

RATIFICATION RIOTS

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(Witten in 1983)

During the years immediately after the Revolution, acts of violence occurred frequently throughout the country. Over and above colonial tradition, the war itself gave new credence to the use of violence as a means of effecting economic, political, or social reformation. In the depression years 1785–1786, a wave of economic riots erupted in every state, the most heralded occurring in Massachusetts under the leadership of Daniel Shays. This continuing post-war violence was particularly alarming to political conservatives because state assemblies, no longer under the direct control of the British Crown, now wielded almost complete power; and many of these assemblies succumbed to the demands of the masses. Henry Knox believed that the country was fast falling into “A mad democracy [which] sweeps away every moral and divine trait from the human character. Hence it is that reason, law, and patriotism is banished from almost every Legislature. Private convenience, paper money, and ex post facto laws are the main springs of the American governments.”¹ To a staid old Englishman like John Temple, it appeared as if “mobs, tumults, and bodies of men in arms are now on tiptoe in various parts of this country, all tending to the dissolution of not only what is called the supreme power [Congress] but to bring into contempt and disregard the legislatures and governments of the several states.”² Young John Marshall in Virginia even feared that he “may live to see another revolution;”³ while Tobias Lear, George Washington’s secretary, maintained that unless “measures are pointed out and adopted to give security to property as well as persons,” the country would be torn with “civil war with all its terrible consequences.”⁴ Prominent men all over the country agreed that something had to be done to strengthen the central government so that it could suppress sustained acts of violence and restrain the democratically-controlled state legislatures. The

solution to the nation's problems, at least in the eyes of one segment of the population, was embodied in the Federal Constitution of 1787 which gave Congress "the power to restrain and controul all the 13 Sub-Sovereignties."⁵

The newly proposed Constitution immediately became the most controversial issue in America since the Declaration of Independence. The terms "Federalist" and "Antifederalist" became "as familiar to the ear as Whig and Tory" during the war "and no great deal short of as much rancour and enmity against the adverse Opinions on the Subject."⁶ Given the tradition of violence, it seemed inevitable that the bitterness of the ratification campaign would ultimately erupt into open conflict. This, however, did not occur. Both Antifederalists, wanting to shed the stigma of Shaysism, and Federalists, trying to avoid the image of tyranny, refrained from violence whenever possible. Moreover, when violence occurred, it was immediately converted into adverse political propaganda by the opposition, so that any ephemeral gains won by rioters were soon lost.

Although leaders of both parties avoided violence, neither side was totally opposed to the threat or use of violence. Intimidation, state dismemberment, secession, and civil war were all threatened. If all else failed, some Federalists even considered using armed troops to insure the ratification of the Constitution.⁷ Fortunately, such extreme measures were never thought to be necessary, but various kinds of violence did occur. The violence of ratification can be categorized into three areas: (1) violence of frustration, (2) violence of intimidation, and (3) violence of subversion.

Of the three types of violence, Antifederalists held a monopoly of the violence of frustration. This violence usually occurred when angry Antifederalists tried to disrupt ratification celebrations held by their adversaries. Incidents of this type occurred in Carlisle, Pennsylvania in

December 1787; in Huntingdon County, Pennsylvania in March 1788; and in Albany, New York and Providence, Rhode Island on the Fourth of July 1788.

The Carlisle riot, the first violence of its type, was precipitated by the hasty and unprecedented manner in which Pennsylvania Federalists ratified the Constitution. On Wednesday, 26 December, the evening air was filled with the sound of bells and drums as Federalists gathered to publicly celebrate their state's ratification of the Constitution two weeks earlier. A cannon was brought to the square and a large supply of barrels and staves was on hand to feed a federal bonfire. As the proceedings began, Antifederalists armed with clubs encircled the outnumbered, unarmed Federalists. Threats were hurled as the celebrants were told to desist and disperse. Major James A. Wilson, one of the three Federalists in charge of the celebration, answered the threats by stating that those who did not wish to celebrate should leave, while those who remained should not be molested. Wilson was answered with a barrage of barrels and staves, one of which struck him in the chest. Recovering from the impact, Wilson lunged towards his antagonists, hitting one with a small pine stick. Six or seven Antifederalists then bludgeoned Wilson and continued the attack even after he had fallen. An old soldier fell atop Wilson, shielding him from the blows, and possibly saved his life. A general melee followed in which the Federalists fared badly.

Quickly sensing the futility of their situation, the Federalists retreated, leaving the field to their adversaries. The Antifederalists thereupon celebrated by lighting the bonfire, spiking the Federalists' cannon, and consigning it and its carriage to the flames. To cap the proceedings, a copy of the newly proposed Constitution was also set ablaze as three cheers were sounded for the twenty-three Antifederalists in the state convention.

The following day, 27 December, Federalists assembled at the courthouse still determined to celebrate their state's ratification of the Constitution. This time they came prepared, "armed chiefly with muskets and bayonets." A bonfire was lit, and the state's ratification document was read amid repeated salutes with musketry and cannon. A group of Antifederalists gathered, armed with firearms and "oaken cudgels," but the two factions exchanged only abusive language.

After a two-hour celebration, the Federalists adjourned, whereupon a drum beat signalled the formation of an Antifederalist mob at the courthouse. Under the leadership of Captain Joseph Frazier, who claimed divine inspiration, the state's two leading Federalists, James Wilson and Thomas McKean, were burned in effigy.⁸

Federalists immediately sought revenge by seeking the prosecution of the Antifederalist mob. "A long train of evidences" was brought before justice of the peace John Agnew who issued warrants for the arrest of the rioters. No arrests were made, however, because "the country people" threatened to "come in and pull down the houses of any who should attempt to issue or execute any warrants."⁹ Justice Agnew was advised to destroy the depositions "and bury the whole transaction in oblivion" or else the whole borough "might be laid in ashes." With this threat clearly in mind, Agnew, "a cautious, prudent, and rather timid man," sent the evidence to the state Supreme Court;¹⁰ which, on 23 January 1788, issued a warrant for the arrest of twenty-one men accused of assaulting Federalists on 26 December.¹¹ Sheriff Charles Leeper received this warrant during the first week of February, but not until 23 February were the alleged rioters notified to appear before Justice Agnew two days later.

Federalists maintained that Leeper played into the hands of the rioters. The sheriff "was too timid to act with firmness, and the advice of those to whom he applied was so various, that it

distracted his irresolute mind.” Consequently the twenty-one accused Antifederalists, all of whom knew about the Supreme Court’s warrant, had ample opportunity to plan their strategy. James Montgomery, a Federalist resident of Carlisle, maintained that riders were sent throughout the country to inflame “the minds of the People” with the news that the rioters had become martyrs to liberty because they had dared to lift their voices against the proposed Constitution. Had the warrant been executed immediately, Montgomery argued, no such charade would have occurred.¹²

On the appointed day, the twenty-one accused rioters “readily complied with” the sheriff’s instructions and appeared before Justice Agnew. “Agnew, believing the affair to be of some importance and delicacy, requested the assistance of three of the nearest Justices,” none of whom attended as the proceedings began.

The defendants, after being presented with the warrant and several sworn depositions containing the alleged charges, demanded a hearing or investigation at which they could defend themselves and confront their accusers. They also maintained that the warrant was invalid because, to the best of their knowledge, supreme court justices Atlee and Rush had neither seen any depositions nor heard sworn testimony accusing them of criminal activity. Consequently, bail or incarceration was improper. Justice Agnew disagreed with these assumptions; and, since he was unsure as to how to proceed, he suggested that the defendants put up bail and be placed on parole for a month, during which time he would confer with Chief Justice Thomas McKean for an opinion.

At this point one of the three justices Agnew had asked to attend arrived. Justice Samuel Irwin agreed with the accused that “the warrant admitted of a hearing but added that he was determined not to act in the matter.” Rather, he advised the defendants to follow Agnew’s

suggestion and put up bail. The accused rioters accepted Agnew's terms on the stipulation that a full hearing would take place on 25 March. Agnew refused to grant such an assurance, whereupon seven of the alleged rioters rejected Agnew's proposal and demanded to be either totally discharged or jailed. They maintained "that they were guilty of no crime against the laws of their country," but that they were being prosecuted for political reasons. Justice Agnew, having already stated his opinion, ordered the sheriff to place what might be called the "Carlisle Seven" in jail.¹³

That evening, and each subsequent evening that week, a group of Antifederalists marched through Carlisle beating a drum and announcing that "riders had gone out to all quarters warning the friends of freedom to collect & rescue their persecuted brethren." Carlisle Federalists met and some of the more "ardent" proposed that the "rescuers" be opposed "by force." More temperate Federalists, however, feared the "dreadful carnage" that might result; therefore it was agreed

not to attempt to prevent a rescue—to avoid giving the most distant pretext of offence either by word or action; but to be in readiness to repair with our arms in order at a Moments warning, & to act under proper command, according to contingency.¹⁴

It was widely known that the Antifederal rescuers planned to descend on Carlisle on Saturday the first of March. The day before the expected invasion some Antifederalists "of Character and Property," who feared the possible consequences of the rescue, came to town and entered bail for the seven jailed martyrs. Despite the bail, all seven men refused to leave the jail until they were forcibly taken out.

At dawn on 1 March, an armed company of militia entered Carlisle and took possession of the courthouse. The bell was rung all morning as other militia companies from Cumberland, York, and Dauphin counties invaded the town. By 10:00 A.M. estimates placed the number of

rescuers at between 500 and 1500 men. Townspeople worried lest the invaders become unruly, especially if they remained the night.

Antifederalists appointed one person from each militia company to form a general committee to consult with each other “on such measures as might be most expedient on the occasion.” Previous to the committee meeting, a five-man delegation from the Dauphin County militia met with inhabitants of Carlisle to propose “terms of accomodation.” The Carlisle residents asked for an hour to confer before giving their response, at which time they met with the general committee and agreed to the terms. A petition to be signed by respectable residents of Carlisle, both Federalists and Antifederalists, was to be submitted to the Supreme Executive Council asking that body to request Attorney General William Bradford, Jr. to issue a writ of *noli prosequi*. The sheriff was also to sign and publicly announce the formal discharge of the Carlisle Seven; while the militiamen were to return to their homes peaceably.¹⁵

After the agreement was ratified, the militia marched to the jail where the sheriff read the formal discharge. The prisoners were then released and conducted to the courthouse amid “huzzaing, singing, hallowing, firing, and the like.”¹⁶ The militia then left town “without injuring any person or property” except for firing two musket balls through the sign of a Federalist tavern.¹⁷

By 14 March the Supreme Executive Council had received the petition requesting a writ of *noli prosequi* signed by ten Federalists and eight Antifederalists. A covering letter stated the opinion of the petitioners:

It is much to be regretted that this unhappy Dispute ever took Place in our County but We hope & trust it will be buried in eternal Silence & oblivion—We know the Pleasure this Communication will give to you— & doubt not of your good offices in bringing about a happy Conclusion of the Transaction.—This Event seems ardently to be sought after by both the Friends & Enemies of the proposed Constitution.¹⁸

Even before the petition was received, however, the Council, at the request of Cumberland County Councillor Frederick Watts, had given its “direction in the Case.” The Council had sent two of its members to inform Chief Justice McKean that it was the Council’s wish that the Supreme Court’s warrant “might be Suspended.” McKean “seemed to be good humoured” and promised that he would write Judge William A. Atlee and Carlisle burgess John Montgomery “for that purpose.”¹⁹ In direct response to the Carlisle petition, the Council, on 20 March, “ordered, that the Attorney General be directed to enter a *Noli Prosequi* in this case.”²⁰ No further action was taken.

Although the violent conflict between Federalists and Antifederalists in Carlisle ended on 1 March, the bitterness continued. Accusations were hurled as each side defended its actions by berating its adversaries. Federalists claimed that the riot and the subsequent invasion of Carlisle was but an Antifederalist “finesse to draw forth & shew their numbers” in an attempt to convince the public that Pennsylvanians largely opposed the Constitution, and that they would rather “foment a civil war” than allow the Constitution to be adopted peacefully.²¹ A Federalist correspondent, writing under the pseudonym of “Veritas,” maintained, however, that the “banditti at Carlisle” only proved “the absolute necessary of a firm federal government” because “the licentious proceedings of an uncontrouled rabble, is the worst kind of despotism.”²²

Antifederalists, on the other hand, continued their verbal assaults on the Constitution. They also defended their actions by stating that the Federalist celebrations of 26–27 December were “unhallowed riotous” proceedings, because no town meeting had authorized such assemblages. Furthermore, Antifederalists claimed that the *Carlisle Gazette* had reported a Federalist meeting on 3 October 1787 in such a manner as to give the impression that the entire county was strongly in favor of the Constitution. Federalists were warned that no such deception

would be tolerated again.²³ This warning was repeated on 1 March by Antifederalists leaders who accused George Kline and George Reynolds, the printers of the *Carlisle Gazette*, of partiality. Any malicious reporting of the disturbances over the Federalist celebration, Antifederalists warned, would result in the destruction of Kline and Reynolds' press.²⁴ The Federalist printers apparently got the hint and responded by printing both Federalist and Antifederalist justifications of the Carlisle affair.²⁵

The Albany riot had its origin on the third of July when the news of Virginia's ratification was received. Bells were rung until sunset and ten cannons were fired on the occasion. "This it seems galled the Antis." Federalists proposed a procession to celebrate the tenth state's ratification, but gave up the idea when their opponents objected. The following day, the 4th, about forty Antifederalists, led by Jeremiah Van Rensselaer, gathered at 9:00 A.M. and marched in procession past the Federalist tavern to the old fort where the Constitution and a handbill announcing Virginia's ratification were publicly burned. This action incensed Federalists.

Two hours later, at eleven A.M., a procession of both parties met at the city hall and marched to the old fort where thirteen cannons were fired and other salutes were given in honor of the anniversary of independence. The celebration ended as bells tolled from 11:30 to 12:00 noon. Both Federalists and Antifederalists adjourned amicably to dine at their respective taverns.

At the city tavern Federalists agreed to meet later in the afternoon to celebrate Virginia's ratification and to raise the Constitution burned by their opponents. A procession of between 800–1000 people left the city tavern at 6:00 P.M. with the Constitution and a federal tree—a thirty-six foot tall pine supported by ten men. When they reached the fort, the tree was erected and ten cannons were fired. On their return, the Federalists, carrying the Constitution fixed on a pole, provocatively marched to Green Street where the Antifederal meeting house was located.

Despite a warning from Abraham Lansing that the Antifederalists “were drunk, and might possibly behave disorderly,” the Federalists continued. When they neared the meeting house they met Antifederalists armed with clubs and paving stones. As the two sides closed, stones were hurled and several Federalists were seriously wounded. A twenty minute pitched battle occurred during which twenty to thirty men were injured. Despite the use of stones, clubs, bayonets, and swords, no one was killed. The one hundred attacking Antifederalists, led by Jeremiah Van Rensselaer, Peter Yates, and Abraham Lansing, were soon routed by their more numerous adversaries. The stoney battle of Green Street ended, but complete calm was not restored. Reports circulated that country Antifederalists were mobilizing to march on Albany to seek revenge.²⁶ Federalists did little to reduce the tension as they continued their daily discharges of ten cannons. Fortunately cooler heads prevailed as the Albany Antifederal leadership recommended that their country brethren “be peaceable and quiet.” The riot, they maintained, was unintentional “and would not have happened had our Friends and their antagonists not been heated with Liquor.”²⁷ This explanation satisfied all, and the unsteady peace remained.

A similar incident almost occurred in Providence, Rhode Island when, on 26 June 1788, three of the state’s four newspapers reported that New Hampshire had become the ninth state to ratify the Constitution.²⁸ Bells pealed, cannons fired, and schools closed in the Federalist strongholds of Providence and Newport. The freemen of Providence resolved to celebrate the great event along with the anniversary of independence on the Fourth of July. A general invitation to share in the festivities was issued to both town and country, while special overtures were made to the state officers, most of whom opposed the Constitution.²⁹ On 3 July, between one and four thousand armed Antifederalists (led by Superior Court Justice William West and assemblymen Andrew Waterman and John Sayles) gathered on the outskirts of Providence. At

11:00 that evening, a Federalist committee from Providence went to see what the Antifederalists wanted. The mob insisted that no celebration would take place if any mention was made of the new Constitution. Any public celebration saluting the Constitution or the ratifying states was thought to be an insult to the assembly and to the great majority of freemen who had overwhelmingly defeated the Constitution in a statewide referendum on 24 March 1788. Committees of both parties met again at seven o'clock on the morning of the 4th. The Providence committee, after an hour's discussion, finally agreed that they would celebrate America's independence and nothing more. Antifederalist leaders, then, instructed their followers not to disturb the festivities, and the day proceeded without incident.³⁰

This type of violence, then, was a manifestation of the frustration Antifederalists had as they saw one state after another ratify the proposed Constitution. The better sort of Antifederalists, however, continually tried to minimize violence, if not avert it. Prominent Antifederalists in the Carlisle affair did all they could to avoid the confrontation by offering bail for the incarcerated seven. When this failed, they proposed a conciliatory plan which Federalists willingly accepted. In Albany, Antifederalist leaders warned their opponents to avoid the Green Street tavern where violence was almost inevitable. Once the Green Street riot occurred, the Antifederal leadership again exerted its ameliorable influence by persuading country Antifederalists not to seek revenge on their adversaries. In Providence, only the secondary Antifederal leadership took part in the intimidation. State leaders, such as Jonathan J. Hazard, Joseph Stanton, Jr., and Governor John Collins, studiously avoided all connection with the mob. Furthermore, both superior court justices involved in the 4 July affair were later removed from their offices because of their involvement.

The violence of frustration played a relatively minor role in the ratification struggle. More important was the violence of intimidation, which took a variety of forms—social, economic, and physical. Social and economic intimidation occurred frequently wherever one faction was dominant. Antifederalists in Cumberland County, Pennsylvania “resolved to have no dealings with them [Federalists] either social or Comercial [sic],”³¹ while Federalists in Philadelphia despised “every one who dares to speak a Word agt. the new Constitution ... they would hang them all.”³² More infrequent than the social and economic intimidation was the actual physical intimidation which took place, and was widely publicized, in Philadelphia on 6 November 1787 and in New York City on 26 July 1788.

On the day of the election for delegates to the state convention, a Philadelphia boarding house where seven Antifederal legislators lived was attacked by a mob at midnight. Stones were hurled and the legislators were threatened because of their opposition to the Constitution. Cries rang out that “here the damned rascals live who do all the mischief,” followed by shouts “that they ought to be all hanged.”³³ The rioters, reportedly either instigated or led by James Wilson,³⁴ after damaging the house and haranguing the legislators, proceeded to attack the homes of George Bryan, John Ewing, and James Hutchinson, all Antifederal leaders.

Three days later, the Assembly officially denounced this “outrageous ... breach of the privilege of its members” and offered a \$300 reward for the apprehension of the rioters; but none of the perpetrators was ever brought to justice. Antifederalists wondered whether this was “a Foretaste of this blessed constitution?”³⁵

In New York City a more serious attack upon a newspaper occurred. Throughout the entire ratification campaign, Thomas Greenleaf, the Antifederal printer of the *New York Journal*, had antagonized the Federalist majority of the city. Federalist leaders realized that any attack on

Greenleaf before state ratification would be interpreted as an attack on freedom of the press. Consequently, Greenleaf was allowed to continue publication, expanding from a weekly to a daily in November 1787.

According to some Federalists, Greenleaf's scurrility reached its height on 24 July 1788 when he ridiculed the Federal procession of that day. Federalists, however, did nothing to Greenleaf because the state convention was still meeting in Poughkeepsie and the fate of the Constitution, perhaps the fate of the country, hung in the balance. Two days later, however, at 9:00 P.M. it was reported in New York City that the convention had ratified the Constitution. Joy and relief filled the air as bells tolled and cannons discharged until twelve midnight.

With the stroke of the clock, a Federal mob formed with the intention of attacking Greenleaf's home, which also housed his print shop. Between one and three A.M., 500 men gathered at the Antifederal printer's house. Awakened by the noise, Greenleaf armed himself with two pistols, threw open a window, and asked, "gentlemen, what do you want?" He was answered by the leader of the mob, "God damn him, brake down the door—by God, down with it." Then followed a shower of rocks upon the house. Greenleaf, again at the window, vowed to protect his property, adding "gentlemen, I am armed." At that point, four men charged the door, while others smashed the windows. Greenleaf fired into the mob, wounding a sailor in the left hand. This shot only infuriated the mob, which had by this time procured axes that were being used to tear down the door. Greenleaf then fired point-blank at one of the axe-wielding rioters, but the pistol only flashed in the pan. The mob, sensing that Greenleaf was out of ammunition, advanced and broke into the house. Having no further defense, Greenleaf escaped through the rear of the building. The intruders entered the print shop, destroyed much of the type, and carried off other materials.³⁶

The attack on Greenleaf was naturally viewed in two different lights. Federalists, while openly condemning the violence, claimed that Greenleaf himself was the instigator. The virulence of the *New York Journal* had so angered the populous that vengeance was inevitable. Antifederalists, however, pictured the attack as another step in their opponents' plan of repression. Thomas Greenleaf himself stated that he had repeatedly received threats against his property and his life. He believed that the 26 July attack was not motivated by his satirical reports of the federal procession two days earlier; but rather, the sacking was planned by Federalist leaders with the intention of destroying "the usefulness of his paper as a free and impartial" tabloid. Other Antifederalists agreed with Greenleaf's assessment. Eleazer Oswald, in Philadelphia, asked for deliverance from God "If these be *the dawnings* of the new federal government."³⁷

Both Federalist and Antifederalist assessments of the attack have validity. There is little doubt that Federalist residents of New York were anxious to attack their nemesis if and when the opportunity arose. But it seems equally apparent that the violence that occurred on 26 July was not spontaneous, and it is also likely that it had at least the tacit approval of Federalist leaders. Any spontaneous attack on Greenleaf in response to the satirical article published on 24 July would have occurred long before the late evening hours of 26 July. Only when word of New York's ratification was received, however, was the vengeance of the mob released.

But Federalist leaders had aims other than mere vengeance. New York's ratification was achieved at a tremendous cost. Federalists, outnumbered in the state convention by two to one, were forced to acquiesce in a circular letter to the states which called for a second general constitutional convention which was to draft amendments to the proposed Constitution. New

York Federalists, therefore, had won only a partial victory with ratification—some Federalists both in and out of the state believed it a Pyrrhic victory.

In the anticipated struggle over this second convention and amendments, Federalists used the mob to intimidate Greenleaf in an effort to neutralize his press. In this effort, the Federalists were abundantly successful. Even though Greenleaf declared that he would not be intimidated, the *New York Journal* was cut back from a daily to a weekly, and Greenleaf's editorial policies moderated noticeably.

The intimidation exerted on Thomas Greenleaf, obvious as it was, was less flagrant than the violence of subversion, aimed at overturning the established political system, perpetrated by Federalists in Philadelphia in September 1787 and in North Carolina in 1788. The Pennsylvania Assembly, meeting in the same building with the Constitutional Convention, received the Constitution almost immediately after the Convention adjourned on 17 September 1787. Even before Congress officially transmitted the Constitution to the states, Federalists in the Pennsylvania Assembly resolved to call a state convention to ratify the Constitution. This resolution was passed on 28 September 1787, but before the implementing legislation could be enacted, nineteen Antifederal assemblymen seceded from the legislature, denying the Assembly the necessary two-thirds majority quorum. Without a quorum, it appeared that no convention could be authorized before the legislative elections of 9 October 1787.

Pennsylvania Federalists, who controlled a clear-cut majority in the unicameral legislature, wanted to provide for a state ratifying convention before the October elections. State politics being what they were, neither party could be sure who would control the next Assembly. Federalists, therefore, wanted to act quickly so that the anticipated state convention would be held in Philadelphia rather than in an Antifederal stronghold, and so that the convention would

be held no later than November 1787 before Antifederalists could effectively organize their efforts in the backcountry. Both of these conditions—the early meeting of the convention and the Philadelphia location—were considered essential to secure Pennsylvania’s ratification.

The secession of the nineteen Antifederal assemblymen stymied the Federalists. Without the two-thirds quorum, the implementing legislation providing for the election of convention delegates and the site and date of the meeting of the convention could not be enacted. The matter was thought to be of such urgency that the Assembly ordered the sergeant at arms to summon the absent members. This officer, returning alone, reported that he had found most of the seceding assemblymen at Alexander Boyd’s boarding house, but that they refused to attend the Assembly because “they had not made their minds upon the subject.” The Assembly, consequently, adjourned to the next day, 29 September.

When the Assembly reconvened, the roll was taken and only forty-three members, two short of a quorum, attended. The sergeant at arms and the assistant clerk were, therefore, sent to ask the seceding members to attend “in their places.” These officers reported that they had seen and talked with eleven of the absconding assemblymen, but all refused to return to the Assembly. While the sergeant at arms and assistant clerk were looking for the absent members, a mob was formed under the leadership of Captain John Barry, Michael O’Brien, and Major William Jackson, the former secretary of the Constitutional Convention.³⁸ This mob forcibly abducted two of the seceding members—James McCalmont and Jacob Miley—from their lodgings and carried them to the Assembly. Both McCalmont and Miley objected to the treatment they received and requested that they have leave to withdraw from the Assembly. This request was denied even though the rules of the house allowed any member to withdraw from the Assembly without leave if that member paid a five shilling fine. Both McCalmont and Miley were willing

to pay the fine, the former even tendered the five shillings at the table. Both men, however, were informed that James Barr, an absent member, had been appointed to receive all fines, and since he was not present, no one else could accept their money. At that point, McCalmont attempted to leave the Assembly, but a general cry rose from the gallery to “Stop him!” and several other assemblymen blocked the exit.

At this point a debate ensued over the propriety of restraining the members in the house against their will. McCalmont, Miley, and a few Federalist assemblymen believed that the Assembly could not legally bar the door or use any physical means of preventing a withdrawal. They maintained that representatives were answerable only to their consciences and their constituents. Most Federalists, however, maintained that the house indeed had the power to compel the attendance of its members, and, though the house reprobated the violence used to abduct the two Antifederalists, the Assembly ruled that McCalmont and Miley could not leave. Consequently, a quorum was attained, and the Assembly passed the implementing legislation which provided that the election for convention delegates would be held on 6 November and that the convention would meet two weeks later on 20 November in Philadelphia. With all of their proposals accepted, Federalists voted to adjourn, knowing that their actions had virtually assured that Pennsylvania would ratify the Constitution.³⁹

The events of 28–29 September immediately created a heated debate within the state. Federalists accused the absconding members of violating their oaths of office and sacrificing the interests of their constituents to their own self-interest. Antifederalists vindicated their actions by stating that their opponents had violated the state constitution by hurrying legislation through the Assembly in one session. Previously, as provided by the state constitution, legislation was proposed in one session of the legislature, laid before the public for consideration, and then acted

upon in a subsequent session of the Assembly. This procedure was followed even for the most insignificant bills. Now the Federalists had acted with unprecedented haste in a matter of the highest magnitude.

Besides defending their conduct in the newspapers, Antifederalists attempted to bring the leaders of the Federalist mob to justice. James McCalmont, one of the two offended assemblymen, petitioned the Supreme Executive Council for redress. On 3 October the Council voted eight to three to direct Attorney General William Bradford, Jr. “to commence a prosecution against Captain John Barry, and such other persons as shall be found to have been principally active” in the mob action.⁴⁰ Almost three weeks later Bradford drew up warrants against Barry and certain unnamed persons, and applied to Chief Justice Thomas McKean for a precept. McKean, an ardent Federalist, refused to issue one until all the accused were named in the warrant.⁴¹ He also refused to issue warrants against Barry and others because “the mass of the people were so incensed at their [the seceding assemblymen’s] conduct, that tumult and further outrage would be the inevitable consequence.”⁴² During the first week of December, one of the Supreme Court justices finally did issue a warrant for Barry’s arrest, but Barry left the country a week later as captain of Robert Morris’ ship *Asia* bound for Canton. No further action was taken against Barry or any of the other leaders of the mob.

Acts of violence which attempted to subvert the established political system also occurred in North Carolina, where various Federalists tried to disrupt the election of delegates to the state convention. A week before the election, Elkanah Watson, a transplanted New York Federalist, who later became one of the country’s foremost canal entrepreneurs, rode through Hertford County, North Carolina with Major Hardy Murfree and a Dr. Patrick Garvey, both Federalists. While riding, they came across a handbill advertising a meeting to be held two days before the

election. The handbill read: “Notice!—On Wednesday next at three o’clock, all persons desirous of hearing the new Constitution explained, by Elder Bt [Lemuel Burkitt, are requested to attend his church in the Woodlands, 27th March 1788.”⁴³

Indignant at what they “deemed an insidious attempt to deceive the community,” the three Federalists determined “to counteract” the Antifederal Baptist minister’s efforts. On the appointed day Watson and his two friends arrived at Burkitt’s crowded church and took seats near the pulpit. The Antifederal minister, already into his tirade against the Constitution, repeatedly cast suspicious glances at the three Federalists. Burkitt and Watson had already “been engaged in many warm personal [and public] discussions;” therefore the Antifederal minister was wary immediately upon noticing Watson.

Watson and his two friends were incensed by Burkitt’s explanation of the constitutional provision granting Congress control over a ten mile square tract of land. This, my friends, said the preacher, “will be walled in or fortified. Here an army of 50,000, or, perhaps, 100,000 men, will be finally embodied, and will sally forth, and enslave the people, who will be gradually disarmed.” This assumption set the Federalists’ “blood in fermentation.” After a brief consultation, the three Federalists moved to the seats directly beneath the pulpit with the intention of breaking up the meeting. As the three men moved forward, Garvey, with the Constitution in his hand, addressed Burkitt in a loud voice. “Sir, as to the ten miles square, you are....” Before Garvey could finish his sentence he was interrupted by an uproar from the crowd. Only the personal popularity of Murfee saved the three Federalists from an immediate thrashing, and wisely they hurried to their horses. Their efforts, however, were totally successful, as the meeting then dissolved.

The next day, Watson and Garvey continued their political sabotage. They drew a caricature of Burkitt at his pulpit with the words “And lo, he brayeth!” coming from his mouth. “Some resolute fellows” were hired to post and guard this caricature at the door of the courthouse when the polling began. The caricature had the desired effect. Some of Burkitt’s friends tried to pull it down, but the Federalists defended it. “A general battle ensued.” The candles were extinguished and both parties were left in the dark. Despite the confusion, the polls remained open and Burkitt was one of Hertford County’s five delegates elected to the state convention.⁴⁴

Election abuses were even greater in Dobbs County, North Carolina where Federalists, led by Colonel Benjamin Sheppard, rioted when it appeared that their candidates for the state ratifying convention would be defeated. Dobbs County Federalists put up a slate of five prominent state and local politicians including such men as Richard Caswell, seven times governor of the state, James Glasgow, secretary of state since 1777, and Benjamin Sheppard, the county’s state senator in 1787 and assemblyman in 1788–1789. Opposed to these five Federalists were five less distinguished Antifederal candidates. According to Sheriff Benjamin Caswell, the election, held on 28–29 March 1788, “was conducted & submitted to with order & decorum.”⁴⁵ The polls closed at sunset and the ballot box was taken to the courthouse. After 282 of the 372 ballots had been counted, it appeared as if the Antifederal candidates would easily be elected—Caswell and Glasgow, the most popular Federal candidates, had but 120 votes each; while Abraham Baker, an Antifederal Baptist minister, had 154 votes, the lowest total of the five Antifederal candidates. It was at this point, according to a sworn deposition, “that the Federal Candidates from their Expressions Appear’d to be fully Convinc’d they should lose their Election.” One witness declared that a Federalist bemoaned “POOR DOBBS POOR DOBBS

Preacher Baker before Governor Caswell.”⁴⁶ Other Federalists “Made use of Abusive and Degrading language Mix’d with some threats of Blows to the Antifederal Candidates.” Benjamin Sheppard even mounted “the Bench in an Angry Manner and threaten’d to beat Neall Hopkins, one of the Inspectors of the Election,”⁴⁷ causing Hopkins to flee through an open window.⁴⁸ At this instant, Federalists, armed with clubs, attacked the men holding candles. A great tumult occurred in the dark as the sound of blows with clubs filled the courthouse. Antifederalists attempted to light new candles but their efforts were thwarted by their club-wielding adversaries. The five Antifederal candidates immediately attempted to escape. They all succeeded, except for Isaac Groom, who “was overtaken in the street by a party” of twelve to fifteen men armed with clubs. After receiving a beating, Groom struggled to his horse and rode off. Even the sheriff, Governor Richard Caswell’s brother, was not spared from the Federalist lumber. He received “a heavy blow” on the head as the ballot box was wrenched from his custody.⁴⁹ After the violence had abated, Benjamin Sheppard, “the ringleader” of the riot, was heard saying, “Well done Boys Now we’ll have a new Election.”⁵⁰

Since neither slate of candidates had received a majority of votes before the ballot box disappeared with the remaining ninety ballots, the sheriff was unable to certify any candidate as duly elected to the convention. Consequently, Governor Samuel Johnston, upon the request of several Federalist petitions, “recommended” that another election be held on 14–15 July, one week before the convention was to meet.⁵¹ Denying the legality of this election, the Antifederalists boycotted it, and only eighty-five ballots were cast. As a result, Federalists were elected without opposition.

When the convention assembled, an Antifederal petition signed by 248 freemen contested the seating of the five Federalist delegates from Dobbs. The convention’s committee on

elections, composed of eleven Federalists and sixteen Antifederalists, ruled that both Dobbs County elections were void.⁵² The Antifederalist-dominated convention agreed with the report of the committee, and the Federalists from Dobbs were unseated. The county was, therefore, unrepresented in the convention.

The Dobbs County riot should not be viewed as a plot by Federalists in general to subvert the election process, but rather as an aberration fostered by the eccentricity of Colonel Benjamin Shepard, a wealthy, influential landowner. Shepard's violent actions did not cease on 29 March. Two weeks later, while visiting an elderly neighbor, William Barfield, Shepard defended the proposed Constitution. When Barfield disagreed with Shepard's interpretation, the Federalist "proceeded to chastise him with a whip." Barfield's apprentice, in the heat of the moment, "took up a broad ax, and struck Col. Shepard on the cheek," cutting off a side of his face and breaking his collar bone. Shepard's nephew, Captain Stephanus Shepard, wrested the ax from the youth. The apprentice then grabbed Barfield's loaded rifle and shot Stephanus Shepard in both arms, one of which had to be amputated.⁵³

Such were the public acts of violence related to the ratification of the Constitution, an event that was, in essence, "a thorough revolution."⁵⁴ Spontaneous and uncontrollable acts of violence were relatively rare. Whenever controlled violence was thought to be necessary, state and local chieftans either led, directed, or tacitly approved of such acts. Thus George Bryan, associate justice of the Pennsylvania Supreme Court and an ardent Antifederalist, maintained that "none but *gentlemen mobs* have been active in Philadelphia."⁵⁵ Bryan's analysis of the Philadelphia mobs also held true for other states as at least seven assemblymen, one state senator, two state supreme court justices (one of whom had recently been speaker of the assembly), the first officer appointed in the United States navy under the Constitution, the former

secretary of the Constitutional Convention, and possibly even a delegate to the Federal Convention who later was appointed to the United States Supreme Court directly participated in the mob violence related to ratification.

When looked at as a whole, however, it can only be wondered why the riots were so mild and so few—only two or three lives were lost, usually in the aftermath of some riots. The explanation for the lack of large-scale violence associated with the political revolution of 1787–1789 can only be conjectural.

In 1787 the country was fairly evenly divided politically—a majority of people being Antifederalists, but a majority of the elite being Federalists. Because neither side was assured of victory, both parties proceeded cautiously as state and local political leaders attempted to control events so that rash actions would not be used as propaganda against their cause.

Violence was also held to a minimum because there were three levels of political activity—the local, state, and national levels. Often a riot on the local level would have beneficial local consequences, but adverse state and national consequences. Thus, even though it appeared as if the Federalists had won a victory in Dobbs County, the hot tempered Archibald Maclaine, a North Carolina Federalist, deprecated the riot, saying, “Thank God, we have had nothing like it in any other county.”⁵⁶ Thus, local riots, which themselves could have little influence on the ratification process, might well create dangerous, uncontrollable, and adverse reverberations on the state and national levels.

The press acted as a deterrent to violent activity because reports of violence, especially violence instigated by Antifederalists, were seized upon by the press and reprinted throughout the country.⁵⁷ The account of the Carlisle riot, as reported by the *Carlisle Gazette* on 2 January 1788, was reprinted in at least eleven states by thirty-eight different newspapers; while the

Albany riot, as reported in the New York *Daily Advertiser* on 10 July 1788, was reprinted at least thirty-two times from Halifax, Nova Scotia to Savannah, Georgia.⁵⁸ Even the Federalist inspired riot in Dobbs County, as reported by Martin's *North Carolina Gazette* on 16 April 1788, was reprinted by twenty-six newspapers from Richmond to Boston; while the Shepard-Barfield incident was reprinted thirty times from Charleston, South Carolina to Windsor, Vermont.

Whenever acts of violence were reported in the press, rioters or members of their political persuasion felt it imperative to justify their actions immediately. Thus Antifederalists defended the Carlisle rioters in two separate essays both signed "One of the People" printed in the *Carlisle Gazette* on 9 January 1788 and the Philadelphia *Independent Gazetteer* on 7 February 1788. The Albany Antifederalists were defended in an "Extract of a letter from Albany, July 6," printed in the *New York Journal* on 14 July 1788 and reprinted five times in Philadelphia, Boston, and Portsmouth. North Carolina Federalist Hugh Williamson, while attending Congress in New York, wrote that he believed it was his "Duty to prepare a Paragraph and cause it to be published which is thought by the Readers to put the Matter [the Dobbs County riot] in a very different or in a new Point of Light."⁵⁹

Antifederalists had other reasons for not resorting to violence. First, most Americans, Federalists as well as Antifederalists, resorted to violence only as a last resort after all legal alternatives were exhausted. In the struggle to ratify the Constitution, neither Federalists nor Antifederalists were certain of the outcome. But even after ratification seemed a certainty, when Massachusetts ratified on 6 February 1788,⁶⁰ Antifederalists still believed that they had a real alternative. The Massachusetts Convention, in order to obtain ratification, had been forced to propose substantive amendments to the Constitution. If these amendments, proposed by every state that ratified the Constitution after Massachusetts except Maryland, were accepted by

Congress and the state legislatures, most Antifederalists believed that the new Constitution would serve the country well. Furthermore, the Antifederalists adopted a “wait-and-see” attitude early in 1788, in anticipation of the Virginia and New York conventions scheduled to meet in June of that year.

Federalist propaganda also had its effect. Throughout the spring and summer of 1787 the public was bombarded with newspaper and pamphlet literature stressing the need to strengthen the central government.⁶¹ Almost everyone, Antifederalists as well as Federalists, agreed that Congress had to be given greater powers.⁶² After the Constitution was made public, Federalists used a cyclical theory of government and maintained that anarchy would occur if the central government was not strengthened by the immediate adoption of the new Constitution without amendments. The people would then “enroll themselves under the banners of some interprising ruffian” and tyranny would ensue with the complete loss of liberty.⁶³ This progression was pictured not as a probable consequence of rejecting the Constitution, but as inevitable. Every act of violence committed by Antifederalists, thus, only played into the hands of their adversaries and gave additional credence to their dire predictions.

The most ardent Federalists also had good reason to avoid violence. They thought that the Constitution could be adopted without it. Violence would only arouse the aura of despotism which many Antifederalists were already raising. Perhaps more importantly, and ominously, the extreme Federalists were willing to allow the states to freely consider the Constitution without recourse to localized violence because they were willing to employ massive, Continental violence if the Constitution were rejected.

Henry Knox, the Confederation’s Secretary at War, writing to his former commander-in-chief, asserted that “alterations must be affected by wisdom and agreement, or by force....” If the

Federal Convention failed to propose an acceptable plan of government, the Secretary said “we would look to events, and force, for a remedy.”⁶⁴ James Madison feared that if the Convention failed “to agree on some remedy ... some very different arrangement will ensue” as “a propensity towards monarchy is said to have been produced ... in some leading minds.”⁶⁵ Later, Alexander Hamilton, writing under the pseudonym “Cæsar,” suggested that “it will be more healthy for this country, and *this state*, that he [George Washington] should be induced to accept of the Presidency of the New Government, than that he should be solicited again to accept of the command of *an army*.”⁶⁶ Even an eighteenth century rationalist like Benjamin Rush believed that “Time, necessity, and the gradual operation of reason will carry it down, and if these fail, *force* will not be wanting to carry it into execution, for not only all the wealth but all the military men of our country (associated in the Society of the Cincinnati) are in favor of a wise and efficient government.”⁶⁷ Joseph Gilpin of Maryland also wrote that unless the new “Sistom Should take Place we Shall have No Government at all untill the Sword Give one, which Numbers wish for from their having Nothing to loose in a scramble.”⁶⁸ Rumors of this sort were prevalent during the ratification struggle. The proposed Constitution, therefore, was viewed by some as a preferable republican alternative to a military dictatorship supported by a standing army.

Finally, and possibly most important of all, violence was held to a minimum because a majority of Americans were neither as fearful as the extreme Antifederalists nor as cynical as the most ardent Federalists. Most Americans were both optimistic and idealistic, and they believed that they were involved in an epic drama where men were given a last chance to establish a republican form of government by themselves, for themselves. To completely alter the nation’s constitution “without bloodshed” would truly “be a singular thing in the history of mankind.”⁶⁹ Benjamin Franklin even hoped that Europe might follow America’s example and “carry the

Project of good Henry the 4th into Execution, by forming a Federal Union and one Grand Republick of all its different States & Kingdoms....”⁷⁰ Alexander Hamilton, writing as “Publius” possibly stated the position best in “The Federalist,” No. I: “it seems to have been reserved to the people of this country, by their conduct and example, to decide the important question, whether societies of men are really capable or not, of establishing good government from reflection and choice, or whether they are forever destined to depend, for their political constitutions, on accident and force. If there be any truth in the remark, the crisis, at which we are arrived, may with propriety be regarded as the era in which that decision is to be made....”⁷¹ If this opportunity were wasted by reverting to violence, little hope remained for mankind.

¹ To Mercy Warren, New York, 30 May 1787, Mercy Warren Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society [MHS].

² To Lord Carmarthen, 4 October 1786, in George Bancroft, ed., *History of the Formation of the Constitution* (2 vols.; New York, 1882), II, 398.

³ To James Wilkinson, Richmond, 5 January 1787, *American Historical Review*, XII (1906–07), 347–48.

⁴ To Benjamin Lincoln, Jr., Mount Vernon, 4 June 1787, Lincoln Papers, MHS. William Plumer of New Hampshire also stressed this point: “There is an absolute necessity of establishing a more efficient system of government than the present. Our liberties, our rights & property are now the sport of ignorant unprincipled state legislators.” To Daniel Tilton, Epping, 16 December 1787, Plumer Papers, Library of Congress [LC].

⁵ Jeremy Belknap to Ebenezer Hazard, Boston, 8 December 1787, Belknap Papers, MHS.

⁶ Arthur Bryan to [Thomas Lloyd], Annapolis, 28 March 1788, Lloyd Papers, Maryland Historical Society.

⁷ For examples of intimidation see the accounts of the Greenleaf riot in New York City and the Providence, Rhode Island affair (printed below). The most serious consideration of state dismemberment occurred over Rhode Island. Francis Dana even suggested how Rhode Island was to be divided between Massachusetts and Connecticut (to Elbridge Gerry, Newport, 2 September 1787, L. W. Smith Collection, Morristown National Historical Park). The southern counties of New York and the seacoast towns of Rhode Island threatened to secede from their states if ratification was not achieved (Linda G. DePauw, *The Eleventh Pillar: New York State and the Federal Constitution* (Ithaca, 1966), 231–36; Jabez Bowen to George Washington, Providence, 15 December 1789, RG 360, Item 78, X, 613, National Archives). Numerous threats of civil war occurred all over the country. For the possible use of force by Federalists see notes 64 to 68 (below).

⁸ For the Federalist account of the riot, see the *Carlisle Gazette*, 2, 16 January 1788; for the Antifederalist version, see “One of the People,” *Carlisle Gazette*, 9 January and “One of the People,” *Philadelphia Independent Gazetteer*, 7 February 1788.

⁹ “Extract of a letter from Carlisle, dated January 4, 1788,” *Philadelphia Independent Gazetteer*, 12 January 1788; “Another of the People,” *Carlisle Gazette*, 16 January 1788.

¹⁰ James Montgomery to James Wilson, Carlisle, [2 March 1788], James A. Montgomery Collection, Historical Society of Pennsylvania [HSP]; “Charles Leeper, Sheriff, to the Printer,” *Carlisle Gazette*, 5 March 1788.

¹¹ Peter Force, Pennsylvania Misc., Library of Congress [LC]. The warrant was signed by only William A. Atlee and Jacob Rush. McKean abstained because he was personally concerned, while George Bryan cautioned against issuing a warrant that was unenforceable.

¹² To James Wilson, Carlisle, [2 March 1788], Montgomery Collection, HSP.

¹³ For the various accounts of the events of 23–25 February, see *ibid*; “Six Accused Rioters to Candid Public,” *Carlisle Gazette*, 5 March 1788; “John Agnew and Samuel Irwin to the Printer,” *Carlisle Gazette*, 27 February 1788; “Charles Leeper, Sheriff, to the Printer,” *Carlisle Gazette*, 5 March 1788. The Carlisle Seven were William Petrikin, Samuel Greer, Joseph Young, Joseph Steel, James Wallace, Bartholomew White, and Thomas Dickson.

¹⁴ Montgomery to James Wilson, [2 March 1788], Montgomery Collection, HSP.

¹⁵ “Charles Leeper, Sheriff, to the Printer,” *Carlisle Gazette*, 5 March 1788. The petition was printed in the *Philadelphia Independent Gazetteer* on 14 March 1788.

¹⁶ John Shippen to Joseph Shippen, Carlisle, 3 March 1788, in Thomas Balch, *Letters and Papers Relating Chiefly to the Provincial History of Pennsylvania, With Some Notices of the Writers* (Philadelphia, 1855), 288–90.

¹⁷ “Charles Leeper, Sheriff, to the Printer,” *Carlisle Gazette*, 5 March 1788.

¹⁸ Draft, Manuscript Box 21–9, Cumberland County Historical Society.

¹⁹ Frederick Watts to John Agnew, Philadelphia, 25 February 1788, Watts Papers, Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission [PHMC]. One month earlier, Walter Stewart stated that “the Papers handed Mr. McKean will be laid by, as He Could not be so very Ridiculous as to blow up a Coal which Now seems expiring; by Investigating them, or Calling to Account any of the People Concern’d in the Affair at Carlisle. It is now over, and the less that is said publicly on the Subject the better.” To William Irvine, Philadelphia, 30 January 1788, Irvine Papers, HSP.

²⁰ *Minutes of the Supreme Executive Council of Pennsylvania* (Vols. XI–XVI of [Colonial Records], Harrisburg, 1852–53), XV, 416.

²¹ Richard Butler to William Irvine, Philadelphia, 11 March 1788, Irvine Papers, Draper Collection, State Historical Society of Wisconsin; Montgomery to Wilson, [2 March 1788], Montgomery Collection, HSP.

²² *Philadelphia Federal Gazette*, 22 March 1788.

²³ George Bryan to John Ralston, Philadelphia, 7 March 1788. This letter was intercepted by Federalists and printed in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* on 26 March 1788.

²⁴ Montgomery to Wilson, [2 March 1788], Montgomery Collection, HSP.

²⁵ For a detailed account of the Huntington County riots, see Milton S. Lytle, *History of Huntingdon County, in the State of Pennsylvania ...* (Lancaster, Pa., 1876), 101–09. Also see the *Philadelphia Freeman’s Journal*, 19 March 1788 for a much briefer account with a strong Antifederalist bias.

²⁶ For the Federalist accounts of the Albany riot, see the *New York Daily Advertiser*, 10 July 1788; *Litchfield Monitor*, 7 July 1788; *New York Packet*, 15 July 1788; *Vermont Gazette*, 14 July 1788. For the Antifederalist version, see “Extract of a letter from Albany, July 6,” *New York Journal*, 14 July 1788.

²⁷ Abraham G. Lansing to Abraham Yates, Jr., [Albany], 9 July 1788, Abraham Yates, Jr., Papers, New York Public Library [NYPL].

²⁸ *Providence Gazette*, *Providence United States Chronicle*, and *Newport Herald*.

²⁹ Providence Town Meeting, 27 June 1788, Providence Town Records, Providence City Hall; *Providence United States Chronicle*, 26 June, 3, 10 July 1788; *Newport Herald*, 26 June, 3 July 1788; *Providence Gazette*, 28 June 1788.

³⁰ For various accounts of these events, see the *Providence Gazette*, 5, 12 July 1788; the *United States Chronicle*, 10 July 1788; *Newport Herald*, 10, 17, 24, 31 July, 14 August 1788; “Extract of a letter from a gentleman in the State of Rhode Island, to his friend in Stonington, dated July 8, 1788,” *Connecticut Gazette*, 11 July 1788. Antifederalists, led by Justice of the Superior Court Othniel Gorton, the former speaker of the assembly, attempted to disturb other celebrations throughout the state. *Newport Herald*, 10 July 1788; *Providence United States Chronicle*, 17 July 1788.

³¹ William Petrikin to John Nicholson, Carlisle, 24 February 1788, Nicholson Papers, PHMC.

³² William Shippen, Jr. to Thomas Lee Shippen, Philadelphia, 18 November 1787, Shippen Papers, LC. For other threats against Antifederalists, see “Avenging Justice,” *Pennsylvania Gazette*, 17 October 1787 and “Tar and Feathers,” *Philadelphia Independent Gazetteer*, 2 October 1787.

³³ *Proceedings and Debates of the General Assembly of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia, 1787), 10 November 1787.

³⁴ The accusations against Wilson appear in “Plain Truth,” *Philadelphia Independent Gazetteer*, 24 November 1787; “A New-Yorker,” *Philadelphia Independent Gazetteer*, 31 December 1787; “The Scourge,” *Carlisle Gazette*, 23 January 1788.

³⁵ William Shippen, Jr. to Thomas Lee Shippen, Philadelphia, 7 November 1787, Shippen Papers, LC.

³⁶ *New York Journal*, 7 August 1788.

³⁷ *Philadelphia Independent Gazetteer*, 30 July 1788.

³⁸ Charles Swift to Robert E. Griffiths, [Philadelphia], 18 October 1787, Swift Family Papers, HSP.

³⁹ For the events of 28–29 September, see Tench Coxe to James Madison, Philadelphia, 28–29 September 1787, Madison Papers, LC; “Address of the Subscribers...,” *Independent Gazetteer*, 3 October 1787; “Federal Constitution,” *Pennsylvania Gazette*, 10 October 1787; “An Assemblyman” [William Findley], *Pittsburgh Gazette*, 27 October 1787; “One of the Dissenting Assemblymen,” *Freeman’s Journal*, 14 November 1787; “Remarks on the Address of Sixteen Members...,” *Pennsylvania Packet*, 8 October 1787; “A Citizen of Philadelphia” [Pelatiah Webster], *Remarks on the Address...* {Philadelphia, 1787}; *Minutes of the Third Session of the Eleventh General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania...* (Philadelphia, 1787), 239–47; *Proceedings and Debates of the General Assembly of Pennsylvania* (4 vols.; Philadelphia, 1787–1788), III, 110–43.

⁴⁰ *Minutes of the Supreme Executive Council*, XV, 286–88.

⁴¹ McKean to William A. Atlee, 22 October 1787, Atlee Papers, LC.

⁴² Samuel Hodgdon to Timothy Pickering, 4 October 1787, Pickering Papers, MHS.

⁴³ Elkanah Watson, *Men and Times of the Revolution ...* (2nd ed., New York, 1856), 262–63.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 262–64.

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- ⁴⁵ Benjamin Caswell Deposition, 23 April 1788, Papers of the Convention of 1788, North Carolina Department of Archives and History. [Nc-Ar].
- ⁴⁶ Frederick Baker Deposition, 16 July 1788, Papers of the Convention of 1788, Nc-Ar.
- ⁴⁷ Ibid.
- ⁴⁸ Neall Hopkins Deposition, 14 July 1788, Papers of the Convention of 1788, Nc-Ar.
- ⁴⁹ *North Carolina Gazette*, 16 April 1788.
- ⁵⁰ Job Smith Deposition, 17 July 1788, Papers of the Convention of 1788, Nc-Ar.
- ⁵¹ Johnston to the Sheriff of Dobbs County, 28 June 1788, Papers of the Convention of 1788, NC-Ar.
- ⁵² Draft Report of Committee on Elections, 23 July 1788, Papers of the Convention of 1788, Nc-Ar.
- ⁵³ *Wilmington Centinel*, 30 April 1788. A much different, though highly exaggerated and rather improbable account putting Sheppard in a better light, was printed in the Petersburg *Virginia Gazette* on 5 June 1788.
- ⁵⁴ Edward Carrington to Thomas Jefferson, New York, 14 May 1788, Jefferson Papers, LC.
- ⁵⁵ George Bryan to John Ralston, Philadelphia, 7 March 1788 (spurious letter), *Pennsylvania Gazette*, 7 March 1788.
- ⁵⁶ Maclaine to James Iredell, Wilmington, 29 April 1788, Personal Misc. Papers, LC.
- ⁵⁷ Benjamin Rush wrote that newspapers “form the principles and direct the conduct of the greatest part of mankind.” To G. H. E. Muhlenberg, Philadelphia, 15 February 1788, in Lyman Butterfield, ed., *Letters of Benjamin Rush* (Princeton, 1951), 452–53.
- ⁵⁸ Other accounts of the Albany riot were printed in the Litchfield Weekly Monitor on 7 July and reprinted fifteen times throughout New England, and in the *New York Packet* on 15 July and reprinted eleven times from Vermont to Virginia.
- ⁵⁹ To John Gray Blount, New York, 21 May 1788, Blount Papers, Nc-Ar. Williamson’s “Paragraph” was printed in the *New York Packet* on 20 May 1788 and reprinted ten times from Portsmouth, New Hampshire to Carlisle, Pennsylvania.
- ⁶⁰ Edward Carrington believed that the Massachusetts ratification was “perhaps the most important event that ever took place in America, as upon her in all probability depended the fate of the Constitution.” To Henry Knox, Richmond, 13 March 1788, Knox Papers, Gilder Lehrman Collection, New-York Historical Society. James Manning “considered Massachusetts the hinge on which the whole must turn....” To Hezekiah Smith, Providence, 11 February 1788, Manning Papers, Brown University.
- ⁶¹ David Humphreys wrote to George Washington that “the well affected have not been wanting in efforts to prepare the minds of the Citizens for the favorable reception of whatever might be the result of your Proceedings.... Judicious & well-timed publications have great efficacy in ripening the judgment of men in this quarter of the Continent.” New Haven, 28 September 1787, Washington Papers, LC. Humphreys understated the case. Literally hundreds of items were printed early in 1787 urging a strengthening of the central government and an acceptance of the work of the Federal Convention.
- ⁶² Even staunch Antifederalists like George Mason, Richard Henry Lee, and Elbridge Gerry favored a strengthened central government. Their objections lay elsewhere—in the Constitution not guaranteeing fundamental civil liberties.

⁶³ “A Plain Citizen,” *Independent Gazetteer*, 22 November 1787; “Candid,” *Pennsylvania Packet*, 27 November 1787. Theodore Sedgwick wrote cynically that “The people can be convinced that their most important interests will not only be promoted by adopting the constitution but also that misery and slavery will in all human probability be the consequence of its rejection.” To Henry Van Schaack, Stockbridge, 5 December 1787, Sedgwick Papers, MHS.

⁶⁴ To George Washington, New York, 9 April 1787, Washington Papers, LC.

⁶⁵ To Edmund Pendleton, New York, 24 February 1787, Madison Papers, LC. Madison’s sentiments were shared by Cotton Tufts who believed that “A prevailing Sense of present Weakness & Danger for want of an efficient Government together with the Fear of having one that shall be the Result of Force, will probably reconcile many to this, who would otherwise be decidedly against it.” To Abigail Adams, Weymouth, 18 December 1787, Adams Papers, MHS.

⁶⁶ *New York Daily Advertiser*, 1 October 1787.

⁶⁷ To Richard Price, Philadelphia, in Butterfield, *Letters of Benjamin Rush*, 418–19.

⁶⁸ To Levi Hollingsworth, Elk, 5 December 1787, Hollingsworth Papers, HSP.

⁶⁹ Walter Minto to the Earl of Buchan, New York, 28 October 1787, American Philosophical Society; Benjamin Franklin to Count Castiglione, Philadelphia, 14 October 1787, Franklin Papers, LC.

⁷⁰ Benjamin Franklin to Mr. Grand, Philadelphia, 22 October 1787, Franklin Papers, LC.

⁷¹ *New York Independent Journal*, 27 October 1787.