

6950 + 1m 6953 pdf.
ADAMS, J.
1787

A Defense of the Constitutions of the United States

by John Adams

Introduction: Published in January of 1787, six months before the Constitutional Convention by American Founder, John Adams. In it he calls for a republic consisting of a balance of powers between the executive, judicial, and legislative powers. Citing penetrating examples of the successes, but mostly failures in so-called republican experiments and the reasons for those failures which usually consisted in a failure to balance those powers. For those pushing for a more pure democracy today are many examples of what history has proven about their baneful effects including centralization of power, violent factions, and moral corruption in the extreme, and thus anarchy and tyranny. Written in typical Adams prose, a most worthy read. Of interest is Adams call for a thorough examination of the constitutions of the American Indians which had well defined these three powers, and which he said were given unfairly a bad name. Steve Farrell

Preface

Letter 1 Preliminary Observations

Letter 2

Democratical Republics

Letter 3 St. Marino

Letter 4 Biscay, The Grisons, United Provinces of the Low Lands

Letter 5 Switzerland, Appenzel

Letter 6 Switzerland, Underwald

Letter 7 Switzerland, Glaris

Letter 8 Switzerland, Zug

Letter 9 Switzerland, Uri

Letter 10 Switzerland, Switz

Aristocratical Republics

Letter 11 Switzerland, Berne

Letter 12 Switzerland, Fribourg

Letter 13 Switzerland, Soleure

Letter 14 Switzerland, Lucerne

Letter 15 Switzerland, Zurich

Letter 16 Switzerland, Shaffhause, Mulhouse, Bienne

Letter 17 Republics of St. Gall, and Geneva

Letter 18 Swiss Republics of Lucca and Genoa

Letter 19 Republic of Venice, United Provinces of the Low Countries

Monarchical Republics

Letter 20 England

Letter 21 Poland

Letter 22 POLAND, Part 2

Letter 23 RECAPITULATION

Ancient Republics and Opinions of Philosophers

6950 + 1m 6953
ADAMS, J.
1787

Letter 24 DR. JONATHAN SWIFT
Letter 25 BENJAMIN FRANKLIN
Letter 26 DR RICHARD PRICE
Mixed Governments
Letter 27 MACHIAVELLI
Letter 28 SIDNEY, MONTESQUIEU
Ancient Republics, And Opinions of Philosophers
Letter 29 Harrington
Letter 30 POLYBIUS Part 1
Letter 31 POLYBIUS Part 2
Letter 32 Dionysius, Valerius
Letter 33 Plato 6p.
Letter 34 Sir Thomas Smith
Letter 35 Carthage
Ancient Aristocratical Republics
Letter 36 Rome
Ancient Monarchical Republics
Letter 37 Tacitus on Ancient Germans
Letter 38 HOMER on PHÆACIA
Letter 39 HOMER on ITHACA
Ancient Aristocratical Republics
Letter 40 LACEDÆMON
Ancient Democratical Republics
Letter 41 Athens
Letter 42 Antalcidas Crushes Liberty by Deceit
Letter 43 Achaia and the Volatility of Small Republics
Letter 44 Crete's So-Called Democracy
Letter 45 Corinth
Letter 46 Argos
Letter 47 Iphitus
Letter 48 Thebes
Ancient Aristocratical Republics
Letter 49 Crotona, Pythagorus 2p.
Letter 50 Sybaris, Charondas 3p.
Letter 51 Locris, Zaleucus 2p.
Letter 52 Rome
Conclusion
Letter 53 Congress
Letter 54 Locke, Milton, and Hume
Letter 55 Conclusion

IN . A DEFENSE OF THE CONSTITUTIONS
OF THE UNITED STATES



The Moral Liberal
op Facebook

Vind ik leuk

454 personen vinden **The Moral Liberal** leuk.







Sociale plug-in van Facebook

[Zalando.nl](http://www.Zalando.nl) Online shop

Groot aanbod merkschoenen & kleding Gratis verzending en retour!

www.Zalando.nl

AdChoices 

Crotona & Pythagoras: Adams 'Defense' No. 49



Liberty Letters, John Adams, 1786

A Defense of the Constitutions of the United States, Letter 49

Ancient Aristocratical Republics: Crotona. Pythagoras

My dear Sir,

PYTHAGORAS, as well as Socrates, Plato, and Xenophon, were persuaded that the happiness of nations depended chiefly on the form of their government: they were fully sensible of the real misery, as well as dangerous tendency, both of democratical licentiousness and monarchical tyranny; they preferred a well-tempered aristocracy to all other governments. Pythagoras and Socrates, having no idea of three independent branches in the legislature, both thought, that the laws could neither prevent the arbitrary oppressions of magistrates, nor turbulent insolence of the people, until mankind were habituated by education and discipline to regard the great duties of life, and to consider a reverence of themselves, and the esteem of their fellow-citizens, as the principal source of their enjoyment. In small communities, especially where the slaves were many, and the citizens few, this might be plausible; but the education of a great nation can never accomplish so great an end. Millions must be brought up, whom no principles, no sentiments derived from education, can restrain from trampling on the laws: orders of men, watching and balancing each other, are the only security; power must be opposed to power, and interest to interest. Pythagoras found this by experience at Crotona, where the inferior ranks, elated with the destruction of Sybaris, and instigated by an artful ambitious leader, Cylon, clamoured for an equal partition of the conquered territory: this was denied them, as inconsistent with an aristocratical government; a conspiracy ensued against the magistrates, who were surprised in the senate-house, many put to death, and the rest driven from their country. Pythagoras was one of the banished, and died soon afterwards, in extreme old age, at Metapontum. The Crotonians had soon cause to repent their insurrection; for they were defeated, with all their forces, by the Locrians and Rhegians, with smaller numbers.

The other Greek cities of Italy, which had imitated the example of Crotona, in deposing their magistrates, were harassed with wars

against each other, and against their neighbours. In consequence of these distresses, the disciples of Pythagoras again recovered their reputation and influence; and about sixty years afterwards, Zaleucus and Charondas, the one in Locris, and the other in Thurium, revived the Pythagorean institutions. In forty years more, a new revolution drove the Pythagoreans entirely from Italy, and completed the misery of that beautiful country. Thus experience has ever shewn, that education as well as religion, aristocracy as well as democracy and monarchy, are, singly, totally inadequate to the business of restraining the passions of men, of preserving a steady government, and protecting the lives, liberties, and properties of the people. Nothing has ever effected it but three different orders of men, bound by their interests to watch over each other, and stand the guardians of the laws. Religion, superstition, oaths, education, laws, all give way before passions, interest, and power, which can be resisted only by passions, interest, and power.

It is no wonder that Mr. Turgot should have entertained very crude conceptions of republican legislation; it is a science the least understood of any in the whole circle: all other orders of men of letters in Europe, as well as physicians, for a long time, have thought it "litteræ nihil sanantes." It is a kind of erudition which neither procures places, pensions, embassies, chairs in academies, nor fame nor practice in the pulpit, at the bar, nor in medicine. A minister of state, of great abilities and merit, as well as reputation, advanced to the head of the affairs of a respectable monarchy, by one of the greatest princes that has ever lived, I mean the Baron de Hertsberg, has within a few years set an example, in a royal academy of sciences, of enquiry into this subject. In a learned and ingenious discourse, delivered by himself, he has attempted to show the advantages of simple monarchy over all kinds of republican governments, even that best species of them, limited monarchies: but did this worthy minister expect that any of his brother academicians would contest with him the merits of such governments? Men of letters are not fond of martyrdom in this age, nor of ruining their reputations. It is not, however, my design to discuss any questions at present concerning absolute monarchies, though the principles I contend for might be traced through the history of every monarchy and empire in Europe. Even in these there are orders, checks, and balances contrived, at least against abuses in administration, and for the preservation of the laws. The science of government has received very little improvement since the Greeks and Romans. The necessity of a strong and independent executive in a single person, and of three branches in the legislature instead of two, and of an equality among the three, are improvements made by the English, which were unknown, at least never reduced to practice, by the ancients. Machiavel was the first who revived the ancient politics: the best part of his writings he translated almost literally from Plato and Aristotle, without acknowledging the obligation; and the worst of the sentiments, even in his Prince, he translated from Aristotle, without throwing upon him the reproach. Montesquieu borrowed the best part of his book from Machiavel, without acknowledging the quotation. Milton, Harrington, Sidney, were intimately acquainted with the ancients, and with Machiavel. They were followed by Locke, Hoadley, &c. The reputation which is to be acquired by this kind of learning may be judged of by the language of Mr. Hume: "Compositions the most despicable, both for style and matter, such as Rapin Thoyras, Locke, Sidney, Hoadley, &c. have been extolled, and propagated, and read; as if they had equalled the most celebrated remains of antiquity." Hume's History of England, vol. viii. p. 323. — Such is the style in which this great writer speaks of writings which he most probably never read. But although the time is long since passed when such writings were extolled, propagated, or read, the contempt of them is as fashionable, as likely to procure places and pensions, and to make a book sell now, as it was when Mr. Hume wrote.

The facts in these letters relative to Venice, are taken from the Abby Laugier and Moor's Travels; those relative to the ancient republics, excepting the authorities already quoted, are taken from Robertson, Montague, Potter, the Universal History, and especially from Mitford, Gillies, and Ferguson, three very valuable and elegant productions, which deserve to be carefully studied by all America. I have made free use of their expressions as well as reflections, without noting them; if you would see how much has been borrowed, you must read.

Mr. Turgot was as little conversant in this kind of erudition as Mr. Hume. The former, however, was a lover of liberty; but it was of that kind of liberty which he meditated to introduce into France, and could reconcile with a simple monarchy: he was too good a subject to think of introducing a free constitution of government into his own country. For the liberty of commerce, the liberty of religious sentiments, and the personal liberty of the subject, such as are established by the laws, in a monarchy, he was an enthusiast; and enthusiasm for liberty, the common cause of all mankind, is an amiable fervor, which is pardonable even when it is not according to knowledge: but he was neither an enthusiast for a free constitution of government, nor did he know in what it consisted.

Table of Contents: [A Defense of the Constitutions of the United States. by John Adams](#)

Edited by Steve Montgomery: In Letter 49, spelling has been modernized and paragraphs broken up for easier reading. The original copyright of John Adams' "A Defense of the Constitutions of the United States," is in the Public Domain. As edited in this version: Copyright © 2011 Steve Farrell and The Moral Liberal.

The Moral Liberal recommends David McCullough's Pulitzer Prize Winner: [John Adams](#)

Share this:



0



Post Published: 20 February 2012

Author: Steven R. Montgomery

Found in section: [A Defense of the Constitutions of the United States by John Adams](#), [Founders Corner](#), [Steve Montgomery](#)

Tags: [constitutional republic](#), [Crotona](#), [Divine Science](#), [Forms of Government](#), [mixed government](#), [Pythagoras](#)

Previous Topic: [The Legacy of Adoniram Judson](#)

Next Topic: [The Supreme Power in the State: Aristotle's Politics, Bk 3, Prt 12](#)