David Ramsay Oration
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I congratulate you my fellow-citizens on the ratification of the new constitution. This event, replete with advantages, promises to repay us for the toils, dangers and waste of the late revolution. Merely to have established independence was but half the work assigned to this generation. Without an efficient government to protect our rights, in vain have our heroes spilt their blood in emancipating us from Great-Britain; that the blessings of such a government have not yet descended upon us is a melancholly truth too universally known and felt to be disguised. I will not wound your feelings on this festive day, by recapitulating our national distresses since the peace. When we thought our sufferings were ended, we found them only to be varied; nor is it wonderful that constitutions hastily instituted by young politicians and in the tumult of war, should not fully answer their ends in time of peace—Expiring credit, languishing commerce, with a group of concommittant evils, proclaimed aloud something to be fundamentally wrong.—The spirit of the country was once more roused. Unattacked by foreign force—unconvulsed by domestic violence, America called forth her sons to meet and form a constitution for the future good government of her widely extended settlements. To combine in one system, thirteen states differing in climate, soil and manners, and impelled by variant interests, was the arduous work assigned to this band of patriots. Heaven smiled on their deliberations, and inspired their councils with a spirit of conciliation: hence arose a system, which seems well calculated to make us happy at home and respected abroad. The *legislative powers* are resolveable into this principle, that the sober second thoughts and dispassionate voice of the people, shall be the law of the land. The *executive* department amounts to no more than that the man of the people shall carry into effect the will of the people. The *judicial* declares, that where impartial trials from the nature of the case cannot be expected from state tribunals, there the federal judiciary shall interpose. All this power is derived from the people, and at fixed periods returns to them. No privileges are conferred on the rich or the few, but what they hold in common with the poor and the many. All distinctions of birth, rank and titles are forever excluded. Public offices are open to merit and talents wherever found, and nought forbids the poorest man in the community from attaining to the highest honors.

One of the many advantages we may expect from the adoption of this constitution, is a protecting navy. What is there at present to secure our sea-coast from being laid under contribution by a few frigates? Are either the treasuries of the continent or of the individual states sufficiently replenished to command the means of defence? We have hitherto lain at the mercy

of the most inconsiderable maritime powers, and even of a single daring pirate; but we have now well-grounded hopes of an alteration in our favor.

Nothing is more likely to secure a people from foreign attacks than a preparedness for repelling them. On this principle the militia arrangements of the new constitution promise a long exemption from foreign war.—What European power will dare to attack us, when it is known that the yeomanry of the country uniformly armed and disciplined, may on any emergency be called out to our defence by one legislature, and commanded by one person? Tradition informs us, that about forty years ago France meditated an invasion of New-England; but on reading the militia law of Massachusetts, declined the attempt. If this was the case under the wholesome regulations of one state, what room is there to fear invasion when an union of force and uniformity of system extends from New-Hampshire to Georgia? Domestic violence will on the same principles be either prevented or controled—faction will not dare to disturb the peace of a single state, nor will any aspiring leader presume to oppose lawful authority, when it is known that the strength of the whole is subjected to the will of one legislature, and may be called forth under the direction of one man for the safety of each part. How widely different would be our case under a loose federal government, or the more pernicious system of two or more separate confederacies? Let us for a moment suppose these states detached from a common head—what a field for European intrigue! It would be their interest to play off one state or confederacy against another, and to keep us at constant variance. Standing armies would then be multiplied without end, for the defence of the respective parts—good militia arrangements will for the most part be sufficient for our defence when united, but they would be far short of that purpose when our most inveterate enemies might be our next neighbours. After we had weakened ourselves with mutual devastation, we could expect no better fate than that of Poland, to be distributed as apendages to the sovereigns of Europe. To disunite the states of America, would be to entail discord and wars on our unoffending posterity, and turn a band of brethren into a monster, preying upon itself, and preyed upon by all its enemies. How much wiser that policy which embraces our whole extent of territory in one efficient system? This is not only the path to safety but to greatness. While our government was nerveless, nothing could be undertaken which required a persevering unity of design. Much may be done to improve our inland navigation and facilitate our intercourse with each other: but who would expend his capital on any project of this kind, while legislative assemblies claimed and exercised the right of making ex post facto laws? Under the stability and energy which our new constitution promises, methinks I see the rivers of these states wedded to each other. The western country attached to the sea-coast, while turnpike roads enable travellers with ease and expedition to traverse the whole of our country. These beneficial improvements must have been in a great degree relinquished, unless one legislative power had pervaded the whole of the United States.

Under the same patronage, justice will again lift up her head. While legislative assemblies interfered between debtors and creditors, what security could there be for property? He that sold, did not know that he should ever get the stipulated price. he that parted with his money could not tell when it would be replaced.—hence a total want of confidence and of credit. From this day forward, these evils will be done away; creditors knowing that they can recover payment, will be less disposed to distress their debtors than when under a fluctuating system which might induce them to make the most of present opportunities, lest future laws should create new

impediments to the course of justice. Debtors, despairing of farther legislative indulgences, and knowing that they can be compelled to pay, will be stimulated to double exertions for acquiring the means of discharging their debts. The gold and silver which have long rusted in the desks of the cautious, will once more see the light and add to the circulating medium of our country. That useful order of men, formerly called money lenders will be revived, and the distresses of the unfortunate relieved without sacrificing their property, or administering to the rapacity of usurers. Time would fail me in dilating at full length on that section of the constitution which declares, that "no state shall emit bills of credit, make any thing but gold and silver a tender in payment of debts, pass any bill of attainder or ex post facto law, impairing the obligation of contracts." This will restore credit; and credit is a mine of real wealth, far surpassing those of Mexico and Peru. It will soon bring back the good old times under which we formerly flourished and were happy.

Our new constitution will also make us respected abroad. What have these states to fear? What may they not hope for when united under one protecting head? The wealth and colonies of the most powerful nations of Europe are near our borders. In case of their future contentions, these states will stand on high ground; that scale into which they throw their weight, must, in the ordinary course of events, infallibly preponderate. The contiguity of our harbours to their territories, and that marine which will grow out of our new constitution, will enable us to hold the balance among European sovereigns. While they contend for their American possessions, those whom the United States favor will be favored, and those whom they chuse to depress will be depressed. Far be it from me to wish this country to be involved in the labyrinth of European politics, but it is both our duty and interest to improve local advantages for procuring us that respect abroad, which will promote our happiness at home. Under such circumstances, and when our citizens can be brought to act in unison, what beneficial treaties may we not expect? At present our commerce is fettered by those very powers which under the new constitution will, for their own sakes, court our friendship. For a long series of years we shall be principally a nation of farmers and planters, and disposed to purchase many manufactures from Europe. To old countries overstocked with inhabitants, and abounding with manufactures, the privilege of supplying our growing numbers with those articles we want to purchase and they to sell, will be an object for which they can afford a valuable consideration; the equivalent which might have been commanded on this account we have hitherto lost, from the want of an efficient government. It is not more melancholy than true, that the inhabitants of this state, in consequence of our deranged police, are now paying nearly as much of the taxes of Great-Britain, as they pay to support their own government. The public benefits which will flow from a constitutional ability to direct the commerce of these states on well regulated permanent principles, will enable us once more to raise our heads and assume our proper rank among the nations. Hitherto, while we were under an unbraced confederation of states, the members of the confederacy could not be brought to draw together, and in consequence thereof our ships have rotted, our commerce has either been abandoned or carried on to our prejudice.

The good consequences which may be expected to result from our new constitution, will also extend to agriculture and manufactures. The stability of government will enhance the value of real property. Our protected commerce will open new channels for our native commodities, and give additional value to the soil, by increasing the demand for its productions. At the same

time, judicious arrangements of bounties and duties, will give encouragement to such manufactures as suit our country.

That coasting trade, which under state regulations, would probably have been a source of contention, will, when directed by one legislature, become a nursery for seamen and a cement of our union. Bound together by one general government, we may defy the arts and intrigues of Europe. Commanding our own resources and acting in concert, we can form a little world within ourselves, and smile at those who are jealous of our rising greatness; their efforts against us would resemble waves dashing themselves into foam against a rock. It would be easy to enumerate a variety of other particulars, and from each of them point out advantages that will result from adopting the new constitution. We thereby become a nation, and may hope for a national character. Hitherto our manners, customs and dress have been regulated by those of Europe: But, united under one head, our people will have something original of their own, from which they may copy, and save that money which is now absurdly expended in following the fashions of foreign countries; these may well accord with their policy, but are apparent from ours.

On the whole, to separate from Britain was the least considerable object of the late revolution, and amounted to nothing more than to acquire a capacity for taking care of ourselves. To pull down one form of government without substituting something in its place that would answer the great ends for which men enter into society, would have been to trifle with posterity. The event which we are this day celebrating, acquits us of that heavy charge. The fathers of our country have proposed, and we have adopted a constitution which promises to embrace in one comprehensive system of liberty, safety and happiness the inhabitants of that vast extent of territory which reaches from the Atlantic to the Missisippi, and from the lakes of Canada to the river St. Mary. Judging of the future by the past, a child born on this day, has a prospect of living to see the time when fifty millions of freemen will enjoy the blessings of government under the administration of the president of the United States. Our new constitution is of that expansive nature as to admit of a communication of its privileges to that group of new states, which, ere long will be planted in our Western territory; provision is made for receiving them into the union as fast as they are formed. This is founded on such generous principles, as will divert them from foreign connexions or separate confederacies. What a God-like work, to embrace our growing numbers and extending settlements in one efficient system of government. This our new constitution promises; and from the humanity of the age and the liberal principles of its policy, it is likely to perform. Within one century, the citizens of the United States will probably be five times as numerous as the inhabitants of Great-Britain. Had not the present constitution, or something equivalent been adopted, no one can compute the confusion and disorder which would probably have taken place from the jarring interests of such an ungoverned multitude. The articles of confederation were of too feeble a texture to bind us together, or to ward off threatened evils. Had it not been wisely resolved to introduce a more energetic system, the states must soon have crumbled to pieces; in that case what was to protect the weak from the strong? What was to restrain some adventurous Cromwell from grasping our liberties and establishing himself on a throne of despotism? One Cromwell, did I say—more probably there would have been a score, and each contending for the sovereignty through our desolated country, bleeding in a thousand veins. Thanks to Heaven, far different are our prospects; united under one head, the force of the union will soon bring an aspiring individual or overbearing state to reason and moderation. We shall be protected from foreign invasion and

restrained from warring on one another. At the same time agriculture, commerce and the useful arts of life will be cherished and protected by federal arrangements pervading all the states, and raising them to an eminence unattainable in any circumstances of separation.

We have now in our view the fairest prospects of political happiness; the wisdom, energy and well poised ballances of our new system, promise to confute the assertions of those who maintain "that there are incurable evils inherent in every form of republican government." From the federal house of representatives we may expect a sympathy with the wants and wishes of the people—from the senate, wisdom, unity of design and a permanent system of national happiness.—from the executive, secrecy, vigor and dispatch. In short, our new constitution is a happy combination of the simple forms of government and as free from the inconveniences of each, as could be expected from the inseparable imperfection of all human institutions. It unites liberty with safety, and promises the enjoyment of all the rights of civil society, while it leads us up the steep ascent to national greatness.

Before I conclude, I beg leave to inculcate a sentiment which cannot be too often presented to the view of the public. No form of government can make a vicious and ignorant people happy.—When the majority of our citizens becomes corrupt, even our well ballanced constitution cannot save us from slavery and ruin. Let it therefore be the unceasing study of all who love their country, to promote virtue and dispense knowledge through the whole extent of our settlements. Without them our growing numbers will soon degenerate into barbarism; but with them the citizens of the United States bid fair for possessing, under the new constitution, as great a share of happiness, as any nation has hitherto enjoyed.

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