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Convention

William Pierce: Oration Delivered in Savannah, Ga. 4 July 1788 (excerpts)

On 16 March 1788 the Georgia Society of the Cincinnati appointed a three-man committee to select one of its members to deliver an oration on the Fourth of July. Two weeks later the committee reported that Major William Pierce, a Savannah merchant, had agreed to give the oration. Pierce had been a delegate to the Constitutional Convention in 1787.

. . . Our Union, every day weakening, would before this have fallen into ruin, had not that wisdom which has guarded us in all extremes pointed to the propriety of consolidating our interests, and uniting our views under the direction of a general government. The different states appear by their Deputies at Philadelphia, to undertake the momentous task. At the head of this great Council presides the immortal Washington, and with him many of those illustrious characters whose signatures grace the scroll of Independence. After four months deliberation the great work is produced. It rises to view like a pyramid, whose broad foundation is the people,—whose summit is their happiness. Let us examine the inscription which relates the story of its birth:—“In all our deliberations” (say the framers) “we kept steadily in view, that which appeared to us the greatest interest of every true American, the consolidation of our Union, in which is involved our prosperity, felicity, safety,—perhaps our national existence. This important consideration, seriously and deeply impressed on our minds, led each state in the Convention to be less rigid on points of inferior magnitude than might have been otherwise expected,—and the Constitution which is here presented is the result of a spirit of amity, and of that mutual deference and concession which the peculiarity of our political situation rendered indispensable.”¹ . . .

In contemplating our success in this great undertaking, we should congratulate ourselves that no mischievous or ambitious character should have shaken or disturbed the public mind during the deliberations of the Convention;—and that no popular leader since should have started up to give us law, and take advantage of our divisions. . . .

1. Quoted from the letter of the President of the Constitutional Convention (George Washington) to the President of Congress, 17 September 1787.

CITE AS: John P. Kaminski et al., eds., *The Documentary History of the Ratification of the Constitution*, Vol. XVIII: Commentaries on the Constitution, Public and Private [6] (Madison, Wis.: Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 1995), 249–54.