

HUMAN WISDOM/GENIUS

ABLE ADVOCATE

In searching after error truth will appear, he flatters himself he should be excused, were he to leave the merits of this cause to that more able ADVOCATE, the CONSTITUTION itself, and confine himself wholly to those general, plain, and honest truths which flow from the feelings of the warmest heart.

“The State Soldier” I (George Nicholas?), *Virginia Independent Chronicle*
16 January 1788 (RCS VA., 303–4)

ACT OF HUMANITY, JUSTICE & POLICY

Permit me to congratulate you upon the adoption of the Federal Constitution by the States of Maryland & So. Carolina, the former by a majority of 63 to 11 the latter by 149 to 73—thus we want but one State more to agree . . . this will not only be an act of Humanity but also of Justice & Policy!

Anthony Wayne to George Handley, Richmond County, Ga.
28 May 1788 (RCS SUPPL. S.C., #54, p. 92)

BEAUTIFUL GRADATION

In this beautiful gradation we find all those checks which are necessary for the stability of republican government, and the due deliberation of the most perfect legislature. Instead of the mad collections of the populace, we shall have a representation accurately calculated upon the numbers and property of the constituents.

Simeon Baldwin, Oration, New Haven, Conn.
4 July 1788 (CC 6, 238)

BOOK

In this, as in all other instances, they endeavour to support their scheme of consolidation by delusion. Not one word is said in the book.

“Agrippa” VIII (James Winthrop), *Massachusetts Gazette*
25 December 1787 (RCS MASS., 516)

CHEF D’ŒUVRE IN POLITICS

One party sees nothing but Danger and Mischief in the proposed Constitution; while the other extols it as a *Chef d’oeuvre* in Politics.

George Turner to Winthrop Sargent, Philadelphia
6 November 1787 (RCS PA., 209; CC I, 565)

THE CHEF D’ŒUVRE OF CONTINENTAL WISDOM

I do not know whether I should be justifiable in making any observations upon what I suppose, may be considered as the Chef d’œuvre of continental Wisdom.

To James Madison, n.p., ca. 1 October 1787 (CC I, 283)

A FEW RESOLVES UPON PAPER

I think it is nonsense for any of us to suppose, that a set of men, be they ever so good, or ever so wise, can, by a few resolves upon paper, cause us to be the happy people we so anxiously wish for.

“A Thinker” I, *Virginia Centinel*, 2 April 1788 (RCS SUPPL. VA., #182, p. 61)

**THE FIRST PRODUCTION OF
POLITICAL WISDOM AND INTEGRITY**

In opposing the establishment of the Federal Constitution, that first production of political wisdom and integrity, they are alike the objects of a just resentment, from which neither the gold of Europe, nor the friendship of apostate Americans will be able to protect them.

“Dentatus,” Philadelphia *Independent Gazetteer*
13 October 1787 (RCS SUPPL. PA., #128, p. 306)

THE GREAT WORK

You ask me for such information as I can, with propriety, give you, respecting the proceedings of the [Constitutional] Convention. In my

letter from Philadelphia, in July last, I informed you that everything was covered with a veil of secrecy. It is now taken off, and the great work is presented to the public for their consideration. I enclose you a copy of it, with the letter which accompanies the Constitution.

William Pierce to St. George Tucker, New York
28 September 1787 (RCS SUPPL. GA., #13, p. 10)



But when the great work was done and published, I was not only most agreeably disappointed, but struck with amazement.—Nothing less than that superintending hand of providence, that so miraculously carried us through the war, (in my humble opinion,) could have brought it about so compleat, upon the whole.

“A Steady and Open Republican,” *State Gazette of South Carolina*
5 May 1788 (CC 5, 388)



But, though this ensures the ratification of the constitution, by a very respectable majority, and there is no doubt but that a few revolving months will set this master-piece of political wisdom in motion, yet something still is wanting to complete the great work.

“A Patriotic Citizen,” *Pennsylvania Mercury*
10 May 1788 (CC 6, 7)



After four months deliberation the great work is produced. It rises to view like a pyramid, whose broad foundation is the people,—whose summit is their happiness.

William Pierce, Oration, Savannah, Ga.
4 July 1788 (CC 6, 251)

THE GREATEST AGGREGATE EXERTIONS OF HUMAN REASON

We have been very much occupied in conversations with political topics. The proposed Constitution has [— —] [been so?] ably discussed. Though nothing among such fallible and short-sighted mortals as we are, had any pretension to perfection, and though the System in question is the result of mutual concession and accommodation in such sort as not to come fully up to the views of any one, still I cannot but consider it as one of the greatest aggregate exertions of human reason, and ad-

mirably calculated to promote and secure the felicity of mankind in a State of civil society.

“Extract of a Letter from a Gentleman in Virginia to his Friend in Portsmouth”
dated 12 May 1788 (RCS SUPPL. N.H., #79, pp. 27–28)

LABOR OF WISDOM

He flatters himself that before the month of April, we shall be united to the NEW CONSTITUTION; a Constitution which was formed by the labour of wisdom, and which if cordially adopted by us, may give us reason to hope for the accomplishment of our rational wishes: our trade will flourish, the farmer *find* a market for his produce, and industry a reward.

Newport Herald, 21 January 1790 (RCS R.I., 715)

MASTERPIECE OF HUMAN WISDOM

We are informed by a gentleman who arrived lately from the West-Indies, that the federal constitution has been considered in the Islands as a masterpiece of human wisdom.

Pennsylvania Herald, 29 December 1787 (CC 3, 559)



But to the enemies of America (for such are the enemies of Washington and Franklin) be it told, and let them burst with spite at the information, that “his extreme old age” has not prevented him from devoting his knowledge and experience to the formation of a constitution, which is justly esteemed a master piece of human wisdom, and is the best legacy he could bequeath to his country.

“Detector,” *Philadelphia Federal Gazette*
22 April 1788 (RCS SUPPL. PA., #645, p. 1200)



They have calmly and deliberately formed and adopted a plan of government, which (when we consider the heterogeneous materials afforded for its construction by thirteen distinct states, almost all of them dif-

ferent in their interests, manners and customs) may justly be called a master-piece of human wisdom.

Pennsylvania Mercury

28 June 1788 (CC 6, 209–10; RCS SUPPL. PA., #695, p. 1308)

A MASTERPIECE OF POLITICAL WISDOM

But, though this ensures the ratification of the constitution, by a very respectable majority, and there is no doubt but that a few revolving months will set this masterpiece of political wisdom in motion, yet something still is wanting to complete the great work.

“A Patriotic Citizen,” *Pennsylvania Mercury*

10 May 1788 (RCS SUPPL. PA., #678, p. 1286; CC 6, 7)

A MONUMENT OF THE WISDOM AND PATRIOTISM OF THE GLORIOUS YEAR 1788

May the New Federal Government remain to the most distant ages a monument of the wisdom and patriotism of the glorious year 1788.

Pa. *Carlisle Gazette*, 2 July 1788 (RCS SUPPL. VA., #289, p. 111)

MONUMENT TO POLITICAL VIRTUE AND WISDOM

Men, who from the most pure and patriotic motives abandoned their private pursuits and their domestic endearments, in order to devote their time to the formation of a government better calculated for the wants and weakness of our country—a government, which has already been approved of by a majority of the people, and which has been contemplated in Europe, as a monument of political virtue and wisdom.

“A Citizen,” *Pennsylvania Gazette*

2 April 1788 (RCS SUPPL. PA., #599, p. 1152)

MONUMENT OF WISDOM

I should weary the patience of my audience, were I to attempt those encomiums which are due to this monument of wisdom.

Simeon Baldwin, Oration, New Haven, Conn.

4 July 1788 (CC 6, 239)

MUSICAL INSTRUMENT

The *new Government*, like a Musical Instrument, well tuned, and skillfully struck, by men of *distinguished abilities, known integrity, and firm attachment*, will produce *perfect harmony*—But played on by men *confessedly unskilled, unprincipled, and inimical to it*, will produce *harsh discord, perpetual jars, and dire confusion*—which heaven forbid!

“A Federal Sentiment,” Baltimore *Maryland Gazette*
11 July 1788 (RCS SUPPL. MD., #149, p. 85)

THIS NEW EFFORT

The labours of their committee will be unavailing, the point of deception is passed, the rays of enlightened patriotism have diffused general illumination. However, this new effort will serve to shew the perseverance of ambition and the necessity of constant vigilance in the people for the preservation of their liberty.

“Centinel” X (Samuel Bryan), Philadelphia *Independent Gazetteer*
12 January 1788 (CC 3, 361–62)

A PAINTING

The good natured similarity which the citizen of America discovered between this constitution and apiece of painting, is perfectly erroneous. All painting is addressed to the *sense* and relished by *taste* which is various and fluctuating—but this constitution is addressed to the *understanding*, and judged of by *reason* which is fixed and true.

“A Federal Republican,” *A Review of the Constitution*
28 November 1787 (CC 2, 276)

A PATCHED UP AFFAIR EVEN ON PAPER

The making of any government at all, upon republican principles for so extensive a continent, rendered it but a patched up affair even on paper.

“A Farmer” VII (Part 6), Baltimore *Maryland Gazette*
25 April 1788 (RCS MD., 535)

AS PERFECT AS COULD BE DEvised

Upon the whole, I think that there is much to be admired in this Constitution, and that perhaps it is as perfect as could be devised.

Oliver Wolcott, Sr. to Oliver Wolcott, Jr., Litchfield, Conn.
8 October 1787 (CC 1, 354)

PERFECT SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT PROMISES
TO THE FEDERAL UNION

I cannot but congratulate you, as well as every real friend to the interest of the United-States, on the great and promising prospects which the new, and I may say, perfect system of government promises to the federal union. I call it perfect, because it is perfectly adapted to our national distress.

“Social Compact,” *New Haven Gazette*
4 October 1787 (CC I, 310)

PERFECTION OF HUMAN WISDOM

I entirely coincide in sentiment with *Civis* and *Hampden*, that the system is the perfection of human wisdom; and that no government similar to it was ever seen in the world before.

“A Real Federalist,” *Maryland Journal*, 21 March 1788 (RCS MD., 425)

A PIECE OF PAINTING

The good-natured simularity which the citizen of America discovered between this Constitution and a piece of painting is perfectly erroneous.

“A Federal Republican,” *A Review of the Constitution*
28 November 1787 (RCS PA., 305)

PRODUCTION

Time must determine the fate of this production, which with a check on standing armies in time of peace, & on an arbitrary administration of the powers vested in the Legislature, would have met with my approbation.

Elbridge Gerry to John Adams, New York
20 September 1787 (CC I, 218)

THE PRODUCTION OF FRAIL AND INTERESTED MEN

But if, on the other hand, this able advocate [James Wilson] has failed to vindicate it from the objections of its adversaries, must we not consider it is as the production of *frail* and *interested* men.

“Centinel” II (Samuel Bryan), *Philadelphia Freeman’s Journal*
24 October 1787 (CC I, 459)

A PRODUCTION OF MUCH GENIUS

Having matured my thoughts upon it, confess I am much alarmed, & am prone to think (although it is a production of much *genius*, yet, it demands the closest attention of every friend to our Country; or it may prove an *engine* of destruction to the liberties, we have been so long [— —] contending for, & at length acquired, at vast expence of blood & treasure.

William Russell to William Fleming, Aspsville, Va.
25 January 1788 (CC 3, 467)

THE PRODUCTION OF THE WISEST AND THE BEST OF MEN

Upon the whole, I think that there is much to be admired in this Constitution, and that perhaps it is as perfect as could be devised—It is the Production of the wisest and the best of Men,—and I hope that it will be so considered.

Oliver Wolcott, Sr., to Oliver Wolcott, Jr., Litchfield, Conn.
8 October 1787 (CC 1, 354)

SIGN POST

God forbid that we should be so much allured by *names* as to forget measures, or so blindfolded as to worship a sign post at the expense of our liberties.

Alexander Fowler to John Nicholson, Pittsburgh
10 November 1787 (RCS PA., 287)

A SUBLIME WORK

I have only room to add that the Form of Government by the late Convention is esteemed here as a Sublime work, they add that it is so good that they are persuaded the Americans will not accept it. it may admitt of Some amendments but it is certainly a great Federal Structure.

Abigail Adams to Cotton Tufts, London
6 November 1787 (CC 2, 462)

STUPENDOUS EFFORT OF HUMAN WISDOM

These blessings appear to be suspended on our acceptance of that stupendous effort of human wisdom, the AMERICAN CONSTITUTION.

Massachusetts Centinel, 17 October 1788 (RCS MASS., 82)

'TIS A HUMAN COMPOSITION

'Tis a human composition, and may have errors which future experience will enable us to discover and correct.

“A Citizen of Philadelphia” (Pelatiah Webster)
Remarks on the Address of Sixteen Members, 18 October 1787 (CC 1, 305)

UNNECESSARY AND UNADVISABLE DEPARTURE FROM TRUE REPUBLICAN AND FEDERAL PRINCIPLES

A very great majority of the people of the United States think it, in many parts, an unnecessary and unadvisable departure from true republican and federal principles.

“Federal Farmer,” *Additional Letters to the Republican*
 2 May 1788 (CC 5, 371)

UTMOST EFFORT OF HUMAN GENIUS

The author has discovered great political erudition, and a most profound knowledge in the science of Government. He condemns to oblivion the present confederacy of the states, and celebrates the *new* system as the utmost effort of human genius.

“A Real Federalist,” *Maryland Journal*
 21 March 1788 (RCS MD., 424)

A VERY FULL AND COMPREHENSIVE CREED

Our late C[onventio]n, sensible of truth of this maxim, have taken care to draw up a very full and comprehensive *creed* for the use of their creatures and expectants, who are obliged to believe and maintain every article of it, right or wrong, on pain of political damnation.

“The Federalist’s Political Creed,” *Philadelphia Independent Gazetteer*
 10 May 1788 (CC 6, 4–5)

A WELL PROPORTIONED PIECE OF WORKMANSHIP

We may remedy her defects to the satisfaction of all concerned; but if we proceed now to make alterations, we may deface a beauty, or deform a well proportioned piece of workmanship.

James Jackson, Speech in the U.S. House of Representatives
 8 June 1789 (RCS BoR 1, 307)

THE WORK OF THE AGES REDUCED TO PRACTICE

The more I consider the new constitution of America the more I rejoice and congratulate myself & you. It is the wisdom of the ages reduced to practice.

Thomas Brand Hollis to John Adams, The Hyde, England
4 November 1788 (RCS B0R III)

THE WORK OF PLAIN HONEST MEN

While some have boasted it as a Work from Heaven others have given it a less righteous origin and charged it to the old great Devil. Medio tutissimus ibis* I have many Reasons to believe that it was the Work of plain honest Men and such I think it will appear.

*You will go most safely in the middle.

Gouverneur Morris to James LaCaze, Williamsburg, Va.
21 February 1788 (CC 4, 171)