



John Jay —

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**Name:** John Jay

**Years:** December 12, 1745 – May 17, 1829

**Location:** New York, NY and Katonah, NY

**Biography:** John Jay was born in New York, NY on December 12, 1745 and is well regarded in history as a lawyer, diplomat, and first Chief Justice of the Supreme Court from 1789-95. The Jays were related by marriage to prominent families of New York like the Van Cortlandts, Bayards, Van Rensselaers, and Schuylers, and John Chambers, a leading New York lawyer and Supreme Court justice, was one of John Jay's godfathers as well as his uncle. In 1764, Jay graduated from King's College (Columbia University) and was admitted to the bar in 1768, establishing himself as an attorney in New York. In April 1774, Jay married Sarah Van Brugh Livingston, daughter of William Livingston, one of the leading figures in New York's intellectual, literary, and legal life and a brother of the Lord of the Livingston Manor.<sup>1</sup>

Jay was appointed as a delegate to the First Continental Congress in Philadelphia in 1774 and drafted *The Address to the People of Great Britain*, voicing the opinions of colonial subjects. Additionally, Jay served as the Chief Justice of New York and as the President of the Continental Congress in 1778. Jay was significant to the Revolution as an ally to the Patriot cause. Milton Klein in "John Jay and the Revolution" tracks Jay's step-by-step conversion in becoming a revolutionary and argues that it reflected 'both a cautious temperament and a conviction that rebellion would not succeed until it had secured the support of a broad consensus of Americans.'<sup>2</sup> Additionally, Klein shows how the behavior of Jay's close legal associates, Peter Van Schaack and Robert Livingston, arguing that Jay approached insurrectionary behavior moderately. Klein ultimately contends that Jay fits the framework of a conservative who turned revolutionary in that he neither sought out a separation from Great Britain nor actively led the movement for independence. Instead, Jay waited to act

<sup>1</sup> Klein, 18.

<sup>2</sup> Klein, 26.

and eventually became a leading figure in the American Revolution. (le of Washington) while the un-enfranchised propertyless commoner did not always support independence. Klein successfully argues that Jay cautiously and tactfully came to support the Revolution on his own terms.

Jay, moreover, was fervently against slavery and called for the manumission of slaves in a draft of New York's first constitution. A slaveowner himself, Jay argued that "I purchase slaves and manumit them at proper ages and when their faithful services shall have afforded a reasonable retribution." Likewise, Jay's children, William and John II advocated for abolition with both men involved politically in New York State.

Upon retirement, Jay and his family settled on a 714 acre estate in present-day Katonah, NY in 1801. The mansion was a 24 room dwelling built in the Federal style and housed Jay and his immediate family. The estate passed to Jay's son, William, and to subsequent generations.

**Accomplishments:** Jay served as first Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court and negotiated the Jay Treaty of 1794, settling grievances and promoting commerce with Great Britain.

**For more information:** <http://www.ushistory.org/declaration/related/jayj.html>

**Resources:** <https://www.britannica.com/biography/John-Jay>  
Milton Klein, "John Jay and the Revolution"