

Module 03: A Revolution for Whom?

Evidence 17: A Pennsylvania Watchman, June 10, 1776

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Introduction

It is unclear exactly what inspired the piece below, but most likely the debate raging in Pennsylvania over property requirements for voting and office-holding in the state's new constitution provided incentive to put pen to paper. The article appeared in the *Pennsylvania Packet* newspaper and seems to have been written in response to a suggestion that it was improper to include common people — men with little or no property — in political discussions and decision-making.

Questions to Consider

- Does the author seem to support or oppose the inclusion of common people in public life?
- What does the author point out about "uncommon people"?
- The author identifies two kinds of vulgarity. Which did the author consider the worse of the two?

Document

Here I cannot help making a digression from my subject. It was a custom among the Jews on certain occasions, to acknowledge the origin of their families as an antidote to pride. "A Syrian ready to perish was my father," was the confession with which they approached the temple. Suppose the same acknowledgement was demanded from some of our UNCOMMON People. I believe the answer should be, a poor tradesman, a day-labourer, or a vagrant, "ready to perish was my father."--Talk not, ye pretenders to rank and gentility, of your elevated stations.--They are derived from those very people whom you treat with so much contempt. Talk not of their *vulgar* countenances and behaviour. Their vulgarity is seated only in their MANNERS. It occupies a higher place among yourselves. It is seated in your MINDS. This the profane, obscene, and trifling conversation so peculiar to high life abundantly witnesses. Had you concurred in the present virtuous and necessary measure of instituting a new government, you would have probably continued to occupy your posts and offices, with that additional

lustre which they would have received from being the unbiassed gifts of freemen, but you have now forfeited the confidence of the people, by despising their authority, and you have furnished them with a suspicion that in taking up arms you yielded only to the violence of the times, or that you meant to fight for your offices, and not for your country.

Source:

Pennsylvania Packet, June 10, 1776. Downloaded from *The Founders' Constitution*, vol. 1, ch. 15, doc. 15. <http://press-pubs.uchicago.edu/founders/documents/v1ch15s15.html>.