

FOUNDING FATHER QUOTES

Most of the following quotations and prose relate directly to the Founding Fathers prior to, during, and after the Revolutionary War. Other quotes portray the beliefs of earlier thinkers whose political philosophy may have directly impacted the Founding Fathers views during this vital period of America's history.

Concord Hymn - Ralph Waldo Emerson

Sung at the completion of the battle monument on April 19, 1836

By the rude bridge that arched the flood,
Their flag to April's breeze unfurled,
Here once the embattled farmers stood,
And fired the shot heard round the world.

The foe long since in silence slept;
Alike the conqueror silent sleeps;
And Time the ruined bridge has swept
Down the dark stream which seaward creeps.

On this green bank, by this soft stream,
We set today a votive stone;
That memory may their deed redeem,
When, like our sires, our sons are gone.

Spirit that made those heroes dare
To die, and leave their children free,
Bid Time and Nature gently spare
The shaft we raise to them and thee.

"His Excellency General Washington has arrived amongst us, universally admired. Joy was visible on every countenance."

- 1775 General Nathaniel Greene

"In the beginning of a change the patriot is a scarce man, and brave, and hated and scorned. When his cause succeeds, the timid join him, for then it costs nothing to be a patriot."

- Mark Twain - Notebook, 1904

"The quality of independence was almost wholly left out of the human race. The scattering exceptions to the rule only emphasize it, light it up, make it glare."

- Mark Twain's Autobiography

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"Every man feels mean of himself for not having been a soldier."

- Samuel Johnson

"I have never let my schooling interfere with my education. "

- Mark Twain (1835-1910)

"When you have to kill a man, it costs nothing to be polite. "

- Sir Winston Churchill (1874-1965)

"Who would be free themselves must strike the blow."

- Lord Bryan

"Glory is fleeting, but obscurity is forever. "

- Napoleon Bonaparte (1769-1821)

"For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting."

-Bible passage selected by Bill Clinton and opened to this passage for his presidential Inaugural swearing in ceremony on January 20, 1993

"War is an ugly thing, but not the ugliest of things. The decayed and degraded state of moral and patriotic feeling, which thinks that nothing is worth war, is much worse. The person who has nothing for which he is willing to fight, nothing which is more important than his own personal safety, is a miserable creature and has no chance of being free unless made and kept so by the exertions of better men than himself."

- John Stuart Mill

It does not require a majority to prevail, but rather an irate, tireless minority keen to set brushfires in people's minds.

---Samuel Adams

Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely.

--Lord Acton

Let us contemplate our forefathers, and posterity, and resolve to maintain the rights bequeathed to us from the former, for the sake of the latter.

---Samuel Adams

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

--Thomas Jefferson

Tyranny, like hell, is not easily conquered; yet we have this consolation with us, that the harder the

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conflict, the more glorious the triumph. What we obtain too cheap, we esteem too lightly: it is dearness only that gives every thing its value.

--Thomas Paine

Tyranny and anarchy are never far asunder.

--Jeremy Bentham

A small leak will sink a great ship.

--Benjamin Franklin

Little strokes fell great oaks.

--Benjamin Franklin

Few men have virtue to withstand the highest bidder.

--George Washington

That which seems the height of absurdity in one generation often becomes the height of wisdom in the next.

--John Stuart Mill

If you can be well without health, you may be happy without virtue.

--Edmund Burke

The only one who is wiser than anyone is everyone.

--Napoleon Bonaparte

In this world nothing is sure but death and taxes.

--Benjamin Franklin

The only fence against the world is a thorough knowledge of it.

--John Locke

We have it in our power to begin the world over again.

--Thomas Paine

Those who expect to reap the blessings of freedom must, like men, undergo the fatigue of supporting it.

--Thomas Paine -The American Crisis, No. 4, 1777

Speculation, speculation, and insatiable thirst for riches seem to have got the better of every other consideration and almost of every order of men.

--George Washington - Commenting on greed of the money men turning the fluctuations of the currency to their own advantage during the Revolutionary War

A democracy is a state in which the poor, gaining the upper hand, kill some and banish others, and then divide the offices among the remaining citizens equally, usually by lot.

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--Plato - The Republic, VIII

A democracy is a government in the hands of men of low birth, no property, and vulgar employments.

--Aristotle - Rhetoric, I

Liberty, when it begins to take root, is a plant of rapid growth.

--George Washington

The constitution, on this hypothesis, is a mere thing of wax in the hands of the Judiciary, which they may twist and shape into any form they please.

--Thomas Jefferson

It behooves every man who values liberty of conscience for himself, to resist invasions of it in the case of others: or their case may, by change of circumstances, become his own.

--Thomas Jefferson

My mind is my own church.

--Thomas Paine

Make revolution a parent of settlement, and not a nursery of future revolutions.

--Edmund Burke

I have not yet begun to fight.

--John Paul Jones

It's a fine fox chase my boys!

--George Washington - Chasing fleeing British soldiers at the Battle of Princeton. The first time in open combat that American troops broke a British line

God grant, that not only the Love of Liberty, but a thorough Knowledge of the Rights of Man, may pervade all the Nations of the Earth, so that a Philosopher may set his foot anywhere on its Surface, and say, "This is my Country."

--Benjamin Franklin

I request you will witness to the world that I die like a brave man.

--Colonel John Andre - Before he was hanged as a spy in concert with Benedict Arnold.

We came equals into this world, and equals shall we go out of it. All men are by nature born equally free and independent. To protect the weaker from the injuries and insults of the stronger were societies first formed; . . . Every society, all government, and every kind of civil compact therefore, is or ought to be, calculated for the general good and safety of the community. Every power, every authority vested in particular men is, or ought to be, ultimately directed to this sole end; and whenever any power or authority whatever extends further, or is of longer duration than is in its nature necessary for these purposes, it may be called government, but it is in fact oppression . . .In all our associations; in all our agreements let us never lose sight of this fundamental maxim--that all

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power was originally lodged in, and consequently is derived from, the people. We should wear it as a breastplate, and buckle it on as our armour.

---George Mason

A general dissolution of principles and manners will more surely overthrow the liberties of America than the whole force of the common enemy. While the people are virtuous they cannot be subdued; but when once they lose their virtue they will be ready to surrender their liberties to the first external or internal invader...if virtue and knowledge are diffused among the people, they will never be enslaved. This will be their great security.

--Samuel Adams

When bad men combine, the good must associate, else they will fall one by one, an unpitied sacrifice in a contemptible struggle.

--Edmund Burke

[O]nce vigorous measures appear to be the only means left of bringing the Americans to a due submission to the mother country, the colonies will submit.

--King George III

Rebellion against tyrants is obedience to God.

--Benjamin Franklin

A little rebellion now and then ... is a medicine for the sound health of government. From time to time the Tree of Liberty must be refreshed with the blood of tyrants and patriots.

--Thomas Jefferson

Can the liberties of a nation be thought secure when we have removed their only firm basis, a conviction in the minds of the people that these liberties are the gift of God? That they are not to be violated but with His wrath? Indeed, I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just; that His justice cannot sleep forever...

--Thomas Jefferson

With nations as with individuals our interests soundly calculated will ever be found inseparable from our moral duties.

--Thomas Jefferson - Second Inaugural Address, March 4, 1805

Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports. It is impossible to rightly govern the world without God and the Bible.

--Thomas Jefferson

It is the duty of all Nations to acknowledge the providence of Almighty God.

--George Washington - first Presidential Proclamation, Oct. 3, 1789

The highest glory of the American Revolution was this: it connected, in one indissoluble bond the

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principles of civil government with the principles of Christianity.

--John Quincy Adams

Our constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.

--John Adams

We have staked the future of all of our political institutions upon the capacity of each and all of us to sustain ourselves according to Commandments of God.

--James Madison

No power over the freedom of religion [is] delegated to the United States by the Constitution.

--Thomas Jefferson

Reason and experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle.

--George Washington

The people never give up their liberties but under some delusion.

--Edmund Burke

Statesmen may plan and speculate for liberty, but it is religion and morality alone which can establish the principles upon which freedom can securely stand.

--John Adams

A man that would sacrifice his freedom for security deserves neither.

--Thomas Jefferson

The God who gave us life gave us liberty at the same time.

The Rights of British America, 1774

--Thomas Jefferson

The truth is, all might be free if they valued freedom, and defended it as they ought.

--John Quincy Adams

I believe there are more instances of the abridgment of freedom of the people by gradual and silent encroachments of those in power than by violent and sudden usurpations.

--James Madison

It is in vain, sir, to extenuate the matter. Gentlemen may cry, Peace, Peace -- but there is no peace. The war is actually begun! The next gale that sweeps from the north will bring to our ears the clash of resounding arms! Our brethren are already in the field! Why stand we here idle? What is it that gentlemen wish? What would they have? Is life so dear, or peace so sweet, as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery? Forbid it, Almighty God! I know not what course others may take; but as for me, give me liberty or give me death!

--Patrick Henry

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Where liberty dwells there is my country.

--James Otis

Society in every state is a blessing, but government, even in its best stage, is but a necessary evil; ignites worst state an intolerable one.

--Thomas Paine - Common Sense, 1776

We claim Nothing but the Liberty & Privileges of Englishmen, in the same Degree, as if we had still continued among our Brethren in Great Britain: these Rights have not been forfeited by any Act of ours, we can not be deprived of them without our Consent, but by Violence & Injustice; We have received them from our Ancestors and, with God's Leave, we will transmit them, unimpaired to our Posterity.

--George Mason

I think we have more machinery of government than is necessary; too many parasites living on the labor of the industrious.

--Thomas Jefferson - Letter to William Ludlow, 1824

Government governed least is government governed best.

--Thomas Jefferson

I predict future happiness for Americans if they can prevent the government from wasting the labors of the people under the pretense of taking care of them.

--Thomas Jefferson

The greater the power the more dangerous the abuse.

--Thomas Jefferson

No government ought to exist for the purpose of checking the prosperity of its people or to allow such a principle in its policy.

--Edmund Burke

I have no fear that the result of our experiment will be that men may be trusted to govern themselves without a master.

--Thomas Jefferson

America does not go abroad in search of monsters to destroy. She is the well-wisher to freedom and independence of all. She is the champion and vindicator only of her own.

--John Quincy Adams

There is nothing so likely to produce peace as to be well prepared to meet the enemy.

--George Washington

I venture to say no war can be long carried on against the will of the people.

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--Edmund Burke

War is an ugly thing but not the ugliest of things; the decayed and degraded state of moral and patriotic feelings which thinks that nothing is worth fighting for is much worse. A man who has nothing for which he is willing to fight, nothing he cares about more than his personal safety, is a miserable creature who has no chance of being free unless made and kept so by the exertions of better men than himself.

--John Stuart Mill

To disarm the people is the best and most effectual way to enslave them.

--George Mason

Firearms are second only to the Constitution in importance; they are the people's liberty's teeth.

--George Washington

The great object is that every man be armed. Everyone who is able may have a gun.

--Patrick Henry

No free man shall ever be debarred the use of arms.

--Thomas Jefferson

The beauty of the second amendment is that it will not be needed until they try to take it.

--Thomas Jefferson

The said Constitution shall never be construed to authorize Congress to infringe the just liberty of the press, or the rights of conscience; or to prevent the people of the United States, who are peaceable citizens, from keeping their own arms.

--Samuel Adams

The American continents . . . are henceforth not to be considered as subjects for future colonization by any European powers.

--James Monroe

The religion most prevalent in our northern colonies is a refinement on the principles of resistance: it is the dissidence of dissent, and the Protestantism of the Protestant religion.

--Edmund Burke - Speech on the Conciliation of America

America does not go abroad in search of monsters to destroy. She is the well-wisher to freedom and independence of all. She is the champion and vindicator only of her own.

--John Quincy Adams

The Constitution only guarantees the American people the right to pursue happiness. You have to catch it yourself.

--Benjamin Franklin

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In the beginning all the world was America.

--John Locke

Humanity has won its battle. Liberty now has a country.

--Marquis de Lafayette - On the birth of the United States of America

If ye love wealth better than liberty, the tranquillity of servitude better than the animating contest of freedom, go home from us in peace. We ask not your counsels or arms. Crouch down and lick the hands which feed you. May your chains set lightly upon you, and may posterity forget ye were our countrymen.

--Samuel Adams

These are the times that try men's souls. The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in the crisis, shrink from the service of their country; but he that stands now, deserves the love and thanks of man and woman. Tyranny, like hell, is not easily conquered; yet we have this consolation with us, that the harder the conflict, the more glorious the triumph. What we obtain too cheap, we esteem too lightly; 'tis dearness only that gives everything it's value. Heaven knows how to put a proper price on it's goods; and it would be strange indeed, if so celestial an article as freedom should not be highly rated.

--Thomas Paine - The American Crisis

A patriot without religion in my estimation is as great a paradox as an honest Man without the fear of God. Is it possible that he whom no moral obligations bind, can have any real Good Will towards Men? Can he be a patriot who, by an openly vicious conduct, is undermining the very bonds of Society?.... The Scriptures tell us "righteousness exalteth a Nation."

--Abigail Adams

Every individual necessarily labors to render the annual revenue of society as great as he can. He generally neither intends to promote the public interest, nor knows how much he is promoting it. He intends only his own gain, and he is, in this, as in many other cases, led by an invisible hand to promote an end which was not part of his intention."

--Adam Smith - Wealth of Nations

Every man has a property in his own person. This nobody has any right to but himself. The labor of his body and the work of his hands are properly his.

--John Locke

Banking establishments are more dangerous than standing armies.

--Thomas Jefferson

I do not know the method of drawing up an indictment against a whole people. The natural rights of mankind are indeed sacred things, and if any public measure is proved mischievously to affect them, the objection ought to be fatal to that measure, even if no charter at all could be set up against it. Only a sovereign reason, paramount to all forms of legislation and administration, should dictate.

--Edmund Burke - Speech on Conciliation with America, March 22, 1775

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Truth never envelops itself in mystery, and the mystery in which it is at any time enveloped is the work of its antagonist, and never of itself.

--Thomas Paine

America's future will be determined by the home and the school. The child becomes largely what he is taught; hence we must watch what we teach, and how we live.

--Jane Adams

In general the art of government consists in taking as much money as possible from one class of citizens to give to the other.

--Voltaire

Those who expect to reap the blessings of freedom must, like men, undergo the fatigue of supporting it.

--Thomas Paine - The American Crisis 1777

Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains.

--Jean-Jacques Rousseau - The Social Contract, 1762

Remember, democracy never lasts long. It soon wastes, exhausts, and murders itself. There never was a democracy yet that did not commit suicide.

--John Adams, 1814

Democracy passes into despotism.

--Plato - The Republic

The most cogent reason for restricting the interference of government is the great evil of adding unnecessarily to its power.

--John Stuart Mill - On Liberty, 1859

Society in every state is a blessing, but Government, even in its best state, is but a necessary evil; in its worst state, an intolerable one.

--Thomas Paine - Common Sense, 1776

The surest way to prevent war is not to fear it.

--John Randolph, 1806

As soon as government management begins it upsets the natural equilibrium of industrial relations, and each interference only requires further bureaucratic control until the end is the tyranny of the totalitarian state.

--Adam Smith

If I knew for a certainty that a man was coming to my house with the conscious design of doing me good, I should run for my life.

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--Henry David Thoreau

In general, the art of government consists of taking as much money as possible from one class of citizens to give to another.

--Voltaire - Dictionnaire Philosophique, 1764

The actions of men are the best interpreters of their thoughts.

--John Locke

Censure is the tax a man pays to the public for being eminent.

--Jonathan Swift

Associate with men of good quality if you esteem your own reputation; for it is better to be alone than in bad company.

--George Washington

Nobody makes a greater mistake than he who did nothing because he could only do a little.

--Edmund Burke

The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.

--Edmund Burke

Distrust and caution are the parents of security.

--Benjamin Franklin

Rebellion against tyrants is obedience to God.

--Benjamin Franklin

We must all hang together, or assuredly we shall all hang separately.

--Benjamin Franklin, 1776 - After signing the Declaration of Independence

The spirit of resistance to government is so valuable on certain occasions that I wish it to be always kept alive.

--Thomas Jefferson, 1787 - Letter to Abigail Adams

...whenever any form of government becomes destructive...it is the right of the people to alter or abolish it...

--Thomas Jefferson - Declaration of Independence, 1776

When the government violates the people's rights, insurrection is, for the people and for each portion of the people, the most sacred of the rights and the most indispensable of duties.

--Marquis de Lafayette, 1790

Whenever the legislators endeavor to take away and destroy the property of the people, or to reduce them to slavery under arbitrary power, they put themselves into a state of war with the people, who

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are thereupon absolved from any farther obedience, and are left to the common refuge which God hath provided for all men against force and violence.

--John Locke - Two Treatises of Government, 1698

It is not a field of a few acres of ground, but a cause, that we are defending, and whether we defeat the enemy in one battle, or by degrees, the consequences will be the same.

--Thomas Paine

The reason why men enter into society is the preservation of their property.

--John Locke - Two Treatises of Government, 1698

A well-regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed.

--Constitution of the United States of America - Amendment II, 1791

The strongest reason for the people to retain the right to keep and bear arms is, as a last resort, to protect themselves against tyranny in government.

--Thomas Jefferson

When you disarm [the people], you commence to offend them and show that you distrust them either through cowardice or lack of confidence, and both of these opinions generate hatred...

--Machiavelli - The Prince, 1513

[The Constitution preserves] the advantage of being armed which Americans possess over the people of almost every other nation [where] the governments are afraid to trust the people with arms.

--James Madison -The Federalist No. 46, 1787

Arms discourage and keep the invader and plunderer in awe, and preserve order in the world as well as property....Horrid mischief would ensue were [the law-abiding] deprived of the use of them.

--Thomas Paine -Thoughts on Defensive War,1775

Firearms stand next in importance to the constitution itself. They are the American people's liberty and keystone under independence. To secure peace, security and happiness, the rifle and the pistol are equally indispensable. The very atmosphere of firearms everywhere restrains evil interference....

--George Washington

When firearms go, all goes. We need them every hour.

--George Washington

If we desire to avoid insult, we must be able to repel it; if we desire to secure peace, one of the most powerful instruments of our rising prosperity, it must be known, that we are at all times ready for War.

--George Washington

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I think myself that we have more machinery of government than is necessary, too many parasites living on the labour of the industrious.

--Thomas Jefferson, 1812

The democracy will cease to exist when you take away from those who are willing to work and give to those who would not.

--Thomas Jefferson

A man cannot lay down the right of resisting them that assault him by force, to take away his life.

--Thomas Hobbes -Leviathan, 1651

The right of nature...is the liberty each man hath to use his own power, as he will himself, for the preservation of his own nature; that is to say, of his own life.

--Thomas Hobbes - Leviathan, 1651

Every man has a right to risk his own life for the preservation of it.

--Jean Jacques Rousseau - The Social Contract, 1762

Arms in the hands of citizens [may] be used at individual discretion...in private self-defense.

--John Adams - A Defense of the Constitutions of Government of the United States of America, 1787

The right of a nation to kill a tyrant in case of necessity can no more be doubted than to hang a robber, or kill a flea.

--John Adams - Constitution of Massachusetts: Declaration of Rights, 1780

Nothing is as dangerous as an ignorant friend; a wise enemy is to be preferred.

--Jean de la Fontaine, 1668

Every law is an infraction of liberty.

--Jeremy Bentham - Principles of Morals and Legislation, 1789

Bad laws are the worst sort of tyranny.

--Edmund Burke

I have sworn upon the alter of God, eternal hostility against every form of tyranny over the mind of man.

--Thomas Jefferson, 1800 - Letter to Dr. Benjamin Rush

Unlimited power is apt to corrupt the minds of those who possess it; and this I know, my lords: that where law ends, tyranny begins.

--William Pitt, Earl of Chatham, 1770

Tyrants have always some slight shade of virtue; they support the laws before destroying them.

--Voltaire

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I must study politics and war that my sons may have liberty to study mathematics and philosophy.

--John Adams - 1780 - Letter to Abigail Adams

They that can give up essential liberty to obtain a little temporary safety deserve neither liberty nor safety.

--Benjamin Franklin - Historical Review of Pennsylvania, 1759

The natural progress of things is for liberty to yield and government to gain ground.

--Thomas Jefferson

The liberty of the individual must be thus far limited; he must not make himself a nuisance to other people.

--John Stuart Mill - On Liberty, 1859

Free people, remember this maxim: we may acquire liberty, but it is never recovered if it is once lost.

--Jean Jacques Rousseau

The tree of liberty will grow only when watered by the blood of tyrants.

--Bertrand Barère de Vieuzac, 1792 - Address to the French National Assembly

Fear is the foundation of most governments.

--John Adams - Thoughts on Government, 1776

Experience hath shewn, that even under the best forms [of government] those entrusted with power have, in time, and by slow operations, perverted it into tyranny.

--Thomas Jefferson, 1778

He has erected a multitude of new offices, and sent hither swarms of officers to harass our people and eat out their substance.

--Thomas Jefferson - Declaration of Independence, 1776

The essence of Government is power; and power, lodged as it must be in human hands, will ever be liable to abuse.

--James Madison

He that would make his own liberty secure must guard even his enemy from oppression; for if he violates this duty, he establishes a precedent that will reach to himself.

--Thomas Paine

Government is not reason; it is not eloquence; it is force! Like fire, it is a dangerous servant and a fearful master.

--George Washington

History, in general, only informs us of what bad government is.

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--Thomas Jefferson, ca. 1800

Sir William he, snug as a flea,
Lay all the time a'snoring,
Nor dreamed of harm he lay warm
In bed with Mrs. Loring.

Awake, arise Sir Billy,
There's forage on the plain.
Ah, leave your little filly,
And open the campaign.

--Francis Hopkinson 1776 - Lampoon of British General Sir William Howe and his concubine Mrs. Betsy Loring

--A Tory is an incorrigible Animal: And nothing but the extinction of life will extinguish his malevolence against liberty.

---Governor William Livingston of New Jersey

A thousand years hence, perhaps in less, America may be what Europe is now...the noblest work of human wisdom, the grand scene of human glory, the fair cause of freedom that rose and fell.

--Thomas Paine

I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just.

--Thomas Jefferson

Constitutions should consist only of general provisions; the reason is that they must necessarily be permanent, and that they cannot calculate for the possible changes of things.

--Alexander Hamilton

I have the happiness to know that it (democracy) is a rising, and not a setting sun.

--Benjamin Franklin

The Democratic Party is like a mule - without pride of ancestry or hope of posterity.

--Edmund Burke (1729-1797)

Wherever there is great property, there is great inequality....for one very rich man, there must be at least five hundred poor.

--Adam Smith

Passion for fame: a passion which is the instinct of all great souls.

--Edmund Burke

Force rules the world, not opinion; but it is opinion that makes use of force.

--Blaise Pascal (1623-1662)

A nation may lose its liberties in a day and not miss them in a century.

--Baron de Montesquieu (1689-1755)

In the end, more than they wanted freedom, they wanted security. When the Athenians finally wanted not to give to society but for society to give to them, when the freedom they wished for was

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freedom from responsibility, then Athens ceased to be free.

--Edward Gibbon (1737-1794)

Those who expect to reap the blessings of freedom must, like men, undergo the fatigue of supporting it.

--Thomas Paine (1737-1809)

This will be a precedent for others. I would rather they had burnt my house and laid the plantation in ruins.

--George Washington - Washington's horror that his Mt. Vernon manager was coerced into supplying provisions to the British sloop "Savage"

Government is a contrivance of human wisdom to provide for human wants.

--Edmund Burke

For in reason, all government without the consent of the governed is the very definition of slavery.

--Jonathon Swift (1667-1745)

Government is necessary, not because man is naturally bad....but because man is by nature more individualistic than social.

--Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679)

If men were angels, no government would be necessary.

--James Madison (1751-1836)

To rule is easy, to govern is difficult.

--Johann W. von Goethe (1749-1832)

A state is better governed which has but few laws, and those laws strictly observed.

--Rene Descartes (1596-1650)

The government is best which governs the least, because its people discipline themselves.

--Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826)

Whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive....it is the Right of the People to alter or abolish it.

--Thomas Jefferson - The Declaration of Independence

The people are not the origin of all just power.

--David Hume (1711-1776)

We have just enough religion to make us hate, but not enough to make us love one another.

--Jonathon Swift

History is the discovering of the constant and universal principles of human nature.

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--David Hume (1711-1776)

History is a pact between the dead, the living, and the yet unborn.

--Edmund Burke

Not to know the events which happened before one was born, that is to remain always a boy.

--Marcus Tullius Cicero (106-43 b.c.)

What history teaches us is that men have never learned anything from it.

--Georg Wilhelm Hegel (1770-1831)

...I give you the main key of the fortress of depotism as a tribute which I owe as a son to my adoptive father, as an aide-de-camp to my general, and as a missionary of liberty to its patriarch.

--Marquis de Lafayette - Lafayette's gift to George Washington of the main key to the Bastille

I hope I shall possess firmness and virtue enough to maintain what I consider the most enviable of all titles, the character of an honest man.

--George Washington (1732-1799)

Honesty is the first chapter of the book of wisdom.

--Thomas Jefferson

Hypocrisy can afford to be magnificent in its promises; for never intending to go beyond promises, it costs nothing.

--Edmund Burk

When we are planning for posterity, we ought to remember that virtue is not hereditary.

--Thomas Paine

How can a state be governed, or protected in its foreign relations if every individual remained free to obey or not to obey the law according to his private opinion?

--Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679)

A fox should not be the jury at a goose's trial.

--Thomas Fuller (1608-1661)

I think the first duty of society is justice.

--Alexander Hamilton

Where law ends, tyranny begins.

--William Pitt the Elder (1708-1778)

Laws and institutions go hand in hand with the progress of the human mind.

--Thomas Jefferson

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Nobody has a more sacred obligation to obey the law than those who make the law.

--Sophocles (496?-406 b.c.)

Those who uphold the law must be wiser and calmer than those who seek to repudiate it.

--Edmund Burke

Reason and judgment are the qualities of a leader.

--Tacitus (55?-130?)

The mass of men live lives of quiet desperation.

--Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862)

Man - a reasoning rather than a reasonable animal.

--Alexander Hamilton

Every man is worth just so much as the things are worth about which he busies himself.

--Marcus Aurelius (121-180)

Covenants without swords are but words.

--Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679)

When a man knows he is to be hanged in a fortnight, it concentrates his mind wonderfully.

--Samuel Johnson (1709-1784)

Error of opinion may be tolerated where reason is left free to combat it.

--Thomas Jefferson

The world is governed by opinion.

--Thomas Hobbes

You cannot plan the future by the past.

--Edmund Burke

One generation cannot bind another.

--Thomas Jefferson

The measure of a man is what he does with power.

--Pittacus (650?-569?)

The reputation of power is power.

--Thomas Hobbes

No extraordinary power should be lodged in any one individual.

--Thomas Paine

FOUNDING FATHER QUOTES

Its never too late to give up your prejudices.

--Henry David Thoreau

Each generation ...has the right to choose for itself the form or government it believes most promotive of its own happiness.

--Thomas Jefferson

The care of human life and happiness.....is the first and only legitimate object of good government.

--Thomas Jefferson

I know of no safe depository of the ultimate powers of the society but the people themselves.

--Thomas Jefferson

No man will ever bring out of the Presidency the reputation which carries him into it.

--Thomas Jefferson

To myself, personally it brings nothing but increasing drudgery and daily loss of friends.

--Thomas Jefferson - Comment on the Presidency

The basis of our political systems is the right of the people to make and to alter their constitutions of government.

--George Washington

In matters of principle, stand like a rock; in matters of taste, swim with the current.

--Thomas Jefferson

The moment the idea is admitted into society that property is not as sacred as the laws of God...anarchy and tyranny commence.

--John Adams

The reason why men enter into society is the preservation of their property.

--John Locke

He who will not apply new remedies must expect new evils, for time is the greatest innovator.

--Francis Bacon (1561-1626)

Civil confusions often spring from trifles but decide great issues.

--Aristotle (384-322 b.c.)

Every man is the creature of the age in which he lives; very few are able to raise themselves above the ideas of the time.

--Voltaire (1694-1778)

A nation without the means of reform is without means of survival.

--Edmund Burke

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Justice without a force is powerless; force without justice is tyrannical.

--Blaise Pascal (1623-1662)

There are some jobs in which it is impossible for a man to be virtuous.

--Aristotle

Very little is known about the War of 1812 because the Americans lost it.

--Eric Nicol

I'm a great believer in luck and I find the harder I work the more I have of it.

--Thomas Jefferson

The worth of a state, in the long run, is the worth of the individuals composing it.

--John Stuart Mill

The only freedom deserving the name is that of pursuing our own good in our own way, so long as we do not attempt to deprive others of theirs.....Mankind are greater gainers by suffering each other to live as seems good to themselves, than by compelling each to live as seems good to the rest.

--John Stuart Mill

Nothing then is unchangeable but the inherent and inalienable rights of man.

--Thomas Jefferson

Close alliances with despots are never safe for free states.

--Demosthenes (385?-322? b.c.)

It is our policy to steer clear of permanent alliances with any portion of the foreign world.

--George Washington

The government of the United States is not in any sense founded upon the Christian religion.

--John Adams (1735-1826)

I have now disposed of all my property in my family. There is one thing more I wish I could give the, and that is the Christian religion.

--Patrick Henry

To be like Christ is to be a Christian.

--William Penn (1644-1718)

The Christian religion not only was at first attended with miracles, but even at this day cannot be believed by any reasonable person without one.

--David Hume (1711-1776)

People in general are equally horrified at hearing the Christian religion doubted, and at seeing it

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practiced.

--Samuel Butler

The age of ignorance commenced with the Christian system.

--Thomas Paine

A large portion of the noblest and most valuable teachings has been the work, not only of men who did not know, but of men who knew and rejected, the Christian faith.

--John Stuart Mill (1806-1873)

Man prefers to believe what he prefers to be true.

--Francis Bacon (1561-1626)

Most men's anger about religion is as if two men should quarrel for a lady they neither of them care for.

--Lord Halifax (George Savile) (1633-1695)

All religions must be tolerated....for....every man must get to heaven his own way.

--Frederick the Great (1712-1786)

Religion is excellent stuff for keeping common people quiet.

--Napoleon Bonaparte (1769-1821)

It is conceivable that religion may be morally useful without being intellectually sustainable.

--John Stuart Mill (1806-1873)

Almighty God: We make our earnest prayer that Thou wilt keep the United States in Thy holy protection; that thou wilt incline the hearts of the citizens to cultivate a spirit of subordination and obedience to government, and entertain a brotherly affection and love for one another and for their fellow-citizens of the United States at large. And finally that Thou wilt most graciously be pleased to dispose us all to do justice, to love mercy and to demean ourselves with that charity, humility and pacific temper of mind which were the characteristics of the Divine Author of our blessed religion without a humble imitation of whose example in these things we can never hope to be a happy nation. Grant our supplication, we beseech Thee, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

--George Washington's Prayer

The hereditary right of succession is....an insult and imposition upon posterity. For all men being originally equals, no one by birth could have a right to set up his own family in perpetual preference to all others forever....One of the strongest natural proofs of the folly of hereditary right in kings, is that nature disapproves it, otherwise she would not so frequently turn it into ridicule by giving mankind AN ASS FOR A LION.

--Thomas Paine

Ye that tell us of harmony and reconciliation, can ye restore to us the time that is past? Can ye give to prostitution its former innocence? Neither can ye reconcile Britain and America. The last cord is

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broken....There are injuries which nature cannot forgive....As well the lover forgive the ravisher of his mistress, as the continent forgive the murderers of Britain.

--Thomas Paine

To be always running three or four thousand miles with a tale or a petition, waiting four or five months for an answer, which, when obtained, requires five or six more to explain it in, will in a few years be looked upon as folly and childishness. There was a time when it was proper and there is a proper time for it to cease.

--Thomas Paine

I am satisfied that one active campaign, a smart action, and burning two or three of their towns, will set everything to rights.

--Major John Pitcairn, British Royal Marines - Arrogant prediction on easily subduing the American Rebels

...The Rebels can always select the best places from which to defend themselves....Never are they so much to be feared as when retreating....We think ourselves victors and follow them; they flee to an ambush, surround and attack us with a superior number of men and we are defeated.

--Hessian Colonel DuRoi - Penetrating insight on American Rebel fighting skills

My political curiosity, exclusive of my anxious solicitude for the public welfare, leads me to ask who authorized them (the framers of the Constitution) to speak the language of 'We, the People,' instead of 'We, the States?'

--Patrick Henry, 1788 - Orations of American Orators

As the British Constitution is the most subtle organism which has proceeded from the womb and long gestation of progressive history, so the American Constitution is, so far as I can see, the most wonderful work ever struck off at a given time by the brain and purpose of man.

--W. E. Gladstone

In questions of power, then, let no more be heard of confidence in man, but bind him down from mischief by the chains of the Constitution."

--Thomas Jefferson

I confess that there are several parts of this Constitution which I do not at present approve, but I am not sure I shall never approve them. For having lived long, I have experienced many instances of being obliged by better information, or fuller consideration, to change opinions even on important subjects, which I once thought right, but found to be otherwise.

--Benjamin Franklin, 1787

The Constitution, on this hypothesis, is a mere thing of wax in the hands of the Judiciary, which they may twist and shape into any form they please.

--Thomas Jefferson

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My movements to the chair of Government will be accompanied by feelings not unlike those of a culprit who is going to his place of execution.

--George Washington, 1787

Never did a prisoner released from his chains feel such relief as I shall on shaking off the shackles of power.

--Thomas Jefferson on leaving the presidency, 1809

No man who ever held the office of President would congratulate a friend on obtaining it.

--John Adams

Neither philosophy, nor religion, nor morality can govern people against their vanity, their pride, their resentment, or revenge; nothing but force and power and strength can restrain them.

--John Adams on religiosity

Let our government be like that of the solar system. Let the general government be like the sun and the states the planets, repelled yet attracted, and the whole moving regularly and harmoniously in several orbits.

--John Dickinson - Delaware Delegate, 1787

Slavery discourages arts and manufacturing ...[and] every master of slaves is born a petty tyrant.

--George Mason - Virginia Delegate, 1787

I am exceedingly distressed at the proceedings of the Convention --being ... almost sure, they will ... lay the foundation of a Civil War.

--Elridge Gerry - Massachusetts Delegate, 1787

We have seen the mere distinction of color made, in the most enlightened period of time, a ground of the most oppressive dominion ever exercised by man over man.

--James Madison, 1787

The situation of the general government, if it can be called a government, is shaken to its foundation, and liable to be overturned by every blast.

--George Washington - Letter to Thomas Jefferson, 1787

The very idea of the power and the right of the People to establish Government presupposes the duty of every Individual to obey the established Government."

--George Washington - Farewell Address, September 19, 1796

I consider the difference between a system founded on the legislatures only, and one founded on the people, to be the true difference between a league or treaty and a constitution.

--James Madison - At the Constitutional Convention, 1787

If the General Government should be left dependent on the State Legislatures, it would be happy for us if we had never met in this room.

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--John Dickinson - At the Constitutional Convention, 1787

The situation of this Assembly, groping as it were in the dark to find political truth.

--Benjamin Franklin - At the Constitutional Convention, 1787

The backbone of surprise is fusing speed with secrecy.

--Von Clausewitz (1780-1831)

It is better to be feared than loved, if you cannot be both.

--Niccolo Machiavelli (1469-1527) - The Prince

It has been a political career of this man to begin with hypocrisy, proceed with arrogance, and to finish with contempt.

--Thomas Paine - About John Adams

Their...demeanour is invariably morose, sullen, clownish and repulsive. I should think there is not, on the face of the earth, a people so entirely destitute of humor, vivacity, or the capacity of enjoyment.

--Charles Dickens

I am willing to love all mankind except an American.

--Samuel Johnson

Burke was a damned wrong-headed fellow, through his whole life jealous and obstinate.

--Charles James Fox about Edmund Burke

From some traits of his character which have lately come to my knowledge, he seems to have been so hackneyed in villainy, and so lost to all sense of honor and shame that while his facilities will enable him to continue his sordid pursuits there will be no time for remorse.

--George Washington about Benedict Arnold

Be courteous to all, but intimate with few, and let those few be well tried before you give them your confidence. True friendship is a plant of slow growth, and must undergo and withstand the shocks of adversity before it is entitled to the appellation.

--George Washington

Few men have virtue to withstand the highest bidder.

--George Washington

That religion, or the duty which we owe to our Creator, and the manner of discharging it, can be directed only by reason and conviction, not by force or violence; and therefore all men are equally entitled to the free exercise of religion, according to the dictates of the conscience; and it is the mutual duty of all to practice Christian forbearance, love, and charity towards each other.

--Alexander Hamilton

When angry, count ten, before you speak; if very angry, a hundred.

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--Thomas Jefferson

Books constitute capital. A library book lasts as long as a house, for hundreds of years. It is not, then, an article of mere consumption but fairly of capital, and often in the case of professional men, setting out in life, it is their only capital.

--Thomas Jefferson

I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just; that his justice cannot sleep forever.

--Thomas Jefferson

The boisterous sea of liberty is never without a wave.

--Thomas Jefferson

Do not bite at the bait of pleasure, till you know there is no hook beneath it.

--Thomas Jefferson

No government ought to be without censors; and where the press is free no one ever will.

--Thomas Jefferson

If this be treason, make the most of it!

--Patrick Henry - Criticism of the Stamp Act Stamp Act

If our Trade be taxed, why not our Lands, or Produce... in short, everything we possess? They tax us without having legal representation.

--Samuel Adams - After passage of the Stamp Act of 1765

The distinctions between Virginians, Pennsylvanians, New Yorkers, and New Englanders are no more. I am not a Virginian, but an American!

--Patrick Henry

Don't fire unless fired upon, but if they mean to have a war, let it begin here.

--Captain John Parker - At Lexington after Paul Revere's ride.

...Should the colonies send an army of two or three thousand man and attack Montreal, we should have little to fear from the Canadians or Indians, and would easily make a conquest of that place... "

--Ethan Allen - 1775, after the Revolutionary War had begun.

I move that these united colonies ought to be free and independent...

--Richard Henry Lee - 1776 at the writing of the Declaration of Independence

It is better to submit to some abridgement of our rights [as Americans], than to break off our connection with our protector, England.

--Thomas Hutchinson - Loyalist Governor of Massachusetts

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...On our side, the war should be defensive... we are now in a [dangerous] position. Declining an engagement to flight may throw discouragement over the minds of many, but when the fate of America may be at Stake, we should continue the war as long as possible....

--George Washington (1776)

Sink or swim, live or die, survive or perish.

--John Adams (1776) - Just before the writing of the Declaration of Independence

May it please Your Honor, I surrounded them!

--Sam Clowney - Battle of Camden - Convincing Tories they were surrounded

Where a goat can go, a man can go; and where a man can go, he can drag a gun.

--General John Burgoyne - At the Battle at Mount Defiance encouraging his troops to drag their cannons and weapons up Sugarloaf Mountain (Mount Defiance).

...Let us die here rather than retreat.

--Alexander Hamilton - At the Battle of Monmouth imploring Major General Charles Lee not to retreat.

Tie up overcoats, pick touch-holes, fresh prime, and be ready to FIGHT!

--Ben Cleveland - At the Battle of Kings Mountain to prepare his men for the battle

...I know the cause it desperate; but Sir, we must either quit the country or attack.

--George Rogers Clark - To Patrick Henry at Battle of Vincennes

I have not yet begun to fight!

--John Paul Jones - Battle between Bonhomme Richard and Serapis

I request you will witness to the world that I die like a brave man.

--Colonel John André - Before he was hanged as a spy in concert with Benedict Arnold.

We began a contest for liberty ill provided with the means of war, relying on our patriotism to supply the deficiency....We expected to encounter many wants and distresses...we must bear the present evils with fortitude....

--George Washington - At the battle of West Point in 1781

To raise an officer without conspicuous merit would give a fatal blow to the existence of of the army....It will be impossible for me to be of any further service if such insuperable difficulties are thrown in my way.

--George Washington - Washington's reply to the intention of Congress to promote Brigadier General -- Thomas Conway, leader of a scheme (the "Conway Cabal") to remove Washington from command of the Continental Army

The business of government is to promote the happiness of the society by punishing and rewarding.

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--Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832)

Though our knowledge begins with experience, it does not follow that it arises out of experience.

--Immanuel Kant (1724-1804)

The following prophetic Quote about democracy is from Sir Alex Fraser Tytler (1742-1813). He was a Scottish jurist and historian and a Professor of History at Edinburgh University in the late 18th century. This quote is from an 1801 lecture series, and it still rings with great truth:

"A democracy cannot exist as a permanent form of government. It can only exist until the voters discover that they can vote themselves largess from the public treasury. From that time on the majority always votes for the candidates promising the most benefits from the public treasury, with the results that a democracy always collapses over loose fiscal policy, always followed by a dictatorship."

"The average age of the world's great civilizations has been 200 years. These nations have progressed through this sequence:"

- * From bondage to spiritual faith;
- * From spiritual faith to great courage;
- * From courage to liberty;
- * From liberty to abundance;
- * From abundance to selfishness;
- * From selfishness to complacency;
- * From complacency to apathy;
- * From apathy to dependency;
- * From dependency back again to bondage."

"Perhaps this is why the Founding Fathers did not want a democracy and, therefore, established our representative Republic instead."

To reconcile British superiority with American liberty will be my great object....

--Edmund Burke (1774)

Men, you are all marksman. Don't one of you fire until you see the whites of their eyes.

--Israel Putnam - Battle of Bunker Hill, June 17, 1775

In the new code of laws which I suppose will be necessary for you to make, I desire you would remember the ladies and be more generous and favorable to them than your ancestors.

--Abigail Adams - Letter to John Adams, March 31, 1776

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Don't give up the ship! You will beat them off!

--James Mugford - Last words on board the Franklin, May 19, 1776