

An Assembly of Demigods

Gouverneur Morris

William Duer to Robert R. Livingston, Philadelphia, July 9, 1777

At present there are no very great Matters in which our State is particularly interested before Congress; and indeed if they were, Mr. [Gouverneur] Morris can supply my place with great Advantage to the Reputation of the State, as well as his own. His Coolness of Temper, and happy Vein of Irony are Qualifications, which would render him a very powerful Antagonist to Mr. R. H. Lee.

John Laurens to Alexander Hamilton, Philadelphia, December 18, 1779

. . . the world in general allows greater credit for his abilities than his integrity.

William Bingham to John Jay, Philadelphia, July 1, 1780

An unlucky accident lately happened to Gouverneur Morris. In attempting to drive a pair of wild horse in a phaeton, he was thrown out and in the fall his left leg caught in the wheel and was greatly shattered. He was under the necessity of having it amputated below the knee and is now in a fair way of recovery.

John Jay to Robert Morris, St. Idefonso, September 16, 1780

Gouverneur's Leg has been a Tax on my Heart. I am almost tempted to wish he had lost something else.

Nathanael Greene to Charles Pettit, December 21, 1782

[On the rumor that Superintendent of Finance Robert Morris had been killed in a duel, it was thought that Gouverneur Morris might fill the Superintendent's vacancy.] Gouverneur Morris is in the order of promotion; but the confidence of the people is wanting. His abilities are great; but I fear he has more of genius than judgment.

Francisco de Miranda: Travels in the United States, 1783-1784

Mr. Gouverneur Morris, the lively intellect of the town, and it seems to me he has more ostentation, audacity, and tinsel than real value.

Luigi Castiglioni: Sketches of American Statesmen, 1787

All those who have the good fortune to know him marvel at his talents and can only profit from his conversation and his pleasant company. As courteous and refined as a European, free as an American, he combines the talents of French bon ton and republican frankness, and is welcomed with pleasure in Philadelphia society.

Otto's Biographies, Fall 1788

Citizen of the state of New York, but always connected with Robert Morris and having represented Pennsylvania several times. Celebrated lawyer, one of the best organized minds on the continent, but without manners, and, if one believes his enemies, without principles; extremely interesting in conversation having studied finances with special care. He works constantly with Robert Morris. He is feared more than admired, but few regard him with esteem.

Gouverneur Morris to George Washington, London, April 6, 1792

I now promise you that Circumspection of Conduct which has hitherto I acknowledge formed no Part of my Character. And I make the *Promise* that my Sense of Integrity may enforce what my Sense of Propriety dictates.

Mercy Otis Warren's *History of the American Revolution*, 1805

A character eccentric from youth to declining age; a man of pleasure, pride, and extravagance, fond of the trappings of monarchy, and implicated by a considerable portion of the citizens of America, as deficient in principle, was not a suitable person for a resident minister in France at so important a crisis. . . . These circumstances required a man of character, rather than a dexterous agent of political mischief, whose abilities and address were well adapted either for private or court intrigue.