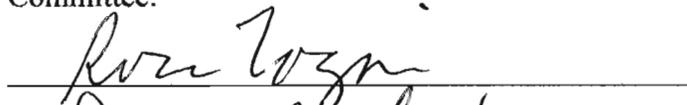


VOX POPULI: THE CLASSICAL IDIOM IN EARLY AMERICAN PUBLIC OPINION
ARTICLES, 1789-1791

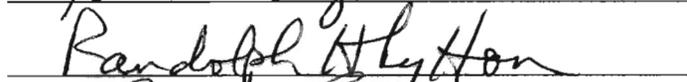
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Maureen E. Connors
A Thesis
Submitted to the
Graduate Faculty
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The Requirements for the Degree
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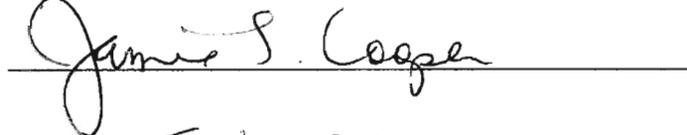


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Date: July 24, 2008

Summer Semester 2008
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Vox Populi: The Classical Idiom in Early American Public Opinion Articles, 1789-1791

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts at George Mason University

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DEDICATION

This is dedicated to every classics student who has ever been asked, “Classics, huh? What are you going to do with that?” *Perfer et obdura! dolor hic tibi proderit olim.*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis is the product of ceaseless inspiration and support from many individuals and institutions. I was inspired to develop my ideas of examining the influence of the classics on the early American republic while interning with the First Federal Congress Project at The George Washington University. Through insight and support from Charlene Bangs Bickford, Ken Bowling, Helen Veit, and William diGiacomantonio, I was able to develop a working thesis idea and set in the right direction for my research. My advisor, Dr. Rosmarie Zagari, has provided me with her invaluable advice, suggestions and time as I put my ideas on paper. My second reader, Dr. Randolph Lytton not only provided support for my interest in the classics as found in American history by serving as a reader on this thesis, but also allowed me to participate in a readings course during the summer of 2007 on the topic of classical architecture in Washington D.C. The History program at George Mason University received me as a student of history in the Fall of 2006 and assisted in developing my interests into that of a budding historian. This thesis is the product of my efforts as a Masters student at George Mason University and I am grateful to the History program for the support it has provided to me over the last two years. I also would like to thank my circle of fellow graduate student friends from the History department. Aside from friendship, this small group of people served as a sounding board for ideas discussed in courses as well as observations on the field of history in general. Their support has been priceless. Lastly, I want to thank my best friend and boyfriend, Stephen Santelli, who suffered through countless hours of listening to my many triumphs and pitfalls in researching this thesis. His love, support, and interest in American history and classics, have sustained me through this project. Without him this thesis may never have seen a successful completion.

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ABSTRACT

VOX POPULI: THE CLASSICAL IDIOM IN EARLY AMERICAN PUBLIC OPINION ARTICLES, 1789-1791.

Maureen E. Connors, M.A.

George Mason University, 2008

Thesis Director: Dr. Rosemarie Zagarri

This thesis serves as an examination of the debates which took place in the public discourse during the First Federal Congress (1789-1791), by examining public opinion articles written in newspapers. The authors' use of the classics reveals a sense of knowledge of the classical idiom among those participating in the public discourse.

Issues discussed included location of the national capital, public funding, Indian treaties, and slavery. In each case, the classical idiom played an important part in the debate.

This thesis is meant to convey a slice of the ideological motivations in the public discourse and in turn, demonstrate how inclusive or exclusive the scope of public opinion was among the larger population.

INTRODUCTION

During the meeting of the First Federal Congress from March 1789 to March 1791, the country's newspapers carried a variety of articles relating to issues debated by the people's elected representatives. Many of these articles contained allusions to events or people in classical Greek and Roman history. What is the meaning and significance of the classical idiom in the public discourse of this period? Due to a widespread knowledge of the classics, the classical idiom was a legitimizing force to one's argument. One desiring to participate could use the classical idiom to demonstrate an educated background, social status, and a sufficient understanding of history and politics, which was thought to be intrinsic to active involvement in the public discourse. The classical idiom also permitted an author to be as inclusive or exclusive as one desired. An author could appeal to a more educated group of people via a higher understanding of the classical idiom or could appeal to a broader base by merely referencing popular classical icons. Finally, the use of the classical idiom in the public discourse indicated the widespread working knowledge of the classics, which assisted in the perpetuation of the inclusion of classics as invaluable to an American education as well as a significant source of knowledge for entering a public life.

ORIGINS OF THE CLASSICAL INFLUENCE IN AMERICA

Modern day research of the classical influence on the early republic demonstrates that the founders had an admiration for the ancients, read classical works of literature, and may have modeled the new republic after those of Greece and Rome. The importance of the classics in early America extended farther than a mere interest or recreational fascination and had an impact on the form of government Americans created in the aftermath of the Revolution. The classical tradition was neither a fleeting phenomenon of the Revolution or of the Constitutional Convention and continued in its importance during the First Federal Congress.

The founders created a government that was considered at the time to be exceptional and was based in classical models where a republic was considered to be the paragon of a successful government. It was understood by Americans that “when the senate, the people and the magistrates became in turn too powerful, they lost their virtue, the state declined, and liberty was lost.”¹ The rise of tyranny was the greatest fear Americans had for their new government and guidance from ancient sources revealed the value of a republican form of government.

Since the educated class was so familiar with ancient history, they were painfully aware of the consequences should republican virtue fall from the sight of those who held positions of power. Holding that they possessed the power of hindsight, the founders used the classics as intellectual tools that they would need in forming the new republic.² There are some historians who consider the classical influence of the early republic to be “mere window dressing” and still others who argue that just because the founders had

¹ M.N.S. Sellers, *American Republicanism*. (New York: New York University Press, 1994) pp. 6

² Carl J. Richard, *The Founders and the Classics*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994) pp. 8.

extensive libraries that included the classical authors, it cannot be definitively argued that any of these books were even read let alone held persuasive intellectual sway.³ Based on the evidence found in public opinion articles, it can be gathered that not only did the founders have a command of knowledge in the classics, but those who participated in the printed discourse of newspapers also had this knowledge.

The perpetuation of the classical tradition in America occurred as part of the carryover of the British education system in the early republic. A classical education began at the age of eight and took up the majority of one's studies. Entrance into college required a basic knowledge of classical languages and was a standard that changed little for two hundred years. As Carl Richard stated, "colleges were interested in a candidate's ability to read Latin and Greek and little else."⁴ Once accepted to college, a student could expect to spend countless hours on the classics, including vacation time, in order to keep one's skills sharpened. Although there were some dissenting groups who were against an emphasis on a classical education, it was thought by most that this type of education system conditioned American youth to revere the classics as a benchmark of what a virtuous, republican should know and practice. From childhood, one was taught to "associate the works of certain ancient republican authors with personal and societal virtue. This social conditioning was so successful that it left many of the founders unable to imagine the teaching of virtue independent of the teaching of the classics and, consequently, made the transmission of the classical heritage an urgent concern."⁵

³ Ibid 2. Meyer Reinhold, *Classica Americana*. (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1984) pp. 19.

⁴ Richard 19.

⁵ Ibid 38.

A classical education was perceived as a “badge denoting class, taste, wisdom, and virtue.”⁶ The importance of having a command of classical knowledge was understood even by those who were not able to obtain a classical education. George Washington, for example, lacked a formal classical education. Fearing that his stepson might suffer the same fate, Washington oversaw his education, making certain it included extensive instruction in the classics.

The classics were so closely identified with success within American society that to be ignorant of the classics would mean the closure of many doors to a successful career. In a letter to his son John Quincy, John Adams spoke of the importance of taking one’s education seriously and said, “When I speak of reading I dont mean holding a book in hand and dreaming over it - take your pen - and make yourself Master of every sentence. By all means make yourself Master of the Latin tongue and that immediately.”⁷ It was thought that by mastering the classics, one could master the foundational intellectual thought required of responsible civil servants. This was the sort of representation the founders desired for the American republic.

From the beginning, the founders did not intend to exclude citizens from their circle based on the conditions of their birth. The British aristocracy was closely associated with government and societal customs. In the outset of the war, British influences over the new American society were actively rejected by the public, which included an active interest in preventing a caste system in America. The acquisition of

⁶ Richard 10.

⁷ John Adams, Written Correspondence to John Quincy Adams, October 4, 1790. (First Federal Congress Project).

knowledge and the capacity to engage in the public discourse enabled anyone who could speak the language of the print culture to participate. Many men who held positions of power “did not go to school, but knew Latin.”⁸ The printed discourse at this time indicated this expectation of a classical education with copious references to ancient history and literature while calling upon republican virtue to restrain those who did not have the best interests of the people at heart. While creating a new government exceptional to any government in Europe at that time, the educated class turned to the classics for guidance.

A REPUBLIC AND NOT A DEMOCRACY

The American conception of republican virtue derived itself primarily from ancient Roman sources as the Roman tradition was favored over the Greek tradition in the early republic. Carl Richards argued that “the founders generally derived their Stoicism not from the systematic Greek philosophers Zeno and Epictetus, but from the works of the two ill-fated Roman republicans Cicero and Seneca, and from the Roman historians.”⁹ A democracy was not perceived as a favorable form of government because Athenian history showed that it proved unsuccessful to the Athenians. John Adams argued that “we shall learn to prize the checks and balances of a free government... if we recollect the miseries of Greece which arose from the ignorance of them.”¹⁰ Though

⁸ Richard M. Gummere, *The American Colonial Mind and the Classical Tradition*. (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1963) pp. 66.

⁹ Richard 175.

¹⁰ Adams, *Defense of the Constitutions*. I: IV.

Sparta had a republican form of government and some favorable references were made to this in early America, the Roman influence was more widely used.

As John Adams stated in his *Defence of the Constitutions of the United States of America*, Cicero's "decided opinion in favour of three branches is founded on a reason that is unchangeable; the laws, which are the only possible rule, measure, and security of justice, can be sure of protection, for any course of time, in no other form of government: and the very name of republic implies, that the property of the people should be represented in the legislature, and decide the rule of justice."¹¹ The Athenian model of a democratic government was looked upon as riddled with corruption and factions where the voice of the people could not survive. The public good was what the founders sought to preserve and it was thought that through the use of a republican form of government, that interest could be preserved.

Although studied, Greek authors were often translated into Latin and were considered important in so far as complementary to their Roman counterparts. Latin phrases were typically written out without an English translation in both correspondence and in newspapers, "although they did translate French, Italian, and Greek."¹² This emphasis on Rome and Latin was evident in public opinion articles which made use of the classical idiom. As will be demonstrated, public opinion authors convey the popular reliance on the Roman model with minor support from Greek authors.

It is important to consider which classical authors were favored over others in early American. As it was mentioned before, Latin texts such as Cicero and Livy were

¹¹ Adams, *Defense of the Constitutions*. xxi.

¹² Sellers 21.

emphasized, but this did not mean that Greek authors were not considered. The Greek historian Polybius was a particular favorite in America since his history of the Punic wars between Rome and Carthage may have provided particular legitimacy for American independence from Great Britain given his explanation for Rome being at the time the new power and Carthage the old. Carthage was defeated because it had passed its prime as a world power and gave the opportunity for Rome to take its place.¹³

Classical texts also provided heroes. Cato the younger, Brutus, Cassius, and Cicero were favorite Roman heroes because of their attempts to save the Roman republic in particularly trying times.¹⁴ John Adams heavily quotes Cicero in his *Defence of the Constitutions of the United States*, which is his explanation for choosing a republic and describes the role of the people within that form of government. Adams quoted an entire section of Cicero in Latin where a republic was defined as the property of the people, (*res publica est res populi*) where the people must develop a common sense of justice (*consensus iuris*).¹⁵ Without justice there could be no republic and without constant vigilance on the part of the people, the end of the republic would come swiftly. This idea of public responsibility might have been what intrigued those outside of the elite, educated class and inspired them to become active participants in the public sphere.

Another model of virtue used by the founders was Cincinnatus, the very embodiment of public service, who as a farmer led the Romans to victory over the Aequians and was offered a dictatorship in Rome. Livy wrote that after only six months,

¹³ Polybius, *The Rise of the Roman Empire*. Trans. Ian Scott-Kilvert. (New York: Penguin Group, 1979) VI: 57.

¹⁴ Richard 57.

¹⁵ Sellers 36-37. Adams, *Defence of the Constitutions*, xxi.

Cincinnatus declined to serve as a dictator for life and returned to his farm.¹⁶ John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, and George Washington, to name a few, desired to emulate Cincinnatus by returning to their farms and leaving behind politics.¹⁷ When Washington left the presidency upon the completion of his second term, there was a shock throughout Europe that he could leave behind such power. This relinquishment of power only played in more to the Cincinnatus model.

One question that emerged from the examination of the classical tradition in America was how a predominantly Christian society could reconcile themselves with an ideology so based in pagan traditions. One historian, Peter Gay, states that “educated Christians never thought for a moment that their classicism might in any way interfere with their religious duties.”¹⁸ This dichotomy was neither new to the Americans nor to their European counterparts. Even in early Christian Europe, classical sources were viewed as a guide to achieving virtue.¹⁹ Medieval scholars further supported the continued value of Classical authors by suggesting various verses prophesied the coming of Christ. Virgil’s *Eclogue IV*, for example, reads “Now the last age of the Cumaean prophecy is come: the great order of ages is born anew. Now returns the Virgin, returns the reign of Saturn: now from high heaven a new generation comes down.”²⁰ This admiration was expressed by authors such as Dante Alighieri in his *Divine Comedy* where because Virgil possessed the knowledge of the coming of Christ, he was permitted

¹⁶ Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita, or The Early History of Rome*. Trans. Aubrey De Selincourt. (New York: Penguin Group, 1971) III.

¹⁷ Richard 55-56.

¹⁸ Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment, An Interpretation: The Rise of Modern Paganism*. (New York: Knopf, 1966) pp. 39.

¹⁹ Christopher Hibbert, *Rome: The Biography of a City*, (London: Penguin Books, 1987) pp 70-72.

²⁰ Vergil, *Eclogue IV* [Source online], <http://classics.mit.edu/Virgil/eclogue.4.iv.html>, lines 4-7.

to lead souls such as Dante through hell and purgatory. Although hindsight calls to question the clear paradox in ideology between paganism and Christianity, it was apparently not an issue to the founders in such a way that the classical tradition could have been odious to the American Christian tradition.

Thus, Public opinion articles written at the time of the First Federal Congress indicated a wide spread understanding of the classics as well as an active engagement in a classically driven medium of discussion. Even if it cannot be known to what extent the American public actively read the classics, it is evident upon examining the print discourse that there was a widespread admiration for republican values as were demonstrated in ancient history and literature. Some articles were saturated with the classical influence and others merely footnoted it, but one thing that remained evident was a widespread deferment to the classics when writing about politics. By examining the shades of classical influence in each of these public opinion articles, it can be inferred who might be actively participating in the public discourse.

PRINT AND POLITICAL DISCOURSE

Public print discourse did not become a widespread means of debate in the American colonies until 1720. Prior to this date, as one Maryland printer discovered in 1685, the penalty for printing such material could result in a jail sentence.²¹ Historian Michael Warner argued that “the meaning of public utterance... is established by the very fact that their exchange can be read and participated in by any number of unknown and in

²¹ Warner 34-37.

principle unknowable others... The resulting form of mediated relation... was to become the paradigmatic political relation of republican America.”²² Public opinion articles from eighteenth-century newspapers are the remnants of what issues were of importance to the public. These public opinion pieces are what guided and informed the public at this time and illustrate what drove political discourse. Public opinion articles written for newspapers while the First Federal Congress was in session drew upon classical history, literature, and language to make compelling arguments concerning political issues of the day. The extensive use of the classical tradition indicates that it served at the least as a persuasive argument within the political discourse of the day and was more than likely an influential part of this American paradigm in public printed discourse.

Michael Warner’s *The Letters of the Republic* explored the development of the public discourse in Colonial America. He described the language of republicanism as being a “cultural vocabulary” where the “print discourse made it possible to imagine a people that could act as a people and in distinction from the state.”²³ Republicanism in the print discourse made it possible to participate even by merely reading public opinion articles. An anonymous public opinion article could potentially have been written by any number of people, which creates an expansive base of people who could actively write in the public discourse while including the reader as well as a participant. These public opinion articles are directly speaking to the public at large and as Warner stated, “it becomes possible to imagine oneself, in the act of reading, becoming part of an arena of

²² Warner 40.

²³ Warner xiii.

the national people that cannot be realized except through such mediating imaginings.”²⁴ The public sphere was inclusive instead of exclusive of a seemingly limitless audience and was one where readers and authors simultaneously contributed. The classical influence that is so evident in the print culture of this time facilitated the inclusive nature of participation in the public sphere because of anonymity in authorship and the widespread knowledge of republican ideals as expressed by classical allusion.

The classical tradition made itself a common entrance exam for those desiring to participate in the print discourse. Although elite status bought the education with which one would use to enter a public life, by merely being aware of the classics as a medium of discourse, one could rise in the social arena at least on paper. In other words, the classical tradition could be used to one's advantage because knowledge could buy one the right to participate. Although it cannot be determined with any certainty who the authors of these public opinion articles were, important observations can be made based on how an author signed their name and to whom the article was addressed. The classical idiom was accepted as a means of rhetorical expression by people of all backgrounds given the varied authorship of public opinion articles.

THE FIRST FEDERAL CONGRESS

Searching for legitimacy for a republican government in classical models was prevalent in political discourse during the First Federal Congress, which convened in New York City on March 4, 1789 and adjourned on March 3, 1791 in Philadelphia. The

²⁴ Warner xiii.

temporary seat of government had been set by the Confederation Congress in New York City, but it was by no means a final and permanent decision. This decision and others would prove to be one of the more controversial issues the first Congress faced. By the time the first session convened, the greatest challenge the members of the first congress faced was establishing precedent based on the new Constitution. James Iredell, who served as one of the first justices of the Supreme Court, said to the North Carolina Ratification Convention in July 1788 that “the first session of Congress will probably be the most important of any for many years. A general code of laws will then be established in execution of every power contained in the constitution.”²⁵

Although the Constitution had been drafted and sent to the states for ratification, interpreting the content of the Constitution had had only just begun. Members of the Constitutional Convention had intentionally left such issues as a permanent seat of government, Revolutionary War debt, funding, and congressional salaries because by doing so the Constitution would truly be an outline of a system of government where future generations would dictate which issues should be addressed. The First Federal Congress set itself to solving these issues by interpreting the Constitution, which yielded intense debate among members of Congress as well as the American public as was illustrated in the numerous public opinion articles written at that time.

The First Federal Congress was the beginning of the American republic. Although the Continental Congress had been the governing power under the Articles of Confederation, it lacked the power needed to form an effective union among the

²⁵ Bickford 5.

states. The United States Constitution was written in response to a suggested need for revision to the Articles of Confederation. Naturally, there was support and opposition for such a measure. Many of the precedents set during the First Federal Congress would dictate how government was to operate in the United States for years to come. At the time, it was uncertain as to whether or not this endeavor would prove to be any more successful than the previous one. Since this constitution gave more power to a central government, there was much fear among both the ruling class and society at large that a central government would prove to be just as tyrannical as the one that had been defeated in the Revolutionary War.²⁶

Both mistrust and faith in the new government were evident through the examination of the public discourse during the time of the First Federal Congress. The inner-turmoil that existed in the public discourse at this time will be examined through some of the most controversial of issues to the First Congress and how the public reacted to their actions. The removal of the capital and its permanent seat, assumption of the state debts, slavery, and the Creek Treaty are just a few of these issues that will be examined to gather some insight into the use of the classical tradition and those who participated in the discussion.

NEWSPAPERS AND PUBLIC OPINION ARTICLES

The print discourse primarily existed in the context of newspapers, pamphlets and broadsides in colonial and early republican America. Books at this time were expensive

²⁶ Bickford 1-7.

and in many cases were considered to be an indication of wealth. The act of acquiring books as a display of wealth was particularly acute among wealthy Southerners as printing was slower to develop in comparison with New England.²⁷ It would have been uncommon for someone outside of the wealthy class to have the means of acquiring many books, so information distributed through newspapers, broadsides, and pamphlets were easier to acquire and as such became a mainstream as well as reliable means of exchanging ideas within the public sphere. One person writing under the classical persona of “Publicola,” which referred to Publius Valerius Publicola, a Roman who assisted in the overthrow of the last Roman king, wrote in a New York paper that “In every nation, where freedom has any existence, the newspapers are the proper vehicles for conveying intelligence and strictures upon the conduct of men in office. Subject which relate to the public good, always require to be disseminated amongst the people; and he who will first attempt to check the free channel of newspaper intelligence and discussion, must be a dishonest man and traitor to this country.”²⁸ As is indicated here, the newspapers were the major outlet for the free exchange of criticism and ideas on the inner workings of government at this time.

Since Congress convened in New York City, papers from all over the country relied on the coverage given in the New York papers for information. For example, two major papers that covered the proceedings of Congress in New York and vied for the recognition as a national paper were the *New York Daily Advertiser* edited by Francis Childs and the *Gazette of the United States* edited by John Fenno. Each of these

²⁷ Warner 26.

²⁸ Publicola, *New York Daily Gazette*, January 4, 1790.

newspapers went to great lengths in recording the proceedings of Congress by personally attending or dispatching a reporter to take down the debates. To a large extent, what is known of the proceedings of the First Federal Congress come from these newspapers. Print culture went through a metamorphosis from the end of the Revolution to the early republican era as many newspapers began printing at this time. Where before the Revolution, printers had attempted to merely make a living at printing newspapers, but after independence, there was a shift in motives.

Jeffrey Pasley, in his *Tyranny of the Printers*, stated that “new kinds of men took up the newspaper business during the Federalist-Republican struggle, especially on the Republican side... Not only did they fail to shy away from political controversies, they came to find their trade’s chief attraction in politics.”²⁹ Where during the colonial era, printers had been the elite of the artisan class and interested in perpetuating a form of trade in printing. This contrasted with the change the printing industry experienced beginning with the First Federal Congress where printers became more interested in the political aspect of printing than in the trade itself.³⁰ Under the rise of influence from the newspapers came a national conversation of politics and was moderated to a large extent by the editors themselves.

Francis Childs, the editor of the *New York Daily Advertiser*, got his start with the support of John Jay as his financial supporter and Ben Franklin who lent him his first printing press in New York. Publishing under the motto, “The Noblest Motive is the

²⁹ Jeffrey Pasley, *The Tyranny of Printers: Newspaper Politics in the Early American Republic*, (Charlottesville: The University of Virginia Press, 2001) pp. 46-47.

³⁰ Pasley 24-47.

Public Good,” Childs diligently reported the proceedings of Congress in the first session, which appeared in print daily. Upon becoming an assemblyman in New York after the first session, coverage of congressional debates became less frequent as Childs himself attended congress to write the debates in shorthand. Due to the active involvement of the Daily Advertiser in reporting the proceedings of Congress, the public opinion articles reflect the same active involvement in the public discourse.

John Fenno, editor of the *Gazette of the United States*, came from a humble background and desired to advance himself in life by becoming successful in the printing business. After some success in the business and in turn gained notable respect among the elite class, he proposed to the First Congress that he become editor of a national paper that would be the servant of congress in promoting the government’s legitimacy. He wanted this paper to not show any local ties, but to create a paper where a much larger community could participate and learn of the proceedings of congress through a government-sanctioned paper. Like many other editors at this time, however, Fenno did not see his paper as partisan driven. Fenno stated that “the printer [who] can be made the tool of a party... merits universal contempt.”³¹ Instead, Fenno saw himself as the defender of the new Constitution and the national interest in preserving the legitimacy of the foundling government. John Fenno never gained the financial support he needed from Congress to realize his goal of a national paper, but his contribution in creating a national forum of political discussion remains significant to the public discourse.

³¹ Pasley 55.

In general, members of the First Congress supported a postal system that would promote a broad circulation of newspapers. This interest in broad distribution resulted in a postage free agreement with the printers. Printers used this to their advantage and by 1794, newspapers accounted for 70 percent of the total bulk of mail and only 3 percent of postage revenue.³² The efficiency of distributing newspapers among the states is evident in any examination of newspapers during the First Federal Congress. If an article published in a daily New York newspaper stated that it was originally published in Philadelphia, one may reliably check the Philadelphia newspapers a week before and discover the same article. Although it did take time for mail to reach the next city, this was an inconvenience that was overcome on a daily basis. An efficient system of distributing newspapers meant a reliable and up-to-date source of information from all states in the union. Without this efficiency, a common language of expression as well as the ability to respond and engage in conversation over a current topic Congress faced would have been difficult. Republican language and the classical idiom assisted in providing a common reference for those participating in the print discourse. The efficient distribution of the newspapers meant that others could respond to particular articles thus creating a printed dialogue on a given topic.

Defining what groups of people participated in the public discourse of newspaper articles has been a topic of some popularity. Philosopher-sociologist Jurgen Habermas defined the public sphere as existing for the specific purpose of “rational-critical”

³² Pasley 48-49.

discussion of “public” affairs.³³ This discussion existed among educated elite men. Habermas further argued that the rise of the bourgeoisie where the broadening of the public sphere in response to the growing nation-state meant the “degeneration in the quality of discourse.”³⁴ David Waldstreicher did not feel Habermas’s assessment of the public discourse satisfactorily explained the early American public discourse. Waldstreicher rejected the limitations Habermas put on his definition of the public sphere as being only property holding whites and seeks to include, women, blacks, and even American Indians.

This thesis does not assume that only elite white men participated in the public discourse during the First Congress. Since authors signed their names as everything from farmers to merchants, consideration for what these identities would have meant to the reading audience in terms of building a compelling argument were assessed. The classics as an idiom of expression provided classical figures, ideas, and myths, which were popular at the time of the First Congress and were employed as a foundational guide to understanding whether the new Congress was effective for the needs of all the states. What emerged was a varied public discourse that employed the classical idiom to provide a common reference to the reading audience in fully gathering an author’s argument.

The classics as being intrinsic to the public discourse during the early republic have not been fully considered. Authors such as Meyer Reinhold, Richard Gummere, and Carl Richard specifically addressed the importance of the classics in America in general particularly focusing on the classical education of the founders and its influence

³³ Waldstreicher 217.

³⁴ Waldstreicher 217.

over their decisions. The classics have been discussed in passing by many other authors, but seldom as a separate contributing force. This thesis seeks to redress some aspects of this shortcoming in the historiography while specifically addressing the classical idiom in public opinion articles. Response to work by historians such as David Waldstrieher in defining participation in politics during the early republic was also intended in an effort to demonstrate how the classics actually assisted in the broadening of the public sphere during the First Congress.

Michael Warner's definition of participation as being anyone who could read or listen to public opinion articles was considered while analyzing the public opinion articles in this thesis. Warner's assessment that one became part of the discussion by merely reading an article was legitimate in considering that numerous articles were written in response to the views of other authors, which suggested an engaged audience.³⁵ This indicated an active readership and an interest in participation. Although the identity of many authors cannot be determined due to the nature of the anonymous authorship style of the time, the identities that authors assumed played a role in conveying their argument to their audience. Thus, what these identities meant to the public and how they spoke to their audience were considered. In the case of an article signed as "Agricola" or farmer, for example, the participation of a farmer and what that would have meant to the reading and listening audience was considered. Participation was not limited to the elite and educated class, but actually reached out to other groups of people in an effort to gain support for any number of pressing issues of the day.

³⁵ Warner xii-xiii and chapter II.

CHAPTER I: EXAMINING THE SEAT OF GOVERNMENT DEBATES THROUGH THE CLASSICAL IDIOM

Many of the precedents set during the First Federal Congress would dictate how government was to operate in the United States for years to come. Since the new Constitution gave more power to a central government, there was much fear among the public at large that the Federal Government would prove to be just as tyrannical as the one that had been defeated in the Revolutionary War.³⁶ With an understanding of republican virtue as defined by ancient Rome, both mistrust and faith in the new government were evident through the examination of the public discourse in newspapers during the time of the First Federal Congress. As the First Federal Congress was called into its first session in 1789, the public waited anxiously to see how the Federal Government as defined by the Constitution would use its new power. The classics were a guiding light for the public in monitoring Congress's actions in order to avoid tyranny.

The residency issue was one of the first to be taken up by Congress. This issue was not one the public felt much time should be spent debating as can be gathered by the outpouring of public opinion articles. The residency of Congress had resided in Philadelphia when it was the Continental Congress, and then moved to New York under the Articles of Confederation. Many members of Congress disliked the last location due

³⁶ Charlene Bangs Bickford, *Birth of the Nation: First Federal Congress, 1789-1790*. (Second Circuit Committee on the Bicentennial of the United States Constitution, 1989).

to the long travel from the southern states. Southerners, however, did not want to move the seat of government to Philadelphia due to the anti-slavery sentiments of the area. The debate that ensued upon the calling to order of the First Federal Congress was one left over from many years of contention over where the seat of government would best be located.³⁷

The reason for the delay in Congress came from the fact that many of the first issues taken up by Congress were connected to one and other based primarily on North-South conflict. When a deadlock was reached in Congress over multiple issues, public opinion authors strongly questioned the effectiveness of Congress and its overall intentions toward the public good. Use of the classical idiom in the first session of the First Congress in reference to the residency issue displayed the frustration that was generated by the deadlock as well as punctuated public concern for Congress's intentions.³⁸

HISTORY OF THE RESIDENCY DEBATE

The question of where the Federal Government would reside was an issue that had been unresolved from the days of the Confederation Congress. In 1783 the temporary seat of government was located in New York City with the intent to build a new capital near Trenton. When this upset the South, a proposal for dual capitals was proposed where one would be located in the North and the other near Georgetown Maryland. This proposal also failed and by the end of 1784 the Confederated Congress

³⁷ See Bickford Ch. VIII.

³⁸ See Meyer Rienhold 142-162. Carl Richard 39-52.

returned to the original proposal of building a federal town near Trenton on the Delaware River. Under the Articles of Confederation, a majority of the states had to vote in favor of levying financial support to build such a capital, construction never began. The First Federal Congress began its first session in New York almost immediately with a bill proposing that the seat of government remain in New York until a new capital could be built on the Susquehanna River in Pennsylvania. The owner of the property where the proposed federal town was to be located even changed the name of the site to Columbia in order to attract interest from Congress.³⁹

By the end of the first session, the passing of this bill seemed imminent because of its support from the northern states. James Madison influenced Senators from New York to postpone voting on this bill and proposed a minor amendment to the bill in the House of Representatives, which then sent the bill back to the Senate. This meant that the decision on this bill would be taken up when the second session began. Much to the dismay of those who supported the seat of government bill, Congress adopted a new rule at the start of the second session call the *de novo* rule, which stated that any business left unfinished from a previous session must begin anew in the new session. Thus the first seat of government bill to be considered by Congress died.⁴⁰

Hostilities toward the location of the Federal Government in Philadelphia continued from southerners, particularly those from South Carolina and Georgia. Their reasons were based upon the ease of travel to New York over Philadelphia and the fact that there was a vocal anti-slavery community located in Pennsylvania. These sentiments

³⁹ Bickford 55-57.

⁴⁰ Bickford 57-58.

were punctuated in early February of 1790. Quakers from Virginia, Maryland, New York, and New Jersey brought forth a proposal to Congress requesting that the slave trade be regulated as well as a petition from the Quakers of Pennsylvania requesting the abolition of the slave trade. Southerners were primarily interested in the building of a federal city on the Potomac River, but if necessary they would stay in New York if the other option meant going to Philadelphia.⁴¹

While hostilities concerning the seat of government raged on for two sessions, the national debt simultaneously proved to be a contentious issue. There were many opinions on how the domestic and foreign debt, which had been acquired during the Revolution, should be managed. Some members of Congress were in favor of each state assuming responsibility for their own debts as states such as Virginia immediately paid their debt while others had not. Alexander Hamilton presented his proposal on the public credit issue on January 14, 1790 to the House of Representatives, calling for the assumption of the state debts and the creation of a national bank. The issue of public credit was incited intense discussion inside and outside of the walls of Congress as one New Yorker observed that New York City was “all in a flame about funding, nothing else heard even among the women and children.”⁴² The funding issue combined with the seat of government debates created a deadlock in Congress. The prolonged decision on these issues only fanned the flames of contempt among the public. Concern for how this issue would be decided was obvious in public opinion articles during the first and especially

⁴¹ Bickford 68.

⁴² Bickford 64.

second sessions as time in Congress continually turned to other issues. In order to resolve these issues, a compromise had to be reached between opposing factions.

Combined with the tensions incited by the Alexander Hamilton's proposal for assuming the state debts, the future of the United States looked bleak. The northern and southern states found themselves at an impasse and resolution after proposed resolution failed to relieve the deadlock. Finally, Thomas Jefferson brought Alexander Hamilton and James Madison together for the now infamous dinner party where Madison and Hamilton agreed to provide each other with the necessary votes from their sections in order that both the permanent seat on the Potomac and the assumption of state debts could be passed. Hamilton bargained with those in support of a temporary federal capital in Philadelphia and Madison provided the southern votes Hamilton needed.

On July 9, 1790, the House of Representatives passed the residency bill, thus sending it to George Washington for his ready signature. Soon after this, assumption of the state debts was reintroduced to the Funding Bill and gained the support it had lacked previously due to the compromise Madison and Hamilton had established between the two opposing groups. The provision of assumption was adopted on July 24, 1790 thanks to the change in votes from Representatives of Maryland and Virginia. Issues such as a national bank would not be addressed until the beginning of the third session in January and February of 1791.

PUBLIC RESPONSE

The vast majority of public opinion articles that addressed the issue of residency indicated that the public were not as interested in this issue as were the members of Congress. Articles written in New York, Boston, Philadelphia, and Baltimore all express concern for Congress' lack of consideration for other issues such as the assumption of the state debts over an obsession with where the temporary and permanent seat of government would be located. Public opinion articles signed with a Classical pseudonym take on a recognizable classical persona such as Brutus and Cassius.⁴³ Both of these persona referenced Roman characters that had defended the Roman republic against tyranny. These figures would have been easily identified by readers as persons interested in defending the public good against tyranny. By expressing concern and in many cases, outrage, that the Congress had allowed passion to eclipse their judgment on issues most important to the public at large, namely the issue of public credit, these authors are not only intending to gather support among the public against Congress, but also are issuing a threat against the members of congress by calling to mind the fate of the tyrants of antiquity.

What must be considered when examining these references is to what purpose each reference has been chosen. One author may choose to write under the pseudonym "Brutus" for one reason while another author may take the opposing side of that debate and sign their name with the same identity. Those participating in the public discourse were expected to identify the classical reference and make the connection between the reference and the point being made concerning contemporaneous politics. As will be

⁴³ Reinhold 157. Richard 40-41.

demonstrated, the republican virtues conveyed by a multitude of classical references in these public opinion pieces were not restatements of Congress's views on the subject of residency, but reflected a broad sense of hostility toward a government that had the potential of becoming a tyrannical power whose own interests were prioritized over those of the public.

The classical idiom found within public opinion pieces was sometimes subtle in mentioning classical allusion and ideology and in others it was unavoidably obvious. One public opinion piece titled *Intelligence Extraordinary* was literally saturated in the classical idiom. This article was a satiric proposal given by the "Nymphs and Naiades of Schuylkill," or spirits of land and river, to the Senate that the seat of government be moved to Philadelphia.⁴⁴ Due to the extent of the classical references in this article, a portion of the text of the article will be provided:

"Yesterday evening arrived in the sloop Cerberus, from Wig-Wam, the *Nymphs* and *Naiades* of *Schuylkill*, with a *Remonstrance*, which they mean this day to present to the Vice-President of the United States.

Captain Charon, who commanded the sloop, has favoured us with the following copy of the remonstrance.

The Nymphs and Naiades of Schuylkill, take leave to acquaint Congress, that, having obtained a patent from Pluto, senior, conveying to them the exclusive privilege of baptising Senators and Representatives; they have accordingly constructed a new invented font, situate at the Wig-Wam, within one mile of the mansion of the *golden calf*, in the metropolis of America.

Be it therefore known until all those Senators and Representatives who have obstinately opposed or wantonly abused the *salutary* propositions of our favourite servant, respecting a removal of Congressional goods and chattels to Philadelphia, that we the said Nymphs and Naiades have entered into a solemn contract with the demons of discord, whereby we have come to a resolution that we will bestow the

⁴⁴ "nymph" *A Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*. Edited by Elizabeth Knowles. Oxford University Press, 2006. *Oxford Reference Online*. Oxford University Press. Marymount University. 13 July 2008 <<http://www.oxfordreference.com.proxy.mu.wrlc.org/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t214.e4977>>

benefit of baptism on each and every member of Congress who comes within the description before mentioned....

Vestibulum ante ipsum, primsq; in fauciubus Orci, Luctus et ultrices posuere cubilia Cura; palentesq; habitant Morbi tristisque Senectus. Et metus, & malesuada Fames, et turpis Egestas (terribiles visu forma) Lethumque, Laborque. Tum consanguineus Lethi sopor, et mala mentes guadia, Mortiferumq; adverso in limine bellum, Ferreiq; Eumenidum thalami, et discordia Demens Viperium Crinem Vittis innexa cruentis.

But if all these *pleasures* should not intice ye to our Wig-Wam, we have still more enchanting lures. The lake *Avernus* lies on the south side of our vallies, and the river *Cocytus* runs by our easter border. It was here that *Proserpine* was found gathering flowers, and here *Narcissus* is yet to be seen hanging his beauteous head over the charming banks of *Schuylkil*.

If all these pleasure can thee move,
Come live with us and be our Love.
Signed, in behalf of the Nymphs and Naidess,
Scylla, Charbyddis, Parnethope, Ligea, and Leucosia.

The pseudonyms chosen for this article were sea monsters and sirens from classical mythology that would have been immediately recognizable to the reading public. *Scylla* and *Charybdis* were sea monsters *Odysseus* and his men encountered in *Homer's Odyssey*. Both of these monsters were situated opposite each other in a narrow strait, so when *Odysseus* and his men attempted to pass through, avoiding both monsters was impossible. The two names have become proverbial associated with being given two unpleasant alternatives.⁴⁵ *Parenthope*, *Ligea*, and *Leucosia* were the names of the three sirens whom *Odysseus* and his men also met on their voyage home. These three women

⁴⁵ "Charybdis" *The Concise Oxford Companion to Classical Literature*. Ed. M.C. Howatson and Ian Chilvers. Oxford University Press, 1996. *Oxford Reference Online*. Oxford University Press. Marymount University. 29 June 2008 <<http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t9.e610>>. Alan H. Griffiths "Scylla (1)" *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*. Ed. Simon Hornblower and Anthony Spawforth. Oxford University Press 2003. *Oxford Reference Online*. Oxford University Press. Marymount University. 29 June 2008 <<http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t111.e5766>>.

had the power to stop men working on their ships with the use of the melodious voices. Unable to work on their ships, whole crews of men perished at the hands of the sirens.⁴⁶

The author or authors of this article, by signing with these names, indicated to their readers that the supporters for residency in Philadelphia were no better than the beguiling and destructive monsters of antiquity. Perhaps the author of this article intended to reference the *Odyssey* itself because of similar ultimate goals of reaching “home.” Just as Odysseus and his men desired to arrive safely home at the shores of Ithaca, the members of Congress searched for a resolution on controversial issue of wear to place the seat of government. Like Odysseus, the members of Congress were subject to encounter dangerous and sometimes seemingly attractive alternatives to the best route home.⁴⁷ This author was opposed to the removal of Congress to Philadelphia given the strong language used in this article. What the author was telling his audience was that those in Congress who supported this alternative seat of government were attempting to lead Congress down a wrong path. The author expected his audience to recognize these references as the entire meaning of the article depended upon this knowledge.

The classical references were not only used in the pseudonyms, but also were evident in the subject matter. The article itself served as a warning to “those Senators and Representatives who have obstinately opposed or wantonly abused the *salutary*

⁴⁶ "Sirens" *The Oxford Companion to Ships and the Sea*. Ed. I. C. B. Dear and Peter Kemp. Oxford University Press, 2007. *Oxford Reference Online*. Oxford University Press. Marymount University. 29 June 2008 <<http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t225.e2224>>.

⁴⁷ "Odyssey" *The Concise Oxford Companion to Classical Literature*. Ed. M.C. Howatson and Ian Chilvers. Oxford University Press, 1996. *Oxford Reference Online*. Oxford University Press. Marymount University. 29 June 2008 <<http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t9.e2003>> . See also Homer's *Odyssey*.

proposition... respecting a removal of Congressional goods and chattels to Philadelphia.”⁴⁸ According to the author, a Philadelphia residency was to be considered that week in the Senate. The bill was to be submitted to the Vice President by Charon, the ferryman of the underworld who escorted the deceased across the Acheron River. The Nymphs and Naiades further threaten that should anyone oppose their proposal, Pluto, or god of the underworld, had approved a punishment.⁴⁹ The author could be referring to any number of senators who supported changing the seat of government to Philadelphia, or it could rhetorically refer to the author’s feeling of impending doom as Congress took up the issue for residency once again.

It must be noted here that in the First Congress, the meetings of the Senate were closed through the three sessions, which meant the public could not attend. Unlike the House of Representatives, newspapers could not attend the Senate meetings, which meant that any consistent record of the Senate’s business was unrecorded in the daily New York papers. The fact that this public opinion article was announcing the business of the Senate and even states which Senators have been opposed to a Philadelphian residency indicates that the article was either written by someone who received leaked information from a Senator or was actually written by a Senator.

The tone of this article was sarcastic, indicating that the author(s) were not in favor of a residency in Philadelphia. The essence of the author’s argument emerged in

⁴⁸ Intelligence Extraordinary, *NYDG* June 28, 1790.

⁴⁹ "Pluto" *The Concise Oxford Companion to Classical Literature*. Ed. M.C. Howatson and Ian Chilvers. Oxford University Press, 1996. *Oxford Reference Online*. Oxford University Press. Marymount University. 13 July 2008 <<http://www.oxfordreference.com.proxy.mu.wrlc.org/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t9.e2319>>

the ten lines of Latin which is found in the middle of the article. There was no translation offered in the article, but the passage was taken from Book VI of the *Aeneid* in which Aeneas is traveling through the underworld. A translation of this passage by Allen Mandelbaum reads:

“Before the entrance, at the jaws of Orcus, both Grief and goading Cares have set their couches; there pale Diseases dwell, and sad Old Age, and Fear and Hunger, that worst counselor, and ugly Poverty – shapes terrible to see – and Death and Trials; Death’s brother, Sleep, and all the evil Pleasures of the mind; and War, whose fruits are death; and facing these the Furies’ iron chambers; and made Strife, her serpent hair bound up with bloody garlands.”⁵⁰

This was strong language to connect the residency of Congress in Philadelphia to an ancient text which described the entrance of hell. Virgil’s *Aeneid* was common reading among the educated in America and was a basic requirement for entrance into every college in America. The author expected his readers to immediately recognize this passage as being from the *Aeneid* and also would have expected them to understand the connection between his own argument concerning the seat of government and Aeneas’s journey through the underworld. The image this Latin passage would have provided the readers with the sense that the author(s) were strongly against residency in Philadelphia. Perhaps the author was suggesting that placing government in Philadelphia would lead to nothing short of death to the government itself.

The theme of destruction to the government was carried through the conclusion of the article. The conclusion suggested that to remove the seat of government to Philadelphia would be the equivalent of removing to the gates of Hell, as indicated by

⁵⁰ Virgil, *The Aeneid*, translated by Allen Mandelbaum, (New York, Bantam Books, 1981) pp 142.

describing the location as “The lake Avernus lies on the south side of our vallies, and the river Cocytus runs by our eastern border.”⁵¹ Avernus is known in mythology as the lake which literally served as the gate to the underworld and the Cocytus River was the first river the dead would encounter where they would be compelled to pay the ferryman Charon for passage across.⁵² Perhaps the author intended his audience to associate the gateway to hell with the government’s possible descent into destruction and tyranny should the seat of government be relocated to Philadelphia. At the very least, the author instructed his reading audience that Philadelphia was no better than the gateway to hell as described by ancient texts and such a proposal was best avoided.

Although *Intelligence Extraordinary* was saturated with the classical idiom, this was not the norm among public opinion articles. The majority of articles that were signed with classical pseudonyms do not use the extent of reference to specific figures of antiquity as well as entire Latin passages as was found in *Intelligence Extraordinary*. As mentioned before, the author of this article was in all likelihood either a Senator or an acquaintance of a Senator, which immediately indicates that the person who authored this article was most likely well-educated and may have been directing his article to other people within in his circle. The article was a threat and a criticism of those in favor of a residency in Philadelphia, which further suggests the audience of this particular article

⁵¹ *Intelligence Extraordinary*, *NYDG* June 28, 1790.

⁵² "Avernus" *The Concise Oxford Companion to Classical Literature*. Ed. M.C. Howatson and Ian Chilvers. Oxford University Press, 1996. *Oxford Reference Online*. Oxford University Press. Marymount University. 29 June 2008 <<http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t9.e414>> . "Cocytus" *The Concise Oxford Companion to Classical Literature*. Ed. M.C. Howatson and Ian Chilvers. Oxford University Press, 1996. *Oxford Reference Online*. Oxford University Press. Marymount University. 29 June 2008 <<http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t9.e685>>

would have possessed the knowledge necessary to decipher the allusions made to the Aeneid without a second thought. Not all or even a majority of public opinion articles demanded the extent of Greco-Roman knowledge that *Intelligence Extraordinary* did, but they do require a basic background in ancient texts as authors continually made ancient references in their arguments.

Members of Congress participated in the public discourse. Although it cannot be known to what extent this participation took place because of the anonymity aspect of writing, historians have been able to determine the authorship of a number of these articles.⁵³ Senator William Maclay, for example, wrote a number of public opinion articles for newspapers, which have been identified as his work by the First Federal Congress Project. William Maclay, senator from Philadelphia, wrote for newspapers under the pseudonym “Oculus Mundi” or “Eye of the World.” Members of Congress would have been almost certainly educated and at the very least familiar with the classics and the connections that other members made between the current state of affairs in America with that of the Roman republic. Maclay’s articles bear a similarity in the extent of the classical idiom used with the article signed by the “Nymphs and Naiades of Schuylkill.”

Maclay approached the public sphere with a strong understanding of the classical tradition and used it vividly in the framing of his arguments. One article he wrote concerned the issue of debt certificates as outlined by Hamilton’s funding plan. Congress was divided over how to handle this situation since most of the original creditors no

⁵³ See *Documentary History of the First Federal Congress 1789-1791: The Diary of William Maclay*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988).

longer possessed their certificates, having sold them for far less than what they purchased them to other people. As a result, there was a debate in Congress over whether or not these original creditors should be compensated for the money they gave to the Continental Congress during the Revolutionary War.⁵⁴

Maclay's choice in pseudonym was indicative of the point of view he intended to convey to his audience. By using "Oculus Mundi" or "Eye of the World" as his pseudonym, Maclay presented himself as a public observer. In many cases, authors chose names that indicated a similar view point, except through a name that indicated an active voice, such as "Vox Populi" or "Voice of the People." "Vox Populi" was a name that referenced the author's intent to speak out from the public and usually to convey a "consensus" opinion. Instead, Maclay labeled himself an observing guardian of the public interest. Perhaps he even referenced his inside position as a Senator in giving himself an almost omniscient rhetorical quality in authorship.

In his contemplative article, Maclay reported having a vision of a "gigantic female, with an aspect indescribable, who bore in her right hand a huge pair of scales, and in her left the pointless sword of mercy."⁵⁵ He went on to relate how the classical goddess, Justice, resolves this issue by commanding

"The speculators into one scale; and the original creditors into the other. The spirits of the departed heroes had heard the sound of the trumpet, and joined these – but – ghosts weigh nothing. – Millions of spectators silently waited the event... One voice exclaimed, 'Foul play! Foul play!' Here Justice knit her brows, and demanded the reason for such a charge. 'It is this, may it please the Highness' ...the pockets of the Speculators are filled with gold, while ours, on the contrary,

⁵⁴ Bickford 61-66.

⁵⁵ Oculus Mundi, *Independent Gazetteer*, March 20, 1790.

are perfectly light and empty.’ At this the countenance of the Goddess brightened up.”

“Oculus Mundi” described how Justice requested that the speculators remove the gold from their pockets resulting in the scales weighing in favor of the original creditors. The author awakened in such fervor that he still had “Long live ...JUSTICE on my lips.” The ancient image of Justice as a blindfolded woman carrying scales in order to neutrally pass judgment was a personification became popular in America. Maclay used the scales in connection with the original creditors to suggest that justice must be upheld in order to keep the good faith of the public. This idea of upholding virtue was something public opinion authors took seriously and was derived from sources such as Aristotle and later would be revived by the Enlightenment.⁵⁶ Maclay’s use of the image of Justice and deciding in favor of the original creditors would have been an easily identifiable reference to virtue and the perceived responsibility members of Congress had toward the public good.

While this mastery was evident in his use of the classics to support his argument, an even larger body of the print culture did not display as much of a saturation of classical allusion. This could suggest that many of those participating in the public sphere were engaging in print culture on the terms of the already established medium of republican language. This indicated that the formally educated were not the only people who could participate in the public discourse.

⁵⁶ Christopher J. Berry "Virtue" *Encyclopedia of the Enlightenment*. Ed. Alan Charles Kors. Oxford University Press 2003. Marymount University. 1 July 2008 <<http://www.oxfordreference.com.proxy.mu.wrlc.org/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t173.e735>> See also Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment, An Interpretation: The Rise of Modern Paganism*. (New York: Knopf, 1966) especially chapter 2.

Michael Warner's *The Letters of the Republic* explored the development of the public discourse in Colonial America. He described the language of republicanism as being a "cultural vocabulary" where the "print discourse made it possible to imagine a people that could act as a people and in distinction from the state."⁵⁷ Those who desired to voice their opinion in a medium established by the elite did so through the use of the classics. By using the classical idiom in one's article, one indicated that they were capable of making connections between current events and antiquity in determining the best way in which to preserve a stable form of republican government. Not only is this evident in how the classical influence was conveyed, but also in how they suggested the public good was misrepresented by the issues which dominated congressional debates.

In most cases, the use of the classical idiom was subtly used in making one or two references within the article or even by merely signing with a classically inspired pseudonym. More articles appeared on the issue of public credit and Hamilton's financial proposal than there was in the residency bill. One public opinion author who signed his name as "Brutus" wrote for the *Connecticut Courant*. Directing his argument to "The Public," "Brutus" stated that:

"In the first part of the first Session... we saw (and we rejoiced at the spectacle) all parties exerting themselves to devise a revenue system for a great empire, and all parties disposed to make small concessions for the general good. When the great principles of the constitutions were agitated, we saw a Maddison, an Ames, a Boudinot, a Benson and other able and eloquent men boldly come forward, and with the manliness of Roman Senators, contend for the establishment of a vigorous Executive, without which our whole government would have been a nerveless body..."

⁵⁷ Michael Warner, *The Letters of the Republic: Publication and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century America*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990) pp. xiii.

But at the close of the session, what a change! When the question respecting the Residence of Congress came before the House of Representatives, a question that did not materially affect the Union... this trifling question called forth all the narrow selfish passions of the members.⁵⁸

The author compared the personalities of the members of the House with that of Roman senators, which was significant in that the author uses this allusion to suggest that at the start of the first session, these men displayed the virtuous qualities thought necessary to possess in serving the public good. The author's confidence in their abilities as representatives of the public was evident in making this connection with antiquity. Once a controversial subject to the members of Congress was brought forth, however, the author's opinion changed. "Brutus" claimed that once intense debate took hold of Congress, these qualities of virtue vanished, yielding to passion instead of eloquence and intellectuality. The author accused the members of Congress of neglecting to preserve their intentions for the public good as "the great and leading object of their deliberations." "Brutus's" comparison between Roman senators and the current members of Congress would have been easily recognized by his reading audience. The authors feelings toward Congress were punctuated by this comparison and would have indicated an underlying meaning of impending disaster should Congress refuse to turn their attentions to the public good.

The author continued his denunciation of the Congress by Concluding, "I boldly assert, that unless Congress shall assume the debts of the several states, their government will loose the confidence of our citizens in general; and unless the national government has their confidence, the revenue will not generally be collected." Not only did the

⁵⁸ Brutus, *The Connecticut Courant*, April 26, 1790.

author suggest that passion had blinded the members of Congress from seeing what was in the best interests of the public good, but also claimed that the very credibility of the new government could be called into question should they fail to correct their errors.

The author signed with the pseudonym “Brutus,” which was a reference to either Lucius Junius Brutus, the Roman citizen credited with ridding Rome of its tyrannical king and thereby ushering in the Roman Republic or Marcus Junius Brutus, a Roman Senator who was the main conspirator in the assassination of Julius Caesar.⁵⁹ Lucius Junius Brutus was thought of as a hero and the guardian of republican virtue even by the ancient Romans. Marcus Junius Brutus was thought of by Americans as the man who tried to overthrow a dictator and revive the declining Roman Republic.⁶⁰ In short, someone writing under this persona was weary of tyranny and the downfall of republican virtues.

This author presented himself as an observer to the congressional turmoil, one of the masses, but also a vigilant participant in the public discourse who has armed himself with the pen. “Brutus” admitted that he was only one voice, but hoped that “more enlarged views of national policy will produce a change of measures,” which the Brutus of antiquity did in calling upon the citizens of Rome to rise up against tyranny. In stating that “the man therefore that attempts to prevent this equality of burdens, forfeits his

⁵⁹ "Brutus" *World Encyclopedia*. Philip's, 2008. *Oxford Reference Online*. Oxford University Press. Marymount University. 28 June 2008 <<http://www.oxfordreference.com.proxy.mu.wrlc.org/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t142.e1715>>.

⁶⁰ Andrew Drummond "Iunius Brutus, Lucius" *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*. Ed. Simon Hornblower and Anthony Spawforth. Oxford University Press 2003. *Oxford Reference Online*. Oxford University Press. Marymount University. 28 June 2008 <<http://www.oxfordreference.com.proxy.mu.wrlc.org/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t111.e3438>>.

claims to the common protection” he went on to threaten “I flatter myself the gentlemen who oppose the assumption, will not have the face to ask for money or forced to guard their frontiers from the Savages.” Not only has “Brutus” stated that no congressman who threatened the public good with inaction on public measures should relinquish his post, but also suggested that any man who failed to do so should meet an untimely end by the cause of his own actions. This American Brutus expected congressmen to live up to a high standard of republican virtue and anyone who did not meet this standard should be removed from office before any real damage could be done.

A “Junius” writing for the *Independent Chronicle* in Boston expressed similar sentiments. The author wrote that “The Merchant, Tradesman, and Husbandman, are all depending on the result of your deliberations – not as to the place of your residence, but as to your measure to help and assist them.”⁶¹ “Junius,” who as mentioned before was most likely referencing Lucius Junius Brutus, represented the interests of the people and suggested so be making reference to several groups of people who would have the most interest in the deliberations of Congress. “Junius” continued on to say that “it is full time the PEOPLE spoke freely, and it is hoped that another election will introduce such characters, as will attend to the great business of the government, to the exclusion of local interest.” This champion of republican virtue suggested the equivalent action made by the Brutus of antiquity in calling forth the people and requested that they remember these actions when it comes time for re-election. The pseudonym “Brutus” was commonly

⁶¹ Junius, *Independent Chronicle*, July 15, 1790.

used in the print discourse, which indicated the widespread implication this name carried for one's argument in seeking to preserve the virtue of the republic.⁶²

Yet another popular pseudonym that called to mind similar references is "Cassius." Gaius Cassius Longinus was a Roman senator who conspired with Marcus Junius Brutus against Julius Caesar. One "Cassius" who wrote for the *Connecticut Courant* also expressed contempt for the amount of time Congress spent on the residency question instead of addressing the financial plan. He demanded to know why Congress had been unable to come to a quick conclusion on the matter and move on to more important business. "Cassius" concluded by stating "These are my sentiments, Messieurs Printers, and the declared sentiments of most of the people with whom I have conversed on this subject."⁶³ By observing the public discourse it can be inferred that Congress faced a growing hostility for their inaction on subjects that were thought to affect the good of the people in favor of ones that were of importance to members of Congress only. It is in this case that "Cassius" and "Brutus" were not necessarily one person speaking out against another, but were personifications of the public at large against a seemingly inactive Congress. The "quest for virtue," as historian Meyer Reinhold termed it, was a standard that the public sought to hold their members of Congress to and through references to the classics, these authors informed the public on congressional action and judged them through connection with the actions of the ancients.⁶⁴

⁶² Reinhold 157.

⁶³ Cassius, *Connecticut Courant*, July 15, 1790.

⁶⁴ Reinhold, Chapter V: The Classics and the Quest for Virtue in Eighteenth-Century America.

Unlike the author of the satire, who so obviously seemed personally vested in the decision of Congress on the residency issue, these public opinion articles point out that should Congress continue to misrepresent the will of the people, they would eventually be removed from office and replaced with someone who will better serve nationally oriented interests.

Articles merely signed with a classical pseudonym contrast with the satire written by the “Nymphs and Naiades of Schuylkill” and Senator Maclay’s article. Where in one article it can be inferred the author had strong connections with a senator and therefore had an agenda in calling attention to the events in Congress surrounding the residency debate, most articles written on the subject not only express a lack of enthusiasm for the debates on residency, but also an obvious disdain toward the members of Congress in general for daring to waste time on such matters that do not directly affect the people at large. It is important to consider this contrast because it suggests a different group of people with different agendas participating in the public sphere on these topics. It not only suggests a different interest base, but also suggests a base of public opinion articles written independently of those of the members of Congress attempting to persuade the public opinion. This further suggested the capacity of the public opinion to enter the public discourse and engage in the classically driven medium of print culture while at the same time expressing a separate opinion from the ruling class.

CONCLUSION

Michael Warner stated that under the republican culture of print, “the reader does not simply imagine him- or herself receiving a direct communication or hearing the voice of the author. He or she now also incorporates into the meaning of the printed object an awareness of the potentially limitless others who may also be reading.”⁶⁵ Public opinion authors who wrote in concern of wasted time in Congress used this idea in addressing their audience. These authors inclusively addressed the public and called them to their duty as responsible citizenry on the look out for tyranny. Given how public opinion authors seem to address a limitless audience, Warner’s assessment of the printed discourse at this time is applicable. Responsibility for the republic was not merely the responsibility of those in power, but was perpetually kept in check by the public.

⁶⁵ Warner xiii.

CHAPTER II: THE CLASSICAL IDIOM IN PUBLIC CREDIT

One of the most controversial issues that faced the First Federal Congress was public credit. Funding the Revolutionary War debt and nurturing economic growth were goals the first Congress had to achieve, but how to achieve these goals was far from being unanimously agreed upon. In order to develop the economy however, public credit had to be established to convince creditors that the new American government was stable enough to pay its debts.⁶⁶ Debates concerning how to deal with this problem abounded both inside and outside of Congress. Alexander Hamilton's plan addressed foreign debts, domestic debts, the creation of a national bank and mint, and the development of American manufactures. How this plan would be carried out was discussed with passion and enthusiasm in the public discourse. Public opinion authors displayed interest in all aspects of Hamilton's funding plan and wrote on a wide range of issues. The use of the classical idiom in public opinion articles provides an important aspect of the broader scope of the debate concerning the issue of public credit. By examining how authors used the classical idiom, an understanding of participation in these debates as well as how those who participated viewed the issue begins to emerge.

Public opinion articles written on the public credit issue circulated like wildfire in the newspapers. In order to gather a range of participation in the public discourse, the

⁶⁶ Charlene Bangs Bickford, *Birth of the Nation: The First Federal Congress, 1789-1791*. (Lanham: Madison House Publishers, 1989) pp. 61.

way in which authors used pseudonyms will be discussed as well as reasons for the authors' particular choice in one pseudonym over another. In choosing a pseudonym, the author took on a specific persona they wished to convey to their reading audience. How the author used that persona to deliver an argument will be considered in determining how a farmer, for example, would interact in the public discourse as opposed to a merchant. The dynamic between the yeoman farmer and the merchant will be the focus of this chapter's examination of the classical idiom in the public discourse.

FUNDING BEFORE AND AFTER THE ARTICLES OF CONFEDERATION

Under the Articles of Confederation, the central government lacked the necessary power to tax the states in order to pay off the Revolutionary War debt and to even pay the current costs for an operational central government. In 1781 for example, Congress asked that the Articles of Confederation be amended to levy a five percent tariff on import goods in order to government costs. An amendment to the Articles required a unanimous vote from the states and with Rhode Island's rejection, the proposed amendment failed.⁶⁷ Under the United States Constitution, any proposed revenue bills had to originate with the House of Representatives. The First Congress recognized the necessity of addressing revenue issues and quickly took up the issue once a quorum had been obtained in the House during the first session. Both temporary and permanent systems were proposed, but the House voted in favor of focusing every effort on

⁶⁷ Bickford 29.

developing a permanent system even if it meant losing revenue from imported goods for a brief period of time.⁶⁸

Due to the perceived importance of the funding issue, delays the House encountered were met with criticism from both members of Congress as well as public opinion authors writing in the public sphere. Several revenue bills were taken up during the first session, including James Madison's tonnage bill. The tonnage bill imposed a duty on any ship entering an American port based on how many tons of cargo the ship was carrying. Debates concerning how to approach funding, which included such measures as the tonnage bill, brought forth differences among members of Congress and would lead to delays in ultimately deciding funding questions. This would prove to be one of the first of many debates between Madison's supporters and Hamilton's supporters (Hamilton was opposed to alienating British business). As these differences mounted, concern for how to fund the debt became all the more pressing upon Congress. Congress requested that Alexander Hamilton, by then the first Secretary of the Treasury to report on the state of public credit in the United States. Hamilton would report on this issue several times throughout the three sessions of the First Federal Congress. The first report was given in January 1790, the second report which concerned the formation of a national bank was given in December 1790, a report on the establishment of the mint was given in January 1791, and the report on manufactures was given in December 1791. Particular attention to the first report and the national bank will be paid in this chapter due to the expansive discussion the issue of public credit merits.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

What was the foundation for dissent between those who favored Hamilton's funding bill and those who did not? Part of this debate was framed by classical models. The image of the yeoman farmer was a favorite among many founders including George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and James Madison. Historian Meyer Reinhold stated in his examination of the classics in America that the

“Return to the plough, to the ancestral estate in America was more than a symbolic gesture; it was a response to a mix of impulses: the gentleman's Sabine farm ideal of the eighteenth century; English country ideology; the devaluation of trades as banalistic, and of cities and commerce as corruptive, encouraging luxury and political ambition; traditional American 'primitivism' ... and the legacy of classical political theory of a free agricultural commonwealth composed of self-sufficient, economically independent farmer-soldier-citizens. American agrarianism was, like its classical antecedents, politico-ethical in nature: an agricultural base for the republic with availability of freehold land was deemed by most of the Founding Fathers to be a prime safeguard for liberty and stability.”⁶⁹

In upholding this way of life, tyranny was suspect as was any alternative to the agrarian lifestyle. Alexander Hamilton's funding plan and those who supported it were considered to be the antithesis of this model.⁷⁰ Farmers versus merchants and small republics versus one large republic became the parting point in interpreting what kind of nation the United States would become. This difference translated into controversy over how much power the Federal Government would have over the states and whether federal rule would stifle the interests of the farmer. Not surprisingly, pseudonyms referencing republican farmers were among the most popular in opposing Hamilton's plan.

Tyranny was viewed as the opposite of a republican form of government and reliance on ancient history was perceived to be one method by which Americans could

⁶⁹ Meyer Reinhold, *Classica Americana*, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1984) pp. 99.

⁷⁰ Carl Richard, *The Founders and the Classics*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994) pp. 89.

prevent any future advent of tyranny. Through a classical education it was thought ancient wisdom would produce a virtuous natural aristocracy who would avoid tyranny and sustain a republican form of government.⁷¹ Both John Adams and Thomas Jefferson, for example, viewed the study of ancient history as the means for preventing the rise of tyranny.⁷² Differing interpretations of the classics and how best to apply it to the new American Federal Government became one aspect of the debate on funding.

Due to the Federalist promotion of a strong central government, many Anti-Federalists (what would later be known as Democratic-Republicans) advocated the model of small republics instead of a large republic. Debate concerning Hamilton's funding plan centered on how much power the central government would have over the states. Giving the Federal Government the kind of power Hamilton proposed set off alarm bells for many who viewed it as one step toward the creation of a potentially tyrannical government. Public opinion articles written with the use of the classical idiom addressed these fears and countered the opposition's arguments with their own assurances from ancient history. Both those who supported and opposed the funding plan used the classics as evidence for authors' arguments.

Any examination of the Alexander Hamilton's funding system must begin with Hamilton himself. Hamilton was the illegitimate son of divorced mother and a failed merchant father. Born in 1755 on a small island in the Caribbean, Hamilton was soon

⁷¹ See Richard 40-41, Reinhold 94-109, and A. Owen Aldridge, *The Concept of Ancients and Moderns in American Poetry of the Federal Period in Classical Traditions in Early America*, ed. John William Eadie, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1976) pp 99-118.

⁷² Richard 86.

orphaned at thirteen and left at the mercy of family and friends.⁷³ Hamilton was able to obtain an education, however, through the assistance of family members and left the Caribbean for King's College (later Columbia) in New York. Hamilton adopted the views of the Whig cause and proclaimed "no laws have any validity, or binding force, without the consent and approbation of the people" in a 1774 political pamphlet.⁷⁴ Referred to by John Adams as "the bastard Bratt of a Scotch Peddlar," it was a well-known fact that Hamilton did not come from the most conventional of backgrounds.⁷⁵ Hamilton was determined to rise above this label and molded himself into the image of a gentleman. When his enemies brought up his illegitimate background, Hamilton wrote to a friend that he had "better pretensions than most of those who in this Country plume themselves on Ancestry."⁷⁶ Hamilton's character and motivation behind his funding plan would surface over and over in the years following his service in the American Revolution and the Constitutional Convention as he advocated his vision for a federal funding system.

As a delegate from New York to the Constitutional Convention, Hamilton had been a big proponent of a consolidated system where the states could no longer rival the authority of the central government. This contrasted with Madison's plan for a compound government where the central government would remain sovereign over the states except in carefully specified situations.⁷⁷ Hamilton's desire for a strong executive

⁷³ Ron Chernow, *Alexander Hamilton*, (New York: Penguin Press, 2004) pp. 24.

⁷⁴ Harper 16.

⁷⁵ John Lamberton Harper, *American Machiavelli: Alexander Hamilton and the Origins of U.S. Foreign Policy*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004) pp.15.

⁷⁶ Harper 17.

⁷⁷ Harper 37.

was something that he argued for in his contributions to the Federalist Papers. In Federalist 70, Hamilton wrote:

“Every man the least conversant in Roman story [sic] knows how often that republic was obliged to take refuge in the absolute power of a single man, under the formidable title of dictator, as well against the intrigues of ambitious individuals, who aspired to the tyranny, and the seditions of whole classes of the community, whose conduct threatened the existence of all government, as against the invasions of external enemies, who menaced the conquest and destruction of Rome. There can be no need, however, to multiply arguments or examples on this head. A feeble Executive implies a feeble execution of the government. A feeble execution is but another phrase for a bad execution; and a government ill executed, whatever it may be in theory, must be, in practice, a bad government.”⁷⁸

Among the most important powers the executive branch would possess was the ability to tax and borrow, which “In the modern system of war, nations the most wealthy are obliged to have recourse to large loans. A country so little opulent as ours, must feel this necessity in a much stronger degree.”⁷⁹ Hamilton’s opposition were weary of what kind of an effect a strong Federal Government would have over state and local interests.

After serving as a delegate from New York at the Constitutional Convention, Alexander Hamilton was appointed the first Secretary of Treasury by George Washington on September 11, 1789. With the first session complete and the second imminent, Hamilton prepared a report on the public credit and presented it to Congress on January 9, 1790. Hamilton’s proposed plan for reviving public credit was not only illustrative of his own views on a strong, central government, but also agitated debate between Federalists and what would become the Democratic-Republican Party.

⁷⁸ Federalist Papers 70, <http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/federal/fed70.htm>, accessed: June 17, 2008. Harper 38.

⁷⁹ Federalist 75. Harper 38.

Hamilton's supporters were predominantly members of the wealthy class and from New York. Supporters included a large number of Hudson Valley land owners (a group of individuals into which Hamilton married) and bond holders who stood to gain significantly from a funding system. Ex-Loyalists who wanted a strong central government that would defend civil and property rights from state legislatures were also among Hamilton's supporters as were New York merchants.⁸⁰ Many of these New York merchants were from Anglo-American firms that reserved special interest in doing business with Great Britain. In the midst of a rising society with Anti-British sentiments, Hamilton's defense of their interests sealed their loyalties to him. Madison's tonnage bill for example, sought to punish British ships by charging them more than any other foreign ship that delivered cargo to American ports. Hamilton's funding system was dependent on a steady income from federal revenues. Most of this came from duties placed on British import goods. Hamilton and his supporters were against this stipulation to the tonnage bill and in the end blocked it from inclusion in the bill. Mistrust Hamilton's enemies had for those who supported the British was another cause for opposition in Hamilton's funding system.

Hamilton's first report given in January 1790 opened with the declaration "That an adequate provision for the support of the Public Credit is a matter of high importance to the honor and prosperity of the United States."⁸¹ Hamilton's report stated the United States owed a total of \$77.1 million with \$11.7 million owed to foreign governments,

⁸⁰ Harper 47.

⁸¹ Alexander Hamilton, *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, vol. 6, edited by Harold C. Syrett. (Columbia University Press, 1962).

\$40.4 million in domestic debt dating to the American Revolution, and \$25 million in state debt. This state debt would be assumed by “the union, and a like provision for them, as for those of the union, will be a measure of sound policy and substantial justice.”⁸² Among other points Hamilton touched on in his report, the plan was opposed to discrimination between original and current holders of these debt certificates.

Hamilton’s plan also called for the creation of a national bank, which would enable the federal government to support itself and economic growth by giving it the power to leverage funds. Through the establishment and maintenance of public credit as outlined in his report, Hamilton claimed that a public debt could be used as a national blessing. Hamilton concluded that with the implementation of his plan, the country would experience an increase in public confidence in the new national government both at home and abroad.⁸³

Despite the report’s careful consideration for the many financial issues the United States faced at the time, Hamilton’s report was not accepted with open arms in Congress. One issue that would become one of the most controversial centered on the issue of original holders of the debt, which included individuals such as soldiers and farmers who had loaned goods and services to Congress during the war. Many of these individuals had sold their certificates to speculators as the market value depreciated. Many members of Congress as well as public opinion authors argued that to ignore the original holders of these certificates would greatly devastate confidence in the virtue of Congress. Still other controversies concerning the constitutionality of a bank as well as what medium of

⁸² Alexander Hamilton’s Report on Public Credit (1790).

⁸³ Bickford, *Birth of the Nation*, 64.

currency would best suit the new government emerged in the months proceeding the submission of the public credit report.⁸⁴

James Madison in particular opposed the report concerning certificates used to pay Revolutionary War veterans and farmers. Under Hamilton's plan, those who were in possession of these certificates would be issued full compensation for the certificate. This resulted in a buying frenzy among the public as people attempted to buy up certificates in order to turn a profit once bought by the government. Madison rose in support of the original holders of the Continental certificates and demanded they be fully compensated as if they still possessed their original certificates.⁸⁵ Only by doing this could the new Federal Government revive public faith. Such opposition to Hamilton's funding plan was only the beginning.

Once Madison's proposal on original certificate holders failed, the debate concerning assumption of the state debt immediately emerged. This debate was also led by Madison and supported by most southern states except for South Carolina, who carried much debt from the late war. Pointing out the contempt Madison and his supporters had for the assumption of the state debts as based solely in economics does not give the complete view of the debate.⁸⁶ Hamilton argued in Federalist 30 that "A complete power, therefore, to procure a regular and adequate supply of revenue, as far as the resources of the community will permit, may be regarded as an indispensable ingredient in every constitution."⁸⁷ By allowing the Federal Government to assume state

⁸⁴ See Bickford, Michael D. Chan, John Lamberton Harper, and Ron Chernow.

⁸⁵ Joseph Ellis, *Founding Brothers*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000) pp. 56-57.

⁸⁶ Ellis, *Founding Brothers*, 58.

⁸⁷ Hamilton, Federalist 30. See Chan 94.

debts, the state consented to relinquishing some control over their own financial affairs to an increasingly powerful central government. As it would turn out in the aftermath of Hamilton's proposal, many members of Congress were not in favor of giving the central government so much power. Those who particularly aligned themselves ideologically with classical republicanism and ancient virtue perceived this to be the opportunity the United States government would need to exploit their power and tyrannically govern the states beneath its rule.

In short, the discussion of how much power the central government would have over the states was not a settled debate from the days of the Constitutional Convention. These individual states, which had enjoyed personal autonomy in both economics and local government, were being asked for the first time to resign a major portion of power to the central government of the United States. The "proper funding of the present debt" that would "render it a national blessing" as proposed by Hamilton, was up for debate and would prove to be a struggle inside and outside the walls of Congress for an extended period of time.⁸⁸ Questions concerning power, money, virtue, and the public good all fused into one debate in the public discourse and under the name of Hamilton's proposed funding system. These issues were important to members of Congress and participants in the print discourse as indicated by the response given in the newspapers.

Another underlying element to the debate that emerged between the Federalist and the Anti-Federalists just prior to the First Federal Congress, according to historian Michael D. Chan, was one between reliance on ancient virtue and classical republicanism

⁸⁸ Alexander Hamilton, Report on Public Credit, January 1790.

with David Hume's "vicious luxury." "Vicious luxury" was associated with the pursuit of convenience and luxury as a means to promote labor and industry. According to Hume, vicious luxury could be defined with "No gratification, however Sensual, can of itself be esteemed vicious. A gratification is only vicious, when it engrosses all a man's expence, and leaves no ability for such acts of duty and generosity as are required by his situation and fortune."⁸⁹ Still other authors popular among the founding generation included John Trenchard and Thomas Gordon, authors to *Cato's Letters*, "argued luxury is not inherently pernicious but only becomes so when it replaces the 'love of business' with 'indolence.'"⁹⁰ Hamilton came from the mindset of those agreeing with Hume and Trenchard, where the encouragement of business and industry was in the best interest of government and the ultimate public good. Saul Cornell in *The Other Founders* as well as Michael Chan argued that many Anti-Federalists, who held that a successful republic was a small one and held together by yeoman farmers, were skeptical of commerce and luxury and favored frugality.⁹¹ Those who were weary of indulging luxury held that it sapped public virtue or in other words discouraged citizens from acting in the best interest of the public good.⁹² Through opposing views on luxury and frugality as learned from classical republicanism and ancient virtue, the Federalists and Anti-Federalists clashed on how to deal with the issue of public credit and the reception of Hamilton's plan.

⁸⁹ Chan 69.

⁹⁰ Michael D. Chan, *Aristotle and Hamilton on Commerce and Statesmanship*, (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2006) pp. 69.

⁹¹ Saul Cornell, *The Other Founders: Anti-Federalism and the Dissenting Tradition in America, 1788-1828*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999) pp 36-39. Chan 68.

⁹² Chan 73.

Michael Chan's assessment of the opposing views between Federalists and Anti-Federalists contradicts other historians' research. While Chan argued that the Anti-Federalists were especially prone to looking to the classics for guidance, Linda Kerber argued something different in *Federalists in Dissent*. She stated that "To the Federalist mind, Jeffersonians were Laputans, committed to an abstract impracticality which would, if not deterred, tear apart the cultural fabric of the young republic."⁹³ Laputa was a fictional island in the sky created by Jonathan Swift in his fictional work *Gulliver's Travels*. Swift portrayed those living there as being part of a society formed and ruined by men who walked with their heads literally in the clouds. Even in Kerber's discussion of the importance of a Classical education based in a study of the ancient languages, she stated that "Thomas Jefferson himself, at whose urging William and Mary had dropped 'ancient languages' as a requirement for admission and, indeed, from the required curriculum."⁹⁴ Although Kerber spoke from a viewpoint on the political scene that would emerge after the First Federal Congress under the Adams and Jefferson administrations, it seems disputable as to what extent each group relied on an understanding of the classics and ancient virtue.

What Kerber indicated that cannot be denied was that "Federalists and Jeffersonians alike assumed that social stability in a republic requires an educated and politically sophisticated citizenry."⁹⁵ Given that educated men at this time shared the same background in a classical education, it seems unavoidable that however important it

⁹³Linda Kerber, *Federalists in Dissent: Imagery and Ideology in Jeffersonian America*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1970) pp 22.

⁹⁴ Kerber 112.

⁹⁵ Kerber 95.

was considered to be, classics were a general basis of intellectual understanding and expression and thus can be found in both opposing views. This all the more made an understanding of the classical idiom important to engaging in the public discourse because of its general use.

Saul Cornell argued that many authors addressed their writing “to an elite, middling, or plebeian audience. Once their texts entered the public sphere, however, authors no longer controlled how they were read.”⁹⁶ In his examination of newspaper articles signed with Classical pseudonyms, Cornell attempted to demonstrate how all three of these groups participated in using the classical idiom in their writing as a rhetorical tool for promoting a particular ideal. Although it is difficult to piece what information that has survived insofar as authorship was concerned, it seems likely that given the common educational standards of the time, people from all classes could participate through the classical idiom in the print discourse. In order to gather a sense of participation, the promotion of the republican farmer model in early America will be examined through “Agricola” (farmer) and “Mercator” (merchant) in order to assess opposing intellectual and political views on public credit. Although it cannot be positively determined to which school of thought an author was a part, their choice in pseudonym may betray some of this information to the reader.

Public opinion articles written on the funding plan discussed both the foreign and domestic debt. What would be done concerning the depreciated certificates, which had been predominantly held by Revolutionary War veterans and farmers, was of particular

⁹⁶ Cornell 11 and 34-42.

interest in the discussion of the domestic debt as well. Through these issues, discussion of the public good through Congress' actions, or in many cases, inaction, and the significance for the employment of the classical idiom was revealed. Through the variety of debates that concerned the funding system, a wide range of participation was also revealed through authors' rhetoric as well as by whom and to whom the articles were addressed.

AGRICOLA

The first persona that will be considered is that of the farmer. Authors writing in concern for how Hamilton's plan proposed to deal with the issue of certificates tended to be written by authors using classically inspired references to republican farmers. As will be demonstrated, one of the most powerful images that was drawn from antiquity was that of the humble farmer who left his fields to defend his country. Upon successfully defeating the threat to the republic, the republican farmer left behind the glory of victory to return to his farm. Many authors argued on behalf of the Revolutionary War soldiers who would be affected by how Hamilton's funding plan chose to deal with the situation of devalued certificates.

"Agricola" or "farmer", writing for the *Independent Gazetteer* in Philadelphia called attention to his record as a Revolutionary War veteran as well as his career as a farmer in Pennsylvania. "Agricola's" article was addressed "to the Old Whigs, if any yet remain."⁹⁷ "Agricola" declared himself a Whig during the American Revolution, one

⁹⁷ Agricola, *Independent Gazetteer*, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. May 8, 1790.

aligned his or herself with the cause for American Independence. By addressing his article to “Old Whigs,” “Agricola” requested his audience to call to mind the patriotic motivations that had led to victory over the British during the American Revolution.⁹⁸ The motivations, of course, were based in the deposition of tyranny in favor of a republic. In the case of “Agricola,” he wrote in response to the situation concerning original holders of certificates. As mentioned previously, Hamilton’s funding plan proposed to pay anyone in possession of a certificate the full value, regardless of whether or not that person might have been the original holder of the certificate. To this author and many others, by doing this to those who had served their country in eliminating tyranny, the new Federal Government had insulted the virtue of these veterans and farmers just as much as the tyrant who had been overthrown. “Agricola” counted himself among the common people and represented those who would be affected by Hamilton’s funding plan, which would favor the current certificate holders instead of the original bearers.

“Agricola” described himself “in the beginning of 1776 being a warm and zealous Whig” who took a commission in the Continental army where he served for the entire war. Although paid in bonds that quickly depreciated in value, “being a great Whig, it was unsuitable to complain much.” “Agricola” believed that Congress would pay back what he was rightfully owed while “hoping for the happy days of American freedom, when we should have peace and plenty.” At the end of the war, however, “Agricola” found he was in poverty. Laboring under far more difficult conditions than he had suffered prior to the war, Agricola was soon “convinced that too much avarice,

⁹⁸ Harper 16.

selfishness, pride and covetousness, prevailed among our rulers for several years past; and if the great body of the people do not speedily remonstrate for a total change of measures, they may look for greater oppression from their new masters than ever would have been imposed by Great-Britain.”

“Agricola” portrayed himself as a humble farmer who was unwilling to become involved in political discussion until “that unrighteous system of funding the certificates at 4 per cent, appeared.” Agricola specifically blamed Alexander Hamilton for proposing to ignore the original certificate holders and observed disbelief “that a person in a high station in this government would propose a system that would rob the worthy officers and original holders of certificates of one third of their interest.” Agricola concluded that “men who receive their thousands for doing almost nothing, feel very little for the distresses of the poor.” “Agricola” also commented on the increase in land prices as well and connected this observation with the same sentiment. “Agricola” wondered “it may be justly suspected that some wicked scheme is laid, to sport away our lands to advance fortunes at the expence of the public.”⁹⁹ “Agricola’s” concerns all stem from an understanding of rights such as life, liberty, and property, which were guaranteed to him after his service in the Continental army. This public opinion article served as an alert to the public discourse against a system which seemingly gave too much power to the central government.

This author adopted an anonymous persona of a republican farmer. He invoked the image of Cincinnatus, a legendary Roman considered to be the ultimate model of

⁹⁹ Agricola, *Independent Gazetteer*, May 8, 1790.

republican virtue even to the ancient Romans. According to Roman history, Cincinnatus was a successful general who was offered a dictatorship in Rome to save the state. After his success he voluntarily left the life of leadership in favor of a life on the farm.¹⁰⁰ Even in ancient Rome, men strived to achieve the virtues Cincinnatus possessed in order to better preserve the public good and thus steer clear from tyrannical leaders. Americans particularly admired these qualities in a ruler and consistently referenced them as a foil to someone perceived to be abusing power. Alluding to this ancient persona acts as a legitimating force behind the argument being made in this article. Although “Agricola” did not mention Cincinnatus by name, many of his readers would have undoubtedly made the connection. “Agricola” played out his role as a humble farmer and not the great leader Cincinnatus was and counted himself among a much larger body of people living in Pennsylvania with a vested interest in how Congress should decide to deal with the certificates issue. Although the author seeks to include all those who would be affected by Congress’s decision, he specifically focused on a reading audience only interested in the certificates issue.

What does this mean when considering who “Agricola” might have been and the specific audience he addressed? Given the emphasis of the farmer and the weariness of a government intending to ignore the interests of those who bore the burden of obtaining that very form of government, it is possible that the author considered himself among those interested in classical republicanism and anti-luxury, or a member of the opposition to Hamilton and his supporters. “Agricola” informed the public of what Hamilton’s plan

¹⁰⁰ Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita, or The Early History of Rome*. Trans. Aubrey De Selincourt. (New York: Penguin Group, 1971) III.

would essentially do to original certificate holders and called his audience to take notice of this injustice.

“Agricola” was not an uninformed back woodsman. By using the classical idiom in his article he not only labeled himself as an educated and active member of the public, but also was capable of making connections to the past and present and declared Congress’s current actions as contrary to a republican form of government. He detailed Hamilton’s plan at length and observed how its application might affect the widows and orphans of the original certificate holders. What “Agricola” seemed to essentially argue was by forsaking the farmer and veteran, whose interests were championed by the classics, the hope of a successful republic could not be sustained. This image of the yeoman farmer was so popular that “Agricola’s” audience would have almost certainly made the connection to the classical reference. Identifying “Agricola” in this context gives a broad inclusion of audience members who would have been weary of a strong central government and more in favor of a yeoman-based, classical republic who expected members of Congress to exercise an understanding of ancient virtue toward the public good.

The concerns “Agricola” and “Cincinnatus” expressed were not exceptional. Yet another public opinion writer, “Ruricola,” made similar observations on Pennsylvania farmers and their status as veterans. In Latin, “ruricola” means “one who tills the land; a country-dweller.” This particular public opinion author wrote from the same point of view as that of “Agricola” in taking on the humble, yeoman farmer persona. This identified the author with others who were in favor of the yeoman farmer lifestyle and

played to the concerns of those in the reading audience concerned with what would become of the original certificate holders who were ignored by Hamilton's plan.

"Ruricola" supported his own denunciation of the certificate plan via a similar illustration of the bleak outlook facing other former veterans of the late war. The author stated:

"At the close of the war another description of men came amongst us; men, some of whom we had once known hail, hearty and vigorous – some of them our sons, and some of them our more distant connections; but, alas, how changed! Emaciate, wounded and tattered, they exhibited in every neighbourhood a distressing spectacle of unrewarded virtue. They brought, it is true, from camp, their military accoutrements in their hands, but were ready to ejaculate at every door the "*date obulum*" of the neglected Belisarius. These men too, obtained their certificates; but, alas, they were neither victuals nor clothes; they had spent their health and their strength in their country's service."¹⁰¹

Not only did "Ruricola" portray a similar situation among the veteran farmers of Pennsylvania, but he even used a classical reference to achieve this horrific scene.

"Ruricola" referenced a sixth-century Roman general named Belisarius who defeated the Vandals and Ostrogoths in 533 and 540 A.D. respectively. According to myth, Belisarius fell out of favor after being accused of conspiracy against the Emperor. He was supposedly blinded and forced to spend the rest of his days as a beggar, notably asking, "Date Obulum Belisario," or "give a coin to Belisarius."¹⁰² Belisarius was a popular classical figure at this time and was depicted in literature and art frequently during the eighteenth and nineteenth century. "Ruricola" chose to reference this story

¹⁰¹ Ruricola, *Independent Gazetteer*, April 24, 1790.

¹⁰² "Belisarius" *A Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*. Edited by Elizabeth Knowles. Oxford University Press, 2006. *Oxford Reference Online*. Oxford University Press. Marymount University. 20 June 2008 <http://www.oxfordreference.com.proxy.mu.wrlc.org/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t214.e787>. See also Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, vol. IV ch. XLIII.

because he associated it with the ultimate downfall of a victorious soldier who was unjustly treated by the emperor. The popularity of this story would have made this reference easily identifiable to “Ruricola’s” audience and emphasized the unjustness of Hamilton’s proposal concerning original certificate holders. By ignoring farmers and veterans who had been paid in certificates, only to have sold them to speculators in order to survive, “Ruricola” dramatically punctuated his argument against Hamilton’s funding system with the reference to Belisarius.

Some authors wrote from a similar viewpoint as that of a farmer, but expressed a more inclusive opinion and ergo a more inclusive solution. One such author wrote under the pseudonym “Cincinnatus” for the *New York Journal* and was reprinted in the *New Jersey Journal* in February 1790. “Cincinnatus” did not mention his status as a farmer as did “Agricola,” but by choosing this pseudonym the reading audience would have immediately assumed this of the author’s viewpoint. He also placed himself in a situation of authority over the issue of the funding plan and the question of original certificate holders. This particular author did not construct his article around the portrayal of the destitute farmer or veteran who had been financially hurt by the certificate issue, but instead proposed an alternative plan to Hamilton’s. Since Cincinnatus as a historical figure was simultaneously a leader and champion of yeoman farming and preserver of a republican form of government, using his name would have suggested someone with authority. Using such a pseudonym to make these suggestions might have been perceived as more legitimate than if this author had chosen to write

under the name “Agricola” because of the direct reference to a historical figure with experience in leadership.

“Cincinnatus” repeatedly described to his reading audience the virtuous nature of the veterans in arguing for an amended certificate plan. “Cincinnatus” suggested:

“It is not in the power of government, in this delicate and interesting instance, to do justice to speculators and the army? First – All the original holders who have never parted with their final settlements, should have them estimated at full value, and funded at the rate of interest specified in those securities. Then those virtuous soldiers who never lost their faith in government, will receive a compensation for their patient patriotism and eminent services. Secondly – The present holders who hold them by purchase should have them valued at eight shillings, which has been the highest cash price on the market, and should be funded at the rate of six per cent interest.”¹⁰³

Cincinnatus calmly presented to the public discourse an alternative plan that would satisfy the criticisms and concerns of Hamilton’s plan. He did not denounce the government nor did he suggest that one groups’ needs were more weighty than the others’. This author played out the persona of an experienced leader by conveying his thoughts in a logical and diplomatic manner. He went on to point out that by using a plan that would satisfy all parties,

This transaction would assume the look of a composition on the part of government betwixt the soldier and speculator; and I believe would conciliate all parties... Not to pay the present holders the full value of their securities... would destroy our credit, and we should never be able to borrow a *farthing* – If we neglect to do justice to the army when we have an opportunity, will we ever be able to obtain a *soldier*?¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ Cincinnatus, *New Jersey Journal*, February 11, 1790.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

Through the persona of a seasoned general and farmer, “Cincinnatus” referenced a reliance on classical republicanism by not only speaking from the viewpoint of a classical figure, but also by presenting a plan that would placate to all groups in the republic and not to any majority. “Cincinnatus” seemed to further suggest that only by arriving to such conclusions can a government prove to be a virtuous one and further its endeavor in satisfying the public good.

Where “Agricola” chose to write under a persona that would place him among a larger body of sympathizers to the farmers’ plight, “Cincinnatus” was inclusive to his reading audience through his reasoning on a solution. “Cincinnatus’s” rhetoric placed him on a middle ground between those who were in favor of uplifting the yeoman farmer and those who would have supported Hamilton’s financial plan. Instead of joining the ranks of one group over the other, “Cincinnatus” was interested in composing an alternative plan. In referencing the ancient figure, “Cincinnatus” played out the part of the stoic and fair leader by not taking sides. The author seemed to simultaneously uphold ancient virtue by favoring farmers and veterans while appeasing certificate speculators with an eye for preserving public credit for future business dealings. “Cincinnatus” effectively used the experience of the ancient figure to lend legitimacy to a middle ground approach to the issue.

MERCATOR

The second persona that will be considered and supposed opposite of the farmer was that of the merchant. One “Mercator,” which in Latin means merchant, wrote for the

Independent Chronicle in Boston, Massachusetts. This author supported Congress's efforts and stated that, "Considering that Congress are elected from amongst the wealthy, or their abilities and integrity it is not conceivable that they will not see the necessity of public credit to a nation – that seeing it, they will not endeavor to restore it, and having accomplished the same, that they will do anything to injure it."¹⁰⁵ The tone of this statement suggested that "Mercator" was particularly speaking to those who had doubts as to Congress's and Hamilton's intentions toward the public good through the proposed funding system. "Mercator" also outlined how the country would benefit from Hamilton's plan. To name a few of the benefits that were listed, this included the creation of a national bank and the distribution of paper money by the government. By creating a "portable and fixed medium" of form of currency, this would "give an active capital to many of the public creditors, to be employed in agriculture, manufactures and commerce, and thus increase our exports or lessen our imports... increase the value of improved lands, by enabling the landholders to borrow money upon them," and would "increase the number of lenders, and lessen the borrowers – and thus tend to lessen the market rate of interest, and promote improvements in agriculture and manufactures."

"Mercator" was clearly in favor of Hamilton's plan and giving the Federal Government the power to stimulate public credit and was directed at audience members who were uncertain of their support for the proposed funding system. The author also presented himself as someone who would possibly benefit from Hamilton's plan given his declared profession as a merchant. As a representative for merchants, "Mercator"

¹⁰⁵ Mercator, *Independent Chronicle*, Boston, Massachusetts, July 8, 1790.

spoke from a tradition of the Roman forums, which were vital to the economic growth of Rome. Each Roman town had a forum where not only goods could be bought and sold, but also provided a public meeting place for citizens to discuss business and politics. The forum was essentially the social, commercial, and political center of Roman life in antiquity.¹⁰⁶ A Roman merchant would not have been only interested in business, but given the nature of his work, public interest through politics would have been important as well. By referencing the Roman form of merchant, “Mercator,” rhetorically brought up the image of the forum and all the inner-workings of that system to his readers. After all, by writing and publishing this article, “Mercator” was taking part in the public American forum which revolved around social, commercial, and political issues. In encouraging support of Congress and Hamilton’s plan among other audience members apart from those who already supported Hamilton’s plan, showing a more inclusive consideration for the public good would have been important.

Another “Mercator” writing a month later for the same newspaper specifically expressed concern for those who would be affected domestically by Hamilton’s plan. “Mercator” began his assessment of the public funding proposal by stating that “But, admitting that a moderate debt to its own citizens, such as can be supported by duties on luxuries, and without burthening commerce, may be beneficial to a country. – It will hardly, I believe be contended, that, to pay an excessive use to foreigners will not be injurious.”¹⁰⁷ “Mercator” was interested in placing importance on the domestic debt in

¹⁰⁶ "forum" *The Concise Oxford Companion to Classical Literature*. Ed. M.C. Howatson and Ian Chilvers. Oxford University Press, 1996. *Oxford Reference Online*. Oxford University Press. Marymount University. Accessed 24 June 2008.

¹⁰⁷ Mercator, *Independent Chronicle*, (Boston, Massachusetts, August 5, 1790).

favor of having American public creditors more in control of the debt than foreign creditors. “Mercator” demanded “Is it not then evident I ask, that some steps should be *immediately taken*, not only to provide a substitute for the deficiency of the medium which will be consequent on paying the interest of what we owe abroad... but so far to raise the value of the domestic debts, that, if foreigners should continue to be the purchasers, we may not pay them *excessive use for the money they advance, and lose the difference between that and what they will finally receive.*” This “Mercator” was particularly interested in focusing efforts on using gold and silver as the preferred medium of currency over paper money and suggested that only through this medium could the economy hope to see a stable increase over a period of time. The author saw Hamilton’s plan as an opportunity to nurture the American economy, which in time would prove stable and independent from foreign powers by becoming less reliant on foreign credit.

This “Mercator” seemed to write for a broad audience in this article particularly given the extent of explanation and background to Hamilton’s report on public credit. The author’s intended audience could be a group of individuals who already supported the funding plan, but may not have considered the shortage issue of silver and gold and the problems that could arise should the central government move in favor of paper currency as a means of funding the domestic debt. The author also could have been writing for original American creditors who would be affected by Congress’s decisions given his sentiment, “every day’s delay is ruinous to many of the original public creditors, and to encrease their mortification, their country will long suffer under the

effects, in proportion as foreigners are the purchasers.”¹⁰⁸ As this author signed with the name “Mercator,” the author indicated that he not only had an invested interest in the outcome of the public credit issue, but also that he had expertise in the issue and therefore could be relied upon in his assessment.

This article, among many others, is more difficult than others in assessing why the author chose to sign his name as “Mercator” instead of merely signing it as “Merchant.” It is possible that the author intended his readers to identify his argument with the classical idiom as a legitimating force to his argument. The legitimating force that would have accompanied such a name was the reference to an interest in Roman virtue through the support of the public good. Here, the public good is obviously the promotion of public credit in America, or the paying down of the domestic debt and the interest it had accumulated. “Mercator” indicated in his article that Hamilton’s plan was well intended for meeting the needs of the public good and by paying special attention to the issue of silver and gold as the preferred medium of currency, the goal of a strong domestic economy was possible. Through the public forum of the print discourse, this “Mercator” accomplished an instructive entreaty to the public on the political issues affecting the future development and growth of the American economy.

Another “Mercator” from Philadelphia writing several months later expressed concern for the creation of a national bank and the affects it would have on a state level. “Mercator” qualified his argument by stating that

“Indeed in the infant state of commerce in this country, it is easy to perceive that Congress, invested with this power, by the aid of foreign loans and domestic imposts,

¹⁰⁸ “Mercator, *Independent Chronicle*, August 5, 1790.

might soon cause the ruin of any of the state banks, which might prove obnoxious to the ill will of the Secretary of their Treasury, however prudent their administration, or fertile their resources.”¹⁰⁹

“Mercator” of Philadelphia wrote with concern for allocating such power to the federal government citing that in Britain, their bank system “now is merely a creature of government, depending for its very existence on the maintenance of the public faith, and that faith is pledged for millions, the payment where of is beyond all expectation and the very interest on which is a burthen almost insupportable on the people.”¹¹⁰ Mercator argued for the preservation of state interest over national interest when considering a banking system and declared “the different state banks should make a common cause to try its legality, and oppose its progress before our Chief Magistrate, and the public at large should consider its consequences with serious attention.” This “Mercator” agreed with his Boston counterpart that “A bank of our own, founded on solid coin, and uncontroled by government, will be far more favorable to the independence of the state, as well as to its commerce.” In declaring this, however, “Mercator” identified himself as an advocate for protecting public credit and banks on a local level and was weary of too much control on the part of the Federal government. This “Mercator” was no supporter of Hamilton’s as he described his proposal for a national bank as possessing ill will toward state banks. This author was at the very least, a cautious participant in the public discourse and wrote to inform the public on his thoughts concerning Hamilton’s proposal.

¹⁰⁹ Mercator, *American Daily Advertiser*, reprinted in the *New York Daily Gazette*, February 9, 1791.

¹¹⁰ Mercator, *New York Daily Gazette*, February 9, 1791.

“Mercator” as an advocate of state banks and weary of too much Federal Government control seemed to be the opposite of Hamilton’s usual supporters who were in favor of a central government. This is interesting as one might expect an author writing under the pseudonym of a Roman merchant would be in favor of Hamilton’s plan. Unlike Hamilton’s supporters, this author was not interested in protection from state legislatures for the regulation of public credit and was interested in the opposite scenario.¹¹¹ This author was interested in the preservation of state and local interest; the typical small republic as the healthiest form of government. This differentiation could be due to the fact that the article was first published in Philadelphia where perhaps merchants were more trusting of their state legislature, but the article was reprinted in the New York Daily Gazette, which meant that this “Mercator’s” audience included Hamilton’s supporters.

It cannot be determined whether this author was a Federalist nor can it be determined if this author was a merchant. Given the popular model of the farmer and its antithesis based in those who preferred commerce, it is possible that this author intended to address the audience of “Agricolae” and inform them that not all merchants were in favor of Hamilton’s plan. Through this, farmers would realize that there could be an a chance for political opportunity in blocking Hamilton’s plan. It is equally possible that “Mercator” intended to address Hamilton and his supporters in letting them know that not all merchants were convinced of the benefits a strong central government would bring to merchants on a local and state level. This author chose “Mercator” in order to take on the

¹¹¹ This illustration of one of Hamilton’s typical New York supporters was discussed earlier in the chapter. Refer to Harper 47.

persona of an informed and active merchant who was not in favor of Hamilton's plan. Thus, taking the persona of a merchant lent legitimacy to the author's assessment given that it would be assumed this author had special familiarity in business.

The opportunity for partaking in the political discussion as done through guises made it possible to participate in the broadest sense. Through this medium of expression, "Mercator" could confront those he did not support in a very public way without disclosing his own identity. "Mercator" seemed to engage the debate framed by the classical model of the farmer versus the merchant. Although the only classical reference in this article can be found in the pseudonym, this author used the "Mercator" persona for a specific purpose. By merely using "Mercator" instead of "merchant," this author could enter the political discussion using the classical idiom to denote his own education or even knowledge of a government's duty to the public good and perhaps strengthen other merchants claims to bearing the best interests of the public at heart while challenging Hamilton's funding plan and its dependency on the Federal Government. Historian Carl Richard stated that "Federalists avoided revealing their true identity because they knew that the American people staunchly opposed the annihilation of state power."¹¹² It is interesting to note that there are far more references to the republican farmer in the newspapers at this time than there were merchants. Given Richard's argument, it seemed likely that should a merchant desire to address the public sphere as a merchant and not some other persona, presenting an argument weary of federal control would have served

¹¹² Richard 89.

as a legitimating force in the eyes of the majority who favored the agrarian model over the corruptive commercial one.

CONCLUSION

Comparing “Agricola” and similar pseudonyms with that of “Mercator” reveals an intense political discussion concerning the government’s role in public credit. Upon first glance, one might suspect that these personae would represent those who favored Hamilton and those who did not, but given the intricacies of the public credit debate, even this much cannot be definitively determined. What can be determined was that authors chose personae that would punctuate their arguments through the classical idiom and identified this medium of expression with one that would be easily identified by their audience. The nature of the public sphere and how authors interacted within it was determined by a common ground of education and interest in the classics as a foundation to the new American government. The prevalence of the farmer versus merchant dynamic was known enough that public opinion authors used this to their advantage while expressing their opinions through the classical idiom. The added weight the classical idiom provided to these arguments was used widely by authors because participants in the public discourse would have been able to at least identify the rhetorical references and understood why they were chosen for a given article. The classical idiom as part of the debate on public credit indicates one commonly used and widely accepted medium of expression that spoke volumes to other participants within the print discourse.

CHAPTER III: SLAVERY AND INDIAN TREATIES

Although it is not surprising to find classical references and pseudonyms in public opinion articles concerning public funding and residency, it is perhaps more surprising to find these references in articles concerning slavery and Indian treaties. This chapter will examine content as well as pseudonyms to discern the reasons for why authors chose to use specific classical references in debating these issues. Participation as expressed through an author's chosen persona will also be considered as well as what role the classical idiom played in conveying a particular point of view.

INDIAN POLICY AND THE CREEK NATION

The issue of Federal control over Indian policy and slavery was controversial during the First Federal Congress. Under British rule, settlers had been forbidden to move west of the Appalachian Mountains and Indian skirmishes were often dealt with on a local level or by Great Britain. Slavery was, for the most part, not subject to external control, except by Britain. This all changed under the First Federal Congress. How much power the Federal Government would wield over the people immediately became a concern to participants in the public discourse. The biggest concern expressed on these issues centered on the integrity of the new republic and how it could be upheld or torn down depending on how involved the Federal government became in local affairs. Could

the “Good of the People” be preserved through such intervention? Could state sovereignty exist if the Federal government were permitted to intervene? The use of the classical idiom in these debates provides new dimensions for understanding the way participants conceived of these topics.

Westward expansion was an important issue even by the time of the First Federal Congress. Although Thomas Jefferson famously acquired the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, the desire for western land did not begin with his presidency. Southerners perceived the value of the west even before the American Revolution, and pushed Congress to take a stronger stance in favor of expansion. New Englanders had different ideas. Fearing an alliance between the West and southern states, New Englanders began to raise objections to western settlement on the expectation the West and South would eventually unite against the rest of the country.¹¹³ The opposition to this argument, however, felt the sale of western lands would prove financially beneficial to the Federal Government. It was thought it would be easier to control the Indian populations living out west than to protect a border between the United States and recognized Indian nations.¹¹⁴ George Washington submitted many messages to Congress demanding attention be paid to a number of issues, but his messages concerning the West were the most numerous.¹¹⁵ Washington perceived the importance of the West in the future of the United States. This perception combined with his own long-standing interest in western

¹¹³ Charlene Bangs Bickford, *Birth of the Nation: The First Federal Congress, 1789-1791*. (Lanham: Madison House Publishers, 1989) pp. 78.

¹¹⁴ Bickford 78.

¹¹⁵ Bickford 78.

expansion, Washington was one of the biggest advocates for expansion during the First Federal Congress.

Washington's Secretary of War, Henry Knox, played an instrumental role in developing the Indian policy of the First Federal Congress. Under British rule, Indian nations were considered to be "tenants at will," which was a major source of hostilities between the Indian nations and white settlers.¹¹⁶ Henry Knox recommended a complete review and revision to Indian policy arguing that the conquest method used by Great Britain violated the most basic of republican principles.¹¹⁷ Knox proposed a more gradual method of expansion where treaties would be established between the United States and slowly altered over time in order to accommodate the future expanding needs of the United States. Knox thought such a change would not only avoid outright conflict between the opposing nations, but would also stand as an affirmation to the values that embodied the American Revolution.¹¹⁸

While Knox developed a new approach to Indian policy, American settlers in the West were faced with hostilities from the various Indian tribes dwelling there. These events resulted in a steady stream of urgent letters to the Secretary of War demanding a resolution. Prompted by these letters, Henry Knox submitted a report to the president during the summer of 1789. He proposed two possible resolutions. The first called for the removal of the offending Indian tribes and the second required the appropriation of

¹¹⁶ Joseph Ellis, 135.

¹¹⁷ Ellis 136

¹¹⁸ Ellis 136.

funds to negotiate with both the Wabash Indian tribes in the Northwest and the Creek Indians of Georgia. Henry Knox was in favor of his own second choice stating:

The Indians being the prior occupants possess the right of the soil- It cannot be taken from them unless by their free consent, or by the right of conquest in case of a just War – To dispossess them on any other principle would be a gross violation of the fundamental Laws of nature, and of that distributive justice which is the glory of a nation.¹¹⁹

The House of Representatives chose the second option and sent the bill to the Senate, where the amount to be appropriated was cut in half. The focus was placed on negotiations with the Creek Indians in Georgia. Mere negotiations did not remain the perceived best option as calls for a standing army for the defense of the West against hostile Indian tribes escalated.

In Washington's January 1790 state of the union message to Congress, the president emphasized the necessity of a standing army as the best method for preserving peace in the West, "To be prepared for war," he said, "is one of the most effectual means of preserving peace."¹²⁰ The proposed standing army caused shock waves among members of Congress. Senator William Maclay warned, "Give Knox his Army, and he will soon have a War on hand. Indeed I am clearly of Opinion That he is aiming, at this even now."¹²¹ A bill authorizing \$20,000 for negotiating with both the Creeks and the Wabash Indians was finally approved while consideration for the raising of a militia continued. Primarily an idea nursed by Henry Knox, the militia bill was printed and left for the last session of Congress in order to solicit public opinion from constituents. This

¹¹⁹ Bickford 81.

¹²⁰ George Washington, *First Annual Message of George Washington, January 8, 1790*. (The Avalon Project, <http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/presiden/sou/washs01.htm>. Accessed May 30, 2008.)

¹²¹ Bickford 82.

unusual tactic indicates how delicate the subject of raising an army during a time of peace was to people of this time.¹²² While this was taking place, an outpouring of letters from the West, particularly in the Northwest, continued to arrive at Henry Knox's door, pleading for military support against hostile Indian tribes. In response to these pleas, Knox dispatched troops to assist settlers. The result was costly. One hundred eighty three troops and militia were reported killed in the Northwest, almost double the number of Indian casualties.¹²³ This caused unrest among Americans living in the East while settlers in the West called for a second expedition.

George Washington was particularly interested in dealing with the Indian Nations as separate sovereign nations. Since the new Constitution vested this power in the executive where under the Articles of Confederation it had not, Washington was not about to lose the opportunity to establish a precedent. Washington personally requested the Senate to consider negotiations with the Creek Nation while also blaming the violence in the West on the Georgians. Since the matter of treaty negotiations had not yet been taken up by the new Federal Government, this request was received with awkwardness. Washington reportedly left the Senate chamber with a "discontented air" only the next day to send a written list of questions to the Senate requesting the matter be decided.¹²⁴ The Senate finally yielded. The President of the United States would be received and negotiate with the first sovereign of another nation.

¹²² Bickford 82.

¹²³ Bickford 83.

¹²⁴ Ellis 141.

In the South, several treaties already existed except with the Creeks, which yielded another host of problems between the Indians of the South and its settlers. George Washington requested that representatives of the Creek Nation come to New York for negotiations. Alexander McGillivray, king of the Creek Indians, was asked in particular to accompany the envoy to New York. McGillivray, who had been a loyalist during the American Revolution and later allied himself with the Spanish once the British departed, opposed American expansion into the West. McGillivray sought a number of concessions. In meeting with the United States in July 1790 he asked for a guarantee of access to American ports should the Spanish choose to close their Florida ports to trade. Congress would be asked to consider this request while not being made privy to the so-called secret articles of the Creek Treaty.¹²⁵

The Creek Treaty or the Treaty of New York named Alexander McGillivray a brigadier general of the United States in the Creek Nation with an annual salary of twelve hundred dollars. When made public, the people of Georgia responded in anger. Not only were they outraged at the secret payment to McGillivray, they also object to the area of land West of Georgia as the Creek Nation to be defined as an entity separate from the United States. The treaty also declared that any American citizen who attempted to settle in the territory defined as the Creek Nation “shall forfeit the protection of the United States, and the Creeks may punish him or not, as they please.”¹²⁶ Settlers in particular as well as citizens of Georgia in general, were furious with the Federal Government’s

¹²⁵ Bickford 88.

¹²⁶ Treaty with the Creeks, 1790, [Source Online] The Avalon Project, accessed July 22, 2008, <http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/ntreaty/cre1790.htm>.

audacity in signing away Georgian lands to an Indian Nation, not to mention the loss of protection from the Federal Government should white settlers choose to ignore the new treaty.

What made this treaty particularly troubling to Georgians was that after the American Revolution, it was generally thought that all land in the colonies that had once been controlled by the British were now under control of the United States.¹²⁷ This included all frontier lands west of the Appalachian Mountains. After all, one contention the colonists had with Great Britain was the Proclamation Line of 1763, which forbade colonists from settling in west of the Appalachians. Already having dealt with this issue, Georgians were outraged that they found themselves confronted with similar problems they had experienced prior to the war.

The use of the classical idiom in the public discourse did not exist exclusively in northern papers. Although many of the more established universities in America, such as Harvard College, Yale University, and Princeton University, were located in New England, the use of the classical idiom outside of these states indicates that knowledge of the classics existed apart from those who were able to attend the northern colleges. One issue the First Federal Congress faced which yielded a hostile response in the print discourse from residents of Georgia and South Carolina concerned the western territories inhabited by the Creek and Wabash tribes. The classical idiom is evident within public opinion articles that emerged in southern newspapers on this topic. Tyranny of the

¹²⁷ Joseph Ellis, *American Creation*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007) pp. 132.

Federal Government over the will of the states was one dominant theme where republican virtue once again emerged as the suggested guiding light for those serving the public.

One author used the pseudonym “Metellus” in a series of articles written to denounce the Creek Treaty and the Federal Government. Metellus most likely refers to a Roman family who were influential from the third century B.C. to the end of the Republic. Although influential and successful nobles, they were not of patrician lineage. Rising from more humble plebeian origins, they never the less became prominent politicians, faithful to the republic. This image was the kind of image “Metellus” desired to convey to his readers. By doing this the author made no claim to an aristocratic background. The author might have thought of this as an important point to his argument in conveying to his audience that he was someone who was successful in his own right and was capable of understanding audience members of outside of those actively involved in politics. Since Georgians perceived the Creek treaty to be a direct threat to settlers in Indian Territory, perhaps “Metellus” desired to specifically address this group of people.

It is also possible that the author was specifically referencing one member of the Metellii family in particular, Quintus Cecilia Metellus Celer. Quintus was a tribune and commanded the Roman forces in 63 B.C. against the infamous Catiline and his conspirators.¹²⁸ Catiline was accused and condemned for his involvement in the attempted overthrow of the Roman republic. Catiline’s name was synonymous with

¹²⁸ E. Badian "Caecilius Metellus Celer, Quintus" *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*. Ed. Simon Hornblower and Anthony Spawforth. Oxford University Press 2003. *Oxford Reference Online*. Oxford University Press. Marymount University. 27 May 2008 <<http://www.oxfordreference.com.proxy.mu.wrlc.org/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t111.e1223>>

treachery and would have been thought of by those writing under the classical idiom in the American public discourse as a particular enemy of republics. By choosing this rhetorical persona, this author referenced an ancient figure known for combating an individual associated with principles contrary to a republican form of government. The author also assumed that his reading audience would see the reference and understand the implication.

“Metellus” wrote a long series of articles denouncing the Creek Treaty for the *Augusta Chronicle* ranging from September to November of 1790. In “Metellus”’ first article, the author related the series of acts passed by Congress leading up to the eventual treaty signed between the United States and the Creek Nation. “Metellus” discussed how he had at first every faith in the Federal Government to uphold the sovereignty of the individual states. This belief stood firm even in July of 1790 when the

Act to regulate Trade and Intercourse with the Indian Tribes’ in which ‘it is enacted and declared, that no sale of lands made by any Indians, or any nation or tribe of Indians within the United States, shall be valid to any person or persons, or to any state, whether having the right of pre-emption to such lands or not, unless the same shall be made and duly executed at some public treaty, held under the authority of the United States, doubts arose with respect to the intentions of Congress; but it was demonstrated clearly that the General Government had only done its duty as a watchful Guardian over the rights of infant Georgia.¹²⁹

The Creek Treaty was later ratified in August of 1790. “Metellus” quoted the specific passage of the treaty that defined the western boundary of Georgia where West of that boundary was defined as the Creek Nation and said “doubt and suspicion found their presence no longer necessary, and gave place to invective and rage.”

¹²⁹ Metellus, *The Augusta Chronicle*, (Augusta, Georgia: September 11, 1790).

“Metellus” conceded that the Federal Constitution gave the President and Senate the power to make treaties and that those treaties would carry “supreme law of the land.” The author also pointed out that in the “third section of the fourth article of the aforesaid Constitution... runs thus: ‘The Congress shall have power to dispose of and make all needful rules and regulations respecting the territory of the United States; and nothing in this Constitution shall be so construed as to prejudice any claims of the United, or of any particular state;’ and this not only guarantees the right, but aids even the claim of any state in the Union.” The author also argued that while the Constitution stated there shall be no ex post facto laws passed, it is common knowledge that the General Assembly of the state of Georgia passed a law for the suppression of violence of the Indians. “Metellus” concluded that the Creek Treaty was a breach of the Constitution in “depriving the state of Georgia of the power of making the compensations in the said Act.”

In this first article, “Metellus” presented himself as a champion of state rights; a small republic’s interests against the potential tyranny of a large centralized government. The author displayed for his audience an ability to provide a close reading of the Federal Constitution and applied that knowledge to Georgia’s interest and concluded that the Federal Constitution itself upholds state rights. It was the fault of the current Congress and the President that Georgia suffered such an imposing threat of tyranny over her interests. “Metellus” addressed his article to the citizens of Georgia instructing them on the wording of the Federal Constitution and how Georgia’s authority would be affected

by the current Congress's interpretation of that Constitution. To "Metellus," the Creek Treaty violated state's rights and hence violated his views on republican government.

The emphasis of state's rights as the ultimate good to uphold continued to emerge in "Metellus'" arguments. In the author's September 18 article, "Metellus" argued that the power of the Federal Government as being one to supersede the authority of the states was pushed by politicians in the pursuit of popularity. "Metellus" went on to state that "it is unnecessary to depict the various avenues that lead to the shrine of this so much worshipped idol.... We shall simply consider it as the *greatest political good*, and upon this principle only, pay those promised *ecomiums* on our Legislature. The emphasis on unquestioningly allocating power to the central government was done while "it was a kind of political blasphemy to mention state rights, when the general government was brought into view."¹³⁰ "Metellus" pointed out that such allocation of power had finally resulted in the chiseling away of Georgia's cherished rights and made "M'Gillivray a Brigadier;" a command that "consists of Indians on United States pay."¹³¹

"Metellus" ultimately warned his audience with this conclusion: "Citizens, brood a while over the important subject, - consider what you are bound to fulfill - look forward to what may be expected if these first stretches of power grow into precedents; and you will certainly conclude, that liberty, (which now but breathes here) will exist no more to us, from that instant we surrender one iota of our reserved rights."¹³² "Metellus" argued in terms of the law by comparing the language of the Federal Constitution with

¹³⁰ Metellus, *The Augusta Chronicle*, (Augusta, Georgia: September 18, 1790).

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid.

the laws established by the state of Georgia and declared that “Viewing the treaty in this light, as being provided for by law, and yet ratified in terms expressly contrary thereto, it cannot be recognized as legal, and therefore may be again pronounced nugatory.”¹³³

“Metellus” did not see this view as at odds with the concept of republicanism, but rather at the core of upholding its values. While “Metellus” cited the first clause of the sixth article of the Federal Constitution with “All debts contracted and engagements entered into, before the adoption of this Constitution, shall be as valid against the United States under this Constitution, as under the Confederation.” The author went on to state “And is it not established by universal consent, that the Confederation guaranteed the territorial rights to the respective individual states, in the strongest possible manner.” By allowing this injustice to be suffered by the individual states, the “destruction to liberty and republicanism” would be undoubtedly sustained.¹³⁴

“Metellus” pitched his remarks toward a southern audience who would know and appreciate the importance of the debate over Indian treaties. Although some historians have argued that the classical influence in the South was less pronounced than in the North, the classical idiom remained as the language of persuasion in the public discourse of the South. In “Metellus’s” opinion, the public good was what was best for the state of Georgia first and foremost. He did not portray the greater good in terms of the larger country. He delivered these observations to an audience that would have shared and understood this interpretation of the Federal Constitution and identified with the urgency of his argument in warning against the potential precedent. This Treaty could undermine

¹³³ Metellus, October 16, 1790.

¹³⁴ Metellus, November 6, 1790.

Georgia's interests. The intent behind these articles was to present the framework of the laws set forth by both the Federal and state governments and to demonstrate how the state's greater claims over Indian matters were sovereign. "Metellus" could have been targeting a large audience; possibly any and all interested citizens of Georgia and not merely those participating in politics. As "Metellus" pointed out, this treaty not only would affect those who desired to settle out West, but also the very integrity of the state itself.

"Metellus" did not use Latin words or phrases. By constructing his argument in terms of comparison to the language of the Federal Constitution and previous laws already in place, any member of the public could have read "Metellus'" argument and followed the urgency of his tone. The author defined the public good in light of Georgia's rights as a smaller republic under the protection of a central government, which northern authors appeared to view as the embodiment of the republican government. By signing with a Roman pseudonym, this author merely punctuated his article with a Roman patriotic reference that would have been identifiable by the reading audience and would have carried a weighted meaning. This weighted meaning was his interpretation of Georgia's sovereignty as a separate, smaller republic. By imposing the Creek Treaty upon the people of Georgia, "Metellus" argued that the Federal Government was acting contrary to a historical understanding of the past. Fear of tyranny over Georgia was the assumed result from this unconstitutionally perceived treaty.

Other authors writing on the subject of the Creek Treaty wrote with a similar argument in mind concerning state's rights, but with greater use of classical references

than “Metellus.” One such author, “Americanus,” wrote for the *Charleston City Gazette* on September 29, 1790 and was reprinted in the *Augusta Chronicle* on November 11, 1790. “Americanus” also argued in favor of upholding state’s rights and used a Latin form of “American.” The title of the article, for example, was “Nullius addictus jurare in verba magistri,” which translates to “Devoted to vow obedience to the words of no magistrate.”¹³⁵ This quotation is attributed to the Roman author Horace who lived in the first century B.C.¹³⁶ Horace’s *Satires* and *Epistles* were common reading material among the educated class seeking to enter college. A Horatian satire is a distinctive style of writing from other satiric writing where there is a sense of ironic amusement toward human folly.¹³⁷ “Americanus” set the tone of his article as one of reflection by using a Horatian quote, which would have most likely been recognizable to more educated audience members. Although “Americanus” used stronger language within his article to state his argument, the use of Horace as the overarching tone gave the sense of calm and intelligent reflection, an almost stoic demeanor, which many founders admired in the Romans.

The Latin title taken from Horace declaring “Americanus” would vow obedience to no magistrate was a threatening statement to use as the overarching title of his article.

The author also used this phrase to call attention to his understanding of ancient history

¹³⁵ Americanus, *The Augusta Chronicle*, (Augusta, Georgia: November 11, 1790).

¹³⁶ Hans Peter Syndikus "Horace" *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*. Ed. Simon Hornblower and Anthony Spawforth. Oxford University Press 2003. *Oxford Reference Online*. Oxford University Press. Marymount University. 28 May 2008 <<http://www.oxfordreference.com.proxy.mu.wrlc.org/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t111.e3150>>

¹³⁷ "Horatian" *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*. Chris Baldick. Oxford University Press, 2008. *Oxford Reference Online*. Oxford University Press. Marymount University. 3 June 2008 <<http://www.oxfordreference.com.proxy.mu.wrlc.org/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t56.e555>>

and literature. By doing this, he not only let his audience know of his education, but also his ability to connect current events with the past. “Americanus” essentially declared in the title of his article that the actions of the Federal Government ran contrary to the ancient conception of a republican form of government. What this indicated to his audience was that “Americanus” was using ancient history to support his argument. In applying it to the situation at hand, “Americanus” felt it his duty to denounce Congress and perhaps he even meant he could not vow obedience to George Washington himself. Since “Americanus” held that the treaty was null and void due to Georgia’s authority over the will of the Federal Government, the Congress and the President’s authority too was null and void should they impose unconstitutional laws on the states. “Americanus” clearly used this classical title because he expected his audience to possess the ability to read Latin as well as make the same connection to ancient history as he had done.

“Americanus” further qualified his claim toward the Federal Government as he stated, “Sic volo, sic jubeo, fiat pro ratione voluntas,” is the true language of despotism; and when a people suffer this to be the only rule of their civil government, all freedom is at an end and they are but fit for the yoke.”¹³⁸ Once again, “Americanus” provided no translation for his argument, but expected that his audience had an understanding of Latin. This phrase was taken from Juvenal’s *Satires* and translates to “Thus I will, thus I command, let my pleasure be done on behalf of reason.”¹³⁹ Juvenalian satire is associated with fierce denunciation of human vice, which “Americanus” obviously

¹³⁸ Americanus, *The Augusta Chronicle*.

¹³⁹ Juvenal, *Satires*, VI, 223.

pointedly chose to argue against the actions of Congress.¹⁴⁰ “Americanus” stated that if people submit to the whim of the Federal Government, they would become slaves to that government. Without honoring previous laws established prior to the Creek Treaty, “Americanus” stated that state’s rights will fall prey to such despotism.

This particular phrase had been used on other occasions to express this same sentiment. In one such instance, James Otis quoted this phrase in *Rights of the British Colonies* (1764), which addressed The Revenue Act of 1764. stated: “*Sic volo, sic jubeo, stet pro ratione voluntas* belongs not of right to any mortal man.”¹⁴¹ In this instance as well, James Otis did not offer a translation of this phrase. This indicates that this phrase was probably a widely known one because of its powerful meaning. Such a phrase may not have needed a translation for a broad audience to understand the meaning and how it punctuated the author’s overarching argument.

Still other authors who wrote on the subject of the Creek Treaty used Latin phrases to make their arguments. “A Sentinel” wrote his denunciation of the Creek Treaty for the October 30, 1790 issue of *The Augusta Chronicle*. “Sentinel” wrote directly “To the Citizens of Georgia” and stated in connection to the attacks sustained by settlers in the West:

Depressed, exhausted, and almost ruined, by repeated hostile attacks and depredations, with the necessary expences for defence, you applied to Congress for relief; requesting only the performance of some of those solemn engagements,

¹⁴⁰ “Juvenalian” *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*. Chris Baldick. Oxford University Press, 2008. *Oxford Reference Online*. Oxford University Press. Marymount University. 3 June 2008 <<http://www.oxfordreference.com.proxy.mu.wrlc.org/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t56.e625>>

¹⁴¹ James Otis “Rights of the British Colonies,” *Annals of American History*. <<http://america.eb.com/america/print?articleId=385254>> [Accessed May 27, 2008].

which had induced you so early to become a member of the Union. You asked, only what you had a right to demand, to repel an actual hostile invasion, and to secure to Georgia the quiet possession of her rightful and lawful territory.¹⁴²

“Sentinel” also declared that the “late treaty with the Creek nation is in fact a nullity, because it is a flagrant violation of the Federal Constitution.” “Sentinel” fulfilled his duties as a Sentinel of the public discourse in observing perceived injustices that were inflicted upon the state of Georgia. The interests of Georgia came first even when a most respected leader of the Union was found to be responsible for negotiating the treaty. “Sentinel” grieved “But I forbear – because it has unfortunately received the sanction of a name I revere; but may we not on such an occasion be permitted to say, without the imputation of impiety or ingratitude, ‘*Nemo mortalium omnibus horis sapit.*’” The author is most likely referring to George Washington as this Latin phrase translates “no man is wise at all times.” With this conclusion, “Sentinel” placed the interests and authority of Georgia above that of the Congress and even the beloved Father of the Country. This particular Latin phrase was written by Pliny the Elder in his *Natural History*, a work that would have been familiar to “Sentinel’s” contemporaries. No translation was given for this phrase because it was expected for perspective readers to understand the meaning.

It cannot be known whether authors such as “Sentinel” or “Americanus” intended to exclude a portion of the public by using Latin phrases to support their arguments. It does indicate that the authors thought their audience would have some basic knowledge of the classics in order to understand the argument. Some articles lack classical references except for the choice in pseudonym. In the case of “Americanus” and

¹⁴² A Sentinel, *The Augusta Chronicle* (Augusta, Georgia: October 30, 1790).

“Sentinel,” their use of Latin quotations were intended to qualify their arguments by using ancient texts as authoritative evidence. Knowledge of the classics would have been readily recognized by their audience and consideration would have been paid not only to the author’s argument, but also the implications their ancient evidence had in connection with the legality of the Creek Treaty. These authors associated ancient texts as a legitimizing force to their arguments and hence used them intentionally. Authors who merely used classical pseudonyms did not necessarily have less of an understanding of the classics. These authors punctuated their articles with a classical reference whose meaning was intended to be recognized and understood by the audience. In order to understand the full meaning behind these articles, audience members were expected to possess a basic understanding of the Roman classics and the Latin language.

DEFENDING AND PROTECTING SLAVERY THROUGH THE CLASSICAL IDIOM

Debates over slavery both inside and outside the walls of Congress were contentious despite the fact it is often thought that this subject did not become so until the emergence of the abolition movement in the 1830s. Although the First Federal Congress made no new decisions concerning slavery, the origins of sectional conflict can be glimpsed in the early debates over slavery. When the First Federal Congress was called to order, slavery was not an issue the members of Congress thought they would be debating. This was because during the Constitution Convention, the subject had been addressed on a number of levels and it was thought that further discussion had been

postponed for a later date. The Federal Constitution stated that “The Migration or Importation of such Persons as any of the States now existing shall think proper to admit, shall not be prohibited by the Congress prior to the Year one thousand eight hundred and eight.”¹⁴³ Although this put off the abolition of the slave trade till 1808, beginning in February of 1790 both members of Congress and the public reacted when several groups of Quakers presented Congress with petitions seeking Congressional action on slavery.

One petition, signed by Quakers from Virginia, Maryland, Delaware, New Jersey, New York, and western New England, called for the regulation of the slave trade. The second petition was brought forth by the Pennsylvania Society for the Abolition of Slavery and was signed by its president, Benjamin Franklin. This petition asked Congress to liberate all slaves and to “devise means for removing this inconsistency from the Character of the American People” and to “promote Mercy and Justice towards this distressed Race.”¹⁴⁴ Given Franklin’s public notoriety, Congress could not ignore these petitions; attention had to be paid. James Madison and others debated that the Constitution had specified that slavery was protected from any Congressional limitation for twenty years. Slavery, therefore, was perceived as a state issue. Yet the issue was not an undisputed fact and perceptions on slavery and slaves were a long debated subject. As is reflected in the public opinion articles that emerged in the newspapers at this time, the presentation of these petitions opened the flood gates for debating the many aspects of morality and practicality of slavery in a republican government.

¹⁴³ United States Constitution, Article I Section 9.

¹⁴⁴ Bickford 68.

At first glance, the general mood of public opinion authors concerning the Quaker petitions was one of contempt given the more pressing issue of forming a funding system and the proposed assumption of the state debts. In the midst of establishing numerous precedents under the new Constitution, rehashing what had already been decided concerning slavery and knowing that the subject could not be resolved until 1808 led many public opinion authors to categorize the slavery issue as a waste of time. Members of Congress such as Pierce Butler of South Carolina, upon hearing the petitions, felt “the whole business was designed to overturn the Constitution.”¹⁴⁵ When talk of disunion and tensions between northern and southern states emerged, the Congress’s action on important pressing issues slowed noticeably.

Significantly, the classical idiom also emerged in public opinion articles concerning slavery. This display of knowledge demonstrated the author’s ability to draw connections between ancient sources and current events in putting forth what was thought to be the truest form of a republic. This could be accomplished by authors attempting to make opposing arguments. This portion of the chapter will examine how authors used the classical idiom to support opposing arguments on the subject of slavery. For example, one antislavery author who used a classical pseudonym pointed out that slavery was an unjust institution used by the ancient Greeks and Romans. In other instances, public opinion authors wrote in outrage over any amount of time spent on the Quaker petitions given the Constitution’s explicit wording concerning slavery. In many cases the

¹⁴⁵ William Maclay, *Documentary history of the First Federal Congress 1789-1791: The Diary of William Maclay and Other Notes on Senate Debates, Volume IX*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988) pp. 202.

use of the classics was the defining element the author used to legitimately convey a point. Participation in the public discourse through the classics meant one could not only present themselves as an active individual in the public discourse, but it also provided the author with the tools to make an opposing argument if it was grounded in ancient references.

Debates over slavery emerged in America through the promotion of equal rights to all as stated by the Declaration of Independence.¹⁴⁶ Americans from the pro-slavery and anti-slavery camps looked to the classics for evidence to support their own side of the debate. Both sides of the debate found the evidence they were looking for. Plato, Aristotle, Juvenal, Pliny, and Virgil to just name a few were probed for evidence to support and deny the exclusion of black slaves from the right to equality. Texts could be used by both sides of the debate due to the absence of an emphasis on diversity among human groups. Historian David S. Wiesen stated in his examination of this phenomenon that “we must keep in mind an important difference between ancient and modern discussions of the topic: the modern concept of race, in the technical sense of that term, did not exist in antiquity.”¹⁴⁷ Egalitarianism and anti-egalitarianism was at the core of this debate and would only continue to develop into a more explosive issue with time.

A large number of the articles that mentioned slavery do so only to point out Congress’ neglect of other pressing issues. Public opinion authors using the classical idiom who stated this point primarily did so by raising alarms against a Congress as a

¹⁴⁶ David S. Wiesen, *The Contribution of Antiquity to American Racial Thought in Classical Traditions in Early America*, ed. John William Eadie, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1976) pp. 192.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

potential tyrannical threat. A sample of these articles, printed in Boston, Hartford, and New York, demonstrates these common sentiments. The popular pseudonyms “Junius” and “Brutus” were most frequently used in these articles. The authors intended to denounce Congress as a potential body of self-interested tyrants who were at odds with the public good. The name “Junius” can either refer to the Roman patriot Lucius Junius Brutus, the man responsible for the overthrow of the tyrannical Roman kingship and for founding the Roman republic, or to the poet Decimus Junius Juvenalis (more commonly referred to as Juvenal). Juvenal’s poetic style is classified as critical and fierce rhetoric usually toward human vice in Rome during his time. Referencing Juvenal would also be appropriate in conveying to the public discourse the displeasure the author felt towards Congress’ choice in scheduled debates as Juvenal employed himself in a similar pursuit through writing.

A Juvenalian denunciation was that of neglect toward the public interests. A “Junius” from Boston declared “While the fate of Africans are deciding, it ought to be remembered, that the Situation of our own Citizens is critically circumstanced...Why do they not employ more hours in the day; and spend more of their Constituents time in the public business. Six dollars per day is no small sum, and it out NOT to be wages for three or four hours duty.”¹⁴⁸ This “Junius” presented himself as an outside observer who denounced the actions of Congress. “Junius” suggested that it was the public who would decide how to deal with ineffectiveness of Congress. This “Junius,” like Juvenal, authored a satire on the vices of the First Federal Congress.

¹⁴⁸ Junius, *Boston Gazette*, April 12, 1790.

Another author who signed himself as “Junius” wrote:

“If their [Congress] debates are to be considered as the criterion to determine the importance of the business, we cannot conceive the necessity of their lengthy session, or why the public revenue has been so greatly exhausted to pay the Members. The memorial of the Quakers, and the Residence of Congress, it is supposed have taken up the largest proportion of their time. Whether these concerns were so interesting to the States ... a question, on which their constituents, it is presumed will judge.”¹⁴⁹

This particular “Junius” wrote as an outsider to the situation by indicating himself to be separate from Congress’ larger body of constituents. By not naming himself as a champion of the public good, it seems likely that this “Junius” chose the pseudonym in reference to Juvenal and the ancient poet’s fierce style of writing. By doing this, “Junius” wrote in an informative style rather than a threatening one. This style of expressing his argument reached out to all groups of people participating in the public discourse. “Junius” did not intend to discriminate any one group of people, but to instruct those who were privy to the information he discussed in his article, but also those who may have not been consistently following the newspapers. The fierce language is engaging and would have stirred any participant in the public discourse to take a side in the matter. Given the inclusive approach of “Junius” the only group of people who would have been put off by his article would have been members of Congress who felt the issue of slavery was an important addition to the Congressional agenda.

“Junius” did not exclude these men from his audience. However he did imply in constituents needed only to elect other representatives who might better fulfill their interests. “Junius” article could be viewed as a warning to those members of Congress

¹⁴⁹Junius, *Boston Gazette*, April 12, 1790.

who chose not to do the will of their constituents in place of their own self-interest. Through the classical idiom, “Junius” labeled this self-interest as a vice that would have been perceived in the days of the Roman republic as detrimental to the public virtue.

Another author made an obvious reference to the Roman patriot, Brutus, and expressed similar disdain for Congress’ lack of action in public affairs. “Brutus,” who wrote for the *Connecticut Courant*, endeavored to “examin the conduct of the men who compose Congress, and see whether they have made the public good the great and leading object of their deliberations.”¹⁵⁰ Initially finding the members of Congress to be “eloquent men boldly come forward, with the manliness of Roman Senators,” by the close of the first session, these same members had allowed such questions as the Quakers’ memorial on slavery to monopolize their time; they were “rendered ridiculous by passion.” “Brutus” described the Quakers’ timing as the worst in that it contributed to Congress’ lack of efficiency and declared that Congress deserved censure “for they knew, that, by the Constitution, nothing of consequence could be done in favor of the memorial.” “Brutus” addressed his article “To the Public” and in doing so declared such issues as the Quakers’ memorial on slavery to be a triviality.

All three of these authors appealed to the public to draw attention to Congress. They are not so much interested in the issue of slavery, but rather consider it to be a moot point on which to debate at that time. The authors denounced Congress as an ineffective body based on their unwillingness to devote the majority of their attentions toward public interest. Given this common theme, these authors played to their audience. They

¹⁵⁰ Brutus, *Connecticut Courant*, April 26, 1790.

assumed other readers would recognize that Congress's inaction undermined effective republican government. This common theme further suggests that the classical idiom was a commonly understood style of writing in the public discourse and as such most likely facilitated a widespread opportunity for participation.

One author went so far as to compare the question of slavery in the First Congress to certain attempts to rid Greek and Latin from the basic curricula in schools. At the very least, this author perceived the importance of the classics in the public sphere to be of popular importance. The anonymous author from Philadelphia stated that "A celebrated reformation-monger (I am told) is again coming forward in a few weeks with a new set of arguments, tending to prevent the Greek and Latin languages being taught in future, as parts of a liberal education – This, and negro emancipation seem to be the *mania* of the present hour."¹⁵¹ This author further declared that "if the negroes are liberated, many families that now live in respectable affluence must be reduced to the most abject poverty – and no less certainly if the Greek and Latin languages are banished from our schools, many worthy professors must starve."

This is a striking comparison. The author stated that the study of Latin is what made him a contributing citizen in the United States and should it be declared "out of fashion, I shall be like a man without nerves, a mere perambulating automaton, a useless member of the United States." The author compared the petition before Congress which called for the abolition of slavery to any attempt to rid the American education system of the classics. Clearly this author was a member of the pro-slavery camp and viewed the

¹⁵¹ Extract of a letter from Philadelphia, Reprint from *New York Daily Advertiser*, March 25, 1790.

institution of slavery as intrinsic to daily life as was the study of classics. To rid the education system of the classics, in the view of the author, would prove equally disastrous to the public sphere. This author's enthusiasm for the classics was meant to play off their widespread use and to stir the public discourse to awareness that there were those who desired to rid the public discourse of one of its primary influences. What this says of the public sphere is that there were those who did not view the classics as intrinsic to the public discourse as there were those who desired to see the abolition of slavery. It is also possible that the author was appealing to those who considered supporting the abolition of slavery by putting it on the same level as those who desired the omission of the classics in schools. Similarly, the author could have been appealing to an audience to support his views by showing how intrinsic the classics and slavery were to the author's perceived priorities of an affluent and successful society.

Many public opinion authors directly quoted ancient texts to qualify their arguments against slavery. One author writing under the pseudonym "Rusticus," pointed out the tendency of those in favor of the institution of slavery to point out how Greek and Roman societies employed the same institution. "Rusticus" asked his audience "Who can observe without a smile of contempt, that antiquity is ransacked for precedents to justify the practice of enslaving our fellow creatures. The example of the antient Egyptians, Greeks and Romans, together with the present practice of Eastern nations are produced as authorities."¹⁵² The author acknowledged the ancients' employment of slavery denounced his contemporaries for using ancient sources to qualify their arguments.

¹⁵² Rusticus, *New York Daily Advertiser*, March 23, 1790

In a second article, “Rusticus” even attempted to exonerate the ancients for their employment of slavery by suggesting that “it is at least certain, that they never, like the moderns, dared to advance arguments in opposition to the sovereign dictates of nature and humanity.”¹⁵³ He argued that it was the warrior-like aspect to the ancient Greek and Roman societies that slavery became a common institution by means of their method of conquering and plundering. “Rusticus” went on to state that “the enslaving of the poor negroes was the result of calm reflection, after the injustice of the practice had been clearly demonstrated... and though slavery was countenanced by the ancients, since we can prove its injustice beyond contradiction, their example can argue nothing in our favor.” In this instance, according to this author, the ancients were not a legitimate source to cite in support of the institution of slavery.

“Rusticus” concluded his series of articles by declaring “I have no acquaintance with the Quakers, nor ever received the least injury from a planter. But I thought myself under an indispensable obligation to give my ideas on the impossibility of defending slavery by any arguments however plausible, and ingenious.” The author directly addressed the classical idiom and confronted other participants in the public discourse who used the classics to qualify their arguments and stated that this was not a legitimate argument. Therefore this particular author held that the classical idiom in the public discourse could exist apart from any reference to a classical source. By denouncing the legitimacy of using ancient history in the case of slavery, it would seem that the entire cause for the classics in the public discourse would not stand. “Rusticus” proved that

¹⁵³ Rusticus, *New York Daily Advertiser*, March 25, 1790.

assumption wrong. The value of the classics as an example remained provided that the long scope of history was considered. The present must take responsibility for their ability to recognize the rights of man as given by nature.

“Rusticus” in Latin means peasant or farmer. The author was counting himself as one of the ideal citizens in a republic, such as Cincinnatus: a farmer who periodically participated in government when needed the most, but harbored no characteristic traits of an ambitious person. “Rusticus” identified himself to his audience as someone of the middling class, perhaps a farmer, but obviously not a slave holder. By identifying himself as a potential farmer, “Rusticus” presented himself as someone who recognized the injustice of slavery and was capable of surviving outside of the institution. By referencing the model of republican farmer in his article, “Rusticus” punctuated his argument against slavery in identifying himself as someone who survived and was possibly even successful without slavery.

A second “Rusticus” did not see the use of the classical idiom in the same light as the antislavery “Rusticus” previously discussed. Writing for the *Gazette of the United States* in February of 1790, this “Rusticus” stated,

“Altho I fully applaud, and join in the wish to see slavery abolitshed, I must however confess, that what I have collected, on the means for obtaining the end, out of those channels has given me no satisfaction. . . . Slavery is not only contrary to the feelings of freemen, but to the principles of a free government; it not only viciates it, but it must also be considered, that in America the evil is a deep-rooted and daily increasing one; that to effect a cure, palliatives are dangerous, and no more applicable to it, than they are in the mortification of gangrenated bodies; that to heal this political and moral evil, and to do strict justice on all sides, is a difficult talk.”¹⁵⁴

¹⁵⁴ Rusticus, *Gazette of the United States*, (Boston: February 20, 1790).

This swooping statement was qualified with support from the ancient Roman author, Pliny the Elder. Pliny's *Natural History* is the only surviving complete work by this Roman author. "Rusticus" referenced this work at length as one of his primary sources for supporting his overarching argument. The author stated that "Plinius gives a description of men, living in the interior parts of Africa; they have ears standing upwards, like horses' ears, their mouth is a long shaped wolfs muzzle, and they have nails like a bear, standing stiff at the ends of their fingers. This kind of men carried on bloody wars against the Ethiopians, in their wars with the Egytians, and Romans."¹⁵⁵

The author concluded with "From this perusal, little doubt can remain that all those quoted distinctions are explanatory proofs of the immutable order of the universe, instituted by the infinite wisdom of the Almighty: Can human law change the system?" Thus, "Rusticus" used an ancient source as a foundation for his long series of articles written on the subject of pro-slavery. The author's tendency to elaborate upon the content of Pliny's work to such detail indicates that the author identified Pliny's work as a legitimate source that would resonate with his reader's knowledge on the subject of slavery. "Rusticus" could have been writing his article not only to justify slavery, but also to persuade audience members to the pro-slavery side of the debate. This further demonstrates how the classics were considered to be persuasive evidence in the arguments of public opinion authors at this time. "Rusticus," however, soon discovered another series of articles printed alongside his own in the issues to follow. The classical idiom in both cases proved to be the foundation for the debate.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

Another author signed with the pseudonym “Africanus” and claimed to be a former slave. Merely by signing his identity in the style of the classical idiom, “Africanus” has declared himself a capable participant of the public discourse via his knowledge of the classics. The author most likely used this name to label himself as one who was a former slave and is not referencing the famous Roman hero Scipio Africanus (236-183 B.C.).¹⁵⁶ The primary point of this series of public opinion articles was to declare himself capable of contributing to a free society and therefore negating “Rusticus’s” argument that Africans were subhuman.

“Africanus” began his first article by first declaring his legitimacy to the public discourse via his own credentials. “Africanus” explained that “I am a sheep-hairy negro, the son of an African man and woman; by a train of fortunate events I was left free, when very young, and by the interposition of the most generous of mankind, I have received a common English school education.”¹⁵⁷ “Africanus” demonstrated the extent of his education by responding to “Rusticus’s” arguments and refutes each point at length while concluding his first article with “the American and the African are one species – The law of nature declares it – And I, a sheep-hairy African negro, being a free and in some degree enlightened, feel myself equal to the duties of a spirited, noble, and generous

¹⁵⁶ John Briscoe "Cornelius Scipio Africanus (the elder), Publius" *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*. Ed. Simon Hornblower and Anthony Spawforth. Oxford University Press 2003. *Oxford Reference Online*. Oxford University Press. Marymount University. 28 June 2008 <<http://www.oxfordreference.com.proxy.mu.wrlc.org/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t111.e1867>>

¹⁵⁷ Africanus, *Gazette of the United States*, (Boston: March 3, 1790).

American freeman.”¹⁵⁸ “Africanus” choice of words in saying he was “in some degree enlightened” were particularly interesting in his conclusion.

Although “Africanus” was willing to challenge “Rusticus,” the author still held back from completely stating this point without caveat. It is possible that “Africanus” perceived himself to already taking a bold stance in his overall argument, but did not want to completely lose his reading audience by suggesting he was as enlightened as his white counterparts. In this way, the reading audience might agree that slaves were human and that slavery was wrong based on the laws of nature. But they did not have to accept the argument that they were also capable of becoming a completely enlightened race of beings. This discrepancy emerged again in “Africanus’s” second article’s conclusion where he stated in reference to “Rusticus’s” knowledge of history and philosophy that “These are the sentiments which the pen of a philosopher is labouring to encourage. - If pride must be the consequence of human wisdom, may I still remain in simplicity of heart, a plain, unphilosophic, black, sheep hairy, free citizen of America.”¹⁵⁹ “Africanus” himself kept slaves and former slaves one step lower to the white body of the public discourse. This could also be an appeal to the almost certainly a generally white audience.

It cannot be known whether or not “Africanus” was indeed a former slave. What is interesting about these articles is that they were published in a major newspaper alongside another series of articles written probably written by a white man. The editor recognized that there were active members of the public discourse from both camps of

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

thought and felt it important enough to permit an article supposedly written by a former slave to be printed. Given that “Africanus” used the classical idiom in his signature and his choice to reveal himself as a former slave, by entering the public discourse through the accepted style of expression he could lend legitimacy to his assertions and potentially persuade audience members to join the antislavery ranks. No clear resolution to the question of egalitarianism concerning slavery could be reached through the use of the classical idiom. Both sides of the debate identified the classics as a legitimate resource for how government should operate. However, since slavery based on race did not exist in the way that it did in America during ancient times, classical texts were ultimately silent on the issue.

It may be surprising to find the use of the classical idiom in connection with slavery and Indian treaties in the American public discourse. The classical idiom played such a vital role in the language of public opinion articles however, the employment of this tool would not have been surprising to people during the First Federal Congress. Through the classics, authors expressed outrage over Congress’s actions concerning Treaties that would affect state’s rights as well as slavery’s place in the newly formed United States.

CONCLUSION

In the United States, authors used the established language of the public discourse, which Michael Warner described as a republican language, and used the classical idiom as means to legitimate one's argument concerning political affairs. In this way, regardless of background, if an author presented their argument in the same language using allusions to the classics, an author would have been accepted into the public discourse. Reliance on the classics not only proved an author understood the subject at hand, but also continually served as a foundational point for avoiding the development of a tyrannical Federal Government. This was demonstrated through the general reaction among public opinion authors writing on issues concerning the capital removal, public funding, Indian treaties, and slavery. Public opinion authors connected classical history and literature to these issues and based on the widespread use of the classical idiom, this intellectual printed conversation was one that had an open door for anyone desiring to participate in both writing and reading. A degeneration did not occur in the public discourse as Jurgen Habermas argued, but rather an interest in engaging the already established medium of expression was perpetuated by an interest in the classics.

The classics were looked upon by the founders as a means for avoiding tyranny as well as establishing a form of government different from the English monarchy. The classics as a test against tyranny were widely accepted among those participating in the

public discourse as is evident in their overwhelming use in newspapers from all over the United States. Given the importance of the classics in politics during the First Federal Congress, it is essential to consider how they were important and how they were used in arguments concerning the issues of the day.

Historians such as Bernard Bailyn and Clinton Rossiter argued that the influence of the classics was “mere window dressing” for the ideas of the founders and that “Americans would have believed just as vigorously in public morality had Cato and the Grachi never lived.”¹⁶⁰ To a large extent, this assessment dismisses the examination of the classics as being important to the intellectual motivations of the early republic. However, the widespread use of the classics in public opinion articles conflicts with this assessment. It shows that an understanding of the classics and what Americans in the early republic thought about them is important to gathering a full understanding for their motivations behind support for the Constitution and the First Federal Congress. Public opinion authors did vigorously convey a belief in public morality, but they did so by referencing Cato and not some other author.

The precedents established during the First Federal Congress and the public’s support for them were in some ways dictated by what the ancients thought about republics. To separate an understanding of the classics from the ideas that were prevalent during the First Federal Congress is to not fully understand the founders’ and the public’s motivations. The mere presence of a classical idiom in public opinion articles should give pause to consideration for why this influence was held above others. The classics

¹⁶⁰ Richard 2.

were not “mere window dressing” in that the ideas the public inferred from the classics set the tone for public reaction to congressional decisions. Studying the importance of the classics in America is important because people of that time viewed them as important.

Men such as Benjamin Rush and Hugh Williamson of North Carolina were not as interested in the perpetuation of a classical education. Rush wrote many letters to John Adams and one subject they wrote tirelessly on were their views concerning a classical education. Rush went so far as to state that “Were every Greek and Latin book (the New Testament excepted) consumed in a bonfire, the world would be the wiser and better for it.”¹⁶¹ Hugh Williamson wrote a letter to Senator William Samuel Johnson in 1789 and printed it in the *New York Daily Advertiser* stating that to study so much Latin and Greek was a “heavy tax on life.”¹⁶² However, Williamson provided evidence for his argument in quoting the Greek philosopher Hippocrates that “life is too short.” Despite his argument that American schools and their reliance on the teaching of classical languages should be reformed, Williamson still turned to the classics for support in making his argument. This is evidence of the importance of the classics at that time, but also perhaps foreshadowed the eventual decline of the classics in America.

It is possible that after the First Federal Congress successfully completed its three sessions, the public’s weariness of the new Federal Government and the Constitution were relieved and led to a decrease in reliance on the classics in discussing politics. By

¹⁶¹ John Schutz and Douglass Adair, *The Spur of Fame: Dialogues of John Adams and Benjamin Rush, 1805-1813*, (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund Inc., 1966) pp 180.

¹⁶² Hugh Williamson, *New York Daily Advertiser*, October 29, 1789.

the nineteenth century, the classics were still important to education, art, literature, and architecture in America, but to a lesser degree than they were in the 1780s and 1790s. As the Jacksonian era dawned, interest in the Roman republic declined in favor of Greece and democracy and as the nineteenth century drew to a close, so did the importance of the classics over education and the American public.¹⁶³

As a result of this decline, the classics and the influence of Rome were particularly singular to the early republic and the First Federal Congress. In considering why the classics were so important to the founders and to the American republic, a better understanding for how these people viewed the new form of government emerged and better defined the motivations behind the precedents that were established during the First Federal Congress. Through the widespread use of the classical idiom, the “Vox Populi” that materialized in newspapers during the First Federal Congress revealed the public’s views on the early American republic.

¹⁶³ Caroline Winterer, *Culture of Classicism: Ancient Greece and Rome in American Intellectual Life, 1780-1910*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002) pp 1-9 and 44-76.

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CURRICULUM VITAE

Maureen E. Connors was born August 7, 1982 and raised in Billings, Montana. She graduated from Billings Senior High School in 2001 and received two Bachelor of Arts degrees from the University of Montana at Missoula in History and Classics. Deciding to pursue American history while reluctantly leaving the dream of someday becoming a classicist behind, she matriculated to George Mason University in 2006 to pursue a Master of Arts degree. Her first semester at George Mason University provided her with the opportunity to intern with the First Federal Congress Project located at The George Washington University in D.C. While assisting with the proofreading process for their Documentary History of the First Federal Congress 1789-1791, she was struck by the seemingly common use of classical rhetoric in public opinion newspaper articles. Equipped with her interest in the classics, she happily began to pursue a thesis topic which would couple her academic passions in both classics and American history. Maureen E. Connors received her Master of Arts in History from George Mason University in Summer 2008. She will begin her pursuit for a PhD in American History at George Mason University in Fall 2008.