

Address to the Members of the New York and Virginia Conventions, Post-30 April 1788

For these & many other reasons we are for preserving the Rights of the State Governments, where they must not be necessarily relinquished for the welfare of the Union—& where so relinquished the line should be definitely drawn if under the proposed Constitution the States exercise any Power, it would seem to be at the mercy of the General Government—for it is remarkable that the clause securing to them those rights not expressly relinquished in the old Confœderation, is left out in the new Constitution; And we conceive that there is no Power which Congress may *think* necessary to exercise for the *general Welfare*, which they may not assume under this Constitution—& this *Constitution* & the Laws made under it are declared paramount even to the unalienable rights, which have heretofore been secured to the Citizens of these States by their Constitutional compacts.—

Altho' this new Constitution can boast indeed of a Bill of Rights of seven Articles—yet of what nature is that Bill of Rights? to hold out such a security to the rights of property as might lead very wealthy & influential Men & Families into a blind compliance & adoption—whilst the Rights that are essential to the great body of Yeomanry of America are entirely disregarded.—

Moreover those very powers, which are to be expressly vested in the new Congress, are of a nature most liable to abuse—They are those which tempt the avarice & ambition of Men to a violation of the rights of their fellow Citizens, & they will be screen'd under the sanction of an undefined & unlimited authority—Against the *abuse & improper* exercise of these special powers, the People have a right to be secured by a sacred Declaration, defining the rights of the Individual & limiting by them, the extent of the exercise—The People were secured against the abuse of those Powers by fundamental Laws & a Bill of Rights, under the Government of Britain & under their own Constitutions—That Government which permits the abuse of Power, recommends it; & will deservedly experience the tyranny which it authorizes; for the history of Mankind establishes the truth of this political adage—*that in Government what may be done will be done*

The most blind admirer of this Constitution must in his heart confess that it is as far inferior to the British Constitution, of which it is an imperfect imitation as darkness is to light—In the British Constitution, the rights of men, the primary objects of the social Compact—are fixed on an immoveable foundation & clearly defined & ascertained by their Magna Charta, their Petition of Rights & Bill of Rights & their Effective administration by Ostensible Ministers, secures Responsibility—In this new Constitution—a complicated System sets responsibility at defiance & the Rights of Men neglected & undefined are left at the mercy of events; we vainly plume ourselves on the safeguard alone of Representation, forgetting that it will be a Representation on principles inconsistent with true & just Representation—that it is but a delusive shadow of Representation proffering in theory what can never be fairly reduced to practice—And after all Government by Representation (unless confirm'd in its views & conduct by the constant inspection, immediate superintendance, & frequent interference & control of the People themselves on one side, or an hereditary nobility on the other, both of which

orders have fixed & permanent views) is [really?] only a scene of perpetual rapine & confusion—& even with the best checks it has failed in all the Governments of Europe, of which it was once the basis, except that of England.—

When We turn our Eyes back to the scenes of blood & desolation which we have waded through to separate from Great Britain—we behold with manly indignation that our blood & treasure have been wasted to establish a Government in which the Interest of *the few* is preferred to the Rights of *the many*—When we see a Government so every way inferior to that we were born under, proposed as the reward of our sufferings in an eight years calamitous war—our astonishment is only equal'd by our resentment—On the conduct of Virginia & New York, two important States the preservation of Liberty in a great measure depends—the chief security of a Confœderacy of Republics was boldly disregarded & the old Confederation violated by requiring Nine States instead of 13. voices to alter the Constitution.—but still the resistance of either of these States in the present temper of America (for the late conduct of the Party here must open the eyes of the People in Massachusetts with respect to the fate of their amendments) will secure all that We mean to contend for—THE NATURAL & UNALIENABLE RIGHTS OF MEN in a Constitutional manner—At the distant appearance of danger to these, We took up Arms in the late Revolution—& may we never have cause to look back with regret on that period when connected with the Empire of Great Britain, We were *happy, secure & free*.—

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