

Cæsar II, New York *Daily Advertiser*, 17 October 1787

“The great source of all the evils which afflict Republics, is, that the People are too apt to make choice of Rulers, who are either Politicians without being Patriots, or Patriots without being Politicians.”

Mr. Childs, When I took notice of Cato’s prefatory Address to the Citizens of the State of New-York, in your paper of the first instant, I had no serious intention of becoming a controversial defendant of the New Constitution. Indeed, if the system required defence, I was neither so weak, nor so vain, as to suppose myself competent to the task.—To obviate difficulties which may arise, when such weighty affairs as the principles of legislation are under discussion; I am sensible requires talents far beyond my limited abilities. When I offered a few remarks on Cato’s introduction, I was strongly impressed with the idea, that even the most substantial criticisms, promulgated by the most influential and *avowed Citizens*, could have no good tendency at *this time*. I viewed the public mind as wound up to a great pitch of dissatisfaction, by the inadequacy of the powers of the present Congress, to the general good and conservation of the Union—I believed then, as I do now, that the people were determined and prepared for *a change*: I conceived, therefore, that the wish of every good man would be, that *this change might be peaceably effected*. With this view, I opposed myself to Cato. I asserted, in my last, *that the door of recommendation was shut, and cannot be opened by the same men, that the Convention was dissolved*. If I am wrong, it will be of great importance to Cato’s future remarks, that he make it appear. If he will declare, from sufficient authority, that the Members of the late Convention have only adjourned, to give time to hear the sentiments of every political disputant, that, after the numerous presses of America have groaned with the heavy productions of speculative politicians, they will *again meet*—weigh their respective merits, and accommodate accordingly:—I say, if Cato can do this, I make no hesitation in acknowledging the utility of his plan. In the mean time, I positively deny having any, the most distant desire of shutting the door of free discussion, on any subject, which may benefit the people; but I maintain (until Cato’s better information refutes me) that the door, as far as relates *to this subject*, is already shut—not by me, but by the highest possible authority which the case admits—even by those great Patriots who were delegated by the people of the United States, to *open such a door*, as might enable them to escape from impending calamities, and political shipwreck. This distinction is clear, I conceive, and ought to have some weight even with Cato, as well as those for whom he writes.—I am not one of those who gain an influence by cajoling the unthinking mass (tho’ I pity their delusions) and ringing in their ears the gracious sound of their *absolute Sovereignty*. I despise the trick of such dirty policy.

I know there are Citizens, who, to gain their own private ends, enflame the minds of the well meaning, tho less intelligent parts of the community, by sating their vanity with that cordial and unfailing specific, that *all power is seated in the People*. For my part, I am not much attached to the *Majesty of the multitude*, and therefore wave all pretensions (founded on such conduct) to their countenance. I consider them in general as very ill qualified to *judge* for themselves what government will best suit their peculiar situations; nor is this to be wondered at:—The science of Government is not easily understood.—Cato will admit, I presume, that men of good education and deep reflection, only, are judges of the *form* of a Government; whether it is calculated to promote the happiness of society; whether it is constituted on such principles as will restrain arbitrary power, on the one hand, and equal to the exclusion of corruption, and the destruction of licentiousness, on the other. Whether the New Constitution, if adopted, will prove adequate to such desirable ends, time, the mother of events must shew. For my own part, I sincerely esteem it a system, which, without the finger *of God*, never could have been suggested and agreed upon by such a diversity of interests. I will not presume to say, that a more perfect system might not have been fabricated:—but who expects perfection at once?—And it may be asked, *who are judges of it?* Few, I believe, who have leisure to study the nature of Government scientifically, but will frequently disagree about the quantum of power to be delegated to Rulers, and the different modifications of it. Ingenious men will give very plau[sible], and, it may be, pretty substantial reasons, for the adoption of two plans of Government, which shall be fundamentally different in their construction, and not less so in their operation:—yet both, if honestly administered, might operate with safety and advantage. When a new form of Government is fabricated, it lies with the people at large to receive or reject it:—this is their *inherent right*. Now, I would ask, (without intending to triumph over the weaknesses or follies of any men) how are the people to profit by this inherent right? By what conduct do they discover, that they are sensible of their own interest in this situation? Is it by the exercise of a well disciplined reason, and a correspondent education? I believe not. How then? As I humbly conceive, by a tractable and docile disposition, and by honest men endeavoring to keep their minds easy; while others, of the same disposition, with the advantages of genius and learning, are constructing the bark that may, by the blessing of Heaven, carry them to the port of rest and happiness: if they will embark without dissidence, and proceed without mutiny. I know this is blunt and ungracious reasoning: it is the best, however, which I am prepared to offer on this momentous business: and, since my own heart does not reproach me, I shall not be very solicitous about its reception. If truth, then, is permitted to speak, the mass of the people of America (any more than the mass of other countries) cannot judge with any degree of precision, concerning the fitness of this New Constitution to the peculiar situation of America:—they have, however, done wisely in delegating the power of framing a Government to those every way worthy and well qualified; and, if this Government is snatched, untasted, from them, it may not be amiss to enquire into the causes which will probably occasion their disappointment. Out of several, which present to my mind. I shall venture to select *One*, baneful enough, in my opinion, to work this dreadful evil. There are always men in society of some talents, but more ambition, in

quest of *that* which it would be impossible for them to obtain in any other way than by working on the passions and prejudices of the less discerning classes of citizens and yeomanry.—It is the plan of men of this stamp to frighten the people with ideal bugbears, in order to mould them to their own purposes. The unceasing cry of these designing croakers is, my friends, your liberty is invaded! Have you thrown off the yoke of one tyrant, to invest yourselves with that of another! Have you fought, bled, and conquered, for *such a change!* If you have—go—retire into silent obscurity, and kiss the rod that scourges you.

To be serious: These state empirics leave no species of deceit untried to convince the unthinking people that they have power to do—what? Why truly to do much mischief, and to occasion anarchy and wild uproar. And for what reason do these political jugglers incite the peaceably disposed to such extravagant commotions? Because until the people really discover that they have *power*, by some outrageous act, they never can become of any importance. The misguided people never reflect during this frenzy, that the moment they become riotous, they renounce, from that moment, their independence, and commence vassals to their ambitious leaders, who instantly, and with a high hand, rob them of their consequence, and apply it to their own present, or future aggrandisement; nor will these tyrants over the people stick at sacrificing *their good*, if an advantageous compromise can be affected for *themselves*.

Before I conclude, I cannot refrain from observing, that Cato states very disingenuously the manner in which the Federal System came abroad. He tells us, Congress were sensible that the late Convention exercised a power which no authority could delegate to them. The Convention, says Cato, have taken upon them to make a perfectly new system, which, by its operation, will absorb the sovereignties of the individual States; this new government founded on *usurpation*, (Cato, this expression is very indecent—but I will rouse no passions against you) this consolidated system Congress did not approve, and *therefore* have been *silent* on its character. That Congress was silent on its character is true, but, could Cato find no other reason for their silence than that of disapprobation.—I believe Congress were by no means dissatisfied with the freedom the Convention took with the Articles of the Confederation; I believe further, that with very few exceptions, that honorable body approved of the New Constitution; and, that they did not accompany it to the States with a recommendatory capitulation or circular letter, proceeded from a delicate attention to the Members of the late Convention, to a few of their own body, and to the people of America at large. That the Convention went so earnestly into the business committed to their care, ought, instead of being matter of chagrin, to occasion the liveliest expressions of approbation and gratitude.—As matters stand just now, I think it may be fairly said, that no *generous plan of government* for the *United States* has ever been constructed, (the plan only excepted which is under consideration) so that it seems quite unnecessary in Cato to disturb the peace of society by a bombast appeal to their feelings, on the *generous plan of power delivered down by their renowned forefathers*. I venerate the memory of the slaughtered patriots of America, and rejoice as much as Cato, that they did not bleed in vain, but I would have America profit by their death in a different manner from him. I believe they fought to

obtain liberty for no particular State, but for the whole Union, indissolubly connected under one controlling and supreme head.

Cato complains of my anticipating parts of his subject which he intended for future periods. I shall break in no more upon his *arrangements*; all he can say against the New Constitution has been already disseminated in a neighbouring State, by the glorious defenders of *Shayism*. I shall therefore leave Cato to the wicked influences of his own heart, in the fullest persuasion that all good men, and good citizens, will combine their influence to establish the fair fabrick of American liberty, beyond the reach of suspicion, violence, anarchy, and tyranny. When this glorious work is accomplished, what may America not hope to arrive at! I will venture to prophecy that the day on which the Union under the new government shall be ratified by the American States, that *that day* will begin an era which will be recorded and observed by future ages, as a day which the Americans had marked by their wisdom in circumscribing the *power*, and ascertaining the *decline* of the ancient nations in Christendom.

Oct. 15.

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-02-19-02-0002-0039> [accessed 06 Jan 2011]

Original source: Ratification by the States, Volume XIX: New York, No. 1

