

VOICES OF  
FREEDOM  
A Documentary History  
Fifth Edition  
Volume 1

# VOICES OF FREEDOM

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EDITED BY

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Volume 1



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The petition, of us the subscribers now residing on the western side of the Ohio, humbly show our grateful acknowledgments to those patriots of our country who under Divine Providence so wisely directed and steered the helm of government in that great and unparalleled conflict for liberty, bringing to a happy period the troubles of the states, laying the foundation . . . of the most glorious form of government any people on earth could ever yet boast of.

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Notwithstanding when the joyful sound of peace had reached our ears, we had scarce enough left us to support the crying distresses of our families occasioned wholly by being exposed to the ravages of a cruel and oppressive war. The most of us have since the continuance of the war been reduced to the lowest degree of poverty in lands, and are now in a desperate situation. The acquisition of vacant lands has been the means of driving us to enter into a requisition of the government for the purchase of land at content in the most expensive manner. We are now under the necessity of purchasing land at a price which we were never able to pay. At Fort McIntosh, the British had destroyed our settlements, and now appears our conduct in settling here is considered by the legislature to be prejudicial to the common good, of which we had not the least conception until now. We are greatly distressed in our present circumstances, and humbly pray if you in your wisdom think proper to grant us liberty, to rest where we are and to grant us the preference to our actual settlements when the land is to be settled by order of the government.

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## Questions

1. Who do the authors of the petition consider to be the greatest enemies of their liberty?
2. Who do the authors claim ought to have preference when western land is distributed?

### 41. David Ramsey, American Innovations in Government (1789)

*Source: David Ramsey, The History of the American Revolution (2 vols.: Philadelphia, 1789), pp. 355-57.*

A member of the Continental Congress from South Carolina, David Ramsey published his history of the Revolution in the year the Constitution was ratified. In this excerpt, he lauds the principles of representative government, and the right of future amendment, embodied in the state constitutions and adopted in the national one, as unique American political principles and the best ways of securing liberty. Like many Americans of his era, Ramsey insisted that the political system of the United States was fundamentally different from that of Europe, and offered an opportunity to demonstrate to the rest of the world humankind's capacity for self-government.

THE FAMED SOCIAL compact between the people and their rulers, did not apply to the United States. The sovereignty was in the people. In their sovereign capacity by their representatives, they agreed on forms of government for their own security, and deputed certain individuals as their agents to serve them in public stations agreeably to constitutions, which prescribed their conduct.

The world has not hitherto exhibited so fair an opportunity for promoting social happiness. It is hoped for the honor of human nature, that the result will prove the fallacy of those theories that

mankind are incapable of self government. The ancients, not knowing the doctrine of representation, were apt in their public meetings to run into confusion, but in America this mode of taking the sense of the people, is so well understood, and so completely reduced to system, that its most populous states are often peaceably convened in an assembly of deputies, not too large for orderly deliberation, and yet representing the whole in equal proportion. These popular branches of legislature are miniature pictures of the community, and from their mode of election are likely to be influenced by the same interests and feelings with the people whom they represent. . . . These circumstances give us as great a security that laws will be made, and government administered for the good of the people, as can be expected from the imperfection of human institutions.

In this view of the formation and establishment of the American constitutions, we behold our species in a new situation. In no age before, and in no other country, did man ever possess an election of the kind of government, under which he would choose to live. The constituent parts of the ancient free governments were thrown together by accident. The freedom of modern European governments was, for the most part, obtained by concessions, or liberality of monarchs, or military leaders. In America alone, reason and liberty concurred in the formation of constitutions. . . . In one thing they were all perfect. They left the people in the power of altering and amending them, whenever they pleased. In this happy peculiarity they placed the science of politics on a footing with the other sciences, by opening it to improvements from experience, and the discoveries of future ages. By means of this power of amending American constitutions, the friends of mankind have fondly hoped that oppression will one day be no more.

### Questions

1. In what ways, according to Ramsey, does the formation of governments in the United States differ from precedents in other times and places?

2. Why does Ramsey feel that the power to amend the Constitution is so important a political innovation?

## 42. Patrick Henry's Anti-Federalist Argument (1788)

*Source: Patrick Henry: "Anti-Federalist Argument" from The Complete Anti-Federalist, Volume 1, pp. 285–90, edited by Herbert J. Storing. Copyright © The University of Chicago Press. Reprinted by permission of The University of Chicago Press.*

Opponents of the ratification of the Constitution, called Anti-Federalists, insisted that the document shifted the balance between liberty and power too far in the direction of the latter. They predicted that the new government would fall under the sway of wealthy Americans hostile to the liberties of ordinary folk. Popular self-government, they claimed, flourished best in small communities, where rulers and ruled interacted daily.

Among the leaders of the movement for independence who opposed ratification of the Constitution, few were as eloquent as Patrick Henry. In June 1788 he unsuccessfully implored the Virginia convention called to consider ratification to reject the document, arguing that it would create a "consolidated" national government that would suppress Americans' liberties and completely overshadow the governments of the states.

AN OPINION HAS gone forth, we find, that we are a contemptible people: The time has been when we were thought otherwise: Under this same despised Government, we commanded the respect of all Europe: Wherefore are we now reckoned otherwise? The American spirit has fled from hence: It has gone to regions, where it has never been expected: It has gone to the people of France in search of a splendid Government—a strong energetic Government. Shall we imitate the example of those nations who have gone from a simple

to a splendid Government? Are those nations more worthy of our imitation? What can make an adequate satisfaction to them for the loss they suffered in attaining such a Government for the loss of their liberty? If we admit this Consolidated Government it will be because we like a great splendid one. Some way or other we must be a great and mighty empire; we must have an army, and a navy, and a number of things: When the American spirit was in its youth, the language of America was different: Liberty, Sir, was then the primary object. We are descended from a people whose Government was founded on liberty: Our glorious forefathers of Great-Britain, made liberty the foundation of every thing. That country is become a great, mighty, and splendid nation; not because their Government is strong and energetic; but, Sir, because liberty is its direct end and foundation: We drew the spirit of liberty from our British ancestors; by that spirit we have triumphed over every difficulty.

But now, Sir, the American spirit, assisted by the ropes and chains of consolidation, is about to convert this country to a powerful and mighty empire: If you make the citizens of this country agree to become the subjects of one great consolidated empire of America, your Government will not have sufficient energy to keep them together: Such a Government is incompatible with the genius of republicanism: There will be no checks, no real balances, in this Government: What can avail your specious imaginary balances, your rope-dancing, chain-rattling, ridiculous ideal checks and contrivances? But, Sir, we are not feared by foreigners: we do not make nations tremble: Would this, Sir, constitute happiness, or secure liberty? I trust, Sir, our political hemisphere will ever direct their operations to the security of those objects. Consider our situation, Sir: Go to the poor man, ask him what he does; he will inform you, that he enjoys the fruits of his labour, under his own fig-tree, with his wife and children around him, in peace and security. Go to every other member of the society, you will find the same tranquil ease and content; you will find no alarms or disturbances: Why then tell us of dangers to terrify us into an adoption of this new Govern-

ment? and yet who knows the dangers that this new system may produce; they are out of the sight of the common people: They cannot foresee latent consequences: I dread the operation of it on the middling and lower class of people: It is for them I fear the adoption of this system.

We are told that this Government collectively taken, is without an example—That it is national in this part, and federal in that part, &c. We may be amused if we please, by a treatise of political anatomy. In the brain it is national: The stamina are federal—some limbs are federal—others national. The Senators are voted for by the State Legislatures, so far it is federal.—Individuals choose the members of the first branch; here it is national. It is federal in conferring general powers; but national in retaining them. It is not to be supported by the States—The pockets of individuals are to be searched for its maintenance. What signifies it to me, that you have the most curious anatomical description of it in its creation? To all the common purposes of Legislation it is a great consolidation of Government. You are not to have a right to legislate in any but trivial cases: You are not to touch private contracts: You are not to have the right of having arms in your own defence: You cannot be trusted with dealing out justice between man and man. What shall the States have to do? Take care of the poor—repair and make highways—erect bridges, and so on, and so on. Abolish the State Legislatures at once. What purposes should they be continued for? Our Legislature will indeed be a ludicrous spectacle—180 men marching in solemn farcical procession, exhibiting a mournful proof of the lost liberty of their country—without the power of restoring it. But, Sir, we have the consolation that it is a mixed Government: That is, it may work sorely on your neck; but you will have some comfort by saying, that it was a Federal Government in its origin.

I beg Gentlemen to consider—lay aside your prejudices—Is this a federal Government? Is it not a Consolidated Government for every purpose almost? Is the Government of Virginia a State Government after this Government is adopted? I grant that it is a Republican

Government—but for what purposes? For such trivial domestic considerations, as render it unworthy the name of a Legislature.

The State Governments, says he, will possess greater advantages than the General Government, and will consequently prevail. His opinion and mine are diametrically opposite. Bring forth the Federal allurements, and compare them with the poor contemptible things that the State Legislatures can bring forth. On the part of the State Legislatures, there are Justices of Peace and militia officers—And even these Justices and officers, are bound by oath in favour of the Constitution. A constable is the only man who is not obliged to swear paramount allegiance to this beloved Congress. On the other hand, there are rich, fat Federal emoluments—your rich, snug, fine, fat Federal offices—The number of collectors of taxes and excises will outnumber any thing from the States. Who can cope with the excisemen and taxmen? There are none in this country, that can cope with this class of men alone. But, Sir, is this the only danger? Would to Heaven that it were. If we are to ask which will last the longest—the State or the General Government, you must take an army and a navy into the account. Lay these things together, and add to the enumeration the superior abilities of those who manage the General Government. Can then the State Governments look it in the face? You dare not look it in the face now, when it is but an *embryo*. The influence of this Government will be such, that you never can get amendments; for if you propose alterations, you will affront them. Let the Honorable Gentleman consider all these things and say, whether the State Governments will last as long as the Federal Government.

### Questions

1. What are Henry's most important objections to the new Constitution?
2. Why does Henry feel that a "consolidated" government is a danger to liberty?

### 43. A July Fourth Oration (1800)

#### Source:

From the *Annals of the City of New York*, 1800, 1:100. The oration was published in the *Connecticut Courant* on July 4, 1800. He celebrated the Declaration of Independence but not fully. Like many other Americans, he was disappointed in the progress for the new nation. He believed that the American people had not fully embraced the principles of the Revolution. He argued that the new government was not fully established and that the people were still in a state of anarchy. He called for a more unified and virtuous nation.

On the 4th of July, 1800, the anniversary of the adoption of the Declaration of Independence, the following oration was delivered in New York City. It was one of the most popular of the orations of the time. The speaker, a young man named John Jay, urged that the principles of the Declaration be firmly established in the minds of the people. He argued that the new government was not fully established and that the people were still in a state of anarchy. He called for a more unified and virtuous nation. The idea that had been put forth by a few writers in the 1790s but was quite unusual for the time. Overall, the speech offered both an illustration of American nationalism in the aftermath of the Revolution and a telling commentary on the extent and limits of American freedom at the dawn of the nineteenth century.

...

TO THE PRINCIPLES, the genuine, universal principles of the Declaration of Independence, we consecrate this day. Our festivity is not on account of the achievements of armies, nor merely because the seat of government is removed from London to Philadelphia, but because the American people have calmly and deliberately declared, that "all men are created equal," and in the presence of the supreme God have, in support of this declaration, pledged their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor.

...

Whatever may be the future fate of America, she has destroyed the Bastille, she has liberated Belgium, her principles have scaled the Alps,

**45.** J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur, "What, Then, Is the American?" (1782)

Source: J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer* (London, 1782), pp. 48–56.

In the era of the Revolution, many foreigners celebrated the United States as not only an independent nation, but a new society in which individuals could enjoy opportunities unknown in the Old World and where a new nationality was being forged from the diverse populations of Europe. No one promoted this image of America more enthusiastically than J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur, who had settled in New York and married the daughter of a prominent landowner after serving in the French army during the Seven Years' War. He later returned to France and published a glowing account of life in the United States, entitled *Letters from an American Farmer*. As one who had lived in both Europe and the United States, he outlined the differences a newcomer was likely to note between the two societies. His description of the emergence of a "new man" from the diverse populations of Europe would later be popularized as the idea of the American melting pot.

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I WISH I COULD be acquainted with the feelings and thoughts which must agitate the heart and present themselves to the mind of an enlightened Englishman, when he first lands on this continent. He must greatly rejoice that he lived at a time to see this fair country discovered and settled; he must necessarily feel a share of national pride, when he views the chain of settlements which embellishes these extended shores. When he says to himself, this is the work of my countrymen, who, when convulsed by factions, afflicted by a variety of miseries and wants, restless and impatient, took refuge here. They brought along with them their national genius, to which they principally owe what liberty they enjoy, and what substance they possess.

Here he sees the industry of his native country displayed in a new manner, and traces in their works the embryos of all the arts, sci-

ences, and ingenuity which flourish in Europe. Here he beholds fair cities, substantial villages, extensive fields, an immense country filled with decent houses, good roads, orchards, meadows, and bridges, where an hundred years ago all was wild, woody and uncultivated! . . . He is arrived on a new continent; a modern society offers itself to his contemplation, different from what he had hitherto seen. It is not composed, as in Europe, of great lords who possess every thing and of a herd of people who have nothing. Here are no aristocratical families, no courts, no kings, no bishops, no ecclesiastical dominion, no invisible power giving to a few a very visible one; no great manufacturers employing thousands, no great refinements of luxury. The rich and the poor are not so far removed from each other as they are in Europe. Some few towns excepted, we are all tillers of the earth, from Nova Scotia to West Florida. We are a people of cultivators, scattered over an immense territory communicating with each other by means of good roads and navigable rivers, united by the silken bands of mild government, all respecting the laws, without dreading their power, because they are equitable. We are all animated with the spirit of an industry which is unfettered and unrestrained, because each person works for himself. If he travels through our rural districts he views not the hostile castle, and the haughty mansion, contrasted with the clay-built hut and miserable cabin, where cattle and men help to keep each other warm, and dwell in meanness, smoke, and indigence. A pleasing uniformity of decent competence appears throughout our habitations. The meanest of our log-houses is a dry and comfortable habitation. Lawyer or merchant are the fairest titles our towns afford; that of a farmer is the only appellation of the rural inhabitants of our country. . . . We have no princes, for whom we toil, starve, and bleed: we are the most perfect society now existing in the world. Here man is free; as he ought to be. . . .

The next wish of this traveler will be to know whence came all these people? they are mixture of English, Scotch, Irish, French, Dutch, Germans, and Swedes. From this promiscuous breed, that race now called Americans have arisen. . . . In this great American asylum, the poor of Europe have by some means met together. . . .

Urged by a variety of motives, here they came. Every thing has tended to regenerate them; new laws, a new mode of living, a new social system; here they are become men: in Europe they were as so many useless plants, wanting vegetative mould, and refreshing showers; they withered, and were mowed down by want, hunger, and war. . . .

What then is the American, this new man? He is either an European, or the descendant of an European, hence that strange mixture of blood, which you will find in no other country. . . . He is an American, who leaving behind him all his ancient prejudices and manners, receives new ones from the new mode of life he has embraced, the new government he obeys, and the new rank he holds.

### Questions

1. What characteristics of American life does Crèvecoeur emphasize as being different from European society?
2. What aspects of society, and which parts of the people living in the United States, are left out of his description?

## CHAPTER 8

# Securing the Republic, 1700–1815

### 46. Benjamin F. Bache, *A Defense of the French Revolution* (1792–1793)

Source: *The General Advertiser* (Philadelphia), December 23, 1792, and January 1, 1793.

The French Revolution regenerated liberty in the United States. From its outbreak in 1789, Americans eagerly followed the progress of events. Initially, many Americans looked on the revolution as a fulfillment of the promise of the American Revolution. The French Revolution ended into bloodshed and chaos, and the Federalists, who had remained sympathetic while criticizing its excesses. . . . In Philadelphia newspaper he edited, Benjamin Franklin Bache, a grandson of Benjamin Franklin and himself a leading Republican, defended the actions of the French revolutionaries, insisting that a long-established system of “despotism” could not be overthrown without turmoil. The opposition to change, he insisted, was more deeply entrenched in France than it had been in America, and hence the struggle for liberty had to be more extreme.

Later in the 1790s, Bache was arrested under the Sedition Act, which made it a crime to criticize the policies of President John Adams. His experience illustrates how early American politics was profoundly influenced by events elsewhere in the Atlantic world.