

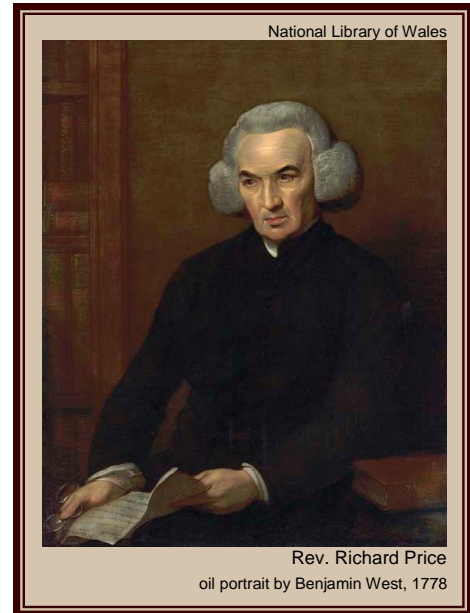
\_\_\_\_\_ Rev. Richard Price

# OBSERVATIONS

on the Importance of the American Revolution  
and the Means of Making It a Benefit to the World

1784 \_\_ EXCERPTS

A British moral philosopher, economic thinker, and Presbyterian minister, Richard Price championed the American Revolution. In its Enlightenment foundations and its victory through united purpose, he drew unprecedented hope for “a new era in the history of mankind”—one based on civil liberty, just ownership of land, wisely distributed political power, and sound economic principles. While lauding the Americans, he also alerted them to their precarious position. Nurture your infant nation with your ideals, guard against the age-old frailties of human nature, or the Revolution may prove to be “an opening to a new scene of human degeneracy and misery” instead of a beacon of hope and a “refuge to the world.”



TO *The FREE AND UNITED STATES OF AMERICA*, THE FOLLOWING OBSERVATIONS ARE  
HUMBLY OFFERED AS A LAST TESTIMONY OF THE GOOD WILL OF THE AUTHOR.

JULY 6, 1784

*Of the IMPORTANCE of the REVOLUTION which has established  
the Independence of the United States.*

HAVING from pure conviction taken a warm part in favour of the *British* colonies (now the United States of America) during the late war, and been exposed in consequence of this to *much* abuse and *some* danger, it must be supposed that I have been waiting for the issue [outcome] with anxiety — I am thankful that my anxiety is removed and that I have been spared to be a witness to that very issue of the war which has been all along the object of my wishes. With heartfelt satisfaction, I see the revolution in favour of universal liberty which has taken place in *America* — a revolution which opens a new prospect in human affairs and begins a new era in the history of mankind — a revolution by which *Britons* themselves will be the greatest gainers, if wise enough to improve properly the check that has been given to the despotism of their ministers, and to catch the flame of virtuous liberty which has saved their American brethren.

The late war, in its *commencement and progress*, did great good

- by disseminating just sentiments of the rights of mankind and the nature of legitimate government,
- by exciting a spirit of resistance to tyranny which has emancipated one *European* country and is likely to emancipate others and
- by occasioning the establishment in *America* of forms of government more equitable and more liberal<sup>1</sup> than any that the world has yet known.

But, in its *termination*, the war has done still greater good

- by preserving the new governments from that destruction in which they must have been involved, had Britain conquered;

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<sup>1</sup> “Liberal,” in its 18<sup>th</sup>-century usage here, means supportive of freedom, natural rights, the social contract, and government free of tyranny and authoritarian power. The modern labels of *liberal* and *conservative* holds connotations not implied by Price.

- by providing, in a sequestered continent possessed of many singular advantages, a place of refuge for oppressed men in every region of the world, and
- by laying the foundation there of an empire which may be the seat of liberty, science, and virtue, and from whence there is reason to hope these sacred blessings will spread till they become universal and the time arrives when kings and priests shall have no more power to oppress, and that ignominious slavery which has hitherto debased the world is exterminated.

I therefore think I see the hand of Providence in the late war working for the general good, and can scarcely avoid crying out, *It was the Lord's doing*.

Reason, as well as tradition and revelation, lead us to expect that a more improved and happy state of human affairs will take place before the consummation of all things [end of the world]. The world has hitherto been gradually improving. Light and knowledge have been gaining ground, and human life *at present* compared with what it *once* was, is much the same that a youth approaching to manhood is compared with an infant. . . .

But among the events in modern times tending to the elevation of mankind, there are none probably of so much consequence as the recent one which occasions these observations. Perhaps, I do not go too far when I say that, next to the introduction of Christianity among mankind, the American revolution may prove the most important step in the progressive course of human improvement. It is an event which may produce a general diffusion of the principles of humanity, and become the means of setting free mankind from the shackles of superstition and tyranny by leading them to see and know “that nothing is *fundamental* but impartial inquiry, an honest mind, and virtuous practice — that state policy ought not to be applied to the support of speculative opinions and formularies<sup>2</sup> of faith.” — “That the members of a civil community are *confederates*, not *subjects*<sup>3</sup>, and their rulers *servants*, not *masters*. — And that all legitimate government consists in the dominion of equal laws made with common consent, that is, in the dominion of men over *themselves* and not in the dominion of communities over communities, or of any men over other men. . . .”

. . . Perhaps, there never existed a people on whose wisdom and virtue more depended, or to whom a station of more importance in the plan of Providence has been assigned. They have begun nobly. They have fought with success for themselves and for the world, and, in the midst of invasion and carnage, established forms of government favourable in the highest degree to the rights of mankind. — But they have much more to do — more indeed than it is possible properly to represent. In this address, my design is only to take notice of a few *great* points which seem particularly to require their attention in order to render them permanently happy in themselves and useful to mankind. On these points, I shall deliver my sentiments with freedom, conscious I mean well, but at the same time with real diffidence, conscious of my own liability to error.

*They have begun nobly. They have fought with success for themselves and for the world . . . .  
— But they have much more to do —*

## OBSERVATIONS

- I. Of the Importance of the Revolution
- II. Of the Means of Promoting Human Improvement and Happiness in the United States
  - Of Public Debts
  - Of Peace, and the Means of Perpetuating it
  - Of Liberty
  - Of Liberty of Discussion
  - Of Liberty of Conscience and Civil Establishments of Religion
  - Of Education
- III. Of the Dangers to which the American States are Exposed
  - Of Debts and Internal Wars
  - Of an Unequal Distribution of Property.
  - Of Trade, Banks, and Paper Credit.
  - Of Oaths.
  - Of the Negro Trade and Slavery.
- IV. Conclusion

<sup>2</sup> Medieval formularies were books containing prescribed forms for civil and legal actions such as oaths, declarations, medical formulas, etc., and because issued by religious bodies of the Roman Catholic Church, included standard prayers and forms of religious practice.

<sup>3</sup> Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, 1752: “Their laws not being made for one individual more than another, each considers himself a monarch; and, indeed, the men of this nation are rather confederates than fellow-subjects.” Sources of Price’s other quotes in this paragraph unidentified.

*Of the Means of promoting human Improvement and Happiness  
in the United States — And first, of PUBLIC DEBTS.*

IT seems evident that what first requires the attention of the United States is the redemption of their debts and making compensation to that army which has carried them through the war. They have an infant credit to cherish and rear, which, if this is not done, must perish, and with it their character and honour forever. Nor is it conceivable they should meet with any great difficulties in doing this. They have a vast resource peculiar to themselves in a continent of unlocated lands possessing every advantage of soil and climate. The settlement of these lands will be rapid, the consequence of which must be a rapid increase of their value. By disposing of them to the army and to emigrants, the greatest part of the debts of the United States may probably be sunk *immediately*. But had they no such resource, they are very capable of bearing taxes sufficient for the purpose of a gradual redemption.

Price proposes that the United States pay its debts through a sinking fund—money set aside to pay off a public or corporate debt—and concludes “Let the United States take warning—Their debts at present are moderate. A Sinking fund, guarded against misapplication, may soon extinguish them and prove a resource in all events of the greatest importance.”

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*Of P E A C E, And the Means of Perpetuating It.*

CIVIL Government is an expedient for collecting the wisdom and force of a community or confederacy to preserve its peace and liberty against every hostile invasion, whether from *within* or from *without*. — In the latter of these respects, the United States are happily secured, but they are far from being equally happy in the *former* respect. Having now, in consequence of their successful resistance of the invasion of *Britain*, united to their remoteness from *Europe*, no external enemy to fear, they are in danger of fighting with one another. — This is their *greatest* danger, and providing securities against it is their *hardest* work. Should they fail in this, America may some time or other be turned into a scene of blood, and instead of being the hope and refuge of the world, may become . . . *they are in danger of fighting with one another.*

— *This is their greatest danger, and providing securities against it is their hardest work.*

. . . When a dispute arises between any of the States, they order an appeal to Congress — an inquiry by Congress — a hearing — and a decision. — But here they stop. — What is most of all necessary is omitted. No provision is made for enforcing the decisions of Congress, and this renders them inefficient and futile. I am by no means qualified to point out the best method of removing this defect. Much must be given up for this purpose, nor is it easy to give up *too* much. Without all doubt the powers of Congress must be enlarged. In particular, a power must be given it to collect, on certain emergencies, the force of the confederacy, and to employ it in carrying its decisions into execution. A State against which a decision is made will yield of course when it knows that such a force exists, and that it allows no hope from resistance.

By this force I do not mean a STANDING ARMY.<sup>4</sup> God forbid that standing armies should ever find an establishment in America! They are everywhere the grand supports of arbitrary power and the chief causes of the depression [oppression] of mankind. No wise people will trust their defense out of their own hands or consent to hold their rights at the mercy of armed *slaves*. Free States ought to be bodies of armed *citizens*, well regulated and well disciplined, and always ready to turn out when properly called upon to execute the laws, to quell riots, and to keep the peace. Such, if I am rightly informed, are the citizens of America. Why then may not CONGRESS be furnished with a power of calling out from the confederated States *quotas* of *militia* sufficient to force at once the compliance of any State which may show an inclination to break the union by resisting its decisions?

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<sup>4</sup> Army maintained in peacetime.

## Of LIBERTY .

THE next point I would insist on, as an object of supreme importance, is the establishment of such a system of perfect liberty, *religious* as well as *civil*, in America, as shall render it a country where truth and reason shall have fair play, and the human powers find full scope for exerting themselves and for showing how far they can carry human improvement.

The faculties of man have hitherto, in all countries, been more or less cramped by the interference of civil authority in matters of [religious] speculation by tyrannical laws against heresy and schism and by slavish hierarchies and religious establishments. It is above all things desirable that no such fetters on reason should be admitted into America. I observe, with inexpressible satisfaction, that at present they have no existence there. In this respect the governments of the United States are liberal to a degree that is unparalleled. They have the distinguished honour of being the first states under heaven in which forms of government have been established favourable to *universal* liberty. They have been thus distinguished in their *infancy*. What then will they be in a more advanced state when time and experience, and the concurring assistance of the wise and virtuous in every part of the earth, shall have introduced into the new governments corrections

and amendments which will render them still more friendly to liberty, and more the means of promoting human happiness and dignity? — May we not see there the dawning of brighter days on earth and a new creation rising. But I must check myself. I am in danger of being carried too far by the ardor of my hopes.

*May we not see there the dawning of brighter days on earth and a new creation rising. But I must check myself. I am in danger of being carried too far by the ardor of my hopes.*

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## Of LIBERTY of DISCUSSION.

IT is a common opinion that there are some doctrines so sacred, and others of so bad a tendency, that no public discussion of them ought to be allowed. Were this a right opinion, all the persecution that has been ever practiced would be justified. For if it is a part of the duty of civil magistrates to prevent the discussion of such doctrines, they must, in doing this, act on their own judgments of the nature and tendency of doctrines, and consequently they must have a right to prevent the discussion of all doctrines which they *think* to be too sacred for discussion or too dangerous in their tendency; and this right they must exercise in the only way in which civil power is capable of exercising it — “by inflicting penalties on all who oppose sacred doctrines or who maintain pernicious [harmful] opinions.” . . . civil power has nothing to do with any such matters, and civil governors go miserably out of their proper province whenever they take upon them the care of truth or the support of any doctrinal points. They are not judges of truth, and if they pretend to decide about it, they will decide wrong.

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## Of LIBERTY of CONSCIENCE and CIVIL ESTABLISHMENTS of RELIGION.

IN LIBERTY of CONSCIENCE I include much more than *Toleration*. Jesus Christ has established a perfect equality among his followers. His command is that they shall assume no jurisdiction over one another and acknowledge no master besides *himself*. — It is, therefore, presumption in any of them to claim a right to any superiority or pre-eminence over their brethren, Such a claim is implied whenever any of them pretend to *tolerate* the rest. — Not only all *Christians*, but all *men* of all religions ought to be considered by a State as equally entitled to its protection as far as they demean themselves honestly and peaceably. *Toleration* can take place only where there is a civil establishment of a particular mode of religion<sup>5</sup>, that is, where a predominant sect enjoys *exclusive* advantages and makes the encouragement of

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<sup>5</sup> A state-sanctioned official religion.

its own mode of faith and worship a part of the constitution of the State, but at the same time thinks fit to SUFFER [permit] the exercise of other modes of faith and worship.

Thanks be to God, the new

American States are at present strangers to such establishments. In this respect, as well as many others, they have shown, in framing their [state] constitutions, a degree of wisdom and liberality which is above all praise. . . .

. . . In the United States may RELIGION flourish. They cannot be very great and happy if it does not. But let it be a better religion than most of those which have been hitherto professed in the world. Let it be a religion which enforces moral obligations, not a religion which relaxes and evades them. — A tolerant and *Catholic* [i.e., universally held] religion, not a rage for proselitism. — A religion of peace and charity, not a religion that persecutes, curses and damns. — In a word, let it be the genuine Gospel of peace lifting above the world, warming the heart with the love of God and his creatures, and sustaining the fortitude of good men by the assured hope of a future deliverance from death, and an infinite reward in the *everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour*.

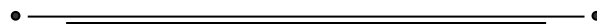


## Of EDUCATION.

SUCH is the state of things which I wish to take place in the united *American States*. — In order to introduce and perpetuate it, and at the same time to give it the greatest effect on the improvement of the world, nothing is more necessary than the establishment of a wise and liberal plan of EDUCATION. It is impossible properly to represent the importance of this. So much is left by the author of nature [God] to depend on the turn given to the mind in early life and the impressions then made, that I have often thought there may be a *secret* remaining to be discovered in education which will cause future generations to grow up virtuous and happy, and accelerate human improvement to a greater degree than can at present be imagined.

The end of education is to direct the powers of the mind in unfolding themselves and to assist them in gaining their just bent and force. And, in order to this, its business should be to teach *how* to think rather than *what* to think, or to lead into the best way of searching for truth rather than to instruct in truth itself. . . .

I am by no means qualified to give a just account of the particular method in which education ought to be conducted so as to avoid these evils — that is, so as to render the mind free and unfettered, quick in discerning evidence, and prepared to follow it from whatever quarter and in whatever manner it may offer itself. . . . — Had this been always the aim of education, mankind would now have been farther advanced.



## *Of the DANGERS to Which the American States Are Exposed.*

IN the preceding observations, I have aimed at pointing out the means of promoting the progress of improvement in the United States of America. I have insisted, particularly, on the importance of a just settlement of the FEDERAL UNION, and the establishment of a well-guarded and perfect liberty in speculation [thought], in government, in education, and in religion. — The United States are now setting out, and all depends

on the care and foresight with which a plan is begun, which hereafter will require only to be strengthened and ripened.

*The United States are now setting out, and all depends on the care and foresight with which a plan is begun, which hereafter will require only to be strengthened and ripened. This is, therefore, the time for giving them advice . . .*

This is, therefore, the time for giving them advice, and mean<sup>6</sup> advice (like the present) may suggest some useful hints. — In this country [Britain], when any improvements are proposed or any corrections are attempted of abuses so gross as to make our boasts of liberty ridiculous, a clamour immediately arises against innovation, and an alarm spreads lest the attempt to *repair* should *destroy*. — In America no such prejudices can operate. *There* abuses have not yet gained sacredness by time. *There* the way is open to social dignity and happiness, and reason may utter her voice with confidence and success.

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### Of DEBTS and INTERNAL WARS.

I HAVE observed in the introduction to this Address that the *American* States have many dangers to shun. In what follows I shall give a brief recital of some of the chief of these dangers.

The danger from an endless increase of PUBLIC DEBTS has been already sufficiently noticed.

Particular notice has been likewise taken of the danger from INTERNAL WARS. — Again and again, I would urge the necessity of pursuing every measure and using every precaution which can guard against this danger. It will be shocking to see in the *new* world a repetition of all the evils which have hitherto laid waste the *old* world — War raging where peace and liberty were thought to have taken their abodes — The points of bayonets and the mouths of cannon settling disputes instead of the collected wisdom of the confederation —

*It will be shocking to see in the new world  
a repetition of all the evils which have  
hitherto laid waste the old world —*

and perhaps one restless and ambitious State rising by bloody conquest above the rest, and becoming a *sovereign* State, claiming impiously (as *Britain* once did) “full authority to make laws that shall bind its sister States in all cases whatever,”<sup>7</sup> and drawing to itself all advantages at their expense. — I deprecate this calamity. I shudder when I consider how possible it is, and hope those persons are mistaken who think that such are the jealousies which govern human nature, and such the imperfections of the best human arrangements, that it is not within the reach of any wisdom to discover any effectual means of preventing it without encroaching too much on the liberty and independence of the States.

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### Of an UNEQUAL DISTRIBUTION OF PROPERTY.

IT is a trite observation that “dominion is founded on property.”<sup>8</sup> Most free States have manifested their sense of the truth of this observation by studying to find out means of preventing too great an inequality in the distribution of property. What tumults were occasioned at ROME, in its best times, by attempts to carry into execution the *Agrarian* law?<sup>9</sup> Among the people of *Israel*, by the direction of heaven, all estates which had been alienated during the course of fifty years returned to their original owners at the end of that term. One of the circumstances that has been most favourable to the *American* States in forming their new constitutions of government has been the equality which subsists among them.

The happiest state of man is the middle state between the *savage* and the *refined*, or between the wild and the luxurious state. Such is the state of society in CONNECTICUT and some others of the *American* provinces where the inhabitants consist, if I am rightly informed, of an independent and hardy YEOMANRY<sup>10</sup> all nearly on a level — trained to arms — instructed in their rights — clothed in homespun — of simple manners — strangers to luxury — drawing plenty from the ground — and that plenty gathered easily by the hand of industry, and giving rise to early marriages, a numerous progeny, length of

<sup>6</sup> *Mean*, i.e., at this time [*mean*: middle, intermediate in time, as in *meanwhile*, *meantime*. *Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology*, 1996]

<sup>7</sup> Referring to the reviled 1766 Declaratory Act, in which Parliament declared its right to make laws for the colonies “in all cases whatsoever.”

<sup>8</sup> Referring to John Locke on the natural right to own property, as presented in the second treatise on government (not a direct quote). Price is not labelling Locke’s stance as trite but as often re-stated.

<sup>9</sup> Laws passed in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C.E. to distribute private and public lands more equitably and provide land to small farmers who had been displaced by wealthy landowners.

<sup>10</sup> *Yeomanry*: freemen owning their own land; small independent farmers.

days,<sup>11</sup> and a rapid increase . . . —  
O distinguished people! May you  
continue long thus happy, and may the  
happiness you enjoy spread over the  
face of the whole earth! — But I am  
forgetting myself. There is danger that a  
state of society so happy will not be of  
long duration, that simplicity and virtue  
will give way to depravity, that equality  
will in time be lost, the cursed lust of domineering show itself, liberty languish, and civil government  
gradually degenerate into an instrument in the hands of the *few* to oppress and plunder the *many*. . . .

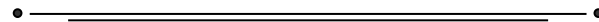
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that simplicity and virtue will give way to  
depravity, that equality will in time be lost . . .*

It is not in my power to describe the best method of doing this<sup>12</sup> — I will only observe that there are three enemies to equality against which *America* ought to guard.

*First.* Granting hereditary honours and titles of nobility. Persons thus distinguished, though perhaps meaner than the meanest of their dependents, are apt to consider themselves as belonging to a higher order of beings and *made* for power and government. Their birth and rank necessarily dispose them to be hostile to general liberty . . . It is, therefore, with peculiar satisfaction that I have found in the Articles of Confederation an order that no titles of nobility shall be ever granted by the United States. . . . In a word, let the United States continue forever what it is now their glory to be — a confederation of States prosperous and happy, without LORDS — without BISHOPS<sup>13</sup> — and without KINGS.

*Secondly.* The right of primogeniture.<sup>14</sup> The tendency of this to produce an improper inequality is very obvious. The disposition to raise a name [heighten family status] by accumulating property in one branch of a family is a vanity no less unjust and cruel than dangerous to the interest of liberty and no wise State will encourage or tolerate it.

*Thirdly.* FOREIGN TRADE is another of the enemies against which I wish to caution the United States. But this operates unfavourably to a State in so many more ways than by destroying that equality which is the basis of liberty, that it will be proper to take more particular notice of it.



### Of TRADE, BANKS, and PAPER CREDIT.

FOREIGN trade has, in some respects, the most useful tendency [result]. By creating an intercourse between distant kingdoms, it extends benevolence, removes local prejudices, leads every man to consider himself more as a citizen of the world than of any particular State, and consequently checks the excesses of that *Love of our Country*<sup>15</sup> which has been applauded as one of the noblest, but which, *really*, is one of the most *destructive* principles in human nature. — Trade also, by enabling every country to draw from other countries conveniencies and advantages which it cannot find within itself, produces among nations a sense of mutual dependence and promotes the general improvement. — But there is no

<sup>11</sup> *Progeny*: offspring. *Length of days*, i.e., lifespan.

<sup>12</sup> I.e., maintaining “equality in society which is essential to liberty.”

<sup>13</sup> Price footnote: “I do not mean by BISHOPS any officers among Christians merely spiritual, but Lords spiritual as distinguished from Lords temporal, or Clergymen raised to pre-eminence and invested with civil honours and authority by a State establishment [of religion].

I must add that by what is here said I do not mean to express a *general* preference of a *republican* constitution of government. There is a degree of political degeneracy which unfits for such a constitution. BRITAIN, in particular, consists too much of the high and the low (of *scum* and *dregs*) to admit of it. Nor will it suit *America*, should it ever become equally corrupt.

<sup>14</sup> *Primogeniture*: the right of the first-born son to inherit the entire estate [property] of the family on the death of the father.

<sup>15</sup> Price footnote: “The love of our country is then only a noble passion when it engages us to promote the *internal* happiness of our country, and to defend its rights and liberties against domestic and foreign invasion, maintaining at the same time an equal regard to the rights and liberties of other countries. But this has not been its most common effects. On the contrary, it has in general been nothing but a spirit of rivalry between different communities, producing contention and a thirst for conquest and dominion. — What is his *country* to a *Russian*, a *Turk*, a *Spaniard*, &c. but a spot where he enjoys no rights and is disposed of by owners as if he was a beast? . . . Among the *Romans* also what was it, however great in many of its exertions, but a principle holding together a band of robbers in their attempts to crush all liberty but their own? — Christianity has wisely omitted to recommend this principle. Had it done this, it would have countenanced a vice among mankind. — It has done what is infinitely better — It has recommended UNIVERSAL BENEVOLENCE.”



part of mankind to which these uses of trade are of less consequence than the *American States*. They are spread over a great continent and make a world within themselves. The country they inhabit includes soils and climates of all sorts, producing not only every *necessary* but every *convenience* of life. And the vast rivers and wide-spread lakes which intersect it create such an inland communication between its different parts as is unknown in any other region of the earth. They possess then within themselves the best means of the most profitable *internal* traffic, and the amplest scope for it.

Why should they look much farther? What occasion have they for being anxious about pushing *foreign* trade, or even about raising a great naval force? — Britain, indeed, consisting as it does of *unarmed* inhabitants, and threatened as it is by ambitious and powerful neighbours, cannot hope to maintain its existence long after becoming open to invasion by losing its naval superiority. — But this is not the case with the *American States*. They have no powerful neighbours to dread. The vast Atlantic must be crossed before they can be attacked. They are all a well-trained *militia*, and the successful resistance which, in their infancy and without a naval force, they have made to the invasion of the first *European* power, will probably discourage and prevent all future invasions. Thus singularly happy, why should they seek connections with *Europe* and expose themselves to the danger of being involved in its quarrels? . . .

*Thus singularly happy, why should they seek connections with Europe and expose themselves to the danger of being involved in its quarrels?*

But in no case will any means succeed unless aided by MANNERS<sup>16</sup>. In this instance, particularly, there is reason to fear that an increasing passion for foreign frippery<sup>17</sup> will render all the best regulations ineffectual. And should this happen, that simplicity of character, that manliness of spirit, that disdain of tinsel in which true dignity consists will disappear. Effeminacy, servility, and venality will enter, and liberty and virtue be swallowed up in the gulf of corruption. Such may be the course of events in the *American States*. Better *infinitely* will it be for them to consist of bodies of plain and honest farmers than of opulent and splendid merchants. . . .

The United States have, I think, particular reason to dread the following effects of foreign trade.

*Better infinitely will it be for them to consist of bodies of plain and honest farmers than of opulent and splendid merchants . . .*

By increasing importation to feed luxury and gratify prodigality

[extravagance], it will carry out their coin and occasion the substitution of a delusive paper currency<sup>18</sup> — the consequence of which will be that *ideal* wealth will take place of *real*, and their security come to depend (as the security of BRITAIN does) on the strength and duration of a *Bubble*. — I am very sensible that paper credit is one of the greatest of all conveniencies, but this makes it likewise one of the greatest of all temptations. A public Bank (while it can circulate its bills) facilitates commerce and assists the exertions of a State in proportion to its credit. But when it is not carefully restricted and watched, when its emissions [money paid out] exceed the coin it can command, and are carried near the utmost length that the confidence of the public will allow; and when, in consequence of this, its permanence comes to depend on the permanence of public credulity — In these circumstances, a BANK, though it may for a time . . . answer all the ends of a MINE from which millions may be drawn in a minute; and, by filling a kingdom with cash, render it capable of sustaining *any* debts, and give it a kind of OMNIPOTENCE. — In such circumstances, I say, notwithstanding these temporary advantages, a public BANK must *at last* prove a great calamity; and a kingdom so supported at the very time of its greatest exertions will be only striving more violently to increase the horror of an approaching convulsion.

<sup>16</sup> *Manners*: a generally accepted mode of social conduct; also, refinement of taste and a disciplined consumption of goods.

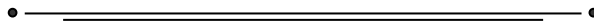
<sup>17</sup> Ostentatious and trivial luxuries.

<sup>18</sup> I.e., they will deplete their gold and silver money and substitute it with paper money, thus causing real wealth (precious metals) to be replaced by unreal ("ideal") wealth (paper money). The dangers were paper currency were hotly debated throughout the war and the 1780s.



## Of OATHS.

OATHS are expedients to which all States have had recourse in order to obtain true information and ascertain facts by securing the veracity of witnesses. But I know not how to relish that *imprecation* [swearing to God] which always makes a part of an oath. Perhaps, there is no such necessity for it as is commonly imagined. An AFFIRMATION solemnly made, with laws inflicting severe penalties on falsehood when detected, would probably answer all the ends [purposes] of oaths. — I am, therefore, disposed to wish that in the United States *imprecatory* oaths<sup>19</sup> may be abolished, and the same indulgence in this respect granted to all which is now granted to the *Quakers*. But I am afraid they will think this too dangerous an experiment . . .



## Of the NEGRO TRADE and SLAVERY.

THE NEGRO TRADE cannot be censured in language too severe. It is a traffic [trade] which, as it has been hitherto carried on, is shocking to humanity, cruel, wicked, and diabolical. I am happy to find that the United States are entering into measures for discountenancing it, and for abolishing the odious slavery which it has introduced. 'Till they have done this, it will not appear they deserve the liberty for which they have been contending. For it is self-evident that if there are any men whom they have a right to hold in slavery, there may be *others* who have had a right to hold *them* in slavery.<sup>20</sup> — I am sensible, however, that this is a work which they cannot accomplish at once. The emancipation of the Negroes must, I suppose, be left in some measure to be the effect of time and of manners [custom]. But nothing can excuse the United States if it is not done with as much speed and at the same time with as much effect as their particular circumstances and situation will allow. I rejoice that on this occasion I can recommend to them the example of my own country. — In *Britain*, a *Negro* becomes a *freeman* the moment he sets his foot on *British* ground.



## CONCLUSION.

SUCH is the advice which I would *humbly* (but *earnestly*) offer to the United States of *America*. — Such are the means by which they may become the seats of liberty, science, peace, and virtue — happy within themselves and a refuge to the world.

Often, while employed in writing these papers, have I wished for a warning voice of more power. The present moment, however auspicious to the United States, if wisely improved, is critical; and, though apparently the end of all their dangers, may prove the time of their greatest danger. I have, indeed, since finishing this Address, been mortified more than I can express by accounts which have led me to fear that I have carried my ideas of them too high and deceived myself with visionary expectations. — And should this be true — Should the return of peace and the pride of independence lead them to security and dissipation — Should they lose those virtuous and simple manners by which alone Republics can long subsist — Should false refinement, luxury, and *impiety* spread among them, excessive jealousy distract their governments, and clashing interests, subject to no strong controul, break the federal union — The consequence will be that the fairest experiment ever tried in human affairs will miscarry, and that a REVOLUTION which had revived the hopes of good men and promised an opening to better times will become a discouragement to all future efforts in favour of liberty, and prove only an opening to a new scene of human degeneracy and misery.

## F I N I S.

<sup>19</sup> I.e., oaths to tell the truth, or fulfill some other promise, that involve calling upon divine punishment if one violates the oath, i.e., as implied in "so help me God" in judicial oaths of witnesses. Quakers opposed oaths on religious grounds and suffered punitive consequences in the colonies. Gradually, colonies allowed Quakers to make affirmations ("solemnly affirm") instead of oaths ("solemnly swear").

<sup>20</sup> Price footnote: "See a remonstrance, full of energy, directed to the United States on this Subject, by a very warm and able friend to the rights of mankind, in a Tract, entitled — *Fragment of an original Letter on the Slavery of the Negroes*; written in the year 1776, but published in 1784, by Thomas Day, Esq." [an English abolitionist, not the free African American furniture maker from North Carolina].