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An American: To the Members of the Virginia Convention, *Pennsylvania Gazette*, 21 May 1788 (excerpts)

To the Honorable the MEMBERS of the Convention of VIRGINIA.

By the special delegation of the people of your respectable commonwealth, you are shortly to determine on the fate of the proposed constitution of fœderal government. First invited to that important measure by the resolutions of your legislature, from the wisest considerations, America, confiding in the steadiness of your patriotism, and feeling that new weight is daily given to your original inducements, doubts not it is now to receive your sanction. But before the awful determination which is to call *the American union* once more into political existence shall be finally taken, permit one of the most respectful of your countrymen to trespass a few minutes on your time and patience.

The qualities of the proposed government have been so fully explained, and it will receive such further exposition in your honorable body, that it is needless to attempt a regular discussion of the subject. This paper shall therefore be confined to *a few particular considerations* that have been already mentioned by others, or which may now be suggested for the first time.

It has been urged by some sensible and respectable men, that your ~~populous~~ (extensive) state will not be properly represented in the fœderal senate. Permit me to remind you, that while you have but one vote of thirteen in the present union, you will have twelve in ninety one in the new confederacy. Suffer me to observe too, that as the United States are *free governments*, it might not have been very unreasonable if the people of Virginia could have given only the same number of votes at *an election for fœderal purposes*, as they can give at *a state election*. If the citizens of Virginia find it *wise and prudent*, that *free persons only* shall be taken into consideration in electing their *state* legislature, would it appear extraordinary that citizens of the United States should think *the same rule* proper in electing the *fœderal* representatives. By the present arrangement, you may enjoy the weight and power of *five* votes and a half for 168,000 slaves, being three fifths of your whole number of blacks. Were these to be deducted from the votes of Virginia in the fœderal house of representatives, it would leave little more than one vote in thirteen in that house. In the present Congress, as before observed, and in the proposed senate, a thirteenth vote is allotted to Virginia. Taking the number of free citizens, which is the proper rule of representation in *free governments*, Virginia, in the fœderal representation, would have about as many votes as New York, and *fewer* than Massachusetts or Pennsylvania. It will be proper to consider too the effect of the erection of Kentucke into a separate state, and of her becoming another member of the new confederacy. When that *certain event* shall take place, Virginia will fall *considerably short* of the proportion of one in fourteen of the free white inhabitants of the United States. Impartially considering this true state of things, the opinion that Virginia will hold a share of the powers of the new government, less than she is entitled to, will appear to be erroneous. If, on examination, these

facts shall be found to be stated with accuracy and candor, and the observations and reasonings upon them shall appear just and fair, we confidently trust your honorable house will not consider the proposed constitution as exceptionable in that particular. . . .

It has been objected to the proposed fœderal constitution, that it tends to render our country more vulnerable, by admitting the further importation of slaves. To persons not accurately acquainted with the whole of the American constitutions, this objection may appear of weight. But when it is canvassed before so enlightened an assembly as the Convention of Virginia, the mistake will be instantly discovered. It will be remembered that ten of the states, and Virginia among the number, have already prohibited the further importation of slaves, and that the power(s) of the legislature of *each state*, even after the adoption of the constitution, will not only remain *competent to prohibition of the slave trade*, but (if they find the measure wise and safe) to the emancipation of the slaves already among us. It may be added further, that the exercise of this power of the state governments can *in no wise* be controuled or restrained by the fœderal legislature. . . .

It will be urged, perhaps, that property should be represented, and that though Virginia has only 252,000 free inhabitants, your representation should still be greater than that of Massachusetts and Pennsylvania, because you are richer. But surely this argument will not be urged by the friends of *equal liberty among the people*. It will not be objected *openly* against the proposed constitution, that it secures *the equal liberties of the poor*. But suppose for a moment a claim for a representation of property were admissible before an assembly of *the free and equal citizens of America*, will not Virginia enjoy the advantage of two votes *more* in the fœderal government than either Massachusetts or Pennsylvania, though each of those states has 108,000 free citizens *more than yours*. If we were represented *by that only rule of republics*, for your *ten* representatives, Massachusetts would have *more than fourteen*, and Pennsylvania the same number, while both of them are limited to *eight*. Here then we see *the balance of property* said to be in favor of Virginia has procured her three fourths as much *extra* power, as *the lives, liberties and property of all the people of Massachusetts or Pennsylvania*. Power has been given to your state *with no sparing hand*. You (suffer me respectfully to say so) of all the members of the union, appear to have the least cause of complaint. Permit me to remind you of the objections made *on this ground* by Mr. Martin, of Maryland. The opposition *there* asserted that the great states had too large a share of power, and you have the most of all. The same sentiments were urged in the Connecticut Convention. Is it probable then that an allotment of power *more favorable to you* would be made by a new Convention? I submit to your candor whether you ought to ask a greater share. A comparison, in point of wealth and resources, between your state and any other, is a matter I wish to touch with delicacy. I mean not to offend, but you would despise a freeman, that would decline *the decent expression of his thoughts* on so momentous an occasion. I would submit to you, whether the energy of 250,000 whites in a southern climate, surrounded by more than as many slaves, can be, *or rather whether it is*, equal to that of the same number in a northern climate? Whether two or three negroes in Virginia will be found equal to one yeoman or manufacturer of Pennsylvania or Massachusetts? Whether the ships, mercantile capitals, houses, and monied corporations of Philadelphia, with her growing manufactures and connexions in foreign commerce, may not be placed in the scale against *the balance* of wealth you may be thought to possess, when Kentucke shall become an independent member of the American union. . . .