

Founding Fathers Quotes: Our Favorite Quotes from America's Courageous Revolutionaries



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The Ten Commandments of Logic

1. Thou shalt not attack the person's character, but the argument. (Ad hominem)
2. Thou shalt not misrepresent or exaggerate a person's argument in order to make them easier to attack. (Straw man fallacy)
3. Thou shalt not use small numbers to represent the whole. (Hasty generalizations)
4. Thou shalt not argue thy position by assuming one of its premises is true. (Begging the question)
5. Thou shalt not claim that because something occurred before, it must be the cause. (Post hoc/False cause)
6. Thou shalt not reduce the argument down to two possibilities. (False dichotomy)
7. Thou shalt not argue that because of our ignorance, claim must be true or false. (Ad ignorantum)
8. Thou shalt not lay the burden of proof onto him that is questioning the claim. (Burden of proof reversal)
9. Thou shalt not assume “this” follows “that” when it has no logical connection. (Non sequitur)
10. Thou shalt not argue that because a premise is popular, therefore it must be true. (Bandwagon fallacy)

Unknown

Introduction

Nothing clarifies a man's thoughts like staking his life on them.

When what you believe threatens to deliver death and danger to your door, you think again – *hard* – about those beliefs. This is the moment of truth, when casual opinions dissolve and only convictions backed with soul-searching can stand. It's what made the American Founders special, and what made their thoughts more valuable than the pontifications of subsequent experts and elites: They were forced to risk their lives on their ideas, and the cross was burned away.

Thus we've brought together some of our favorite Founding Fathers quotes from America's courageous revolutionaries.

Curated by
[Brian Miller](#)

Liberty Quotes

"Our unalterable resolution should be to be free."

[Sam Adams](#), to [James Warren](#), 1776

"Wear none of thine own chains; but keep free, whilst thou art free."

[William Penn](#), "Some Fruits of Solitude", 1693

"You will never know how much it has cost my generation to preserve YOUR freedom. I hope you will make a good use of it."

[John Adams](#)

"Political freedom includes in it every other blessing. All the pleasures of riches, science, virtue, and even religion itself derive their value from liberty alone. No wonder therefore wise and prudent legislators have in all ages been held in such great veneration; and no wonder too those illustrious souls who have employed their pens and sacrificed their lives in defense of liberty have met with such universal applause. Their reputations, like some majestic river which enlarges and widens as it approaches its parent ocean, shall become greater and greater through every age and outlive the ruins of the world itself."

[Benjamin Rush](#), to [Catharine Macaulay](#), January 18, 1769

"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](#)

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

[Thomas Jefferson](#), to [Abigail Smith Adams](#), February 22, 1787

"The price of freedom is eternal vigilance."

[Thomas Jefferson](#)

"The sacred rights of mankind are not to be rummaged for among old parchments or musty records. They are written, as with a sunbeam, 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](#), "The Farmer Refuted", February 5, 1775

"What we obtain too cheap, we esteem too lightly: it is dearness only that gives every thing its value. Heaven knows how to put a proper price upon its goods; and it would be strange indeed if so celestial an article as freedom should not be highly rated."

Thomas Paine

"Freedom hath been hunted round the globe. Asia and Africa have long expelled her. Europe regards her like a stranger, and England hath given her warning to depart. O! Receive the fugitive, and prepare in time an asylum for mankind."

Thomas Paine, "Common Sense", 1776

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

Samuel Adams

"Freedom and not servitude is the cure of anarchy; as religion, and not atheism, is the true remedy for superstition."

Edmund Burke, *Second Speech on Conciliation with America, The Thirteen Resolutions*, March 22, 1775

For more, visit [Founding Fathers Quotes on Why America's Revolutionaries Fought For Liberty and Freedom](#)

Our Founding Fathers on Religious Freedom

"We have no government armed with power capable of contending with human passions unbridled by morality and religion... Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other."

John Adams

"It is a document in proof that *I* am a *real Christian*, that is to say, a disciple of the doctrines of Jesus, very different from the Platonists, who call *me* infidel, and *themselves* Christians and preachers of the gospel, while they draw all their characteristic dogmas from what it's Author never said nor saw. They have compounded from the heathen mysteries a system beyond the comprehension of man, of which the great reformer of the vicious ethics and deism of the Jews, were he to return on earth, would not recognize one feature."

Thomas Jefferson, in a letter speaking about the Jefferson Bible

For more, visit [Founding Fathers Quotes on Religious Freedom and the Separation Between Church & State](#)

Quotes About Liberty and Laws

"A government of laws, and not of men."

John Adams, *Essay in the Boston Gazette*, 1774

"A strict observance of the written laws is doubtless one of the high duties of a good citizen, but it is not the highest. The laws of necessity, of self preservation, of saving our country when in danger, are of a higher obligation. ... To lose our country by a scrupulous adherence to written law would be to lose the law itself, with life, liberty, property and all those who are enjoying them with us; thus absurdly sacrificing the ends to the means."

Thomas Jefferson, to John B. Colvin, September 20, 1810

"Those that can give up essential liberty to gain a little temporary safety deserve neither liberty nor safety."

Benjamin Franklin

"Law is whatever is boldly asserted and plausibly maintained."

Aaron Burr

"Friends and neighbors complain that taxes are indeed very heavy, and if those laid on by the government were the only ones we had to pay, we might more easily discharge them; but we have many others, and much more grievous to some of us. *We are taxed twice as much by our idleness, three times as much by our pride, and four times as much by our folly;* and from these taxes the commissioners cannot ease or deliver us by allowing an abatement. However, let us hearken to good advice, and something may be done for us: 'God helps them that help themselves,' as Poor Richard says."

Benjamin Franklin, *The Way to Wealth*

"When the people find that they can vote themselves money, that will herald the end of the republic."

Benjamin Franklin

"Where carcasses are, eagles will gather, And where good laws are, much people flock thither."

Benjamin Franklin, *Poor Richard's Almanack*, 1732

"Rightful liberty is unobstructed action according to our will within limits drawn around us by the equal rights of others. I do not add 'within the limits of the law' because law is often but the tyrant's will, and always so when it violates the rights of the individual."

Thomas Jefferson

"Of the liberty of conscience in matters of religious faith, of speech and of the press; of the trial by jury of the vicinage in civil and criminal cases; of the benefit of the writ of habeas corpus; of the right to keep and bear arms...If these rights are well defined, and secured against encroachment, it is impossible that government should ever degenerate into tyranny."

James Monroe

"It will be of little avail to the people that the laws are made by men of their own choice, if the laws be so voluminous that they cannot be read, or so incoherent that they cannot be understood; if they be repealed or revised before they are promulgated, or undergo such incessant changes that no man who knows what the law is today can guess what it will be tomorrow."

James Madison

"Any government is free to the people under it where the laws rule and the people are a party to the laws."

William Penn, *Frame of Government*, 1682

"Our new Constitution is now established, everything seems to promise it will be durable; but, in this world, nothing is certain except death and taxes."

Benjamin Franklin

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

Thomas Jefferson

For more, visit [*Founding Fathers Quotes on Justice For All and Equal Treatment Under the Law*](#)

Our Founding Fathers on the Right to Bear Arms

"The supposed quietude of a good man allures the ruffian; while on the other hand, arms like laws discourage and keep the invader and plunderer in awe, and preserve order in the world as well as property. The same balance would be preserved were all the world destitute of arms, for all would be alike; but since some will not, others dare not lay them aside... Horrid mischief would ensue were one half the world deprived of the use of them..."

Thomas Paine

"What country can preserve its liberties if its rulers are not warned from time to time that their people preserve the spirit of resistance? Let them take arms."

Thomas Jefferson

"This may be considered as the true palladium of liberty...The right of self-defense is the first law of nature; in most governments it has been the study of rulers to confine this right within the narrowest possible limits...Wherever standing armies are kept up and [when] the right of the people to keep and bear arms is, under any color or pretext whatsoever, prohibited, liberty, if not already annihilated, is on the brink of destruction."

St. George Tucker

"Laws that forbid the carrying of arms disarm only those who are neither inclined nor determined to commit crimes."

Thomas Jefferson quoting Cesare Beccaria

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

George Washington, Letter to Elbridge Gerry, January 29, 1780

"A strong body makes the mind strong. As to the species of exercises, I advise the gun. While this gives moderate exercise to the body, it gives boldness, enterprise and independence to the mind. Games played with the ball, and others of that nature, are too violent for the body and stamp no character on the mind. Let your gun therefore be your constant companion of your walks."

Thomas Jefferson

"Men are also bound, individuals and societies, to take care of their temporal happiness, and do all they lawfully can, to promote it. But what can be more inconsistent with this duty, than submitting to great encroachments upon our liberty? Such submission tends to slavery; and complete slavery implies every evil that the malice of man and devils can inflict."

Simeon Howard, A sermon preached to the Ancient and Honorable Artillery Company in Boston, 1773

"One loves to possess arms, though they hope never to have occasion for them."

Thomas Jefferson

"Congress have no power to disarm the militia. Their swords, and every other terrible implement of the soldier, are the birth-right of an American...The unlimited power of the sword is not in the hands of either the federal or state governments, but, where I trust in God it will ever remain, in the hands of the people."

Tench Coxe

"The constitutions of most of our States assert, that all power is inherent in the people...that it is their right and duty to be at all times armed."

Thomas Jefferson

"As civil rulers, not having their duty to the people duly before them, may attempt to tyrannize, and as the military forces which must be occasionally raised to defend our country, might pervert their power to the injury of their fellow citizens, the people are confirmed by the article in their right to keep and bear their private arms."

Tench Coxe

"Every citizen should be a soldier. This was the case with the Greeks and Romans, and must be that of every free state."

Thomas Jefferson

"The militia, who are in fact the effective part of the people at large, will render many troops quite unnecessary. They will form a powerful check upon the regular troops, and will generally be sufficient to over-awe them."

Tench Coxe

"Americans have the right and advantage of being armed — unlike the citizens of other countries whose governments are afraid to trust the people with arms."

James Madison

"The right of the citizens to keep and bear arms has justly been considered, as the palladium of the liberties of a republic; since it offers a strong moral check against the usurpation and arbitrary power of rulers; and will generally, even if these are successful in the first instance, enable the people to resist and triumph over them."

Joseph Story

"The right of the people to keep and bear...arms shall not be infringed. A well regulated militia, composed of the body of the people, trained to arms, is the best and most natural defense of a free country."

James Madison

"Free men have arms; slaves do not."

William Blackstone

"From the east to the west blow the trumpet to arms! Through the land let the sound of it flee; Let the far and the near all unite, with a cheer, In defense of our Liberty Tree."

Thomas Paine

"The prohibition is general. No clause in the Constitution could by any rule of construction be conceived to give to Congress a power to disarm the people. Such a flagitious attempt could only be made under some general pretense by a state legislature. But if in any blind pursuit of inordinate power, either should attempt it, this amendment may be appealed to as a restraint on both."

William Rawle

"Guard with jealous attention the public liberty. Suspect everyone who approaches that jewel. Unfortunately, nothing will preserve it but downright force. Whenever you give up that force, you are ruined...The great object is that every man be armed. Everyone who is able might have a gun."

Patrick Henry

"If I were an American, as I am an Englishman, while a foreign troop was landed in my country, I never would lay down my arms – never – never – never!"

William Pitt

"The militia is our ultimate safety. We can have no security without it."

Patrick Henry

"The militia is the natural defense of a free country against sudden foreign invasions, domestic insurrections and domestic usurpations of power by rulers. It is against sound policy for a free people to keep up large military establishments and standing armies in time of peace both from the enormous expenses with which they are attended and the facile means which they afford to ambitious and unprincipled rulers to subvert the government or trample upon the rights of the people. The right of the citizens to keep and bear arms has justly been considered as the palladium of the liberties of a republic since it offers a strong moral check against the usurpation and arbitrary power of rulers and will generally even if these are successful the first instance enable the people to resist and triumph over them."

Justice Joseph Story

"Are we at last brought to such humiliating and debasing degradation, that we cannot be trusted with arms for our defense? Where is the difference between having our arms in possession and under our direction, and having them under the management of Congress? If our defense be the real object of having those arms, in whose hands can they be trusted with more propriety, or equal safety to us, as in our own hands?"

Patrick Henry

"[T]he people are not to be disarmed of their weapons. They are left in full possession of them."

Zacharia Johnson

"I ask, sir, what is the militia? It is the whole people, except for few public officials."

George Mason

"O sir, we should have fine times, indeed, if, to punish tyrants, it were only sufficient to assemble the people! Your arms, wherewith you could defend yourselves, are gone; and you have no longer an aristocratical, no longer a democratical spirit. Did you ever read of any revolution in a nation, brought about by the punishment of those in power, inflicted by those who had no power at all?"

Patrick Henry, *Speech in the Virginia Ratifying Convention, June 5, 1788*

"[W]hen the resolution of enslaving America was formed in Great Britain, the British Parliament was advised by an artful man – who was governor of Pennsylvania, to disarm the people; that it was the best and most effectual way to enslave them; but that they should not do it openly, but weaken them, and let them sink gradually, by totally disusing and neglecting the militia."

George Mason

"Who are the militia? Are they not ourselves? It is feared, then, that we shall turn our arms each man against his own bosom. Congress have no power to disarm the militia. Their swords, and every other terrible implement of the soldier, are the birthright of an American...[T]he unlimited power of the sword is not in the hands of either the federal or state governments, but, where I trust in God it will ever remain, in the hands of the people."

Tench Coxe

"Before a standing army can rule, the people must be disarmed; as they are in almost every kingdom of Europe. The supreme power in America cannot enforce unjust laws by the sword; because the whole body of the people are armed, and constitute a force superior to any bands of regular troops that can be, on any pretense, raised in the United States."

Noah Webster

"It is a great mark of the corruption of our natures, and what ought to humble us extremely, and excite the exercise of our reason to a nobler and juster sense, that we cannot see the use and pleasure of our comforts but by the want of them. As if we could not taste the benefit of health, but by the help of sickness; nor understand the satisfaction of fullness without the instruction of want; not, finally, know the comfort of peace but by the smart and penance of the vices of war: And without dispute that is not the lest reason that God is pleased to chastise us so frequently with it."

William Penn

"Arms in the hands of individual citizens may be used at individual discretion for the defence of the country, the over-throw of tyranny, or in private self-defense."

John Adams

"A people who would stand fast in their liberty, should furnish themselves with weapons proper for their defense, and learn the use of them. It is indeed an hard case, that those who are happy in the blessings of providence, and disposed to live peaceably with all men, should be obliged to keep up the idea of blood and slaughter, and expend their time and treasure to acquire the arts and instruments of death. But this is a necessity which the depravity of human nature has laid upon every state. Nor was there ever a people that continued, for any considerable time, in the enjoyment of liberty, who were not in a capacity to defend themselves against invaders, unless they were too poor and inconsiderable to tempt an enemy."

Simeon Howard, *A Sermon to the Ancient and Honorable Artillery Company in Boston, June 7, 1773*

"The best we can hope for concerning the people at large is that they be properly armed."

Alexander Hamilton

"Whenever governments mean to invade the rights and liberties of the people, they always attempt to destroy the militia, in order to raise an army upon their ruins."

Representative Elbridge Gerry of Massachusetts, spoken during floor debate over the Second Amendment

"To preserve liberty, it is essential that the whole body of people always possess arms, and be taught alike especially when young, how to use them."

Richard Henry Lee

"No freeman shall ever be debarred the use of arms..."

Thomas Jefferson

"A militia, when properly formed, are in fact the people themselves...and include all men capable of bearing arms."

Richard Henry Lee

"In a general view there are very few conquests that repay the charge of making them, and mankind are pretty well convinced that it can never be worth their while to go to war for profit sake. If they are made war upon, their country invaded, or their existence at stake, it is their duty to defend and preserve themselves, but in every other light and from every other cause is war inglorious and detestable."

Thomas Paine, "The Crisis", 1778

"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

"Oppressors can tyrannize only when they achieve a standing army, an enslaved press, and a disarmed populace."

James Madison

"The rights of conscience, of bearing arms, of changing the government, are declared to be inherent in the people."

Fisher Ames

"The ultimate authority...resides in the people alone...The advantage of being armed, which the Americans possess over the people of almost every other nation...forms a barrier against the enterprises of ambition."

James Madison

For more, visit [Founding Fathers Quotes on Guns and the Second Amendment's Right to Keep & Bear Arms](#)

Our Founding Fathers on Power and Peace

"To preserve peace will no doubt be difficult, but by accomplishing it we can show our wisdom and magnanimity, and secure to our people the enjoyment of a dignified repose by indulging which they will be prosperous and happy."

James Monroe

"If there must be trouble, let it be in my day, that my child may have peace."

Thomas Paine

"Our plan is peace forever."

Thomas Paine, "Common Sense", 1776

"As to myself, I love peace, and I am anxious that we should give the world still another useful lesson, by showing to them other modes of punishing injuries than by war, which is as much a punishment to the punisher as to the sufferer."

Thomas Jefferson, to Tench Coxe, May 1, 1794

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

Thomas Paine

"Peace is the best time for improvement and preparation of every kind; it is in peace that our commerce flourishes most, that taxes are most easily paid, and that the revenue is most productive."

James Monroe, First Inaugural Address, March 4, 1817

"There never was a good war or a bad peace."

Benjamin Franklin, Letter to Josiah Quincy, September 11, 1783

"It is not by the consolidation or concentration of powers, but by their distribution that good government is effected."

Thomas Jefferson

"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

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