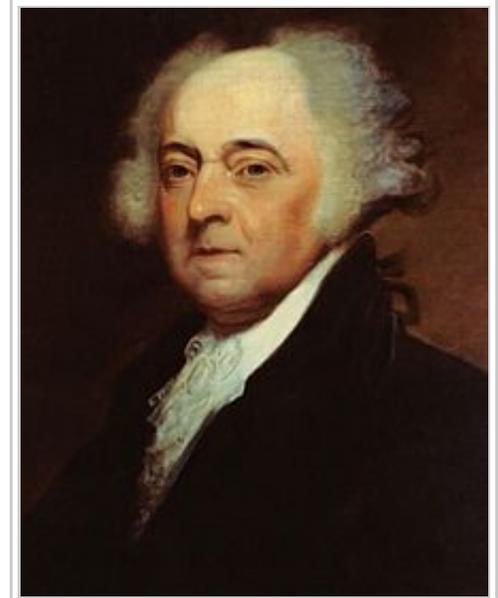


John Adams

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For other uses, see John Adams (disambiguation).

John Adams (30 October 1735 – 4 July 1826) was an American lawyer, author, statesman, and diplomat. He served as the second President of the United States (1797–1801), the first Vice President (1789–1797), and as a Founding Father was a leader of American independence from Great Britain. Adams was a political theorist in the Age of Enlightenment who promoted republicanism and a strong central government. His innovative ideas were frequently published. He was also a dedicated diarist and correspondent, particularly with his wife and key advisor Abigail. He was the father of John Quincy Adams.



There is danger from all men. The only maxim of a free government ought to be to trust no man living with power to endanger the public liberty.

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Quotes

- **Tis impossible to judge with much Præcision of the true Motives and Qualities of human Actions, or of the Propriety of Rules contrived to govern them, without considering with like Attention, all the Passions, Appetites, Affections in Nature from which they flow.** An intimate Knowledge therefore of the intellectual and moral World is the sole foundation on which a stable structure of Knowledge can be erected.

- Letter to Jonathan Sewall (October 1759)

- Tis impossible to avail our selves of the genuine Powers of Eloquence, without examining in their Elements and first Principles, the Force and Harmony of Numbers, as employed by the Poets and orators of ancient and modern times, and without considering the natural Powers of Imagination, and the Disposition of Mankind to Metaphor and figure, which will require the Knowledge of the true Principles of Grammar, and Rhetoric, and of the best classical Authors.

Now to what higher object, to what greater Character, can any Mortal aspire, than to be possessed of all this Knowledge, well digested, and ready at Command, to assist the feeble and Friendless, to discountenance the haughty and lawless, to procure Redress of Wrongs, the Advancement of Right, to assert and maintain Liberty and Virtue, to discourage and abolish Tyranny and Vice?

- Letter to Jonathan Sewall (October 1759)

- **There is danger from all men. The only maxim of a free government ought to be to trust no man living with power to endanger the public liberty.**

- Notes for an oration at Braintree (Spring 1772)

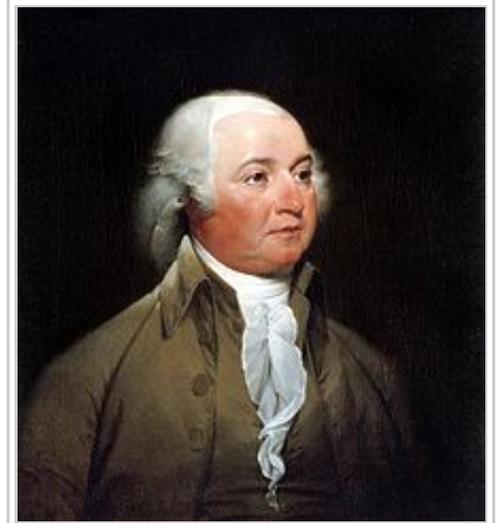
- A Constitution of Government once changed from Freedom, can never be restored. Liberty, once lost, is lost forever.

- Letter to Abigail Adams (17 July 1775)

- But America is a great, unwieldy Body. Its Progress must be slow. It is like a large Fleet sailing under Convoy. The fleetest Sailors must wait for the dullest and slowest. Like a Coach and six—the swiftest Horses must be slackened and the slowest quickened, that all may keep an even Pace.

- Letter to Abigail Adams (17 July 1775); in L. H. Butterfield, ed., *Adams Family Correspondence* (1963), vol. 1, p. 216

- **Human nature with all its infirmities and depravation is still capable of great things.** It is capable of



Metaphysicians and politicians may dispute forever, but they will never find any other moral principle or foundation of rule or obedience, than the consent of governors and governed.



Facts are stubborn things; and whatever may be our wishes, our inclinations, or the dictates of our passion, they cannot alter the state of facts and evidence.

attaining to degrees of wisdom and goodness, which we have reason to believe, appear as respectable in the estimation of superior intelligences. **Education makes a greater difference between man and man, than nature has made between man and brute.** The virtues and powers to which men may be trained, by early education and constant discipline, are truly sublime and astonishing. Newton and Locke are examples of the deep sagacity which may be acquired by long habits of thinking and study.

- Letter to Abigail Adams (29 October 1775), published *Letters of John Adams, Addressed to His Wife*, Vol. 1 (1841), ed. Charles Francis Adams, p. 72
- I agree with you that in politics the middle way is none at all.
 - Letter to Horatio Gates (23 March 1776)
- Let them revere nothing but religion, morality and liberty.
 - Letter to Abigail Adams (15 April 1776) [1] (<http://www.masshist.org/digitaladams/aea/cfm/doc.cfm?id=L17760415ja>)
- **You bid me burn your letters. But I must forget you first.**
 - Letter to Abigail Adams (28 April 1776)
- **There is something very unnatural and odious in a government a thousand leagues off.** A whole government of our own choice, managed by persons whom we love, revere, and can confide in, has charms in it for which men will fight.
 - Letter to Abigail Adams (17 May 1776)
- **Statesmen, my dear Sir, may plan and speculate for Liberty, but it is Religion and Morality alone, which can establish the Principles upon which Freedom can securely stand.** The only foundation of a free Constitution is pure Virtue, and if this cannot be inspired into our People in a greater Measure than they have it now, They may change their Rulers and the forms of Government, but they will not obtain a lasting Liberty. They will only exchange Tyrants and Tyrannies.
 - Letter ([http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/hlaw:@field\(DOCID+@lit\(dg004210\)\)\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/hlaw:@field(DOCID+@lit(dg004210))))) to Zabdiel Adams (21 June 1776)
- **Yesterday the greatest question was decided which ever was debated in America; and a greater perhaps never was, nor will be, decided among men. A resolution was passed without one dissenting colony, "that these United Colonies are, and of right ought to be, free and independent States."**
 - On the decision to proclaim independence from British rule, which was made on 2 July 1776, in a letter to Abigail Adams (3 July 1776), published in *The Adams Papers: Adams Family Correspondence* (2007) edited by Margaret A. Hogan
- **I am well aware of the Toil and Blood and Treasure, that it will cost Us to maintain this Declaration, and support and defend these States. Yet through all the Gloom I can see the Rays of ravishing Light and Glory.** I can see that the End is more than worth all the Means. And that Posterity will triumph in that Days Transaction, even although We should rue it, which I trust in God We shall not.
 - Letter to Abigail Adams (3 July 1776), published in *The Adams Papers: Adams Family*



I am well aware of the Toil and Blood and Treasure, that it will cost Us to maintain this Declaration, and support and defend these States...



Objects of the most Stupendous Magnitude, Measures in which the Lives and Liberties of Millions, born and unborn are most essentially interested, are now before Us. We are in the very midst of a Revolution, the most compleat, unexpected, and remarkable of any in the History of Nations.

- **I am surprised at the suddenness as well as the greatness of this revolution... It is the will of Heaven that the two countries should be sundered forever.** It may be the will of Heaven that America shall suffer calamities still more wasting, and distresses yet more dreadful. If this is to be the case it will have this good effect at least. It will inspire us with many virtues which we have not, and correct many errors, follies, and vices which threaten to disturb, dishonor, and destroy us. **The furnace of affliction produces refinement in states as well as individuals. And the new Governments we are assuming in every part will require a purification from our vices, and an augmentation of our virtues, or they will be no blessings.** The people will have unbounded power, and the people are extremely addicted to corruption and venality, as well as the great. But I must submit all my hopes and fears to an overruling Providence, in which, unfashionable as the faith may be, I firmly believe.
 - Letter to Abigail Adams (3 July 1776)

- The second day of July, 1776, will be the most memorable epocha in the history of America. I am apt to believe that it will be celebrated by succeeding generations as the great anniversary festival. It ought to be commemorated as the day of deliverance, by solemn acts of devotion to God Almighty. It ought to be solemnized with pomp and parade, with shows, games, sports, guns, bells, bonfires, and illuminations, from one end of this continent to the other, from this time forward forevermore.
 - Letter to Abigail Adams (3 July 1776); because of the official adoption of the United States Declaration of Independence two days later, the fourth of July rather than the second, became known as the U.S. Independence Day

- I long for rural and domestic scenes, for the warbling of Birds and the Prattle of my Children. Don't you think I am somewhat poetical this morning, for one of my Years, and considering the Gravity, and Insipidity of my Employment? — As much as I converse with Sages and Heroes, they have very little of my Love or Admiration. I should prefer the Delights of a Garden to the Dominion of a World.
 - Letter (<http://www.masshist.org/digitaladams/aea/cfm/doc.cfm?id=L17770316ja>) to Abigail Adams (16 March 1777)

- **Posterity! you will never know how much it cost the present generation to preserve your freedom! I hope you will make a good use of it. If you do not, I shall repent in Heaven that I ever took half the pains to preserve it.**
 - Letter to Abigail Adams (27 April 1777), published as Letter CXI in *Letters of John Adams, Addressed to His Wife* (1841) edited by Charles Francis Adams, p. 218

- **The science of government it is my duty to study, more than all other sciences; the arts of legislation and administration and negotiation ought to take the place of, indeed exclude, in a manner, all other arts. I must study politics and war, that our sons may have liberty to study mathematics and philosophy.** Our sons ought to study mathematics and philosophy, geography, natural history and naval architecture, navigation, commerce and agriculture in order to give their children a right to study painting, poetry, music, architecture, statuary, tapestry and porcelain.
 - Letter to Abigail Adams (12 May 1780)



Yet through all the Gloom I can see the Rays of ravishing Light and Glory.

- **There is nothing which I dread so much as a division of the republic into two great parties, each arranged under its leader, and concerting measures in opposition to each other. This, in my humble apprehension, is to be dreaded as the greatest political evil under our Constitution.**
 - Letter to Jonathan Jackson (2 October 1780), "The Works of John Adams" (<http://books.google.com/books?id=j9NKAAAAYAAJ&dq=John%20Adams%20works&pg=PA511#v=onepage&q&f=false>), vol 9, p. 511
- You will never be alone with a poet in your pocket.
 - Letter to John Quincy Adams (14 May 1781)
- Thanks be to God, that he gave me Stubbornness, when I know I am right.
 - Letter to Edmund Jenings, 27 September 1782 (<http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/06-13-02-0217>), also quoted in *John Adams* (2008) by David McCullough, p. 272
- Neither my father or mother, grandfather or grandmother, great grandfather or great grandmother, nor any other relation that I know of, or care a farthing for, has been in England these one hundred and fifty years; so that you see **I have not one drop of blood in my veins but what is American.**
 - To an ambassador (1785), as quoted in *The Works of John Adams, Second President of the United States: Autobiography* (<http://books.google.com/books?id=lWcsAAAIAAJ&pg=PA392>) (1851), by Charles F. Adams, p. 392.
- All the perplexities, confusions, and distresses in America arise, not from defects in their constitution or confederation, not from a want of honor or virtue, so much as from downright ignorance of the nature of coin, credit, and circulation.
 - Letter to Thomas Jefferson (23 August 1787), *The Works of John Adams*.
- The new Government has my best Wishes and most fervent Prayers, for its Success and Prosperity: but whether I shall have any Thing more to do with it, besides praying for it, depends on the future suffrages of Freemen.
 - Letter to Thomas Jefferson (2 January 1789), *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*.
- The History of our Revolution will be one continued Lye from one end to the other. The essence of the whole will be *that Dr. Franklins electrical Rod, smote the Earth and out sprung General Washington. That Franklin electrified him with his rod—and thence forward these two conducted all the Policy, Negotiations, Legislatures and War.*
 - Letter to Benjamin Rush, 4 April 1790. Alexander Biddle, *Old Family Letters, Series A* (Philadelphia: 1892), p. 55 (<http://books.google.com/books?id=5d8hAAAAMAAJ&pg=PA55>)
- My country has in its wisdom contrived for me the most insignificant office that ever the invention of man contrived or his imagination conceived; and as I can do neither good nor evil, I must be borne away by others and meet the common fate.
 - On the Vice-Presidency of the United States, in a letter to Abigail Adams (19 December 1793).
- I read my eyes out and can't read half enough. ... The more one reads the more one sees we have to read.



There is, in the human Breast, a social Affection, which extends to our whole Species.

- Letter to Abigail Adams (28 December 1794), *Adams Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society*
- The consequences arising from the continual accumulation of public debts in other countries ought to admonish us to be careful to prevent their growth in our own.
 - First Address to Congress (23 November 1797) (http://books.google.com/books?id=_EeUpTCXs1sC&pg=PA115&dq=



Slavery is an evil of colossal magnitude and I am utterly averse to the admission of slavery.



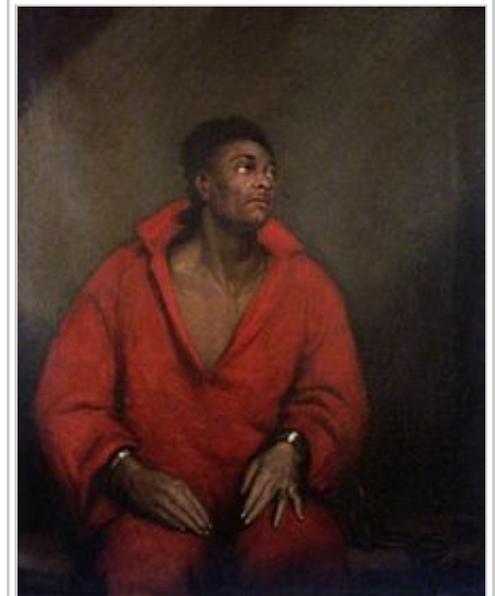
Every measure of prudence, therefore, ought to be assumed for the eventual total extirpation of slavery from the United States.

%22The+consequences+arising+from+the+continual+accumulation+of+public+debts+in+other+countries+ought+to+admonish+us+to+be+careful+to+prevent+their+growth+in+our+own%22&hl=en&ei=wqNLTKb7G42NnQeo_52CDw&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CCcQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=%22The%20consequences%20arising%20from%20the%20continual%20accumulation%20of%20public%20debts%20in%20other%20countries%20ought%20to%20admonish%20us%20to%20be%20careful%20to%20prevent%20their%20growth%20in%20our%20own%22&f=false)

- [N]o pretext, arising from religious opinions, shall ever produce an interruption of the harmony existing

between the two countries.

- Treaty with the bey of Tunis (<https://web.archive.org/web/20150712204904/http://iipdigital.usembassy.gov/st/english/publication/2013/11/20131104285694.html#axzz3sjER1BV1>) (1797).
- While our country remains untainted with the principles and manners which are now producing desolation in so many parts of the world; while she continues sincere, and incapable of insidious and impious policy, we shall have the strongest reason to rejoice in the local destination assigned us by Providence. But should the people of America once become capable of that deep simulation towards one another, and towards foreign nations, which assumes the language of justice and moderation, while it is practising iniquity and extravagance, and displays in the most captivating manner the charming pictures of candour, frankness, and sincerity, while it is rioting in rapine and insolence, this country will be the most miserable habitation in the world. **Because we have no government, armed with power, capable of contending with human passions, unbridled by morality and religion. Avarice, ambition, revenge and licentiousness would break the strongest cords of our Constitution, as a whale goes through a net. Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.** Oaths in this country are as yet universally considered as sacred obligations. That which you have taken, and so solemnly repeated on that venerable ground, is an ample pledge of your sincerity and devotion to your country and its government.
- Letter to the Officers of the First Brigade of the Third Division of the Militia of Massachusetts, 11 October 1798, in *Revolutionary Services and Civil Life of General William Hull* (<http://books.google.com/books?id=E2kFAA>



I have, through my whole life, held the practice of slavery in such abhorrence, that I have never owned a negro or any other slave, though I have lived for many years in times, when the practice was not disgraceful, when the best men in my vicinity thought it not inconsistent with their character, and when it has cost me thousands of dollars for the labor and subsistence of free men.

AAQAAJ&dq=editions%3AVsZcW99fWPgC&pg=PA265#v=onepage&q&f=false) (New York, 1848), pp 265-6. There are some differences in the version that appeared in *The Works of John Adams* (Boston, 1854), vol. 9, pp. 228-9 (<http://books.google.com/books?id=PZYKAQAIAAJ&pg=PA228#v=onepage&q&f=false>), most notably the words "or gallantry" instead of "and licentiousness".

- I have thought proper to recommend, and I do hereby recommend accordingly, that Thursday, the 25th day of April next, be observed throughout the United States of America as a day of solemn humiliation, fasting, and prayer; that the citizens on that day abstain as far as may be from their secular occupations, devote the time to the sacred duties of religion in public and in private; that they call to mind our numerous offenses against the Most High God, confess them before Him with the sincerest penitence, implore His pardoning mercy, through the Great Mediator and Redeemer, for our past transgressions, and

that through the grace of His Holy Spirit we may be disposed and enabled to yield a more suitable obedience to His righteous requisitions in time to come; that He would interpose to arrest the progress of that impiety and licentiousness in principle and practice so offensive to Himself and so ruinous to mankind; that He would make us deeply sensible that "righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people;" that He would turn us from our transgressions and turn His displeasure from us; that He would withhold us from unreasonable discontent, from disunion, faction, sedition, and insurrection; that He would preserve our country from the desolating sword; that He would save our cities and towns from a repetition of those awful pestilential visitations under which they have lately suffered so severely, and that the health of our inhabitants generally may be precious in His sight; that He would favor us with fruitful seasons and so bless the labors of the husbandman as that there may be food in abundance for man and beast; that He would prosper our commerce, manufactures, and fisheries, and give success to the people in all their lawful industry and enterprise; that He would smile on our colleges, academies, schools, and seminaries of learning, and make them nurseries of sound science, morals, and religion; that He would bless all magistrates, from the highest to the lowest, give them the true spirit of their station, make them a terror to evil doers and a praise to them that do well; that He would preside over the councils of the nation at this critical period, enlighten them to a just discernment of the public interest, and save them from mistake, division, and discord; that He would make succeed our preparations for defense and bless our armaments by land and by sea; that He would put an end to the effusion of human blood and the accumulation of human misery among the contending nations of the earth by disposing them to justice, to equity, to benevolence, and to peace; and that he would extend the blessings of knowledge, of true liberty, and of pure and undefiled religion throughout the world.

- Presidential proclamation of a national day of fasting and prayer (6 March 1799)
- **I pray Heaven to bestow the best of blessings on this house and all that shall hereafter inhabit it. May none but honest and wise men ever rule under this roof.**
 - On the White House, in a letter to Abigail Adams (2 November 1800)
 - Franklin D. Roosevelt had this inscribed on the mantelpiece of the State Dining Room
- I had heard my father say that he never knew a piece of land run away or break.
 - *Autobiography* (1802–1807)
- **There is one Resolution I will not omit. Resolved that no Slaves be imported into any of the thirteen colonies.**
 - *Autobiography* (1802–1807), passage on events of April 6, 1776, *The Founding Fathers: John*



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



I pray Heaven to bestow the best of blessings on this house and all that shall hereafter inhabit it. May none but honest and wise men ever rule under this roof.



I will insist that the Hebrews have done more to civilize men than any other nation.

- **Our obligations to our country never cease but with our lives.**
 - Letter to Benjamin Rush (18 April 1808)

- **I will insist that the Hebrews have done more to civilize men than any other nation. If I were an atheist, and believed in blind eternal fate, I should still believe that fate had ordained the Jews to be the most essential instrument for civilizing the nations.** If I were an atheist of the other sect, who believe or pretend to believe that all is ordered by chance, I should believe that chance had ordered the Jews to preserve and propagate to all mankind the doctrine of a supreme, intelligent, wise, almighty sovereign of the universe, which I believe to be the great essential principle of all morality, and consequently of all civilization.
 - Letter to François Adriaan van der Kemp (16 February 1809)

- When I went home to my family in May, 1770, from the town meeting in Boston, which was the first I had ever attended, and where I had been chosen in my absence, without any solicitation, one of their representatives, I said to my wife, "I have accepted a seat in the House of Representatives, and thereby have consented to my own ruin, to your ruin, and to the ruin of our children. I give you this warning, that you may prepare your mind for your fate." She burst into tears, but instantly cried out in a transport of magnanimity, "Well, I am willing in this cause to run all risks with you, and be ruined with you, if you are ruined." These were times, my friend, in Boston, which tried women's souls as well as men's.
 - Letter (<http://www.readme.it/libri/Letteratura%20Inglese/S>



If I were an atheist, and believed in blind eternal fate, I should still believe that fate had ordained the Jews to be the most essential instrument for civilizing the nations.



You and I ought not to die before we have explained ourselves to each other.

ELECTIONS%20FROM%20ADAM'S%20CORRESPONDENCE.shtml) to Benjamin Rush (12 April 1809)

- Callender and Sally will be remembered as long as Jefferson as Blotts in his Character. The story of the

latter, is a natural and almost unavoidable Consequence of that foul contagion in the human Character [—] Negro Slavery.

- Letter to Joseph Ward, 8 January 1810 (<http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/99-02-02-5495>), stating his belief in the reports of James T. Callender that Thomas Jefferson was the father of the children of Sally Hemmings; also quoted in *Scandalmonger* (2001) by William Safire, p. 431
- The Declaration of Independence I always considered as a Theatrical Show. Jefferson ran away with all the stage effect of that; *i.e.* all the Glory of it.
 - Letter to Benjamin Rush (21 June 1811); published in *Old Family Letters: Copied from the Originals for Alexander Biddle* (1892), p. 287 (<http://books.google.com/books?id=5>



The Declaration of Independence I always considered as a Theatrical Show. Jefferson ran away with all the stage effect of that; *i.e.* all the Glory of it.



What do we mean by the Revolution? The war? That was no part of the revolution; it was only an effect and consequence of it. The revolution was in the minds of the people, and this was effected from 1760 - 1775, in the course of fifteen years, before a drop of blood was shed at Lexington.

d8hAAAAMAAJ&dq=%22Jefferson+ran+away+with+all+the+stage+effect+of+that%22); also quoted in *TIME* magazine (25 October 1943) (<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,796192-2,00.html>)

- **The general principles on which the fathers achieved independence, were ... the general principles of Christianity, in which all those sects were united, and the general principles of English and**

American liberty, in which all those young men united, and which had united all parties in America, in majorities sufficient to assert and maintain her independence. Now I will avow, that I then believed and now believe that those general principles of Christianity are as eternal and immutable as the existence and attributes of God; and that those principles of liberty are as unalterable as human nature and our terrestrial, mundane system.

- Letter to Thomas Jefferson, 28 June 1813. Often misquoted as "The general principles on which the fathers achieved independence were the general principles of Christianity"
- While all other Sciences have advanced, that of Government is at a stand; little better understood; little better practiced now than three or four thousand years ago.
 - Letter to Thomas Jefferson (9 July 1813)
- **You and I ought not to die before we have explained ourselves to each other.**
 - Letter to Thomas Jefferson (15 July 1813)
- Indeed, Mr. Jefferson, what could be invented to debase the ancient Christianity which Greeks, Romans, Hebrews and Christian factions, above all the Catholics, have not fraudulently imposed upon the public? Miracles after miracles have rolled down in torrents.
 - Letter to Thomas Jefferson (3 December 1813), published in *Adams-Jefferson Letters: The Complete Correspondence Between Thomas Jefferson and Abigail and John Adams* (<http://books.google.com/books?vid=ISBN0807842303&id=Sz>



When annual elections end, there slavery begins.



Great Britain has been moving earth and hell to obtain allies against us, yet it is improper in us to propose an alliance! Great Britain has borrowed all the superfluous wealth of Europe, in Italy, Germany, Holland, Switzerland, and some in France, to murder us, yet it is dishonorable in us to propose to borrow money! By heaven, I would make a bargain with all Europe, if it lay with me.

SWYPOz6M8C&pg=PP1&lpg=PP1&ots=kTAZL3ImRq&dq=%22Adams-Jefferson+letters%22&sig=tVGzBe0XVhXaF2p0FQLGy4GK6bk#PRA2-PR17,M1) (UNC Press, 1988), p. 404

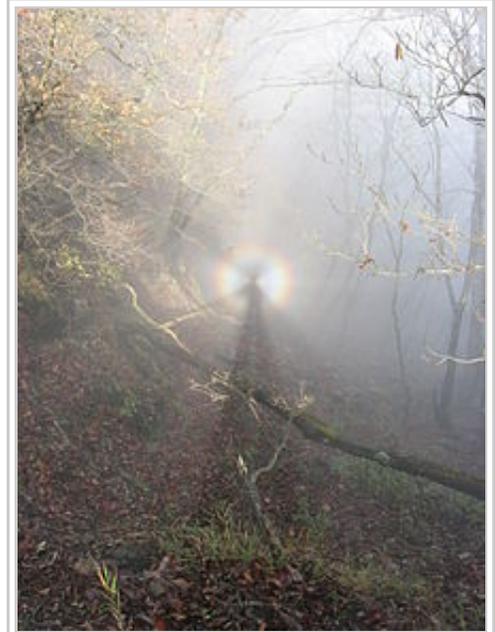
- If the Christian religion, as I understand it, or as you understand it, should maintain its ground, as I believe it will, yet Platonic, Pythagoric, Hindoo, and cabalistic Christianity, which is Catholic Christianity, and which has prevailed for 1,500 years, has received a mortal wound, of which the monster must finally die. Yet so strong is his constitution, that he may endure for centuries before he expires.
 - John Adams, letter to Thomas Jefferson (July 16, 1814). From the Works of John Adams, Vol. X (<http://books.google.com/books?id=9G0vAAAAYAAJ&dq=works%20of%20john%20adams%20%22volume%20x%22&pg=PA100#v=onepage&q&f=false>), p. 100
- As long as Property exists, it will accumulate in Individuals and Families. As long as Marriage exists,

Knowledge, Property and Influence will accumulate in Families.

- Letter to Thomas Jefferson (16 July 1814)
- Government has no right to hurt a hair on the head of an atheist for his opinions. Let him have a care of his practices.
 - Letter to John Quincy Adams (16 June 1816). Adams Papers (microfilm), reel 432, Library of Congress. James H. Hutson (ed.), *The Founders on Religion: A Book of Quotations*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007, p. 20
- As to the history of the revolution, my ideas may be peculiar, perhaps singular. **What do we mean by the Revolution? The war? That was no part of the revolution; it was only an effect and consequence of it. The revolution was in the minds of the people, and this was effected from 1760–1775, in the course of fifteen years, before a drop of blood was shed at Lexington.**
 - Letter to Thomas Jefferson (24 August 1815), *The Works of John Adams*; he later expressed similar sentiments in a letter to Hezekiah Niles (13 February 1818)
- We may appeal to every page of history we have hitherto turned over, for proofs irrefragable, that the people, when they have been unchecked, have been as unjust, tyrannical, brutal, barbarous and cruel as any king or senate possessed of uncontrollable power ... All projects of government, formed upon a supposition of continual vigilance, sagacity, and virtue, firmness of the people, when possessed of the exercise of supreme power, are cheats and delusions ... **The fundamental article of my political creed is that despotism, or unlimited sovereignty, or absolute power, is the same in a majority of a popular assembly, an aristocratical council, an oligarchical junto, and a single emperor. Equally arbitrary, cruel, bloody, and in every respect diabolical.**
 - Letter to Thomas Jefferson (13 November 1815)
- Power always sincerely, conscientiously, *de très bon foi*, believes itself right. Power always thinks it has a great soul and vast views, beyond the comprehension of the weak.
 - Letter to Thomas Jefferson (2 February 1816)
- Government has no right to hurt the hair of an Atheist for his Opinions. Let him have a care of his Practices.
 - Letter to John Quincy Adams (16 June 1816). Adams Papers (microfilm), reel 432, Library of Congress. James H. Hutson (ed.), *The Founders on Religion: A Book of Quotations*. Princeton University Press, 2007, p. 20
- **I almost shudder at the thought of alluding to the most fatal example of the abuses of grief which the history of mankind has preserved — the Cross.** Consider what calamities that engine of grief has produced! **With the rational respect that is due to it, knavish priests have added prostitutions of it, that fill or might fill the blackest and bloodiest pages of human history.**
 - Letter to Thomas Jefferson (3 September 1816), published in *Adams-Jefferson Letters: The*



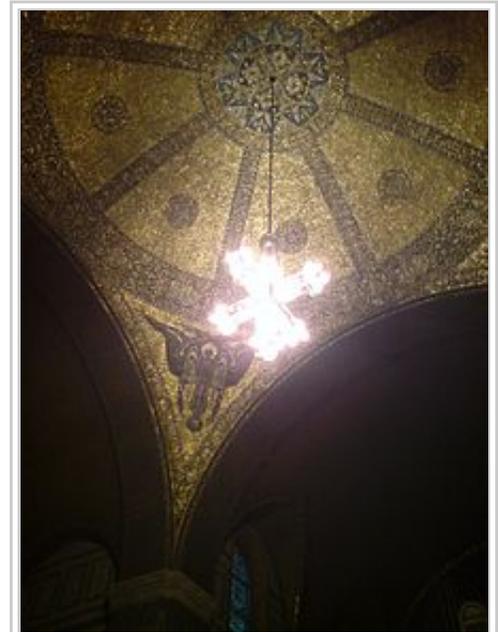
I see in every Page, Something to recommend Christianity in its Purity and Something to discredit its Corruptions.



Let the human mind loose. It must be loose. It will be loose. Superstition and dogmatism cannot confine it.

Complete Correspondence Between Thomas Jefferson and Abigail and John Adams (<http://books.google.com/books?vid=ISBN0807842303&id=SzSWYPOz6M8C&pg=PP1&lpq=PP1&ots=kTAZL3ImRq&dq=%22Adams-Jefferson+letters%22&sig=tVGzBe0XVhXaF2p0FQLGy4GK6bk#PRA2-PR17,M1>) (UNC Press, 1988), p. 488

- We have now, it Seems a National Bible Society, to propagate King James's Bible, through all Nations. Would it not be better to apply these pious Subscriptions, to purify Christendom from the Corruptions of Christianity; than to propagate those Corruptions in Europe Asia, Africa and America! ... Conclude not from all this, that I have renounced the Christian religion, or that I agree with Dupuis in all his Sentiments. Far from it. **I see in every Page, Something to recommend Christianity in its Purity and Something to discredit its Corruptions.** ... The Ten Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount contain my Religion.
 - Letter to Thomas Jefferson (4 November 1816) (Online image 1 (<http://memory.loc.gov/master/mss/mtj/mtj1/049/0600/0623.jpg>) - 2 (<http://memory.loc.gov/master/mss/mtj/mtj1/049/0600/0624.jpg>))
- **Let the human mind loose. It must be loose. It will be loose. Superstition and dogmatism cannot confine it.**
 - Letter to his son, John Quincy Adams (13 November 1816)
- Twenty times in the course of my late reading have I been on the point of breaking out, "*This would be the best of all possible worlds, if there were no religion in it!!!*" But in this exclamation I would have been as fanatical as Bryant or Cleverly. **Without religion this world would be something not fit to be mentioned in polite company, I mean Hell.**
 - Original manuscript at The Library of Congress Letter (<http://lcweb.loc.gov/exhibits/religion/vc006646.jpg>) to Thomas Jefferson (19 April 1817). The *italicized* section within this statement has *often* been quoted out of context. Earlier in the letter Adams explained "Lemuel Bryant was my Parish Priest; and Joseph Cleverly my Latin School Master. Lemuel was a jolly jocular and liberal schollar and Divine. Joseph a Schollar and a Gentleman; but a biggoted episcopalian... The Parson and the Pedagogue lived much together, but were eternally disputing about Government and Religion".
- When people talk of the Freedom of Writing, Speaking, or thinking, I cannot choose but laugh. No such thing ever existed. No such thing now exists; but I hope it will exist. But it must be hundreds of years after you and I shall write and speak no more.
 - Letter to Thomas Jefferson (15 July 1817)
- **I really wish the Jews again in Judea, an independent nation**, for, as I believe, the most enlightened men of it have participated in the amelioration of the philosophy of the age; once restored to an independent government, and no longer persecuted, they would soon wear away some of the asperities and peculiarities of their character, possibly in time become liberal Unitarian Christians, for your Jehovah is our Jehovah, and your God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is our God.
 - Letter to Mordecai Manuel Noah (1819), as quoted in *The Jews, Judea, and Christianity : A Discourse on the Restoration of the Jews* (1849) by M. M. Noah, p. xi



The substance and essence of Christianity, as I understand it, is eternal and unchangeable, and will bear examination forever, but it has been mixed with extraneous ingredients, which I think will not bear examination, and they ought to be separated.

- **Abuse of words has been the great instrument of sophistry and chicanery, of party, faction, and division of society.**
 - Letter to J.H. Tiffany (31 March 1819)
- I Shall not pause to consider whether my Opinion will be popular or unpopular with the Slave Holders, or Slave Traders, in the Northern the Middle, the Southern, or the Western, States—I respect all those who are necessarily subjected to this Evil.—But Negro **Slavery is an evil of Colossal Magnitude. . . I am therefore utterly averse to the admission of Slavery into the Missouri Territory**, and heartily wish that every Constitutional measure may be adopted for the preservation of it.
 - Letter (<http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/99-02-02-7261>) to William Tudor, Jr., 20 November 1819. Partially quoted in *Founding Brothers : The Revolutionary Generation* (2000) by Joseph J. Ellis, p. 240
- When we say God is a spirit, we know what we mean, as well as we do when we say that the pyramids of Egypt are matter. Let us be content, therefore, to believe him to be a spirit, that is, an essence that we know nothing of, in which originally and necessarily reside all energy, all power, all capacity, all activity, all wisdom, all goodness.
 - Letter to Thomas Jefferson (17 January 1820). Often misquoted as "God is an essence that we know nothing of" and attached to a part of his 22 January 1825 letter to Thomas Jefferson.
- **I shudder when I think of the calamities which slavery is likely to produce in this country.** You would think me mad if I were to describe my anticipations... If the gangrene is not stopped I can see nothing but insurrection of the blacks against the whites.
 - 1820, as quoted in *John Adams* (<https://web.archive.org/web/20111029143754/http://home.nas.com/lopresti/ps2.htm>), by Page Smith, Doubleday, Garden City, New York
- Can a free government possibly exist with the Roman Catholic religion?
 - Letter to Thomas Jefferson (19 May 1821), published in *Adams-Jefferson Letters: The Complete Correspondence Between Thomas Jefferson and Abigail and John Adams* (<http://books.google.com/books?vid=ISBN0807842303&id=SzSWYPOz6M8C&pg=PP1&lpg=PP1&ots=kTAZL3ImRq&dq=%22Adams-Jefferson+letters%22&sig=tVGzBe0XVhXaF2p0FQLGy4GK6bk#PRA2-PR17,M1>) (UNC Press, 1988), p. 573
- **Slavery in this Country I have seen hanging over it like a black cloud for half a century...**
 - 1821, as quoted in *Passionate Sage* (<https://web.archive.org/web/20111029143754/http://home.nas.com/lopresti/ps2.htm>) (1993), Joseph J. Ellis, Norton, New York, p. 138
- **The Europeans are all deeply tainted with prejudices, both ecclesiastical and temporal, which they can never get rid of.** They are all infected with episcopal and presbyterian creeds, and confessions of faith. They all believe that great Principle which has produced this boundless universe, Newton's universe and Herschell's universe, came down to this little ball, to be spit upon by Jews. And *until this awful blasphemy is got rid of, there never will be any liberal science in the world.*
 - Letter to Thomas Jefferson (http://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/2127#lf1431-10_head_179) (22 January 1825). The section in italics is often attached to fragments from an earlier letter from Adams to



Old minds are like old horses; you must exercise them if you wish to keep them in working order.

Jefferson (17 January 1820)

- **We think ourselves possessed, or, at least, we boast that we are so, of liberty of conscience on all subjects, and of the right of free inquiry and private judgment in all cases, and yet how far are we from these exalted privileges in fact!** There exists, I believe, throughout the whole Christian world, a law which makes it blasphemy to deny or doubt the divine inspiration of all the books of the Old and New Testaments, from Genesis to Revelations. In most countries of Europe it is punished by fire at the stake, or the rack, or the wheel. In England itself it is punished by boring through the tongue with a poker. In America it is not better; even in our own Massachusetts, which I believe, upon the whole, is as temperate and moderate in religious zeal as most of the States, a law was made in the latter end of the last century, repealing the cruel punishments of the former laws, but substituting fine and imprisonment upon all those blasphemers upon any book of the Old Testament or New. Now, what free inquiry, when a writer must surely encounter the risk of fine or imprisonment for adducing any argument for investigating into the divine authority of those books? Who would run the risk of translating Dupuis? But I cannot enlarge upon this subject, though I have it much at heart. **I think such laws a great embarrassment, great obstructions to the improvement of the human mind. Books that cannot bear examination, certainly ought not to be established as divine inspiration by penal laws.** It is true, few persons appear desirous to put such laws in execution, and it is also true that some few persons are hardy enough to venture to depart from them. But as long as they continue in force as laws, the human mind must make an awkward and clumsy progress in its investigations. I wish they were repealed. **The substance and essence of Christianity, as I understand it, is eternal and unchangeable, and will bear examination forever, but it has been mixed with extraneous ingredients, which I think will not bear examination, and they ought to be separated.**
 - Letter to Thomas Jefferson (23 January 1825), published in *Letters: The Complete Correspondence Between Thomas Jefferson and Abigail and John Adams* (UNC Press, 1988), p. 607
- **No man who ever held the office of president would congratulate a friend on obtaining it. He will make one man ungrateful, and a hundred men his enemies, for every office he can bestow.**
 - Letter to Josiah Quincy III (14 February 1825)
- My best wishes, in the joys, and festivities, and the solemn services of that day on which will be completed the fiftieth year from its birth, of the independence of the United States: a memorable epoch in the annals of the human race, destined in future history to form the brightest or the blackest page, according to the use or the abuse of those political institutions by which they shall, in time to come, be



The Europeans are all deeply tainted with prejudices, both ecclesiastical and temporal, which they can never get rid of... They all believe that great Principle which has produced this boundless universe... to be spit upon by Jews. Until this awful blasphemy is got rid of, there never will be any liberal science in the world.



The moment the idea is admitted into society, that property is not as sacred as the law of God, and that there is not a force of law and public justice to protect it, anarchy and tyranny commence.

shaped by the human mind.

- Reply to an invitation to 50th Independence Day celebrations from a committee of the citizens of Quincy, Massachusetts (7 June 1826); quoted in "Eulogy, Pronounced at Bridgewater, Massachusetts" (http://books.google.com/books?vid=OCLC02570179&id=17ge0_OSAfIC&pg=RA1-PA160&lpg=RA1-PA160&dq=%22solemn+services+of



We took the liberty to make some enquiries concerning the ground of their pretensions to make war upon nations who had done them no injury, and observed that we considered all mankind as our friends who had done us no wrong, nor had given us any provocation... The Ambassador answered us that it was founded on the laws of their Prophet; that it was written in their Koran; that all nations who should not have acknowledged their authority were sinners; that it was their right and duty to make war upon them wherever they could be found, and to make slaves of all they could.

+that+day+on+which+will+be+completed+%22&num=100) (2 August 1826) by John A. Shaw, in *A Selection of Eulogies, Pronounced in the Several States, in Honor of Those Illustrious Patriots and Statesmen, John Adams and Thomas Jefferson* (1826) (<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/18196/18196.txt>)

- **Thomas — Jefferson — still surv —**

- Last words (4 July 1826) as quoted in *The Oxford History of the American People* (1965) by Samuel Eliot Morison, p. 420; this is often rendered as a full statement, "Thomas Jefferson still survives." Thomas Jefferson died a few hours earlier on the same day, the 50th anniversary of the congressional approval of The Declaration of Independence.

- **Old minds are like old horses; you must exercise them if you wish to keep them in working order.**

- As quoted by Josiah Quincy III, in *Looking Toward Sunset : From Sources Old and New, Original and Selected* (1865) by Lydia Maria Francis Child, p. 431

- We find, in the rules laid down by the greatest English Judges, who have been the brightest of mankind; We are to look upon it as more beneficial, that many guilty persons should escape unpunished, than one innocent person should suffer. The reason is, because it's of more importance to community, that innocence should be protected, than it is, that guilt should be punished; for guilt and crimes are so frequent in the world, that all of them cannot be punished; and many times they happen in such a manner,

that it is not of much consequence to the public, whether they are punished or not. But when innocence itself, is brought to the bar and condemned, especially to die, the subject will exclaim, it is immaterial to me, whether I behave well or ill; for virtue itself, is no security. And if such a sentiment as this, should take place in the mind of the subject, there would be an end to all security what so ever.

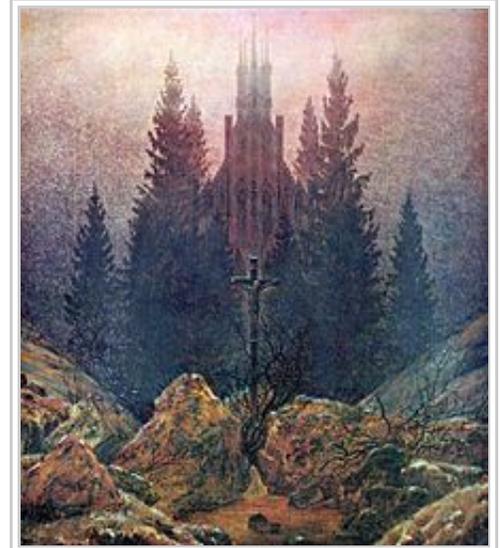
- In Adams' Argument for the Defense in the case of Rex v. Wemms: Suffolk Superior Court, Boston, 3-4 December, 1770; source "The Adams Papers", <http://rotunda.upress.virginia.edu/>

Diaries

- **Major Greene this evening fell into some conversation with me about the Divinity and satisfaction of Jesus Christ.** All the argument he advanced was, "that a mere creature or finite being could not make satisfaction to infinite justice for any crimes," and that "these things are very mysterious."

Thus mystery is made a convenient cover for absurdity.

- Entry of 13 February 1756 in Charles Francis Adams, *The Works of John Adams, Second President of the United States: With a Life of the Author, Notes, and Illustrations* vol. 2 (Boston: Charles C. Little and James Brown, 1850) 4, *Google Books*, 13 Dec. 2010, web [2] (<http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=BGYFAAAAQAAJ&pg=PA5&dq=%2215+sunday+staid+at+home%22&hl=en&sa=X&ei=YJlsU4u-Fs>



Where do we find a precept in the Gospel requiring Ecclesiastical Synods? Convocations? Councils? Decrees? Creeds? Confessions? Oaths? Subscriptions? and whole cart-loads of other trumpery that we find religion incumbered with in these days?

[PBOKu3gaAI&ved=0CDUQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=%2215%20sunday%20staid%20at%20home%22&f=false](http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=BGYFAAAAQAAJ&pg=PA5&dq=%2215+sunday+staid+at+home%22&hl=en&sa=X&ei=YJlsU4u-Fs))

- "17. Wednesday. A fine morning. Proceeded on my journey towards Braintree. Stopped to see Mr. Haven, of Dedham, who told me, very civilly, he supposed I took my faith on trust from Dr. Mayhew, and added, that he believed the doctrine of satisfaction of Jesus Christ to be essential to Christianity, and that he would not believe this satisfaction unless he believed the Divinity of Christ. Mr. Balch was there too, and observed, he would not be a Christian if he did not believe mysteries of the gospel; that he could bear with an Arminian, but when, Dr. Mayhew they denied the Divinity and satisfaction of Christ, he had no more to do with them; that he knew to make of Dr. Mayhew's two discourses upon the expected of all things. They gave him an idea of a cart whose wanted greasing; it rumbled on in a hoarse, rough manner; there was a good deal of ingenious talk in them, but it was thrown together in a jumbled, confused order. He believed the Doctor wrote them in a great panic. He added further that Arminians, however stiffly they maintain their opinions in health, always, he takes notice, retract when they come to die, and choose to die Calvinists. Set out for Braintree, and arrived about sunset."
 - Entry for 17 February 1756 in Charles Francis Adams, *The Works of John Adams* vol. 2, 10-1

- Spent an hour in the beginning of the evening at Major Gardiner's, where it was thought that the design of Christianity was not to make men good riddle-solvers, or good mystery-mongers, but good men, good magistrates, and good subjects, good husbands and good wives, good parents and good children, good masters and good servants. The following questions may be answered some time or other, namely, — **Where do we find a precept in the Gospel requiring Ecclesiastical Synods? Convocations? Councils? Decrees? Creeds? Confessions? Oaths? Subscriptions? and whole cart-loads of other trumpery that we find religion incumbered with in these days?**
 - (18 February 1756)

- **No man is entirely free from weakness and imperfection in this life.** Men of the most exalted genius and active minds are generally most perfect slaves to the love of fame. They sometimes descend to as mean tricks and artifices in pursuit of honor or reputation as the miser descends to in pursuit of gold.
 - (19 February 1756)

- **A pen is certainly an excellent instrument to fix a man's attention and to inflame his ambition.**
 - (14 November 1760)

- This is the most magnificent movement of all! There is a dignity, a majesty, a sublimity, in this last effort of the patriots that I greatly admire. The people should never rise without doing something to be remembered — something notable and striking. This destruction of the tea is so bold, so daring, so firm, intrepid and inflexible, and it must have so important consequences, and so lasting, that I can't but consider it as an epocha in history!
 - On the Boston Tea Party (17 December 1773)

- **Virtue is not always amiable.**
 - (9 February 1779)

- By my physical constitution I am but an ordinary man ... Yet some great events, some cutting expressions, some mean hypocracies, have at times thrown this assemblage of sloth, sleep, and littleness into rage like a lion.
 - (26 April 1779)

- The Christian religion is, above all the religions that ever prevailed or existed in ancient or modern times, the religion of wisdom, virtue, equity, and humanity, let the blackguard Paine say what he will; it is resignation to God, it is goodness itself to man.
 - (26 July 1796).

- Tacitus appears to have been as great an enthusiast as Petrarch for the revival of the republic and universal empire. He has exerted the vengeance of history upon the emperors, but has veiled the conspiracies against them, and the incorrigible corruption of the people which probably provoked their most atrocious cruelties. **Tyranny can scarcely be practised upon a virtuous and wise people.**
 - (31 July 1796)

- **It is folly to anticipate evils, and madness to create imaginary ones.**
 - (4 August 1796)

- *Omnium rerum domina, virtus.* **Virtue is the mistress of all things. Virtue is the master of all things.** Therefore a nation that should never do wrong must necessarily govern the world. The might of virtue, the power of virtue, is not a very common topic, not so common as it should be.
 - (6 August 1796)

A Dissertation on the Canon and Feudal Law (1765)

A Dissertation on the Canon and Feudal Law (1765) (<http://www.ashbrook.org/library/18/adams/canonlaw.html>)

- **The preservation of the means of knowledge among the lowest ranks is of more importance to the public than all the property of all the rich men in the country.**
- 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.
- **The poor people, it is true, have been much less successful than the great.** They have seldom found either leisure or opportunity to form a union and exert their strength; ignorant as they were of arts and letters, they have seldom been able to frame and support a regular opposition. This, however, has been known by the great to be the temper of mankind; and they have accordingly labored, in all ages, to wrest from the populace, as they are contemptuously called, the knowledge of their rights and wrongs, and the power to assert the former or redress the latter. **I say RIGHTS, for such they have, undoubtedly, antecedent to all earthly government, — Rights, that cannot be repealed or restrained by human laws — Rights, derived from the great Legislator of the universe.**
- **Liberty must at all hazards be supported.** We have a right to it, derived from our Maker. But if we had not, our fathers have earned and bought it for us, at the expense of their ease, their estates, their pleasure, and their blood.
- **Liberty cannot be preserved without a general knowledge among the people, who have a right, from the frame of their nature, to knowledge, as their great Creator, who does nothing in vain, has given them understandings, and a desire to know; but besides this, they have a right, an indisputable, unalienable, indefeasible, divine right to that most dreaded and envied kind of knowledge, I mean, of the characters and conduct of their rulers.** Rulers are no more than attorneys, agents, and trustees, of the people; and if the cause, the interest, and trust, is insidiously betrayed, or wantonly trifled away, the people have a right to revoke the authority that they themselves have deputed, and to constitute other and better agents, attorneys and trustees.
- **The jaws of power are always open to devour, and her arm is always stretched out, if possible, to destroy the freedom of thinking, speaking, and writing.**
- Be not intimidated, therefore, by any terrors, from publishing with the utmost freedom, whatever can be warranted by the laws of your country; nor suffer yourselves to be wheedled out of your liberties by any pretenses of politeness, delicacy, or decency. These, as they are often used, are but three different names for hypocrisy, chicanery, and cowardice.



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



Consenting to slavery is a sacrilegious breach of trust, as offensive in the sight of God as it is derogatory from our own honor or interest or happiness.

- Let us tenderly and kindly cherish therefore, the means of knowledge. Let us dare to read, think, speak, and write.
- **Let every sluice of knowledge be opened and set a-flowing.**
- Let us see delineated before us the true map of man. Let us hear the dignity of his nature, and the noble rank he holds among the works of God—that consenting to slavery is a sacrilegious breach of trust, as offensive in the sight of God as it is derogatory from our own honor or interest or happiness.

Boston Massacre trial (1770)

In 1770, Adams defended the British soldiers who were charged with committing murder at the Boston Massacre

- **Facts are stubborn things; and whatever may be our wishes, our inclinations, or the dictates of our passion, they cannot alter the state of facts and evidence.**
- **It is more important that innocence be protected than it is that guilt be punished, for guilt and crimes are so frequent in this world that they cannot all be punished.**

But if innocence itself is brought to the bar and condemned, perhaps to die, then the citizen will say, "whether I do good or whether I do evil is immaterial, for innocence itself is no protection," and if such an idea as that were to take hold in the mind of the citizen that would be the end of security whatsoever.

- The law no passion can disturb. 'Tis void of desire and fear, lust and anger. 'Tis *mens sine affectu*, written reason, retaining some measure of the divine perfection. It does not enjoin that which pleases a weak, frail man, but, without any regard to persons, commands that which is good and punishes evil in all, whether rich or poor, high or low. 'Tis deaf, inexorable, inflexible. **On the one hand it is inexorable to the cries and lamentations of the prisoners; on the other it is deaf, deaf as an adder, to the clamors of the populace.**



You bid me burn your letters. But I must forget you first.

Novanglus essays (1774–1775)

Novanglus; or, A History of the Dispute with America, From Its Origin, in 1754, to the Present Time. first published in the *Boston Gazette*

- **Nip the shoots of arbitrary power in the bud, is the only maxim which can ever preserve the liberties of any people.**
 - No. 3
- We are told: "It is a universal truth, that he that would excite a rebellion, is at heart as great a tyrant as ever wielded the iron rod of oppression." Be it so. We are not exciting a rebellion. **Opposition, nay, open, avowed resistance by arms, against usurpation and lawless violence, is not rebellion by the law of God or the land.** Resistance to lawful authority makes rebellion. ... **Remember the frank Veteran acknowledges, that "the word rebel is a convertible term."**
 - No. 5

- **A government of laws, and not of men.**
 - No. 7; this was incorporated into the Massachusetts Constitution in 1780
- **Metaphysicians and politicians may dispute forever, but they will never find any other moral principle or foundation of rule or obedience, than the consent of governors and governed.**
 - No. 7

Letter to Abigail Adams (1775)

Letter to Abigail Adams (<http://scholarship.kentlaw.iit.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2785&context=cklawreview>) (19 October 1775). Reprinted in I ADAMS FAMILY CORRESPONDENCE 318 (L. Butterfield ed. 1963).

- There is, in the human Breast, a social Affection, which extends to our whole Species.

Thoughts on Government (1776)

Letter to George Wythe, April 1776 (<http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-9116853/Document-John-Adams-The-Foundation-of-Government>)

- **We ought to consider what is the end of government, before we determine which is the best form.** Upon this point all speculative politicians will agree, that the happiness of society is the end of government, as all Divines and moral Philosophers will agree that the happiness of the individual is the end of man. From this principle it will follow, that the form of government which communicates ease, comfort, security, or, in one word, happiness, to the greatest number of persons, and in the greatest degree, is the best.
- **Fear is the foundation of most governments; but it is so sordid and brutal a passion, and renders men in whose breasts it predominates so stupid and miserable, that Americans will not be likely to approve of any political institution which is founded on it.**
- **When annual elections end, there slavery begins.**
- 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.
- **The judicial power ought to be distinct from both the legislative and executive, and independent upon both, that so it may be a check upon both, as both should be checks upon that.**

Letter to William Cushing (1776)

- **Objects of the most Stupendous Magnitude, Measures in which the Lives and Liberties of Millions, born and unborn are most essentially interested, are now before Us. We are in the very midst of a Revolution, the most compleat, unexpected, and remarkable of any in the History of Nations.** A few Matters must be dispatched before I can return. Every Colony must be induced to institute a perfect Government. All the Colonies must confederate together, in some solemn Compact. The Colonies must be declared free and independent states, and Embassadors, must be Sent abroad to foreign Courts, to solicit their Acknowledgment of Us, as Sovereign States, and to form with them, at least with some of them commercial Treaties of Friendship and Alliance. When these Things shall be once well finished, or in a Way of being so, I shall think that I have answered the End of my Creation, and sing with Pleasure my Nunc Dimittes, or if it should be the Will of Heaven that I should live a little longer, return to my

Farm and Family, ride Circuits, plead Law, or judge Causes, just as you please.

- Letter to William Cushing (<http://www.masshist.org/publications/apde2/view?id=ADMS-06-04-02-0109>) (9 June 1776).

Letter to Abigail Adams (1777)

Letter to Abigail Adams (https://books.google.com/books?id=WbFznb7PSGsC&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false) (22 May 1777)

- I believe there is no one Principle, which predominates in human Nature so much in every Stage of Life, from the Cradle to the Grave, in Males and females, old and young, black and white, rich and poor, high and low, as this Passion for Superiority.

Letter to Baron Van Der Capellen (1781)

Letter to Baron Van Der Capellen (21 January 1781), Amsterdam. (http://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/2105#lf1431-07_head_239)

- The invasion of Georgia and South Carolina is the first. But why should the invasion of these two States affect the credit of the thirteen, more than the invasion of any two others? Massachusetts and Rhode Island have been invaded by armies much more formidable. New York, Connecticut, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, and Virginia, have been all invaded before. But what has been the issue? Not conquest, not submission. On the contrary, all those States have learned the art of war and the habits of submission to military discipline, and have got themselves well armed, nay, clothed and furnished with a great deal of hard money by these very invasions. And what is more than all the rest, they have got over the fears and terrors that are always occasioned by a first invasion, and are a worse enemy than the English; and besides, they have had such experience of the tyranny and cruelty of the English as have made them more resolute than ever against the English government. Now, why should not the invasion of Georgia and Carolina have the same effects? It is very certain, in the opinion of the Americans themselves, that it will. Besides, **the unexampled cruelty of Cornwallis has been enough to revolt even negroes**; it has been such as will make the English objects of greater horror there than in any of the other States.

Letter to B. Franklin (1781)

Letter to B. Franklin (16 April 1781), Leyden. (http://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/2105#lf1431-07_head_273)

- Great Britain has been moving earth and hell to obtain allies against us, yet it is improper in us to propose an alliance! Great Britain has borrowed all the superfluous wealth of Europe, in Italy, Germany, Holland, Switzerland, and some in France, to murder us, yet it is dishonorable in us to propose to borrow money! By heaven, I would make a bargain with all Europe, if it lay with me. Let all Europe stand still, neither lend men nor money nor ships to England nor America, and let them fight it out alone. I would give my share of millions for such a bargain. America is treated unfairly and ungenerously by Europe. But thus it is, mankind will be servile to tyrannical masters, and basely devoted to vile idols.

Letter to John Jay (1786)

Letter to John Jay (<http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-09-02-0315>) (28 March 1786), written with Thomas Jefferson.

- We took the liberty to make some enquiries concerning the ground of their pretentions to make war upon

nations who had done them no injury, and observed that we considered all mankind as our friends who had done us no wrong, nor had given us any provocation.

- The Ambassador answered us that it was founded on the laws of their Prophet; that it was written in their Koran; that all nations who should not have acknowledged their authority were sinners; that it was their right and duty to make war upon them wherever they could be found, and to make slaves of all they could take as prisoners; and that every Mussulman who was slain in battle was sure to go to Paradise. He said, also, that the man who was the first to board a vessel had one slave over and above his share, and that when they sprang to the deck of an enemy's ship, every sailor held a dagger in each hand and a third in his mouth; which usually struck such terror into the foe that they cried out for quarter at once. That it was a law that the first who boarded an Enemy's Vessel should have one slave.
 - Concerning an interview in London with the ambassador from Tripoli, Sidi Haji Abdul Rahman Adja.

A Defence of the Constitutions of Government (1787)

A Defence of the Constitutions of Government of the United States of America (3 Volumes, 1787), republished in the 10 volume *The Works of John Adams* (1850 - 1856) edited Charles Francis Adams

- The rich, the well-born, and the able, acquire an influence among the people that will soon be too much for simple honesty and plain sense, in a house of representatives. The most illustrious of them must, therefore, be separated from the mass, and placed by themselves in a senate; this is, to all honest and useful intents, an ostracism.
 - Vol. I, Preface, p. xi
 - The militia and sovereignty are inseparable. In the English constitution, if the whole nation were a militia, there would be a militia to defend the crown, the lords, or the commons, if either were attacked. The crown, though it commands them, has no power to use them improperly, because it cannot pay or subsist them without the consent of the lords and commons; but if the militia are to obey a sovereignty in a single assembly, it is commanded, paid, and subsisted, and a standing army, too, may be raised, paid, and subsisted, by the vote of a majority; the militia, then, must all obey the sovereign majority, or divide, and part follow the majority, and part the minority. This last case is civil war; but, until it comes to this, the whole militia may be employed by the majority in any degree of tyranny and oppression over the minority. The constitution furnishes no resource or remedy; nothing affords a chance of relief but rebellion and civil war. If this terminates in favor of the minority, they will tyrannize in their turn, exasperated by revenge, in addition to ambition and avarice; if the majority prevail, their domination becomes more cruel, and soon ends in one despot. **It must be made a sacred maxim, that the militia obey the executive power, which represents the whole people in the execution of laws.** To suppose arms in the hands of citizens, to be used at individual discretion, except in private self-defence, or by partial orders of towns, counties, or districts of a state, is to demolish every constitution, and lay the laws prostrate, so that liberty can be enjoyed by no man; it is a dissolution of the government. The fundamental law of the militia is, that it be created, directed, and commanded by the laws, and ever for the support of the laws.
 - Ch. 3 Marchamont Nedham : Errors of Government and Rules of Policy" Sixth Rule
- **Children should be educated and instructed in the principles of freedom.**
 - Ch. 3 Marchamont Nedham : Errors of Government and Rules of Policy" Seventh Rule
- **The moment the idea is admitted into society, that property is not as sacred as the law of God, and that there is not a force of law and public justice to protect it, anarchy and tyranny commence.** If "Thou shall not covet," and "Thou shall not steal," are not commandments of Heaven, they must be made inviolable precepts in every society, before it can be civilized or made free.

- Ch. 1 Marchamont Nedham : The Right Constitution of a Commonwealth Examined (http://press-pubs.uchicago.edu/founders/print_documents/v1ch16s15.html)

- **The right of a nation to kill a tyrant, in cases of necessity, can no more be doubted, than to hang a robber, or kill a flea. But killing one tyrant only makes way for worse, unless the people have sense, spirit and honesty enough to establish and support a constitution guarded at all points against the tyranny of the one, the few, and the many.** Let it be the study, therefore, of lawgivers and philosophers, to enlighten the people's understandings and improve their morals, by good and general education; to enable them to comprehend the scheme of government, and to know upon what points their liberties depend; to dissipate those vulgar prejudices and popular superstitions that oppose themselves to good government; and to teach them that obedience to the laws is as indispensable in them as in lords and kings.

- Ch. 18 (<http://press-pubs.uchicago.edu/founders/documents/v1ch18s17.html>)

- **A single assembly will never be a steady guardian of the laws,** if Machiavel is right, when he says, Men are never good but through necessity: on the contrary, when good and evil are left to their choice, they will not fail to throw every thing into disorder and confusion. Hunger and poverty may make men industrious, but laws only can make them good; for, if men were so of themselves, there would be no occasion for laws; but, as the case is far otherwise, they are absolutely necessary.

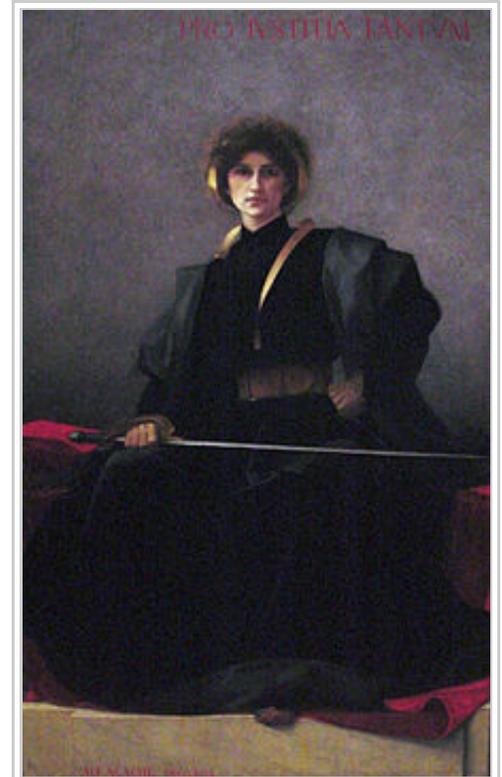
- Vol. I, letter XXVI Ch. 4 Opinions of Philosophers : Dr. Price (http://www.constitution.org/jadams/ja1_26.htm)

- The proposition, that the people are the best keepers of their own liberties, is not true; they are the worst conceivable; they are no keepers at all; they can neither judge, act, think, or will, as a political body.

- This is attributed to Adams in *The Life of Thomas Jefferson* (1858) by Henry Stephens Randall, p. 587

- There never was yet a people who must not have somebody or something to represent the dignity of the state, the majesty of the people, call it what you will — a doge, an avoyer, an archon, a president, a consul, a syndic; this becomes at once an object of ambition and dispute, and, in time, of division, faction, sedition, and rebellion.

- Letter LV: Conclusion (http://www.constitution.org/jadams/ja1_55.htm)



Killing one tyrant only makes way for worse, unless the people have sense, spirit and honesty enough to establish and support a constitution guarded at all points against the tyranny of the one, the few, and the many.

Discourses on Davila (1790)

Discourses on Davila : A Series of Papers on Political History first published in the *Gazette of the United States* (1790-1791) ; (Downloadable PDF of 1805 edition) (http://books.google.com/books?id=9fASAAAIAAJ&pg=PA3&dq=%22Discourses+on+D+avila%22&ei=nNkmR6jSFZ306wKL5ek_); republished with modernized spelling in *The Works of John Adams, Second President of the United States* vol. VI (1851) (http://books.google.com/books?id=QZM8AAAIAAJ&pg=PA274&dq=%22The+world+grows+more+enlightened%22&ei=3uEmR6WiKI6M7gKOzdz_Bw)

- **A desire to be observed, considered, esteemed, praised, beloved, and admired by his fellows is one of the earliest, as well as the keenest dispositions discovered in the heart of man.**

- "Discourses on Davila: A Series of Papers on Political History," No. 4 *Gazette of the United States* (1790–1791)

- **The world grows more enlightened. Knowledge is more equally diffused.** Newspapers, magazines, and circulating libraries have made mankind wiser. Titles and distinctions, ranks and orders, parade and ceremony, are all going out of fashion. This is roundly and frequently asserted in the streets, and sometimes on theatres of higher *rank*. Some truth there is in it; and if the opportunity were temperately improved, to the reformation of abuses, the rectification of errors, and the dissipation of pernicious prejudices, a great advantage it might be. But, on the other hand, false inferences may be drawn from it, which may make mankind wish for the age of dragons, giants, and fairies.

- No. 13

- **Are riches, honors, and beauty going out of fashion? Is not the rage for them, on the contrary, increased faster than improvement in knowledge?** As long as either of these are in vogue, will there not be emulations and rivalries? Does not the increase of knowledge in any man increase his emulation; and the diffusion of knowledge among men multiply rivalries? Has the progress of science, arts, and letters yet discovered that there are no passions in human nature? no ambition, avarice, or desire of fame? Are these passions cooled, diminished, or extinguished? Is the rage for admiration less ardent in men or women? Have these propensities less a tendency to divisions, controversies, seditions, mutinies, and civil wars than formerly? On the contrary, the more knowledge is diffused, the more the passions are extended, and the more furious they grow.

- No. 13

- **Property must be secured, or liberty cannot exist.** But if unlimited or unbalanced power of disposing property, be put into the hands of those who have no property, France will find, as we have found, the lamb committed to the custody of the wolf. In such a case, all the pathetic exhortations and addresses of the national assembly to the people, to respect property, will be regarded no more than the warbles of the songsters of the forest. The great art of law-giving consists in balancing the poor against the rich in the legislature, and in constituting the legislative a perfect balance against the executive power, at the same time that no individual or party can become its rival. **The essence of a free government consists in an effectual control of rivalries.** The executive and the legislative powers are natural rivals; and if each has not an effectual control over the other, the weaker will ever be the lamb in the paws of the wolf. The nation which will not adopt an equilibrium of power must adopt a despotism. There is no other alternative. **Rivalries must be controlled, or they will throw all things into confusion; and there is nothing but despotism or a balance of power which can control them.**

- No. 13



The world grows more enlightened.
Knowledge is more equally diffused.

Letter to T. Pickering (1799)

Letter to T. Pickering (7 December 1799), Philadelphia. (http://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/2107#lf1431-09_head_047)

- Although neither nation has been brought to admit that they were chargeable with the first infraction, yet no American can forget the carrying off the negroes.

Letter to George Churchman and Jacob Lindley (1801)

Letter to George Churchman and Jacob Lindley (24 January 1801), Washington, D.C. (http://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/2107#lf1431-09_head_111)

- **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 sentiments that I have always employed freemen, both as domestics and laborers, 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.
- There are many other evils in our country which are growing, whereas the practice of slavery is fast diminishing, and threaten to bring punishment on our land more immediately than the oppression of the blacks. That sacred regard to truth in which you and I were educated, and which is certainly taught and enjoined from on high, seems to be vanishing from among us. A general relaxation of education and government, a general debauchery as well as dissipation, produced by pestilential philosophical principles of Epicurus, infinitely more than by shows and theatrical entertainments; these are, in my opinion, more serious and threatening evils than even the slavery of the blacks, hateful as that is. I might even add that I have been informed that the condition of the common sort of white people in some of the Southern States, particularly Virginia, is more oppressed, degraded, and miserable, than that of the negroes. These vices and these miseries deserve the serious and compassionate consideration of friends, as well as the slave trade and the degraded state of the blacks. I wish you success in your benevolent endeavors to relieve the distresses of our fellow creatures, and shall always be ready to cooperate with you as far as my means and opportunities can reasonably be expected to extend.

Letter to Josiah Quincy (1811)

Letter to Josiah Quincy (9 February 1811), Quincy. (<http://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/adams-the-works-of-john-adams-vol-9-letters-and-state-papers-1799-1811>)

- You think it impossible the Convention could have a thought of war with Great Britain, and the conquest of Canada. In this point I differ from you very widely. The conduct of Great Britain, and the conduct of our States, too, was such as to keep up very serious apprehensions between the two powers. The treaty of peace was not fulfilled on either side.

Letter to Samuel B. Malcolm (1812)

Letter to Samuel B. Malcolm (6 August 1812), Quincy. (http://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/2127#Adams_1431-10_87)

- **There are two tyrants in human life who domineer in all nations, in Indians and Negroes, in Tartars and Arabs, in Hindoos and Chinese, in Greeks and Romans, in Britons and Gauls, as well as in our simple, youthful, and beloved United States of America. These two tyrants are fashion and party.** They are sometimes at variance, and I know not whether their mutual hostility is not the only security of human happiness. But they are forever struggling for an alliance with each other; and, when they are united, truth, reason, honor, justice, gratitude, and humanity itself in combination are no match for the coalition. Upon the maturest reflection of a long experience, I am much inclined to believe that fashion is the worst of all tyrants, because he is the original source, cause, preserver, and supporter of all others.

Letters to John Taylor (1814)

Letters to John Taylor was an unpublished and apparently unfinished reply to John Taylor's *An Inquiry into the Principles and Policy of the Government of the United States*, which attacked Adams' earlier publication, *A Defence of the Constitutions of the United States*. It took the form of a series of letters, the first dated 14 April 1814. It was published in *The Works of John Adams, Second President of the United States* vol. VI (1851).

- **Liberty, according to my metaphysics, is an intellectual quality; an attribute that belongs not to fate nor chance. Neither possesses it, neither is capable of it.** There is nothing moral or immoral in the idea of it. The definition of it is a self-determining power in an intellectual agent. It implies thought and choice and power; it can elect between objects, indifferent in point of morality, neither morally good nor morally evil. If the substance in which this quality, attribute, adjective, call it what you will, exists, has a moral sense, a conscience, a moral faculty; if it can distinguish between moral good and moral evil, and has power to choose the former and refuse the latter, it can, if it will, choose the evil and reject the good, as we see in experience it very often does.
 - I, p. 448
- I do not say that democracy has been more pernicious on the whole, and in the long run, than monarchy or aristocracy. Democracy has never been and never can be so durable as aristocracy or monarchy; but while it lasts, it is more bloody than either.
 - XVIII, p. 483. Usually misquoted as "Democracy...while it lasts is more bloody than either aristocracy or monarchy".
- Remember, democracy never lasts long. It soon wastes, exhausts, and murders itself. There never was a democracy yet that did not commit suicide. It is in vain to say that democracy is less vain, less proud, less selfish, less ambitious, or less avaricious than aristocracy or monarchy. It is not true, in fact, and nowhere appears in history. Those passions are the same in all men, under all forms of simple government, and when unchecked, produce the same effects of fraud, violence, and cruelty.
 - XVIII, p. 484
- The priesthood have, in all ancient nations, nearly monopolized learning. Read over again all the accounts we have of Hindoos, Chaldeans, Persians, Greeks, Romans, Celts, Teutons, we shall find that priests had all the knowledge, and really governed mankind. Examine Mahometanism, trace Christianity from its first promulgation; knowledge has been almost exclusively confined to the clergy. And, even since the Reformation, when or where has existed a Protestant or dissenting sect who would tolerate A FREE INQUIRY? The blackest billingsgate, most ungentlemanly insolence, the most yahooish brutality is patiently endured, countenanced, propagated and applauded. But touch a solemn truth in collision with a dogma of a sect, though capable of the clearest proof, and you will soon find you have disturbed a nest, and the hornets will swarm about your legs and hands, and fly into your face and eyes.
 - XXXI, p. 517. Also quoted in *The Political Writings of John Adams* (2001) edited by George W. Carey, p. 440 (<http://books.google.com/books?vid=ISBN0895262924&id=zwKs6Wf2NUEC&pg=PA440&lpg=PA440&ots=qW8I2vCTNZ&dq=%22solemn+truth+in+collision+with+a+dogma+of+a+sect%22&sig=BrWgHvNRAAWcN0rXxdBa7zjeEcc>)



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What do we mean by the American Revolution? (1818)

Letter to Hezekiah Niles (13 February 1818) (http://web.archive.org/web/20020602030340/http://www.cooperativeindividualism.org/adams_john_american_revolution.html); Adams had previously expressed similar assertions in a letter to Thomas Jefferson in 1815, quoted above.

- **The American Revolution was not a common event.** Its effects and consequences have already been awful over a great part of the globe. And when and where are they to cease?

But what do we mean by the American Revolution? Do we mean the American war? The Revolution was effected before the war commenced. The Revolution was in the minds and hearts of the people; a change in their religious sentiments of their duties and obligations. ... This radical change in the principles, opinions, sentiments, and affections of the people, was the real American Revolution.

- **By what means this great and important alteration in the religious, moral, political, and social character of the people of thirteen colonies, all distinct, unconnected, and independent of each other, was begun, pursued, and accomplished, it is surely interesting to humanity to investigate, and perpetuate to posterity.**

To this end, it is greatly to be desired, that young men of letters in all the States, especially in the thirteen original States, would undertake the laborious, but certainly interesting and amusing task, of searching and collecting all the records, pamphlets, newspapers, and even handbills, which in any way contributed to change the temper and views of the people, and compose them into an independent nation.

- The colonies had grown up under constitutions of government so different, there was so great a variety of religions, they were composed of so many different nations, their customs, manners, and habits had so little resemblance, and their intercourse had been so rare, and their knowledge of each other so imperfect, that to unite them in the same principles in theory and the same system of action, was certainly a very difficult enterprise. **The complete accomplishment of it, in so short a time and by such simple means, was perhaps a singular example in the history of mankind. Thirteen clocks were made to strike together — a perfection of mechanism, which no artist had ever before effected.**

In this research, the glorieole of individual gentlemen, and of separate States, is of little consequence. The means and the measures are the proper objects of investigation. These may be of use to posterity, not only in this nation, but in South America and all other countries. They may teach mankind that revolutions are no trifles; that they ought never to be undertaken rashly; nor without deliberate consideration and sober reflection; nor without a solid, immutable, eternal foundation of justice and humanity; nor without a people possessed of intelligence, fortitude, and integrity sufficient to carry them with steadiness, patience, and perseverance, through all the vicissitudes of fortune, the fiery trials and melancholy disasters they may have to encounter.



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Letter to William Tudor (1818)

Letter to William Tudor (1 June 1818) (http://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/2127#lf1431-10_head_126)

- No man could have written from memory Mr. Otis's argument of four or five hours, against the acts of trade, as revenue laws, and against writs of assistance, as a tyrannical engine to execute them, the next day after it was spoken. How awkward, then, would be an attempt to do it after a lapse of fifty-seven years! Nevertheless, some of the heads of his discourse are so indelibly imprinted on my mind, that I will endeavor to give you some very short hints of them.
- He began with an exordium, containing an apology for his resignation of the office of Advocate-General in the Court of Admiralty; and for his appearance in that cause, in opposition to the Crown, and in favor of the town of Boston, and the merchants of Boston and Salem.
- A dissertation on the rights of man in a state of nature. He asserted that every man, merely natural, was an independent sovereign, subject to no law, but the law written on his heart, and revealed to him by his Maker in the constitution of his nature and the inspiration of his understanding and his conscience. His right to his life, his liberty, no created being could rightfully contest. Nor was his right to his property less incontestable. The club that he had snapped from a tree, for a staff or for defence, was his own. His bow and arrow were his own; if by a pebble he had killed a partridge or a squirrel, it was his own. No creature, man or beast, had a right to take it from him. If he had taken an eel, or a smelt, or a sculpion, it was his property. In short, he sported upon this topic with so much wit and humor, and at the same time so much indisputable truth and reason, that he was not less entertaining than instructive. He asserted that these rights were inherent and inalienable. That they never could be surrendered or alienated but by idiots or madmen, and all the acts of idiots and lunatics were void, and not obligatory by all the laws of God and man.
- **Nor were the poor negroes forgotten. Not a Quaker in Philadelphia, or Mr. Jefferson, of Virginia, ever asserted the rights of negroes in stronger terms.** Young as I was, and ignorant as I was, I shuddered at the doctrine he taught; and I have all my lifetime shuddered, and still shudder, at the consequences that may be drawn from such premises. Shall we say, that the rights of masters and servants clash, and can be decided only by force? **I adore the idea of gradual abolitions! But who shall decide how fast or how slowly these abolitions shall be made?**
- From individual independence he proceeded to association. If it was inconsistent with the dignity of human nature to say that men were gregarious animals, like wild horses and wild geese, it surely could offend no delicacy to say they were social animals by nature, that there were mutual sympathies, and, above all, the sweet attraction of the sexes, which must soon draw them together in little groups, and by degrees in larger congregations, for mutual assistance and defence. And this must have happened before any formal covenant, by express words or signs, was concluded. When general counsels and deliberations commenced, the objects could be no other than the mutual defence and security of every individual for his life, his liberty, and his property. To suppose them to have surrendered these in any other way than by equal rules and general consent was to suppose them idiots or madmen, whose acts were never binding. To suppose them surprised by fraud, or compelled by force, into any other compact, such fraud and such force could confer no obligation. Every man had a right to trample it under foot whenever he pleased. In short, he asserted these rights to be derived only from nature and the author of nature; that they were inherent, inalienable, and indefeasible by any laws, pacts, contracts, covenants, or stipulations, which man could devise.

Letter to Robert J. Evans (1819)

Letter to Robert J. Evans (8 June 1819) (http://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/2127#lf1431-10_head_152)

- The turpitude, the inhumanity, the cruelty, and the infamy of the African commerce in slaves, have been so impressively represented to the public by the highest powers of eloquence, that nothing that I can say

would increase the just odium in which it is and ought to be held. **Every measure of prudence, therefore, ought to be assumed for the eventual total extirpation of slavery from the United States.**

- **I have, through my whole life, held the practice of slavery in such abhorrence**, that I have never owned a negro or any other slave, though I have lived for many years in times, when the practice was not disgraceful, when the best men in my vicinity thought it not inconsistent with their character, and when it has cost me thousands of dollars for the labor and subsistence of free men, which I might have saved by the purchase of negroes at times when they were very cheap.

Letter to Timothy Pickering (1822)

Letter to Timothy Pickering (6 August 1822) (http://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/2100#lf1431-02_head_061)

- A meeting we accordingly had, and conned the paper over. **I was delighted with its high tone and the flights of oratory with which it abounded, especially that concerning negro slavery, which, though I knew his Southern brethren would never suffer to pass in Congress, I certainly never would oppose.** There were other expressions which I would not have inserted, if I had drawn it up, particularly that which called the King tyrant. I thought this too personal; for I never believed George to be a tyrant in disposition and in nature; I always believed him to be deceived by his courtiers on both sides of the Atlantic, and in his official capacity only, cruel. I thought the expression too passionate, and too much like scolding, for so grave and solemn a document; but as Franklin and Sherman were to inspect it afterwards, I thought it would not become me to strike it out. I consented to report it, and do not now remember that I made or suggested a single alteration. We reported it to the committee of five. It was read, and I do not remember that Franklin or Sherman criticized any thing. We were all in haste. Congress was impatient, and the instrument was reported, as I believe, in Jefferson's handwriting, as he first drew it. Congress cut off about a quarter of it, as I expected they would; but they obliterated some of the best of it, and left all that was exceptionable, if any thing in it was. **I have long wondered that the original draught has not been published. I suppose the reason is, the vehement philippic against negro slavery.**
 - Regarding a draft of the U.S. Declaration of Independence, as quoted in *The Founding Fathers: John Adams: A Biography in his own Words* (<https://web.archive.org/web/20111029143754/http://home.nas.com/lopresti/ps2.htm>) (1973), by James Bishop Peabody, Newsweek, New York, p. 201.

Misattributed

Statements originally made by others, that have become wrongly attributed to John Adams

- **If we do not lay out ourselves in the service of mankind whom should we serve?**
 - Abigail Adams, his wife, in a letter to John Thaxter (1778-09-29).
- There are obviously two educations. One should teach us how to make a living and the other how to live.
 - James Truslow Adams; sometimes rendered : "There are two educations. One should teach us how to make a living and the other how to live".
- Think of your forefathers! Think of your posterity!
 - John Quincy Adams, his son, in a speech at Plymouth, Massachusetts (1802-12-22).

■ **Genius is sorrow's child.**

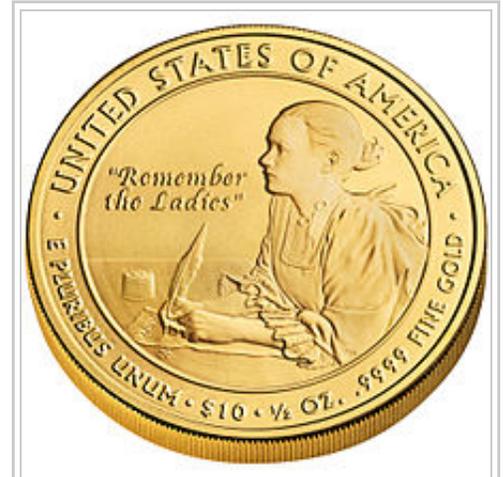
- Adams used this statement in a letter to Benjamin Waterhouse (21 May 1821), but he may have been quoting the poem "To Mr. Stuart, On his Portrait of Mrs. M" by Sarah Wentworth Apthorp Morton, first published in 1803:

*Genius is sorrow's child — to want allied —
Consoled by glory, and sustained by pride.*

- As the government of the United States is not, in any sense, founded on the Christian Religion,—as it has in itself no character of enmity against the laws, religion or tranquility of Musselmen ... it is declared ... that no pretext arising from religious opinions shall ever produce an interruption of the harmony existing between the two countries.

- Article 11 (http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/bar1796t.asp#art11) of the *Treaty of Tripoli* (signed at Tripoli on November 4, 1796, and at Algiers on January 3, 1797 and received ratification unanimously from the U.S. Senate on June 7, 1797; it was signed into law by John Adams (the original language is by Joel Barlow, U.S. Consul); This phrase has also sometimes been misattributed to George Washington, and has also been misquoted as "This nation of ours was not founded on Christian principles".

- I have come to the conclusion that one useless man is called a disgrace; that two are called a law firm; and that three or more become a Congress!
 - Adams as *portrayed* in the musical *1776* (1969); this has sometimes been cited as an actual quote of Adams.



If we do not lay out ourselves in the service of mankind whom should we serve?

Spurious quotations:

Statements which evidence indicates are fabrications; in these cases they seem *derived* from some which are known to have been made by Adams, but have significant alterations and additions.

- The "divinity" of Jesus is made a convenient cover for absurdity. Nowhere in the Gospels do we find a precept for Creeds, Confessions, Oaths, Doctrines, and whole carloads of other foolish trumpery that we find in Christianity.
 - Attributed to Adams in *Spirit* (1988) by William Edelen, p. 4, this seems to paraphrase portions of two diary entries (more extensively quoted in the "Diaries" section above):

Mystery is made a convenient cover for absurdity. (13 February 1756)

Where do we find a precept in the Gospel requiring Ecclesiastical Synods? Convocations? Councils? Decrees? Creeds? Confessions? Oaths? Subscriptions? and whole cart-loads of other trumpery that we find religion incumbered with in these days? (18 February 1756)

- We recognize no sovereign but God, and no king but Jesus!
 - Originally attributed to the "Rev. Jonas Clarke or one of his company" in "No King But King Jesus" (2001) (cache at Internet Archive (<http://web.archive.org/web/20010422194315/www.truthinhistory.org/NoKing.htm>)) by Charles A. Jennings on his website Truth in History (<http://www.truthinhistory.org>), and subsequently attributed to Adams in books like *Is God with America?*

(2006) by Bob Klingenberg, p. 208, and *Silenced in the Schoolhouse* (2008) by Michael Williams, p. 5. (The mistake may have come about because John Adams and John Hancock are mentioned in Jennings' account immediately before Clark.) This is supposed to have been said in reply to Major Pitcairn's demand to "Disperse, ye villains, lay down your arms in the name of George the Sovereign King of England." Clark's own account (<http://books.google.com/books?id=9S8eAAAAMAAJ&pg=PA6#v=onepage&q&f=false>) makes no mention of this (or any other) reply, however. "No king but King Jesus" was the slogan of the Fifth Monarchists (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fifth_Monarchists) during the Interregnum in England, but there is little evidence for its use during the American Revolution.

- God is an essence we know nothing of. Until this awful blasphemy is gotten rid of there will never be any liberal science in the world.
 - Attributed to Adams in *A Brief History of Disbelief* BBC Four (2005) by Jonathan Miller, Online video (<http://www.veoh.com/series/briefhistoryofdisbelief>). The two sentences are derived from two different letters to Thomas Jefferson, written five years apart, juxtaposed to give a misleading impression of Adams' meaning. The first comes from his letter of 17 January 1820, and the second from his letter of 22 January 1825.
- The doctrine of the divinity of Jesus is made a convenient cover for absurdity.
 - Attributed to Adams in *Pathway to the Stars* (2007) by Rev. Ernest A. Steadman, p. 66; this seems to be another paraphrase of the entry for 13 February 1756.
- My friend, there is something very serious in this business. The Holy Ghost carries on the whole Christian system in this earth. Not a baptism, not a marriage, not a sacrament can be administered but by the Holy Ghost, Who is transmitted from age to age by laying the hands of the Bishop on the heads of candidates for the ministry. . . . There is no authority, civil or religious — there can be no legitimate government — but what is administered by this Holy Ghost. There can be no salvation without it — all without it is rebellion and perdition, or, in more orthodox words, damnation. . . . Your prophecy, my dear friend, has not become history as yet. I have no resentment of animosity against the gentleman [Jefferson] and abhor the idea of blackening his character or transmitting him in odious colors to posterity. But I write with difficulty and am afraid of diffusing myself in too many correspondences. If I should receive a letter from him, however, I should not fail to acknowledge and answer it.
 - Adams as misquoted by David Barton, in "The Dream of Dr. Benjamin Rush & God's Hand in Reconciling John Adams and Thomas Jefferson" in *WallBuilders* (June 2008) (<http://www.wallbuilders.com/LIBissuesArticles.asp?id=10152>); omitting many words, giving a very misleading impression that Adams (who did not believe in the Christian Trinity) is endorsing the viewpoint that a government must be administered by the Holy Ghost to be legitimate. Barton went on to use another version, substituting some of Adams' words with false ones:
- The Holy Ghost carries on the whole Christian system in **His truth**. Not a baptism, not a marriage, not a Sacrament can be administered but by the Holy Ghost . . . There is no authority civil or religious: There can be no legitimate government but what is administered by **the** Holy Ghost. There can be no salvation without it. All without it is rebellion and perdition, or in more orthodox words damnation.
 - Adams as misquoted by David Barton on *Glenn Beck* (Fox News) on 2010-04-08, and in a church presentation on 2008-10-06, shown in the film *The Hidden Faith of the Founding Fathers* (2010), at 2:21:32. Without the ellipses and substituted words, this section of Adams's letter of (21 December 1809) (<http://books.google.com/books?id=84oTAQAAMAAJ&pg=PA248>) reads:
 - But my Friend there is something very serious in this Business. The Holy Ghost carries on the whole Christian system in **this earth**. Not a Baptism, not a Marriage not a Sacrament can be administered but by the Holy Ghost, who is transmitted from age to age by laying the hands of the Bishops on the heads of Candidates for the Ministry. In the same manner as the holy Ghost is transmitted from Monarch to Monarch by the holy oil in the vial at

Rheims which was brought down from Heaven by a Dove and by that other Phyal which I have seen in the Tower of London. There is no Authority civil or religious: there can be no legitimate Government but what is administered by **this** Holy Ghost. There can be no salvation without it. All, without it is Rebellion and Perdition, or in more orthodox words Damnation. Although this is all Artifice and Cunning in the secret original in the heart, yet they all believe it so sincerely that they would lay down their Lives under the Ax or the fiery Fagot for it. Alas the poor weak ignorant Dupe human Nature. There is so much King Craft, Priest Craft, Gentlemens Craft, Peoples Craft, Doctors Craft, Lawyers Craft, Merchants Craft, Tradesmens Craft, Labourers Craft and Devils Craft in the world, that it seems a desperate and impracticable Project to undeceive it.

Do you wonder that Voltaire and Paine have made Proselytes? Yet there was as much subtlety, Craft and Hypocrisy in Voltaire and Paine and more too than in Ignatius Loyola. This Letter is so much in the tone of my Friend the Abby Raynal and the Grumblers of the last age, that I pray you to burn it. I cannot copy it.

Your Prophecy my dear Friend has not become History as yet. I have no Resentment or Animosity against the Gentleman and abhor the Idea of blackening his Character or transmitting him in odious Colours to Posterity.

But I write with difficulty and am afraid of diffusing myself in too many Correspondences. If I should receive a Letter from him however I should not fail to acknowledge and answer it.

Quotes about Adams

- I am persuaded, however, that Mr. Adams meant well for his country, was always an honest man, often a wise one, but sometimes and in some things, absolutely out of his senses.
 - Benjamin Franklin, as quoted in *Benjamin Franklin and His Enemies* (<http://archive.is/HI13t>) (1996), by Robert Middlekauff
- **He is vain, irritable, and a bad calculator of the force and probable effect of the motives which govern men. This is all the ill which can possibly be said of him.** He is as disinterested as the Being who made him. He is profound in his views and accurate in his judgment, except where knowledge of the world is necessary to form a judgment. **He is so amiable that I pronounce you will love him, if ever you become acquainted with him. He would be, as he was, a great man in Congress.**
 - Thomas Jefferson in a letter to James Madison (30 January 1787)
- **He saw the whole of a subject at a single glance, and by a happy union of the powers of reasoning and persuasion often succeeded in carrying measures which were at first sight of an unpopular nature**
 - Benjamin Rush as quoted in Kiernan, Denise and D'Agnes, Joseph "Signing Their Lives Way" Quirk Books, Philadelphia (2009)p. 26-27



He is so amiable that I pronounce you will love him, if ever you become acquainted with him. ~ Thomas Jefferson

- **What for me makes people like Teddy Roosevelt and Franklin Roosevelt and John Adams and George Washington and Dwight Eisenhower and Ronald Reagan such extraordinary leaders is that they had integrity through and through. What they were on the inside and what they said on the outside was harmonious.** There are a lot of people like that. I think that if people try to live a very different personal life not consistent with the role they've assumed as a governor or senator or president, we lose something as a nation.
 - Massachusetts governor Mitt Romney, in the September 2005 *The Atlantic* article "The 'Holy Cow!' Candidate"
- **Among all our presidents from Washington downward, not one was a professor of religion, at least not of more than unitarianism.**
 - The Reverend Doctor Bird Wilson in a sermon (23 October 1831) published in the *Albany Daily Advertiser* (29 October 1831), as quoted in *Discussion of the Existence of God and the Authenticity of the Bible* (1840) (<http://books.google.com/books?id=hIQm1JttIL4C&dq=%22Discussion+on+the+Existence+of+God+and+the+Authenticity+of+the+Bible%22>) by Origen Bachelier and Robert Dale Owen, Appendix, p. 231. The presidents mentioned here would include, beyond Washington and Adams: Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, James Monroe, John Quincy Adams, and Andrew Jackson; also quoted in *George Washington & Religion* (1963) by Paul F. Boller, p. 14 – 15.
 - Disputed variant: The founders of our nation were nearly all Infidels, and that of the presidents who had thus far been elected not a one had professed a belief in Christianity.
 - This has been attributed to Bird Wilson from the same sermon, but it seems to be a summarizing paraphrase of the above quotation which may have originated in *Six Historic Americans* (1906) by John Eleazer Remsburg which has been cited as its source.
 - Disputed variant: The founders of our nation were nearly all Infidels, and that of the presidents who had thus far been elected (George Washington, John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, James Monroe, John Quincy Adams, and Andrew Jackson) not a one had professed a belief in Christianity.
 - This has also been attributed to the same sermon, but seems to be an even further paraphrase of the above quotations, as rendered in *Jesus : Myth Or Reality?* (2006) by Ian Curtis, p. 250

External links

- White House biography (<http://www.whitehouse.gov/history/presidents/ja2.html>)
- The Papers of John Adams *at the Avalon Project* (http://avalon.law.yale.edu/subject_menus/adamspap.asp)
- Adams Family Papers : An electronic archive (<http://www.masshist.org/digitaladams/aea/>)
- Works by John Adams (http://www.gutenberg.org/author/John_Adams) at Project Gutenberg

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