

America is Exceptional

239 years ago a group of very brave men signed a document stating that the thirteen colonies would no longer be under the rule of the King of England.

That document, The Declaration of Independence, laid the foundational principles upon which our form of government was later built.

In it they declared, “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, – That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.”

Points to ponder ~

- We are created purposefully and intentionally – we’re not merely an accidental result of evolution.
- All people have equal worth and value as human beings. As such we are to have equal standing before the law, and there should be no special favors for certain people or groups.
- Our basic rights come from God, not from any government.
- The right to Life – life is sacred because it is from God.
- The right to Liberty – we were created to be free. Most of the founding fathers recognized slavery as a great evil, but they did not know how to get rid of it. By incorporating these concepts into the Declaration of Independence, they purposefully planted seeds that would one day come forth and result in the end of that great evil.
- The pursuit of Happiness – the right to make free choices, as a line of work – and be able to enjoy the fruit/reward of that labor.
- That the legitimate powers of a government come from the consent of the people – rather than from the dictates of a king or ruler.

These were revolutionary ideas in 1776 – and in many countries today they are still revolutionary! Oppressed peoples around the world seek to come here because of these ideas! America is an exceptional nation. If anyone – even our own president – tries to tell you otherwise, don’t believe it. America is exceptional, not because of who we are, but because of the principles upon which our nation was founded.

Where did the ideas in the Declaration of Independence come from?

Our Founders referred to them as ‘self-evident truths’, and stated them as follows: “...all men are created equal, ... they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness...”

These are the concepts that became the foundation of our system of government. Ravi Zacharias, who was born in India and is intimately acquainted with all of the eastern religions, says the American form of government could never have come from Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, or Naturalism. “Hinduism would never have said those words because we are not created equal in Hinduism’s eyes. Islam would never have said that because we don’t have unalienable rights in Islam.” Neither Naturalism nor Buddhism would have said that because they don’t believe in a Creator. Only the Judeo-Christian worldview, where the Creator is personally concerned with all His creation, could have given us a statement so compact and so liberating.

The concepts in our founding documents are under attack today. There are those who seek to “fundamentally transform” our form of government and our way of life. We see evidence of this everywhere. The word, ‘capitalism’ has almost become a dirty word. ‘Capitalism’ is ‘Free Enterprise’. The ‘pursuit of happiness’ means we are free to set up and run a business – or free to seek employment at some business. Capitalism is good and benefits everyone; it becomes bad only when people use it to seek gain at the expense of others.

The problem is not with the system – but with the people who abuse the system. John Adams said, “Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.”

Benjamin Franklin stated, “Only a virtuous people are capable of freedom. As nations become corrupt and vicious, they have more need of masters.”

Let us blame the system no longer. Let us rather examine ourselves and be sure that we, as individuals are ‘capable of freedom’.

Looking at the Constitution as a Game of Chess

Think of the Constitution as a game of chess. There are different players, each with a different role to play. In our version of chess, we use the king, the queen and the rook to stand for the three branches of government - executive, legislative and judicial.

In chess, the piece with the greatest value, (the greatest power), is the queen because it can move freely in any direction. The men who wrote our Constitution wanted the legislative (law-making) branch to have the greatest power, so they placed it at the beginning of the document, titling it, 'Article I'. Because they wanted to assure that the ultimate power of the government, the power to make the laws, would rest equally with the people of every state, they established not just one, but two legislative bodies.

In the Constitution, you can read the general 'description' of the House of Representatives in Article I, Section 2, and the Senate in Article I, Section 3. In Section 8 of Article I, you can read the 17 specific powers granted to the law-making bodies. These include the power to tax, to establish post offices and post roads, to declare war, to raise and support an army and a navy, and to enact all necessary laws. The power to raise revenue was assigned to the House of Representatives in Section 7.1. Since the power to tax, (to raise revenue), carries with it the power to destroy, our Founding Fathers put a very short leash on the Representatives – they would have to return home and face the voters every other year!

The most important-sounding piece in the game of chess is the king, yet his powers are more limited than the queen's because he can move only one square at a time. The king in this version of chess is the Executive Branch. You can see how few powers the Executive has if you read Article II, Section 2. His most important power or duty is listed first: He is to be commander-in-chief of the army and navy. In other words, he has the solemn responsibility of protecting us from harm. (Section 2.1) With the advice and consent of the Senate, he may also make treaties and make appointments of inferior officers.(Section 2.2) Finally, he shall periodically give information to Congress, give advice as he sees necessary, and take care that the laws are faithfully executed. (Section 3). The president can advise Congress as he sees fit, but he has been given no authority to make laws.

In chess, the rook can be used to "castle" or protect the king. The rook in this version of chess is the Judicial branch designed to protect – not the king – but the citizens from laws that are determined to be *unconstitutional*, and are therefore harmful to the people.

Our Founding Fathers held a deep distrust of government – even the one they would create themselves. They knew from experience that, "power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely"(Lord Acton). For this reason the rights and powers they gave to the federal government were specific and limited in scope – all others were reserved to the States. They knew that if we continued to be a virtuous people and if our leaders 'followed the rules' established in the Constitution, America would always be a free and prosperous nation.

Learn more about the Constitution by taking the free online course, '[Constitution 101](https://online.hillsdale.edu)', at: <https://online.hillsdale.edu>

The Rules of the ‘Game’

The common goal of the Founding Fathers was to set up a system in which there would be enough government to maintain security, justice and good order, but not enough to abuse the people. They desired that the ultimate power would rest with the people, rather than with the government. They had suffered long enough under a king’s abuse and did not want to exchange one form of tyranny for another.

Our Founders were well educated in the political systems of ancient Greece and Rome and spent much time discussing and evaluating these as possible models for the new nation. They were also very well schooled in the Bible, and acknowledged that mankind is flawed in nature, and not even the best of men –not even they themselves – could be trusted with unlimited power. History had demonstrated repeatedly that people suffer when political power is concentrated in one individual or group of individuals. To prevent this from happening, the Founders set up a complex system in which each ‘player’ has the ability to put a ‘check’ on one of the others. Recall that they had designated certain powers to be exercised by the two branches. (*See preceding flier*) Then, to restrain each from usurping a power that belonged to one of the others, they set up the system we call ‘checks and balances’.

When the Senate, for example, introduces a bill, it cannot become law without the approval of the House of Representatives. The same applies to the House when it introduces a bill. When – and if – the legislators in both houses come to agreement, the bill is then sent to the president. He either signs it into law or vetoes it. If he vetoes it, the members of the legislature can override his veto by re-passing it with a 2/3rd vote. Furthermore, if the law, once enacted, seems to be harmful to the citizens, it can be brought before the judicial branch where it might be declared unconstitutional. These are only a few of the checks and balances which our Founders built into the Constitution. The ultimate check they gave to the people. At the ballot box we have the opportunity to remove and replace those who do not govern according to the ‘will of the people’. We have the ultimate ‘checkmate’! Jefferson reflected the thinking of all the Founders when he said, “We must not place confidence in our elected officials, rather we must “bind them down from mischief by the chains of the Constitution.”

These “chains” remained strong as long as our elected officials continued to ‘follow the rules’ and the people demanded through their votes that they do so, but in the late 1800’s an idea that grew out of Darwin’s theory of evolution took hold among the educated classes. They became convinced that society could ‘evolve’ into a kind of Utopia if only the elite were in control. In Europe the political systems of Communism, Socialism and even Nazism grew out of this idea. In America, Woodrow Wilson was the first president to hold such ‘evolutionary – progressive’ ideas. Here it was called ‘Progressivism’ or ‘Liberalism’. It was the opposite of ‘government by the people’. In time it grew into a massive centralized government where the leaders have all the power and the rights of the people are few.

This is where we are today. Thankfully, there are many potential candidates who are aware of the direction our nation has been going and want to begin a gradual rolling back of big government – back toward limited government, free enterprise and the principles of our Founders. You can have a part in this by making sure you are (1) registered to vote, (2) by learning about the issues and the candidates – and (3) by casting your vote. Your vote CAN make a difference!

Learn about Progressivism by taking the free online course, ‘Constitution 201’ at: <https://https://online.hillsdale.edu>

Patriot’s flier #4

How was the Constitution Birthed?

Imagine you are living in 1787. The Revolutionary War is over and the 13 individual states are free from the oppressive British rule. For several years the states have been loosely held together under a document called, 'The Articles of Confederation', but it has become apparent that the Articles are too weak to adequately govern the states and keep them from eventually breaking apart into separate nations. Should that happen, the leaders knew European nations stood ready to gobble them up. If the 13 former colonies were to remain free and sovereign, they must have a stronger, more robust form of government.

With that in mind, delegates from each of the 13 states were gathered in Philadelphia to draw up a constitution that would meet their unique needs. They had arrived there in May, expecting their task would be quickly completed. They found, instead, that it was extremely difficult. The new constitution needed to provide not only liberty and security, but it also had to meet the approval of the many groups, each with their own special agendas. Compromise seemed impossible. To make matters worse, funds were running low for many of the delegates, the weather had become hot and tempers were beginning to flare.

Just when it seemed they had failed in their attempt to craft a constitution, Benjamin Franklin, now very elderly, rose and addressed the body. He rehearsed the "small progress they had made after six or seven weeks – how they had been groping, as it were in the dark, to find political truth", but unable to find it. Then he asked, "How has it happened, therefore, that we have not once thought of humbly applying to the Father of lights to illuminate our understandings?" Franklin went on to remind the delegates how they had prayed daily when they were at war – and how those prayers were heard and were graciously – or even miraculously answered.

Picture this white haired patriot pulling himself up to stand as tall as his aged frame would allow and declaring, "Gentlemen, I have lived 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 in the sacred writings that, 'Except the Lord build, they labor in vain that build it.' I firmly believe this... I therefore... move that henceforth prayers imploring the assistance of Heaven, and its blessings on our deliberations, be held in this Assembly every morning."

From that time on, the delegates prayed – not just for a few minutes, but for hours, and sometimes, even for days. When they returned to their work, they were amazed to find that the difficulties, which stood like mountains before, could now be overcome. Madison wrote later, "The real wonder is that so many difficulties should have been surmounted", and done so with a unanimity that was both unprecedented and unexpected." He concluded, "It is impossible not to perceive in this a finger of the Almighty."

Should we not also at this critical point in our history devote ourselves both to individual and corporate prayer – that God might be pleased to preserve and maintain what He so evidently and graciously gave to our forefathers? Let us pray.

Our Freedoms Guaranteed

The Founders continued working throughout the hot summer, praying for wisdom and guidance as they did. Finally, on September 17 the work was completed. They had accomplished what had never been done before: They established * “a system of ‘People’s Law’, where the government is kept under the control of the people and political power is maintained at the balanced center with enough government to maintain security, justice and good order, but not enough to abuse the people.” The 5,000 Year Leap by Leon Skousen

Each of the states would have to sign on to the new constitution. There was much debate over each aspect of it. There were those who were fearful that a powerful central government would infringe upon the rights of the people. For that reason, the states were asked to submit amendments to guarantee that their rights would never be violated. Ten of those were selected and added to the Constitution. These are called ~

The Bill of Rights

- 1. Freedom of religion, speech, of the press, and right of petition:** Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.
- 2. The right of the people to bear arms is not to be infringed.**
- 3. Quartering of troops** (Soldiers were not to be lodged in homes of private citizens.)
- 4. Persons and houses are to be secure from unreasonable searches and seizures.**
- 5. Trials for crimes:** (Trial by jury. No person shall be deprived of life, liberty or property without due process of law. Private property shall not be taken...without just compensation.)
- 6. The Civil Rights of the Accused are Enumerated:** (Trial by an impartial jury)
- 7. Civil Rights in Civil Suits:** (No person is to be tried twice for the same crime.)
- 8, Excessive bail, fines and punishments are prohibited.**
- 9. The rights of the people are reserved.**
- 10. The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people.**

“Many Americans in the early years of the Republic truly regarded the Constitution as a miracle. ...They looked on it as an event that was actually ‘influenced, guided and governed by the hand of God’ ” The 5,000 Year Leap, by Leon Skousen.

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