

Democratic Society of the City New York, *An Address of the Democratic Society, of the City of New-York, to the Republican Citizens of the United States* (Newport, NY: n.p., 1794)

AN
ADDRESS
 OF THE
DEMOCRATIC
SOCIETY,
 OF THE CITY OF
 NEW-YORK,
 TO THE
 REPUBLICAN
CITIZENS
 OF THE
 UNITED STATES:

Which breaths such a NOBLE Spirit of TRUE, RATIONAL Liberty, Humanity, and universal Charity and Benevolence; that it is Thought highly worthy of the serious Perusal of every true Friend to impartial Justice and Liberty, in this Country, and is therefore republished at the Request of a Number of Citizens here.

NEWPORT:

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 the CAP OF LIBERTY.
 M, DCC, LCIV. /

At a Meeting of the DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY of the City of NEW-YORK, on Wednesday the 28th of May, 1794, and in the 18th Year of American Independence,

The following ADDRESS to the Republican Citizens of the United States, was, upon mature Deliberation, unanimously agreed upon, and ordered to be made Public.

Republican Friends and Fellow-Citizens!

Whereas sundry anonymous writers have advanced objections against this and other societies established upon similar principles, with a view of making them appear, at one moment dangerous, at another contemptible; we esteem it a duty incumbent upon us, not only to expose the falsity of the charges, but to demonstrate, as well the legality and propriety of such meetings, as also the advantages which the community will probably derive from them. In accomplishing which, we beg leave to observe –

In all nations wherever there has been an inclination in government, any principal part thereof, or in any particular class of the community, to subvert or abridge the rights of the people, there never have been men wanting ready to sacrifice their time and their talents at the altar of expected power, at the shrine of anticipated greatness, who, with the apparent meekness of doves, but the real undermining subtlety of serpents, have industriously and insidiously wrote and harranged with devotional fervour, on the necessity of supporting government, on the evils, the terrible evils, of anarchy and confusion, on the villainy of designing demagogues, who, under the pretext of affecting the rights of the / people, were engaged in schemes subversive of every principle of order, and perfectly destructive of those endearing bonds which link society in peace, harmony and friendship; and then, with affected candor, dwell upon the numerous blessings, the extensive advantages, which flow from a perfect union in sentiment between the government and the people; closing this delusive appeal to the passions by depicting, in the most lively colours, the horrid scenes which must, on the other hand, be the attendants of a civil war.

These have been the darling topics, the studied themes of a certain set of men, artfully obtruded upon the citizens of the United States for some time part; they well knowing, that there is more than an equal chance of preventing the people, by such general and specious observations, from attending to the deep designs and machinations of men in power, the great body of them being in easy circumstances, and lovers of peace, good order, and good government, equally enemies of the despotism of anarchy, as of the despotism of kings.¹

While WE heartily join in the great advantages which arise from a perfect union between the people and the government, we firmly deny, that either the

principles, regulations, or practice of this society, or any of the others alluded to, as far as our knowledge or judgment extends, can justify, in the smallest degree, any accusation made against them, or us, as sowers of civil discord and sedition, or as promoters of feuds and broils in the community: But that, on the contrary, we most sincerely wish for an union of sentiment throughout the nation, on the *real principles of the constitution, and original intention of the revolution*, and for a perfect and uninterrupted peace with all nations, upon safe and honorable terms; in support of which affections, we now lay before you, our Fellow-Citizens, such objections against our and other societies founded upon similar principles with our justificatory answer thereto.² /

It has been objected, that we have not stiled ourselves *Republican, but Democratic*; which signifies, as it is alledged, a government composed of the whole mass of the people, and not a representative government.

To this we reply – It is ever deemed a strong presumptive proof of a very bad cause, when its advocates attack their opponents with either false or flimsy arguments; and any one who will take the trouble of applying to Johnson’s dictionary (admitted to contain the best explanation of English terms) will find, that the words Republican and Democratic are synonymous; and, therefore, that this accusation is absolutely false and groundless – besides, the author of the Federalist (see vol. 2, p. 20) generally supposed to be the present Secretary of the Treasury, and our opponents are universally his warmest friends, affects, ‘That political writers have applied the term *Republican* to so many various forms of government, that it is left without any definite meaning at all.’

Men of suspicious characters, men matured in intrigue and design, might alledge it was from a foresight of his being able, at some future convenient opportunity, to affix to the term Republican, such meaning as he & his friends should find best to comport with their then wishes and intentions, that the first sentence of the 10th section of the 4th article of our constitution obtained its existence, which is ‘The United States shall guarantee to every State in this Union, a *Republican form* of government;’ for if the term Republican has no definite meaning, *Republican form* must be still more indefinite.

It has also been objected, that we are *anti-federalists*. To this we reply – In the first place, we positively deny the charge, there being many, very many, members of these societies, who were warm advocates for the adoption of the constitution, from its first formation: But suppose there were none but those who, previous / to the adoption thereof, *were stiled anti-federalists* – Reflect, Fellow-Citizens, what the nature of the objection would then be.³

A convention was appointed in 1787, to amend the old confederation; instead of amending which, agreeably to the intention and direction of their constituents, they thought it absolutely necessary to exceed their original pow-

ers, and proposed one totally new, to be adopted or rejected, as the people might think proper.

All parties agreed, that a new constitution was necessary, but those stiled anti-federalists said, Let us first make certain amendments, and then adopt it, because there is a risque of our not obtaining those amendments, which all parties think right, and we deem *indispensably* necessary. The federalists, on the other hand, declared in favour of the immediate adoption, alledging, that it contained within its own bosom the power of amendment.

This, Fellow-Citizens, we call on you to witness, was the only essential difference between the two contending parties at that time.

That amendments were absolutely necessary, as the anti-federalists insisted on, cannot now be rendered disputable, for they have been actually adopted in sundry important instances. What, then, is the charge against the anti-federalists?

A matter of the utmost importance to the liberty and happiness of the people of the United States, was referred to themselves at large, in the year 1787; a division of sentiments took place throughout the states; in a legal point of view, those denominated anti-federalists, became the minority. The constitution was adopted in a different mode from what they proposed, and they are now, in 1794, by a certain set of their former opponents, branded with the disgraceful epithets of – Enemies to the constitution and government of their / country. For what reason? Because they had the daring impertinence, the unpardonable audacity, the unprecedented effrontery, freely to declare their sentiments on a subject of equal importance to both parties, and left to the unbiassed discussion of each person of every class and denomination.

If this is a true statement of facts on this particular point (and we call upon the enemies of the Democratic Societies to come forward and openly disapprove it) can you, Fellow-Citizens, who are true lovers of those principles for which we sought from 1775 to 83, you who must wish to abolish every distinction except *Republican and Anti-Republican*; can you possibly permit yourselves to suppose, that those who exert every power, and strain every nerve, to re-kindle the pernicious flame of discord and disunion from the sleeping embers of a once warm, but long since dead and buried, political dispute, can be the real friends of either your principles, your constitution, your government, or yourselves?

We will not insult common sense, by saying more in our vindication on this, which, of all our offences, is asserted to be, by far, the most heinous, and, of course, the least pardonable.

The third objection is, that we are leaders of faction, possess a turbulence of disposition, and intend to upset the government.

To this we reply – General accusations, without any specific proof being nothing better than idle declamation, can seldom be answered but by a general plea of, *Not Guilty*. Yet we will go farther.

We are so far from dreading, that we *cagerly court* the most minute, the most strict investigation into our real characters, either as men or politicians; among such numbers we will not pretend to say, that every individual will stand the test of enquiry; but it is the / unequivocal wish of this, and we have no reason to doubt, that we are heartily joined therein by each of the other societies, that no one may remain a member, who is not a lover of genuine republicanism, a man of good moral principles and strict honor, a friend to his country, and determined to defend it at the risque of everything which is near and dear to him on earth.

We deny our being the camelions of accident, changing either our principles or practice, as fortunate or adverse events may turu up; nor are we the *minions of power*, inclined to disgrace the character of freemen, by sacrificing the delicate, the heaven-born principle of gratitude; those sympathetic emotions of friendship, so justly due to a nation contending for the right of enjoying the first principles of human nature, with a firmness and dignity on which angels must look down with admiration: principles which many of our enemies, while they have not virtue enough openly to advocate, possess, nevertheless, a sufficiency of either timidity or shame, not fully to disavow.

Yes, Fellow-Citizens, we take a pleasure in avowing thus publicly to you, that we are lovers of the French nation, that we esteem their cause as our own, and that we are the enemies, the avowed enemies, of him or those who dare to infringe upon the holy law of *Liberty*, the sacred *Rights of Man*, by declaring, that we ought to be strictly neutral, either in thought or speech, between a nation fighting for the dearest, the undeniable, the invaluable Rights of human nature, and another nation, or nations wickedly, but hitherto (we thank God) vainly endeavouring to oppose her in such a virtuous, such a glorious struggle.⁴

If this is the language of treason, if this is the language of sedition, come forward, ye votaries of opposite principles, ye stoical apathists, who can set with folded arms, with sullen silence, with unmoved composure, / while the house of your next neighbour, your former benefactor, *your only real friend*, is on fire, without affording even one single solitary bucket of water, to aid in quenching the raging, the wide spreading flame; ye secret abettors of tyranny and despotism, ye hermaphroditical politicians, come forward, we call upon you, bring us by legal means, if such you can contrive, to the bar of justice, and punish us for these our open, our avowed principles, from which no earthly consideration shall ever tempt us to recede. But be cautious! Could we select, in this land of freedom, such an execrable groupe of judges and jurymen as condemned the innocent, the virtuous, the patriotic MUIR, our brethren, whom we now address, would not only rise as one man, and, by every constitutional method prevent the iniq-

uitous, the unjust sentence from being put into execution; but, would, if they failed therein, open the sluices of their justly provoked wrath, and crush, forever, the nefarious opposers of these principles; principles which they know, we know, and you *ought* to know, brought forth the most glorious epoch in the annals of our country, the ever memorable 4th of July, 1776.

We would not be understood to mean, that every man who opposes our societies, is an enemy to this country, or even an aristocrat in his heart; but we must firmly believe, that he, who is an enemy to the French revolution, cannot be a firm republican; and therefore, though he may be a good citizen in every other respect, ought not to be entrusted with the guidance of any part of the machine of government.

The one moment we are denounced as a set of discontented, disappointed men, too insignificant to be worthy of notice; the next, we are a restless uneasy faction, who not only embarrass, but who will, if permitted to proceed, certainly bring about a revolution in our government. /

Contradictory as these charges are, we will endeavour to vindicate ourselves from both – As to the first, we call upon our *enemies* to form from amongst *themselves* a permanent, political society in this city, under any name they please, let their number be equal to ours; we will reciprocally exchange the name of each individual member, and thereby give an equal opportunity to them, and to us, of discussing the characters, the opinions, the general conduct of each person composing the two societies, from the memorable 19th of April, 1775, to the present moment; and thus place it in the power of *you*, our Fellow-Citizens, to discover on which side the love of country, and the true principles of republicanism, have been most prevalent.

If you, our opposers, dare not enter the lists, with us, in this open and undesigning proposition, call in your scouting parties, order your trifling anonymous writers, your abusive hirelings, to be silent, and join us, hand in hand, in supporting those principles which *we practice*, and *you affect to profess*.

With respect to the second of these charges:– Are your interests, our Fellow-Citizens, so essentially different from those of the government? – Are the constitutional privileges of that government so incompatible with your rights, as to render it an inevitable consequence that we should be their enemies, because we are your friends? Are your public officers so conscious of having violated their most sacred duties, and sacrificed your liberties, as to make it necessary that we should oppose their measures, because we have espoused your interests? Reflect but a moment, and see what a dangerous, what a fatal concession would be involved in this charge against us. If the interests of our government are the same with those of our Fellow-Citizens (and it is necessary for your safety, that it should be so) what possible motives can the friends, the advocates of / the

people, have, in the destruction of the government and constitution of their country?

We have thus, we trust, to your satisfaction, Fellow-Citizens, vindicated ourselves from the charges which have industriously been propagated against us: It yet remains to make a few observations as to the propriety of taking into consideration the measures of government, and to point out some, of the advantages arising from the establishment of popular associations.⁵

To you who are admirers of the British constitution, and esteem it the emblem of perfection, tho' you are citizens of these United States, and well known to be universally inimical to our principles, we give the following extract from the late speech of an Irish Patriot, Mr. CURRAN, delivered before a corrupt bench and a prejudiced and packed jury, for whose political damnation with all its attendant afflictions we most fervently *do*, and you most sincerely *ought* ever to pray.

This great and good man, *even in their presence*, had the honesty and firmness to declare, 'That it is the glory of the British constitution, that the people derive a right to watch over the government, and to see whether abuses have been committed by those entrusted with the administration of public affairs, and that their liberties and properties be attended to as they ought.' Again, 'It is not only the right but the *absolute duty of the people*, to have a jealous *eye* over the conduct of the government.' And he farther says:— 'Is it on the sacred soil, sanctified by the liberty of a British constitution, that the people collectively or individually, are to be prohibited from animadverting on the conduct of those entrusted with the administration of their government?'

Tell us, ye whom we have lately adopted as our brethren – Have we generously granted to you who have emigrated from Great-Britain, or its dominions, / every privilege we enjoy ourselves in the freest country on earth, and do you, even before you have entered your teens in this country wish in return, to deprive us of one of the greatest blessings of our birth right? A blessing formerly claimed, and which we most sincerely hope will soon be regained in the country which gave you birth.

You certainly cannot be so ungenerous, so extremely ungrateful. We will *impute* your opposition merely to your inattention to the principles of our government, and flatter ourselves with the hope that each day will gradually wear off your enmity, and that experience and time will at last render you our firm, our steadfast friends.

To you native Americans, who oppose us, we shall only say – Do you not blush at being so ignorant of the real essence of our constitution, as to object that the people of this country should enjoy a liberty asserted in Ireland, as an unalienable privilege under, and undeniable appendage of the British constitution? And this claim boldly and nobly insisted on, under the immediate direction of a despotic, tyrannical time serving bench; *a bench at the same time possessing more*

modesty than our opposers; for they did not even in the plentitude of their power, attempt to contravene the *propriety* of this claim.

Forgiving all injurious reflections against us, we most sacredly wish to unite with you in the strictest political friendship; but you cannot, nay we are certain you will not, on due consideration insist, that the first bond of that union on our part, shall be a deliberate and sacrilegious surrender of one of our dearest rights, an open acknowledgement that we do not enjoy an equal degree of freedom with the people of that nation, from whose tyrannical fangs many of you but a few years ago bravely assisted us in emancipating ourselves. /

Tell us what we can do, without injuring our feelings as freemen, and we will go a great way indeed to exterminate forever the spirit of discord and dissention which has by far too long perplexed and tormented the citizens of this state.

We are sensible that you have all the agents from Great-Britain, and lovers of the government of that country on your side, by which means you in a great degree direct our commerce and command our purses, but we cannot, notwithstanding, permit you to divest us of the privileges we enjoy under our constitution and laws; it would be improper in you to desire such a sacrifice.

And now, Republican Fellow-Citizens, we will close with shewing a few of the advantages which probably will arise from the establishment of such societies as ours.

Is the liberty of the press an advantage?

It would be treason against common sense, to say that it is not.

Let us then see, what the learned gentleman, the author of the Federalist, whose authority will not be questioned by our opponents, says on this subject (see vol. 2, p. 349.) In proving that no possible evil could arise from the liberty of the press not being secured by the constitution, he says, 'What is the liberty of the press? Who can give it any definition which would not leave the utmost latitude for evasion?' I hold it to be impracticable, and from this I infer, that its security, whatever fine declaration may be inserted in any constitution respecting it, must altogether depend on *public opinion and on the general spirit of the people*, and of the government; and *here*, after all, as intimated upon another occasion, *must we seek for the only solid basis of all our rights*.

If we must then, as this gentleman confesses, rest the / only basis of our *rights* on the spirit of the people, and the government, shall his friends and admirers come forward and say, That the people, or any part of them, are not to meet for the purpose of examining and discussing whether there is, or is not, any infringement on those rights, and in a manly, but decent tone express their opinions, and when necessary, *demand redress*?

But perhaps some of our sophistical opponents may observe, that the Federalist was written for the express purpose of obtaining an adoption of the constitution, and that many of the sentiments contained therein, were only

designed to be applied to that very critical period, but buried in utter oblivion forever afterwards.

For the honour of human nature, we are bound to think otherwise, but if our opinion is too favourable, the author can easily undeceive us.

In the meantime, request him, or any of his advocates to reconcile the above quoted expressions, with their opposition to the Republican Societies established on this Continent.

Should they be silent, it must be deemed a tacit acknowledgment of their error, and if they favour us with a serious argumentative answer, they may rely on having a temperate dispassionate reply.

This mode of conduct, if pursued on their part, as requested and determined to be observed on ours, will enable you, our *Republican* Fellow-Citizens, to determine clearly, and upon good grounds, Whether *they* or *we* are most your friends; and the friends of our joint country and government. Sarcastic wit, scurrilous ribaldry, general and unmeaning calumny, let it come from what quarter it will, we are determined to treat with silent contempt.

Another very important advantage to be derived from the institutions of societies similar to ours, is the promotion of useful knowledge, and the dissemination of political information. /

The character and worth of individuals ought ever to be estimated in proportion to the services they render to the community of which they are members. The active exertions of our talents, the industrious exercise of our abilities, is a debt we all owe to society from the first and most sacred principles of the social compact, and it is upon the strict and faithful performance of these duties, that the safety and public happiness of nations depend.

If the society possesses an absolute and unlimited claim upon the service of its members, it follows as a necessary consequence, that it is incumbent upon each individual, to use every exertion in acquiring a knowledge of the principles of government, and of the rights and interests of its Fellow-Citizens, that he may be the better qualified to support and maintain the one, and to protect and defend the other.

But it is in republican governments – governments instituted upon the only just and solid principle, to promote the universal good and welfare of the people, and not to further the wicked designs and crafty intentions of men in power – governments in which *political* as well as *civil* liberty has established its salutary and happy seat – where the officers of state are equally open to every class and description of citizens, without any other distinction than that which arises from a superiority of virtue and talents; where no other empire is known than that of liberty; no other sway acknowledged but that of law directly derived from the pure and flowing streams of justice and equal Rights; that it becomes a duty more particularly incumbent upon individuals, to acquire a perfect knowledge

of the government and political institutions of their country, in the administration of which they may one day be called upon to take an active share.

To the memory of illustrious characters, the ornaments / of their age and country, who have spent their valuable lives in philosophical pursuits, and in making beneficial discoveries in science; those who have invented or improved the useful or the liberal arts, public honours have been paid, and statues erected. The reason is obvious; because they were useful members of society, and benefactors of mankind. Is the study then of government, in which are involved the dearest interests of human nature, less serviceable or honorable than attainments in any other science? Is less honour or esteem due to the men who devote their time in pursuing the general welfare of their country? Let truth, let candour, let public gratitude decide.

Fellow-Citizens, without attempting to awaken your feelings, or sound the trumpet of alarm to your passions, we will now proceed to pourtray the inconsistency of the enemies to our institution.

Public opinion agreeable to the assertions of their great champion, is *the foundation of all our liberties*, and constitutes the only solid ground work of all our Rights.⁶ But how is that opinion to be formed? Is it to be the result of a careful and attentive deliberation, are you to hear and impartially weigh the arguments on both sides of all questions, and decide as the scale of reason is found to preponderate? By no means, say our enemies, let the presses teem with publications in justification of every measure of the government, however impolitic or arbitrary: Let *Pacificus* and *Publicola* distribute their aristocratic writings in every corner of the Union; and gain eternal fame by undermining the liberties of their country: Let us crush all societies and meetings of the people, established for the purpose of disseminating political information: Let us tell the citizens that public opinion is to be the evidence and safeguard of their rights; but let us mould that public opinion so as to make it congenial with our own interests. /

Such is the sum and substance of the arguments of our enemies, when the *clue* is unravelled – the garb of dissimulation removed and the naked deformity of their assertions presented to the view. Attend for a moment with candour to the voice of men who are devoted to your interests – the first with of whose hearts is the preservation of your Rights, your Fellow-Citizens, embarked in the same cause, and cemented to yourselves by ties of the most indissoluble union, who have no sinister motives or private views to serve, and cannot therefore be suspected of an intention to deceive.

Watch, therefore, carefully watch the conduct of your public servants, examine the different motives by which they appear to be actuated; view all public measures throughout the whole connected chain of consequences, and dilligently enquire, whether, your supreme and universal good is the real object to be promoted.

If this, then, is found to be the case, if the conduct of your government is found to proceed from pure and disinterested motives, and not from views of personal aggrandizement, and private gratification, reward it with all that a free people can bestow, your attachment and esteem; but by no means suffer yourselves to be closed by the baneful opiate of excessive security. If, on the other hand, the picture of your affairs assumes a darker shade – if the sable hue of your political atmosphere portends an impending storm, suffer not the dreadful cloud to approach too nigh; sound the alarm, then flock to the standard of common defence, and evince to the world, that the people of the United States are the only supreme sovereign, the careful preservers, and saviours of their Rights.

Already, Fellow-Citizens, you have doubtless observed the striking contrast between our sentiments, and the opinions of our opponents: You cannot but / be well convinced, that the throne of despotism, the seat of oppression and tyranny, can only be founded upon the basis of ignorance and unlimited confidence; while the best preservative of Liberty, is public knowledge and information. If, then, by the institution of our society, or of others similar to our own, we acquire a knowledge of one single political point, we benefit ourselves; if we publish it for your inspection, we render you a service the most essential.

Again – As ignorance is the irreconcilable enemy of Liberty, so also is it the immediate parent of guilt; it poisons every pure fountain of morals in a state, and generates the greater proportion of crimes, that infest and disturb the peace of society; until at length, its contagious influence, flowing through every stream of example and imitation, has pervaded the most remote parts, the most obscure recesses of the political system, and banished every element of virtue. Thus it is, that from want of information, the moral features of a state become distorted, and a large group of enormities are presented to the indignant reflection – it would in the nature of things be impossible, that the evil should rest here, or government escape the dangerous infection; the symptoms of the malady too soon become evident; penal laws and capital punishments, the prison, the gibbet, and the rack are soon found to be the inseparable consequences, and inevitable additions to the natural evils that are attendant on man. The association, then, that is established to obtain a knowledge of our rights, must also be calculated to instruct us in the nature and extent of our duties.

Such was the pure, such the patriotic purpose for which the society that now addresses you was instituted. To obtain a more perfect knowledge of the fundamental principles of our own constitution; to diffuse political information; to form a more intimate acquaintance / with the sacred and unalienable rights of mankind; to cherish in our breasts the pure and holy flame of Liberty, and to cultivate the love of our country as the most noble of human virtues, were the great and ruing objects of its formation.

Will you, then, our brethren, listen to the pitiful artifices of our calumniators, your enemies, as well as our own? Will you be beguiled by the insidious misrepresentations of those men who wish to banish us forever from your confidence? Will you consider it as criminal in us, that we regard your own and our rights, that we love our country and adore Liberty? Too well we know your hearts, to entertain for a moment the injurious idea. We will cease to wound your feelings even with the appearance of a doubt. — Yes! our countrymen, we still recognize in you the saviours of freedom: We yet see in you that deep rooted enmity to tyrants; that settled detestation of kings and royalty; that determined, unconquerable spirit of independence, which has hitherto rendered the American character first among the nations of the world. How then could we suppose, that you, our Fellow-Citizens, whose sentiments are so congenial, whose interests are so closely interwoven with our own, should become our enemies? Who so hardy to declare, that before the sons of fathers who so recently had conquered in our revolutionary war, have attained the years of manhood, before the blood that so lately streamed at Lexington, has mingled with the earth, that Republican Americans will oppose the institution of a society, intended for the promotion and preservation of Republican principles, or condemn the sentiments of Democracy, founded upon equal rights of mankind, as sentiments contradictory to their own.

We shall only add, That as this session of Congress has been remarkable for debate on some of the most momentous / national concerns, it must be incompatible with the idea of a free government, not to suppose, that our legislature were desirous to know the sentiments of the people at large, whose voice when it can be fully and clearly expressed, they ought implicitly to obey, if circumstances and events remain the same, as when that voice was given; and we know of no better mode of expressing that voice, than by societies whose members are composed of, and mingle with, every class of citizens; and who dedicate a certain portion of their time to that particular purpose.⁷

By Order of the Democratic Society of the City of New-York,

JAMES NICHOLSON, *Pres*

Attest, T. WORTMAN, Sec'y.

THE END

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