

Document #1

Catharine Macaulay. *Observations on a Pamphlet, Entitled, Thoughts on the Cause of the Present Discontents*. London, 1770. Pages 5 and 19–20.

This was written by Englishwoman Catharine Macaulay in response to a pamphlet written by British statesman Edmund Burke. Macaulay was England's first female historian and her work inspired Mary Wollstonecraft to describe her as "a woman of the greatest ability, undoubtedly, that this country has ever produced."

It is an undertaking of the highest difficulty as well as delicacy to point out the corruptions or mistakings of men, whose disappointed ambition has led them to offer their services to an alarmed and iraged populace, and whose abilities of character and situation promise a successful exertion in the cause of opposition. In important parts of duty, every consequence which relates to self is to be hazarded; on this consideration, I will ever, notwithstanding the long and malevolent persecution I have endured from the interested part of mankind for a work written on the general principles of honest policy, in all great points of national welfare, express my genuine opinions to my countrymen; and on this consideration alone I undertake the invidious task of making disagreeable observations on the baneful tendency of a pamphlet, entitled, "Thoughts on the Cause of the present Discontents" . . .

A more extended and equal power of election, a very important spring in the machine of political liberty, is entirely disregarded by our author; but he does not forget to flatter his sovereign with the hopes, that were his party once taken into favour, the purse of the people would be as prodigally sacrificed to every lust of capricious grandeur and expence, as it is at present supposed to be, to the venal machinations of state policy. Such infamous flattery, could it have any effect on a wise and just sovereign, was fitter for the royal ear than for public criticism. The public must consider moderation as the most useful virtue of a prince, and that a parliament fulfilling its duty will on no pretence whatsoever suffer more money to be raised on their constituents than is necessary for their defence, and the decent magnificence of their governors . . .

Questions for Document #1:

1. How does Macaulay's tone shift from the beginning of the document to the end?
2. What republican values does she emphasize in her criticism of Burke?
3. What impact might this document have on the American colonists?