

Extract: Thomas Jefferson to John Cartwright, 5 June 1824

“But can they be made unchangeable? can one generation bind another, and all others, in succession for ever? I think not. the Creator has made the earth for the living, not the dead. rights and powers can only belong to persons, not to things, to mere matter, unendowed with will. the dead are not even things. the particles of matter which composed their bodies, make part now of the bodies of other animals, vegetables, or minerals of a thousand forms. to what then are attached the rights and power they held while in the form of men? a generation may bind itself, as long as it’s majority continues in life; when that has disappeared, another majority is in place, holds all the rights and powers their predecessors once held and may change their laws and institutions to suit themselves. nothing then is unchangeable but the inherent and unalienable rights of man.”

Full transcript available at:

<http://founders.archives.gov/?q=%20Author%3A%22Jefferson%2C%20Thomas%22%20cartwright&s=1111311111&r=1>