

The Arraignment of Centinel, *Pennsylvania Mercury*, 28 February 1788

It is possible that Benjamin Rush was the author of both this series and "The Arraignment of Centinel." An Antifederalist had charged that Rush, in order "to *save his bacon*," had become "the *humble copyist*" of the publisher of the *Pennsylvania Mercury* (*Philadelphia Independent Gazetteer*). "The Arraignment of Centinel" was reprinted only in the New York *Daily Advertiser* on 4 March 1788.

The Arraignment of — Centinel, Esq. February 27, 1788.

— Centinel, Esq. was brought to the bar of the most illustrious the United States; and the clerk having read the return, Mr. A—y G—l informed the court, there was an indictment against the prisoner, and prayed he might be charged with it.

Clerk.—Centinel, hold up your hand, which he (reluctantly) did.

Pennsylvania, ss.

The jurors for the most illustrious United States of America, upon their oaths do present, that — Centinel, late of the Northern Liberties, in the county of Philadelphia, Esq.¹ and within the jurisdiction of the aforesaid most illustrious United States, as a false traitor, not having the fear of God in his heart, neither in his eyes, nor weighing the duties of citizenship and allegiance, but moved and seduced by the instigation of Satan, Belzebub, Lucifer, Belial, and the whole herd of Devils, withdrawing the due obedience, which a true and faithful subject ought, should, and of right is bound to bear, towards the aforesaid most illustrious United States; contriving, and with all his strength, soul, body, and goose quill (even to an unprecedented degree of flaming zeal and enthusiasm) to disturb the peace and common tranquillity of the aforesaid most illustrious United States, by dogmatical, proditorious publications, (lies and other hellish devices) to stir up and move opposition, faction, riot, sedition, insurrection, civil wars, rebellion and murder, against the aforesaid most illustrious United States, the Honorable the Congress, His Excellency General Washington, and divers others members of the honorable the continental and state conventions, and against their new proposed glorious frame of government, for promoting the peace, liberty and safety of the aforesaid most illustrious United States; for which purposes the aforesaid Centinel, as a false traitor, maliciously, traiterously, and diabolically, did conspire, compass, imagine and intend, and with the artifices and plausibility of a thorough-paced Jesuit, to frustrate their designs, &c. by holding a secret correspondence and cabal on the 18th day of September, in the year of our Lord 1787, and in the 12th year of the independence of the aforesaid most illustrious United States; and divers times, as well before as after, did meet and consult with other false traitors, as Philadelphensis, the Red Nos'd Vicar, the Old Militia Man, the Old Whig, Timmy the Rover, and other false and scurrilous traitors, to the jurors at present unknown, at their sedition and libel-shop, at College-Green, in the state of Pennsylvania aforesaid.

And then and there did distil, in large quantities, false, factious, opprobrious, disgraceful, shameful, vile, defamatory, scandalous, libellous, traiterous, malicious, infamous and stinkabuss pieces, to the number of sixteen, entituled the "Centinel," and which said infamous libels, &c. the said — Centinel as aforesaid, as a false traitor, &c.

with the most unparalleled and audacious effrontery, did cause to be printed and published, from time to time, and from day to day, in the paper by him called the "impartial and immaculate paper," which said libels, &c. were filled with lies, false quotations, trifling tales, fears, suggestions, prognostications, broken-hearted sighs, enthusiastic rhapsodies, tautological repetitions, and the whole palladium of nonsense and absurdities, liberally and spontaneously embellished, with the words, miscreants, infernal wretches, conclave, aristocratics, well-born, accursed villains, conspirators, and other Billingsgate expressions, abounding with scandalum magnatum, by wholesale, ad infinitum; and which libellous papers, together with handbills, in both German and English, the aforesaid Centinel, as a false traitor, &c. did clandestinely convey by private hands, into some of the back counties, particularly Cumberland, Franklin and Fayette, to raise and stir up riot, opposition, civil wars, and rebellion, and which actually took effect in the town of Carlisle.

And also this same Centinel, as a false traitor, &c. did hold a treasonable correspondence with certain other well known traitors of the minority, by the names of W—, F— and S—, a detestable triumviri, disturbers of the peace of society, insignificant babblers, noisy, ignorant, impertinent politicasters, assiduous seekers of their own interest, office hunters, makers of paper money and test laws, seceders, protestors, promoters of riot, faction, sedition, discord, civil wars and rebellion; and at the same time impudently, ungraciously, burlesquically and ironically, together (with a very small number of other low, trifling slubberdegullions of an inferior class) calling themselves Patriots!

And moreover, the aforesaid Centinel, as a false traitor, &c. in order to fulfil those his most horrid and diabolical treasons, and traitorous compassings, imaginations and purposes aforesaid, and to leave nothing undone, which envy, hatred, malice, ambition and a diabolical heart could suggest, did colloque with certain wheel-barrow men, convicts and criminals, now in the new gaol of the city and county of Philadelphia, making use of all his interest and influence with divers others, sneakups, timeserving, pickthanks, sycophants, and traitors, &c. of his gang, to get him the aforesaid Centinel, chosen president of their society; and actually succeeded therein, as fully appears by the treasonable and traitorous resolves of the aforesaid society printed and published in the Pennsylvania Gazette, of which he the said Centinel, &c. is now president, and L— M— vice-president, against the duty of his allegiance, against the peace of the aforesaid most illustrious United States, against the dignity and independence thereof, and against the form of the statutes in this case made and provided.

How say you, — Centinel, are you guilty of this high treason and other matters, whereof you stand indicted, or not guilty?

Centinel—Not guilty.

Clerk—Culprit, how will you be tried?

Centinel—By God and the minority.

Clerk—God send you a good deliverance.

The prisoner then was remanded back to gaol, and the court adjourned *sine die*.

Cite as: *The Documentary History of the Ratification of the Constitution Digital Edition*, ed. John P. Kaminski, Gaspare J. Saladino, Richard Leffler, Charles H. Schoenleber and Margaret A. Hogan. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2009.

Canonic URL: <http://rotunda.upress.virginia.edu/founders/RNCN-03-16-02-0088>
[accessed 14 Aug 2012]

Original source: Commentaries on the Constitution, Volume XVI: Commentaries on the Constitution, No. 4