

Creed of a Rioter

Anonymous (fall 1776?).

As you read...

The growing violence against people who opposed the war against Britain — or were suspected of opposing it — worried even many men who supported independence. This document was written by one such man, anonymously, probably in the fall of 1776.

- What sort of man do you suppose wrote this? Rich or poor? What sort of job might he have had?
- Can you tell whether he supported the Revolution?
- What kind of people is he making fun of? How do you imagine they might have been behaving? Does he sound as though he is being fair to them?
- Do you imagine he would have supported the Regulators?
- What sort of government might he have wanted North Carolina to have? Would he have supported the Orange County proposals for a constitution?

1. I am a sworn enemy to all gentlemen. I believe none in that station¹ of life can possibly possess either honor or virtue².
2. I believe the best way to have a good understanding, is never to cultivate the mental powers, and that the most ignorant in appearance, are in fact the most knowing.
3. I impute to gentlemen all our present difficulties. If they had not been so cunning as to foresee distant evils, we should never have dreamt of them. We should then have been probably happy slaves, and the Parliament, finding no opposition from us, would, I doubt not, have treated us with no more rigor than was absolutely convenient for their purposes.
4. I think the supreme felicity of life is to eat and drink, and as I cannot do that in my present situation quite as well as I used to do, I despise all the pretences of virtue which are urged to make me easy under it.
5. Let every man take care of himself is my maxim. The public interest is too troublesome to attend to. What care I who the devil is miserable, if I am not so?
6. I believe I have a right to take another man's property, if it will be useful to me. I surely am not to suffer, for fear of being called a robber. I think I have a right, if I can, to shift distresses from my own shoulders, and put them on those of my neighbors.

7. I am none of those over-wise and irreligious men, who are always thinking of the future. I devoutly obey that saying in Scripture, — “Let us eat and drink, — for tomorrow we die.”
8. As I have the utmost confidence that all my own opinions are right, I despise every man who differs from me. I am sure he must be a tory³.
9. I think a man more liable to be a tory, who has hitherto been most earnest in the cause, and sacrificed great interests to it; because I have no opinion of any man’s acting from a principle of virtue alone, and therefore I can consider such a one in no other light than as a madman, who certainly will be as glad to lose his head as he has already been solicitous to forfeit his fortune.
10. I think that man alone a whig⁴, who has sagacity enough to mind his own interest, resolution enough to plunder his neighbors, who views the storm coolly at a distance, and discovers his principles by getting honesty drunk and abusing gentlemen.

Lastly, I am of opinion that our affairs would prosper much better, if gentlemen who read and consider too deeply for us, were totally banished from all public business, and if those who neither read nor think at all (and consequently cannot injure us by the excess of those practices) were intrusted with the management of our present arduous concerns.

All the above I verily and truly believe, and G____d A____y d____n all those who differ from me.

A RIOTER.

11. I believe it honorable and proper to persecute poor distressed individuals, when we have them in our power, provided we want courage to prove, in any other manner, the alacrity of our zeal against those we suppose enemies of our country.

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Notes

1. Condition or class.
2. In the eighteenth century English and Americans used *virtue* in a very masculine sense, to refer to the virtues of a responsible citizen of a republic. Some key virtues were *industry* (meaning hard work — industriousness — not factories) and *frugality*, a willingness to make do with little and not indulge in unnecessary luxuries. These ideas went back to ancient Rome. Many American leaders in the 1770s wanted to create a republic along the lines of the ancient Roman Republic, which had stayed strong, independent, and (more or less) democratic for hundreds of years.
3. *Tory* was the name given to a British conservative. During the American Revolution it referred to someone who remained loyal to the crown and opposed the resistance and independence.

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