

THE  
SPIRIT  
OF  
LAWS.

Translated from the FRENCH of  
M. DE SECONDAT,  
BARON DE MONTESQUIEU.

*With Corrections and Additions communicated by the  
Author.*

VOL. I.



LONDON:  
Printed for J. NOURSE, and P. VAILLANT, in the Strand.  
MDCCL.

1

*Introduction*

THE FIFTY-FIVE men who came together in Philadelphia to construct the Federal Constitution during the long hot summer of 1787 brought an impressive array of learning and experience to their task. But they were by no means prisoners of their own resources. Contrary to the belief of some contemporary Europeans, Philadelphia was not a rude and undeveloped settlement on the peripheries of European civilization. To be sure, unlike London or Paris, it was not an old metropolitan center in which the political, economic, and cultural resources of a well-established nation-state were concentrated and to which the talent and intellect of an ancient, well-organized, and coherent society automatically flowed. But it was a major city, comparable in size and resources to most of the major secondary seaports and urban centers of late-eighteenth-century Europe.

Just down the street from Independence Hall, for instance, the Library Company of Philadelphia, already about a half-century old, contained an impressive collection of books. Except perhaps for the college libraries of Harvard and Yale, this growing and vital institution was almost certainly the largest library in English-speaking America, and it compared favorably with similar institutions in British provincial cities. Indeed, with around 5,000 titles listed in its 1789 published *Catalogue*, it contained almost all the major books in a bountiful intellectual heritage that was then undergoing an exciting period of expansion and redefinition. Those books provided the delegates with direct and easy access to the accumulated wisdom of this heritage.