Denatus
Virginia Independent Chronicle, 11 June 1788 (excerpts)

To the MEMBERS *of the* VIRGINIA FEDERAL CONVENTION, *collectively, and individually.*

GENTLEMEN, . . .

I object to it [the Constitution] also, because, it appears to be a huddled piece of work: and (that in the general bustle) they forgot to put a bill of rights to it. A bill of rights! say Mr. Wilson and others, to confederated powers, is unnecessary—Very truly, to powers properly confederated, but this is no confederation. It is a national government, i. e. through a little time, the incroachment will so prevail, that the fœderal constitution will expunge entirely the state constitutions—It appears to be a confederation now, but the monarch who is asleep in its bosom, at a convenient time, will awaken with a vengeance!—There would be no need of a bill of rights, were the states properly confederated. The land-mark clearly drawn between the powers that give, and the power given:—And where the remaining parts of the powers that give, are ever to be held sacred by the power given. The remaining parts of the powers that give, or the residue, of our state constitutions, would be a bill of rights, to the power given, or the fœderal constitution. Had this distinction been clearly fixed, so as to prevent any future controversy, the constitution in question, would have been a glorious, and an immortal example of human wisdom. But alas! this is not the case—There is no barrier to the power of the fœderal constitution. It will easily overleap our state constitutions with impunity. When this comes to be the case, and the fœderal constitution sovereign in all things, we ought to have a bill of rights, to save us from oppression. The want of this, is of an alarming nature, and I hope will be one of your amendments.

Had the creator of the universe thought proper to form mankind without selfish and dissocial passions, I think I can maintain, that we would be happy, and in little need of human government. Reason, or the internal voice of infinite wisdom, would be the sole conductor of man.—But for purposes best known to this almighty sovereign of pure goodness and order, we are subject to many jarring propensities. Among these, vanity, ambition, and the love of riches, are not the least.—While reason and conscience can confine the passions, their action and re-action on each other, constitute human happiness. But, when they overcome reason and conscience, they produce our misery. To guard against this misfortune, as much as human foresight could discover, ought to have been the chief business of the late fœderal convention. This necessary and heavy part of the work is not mentioned in the constitution, and for this reason I object to it—Some will say this is no objection—It would have been simple in the convention to debate on preventing those things which have no being, and which, if necessary, may be done by Congress at a future

period. I may be wrong, but in my way of thinking, it is an objection, for the source of all the revolutions and calamities that ever will befal the United States of America, lie dormant in the human mind this very day. The prevention of these misfortunes, which will flow from the passions, instead of being utterly neglected, ought to have employed the most solemn moments of the convention, and ought to have been the point, to which all their views should have tended. . . .

CITE AS: John P. Kaminski et al., eds., *The Documentary History of the Ratification of the Constitution*, Vol. X: Virginia [3] (Madison, Wis.: Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 1993), 1599–1607.