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## 14. *The Ethics of Public Trust*

To Abner Nash

*Philadelphia Mar. 11, 1783*

Dear Sir

Since I had the pleasure of seeing you at Baltimore I have further reflected on the proposition you were so kind as to make me there of entering into a partnership for the purpose of purchasing some of the escheated territory in your state. I consider it as one of those fair opportunities of bettering my situation which in private prudence I ought to adopt, and which were I to consider myself merely as a private man I should adopt without condition or hesitation. But I find it is the opinion of some gentlemen that the interests of land companies may by possibility be brought on the carpet of negotiation in Europe. Whether I may or may

not participate in those negotiations remains still as incertain as it was in the moment of our conversation on this subject. However I having hitherto while concerned in the direction of public affairs made it a rule to avoid engaging in any of those enterprizes which on becoming the subjects of public deliberation might lay my judgment under bias or oblige me for fear of that to withdraw from the decision altogether, I would wish still to pursue that line of conduct. Indeed I feel the obligation to do it the stronger in proportion to the magnitude of the trust at present confided to me. If my mission to Europe be still pursued I would chuse for my own satisfaction as well as for that of Congress to have not a single interest which in any point of the negotiation might separate me from the great bulk of my countrymen, or expose me to a suspicion of having any object to pursue which might lead me astray from the general. You will therefore be sensible that my situation does not leave me an equal liberty with the other gentlemen of availing myself of this opportunity of repairing some of my losses; on the contrary that it calls for this in addition to the sacrifices I have already made. . . .