

# Historic & Contemporary Quotes on American Principles

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## The American Idea and Principles

“The Foundation of every government is some principle or passion in the minds of the people.”

--John Adams

“The great essential to our happiness and prosperity is that we adhere to the principles upon which the Government was established and insist upon their faithful observance.” --William McKinley

“There is no nation so powerful, as the one that obeys its laws not from principals of fear or reason, but from passion.” --Charles de Montesquieu

“Two things in America are astonishing: the changeableness of most human behavior and the strange stability of certain principles. Men are constantly on the move, but the spirit of humanity seems almost unmoved.” --Alexis de Tocqueville

“The great essential to our happiness and prosperity is that we adhere to the principles upon which the Government was established and insist upon their faithful observance.” --William McKinley

“Our nation is the enduring dream of every immigrant who ever set foot on these shores, and the millions still struggling to be free. This nation, this idea called America, was and always will be a new world -- our new world.” --George H. W. Bush

“Our history is not a story of perfection. It's a story of imperfect people working toward great ideals. This flawed nation is also a really good nation, and the principles we hold are the hope of all mankind. When children are given the real history of America, they will also learn to love America.” --George W. Bush, Sept 17, 2002

“America lives in the heart of every man everywhere who wishes to find a region where he will be free to work out his destiny as he chooses.” --Woodrow Wilson

“A man may die, nations may rise and fall, but an idea lives on.” --John F. Kennedy

“Ideals are like stars; you will not succeed in touching them with your hands. But like the ship's captain on the ocean's waters, you choose them as your guides, and following them you will reach your destiny.” --Carl Schurz

“America is more than a place. More significant, it is an idea. Always has been. Adlai Stevenson said it: ‘When an American says that he loves his country, he means not only that he loves the New England hills, the prairies, glistening in the sun, the wide and rising plains, the great mountains and the sea. He means that he loves an inner air, an inner light in which freedom lives and in which a man can draw the breath of self-respect.’” --Paul Greenberg

“When we think about the country and how it started and why it started, we look first to the Declaration of Independence. It has been an enduring and remarkable document and is the precursor and the foundation for the adoption of our constitutional form of government.” --Justice Sandra Day O’Connor, U. S Supreme Court

“The true revolution [of the colonists] was not to defy one earthly power, but to declare principles that stand above every earthly power--the equality of each person before God and the responsibility of government to secure the rights of all.” --George W. Bush

“How I longed to see these things; how I longed to see the Liberty Bell and walk on the streets where Thomas Jefferson, Tom Paine, and Benjamin Franklin had walked.” --Burl Ives

“Patriotism is not short, frenzied outbursts of emotion, but the tranquil and steady dedication of a lifetime.” --Adlai E. Stevenson

### **Bible-Based Principles**

“I have lived, Sir, a long time and the longer I live, the more convincing proofs I see of this truth -- that God governs in the affairs of men. And if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without his notice, is it probable that an empire can rise without his aid? We have been assured, Sir, in the sacred writings that ‘except the Lord build they labor in vain that build it.’ I firmly believe this; and I also believe that without his concurring aid we shall succeed in this political building no better than the Builders of Babel.” --Benjamin Franklin, Constitutional Convention Address on Prayer

“The Bible, above all other books, favors that equality among mankind, that respect for just laws, and those sober and frugal virtues which constitute the soul of republicanism.” --Benjamin Rush, Signer of the Declaration of Independence and “Father of Public Schools Under the Constitution”

“Sir, my concern is not whether God is on our side; my greatest concern is to be on God’s side, for God is always right.” --Abraham Lincoln

“In the chain of human events, the birthday of the nation is indissolubly linked with the birthday of the Savior. The Declaration of Independence laid the cornerstone of human government upon the first precepts of Christianity.” --John Adams

“To promote true religion is the best and most effective way of making a virtuous and regular people. Love to God and love to man is the substance of religion; when these prevail, civil laws will have little to do.” --John Witherspoon, Signer of the Declaration of Independence; President of Princeton University

“The Christian religion is the basis, or rather the source, of all genuine freedom in government. I am persuaded that no civil government of a republican form can exist and be durable in which the principles of Christianity have not a controlling influence.” --Noah Webster, Founding Father and “Schoolmaster to America”

“With Malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation’s wounds.” -- Abraham Lincoln

“Let us then search the Scriptures.... The Bible contains the revelation of the will of God; it contains the history of the creation, of the world and of mankind; and afterwards the history of one peculiar nation, certainly the most extraordinary nation that has ever appeared upon the earth.” --John Quincy Adams, 1811, letter to his son George Adams

“The men who have guided the destiny of the United States have found the strength for their tasks by going to their knees. This private unity of public men and their God is an enduring source of reassurance for the people of America.” --Lyndon B. Johnson

“Israel was not created in order to disappear - Israel will endure and flourish. It is the child of hope and the home of the brave. It can neither be broken in adversity nor demoralized by success. It carries the shield of democracy and it honors the sword of freedom.” --John F. Kennedy

“It is important to note that the free societies of America and Great Britain derive such foundation [of freedom] from Biblical ethics and ideals. Tyrants are not moved by idealism; they are moved by naked ambition. Dictators are encouraged by weakness. They are stopped by strength. By strength, of course, I do not merely mean military might but the resolve to use that might against evil. The price of freedom is still, and always will be, eternal vigilance.” -- Margaret Thatcher, 1994

“We are never defeated unless we give up on God.” --Ronald Reagan

“Without God, democracy cannot and will not long endure.” --Ronald Reagan

## **Covenants**

“All who think cannot but see there is a sanction like that of religion which binds us in partnership in the serious work of the world.” --Benjamin Franklin

## **God-Given Rights**

“The God who gave us life gave us liberty at the same time; the hand of force may destroy but cannot disjoin them.” --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 of the gift of God? That they are not to be violated but with His wrath?” --Thomas Jefferson, 1785, Notes on the State of Virginia

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights. Among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” --Declaration of Independence

“...with a firm reliance on the protection of divine providence, we mutually pledge our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honour.” --Declaration of Independence

“The sacred rights of mankind are not to be rummaged for, among old parchments, or musty records. They are written, as with a sun beam in the whole volume of human nature, by the hand of the divinity itself; and can never be erased or obscured by mortal power.” --Alexander Hamilton 1775

“Almighty God hath created the mind free. All attempts to influence it by temporal punishments or burdens, or by civil incapacitations ...are a departure from the plan of the Holy Author of our religion.” --Thomas Jefferson

“I have sworn upon the alter of God eternal hostility against every form of tyranny over the mind of man.” --Thomas Jefferson

“Physical strength can never permanently withstand the impact of spiritual force.” --Franklin D. Roosevelt

“The Declaration of Independence became a sacred icon (of America) because it was the only national document and is the only national document that states that ‘All men are created

equal and that they have certain, inherent rights given to them by their Creator.” --Paula Maier, Mass. Inst. of Technology

“Those who won our independence...valued liberty as an end and as a means. They believed liberty to be the secret of happiness and courage to be the secret of liberty.” --Louis D. Brandeis

“Nothing opens the door for a totalitarian regime as surely as the elimination of God as source and guarantor of our rights. You do not have to be religious to recognize that the survival of this republic is contingent on God’s rule in the nation’s affairs.” --Balian Vazsonyi, Historian and Concert Pianist

“God alone is the author and guarantor of freedom.” --Whitaker Chambers

### **Freedom, Equality, Justice, and Order**

“If a nation expects to be ignorant and free, in a state of civilization, it expects what never was and never will be.” --Thomas Jefferson

“The happy union of these States is a wonder; their Constitution a miracle; their example the hope of Liberty throughout the world.” --James Madison

“Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal. ... It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us--that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion--that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain--that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom, and that government of the people, by the people, for the people shall not perish from the earth.” --Abraham Lincoln, Gettysburg Address, 1863

“I always consider the settlement of America with reverence and wonder, as the opening of a grand scene and design in providence, for the illumination of the ignorant and the emancipation of the slavish part of mankind all over the earth.” --John Adams

“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, March 23, 1775

“Liberty means responsibility. That is why most men dread it.” --George Bernard Shaw

“We are right to take alarm at the first experiment upon our liberties.” --James Madison

“I hope to see America among the foremost nations of justice and liberality.” --George Washington

“Whenever a separation is made between liberty and justice, neither, in my opinion, is safe.” --Edmund Burke

“If we do not maintain justice, justice will not maintain us.” --Francis Bacon

“Bad laws are the worst sort of tyranny.” --Edmund Burke

“Order without liberty and liberty without order are equally destructive.” --Theodore Roosevelt

“There is no crueller tyranny than that which is perpetuated under the shield of law and in the name of justice.” --Charles de Montesquieu

“I would fight for my liberty so long as my strength lasted, and if the time came for me to go, the Lord would let them take me.” --Harriet Tubman

“You cannot build character and courage by taking away a man’s initiative and independence.” --Abraham Lincoln

“It is seldom that liberty of any kind is lost all at once.” --David Hume

“The true danger is when liberty is nibbled away, for expedience, and by parts.” --Edmund Burke

“I believe there are more instances of the abridgement of freedom of the people by gradual and silent encroachments by those in power than by violent and sudden usurpations.” --James Madison

“The time is near at hand which must determine whether Americans are to be free men or slaves.” --George Washington

“If the freedom of speech is taken away then dumb and silent we may be led, like sheep to the slaughter.” --George Washington

“Under this Constitution the boundaries of freedom have been enlarged, the foundations of order and peace have been strengthened, and the growth of our people in all the better elements of national life has indicated the wisdom of the founders and given a new hope to their descendants.” --James Garfield

“I have sworn upon the alter of God eternal hostility against every form of tyranny over the mind of man.” --Thomas Jefferson, inscribed on Jefferson Memorial

“Life without liberty is like a body without spirit.” --Kahlil Gibran

“If the immigrant comes here in good faith, he becomes an American and assimilates himself to us. He will be treated on an exact equality with everyone else, for it is an outrage in America to discriminate against any such man because of creed, birthplace, or origin. But this is predicated upon the man’s becoming an American....” --Theodore Roosevelt

“Let every nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe, in order to assure the survival and the success of liberty.” --John F. Kennedy

“Freedom and responsibility are equally yoked. Only when they are in tandem can we cultivate the vast field of opportunity and have an orderly society. Freedom requires about as much courage to live with, as it does to get.” --Clarence Thomas, “It’s a Dirty Little Secret: Freedom Necessarily Entails Responsibility,” Americans for an Informed Public, July 1996.

“In the course of two centuries, the ideals of our founding documents have defined America’s purposes in the world. Since July 4th, 1776, to this very day, Americans have seen freedom’s power to overcome tyranny, to inspire hope even in times of great trial, to turn the creative gifts of men and women to the pursuits of peace.” --George W. Bush

“These charters of freedom [the nation’s founding documents such as the Constitution] are a promissory note, a pledge of justice to all who are denied it.” --Martin Luther King

“When you go home, tell them of us and say, ‘For your tomorrow, we gave our today.’” --  
World War II Memorial inscription

“The cost of freedom is always high, but Americans have always paid it. And one path we shall never choose, and that is the path of surrender, or submission.” --John F. Kennedy

## **Unity**

“A house divided against itself cannot stand.” --Abraham Lincoln

“The U. S. escaped the divisiveness of a multiethnic society by a brilliant solution: the creation of a brand-new national identity. The point of America was not to preserve old cultures but to forge a new, American culture.” --Arthur Schlesinger Jr., “The Cult of Ethnicity, Good and Bad.”

“...Pressed too far, the cult of ethnicity has unhealthy consequences. It gives rise, for example, to the conception of the U. S. as a nation composed not of individuals making their own choices but of inviolable ethnic and racial groups. It rejects the historic, American goals of assimilation and integration. And, in an excess of zeal, well-intentioned people seek to transform our system of education from a means of creating ‘one separate people’ into a means of promoting, celebrating, and perpetuating separate ethnic origins and identities.” --Arthur Schlesinger Jr., “The Cult of Ethnicity, Good and Bad”

“If civilization is to survive, we must cultivate the science of human relationships--the ability of all peoples, of all kinds, to live together, in the same world at peace.” --Franklin D. Roosevelt

“Let us not seek the Republican answer or the Democratic answer, but the right answer.” --John F. Kennedy

### **Progress**

“Without continual growth and progress, such words as improvement, achievement, and success have no meaning.” --Benjamin Franklin

“The tax on capital gains directly affects investment decisions, the mobility and flow of risk capital.... ...and thereby the strength and potential for growth in the economy.” --John F. Kennedy

“The best road to progress is freedom’s road.” --John F. Kennedy

“In our seeking for economic and political progress, we all go up--or else we all go down.” --Franklin D. Roosevelt

“Entrepreneurs and their small enterprises are responsible for almost all the economic growth in the United States.” --Ronald Reagan

### **Responsibility**

“You cannot escape the responsibility of tomorrow by evading it today.” --Abraham Lincoln

“Nobody made a greater mistake than he who did nothing because he could do only a little.” --Edmund Burke

“All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing.” --Edmund Burke

“The first requisite of a good citizen in this republic of ours is that he shall be able and willing to pull his own weight.” --Theodore Roosevelt

“Freedom and responsibility are equally yoked. Only when they are in tandem can we cultivate the vast field of opportunity and have an orderly society. Freedom requires about as much courage to live with, as it does to get.” --Clarence Thomas, “It’s a Dirty Little Secret: Freedom Necessarily Entails Responsibility,” Americans for an Informed Public, July 1996.

“As human beings, we are endowed with freedom of choice, and we cannot shuffle off our responsibility upon others, God or nature. We must shoulder it ourselves. It is our responsibility.” --Arnold J. Toynbee

“With freedom comes responsibility--and sacrifices must be made to defend that freedom.” --Dr. Mohboob K. Khan, American Immigrant

### **Role of Government**

“That to secure these rights governments are instituted among men.” --Declaration of Independence

“Government’s first duty is to protect the people, not run their lives.” --Ronald Reagan

“Protecting the rights of even the least individual among us is basically the only excuse the government has for even existing.” --Ronald Reagan

### **Limited Government**

“The government is best which governs the least, because its people discipline themselves.” --Thomas Jefferson

“The sublimity of administration consists in knowing the proper degree of power that should be exerted on different occasions.” --Charles de Montesquieu

“A democracy is always temporary in nature; it simply cannot exist as a permanent form of government. A democracy will continue to exist up until the time that voters discover that they can vote themselves generous gifts from the public treasury. From that moment on, the majority always votes for candidates who promise the most benefits from the public treasury, with the result that every democracy will finally collapse over loose fiscal policy, (which is) always followed by a dictatorship.” --Author Unknown

## **Defense and Security**

“A well-regulated militia, composed of the body of the people, trained in arms, is the best most natural defense of a free country.” --James Madison

“For a people who are free, and who mean to remain so, a well-organized and armed militia is their best security.” --Thomas Jefferson

## **Popular Sovereignty, Consent, and Right of Election**

“The people are the only legitimate fountain of power, and it is from them that the constitutional charter, under which the several branches of government hold their power, is derived.” --James Madison

“A representative democracy, where the right of election is well secured and regulated, and the exercise of the legislative, executive, and judiciary authorities is vested in selected persons, chosen really and not nominally by the people, will, in my opinion, be most likely to be happy, regular, and durable.” --Alexander Hamilton

“As the happiness of the people is the sole end of government, so the consent of the people is the only foundation of it, in reason, morality, and the natural fitness of things.” --John Adams

“A union depending not upon the constraint of force, but upon the loving devotion of a free people; and that all things may be so ordered and settled upon the best and surest foundations that peace and happiness, truth and justice, religion and piety, may be established among us for all generations.” --Rutherford B. Hayes

“Government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the Earth.” --Abraham Lincoln

“No man is good enough to govern another man without that other’s consent.” --Abraham Lincoln

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“Other lands have their vitality in a few, a class, but we have it in the bulk of our people.” --Walt Whitman

### **Work Ethic**

“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

“The first requisite of a good citizen in this republic of ours is that he shall be able and willing to pull his own weight.” --Theodore Roosevelt

“A wise and frugal government, which shall leave men free to regulate their own pursuits of industry and improvement, and shall not take from the mouth of labor and bread it has earned - this is the sum of good government.” --Thomas Jefferson

“You cannot build character and courage by taking away a man’s initiative and independence.” --Abraham Lincoln

### **Religion and Morality**

“Let us with caution indulge the supposition that morality can be maintained without religion. Whatever may be conceded to the influence of refined education on minds, reason and experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle.” --George Washington

“Among a people generally corrupt liberty cannot long exist.” --Edmund Burke

“Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.” --John Adams, Declaration signer, Second U. S. President

“Liberty cannot be established without morality, nor morality without faith.” --Alexis de Tocqueville

“The Americans combine the notions of religion and liberty so intimately in their minds, that it is impossible to make them conceive of one without the other.” --Alexis de Tocqueville

“Character, in the long run, is the decisive factor in the life of an individual and nations alike.” -- Theodore Roosevelt

“A man of courage is also full of faith.” --Marcus Cicero

“Whatever state among us shall make piety and virtue the standard of public honor will enjoy the greatest inward peace, the greatest civic happiness, and will discover the greatest constitutional strength.” --John Witherspoon

“To suppose that any form of government will secure liberty or happiness without any virtue in the people, is a chimerical idea.” --James Madison

“To educate a man in mind and not in morals is to educate a menace to society.” --Theodore Roosevelt

“Knowing as we do that the foundation of national greatness can be laid only in the industry, the integrity and the spiritual elevation of the people, are we equally sure that schools are forming the character of the rising generation upon the everlasting principles of duty and humanity? Are children so educated that when they grow up they will make better leaders or only grander savages? However loftily the intellect of man may have been gifted, however skillfully it may have been trained, if it be not guided by a sense of justice, a love of mankind and a devotion to duty, its possessor is only a more dangerous barbarian.” --Horace Mann

“History has taught us that freedom cannot long survive unless it is based on moral foundations. The American founding bears ample witness to this fact. America has become the most powerful nation in history, yet she uses her power not for territorial expansion but to perpetuate freedom and justice throughout the world.” --Margaret Thatcher, “The Moral Foundations of Society,” *The Bottom Line Quarterly*, Bellevue University, Spring 1995.

“A people can only be free, happy and great in proportion to the virtue and intelligence of the people.” --Stephen F. Austin

“As man is the best of animals when perfected, so he is the worst when separated from law and justice. For injustice is most dangerous when it is armed, and man, armed by nature with good sense and virtue, may use them for entirely opposite ends. Therefore, when he is without virtue man is the most unscrupulous and savage of the animals.” --Dr. Donald Kagan, Bass Professor of Classics, History, and Western Civilization, Yale College