

THE LOCKE SOCIETY

LIFE, LIBERTY & EDUCATION



Unit

**American
Revolution**

Topic

Founding Fathers in Their Own Words (Meet the Founding Fathers)

Lesson Plan

Aim

To evaluate the values of our Founding Fathers by analyzing their perspectives in their own words.

Rationale

Our Founding Fathers are often mischaracterized by secondary sources that are plagued with bias. Using one's opinions and selective research is not suitable for coming to understand and getting to know our Founders. While points favorable to the narrative of these historians and researchers are included in their works, points that go against their narrative are absent. This lesson invites students to meet some of our Founding Fathers by hearing from them in their own words regarding topics including economics, government, religious freedom, education, and slavery. Many have emphasized the latter, but they have conveniently left out much of the Founders' efforts and words arguing for emancipation. Additionally, many Americans today have found themselves at odds with our foundation of economics including private property and free market enterprise and have ignored this economic system in pursuit of a radical agenda. The function of government is another point that needs review as that too is being corrupted by a radical agenda. It is crucial that our Founders are given the fair opportunity to make their statements and positions heard, and the words they left behind is the only means we have to let them speak.

Student Learning Objectives

1. Students will be able to identify the purpose of government, economics, education, and religious freedom as perceived and set forth by our Founding Fathers. Additionally, students will identify these Founding Fathers' perspectives on slavery by analyzing their words and actions regarding emancipation.
2. Students will be able to distinguish the roles of the government and the citizens by evaluating power and the meaning of inalienable rights.
3. Students will be able to apply the words of our Founding Fathers to America's contemporary conflicts and use this suggested evidence as a possible guide for decision-making.



Civics Connection

- How have people in power affected political, social, and economic developments regarding the freedom and protection of their people?
- How do the values of a nation unite its citizens?
- What issue(s) does this topic remind you of today? What action would you take in response?

*See the Civics Connection Through Questioning [guide](#) in Civics for more ideas.

Vocabulary

Government	Emancipation	Private Property
Economics	Abolition.	Free Market
Civics	Slavery	
Persecution	Manumission	

Materials and Resources

1. Text: Documents for each founder (George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, John Adams) on *Government, Education, Religious Freedom, Economics, and Comments on Slavery* *Sources cited in document.
2. Handout: Activity A/B (print 2 per student – one for earlier in the lesson, one for closure)
2. Handout: Blank graphic organizer for each Founder and topic
3. Handout: Guiding Questions for each Founder and topic

Procedure

Do Now:

Should we look to the words of our Founding Fathers for guidance regarding America today and our future? Explain why or why not.

Lesson:

The teacher will introduce students to the four Founding Fathers who will be commenting on the topics of government, education, religious freedom, economics, and slavery. The teacher will clearly define each topic. Students will then be asked to complete a thought sheet of their own independently (either Activity A or Activity B) regarding the topics of government, education, religious freedom, and economics by distinguishing between the responsibilities of the government and the individual citizen. Then, students will be given some time to share their answers with their group (or a partner, or whole class) and discuss similarities and differences. This activity will help students empathize with our Founders on responding to such complex topics that had to be considered as they were building a new nation.

Collaborative/Independent Work:

Students will work in groups of 3-4 to interpret the meaning of each primary source quote from the Founding Fathers. Each group will be assigned one of the five topics to research. Students will analyze the four Founding Fathers' words on that topic. Students will respond to the guiding questions to assist their reading and interpretation.



Share:

The teacher will review each topic as it pertains to the view of the Founding Fathers. The teacher will engage in a strict interpretation of each document, highlighting the main points as students discuss what they learned. Throughout the share portion, students should be discussing/noting will whom they agree and disagree.

Close:

Students will complete the same Activity A or B that they completed earlier in the lesson. This time, they will reflect on what they have learned to determine their viewpoints. Students should note if their viewpoints changed and whether reading the words of our Founding Fathers helped them more clearly realize their values and opinions.

Modifications

- Teachers may use different Founding Fathers and/or different topics pertaining to what is relevant for their unit.
- Teachers may provide a vocabulary list of defined words to assist students reading primary source language.
- Teachers may change the assignment for the collaborative work to be divided among the Founders independently instead of topics, or assign multiple topics/Founders to each group.

Extension

Students will return to the initial pre-lesson activity and closure. In groups of 3-4, they must craft one philosophy regarding each topic (government, education, religious freedom, and economics) that they have all agreed upon. Then, the whole class will engage in a discussion on the similarities and differences between their philosophies. The teacher may note and discuss what was easier to agree on and what was more difficult.

Notes

**Use discretion for activities according to what is appropriate for your class.*



Activity A

Answer **one** or more of these questions regarding each topic:

- How can one change, strengthen, or improve upon a social, political, or economic standing?
- How does one contribute to an evolving political, social, or economic system individually and as a group?
- How do the values of a nation unite its citizens?

What are your thoughts on GOVERNMENT?	
What are your thoughts on EDUCATION?	
What are your thoughts on RELIGIOUS FREEDOM?	
What are your thoughts on ECONOMICS?	



Activity B

Circle whether you agree or disagree with each statement. Explain why in the space provided.

<p>Government is responsible for providing everything for citizens.</p>	<p>Agree</p> <p>Disagree</p>	
<p>Education must be accessible by all citizens.</p>	<p>Agree</p> <p>Disagree</p>	
<p>Religious freedom must always be protected. If it were not...</p>	<p>Agree</p> <p>Disagree</p>	
<p>The free market must run itself without any interference from the government.</p>	<p>Agree</p> <p>Disagree</p>	



COMMENTS ON SLAVERY: GEORGE WASHINGTON

1786 – *Letter to Robert Morris, April 12*

I hope it will not be conceived from these observations, that it is my wish to hold the unhappy people who are the subject of this letter, in slavery. I can only say that there is not a man living who wishes more sincerely than I do, to see a plan adopted for the abolition of it—but there is only one proper and effectual mode by which it can be accomplished, & that is by Legislative authority.

Source: “From George Washington to Robert Morris, 12 April 1786,” *Founders Online*, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/04-04-02-0019>. [Original source: *The Papers of George Washington*, Confederation Series, vol. 4, *2 April 1786–31 January 1787*, ed. W. W. Abbot. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1995, pp. 15–17.]

1786 – *Letter to John Francis Mercer, September 9*

I never mean (unless some particular circumstances should compel me to it) to possess another slave by purchase; it being among my first wishes to see some plan adopted, by the legislature by which slavery in this Country may be abolished by slow, sure, & imperceptable degrees.

Source: “From George Washington to John Francis Mercer, 9 September 1786,” *Founders Online*, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/04-04-02-0232>. [Original source: *The Papers of George Washington*, Confederation Series, vol. 4, *2 April 1786–31 January 1787*, ed. W. W. Abbot. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1995, pp. 243–244.]

1799 – *George Washington's Will*

Item Upon the decease of my wife, it is my Will & desire that all the Slaves which I hold in my own right, shall receive their freedom. [...]

And whereas among those who will receive freedom according to this devise, there may be some, who from old age or bodily infirmities, and others who on account of their infancy, that will be unable to support themselves; it is my Will and desire that all who come under the first & second description shall be comfortably clothed & fed by my heirs while they live; and that such of the latter description as have no parents living, or if living are unable, or unwilling to provide for them, shall be bound by the Court until they shall arrive at the age of twenty five years; and in cases where no record can be produced, whereby their ages can be ascertained, the judgment of the Court, upon its own view of the subject, shall be adequate and final. [...]

Source: Washington, George. “George Washington’s Last Will and Testament.” 9 July 1799, <https://www.mountvernon.org/education/primary-sources-2/article/george-washingtons-last-will-and-testament-july-9-1799/#>.



COMMENTS ON SLAVERY: THOMAS JEFFERSON (1)

1774 – Draft of Instructions to the Virginia Delegates in the Continental Congress (MS Text of A Summary View, &C.)

For the most trifling reasons, and sometimes for no conceivable reason at all, his majesty has rejected laws of the most salutary tendency. The abolition of domestic slavery is the great object of desire in those colonies where it was unhappily introduced in their infant state. But previous to the enfranchisement of the slaves we have, it is necessary to exclude all further importations from Africa. Yet our repeated attempts to effect this by prohibitions, and by imposing duties which might amount to a prohibition, have been hitherto defeated by his majesty's negative: thus preferring the immediate advantages of a few British corsairs to the lasting interests of the American states, and to the rights of human nature deeply wounded by this infamous practice. Nay the single interposition of an interested individual against a law was scarcely ever known to fail of success, tho' in the opposite scale were placed the interests of a whole country. That this is so shameful an abuse of a power trusted with his majesty for other purposes, as if not reformed would call for some legal restrictions.

Source: "Draft of Instructions to the Virginia Delegates in the Continental Congress (MS Text of *A Summary View, &c.*), [July 1774]," *Founders Online*, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-01-02-0090>. [Original source: *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, vol. 1, 1760–1776, ed. Julian P. Boyd. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950, pp. 121–137.]

1785 – Notes on the State of Virginia

The general assembly shall not have power [...] to permit the introduction of any more slaves to reside in this state, or the continuance of slavery beyond the generation which shall be living on the thirty-first day of December, one thousand eight hundred: all persons born after that day being hereby declared free [...]

The whole commerce between master and slave is a perpetual exercise of the most hoisterous passions, the most unremitting despotism on the one part, and degrading submissions on the other [...]. And with what execration should the statesman be loaded, who permitting one half the citizens thus to trample on the rights of the other, transforms those into despots, and these into enemies, destroys the morals [...]. And 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? Indeed I tremble for my country when I reflect that God he just: that his justice cannot sleep forever [...]. I think a change already perceptible, since the origin of the present revolution. The spirit of the master is abating, that of the slave rising from the dust, his condition mollifying, the way I hope preparing, der the auspices of heaven, for a total emancipation, and that this is disposed, in the order of events, to be with the consent of the masters, rather than by their extirpation."

Source: Jefferson, Thomas. *Notes On the State of Virginia*. Boston: Lilly and Wait, 1832. <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=nyp.33433081883005&view=1up&seq=7>



COMMENTS ON SLAVERY: THOMAS JEFFERSON (2)

From Monticello: Jefferson's Attitudes Toward Slavery

“Although Jefferson continued to advocate for abolition, the reality was that slavery was becoming more entrenched. The slave population in Virginia skyrocketed from 292,627 in 1790 to 469,757 in 1830. Jefferson had assumed that the abolition of the slave trade would weaken slavery and hasten its end. Instead, slavery became more widespread and profitable. In an attempt to erode Virginians’ support for slavery, he discouraged the cultivation of crops heavily dependent on slave labor—specifically tobacco—and encouraged the introduction of crops that needed little or no slave labor—wheat, sugar maples, short-grained rice, olive trees, and wine grapes.”

Source: *Jefferson's Attitudes Towards Slavery*. Th. Jefferson Monticello. https://www.monticello.org/thomas-jefferson/jefferson-slavery/jefferson-s-attitudes-toward-slavery/#footnote17_qzsgw66.

1821 – Thomas Jefferson: Autobiography

The first establishment in Virginia which became permanent was made in 1607. I have found no mention of [enslaved persons] in the colony until about 1650. the first brought here as slaves were by a Dutch ship; after which the English commenced the trade and continued it until the revolutionary war. that suspended, ipso facto, their further importation for the present, and the business of the war pressing constantly on the legislature, this subject was not acted on finally until the year 78. when I brought in a bill to prevent their further importation. this passed without opposition, and stopped the increase of the evil by importation, leaving to future efforts it's final eradication [...]

Source: “Thomas Jefferson: Autobiography, 6 Jan.-29 July 1821, 6 January 1821,” *Founders Online*, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/98-01-02-1756>. [This is an [Early Access document](#) from [The Papers of Thomas Jefferson: Retirement Series](#). It is not an authoritative final version.]



COMMENTS ON SLAVERY: JOHN ADAMS

1801 – *Letter to George Churchman, January 24*

Although I have never Sought popularity by any animated Speeches or inflammatory publications against the Slavery of the Blacks, my opinion against it has always been known, and my practice has been so conformable to my Sentiment that I have always employd freemen both as Domisticks and Labourers, and never in my Life did I own a Slave. The Abolition of Slavery must be gradual and accomplished with much caution and Circumspection. Violent means and measures would produce greater violations of Justice and Humanity, than the continuance of the practice. Neither Mr Mifflin nor yourselves, I presume would be willing to venture on Exertions which would probably excite Insurrections among the Blacks to rise against their Masters and imbue their hands in innocent blood

Source: "From John Adams to George Churchman, 24 January 1801," *Founders Online*, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/99-02-02-4766>. [This is an [Early Access document](#) from [The Adams Papers](#). It is not an authoritative final version.]



COMMENTS ON SLAVERY: BENJAMIN FRANKLIN

1789 – *Address to the Public from The Abolition Society*

Slavery is such an atrocious debasement of human nature, that its very extirpation, if not performed with solicitous care, may sometimes open a source of serious evils. [...] Attention to emancipated black people, it is therefore to be hoped, will become a branch of our national policy; but, as far as we contribute to promote this emancipation, so far that attention is evidently a serious duty incumbent on us, and which we mean to discharge to the best of our judgement and abilities.

To instruct, to advise, to qualify those, who have been restored to freedom, for the exercise and enjoyment of civil liberty, to promote in them habits of industry, to furnish them with employment suited to their age, [gender], talents, and other circumstances, and to procure their children an education calculated for their future situation in life; these are the great outlines of the annexed plan, which we have adopted, and which we conceive will essentially promote the public good, and the happiness of these [emancipated people].

Source: Franklin, Benjamin. "Address to the Public." Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery and the Relief of Free Negroes Unlawfully Held in Bondage, 9 November 1789, Philadelphia, PA. Address. <http://www.benjamin-franklin-history.org/address-to-the-public/>



EDUCATION: GEORGE WASHINGTON

1790 – *First Annual Address, January 8*

There is nothing, which can better deserve your patronage, than the promotion of Science and Literature. Knowledge is in every Country the surest basis of public happiness. In one, in which the measures of Government receive their impression so immediately from the sense of the Community as in our's, it is proportionably essential. To the security of a free Constitution it contributes in various ways: By convincing those, who are entrusted with the public administration, that every valuable end of Government is best answered by the enlightened confidence of the people: And by teaching the people themselves to know and to value their own rights; to discern and provide against invasions of them; to distinguish between oppression and the necessary exercise of lawful authority; between burthens proceeding from a disregard to their convenience and those resulting from the inevitable exigencies of Society; to discriminate the spirit of liberty from that of licentiousness, cherishing the first, avoiding the last, and uniting a speedy, but temperate vigilance against encroachments, with an inviolable respect to the laws.

Whether this desirable object will be best promoted by affording aids to Seminaries of Learning already established—by the institution of a national University—or by any other expedients, will be well worthy of a place in the deliberations of the Legislature.

Source: "From George Washington to the United States Senate and House of Representatives, 8 January 1790," *Founders Online*, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/05-04-02-0361>. [Original source: *The Papers of George Washington*, Presidential Series, vol. 4, 8 September 1789–15 January 1790, ed. Dorothy Twohig. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993, pp. 543–549.]

1795 – *Letter to Edmund Pendleton, January 22*

When one side only of a story is heard and often repeated, the human mind becomes impressed with it insensibly.

EDITORIAL NOTES [context]

Washington worried about the United States' ability to address the grievances Native Americans being displaced by western migration of whites. In his 22 January 1795 letter to Edmund Pendleton he explains that annual gifts to Native Americans "are not given so much with a view to purchase peace," but "retribution for injuries, not otherwise to be redressed." He feared Native Americans, only seeing the bad side of the United States, would come to resent whites.

Source: <https://www.mountvernon.org/library/digitalhistory/quotes/article/when-one-side-only-of-a-story-is-heard-and-often-repeated-the-human-mind-becomes-impressed-with-it-insensibly/>



EDUCATION: THOMAS JEFFERSON

1786

I think by far the most important bill in our whole code is that for the diffusion of knowledge among the people. No other sure foundation can be devised, for the preservation of freedom and happiness....Preach, my dear Sir, a crusade against ignorance; establish & improve the law for educating the common people. Let our countrymen know that the people alone can protect us against these evils [tyranny, oppression, etc.] and that the tax which will be paid for this purpose is not more than the thousandth part of what will be paid to kings, priests and nobles who will rise up among us if we leave the people in ignorance.

1818

A system of general instruction, which shall reach every description of our citizens from the richest to the poorest, as it was the earliest, so will it be the latest, of all the public concerns in which I shall permit myself to take an interest.

1820

I know no safe depository of the ultimate powers of the society, but the people themselves: and if we think them not enlightened enough to exercise their controul with a wholesome discretion, the remedy is, not to take it from them, but to inform their discretion by education. this is the true corrective of abuses of constitutional power.

Source: "Quotations on Education." *Thomas Jefferson Encyclopedia*, Thomas Jefferson Foundation.
<http://www.monticello.org/site/jefferson/quotations-education>

Additional access: https://30vpln3tyz8n43tfcf2m7fs5-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/TMTCquotations_on_education-2.pdf



EDUCATION: BENJAMIN FRANKLIN

[Note: Many of the quotes often attributed to Benjamin Franklin have not been proven accurate. Therefore, these quotes that have been attributed to him can be analyzed through a lens of education.]

Poor Richard's Almanack, 1735

“Look before, or you’ll find yourself behind.”

Poor Richard's Almanack, 1734

“Better slip with foot than tongue.”

Poor Richard's Almanack, 1756

“Love your Enemies, for they tell you your Faults.”

Poor Richard's Almanack, 1744

“What you seem to be, be really.”

Source: <https://www.fi.edu/benjamin-franklin/famous-quotes>



EDUCATION: JOHN ADAMS

VI. “A Dissertation on the Canon and the Feudal Law,” No. 4, [Monday, 21 October 1765](#)

Let us tenderly and kindly cherish, therefore the means of knowledge. Let us dare to read, think, speak and write.

Source: “VI. “A Dissertation on the Canon and the Feudal Law,” No. 4, 21 October 1765.” *Founders Online*, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/06-01-02-0052-0007>. [Original source: *The Adams Papers*, Papers of John Adams, vol. 1, *September 1755–October 1773*, ed. Robert J. Taylor. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977, pp. 123–128.]

1780 – *Letter to Abigail Adams, May 12*

I must study Politics and War that my sons may have liberty to study Mathematics and Philosophy.” “I must study Politics and War that my sons may have liberty to study Mathematics and Philosophy.

Source: John Adams Historical Society, <http://www.john-adams-heritage.com/quotes/>

A Dissertation on the Canon and the Feudal Law

Let every sluice of knowledge be opened and set a-flowing.

Source: John Adams Historical Society, <http://www.john-adams-heritage.com/quotes/>

Thoughts on Government

Laws for the liberal education of youth, especially of the lower class of people, are so extremely wise and useful, that, to a humane and generous mind, no expense for this purpose would be thought extravagant.

Source: John Adams Historical Society, <http://www.john-adams-heritage.com/quotes/>



RELIGIOUS FREEDOM: GEORGE WASHINGTON

FROM GEORGE WASHINGTON TO THE HEBREW CONGREGATION IN NEWPORT, RHODE ISLAND | WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 18, 1790

For happily the Government of the United States, which gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance requires only that they who live under its protection should demean themselves as good citizens, in giving it on all occasions their effectual support.

Source: "From George Washington to the Hebrew Congregation in Newport, Rhode Island, 18 August 1790," *Founders Online*, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/05-06-02-0135>. [Original source: *The Papers of George Washington*, Presidential Series, vol. 6, 1 July 1790–30 November 1790, ed. Mark A. Mastromarino. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1996, pp. 284–286.]

LETTER TO SIR EDWARD NEWENHAM | SATURDAY, OCTOBER 20, 1792

Of all the animosities which have existed among mankind, those which are caused by a difference of sentiments in religion appear to be the most inveterate and distressing, and ought most to be deprecated.

Source: George Washington's Mount Vernon, <https://www.mountvernon.org/library/digitalhistory/quotes/article/of-all-the-animosities-which-have-existed-among-mankind-those-which-are-caused-by-a-difference-of-sentiments-in-religion-appear-to-be-the-most-inveterate-and-distressing-and-ought-most-to-be-deprecated/>



RELIGIOUS FREEDOM: THOMAS JEFFERSON

1813 – *Jefferson to Richard Rush, May 31*

“... the subject of religion, a subject on which I have ever been most scrupulously reserved. I have considered it as a matter between every man and his maker, in which no other, & far less the public, had a right to intermeddle.”

1802 – *Jefferson to the Baptist Association of Danbury, Connecticut, January 1*

Believing with you that religion is a matter which lies solely between Man & his God, that he owes account to none other for his faith or his worship, that the legitimate powers of government reach actions only, & not opinions, I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their legislature should 'make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof,' thus building a wall of separation between Church & State.

1814 – *Jefferson to Miles King, September 26*

I must ever believe that religion substantially good which produces an honest life, and we have been authorised by one, whom you and I equally respect, to judge of the tree by it's fruit. our particular principles of religion are a subject of accountability to our god alone. I enquire after no man's, and trouble none with mine: nor is it given to us in this life to know whether your's or mine, our friend's or our foe's are exactly the right.

Source: *Jefferson's Religious Beliefs*, Monticello. <https://www.monticello.org/site/research-and-collections/jeffersons-religious-beliefs>



RELIGIOUS FREEDOM: BENJAMIN FRANKLIN

1780 – *Letter to Richard Price, October 9*

When a Religion is good, I conceive that it will support itself; and when it cannot support itself, and God does not take care to support, so that its Professors are oblig'd to call for the help of the Civil Power, 'tis a Sign, I apprehend, of its being a bad one.

Source: "From Benjamin Franklin to Richard Price, 9 October 1780," *Founders Online*, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Franklin/01-33-02-0330>. [Original source: *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, vol. 33, *July 1 through November 15, 1780*, ed. Barbara B. Oberg. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997, pp. 389–390.]

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM: JOHN ADAMS

1812 – *Letter to Benjamin Rush, June 12*

Nothing is more dreaded than the National Government meddling with religion.

Source: "From John Adams to Benjamin Rush, 12 June 1812," *Founders Online*, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/99-02-02-5807>. [This is an **Early Access document** from The Adams Papers. It is not an authoritative final version.]



GOVERNMENT: GEORGE WASHINGTON

1796 – Farewell Address, September 17

However [political parties] may now and then answer popular ends, they are likely in the course of time and things, to become potent engines, by which cunning, ambitious, and unprincipled men will be enabled to subvert the power of the people and to usurp for themselves the reins of government, destroying afterwards the very engines which have lifted them to unjust dominion.

1796 – Farewell Address, September 17

If in the opinion of the People, the distribution or modification of the Constitutional powers be in any particular wrong, let it be corrected by an amendment in the way which the Constitution designates. But let there be no change by usurpation; for though this, in one instance, may be the instrument of good, it is the customary weapon by which free governments are destroyed.

1796 – Farewell Address, September 17

It is important ... that the habits of thinking in a free Country should inspire caution in those entrusted with its administration, to confine themselves within their respective Constitutional Spheres; avoiding in the exercise of the Powers of one department to encroach upon another.

Source: "Farewell Address, 19 September 1796," *Founders Online*, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/05-20-02-0440-0002>. [Original source: *The Papers of George Washington*, Presidential Series, vol. 20, *1 April–21 September 1796*, ed. David R. Hoth and William M. Ferraro. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2019, pp. 703–722.]



GOVERNMENT: THOMAS JEFFERSON

Extract from Thomas Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia* [Query VIII, "Population"]

Every species of government has its specific principles. Ours perhaps are more peculiar than those of any other in the universe. It is a composition of the freest principles of the English constitution, with others derived from natural right and natural reason. To these nothing can be more opposed than the maxims of absolute monarchies. ... the minds of our citizens may be ripening for a complete emancipation of human nature.

Extract from Thomas Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia* [Query XVII, "Religion"]

But is the spirit of the people an infallible, a permanent reliance? Is it government? Is this the kind of protection we receive in return for the rights we give up? Besides, the spirit of the times may alter, will alter. Our rulers will become corrupt, our people careless. A single zealot may commence persecutor, and better men be his victims. It can never be too often repeated, that the time for fixing every essential right on a legal basis is while our rulers are honest, and ourselves united. From the conclusion of this war we shall be going down hill. It will not then be necessary to resort every moment to the people for support. They will be forgotten, therefore, and their rights disregarded. They will forget themselves, but in the sole faculty of making money, and will never think of uniting to effect a due respect for their rights. The shackles, therefore, which shall not be knocked off at the conclusion of this war, will remain on us long, will be made heavier and heavier, till our rights shall revive or expire in a convulsion.

Source: Jefferson, Thomas. *Notes on the state of Virginia*. Boston, Lilly, and Wait, 1832. Pdf. Retrieved from the Library of Congress, www.loc.gov/item/030004902/.



GOVERNMENT: BENJAMIN FRANKLIN

Freedom of speech is a principal pillar of a free government; when this support is taken away, the constitution of a free society is dissolved, and tyranny is erected on its ruins. Republics...derive their strength and vigor from a popular examination into the action of the magistrates.

Ordaining of laws in favor of one part of the nation to the prejudice and oppression of another is certainly the most erroneous and mistaken policy...An equal dispensation of protection, rights, privileges, and advantages, is what every part is entitled to, and ought to enjoy.

This Constitution...can only end in despotism...when the people shall become so corrupted as to need despotic government, being incapable of any other.

Source: *17 Benjamin Franklin Quotes on Tyranny, Liberty, and Rights*. FEE Stories, Foundation for Economic Education, 17 Jan. 2020. <https://fee.org/articles/17-benjamin-franklin-quotes-on-tyranny-liberty-and-rights/>



GOVERNMENT: JOHN ADAMS

National defense is one of the cardinal duties of a statesman.

The people alone have an incontestable, unalienable, and indefeasible right to institute government; and to reform, alter, or totally change the same, when their protection, safety, prosperity, and happiness require it.

Government is instituted for the common good; for the protection, safety, prosperity, and happiness of the people; and not for profit, honor, or private interest of any one man, family, or class of men.

It is much easier to pull down a government, in such a conjuncture of affairs as we have seen, than to build up, at such a season as the present.

Source: Leidner, Gordon. *The Founding Fathers: Quotes, Quips, and Speeches*. Cumberland House, 2013, pp. 49, 74, 75, 110.

1797 – Inaugural Address in the City of Philadelphia

In the midst of these pleasing ideas we should be unfaithful to ourselves if we should ever lose sight of the danger to our liberties if anything partial or extraneous should infect the purity of our free, fair, virtuous, and independent elections. If an election is to be determined by a majority of a single vote, and that can be procured by a party through artifice or corruption, the Government may be the choice of a party for its own ends, not of the nation for the national good. If that solitary suffrage can be obtained by foreign nations by flattery or menaces, by fraud or violence, by terror, intrigue, or venality, the Government may not be the choice of the American people, but of foreign nations. It may be foreign nations who govern us, and not we, the people, who govern ourselves; and candid men will acknowledge that in such cases choice would have little advantage to boast of over lot or chance.

Source: Adams, John. *Inaugural Address in the City of Philadelphia*. The Avalon Project: Documents in Law, History, and Diplomacy. Yale Law Lillian Goldman-Law Library, https://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/adams.asp.



ECONOMICS: GEORGE WASHINGTON

1796 – *Farewell Address, September 17*

As a very important source of strength and security, cherish public credit. One method of preserving it is, to use it as sparingly as possible; avoiding occasions of expense by cultivating peace, but remembering also that timely disbursements to prepare for danger frequently prevent much greater disbursements to repel it; avoiding likewise the accumulation of debt, not only by shunning occasions of expense, but by vigorous exertions in time of peace to discharge the debts, which unavoidable wars may have occasioned, not ungenerously throwing upon posterity the burthen, which we ourselves ought to bear.

Source: "Farewell Address, 19 September 1796," *Founders Online*, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/05-20-02-0440-0002>. [Original source: *The Papers of George Washington*, Presidential Series, vol. 20, *1 April–21 September 1796*, ed. David R. Hoth and William M. Ferraro. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2019, pp. 703–722.]

1784 - *Letter to Benjamin Harrison, October 10*

A people... who are possessed of the spirit of commerce, who see and who will pursue their advantages may achieve almost anything.

Source: "From George Washington to Benjamin Harrison, 10 October 1784," *Founders Online*, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/04-02-02-0082>. [Original source: *The Papers of George Washington*, Confederation Series, vol. 2, *18 July 1784–18 May 1785*, ed. W. W. Abbot. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1992, pp. 86–98.]



ECONOMICS: THOMAS JEFFERSON

1801 - *First Inaugural Address, March 4*

A wise and frugal government... shall restrain men from injuring one another, shall leave them otherwise free to regulate their own pursuits of industry and improvement, and shall not take from the mouth of labor the bread it has earned. This is the sum of good government.

Source: *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson, Volume 33: 17 February to 30 April 1801* (Princeton University Press, 2006), 148-52

1816 - *Letter to John Taylor, May 28*

And I sincerely believe, with you, that banking establishments are more dangerous than standing armies; and that the principle of spending money to be paid by posterity, under the name of funding, is but swindling futurity on a large scale.

Source: "Thomas Jefferson to John Taylor, 28 May 1816," *Founders Online*, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/03-10-02-0053>. [Original source: *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, Retirement Series, vol. 10, *May 1816 to 18 January 1817*, ed. J. Jefferson Looney. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013, pp. 86-90.]



ECONOMICS: BENJAMIN FRANKLIN

I am for doing good to the poor, but I differ in opinion of the means. I think the best way of doing good to the poor, is not making them easy in poverty, but leading or driving them out of it. In my youth I traveled much, and I observed in different countries, that the more public provisions were made for the poor, the less they provided for themselves, and of course became poorer. And, on the contrary, the less was done for them, the more they did for themselves, became richer.

Source: Leidner, Gordon. *The Founding Fathers: Quotes, Quips, and Speeches*. Cumberland House, 2013, pp. 104.



ECONOMICS: JOHN ADAMS

1787 - A Defense of the Constitutions of Government of the United States of America

The moment the idea is admitted into society that property is not as sacred as the laws of God, and that there is not a force of law and public justice to protect it, anarchy and tyranny commence. If ‘Thou shalt not covet’ and ‘Thou shalt not steal’ were not commandments of Heaven, they must be made inviolable precepts in every society before it can be civilized or made free.

Source: Adams, John. *Property*. Defense of the Constitutions of Government of the United States. *The University of Chicago Press*, vol. 1, ch. 16, no. 15, 1787, <http://press-pubs.uchicago.edu/founders/documents/v1ch16s15.html>

1787 – Letter to Thomas Jefferson, August 25

All the Perplexities, Confusion and Distresses in America arise not from defects in their Constitutions or Confederation, not from a want of Honor or Virtue, So much as from downright Ignorance of the Nature of Coin, Credit and Circulation.

Source: “To Thomas Jefferson from John Adams, 25 August 1787,” *Founders Online*, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-12-02-0064>. [Original source: *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, vol. 12, 7 August 1787–31 March 1788, ed. Julian P. Boyd. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955, pp. 55–56.]



	GEORGE WASHINGTON
Comments on Slavery	
Education	
Religious Freedom	
Government	
Economics	



THOMAS JEFFERSON

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Guiding Questions: Comments on Slavery

George Washington: What did Washington think was necessary for the abolition of slavery? Why do you think this was his belief?

George Washington: How did Washington wish for his slaves to be treated upon his death?

Thomas Jefferson: What were Jefferson's plans regarding the importation of slaves? How did the king prevent his efforts from happening? What did he try to do to get around the king's obstacle? [Answer after reading all documents.]

Thomas Jefferson: What does evidence suggest was Jefferson's belief about emancipation? Do you think he believed this was possible?

Benjamin Franklin: Why did Franklin suggest that emancipation was not enough? What else would be needed and why?

John Adams: Did John Adams own slaves? Why did he believe the process of abolition should be gradual?



Guiding Questions: Education

George Washington: According to Washington, how does education bring security? To what security is he referring?

George Washington: What is the meaning of the quote, “When one side only of a story...?”

Thomas Jefferson: How does Jefferson justify paying for a “common” education?

Benjamin Franklin: What is the meaning of Franklin’s sayings when put in the context of education?

John Adams: Why is reading, thinking, speaking, and writing a “dare”?

John Adams: Why do you think Adams believed no expense would be too much for the education of all?



Guiding Questions: Religious Freedom

George Washington: What did Washington assert would be one of the protections living in the United States? Why were religious differences such a concern?

Thomas Jefferson: Jefferson asserted that the matter of religion remains between which two people?

Thomas Jefferson: What did Jefferson mean by “a wall of separation of Church and State”? Why did he write this to the Danbury Baptists?

Benjamin Franklin: What is the reason Franklin suggests for a government to find it necessary to use force regarding religion?

John Adams: Why does he find it “more dreaded” for the government to “meddle” with religion?



Guiding Questions: Government

George Washington: What were Washington's warnings in his Farewell Address?

Thomas Jefferson: According to Thomas Jefferson, where do our rights come from?

Thomas Jefferson: What is Thomas Jefferson's warning in his *Notes on the State of Virginia*?

Benjamin Franklin: What does Franklin assert is a sure reliance of a free government? Explain why.

John Adams: According to John Adams, what is and is not the purpose of government?

John Adams: Why does Adams say that it is easier to "pull down a government" than to build one up?

John Adams: Explain Adams' concern with political parties.



Guiding Questions: Economics

George Washington: What is Washington's warning about accumulating debt?

George Washington: What does Washington mean when he says, "A people...who are possessed of the spirit of commerce?"

Thomas Jefferson: How does Jefferson promote a free market? Why do you think this was important for him to address?

Benjamin Franklin: What is Franklin's perspective on "doing good to the poor?"

John Adams: Explain how John Adams views private property.

