



CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF THE AMERICAN CONSTITUTION

csac.history.wisc.edu > Document Collections > The Constitutional Convention > The Campaign Against the Critics of the Constitution > Alexander Hamilton Attacks New York Governor George Clinton

Anti-Defamationis

New York Journal, 20 September 1787

MR. GREENLEAF, With great indignation I have observed several publications that have lately appeared, reflecting, in a most illiberal manner, on the Governor of this state, on account of some accidental expressions, concerning the Convention at Philadelphia; particularly one under the signature of *Aristides*, in the Daily Advertiser, No. 794.

For my part, I am not personally acquainted with the Governor, or with Col. Hamilton, and of course cannot be influenced by any undue partiality to either, but I cannot help thinking that the former (even admitting the assertions against him to be strictly true) has been very ill used.

I must beg leave to ask *Aristides* the following questions:

1st. Why should the Governor, or any other man, in a free state, be precluded from the privilege of speaking his sentiments in a matter of general concern?

2d. Why should the Governor, or any other man, be reprobated for differing in sentiment from a majority in Congress, or legislature of the state?

It is foreign to my purpose, at this time, to enter into a particular discussion, concerning the propriety of the appointment of the Convention at Philadelphia; but was I fully persuaded that their appointment was ill judged, and that much evil instead of good would result from their deliberations, I should conceive myself highly criminal in not communicating my ideas, although they might differ from the prevailing opinion.

The free citizens of this continent will never consent to have a constitution crammed down their throats. They have an undoubted right to examine before they accede, and to deny if they do not approve.

Although much is to be expected from the wisdom of the Convention in forming the constitution worthy of being received; it is still to be remembered, that the wisest men have often been guilty of very capital errors, and that, “notwithstanding the various forms of government hitherto recommended to the observance of men, very few are rendered better.” If, therefore, our worthy Governor, or any other man, conceives, that by attempting a cure, the malady will be increased, it becomes his duty, as far as in him lies, to stem the tide of congressional, legislative, or popular prejudice.

But the design of *Aristides* and his colleague, in thus endeavouring, by unjust stigmas and innuendoes, to cast an odium on our Governor, is too obvious to be concealed. I must tell him plainly, that his trick wont take. The people are not so easily gulled. Let him forward his squibs to a certain northern county, where they may be useful to his friends at some future day; but

here, and in other parts of the state, where the people have too much wisdom and spirit to be imposed upon, or browbeaten, they will only serve to bring the author, and his connections, into contempt.

CITE AS: John P. Kaminski et al., eds., *The Documentary History of the Ratification of the Constitution*, Vol. XIX: New York [1] (Madison, Wis.: Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 2003), 29–31.