call for another use of national wealth and power," the monies could be quickly reassigned.

Although the amount raised by the taxation of the net revenue from land would be about the same as that currently being collected in customs duties and tariffs, the burden of taxes on the economy would, according to Du Pont, be lightened substantially. Productivity, commerce, and liberty would be encouraged. Finally, the adoption of such a scheme in America would serve to "shine back upon France its own light." It was, he noted, "a peculiarity of the French to adopt generally out of their compatriots' discoveries only those whose merits have struck foreigners and come back to them through books in a foreign language or through travelers' accounts. . . . It has always been difficult for men to become prophets in their own land."

That said, several significant obstacles stood in the way of Du Pont's ideas. In Europe, the price at which farms were leased could be used as "the most exact appraisal possible of net revenue." Because of the large amount of inexpensive land for sale in the United States, farmers rarely leased land; they purchased it. Du Pont's solution was to utilize the records kept by state land offices: indentures transferring land, sales and mortgage contracts, declarations or appraisals of the value of inherited real estate, and the like. Those who undervalued their possessions or underreported what they had paid for them were to be fined and, perhaps, even have their right to vote suspended. Another way to reduce fraud, Du Pont maintained, was to amend the mortgage laws, which would simultaneously increase the amount of credit available to landowners, lower interest rates, and, because the total they could borrow was tied to the value of their possessions, serve as a "forceful reason not to conceal the value of their property."

Another problem was that America's budding industries and the entrepreneurs investing in them counted "on the *ten percent* levied on merchandise by the customs. . . . They will ask your legislature to raise tariffs rather than lower them." The maintenance of high external tariffs, however, would allow inefficient native industries to survive and do little to spur innovation or promote healthy competition. In addition, by adding to the cost of imported goods, they would call "into existence, from foreign countries . . . a contraband trade that is difficult to combat." To eliminate smuggling, the government would be forced to increase greatly the number of both the ships and the officials guarding America's coastline. Such an expansion of state power was bound to be expensive, "obnoxious and annoying" to the citizenry, and dangerous, in that it heightened the risk of conflict with the British navy.

Finally, the shift away from a reliance on customs duties and tariffs was bound to be jarring economically. Because domestic manufacturers

could not produce goods as cheaply as their foreign competitors, prices would rise, at least in the short term. Moreover, until tariffs were repealed, taxing the net revenue from land would effectively double the amount collected from the populace annually. It would take great political courage, Du Pont realized, to bring about this particular financial transformation. Indeed, he believed that if the United States were successful in this endeavor, it “will have performed the most astounding miracle that history has ever seen and that philosophy could possibly imagine.” Whatever the difficulties, Du Pont remained optimistic that the perseverance, prudence, and wisdom exhibited by the American people on many earlier occasions would see them through this metamorphosis as well.

The initiative for the change, as one might suspect from Du Pont’s previous work, was to come from the top down. A comment he made at the time about his treatise reinforces this point: “It was not a question of writing a book to please the public, but of collecting proofs for statesmen.” Nor are the statesmen he had in mind difficult to identify. Du Pont fully expected that if his work secured Jefferson’s “approval, if it is backed by your approbation, by arguments that you may add to it, by the influence that your public services, virtues, and enlightenment have so justly earned, it will be of use some day.” In March 1811, he asked the ex-president whether it should be submitted to his successor, James Madison, and to Secretary of the Treasury Albert Gallatin; a few months later, in some despair because of his failure to receive an answer, he informed Jefferson that he had decided to send a copy to Madison directly.⁸²

Du Pont need not have worried. Jefferson had dispatched the manuscript to the nation’s capital less than a week after receiving it. It was, he wrote Madison in early December 1810, the work of “a rigorous economist. and altho the system be not new, yet he always gives something new, and places his subject in strong lights. . . . on the whole it is well worth your reading.”⁸³ To Du Pont, Jefferson wrote that his “present retirement and unmeddling disposition make of this *une question oiseuse pour moi* [an idle question for me]. but after reading the Observations with great pleasure, I forwarded them to the President and mr Gallatin, in whose hands they may be useful. yet I do not believe the change of our system of taxation will be forced on us so early as you expect, if war be avoided.” At present, Jefferson continued, nearly all American manufacturing was of the household variety, and excise duties were preferred to land taxes in the eastern states, because they were

⁸²Du Pont to TJ, 31 Mar., 4 July 1811 (both DLC: Jefferson Papers).

⁸³TJ to Madison, 8 Dec. 1810 (DLC: Madison Papers).

thought to fall exclusively on the rich.⁸⁴ Du Pont responded that although the alteration brought about by declining imports might not come to pass in the near future, “it must happen some day, and the Government and especially public opinion must be prepared for it.”⁸⁵ At a bare minimum, he thought that his work should be translated into English and published in America. During the next four years, Jefferson tried—one suspects somewhat half-heartedly—to bring the essay into print. As late as 1815, he justified his inability to do so by saying that although his fellow citizens exhibited “deplorable ignorance in finance and political economy generally,” American “printers are enterprising only in novels and light reading.”⁸⁶

The publication of Du Pont’s opus in November 1815 in the Philadelphia *Aurora* is attributable, therefore, not to Jefferson, but to an unidentified individual who had brought a copy of it from Europe and given it to the editor of that newspaper, William Duane, three or four years earlier. Although Duane had had the work translated into English shortly after receiving it, he decided to set it aside, because there was “no occasion . . . which could give it that sort of interest which can alone produce usefulness.” Now that the time was apparently ripe for “[d]iscussions on every branch of this extensive and precious science” of political economy, Du Pont’s composition was published in ten installments between 4 and 27 November; it was reprinted in the New York *Columbian* and, presumably, other papers in the weeks that followed.⁸⁷

DU PONT’S ESSAY ON AGRICULTURE AND MANUFACTURING IN THE UNITED STATES

Shortly thereafter, Du Pont set down his final thoughts on American agriculture and manufacturing.⁸⁸ The resulting eighteen-page handwritten essay, which he sent to President Madison in mid-January 1816, argued that “[a]griculture is a manufacture like any other. . . . It has thus, like the others, a very great interest that its sale not be loaded with a lot of extra charges, nor be subject to long delays in payments, and that it has to run only a few risks.” America’s reliance on the exportation of agricultural commodities and everything that came along with it

⁸⁴TJ to Du Pont, 15 Apr. 1811 (DeGH: Pierre Samuel Du Pont de Nemours Papers, Winterthur Manuscripts).

⁸⁵Du Pont to TJ, 12 Dec. 1811 (DLC: Jefferson Papers). Author’s translation.

⁸⁶TJ to Du Pont, 28 Feb., 15 May 1815 (DeGH: Pierre Samuel Du Pont de Nemours Papers, Winterthur Manuscripts).

⁸⁷Quotes are from the Philadelphia *Aurora*, 4 Nov. 1815. See also the New York *Columbian*, 11 Nov. 1815 et seq.

⁸⁸Du Pont to Madison, 18 Jan. 1816, and enclosure (DLC: Madison Papers).

—freight charges, insurance premiums, accidents, and the fees levied by a host of middlemen—greatly increased the farmers' costs and reduced their profits. They were, in actuality, selling "their grains and raw materials at the lowest return, at a longer term, and at greater peril" abroad than if they had disposed of them domestically. The solution, for Du Pont, was to increase consumption at home. This was not to say that the government should prohibit or restrict the export of agricultural products; such a policy would do nothing, he believed, but expose the nation to periodic famines. Expanding production in order to meet the needs of both the foreign and domestic markets would keep prices from falling disastrously in good years and shortages from occurring in bad years.

According to Du Pont, the most effective way to accomplish this lofty goal was through the expansion of native manufacturing. This was not to be done through government gifts, loans, or subsidies, however. All such programs undercut Du Pont's primary objective: the multiplication of manufacturing establishments throughout the nation. Still, as the construction of buildings, purchase of machinery, and training of workers required a great deal of capital, American entrepreneurs were not to be left to fend for themselves entirely.⁸⁹ "Congress and the nation" having "already judged that the encouragement to be given to American manufactures . . . will be procured through the tariff" on foreign imports, Du Pont wondered whether the current customs system was the best that could be devised. High duties inevitably brought fraud in their wake, "a very great evil" for "a nation naturally honest" because it accustomed the populace to seeing its laws violated. "Nothing," he warned, "weakens the bonds of society more and loosens morality so much." Deceitfulness, in this context, constituted "*a public robbery*" and represented a danger to "the prosperity of the American union" in that it caused new taxes to be levied and slowed the pace of national progress. While some thought that the best way to curtail deception was to give customs agents the right preemptively to add from 6 to 10 percent to the declared value of suspect bills, Du Pont noted that even the most vigilant officials sometimes make mistakes, and that it is very difficult to estimate the real value of merchandise. In consequence, he proposed that the customs service hire knowledgeable appraisers "of real and realizable prices," such as experienced merchants and auctioneers. By paying them a salary plus one-third of the revenues generated by the corruption they uncovered, the collection of tariffs would "become exact and ethical. . . . [and] One would be able to know with precision by how much the national manufactures had been favored over foreign

⁸⁹ As Du Pont put it, "One can give limits and cushions to children; one must nourish them generously until they have come of age and join the work force." Author's translation.

products.” It would then be easy, Du Pont assumed, to determine which branches of industry needed continued or additional encouragement and which could get by with less.

CONCLUSIONS

At the time Du Pont submitted his essay “Sur l’Agriculture Et les Manufactures aux Etats-unis” to Madison, he seemingly remained confident that with a little prodding his proposals would eventually win acceptance and be implemented. The question why they were not taken more seriously by Jefferson and Madison is, therefore, well worth looking into.

On the subject of education, it is well for us to remember that Jefferson had himself been repeatedly stymied in his efforts to effect real reform, at both the state and national levels. His much-lauded Bill for the General Diffusion of Knowledge, which called for the establishment of a comprehensive system of publicly supported schools, had been submitted to the Virginia legislature in 1779. Although it was passed by the lower house in December 1785, it died in the senate. The bill was revived and enacted into law a decade later, but its later incarnation provided only for the creation of primary schools on a voluntary basis. If local court officials deemed it to be impracticable or imprudent to create them, they did not have to do so. Not surprisingly, the widely held desire of wealthy, propertied Virginians to keep taxes low and their notable lack of interest in bringing book-learning to the masses made certain that the so-called Act to Establish Public Schools did little to advance the cause of education in the commonwealth. In addition, Jefferson had been frustrated while he was president in his attempts both to move the United States Military Academy to the nation’s capital, and, thus, to transform it into a national school of engineering, and establish a national university in Washington, D.C.⁹⁰ However sympathetic he might have been to Du Pont’s educational ideas, Jefferson could not help but be somewhat less than optimistic about their prospects. This, perhaps more than anything else, helps to explain why he did not push more strongly for their dissemination during his presidency and retirement.

Nor did Du Pont’s theories about taxation appear realistic within the context of American politics. To put it most simply, tariffs were popular; internal taxes were not. The most important early example of the latter, the whiskey excise, had both provoked widespread opposition

⁹⁰For a pithy discussion of Jefferson’s educational proposals and his repeated attempts to have them passed into law, see Jennings L. Wagoner, *Jefferson and Education* (2004), esp. 33–43, 64–68. For the reasons behind Virginia’s resistance to educational reform during the nineteenth century, see Susan Dunn, *Dominion of Memories: Jefferson, Madison, and the Decline of Virginia* (2007), esp. 9, 71–74, 76–77.

and proved to be very expensive to collect. When Jefferson and Gallatin supported direct taxes during the late 1790s, they apparently did so in the belief that the passage of such levies by the Federalists would in the end redound to their political benefit. Once Jefferson and the Republicans took office in 1801, they abolished most internal taxes and relied almost exclusively on the tariff. Jefferson adhered to it even after his embargo had seriously reduced federal tax revenues. A new direct tax was passed by Congress only in August 1813, one year after the outbreak of the War of 1812 and four years after Madison took office. It excited little controversy, at least in part because it was clearly intended to last only until the fighting was over.⁹¹

Imposts were popularly accepted and politically popular in America during the early national period for a number of reasons. First, they were relatively invisible, as they were paid by the merchants buying goods from overseas, who then quietly passed along the charges to their customers. Second, the 1789 Revenue Act, which inaugurated the system of federal duties, merely replaced those levied by the individual states prior to that time. Americans did not, therefore, find themselves paying an entirely new tax; only the recipient of the revenue had changed. Third, the tariff was relatively easy and inexpensive to collect.⁹² Finally, as the historian Robin L. Einhorn has recently written, “It was impossible to discuss the economy seriously without talking about slavery—and it was impossible to design any tax but the impost without discussing the economy seriously.”⁹³ All other forms of taxation inevitably raised sticky questions about how they were to be apportioned, and these were questions that the majority of American politicians would just as soon leave unasked. It is easy to see, therefore, why Jefferson and Madison would think that rewriting the nation’s tax code was highly inopportune at that time.

In consequence, although Du Pont’s friendship with Jefferson and, through him, Madison, gave him entrée into the highest levels of the American government, his ideas about education and political economy were ultimately seen by them as being too innovative, expensive, or utopian to be pursued. The *tabula rasa* of his dreams did not exist in 1800 or 1816, and perhaps had never existed. As a result, despite his own best efforts, Du Pont became in America what he had long been in the land of his birth: an anachronism, a voice crying in the wilderness, and a prophet preaching the tenets of a dead religion.

⁹¹Robin L. Einhorn, *American Taxation, American Slavery* (2006), 187, 189, 195. See also, Dall W. Forsythe, *Taxation and Political Change in the Young Nation, 1781–1833* (1977), esp. 25, 50, 55–56, 58–60.

⁹²Forsythe, *Taxation and Political Change*, 65–66, 68.

⁹³Einhorn, *American Taxation, American Slavery*, 120.