

Wisdom for Nations: Character, Virtue, Integrity, Courage

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Quotes are in the order of each leader's service as Head of State,
with their statements before, during, or after their years in the Presidency.
A few quotes are included from other government or military leaders.

These wisdom quotes are mostly from Presidents of the United States during the nation's first century under the U.S. Constitution, whose character was eminently noble—a rare quality in leaders today. The first four Presidents—George Washington, John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, and James Madison—are quoted more than others because of their enormous and extraordinary influence in carefully laying, building, and preserving the good foundations of the nation and national government. They were full of wisdom and are worthy of emulation. *Wisdom quotes from other Heads of State and leaders are desired and can be added (see note at end).*

The topics included are:

- Good Character & Virtue
- Adversity & Difficulties
- Arbitrary Power, Corruption, and Tyranny
- Decline of Nations & Corruption of Governments
- Family, Mentoring, Future Generations / Posterity
- Honesty, Integrity, Truth, Courage, Duty, Accountability
- Humility
- Leadership: Honor, Integrity, Diligence, Firmness, Servant
- Morality, True Religion, and Self-Government Essential to Preserve Liberty & Constitutional Government

Good Character & Virtue

“Few men have virtue to withstand the highest bidder.”¹ – General George Washington, letter to Major-General Robert Howe (about a spy), 17 August 1779

“Arbitrary power is most easily established on the ruins of liberty abused to licentiousness.”²
– General George Washington, *Circular to the States*, 14 June 1783

(T)hese Powers ... are so distributed among the Legislative, Executive, and Judicial Branches, into which the general Government is arranged, that it can never be in danger of degenerating into a ... despotic or oppressive form, so long as there shall remain any virtue in the body of the People.”³ – George Washington, letter to Marquis de LaFayette, 7 February 1788

“The first transactions of a nation, like those of an individual upon his first entrance into life make the deepest impression, and are to form the leading traits in its character.”⁴
– George Washington, letter to John Armstrong, 25 April 1788

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“I hope I shall always possess firmness and virtue enough to maintain, what I consider the most enviable of all titles, the character of *an honest man*.”⁵

– George Washington, letter to Alexander Hamilton, 28 August 1788

“Can it be that Providence has not connected the permanent felicity of a Nation with its virtue?”⁶

– President George Washington, *Farewell Address*, 17 September 1796

“Our proper business in this life is not to accumulate large fortunes, not to gain high honors and important offices in the state, not to waste our health and spirits in pursuit of the sciences, but constantly to improve ourselves in habits of piety and virtue. Consequently the meanest mechanic who endeavors, in proportion to his ability, to promote the happiness of his fellow men, deserves better of society, and should be held in higher esteem than the greatest magistrate who uses his power for his own pleasures, or avarice, or ambition.”⁷

– John Adams, Diary (Fast day), 29 April 1756

“Thus, God has told us by the general constitution of the world, by the nature of all terrestrial enjoyments, and by the constitution of our own bodies, that this world was not designed for a lasting and a happy state, but rather for a state of moral discipline; that we might have a fair opportunity and continual incitement to labor after a cheerful resignation to all the events of Providence, after habits of virtue, self-government, and piety; and this temper of mind is in our power to acquire, and this alone can secure us against all the adversities of fortune, against all the malice of men, against all the operations of nature.”⁸

– John Adams, Diary, 14 August 1756

“Religious institutions are mere means of increasing and preserving piety and virtue in the world.”⁹

– John Adams, Diary, 18 March 1759

“The happiness of life depends more upon innocence in this respect [sexual purity], than upon all the philosophy of Epicurus or of Zeno without it.”¹⁰

– John Adams, Diary, 1764

“The government of the supreme and all-perfect Mind, over all His intellectual creation, is by proportioning rewards to piety and virtue, and punishments to disobedience and vice. Virtue, by the constitution of nature, carries in general its own reward, and vice its own punishment, even in this world. But, as many exceptions to this rule take place upon earth, the joys of heaven are prepared, and the horrors of hell in a future state, to render the moral government of the universe perfect and complete.”¹¹

– John Adams, Diary, 22 August 1770

“(T)hat struggle which I believe always happens between virtue and ambition, when a man first commences a courtier. By a courtier, I mean one who applies himself to the passions and prejudices, the follies and vices of great men, in order to obtain their smiles, esteem, and patronage, and consequently their favors and preferment. Human nature, depraved as it is, has interwoven in its very frame a love of truth, sincerity, and integrity, which must be overcome by art, education, and habit, before the man can become entirely ductile to the will of a dishonest master. When such a master requires of all who seek his favor an implicit resignation to his will and humor, and these require that he be soothed, flattered, and assisted in his vices and follies, perhaps the blackest crimes that men can commit, the first thought of this will produce in a mind not yet entirely debauched, a soliloquy something like my motto, as if he should say,

“The Minister of State or the Governor would promote my interest, would advance me to places of honor and profit, would raise me to titles and dignities that will be perpetuated in my family; in a word, would make the fortune of me and my posterity forever, if I would but comply

with his desires, and become his instrument to promote his measures. But still I dread the consequences. He requires of me such compliances, such horrid crimes, such a sacrifice of my honor, my conscience, my friends, my country, my God, as the Scriptures inform us must be punished with nothing less than hell-fire, eternal torment; and this is so unequal a price to pay for the honors and emoluments in the power of a Minister or Governor, that I cannot prevail upon myself to think of it. The duration of future punishment terrifies me. If I could but deceive myself so far as to think eternity a moment only, I could comply and be promoted.’

“Such as these are probably the sentiments of a mind as yet pure and undefiled in its morals; and many and severe are the pangs and agonies it must undergo, before it will be brought to yield entirely to temptation.”¹² – John Adams, Diary, 9 February 1772

“That people who pay greater respect to a wealthy villain, than to an honest, upright man in poverty, almost deserve to be enslaved; they plainly show that wealth, however it may be acquired, is in their esteem, to be preferred to virtue.”¹³ – Quote from Colonel Hancock speech, after Boston massacre, included in Diary of John Adams, 5 March 1774

“The business of [civil government] is to see those laws enforced, which are necessary for the preservation of peace, virtue, and good order.”¹⁴ – John Adams, Esq., *A Proclamation* (written by Adams), by the Great and General Court of the Colony of Massachusetts Bay, 1775

“That piety and virtue, which alone can secure the freedom of any people, may be encouraged, and vice and immorality suppressed, the [Government] have thought fit to issue this proclamation, commanding and enjoining it upon the good people of this colony, that they lead sober, religious, and peaceable lives, avoiding all blasphemies, contempt of the Holy Scriptures, and of the Lord's Day, and all other crimes and misdemeanors, all debauchery, profaneness, corruption, venality, all riotous and tumultuous proceedings, and all immoralities whatsoever; and that they decently and reverently attend the public worship of God, at all times acknowledging with gratitude His merciful interposition in their behalf, devoutly confiding in Him.”¹⁵ – John Adams, Esq., *A Proclamation* (written by Adams), by the Great and General Court of the Colony of Massachusetts Bay, 1775

“Were not her Talents, and Virtues too much confined, to private, social and domestic Life. My Opinion of the Duties of Religion and Morality, comprehends a very extensive Connection with society at large, and the great Interest of the public. Does not natural Morality, and much more Christian Benevolence, make it our indispensable Duty to lay ourselves out, to serve our fellow Creatures to the Utmost of our Power, in promoting and supporting those great Political systems, and general Regulations upon which the Happiness of Multitudes depends. The Benevolence, Charity, Capacity and Industry which exerted in private Life, would make a family, a Parish or a Town Happy, employed upon a larger Scale, in Support of the great Principles of Virtue and Freedom of political Regulations might secure whole Nations and Generations from Misery, Want and Contempt. Public Virtues, and political Qualities therefore should be incessantly cherished in our Children.”¹⁶ – John Adams, letter to Abigail Adams (wife), 29 October 1775

“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.”¹⁷

– John Adams, Philadelphia, letter to Zabdiel Adams, 21 June 1776

“Revenge, in ancient Days, you will see it through the whole Roman History, was esteemed a generous, and an heroic Passion. Nothing was too good for a Friend or too bad for an Enemy. Hatred and Malice, without Limits, against an Enemy, was indulged, was justified, and no Cruelty was thought unwarrantable. Our Saviour taught the Immorality of Revenge, and the moral Duty of forgiving Injuries, and even the Duty of loving Enemies. . . . Retaliation, we must practice, in some Instances, in order to make our barbarous Foes respect in some degree the Rights of Humanity. But this will never be done without the most palpable Necessity.”¹⁸

– John Adams, letter to Abigail Adams (wife), 2 June 1777

“They seem unable to unite in any principle, and to have no confidence in one another. Thus it is, when truth and virtue are lost.”¹⁹

– Ambassador John Adams, Paris, letter to Thomas Jefferson, 29 June 1780

“It is high time, it is more than time, that a proper discernment of spirits and distinction of characters were made; that virtue should be more clearly distinguished from vice, wisdom from folly, ability from imbecility, and real merit from proud, imposing impudence, which, while it pretends to do every thing, does nothing but mischief.”²⁰

– Ambassador John Adams, The Hague, letter to Secretary Livingston, 16 May 1782

“(I)n a republic, constituted as we propose, the three principles of fear, honor, and virtue, unite and produce more union among the citizens, and give greater energy to the laws.”²¹ – John Adams, *A Defence of the Constitutions of Government of the United States*, Volume III, 1787

“Happiness, whether in despotism or democracy, whether in slavery or liberty, can never be found without virtue.”²² – John Adams, *A Defence of the Constitutions of Government of the United States of America*, Volume III, 1787

“What would have become of American liberty, if there had not been more faith, honor, and justice in the minds of their common citizens, than are found in the common people in Europe? . . . (I)f the common people in America lose their integrity, they will soon set up tyrants of their own, or court a foreign one.”²³

– Ambassador John Adams, London, letter to Secretary Jay, 23 September 1787

“There is no necessary connection between knowledge and virtue. Simple intelligence has no association with morality. What connection is there between the mechanism of a clock or watch and the feeling of moral good and evil, right or wrong? A faculty or a quality of distinguishing between moral good and evil, as well as physical happiness and misery, that is, pleasure and pain, or, in other words, a CONSCIENCE – an old word almost out of fashion – is essential to morality.”²⁴ – John Adams, *Letters on Government: XXXII*

“The existence of such a government [free, comprised of representatives elected by the people] as ours for any length of time is a full proof of the general dissemination of knowledge and virtue throughout the whole body of the people.”²⁵

– President John Adams, *Inaugural Address*, 4 March 1797

[Pray that God] “would interpose to arrest the progress of 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.”²⁶ – President John Adams, *Proclamation* for a national “day of solemn humiliation, fasting, and prayer,” 6 March 1799

“It would be unbecoming the representatives of this nation to assemble ... without looking up to the Supreme Ruler of the Universe and imploring His blessing. May this territory be the residence of virtue and happiness! In this city may that piety and virtue, that wisdom and magnanimity, that constancy and self-government, which adorned the great character whose name it bears be forever held in veneration! Here and throughout our country may simple manners, pure morals, and true religion flourish forever!”²⁷ – President John Adams, *Fourth Annual Address* (1st assembling of Congress in new U.S. Capital building), 22 November 1800

“When public virtue is gone, when the national spirit is fled, when a party is substituted for the nation and faction for a party, when venality lurks and skulks in secret, and, much more, when it impudently braves the public censure, whether it be sent in the form of emissaries from foreign powers, or is employed by ambitious and intriguing domestic citizens, the republic is lost in essence, though it may still exist in form.”²⁸

– Former President John Adams, letter to Dr. Benjamin Rush, 27 September 1808

“(R)eligion and virtue are the only foundations, not only of republicanism and of all free government, but of social felicity under all governments, and in all the combinations of human society.”²⁹ – Former President John Adams, letter to Dr. Benjamin Rush, 28 August 1811

“Have you ever found in history one single example of a nation thoroughly corrupted, that was afterwards restored to virtue? And without virtue, there can be no political liberty. ... Will you tell me how to prevent luxury from producing effeminacy, intoxication, extravagance, vice and folly? ... Yet all these things ought not to discourage us from exertion, for ... I believe no effort in favour of virtue is lost, and all good men ought to struggle, both by their counsel and example.”³⁰ – Former President John Adams, letter to Former President Thomas Jefferson, 18 December 1819

“The object most interesting to me for the residue of my life, will be to see you both developing daily those principles of virtue and goodness, which will make you valuable to others and happy in yourselves.”³¹

– Thomas Jefferson, Ambassador to France, letter to Martha Jefferson (daughter), 21 May 1787

“My confidence is that there will for a long time be virtue and good sense enough in our countrymen to correct abuses.”³²

– Thomas Jefferson, Ambassador to France, Paris, letter to Edward Rutledge, 18 July 1788

“Adore God. Reverence and cherish your parents. Love your neighbor as yourself, and your country more than yourself. Be just. Be true. Murmur not at the ways of Providence.”³³

– Former President Thomas Jefferson, counsel to namesake, 21 February 1825

“*A Decalogue of Canons for Observation in practical life.*

- Never put off till tomorrow what you can do today.
- Never trouble another for what you can do yourself.
- Never spend your money before you have it.
- Never buy what you do not want, because it is cheap ...
- Pride costs us more than hunger, thirst, and cold.

- We never repent of having eaten too little.
- Nothing is troublesome that we do willingly. ...
- When angry, count ten, before you speak; if very angry, an hundred.”³⁴

– Former President Thomas Jefferson, counsel to namesake, 21 February 1825

[Regarding the level of salaries for high public office]: “(T)here are two passions which have a powerful influence on the affairs of men. These are ambition and avarice; the love of power, and the love of money. Separately each of these has great force in prompting men to action; but when united in view of the same object, they have in many minds the most violent effects. Place before the eyes of such men, a post of honour that shall be at the same time a place of profit, and they will move heaven and earth to obtain it. ...

“And of what kind are the men that will strive for this profitable pre-eminence, through all the bustle of cabal, the heat of contention, the infinite mutual abuse of parties, tearing to pieces the best of characters? It will not be the wise and moderate, the lovers of peace and good order, the men fittest for the trust. It will be the bold and the violent, the men of strong passions and indefatigable activity in their selfish pursuits. These will thrust themselves into your Government and be your rulers. ...

[But] “indeed in all cases of Public service the less the profit the greater the honor. ...

“Sir, I have a better opinion of our Country. I think we shall never be without a sufficient number of wise and good men to undertake and execute well and faithfully the office in question.”³⁵ – Dr. Benjamin Franklin, *Constitutional Convention*, 2 June 1787

[My] “thorough conviction [is] that there never was a period since the establishment of the Revolution when ... there was greater necessity for devotion in the public servants to the respective duties, or for virtue, patriotism, and union in our constituents.”³⁶

– President James Monroe, *Seventh Annual Message*, 2 December 1823

Adversity & Difficulties

“The determinations of Providence are always wise, often inscrutable; and, though its decrees appear to bear hard upon us at times, is nevertheless meant for gracious purposes.”³⁷

– General George Washington, Valley Forge, letter to Bryan Fairfax, 1 March 1778

“It is in the trying circumstances to which Your Excellency has been exposed, that the virtues of a great mind are displayed in their brightest lustre, and that the General’s Character is better known, than in the moment of Victory.”³⁸

– General George Washington, letter to Count D’Estaing, 11 September 1778

“(O)urs is a kind of struggle designed, I dare say, by Providence to try the patience, fortitude, and virtue of men. None, therefore, who is engaged in it, will suffer himself, I trust, to sink under difficulties, or be discouraged by hardships.”³⁹

– General George Washington, letter to Brigadier-General Andrew Lewis, 15 October 1778

“The town of Boston, for aught I can see, must suffer martyrdom. It must expire. And our principal consolation is, that it dies in a noble cause – the cause of truth, of virtue, of liberty, and of humanity, and that it will probably have a glorious resurrection to greater wealth, splendor, and power than ever.”⁴⁰ – John Adams, Esq., letter to wife Abigail Adams, 12 May 1774

“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. . . . 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 . . . even although we should rue it, which, I trust in God we shall not.”⁴¹

– John Adams, Member of Continental Congress, letter to his wife Abigail Adams (day after Congress approved Declaration of Independence), 3 July 1776

“I think there is nothing upon this earth more sublime and affecting than the idea of a great nation all on their knees at once before their God, acknowledging their faults and imploring His blessing and protection, when the prospect before them threatens great danger and calamity.”⁴²

– Former President John Adams, *Correspondence XIII* (published in *The Boston Patriot*)

“Have I not been employed in mischief all my days? Did not the American revolution produce the French revolution? And did not the French revolution produce all the calamities and desolations to the human race and the whole globe ever since? I meant well, however. My conscience was clear as a crystal glass, without a scruple or a doubt. I was borne along by an irresistible sense of duty. God prospered our labors; and, awful, dreadful, and deplorable as the consequences have been, I cannot but hope that the ultimate good of the world, of the human race, and of our beloved country, is intended and will be accomplished by it.”⁴³

– Former President John Adams, letter to Benjamin Rush, 28 August 1811

“Let me add an observation which your learning and experience must have made, because all ages and nations have attested to its truth;—that mankind, in general, and our beloved country, in particular, bear adversity much better than prosperity.”⁴⁴

– Former President John Adams, letter to John Lathrop, 22 March 1813

“If ever you find yourself environed with difficulties and perplexing circumstances, out of which you are at a loss how to extricate yourself, do what is right, and be assured that that will extricate you the best out of the worst situations. Though you cannot see, when you take one step, what will be the next, yet follow truth, justice, and plain dealing, and never fear their leading you out of the labyrinth, in the easiest manner possible. . . . Nothing is so mistaken as the supposition, that a person is to extricate himself from a difficulty, by intrigue, by chicanery, by dissimulation, by trimming, by an untruth, by an injustice. This increases the difficulties ten fold; and those who pursue these methods, get themselves so involved at length, that they can turn no way but their infamy becomes more exposed.”⁴⁵

– Thomas Jefferson, Ambassador to France, letter to Peter Carr, 19 August 1785

“When great evils happen, I am in the habit of looking out for what good may arise from them as consolations to us, and Providence has in fact so established the order of things, as that most evils are the means of producing some good.”⁴⁶

– Vice President Thomas Jefferson, letter to Dr. Benjamin Rush, 23 September 1800

“When a Christian people feel themselves to be overtaken by a great public calamity, it becomes them to humble themselves under the dispensation of Divine Providence, to recognize His righteous government over the children of men, to acknowledge His goodness in time past, as well as their own unworthiness, and to supplicate His merciful protection for the future.”⁴⁷

– President John Tyler, *Proclamation* for a national “day of fasting and prayer,” 13 April 1841

“During the past year we have been blessed by a kind Providence with an abundance of the fruits of the earth, and although the destroying angel for a time visited extensive portions of our territory with the ravages of a dreadful pestilence, yet the Almighty has at length deigned to stay His hand and to restore the inestimable blessing of general health to a people who have acknowledged His power, deprecated His wrath, and implored His merciful protection.”⁴⁸ – President Zachary Taylor, *First Annual Message* to Congress, 4 December 1849

“Although disease ... has left its sad traces upon some portions of our country, we have still the most abundant cause for reverent thankfulness to God for an accumulation of signal mercies showered upon us as a nation. ... In the midst of our sorrow for the afflicted and suffering, it has been consoling to see how promptly disaster made true neighbors of districts and cities separated widely from each other, and cheering to watch the strength of that common bond of brotherhood which unites all hearts, in all parts of this Union, when danger threatens from abroad or calamity impends over us at home.”⁴⁹ – President Franklin Pierce, *First Annual Message*, 5 Dec. 1853

“(T)he [civil] war came ... These slaves constituted a peculiar and powerful interest. All knew that this interest was somehow the cause of the war. ... Both read the same Bible and pray to the same God, and each invokes His aid against the other. It may seem strange that any men should dare to ask a just God’s assistance in wringing their bread from the sweat of other men’s faces, but let us judge not, that we be not judged. The prayers of both could not be answered. That of neither has been answered fully. The Almighty has His own purposes. ‘Woe unto the world because of offenses; for it must needs be that offenses come, but woe to that man by whom the offense cometh.’ If we shall suppose that American slavery is one of those offenses which, in the providence of God, must needs come, but which, having continued through His appointed time, He now wills to remove, and that He gives to both North and South this terrible war as the woe due to those by whom the offense came, shall we discern therein any departure from those divine attributes which the believers in a living God always ascribe to Him? Fondly do we hope, fervently do we pray, that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue until all the wealth piled by the bondsman’s two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said ‘the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.’

“With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation’s wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan, to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations.”⁵⁰

– President Abraham Lincoln, *Second Inaugural Address*, 4 March 1865

“(W)hile we contemplate the infinite power of God in earthquake, flood, and storm let the grateful hearts of those who have been shielded from harm through His mercy be turned in sympathy and kindness toward those who have suffered through His visitations.”⁵¹ – President Grover Cleveland, *Proclamation* for “a day of thanksgiving and prayer,” 1 November 1886

Arbitrary Power, Corruption, and Tyranny

“(T)he Massachusetts people ... receiving fresh proofs of a systematic assertion of an arbitrary power, deeply planned to overturn the laws and constitution of their country ... [but] none of them will ever submit to the loss of those valuable rights and privileges, which are essential to the happiness of every free state, and without which, life, liberty, and property are rendered totally insecure.”⁵² – Col. George Washington, letter to Captain Robert Mackenzie, 9 Oct. 1774

“If the minority, and a small one too ... dictate(s) to the majority, after measures have undergone the most solemn discussions by the representatives of the people, and their will through this medium is enacted into a law, there can be no security for life, liberty, or property; nor, if the laws are not to govern, can any man know how to conduct himself in safety.”⁵³
– President George Washington, letter to Major-General Daniel Morgan, 8 October 1794

“(W)herever a general knowledge and sensibility have prevailed among the people, arbitrary government and every kind of oppression have lessened and disappeared in proportion. ...

“(C)alamitous to human liberty, was a wicked confederacy between the two systems of tyranny ... It seems to have been even stipulated between them, that the temporal [civil government] grandees should contribute every thing in their power to maintain the ascendancy of the priesthood, and that the spiritual grandees in their turn, should employ their ascendancy over the consciences of the people, in impressing on their minds a blind, implicit obedience to civil magistracy. ...

“The adventurers [early American colonists] ... had an utter contempt of all [government and religious abuses of power] ... (and of) the most mischievous of all doctrines, that of passive obedience and non-resistance. They knew that government was a plain, simple, intelligible thing, founded in nature and reason, and quite comprehensible by common sense. They detested all the base services and servile dependencies of the feudal system. They ... thought all such slavish subordinations were equally inconsistent with the constitution of human nature and that religious liberty with which Jesus had made them free. ...

“Rulers are no more than attorneys, agents, and trustees, for 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 abler and better agents, attorneys, and trustees. ...

“(T)he jaws of power are always opened to devour, and her arm is always stretched out, if possible, to destroy the freedom of thinking, speaking, and writing.”⁵⁴

– John Adams, *Dissertation on the Canon and Feudal Law*, 1765

“We have the mortification to observe one act of [British] parliament after another passed for the express purpose of raising a revenue from us; to see our money continually collecting from us, without our consent, by an authority in the constitution of which we have no share, and over which we have no kind of influence or control; to see the little circulating cash that remained

among us for the support of our trade, from time to time transmitted to a distant country, never to return, or, what in our estimation is worse, if possible, appropriated to the maintenance of swarms of officers and pensioners in idleness and luxury, whose example has a tendency to corrupt our morals, and whose arbitrary dispositions will trample on our rights.”⁵⁵

– John Adams, *Instructions of the Town of Boston to Their Representatives*, 17 June 1768

“(A)rbitrary, illegal, unconstitutional measures, do not determine what the law is.”⁵⁶

– John Adams, *The Independence of the Judiciary*, 18 January 1773

“As the happiness of the people is the sole end of government, so the consent of the people is the only foundation of it, in reason, morality, and the natural fitness of things. And, therefore, every act of government, every exercise of sovereignty, against or without the consent of the people, is injustice, usurpation, and tyranny.”⁵⁷ – John Adams, Esq., *A Proclamation* (written by Adams), by the Great and General Court of the Colony of Massachusetts Bay, 1775

“(T)he great Creator having never given to men a right to vest others with authority over them unlimited either in duration or degree. When kings, ministers, governors, or legislators, therefore, instead of exercising the powers intrusted with them according to the principles, forms, and proportions stated by the constitution, and established by the original compact, prostitute those powers to the purposes of oppression; to subvert, instead of supporting a free constitution; to destroy, instead of preserving the lives, liberties, and properties of the people; they are no longer to be deemed magistrates vested with a sacred character, but become public enemies, and ought to be resisted.”⁵⁸ – John Adams, Esq., *A Proclamation* (written by Adams), by the Great and General Court of the Colony of Massachusetts Bay, 1775

“Statesmen ... 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 or tyrannies.”⁵⁹

– John Adams, Philadelphia, letter to Zabdiel Adams, 21 June 1776

[In each government examined, when there were] “no well defined ideas of human rights ... consequently there were no limitations of the power of majorities over minorities. The histories consequently show nothing but a series of struggles for the control of the government between factions all equally disposed to abuse their power whenever they succeeded in securing it. In these contentions the safety and happiness of the individual citizen were made of no account. ... To remedy the dangers attendant upon the arbitrary use of power, checks, however multiplied, will scarcely avail without an explicit admission of some limitation of the right of the majority to exercise sovereign authority over the individual citizen. The modern theory of republicanism rests upon the axioms that, in the eye of the state, certain natural rights belong equally to all men; and that these rights cannot be annihilated at the mere pleasure of the greater number. Without some such securities, there is no protection from social tyranny, whatever may be the form it takes.”⁶⁰ – John Adams, *A Defence of the Constitutions of Government of the United States of America*, Volume III, Chapter X, 1787

“To expect self-denial from men, when they have a majority in their favor, and consequently power to gratify themselves, is to disbelieve all history and universal experience; it is to

disbelieve Revelation and the Word of God, which informs us, the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.”⁶¹ – John Adams, *A Defence of the Constitutions of Government of the United States of America*, Volume III, 1787

“(I)n what principle or law is this [arbitrary action by a foreign government] founded? Is there any law of God to support it? Is there any law of nature to justify it? Is there any law of England to authorize it? Certainly not.”⁶² – Former President John Adams, *The Inadmissible Principles of the King of England’s Proclamation of October 16, 1807, Considered*

“It has been, in all times, the artifice of despotism and superstition to nip liberty, truth, virtue, and religion, in the bud, by cutting off the heads of all who dared to show a regard to either. But when a process so summary could not be effected, the next trick was to blast the character of every rising genius, who excited their jealousy, by propagating lies and slanders to destroy his influence.”⁶³ – Former President John Adams, letter to Benjamin Waterhouse, 6 February 1818

“(J)udges should be withdrawn from their bench, whose erroneous biases are leading us to dissolution.”⁶⁴ – Thomas Jefferson, *Autobiography*, 1787

“The time to guard against corruption and tyranny, is before they shall have gotten hold of us. It is better to keep the wolf out of the fold, than to trust to drawing his teeth and talons after he shall have entered.”⁶⁵ – Thomas Jefferson, *Query XIII: Constitution of the State*, 1786

“The preservation of a free Government requires not merely, that the metes and bounds which separate each department of power be invariably maintained; but more especially that neither of them be suffered to overleap the great Barrier which defends the rights of the people. The Rulers who are guilty of such an encroachment, exceed the commission from which they derive their authority, and are Tyrants. The People who submit to it are governed by laws made neither by themselves nor by an authority derived from them, and are slaves.”⁶⁶
– James Madison, Esq., Member of Continental Congress, *Memorial & Remonstrance*, 1785

“All men having power ought to be distrusted to a certain degree.”⁶⁷
– James Madison, *Constitutional Convention*, 11 July 1787

Decline of Nations & Corruption of Governments

“(U)ncontrollable violence ... passions ... destroyed all sense and understanding, all equity and humanity, all memory and regard to truth, all virtue, honor, decorum, and veracity.”⁶⁸
– John Adams, Diary, 22 August 1770

“(W)hen elegance, luxury, and effeminacy begin to be established, these rewards [‘virtue, integrity’] will begin to be distributed to vanity and folly; but when a government becomes totally corrupted, the system of God Almighty in the government of the world, and the rules of all good government upon earth, will be reversed, and virtue, integrity, and ability, will become the objects of the malice, hatred, and revenge of the men in power, and folly, vice, and villany will be cherished and supported. In such times you will see [those in government] ... endeavor to ruin and destroy the people, whose welfare he was under every moral obligation to study and promote.”⁶⁹ – John Adams, Diary, 22 August 1770

“(W)e see every day that our imaginations are so strong, and our reason so weak, the charms of wealth and power are so enchanting, and the belief of future punishment so faint, that men find ways to persuade themselves to believe any absurdity, to submit to any prostitution, rather than forego their wishes and desires. Their reason becomes at last an eloquent advocate on the side of their passions, and they bring themselves to believe that black is white, that vice is virtue, that folly is wisdom, and eternity a moment.”⁷⁰ – John Adams, Diary, 9 February 1772

“That people who pay greater respect to a wealthy villain, than to an honest, upright man in poverty, almost deserve to be enslaved; they plainly show that wealth, however it may be acquired, is in their esteem, to be preferred to virtue.”⁷¹ – Quote from Colonel Hancock speech, after Boston massacre, included in John Adams Diary, 5 March 1774

“In the whole animal kingdom I recollect no family but man, steadily and systematically employed in the destruction of itself. Nor does what is called civilization produce any other effect, than to teach him to pursue the principle of the *bellum omnium in omnia* on a greater scale, and instead of the little contest between tribe and tribe, to comprehend all the quarters of the earth in the same work of destruction.”⁷² – Thomas Jefferson, letter to James Madison, 1 January 1797

Family, Mentoring, Future Generations / Posterity

“I shall persevere till I have gained ... that Peace and Independency, which we have fought for and obtained, a blessing to the millions yet unborn.”⁷³
– General George Washington, letter to Tench Tilghman, 24 April 1783

“(I)t is yet to be decided, whether the revolution must ultimately be considered as a blessing or a curse; a blessing or a curse, not to the present age alone, for with our fate will the destiny of unborn millions be involved.”⁷⁴ – General George Washington, *Circular Letter Addressed to the Governors of All the States on Disbanding the Army*, 8 June 1783

“As a very important source of strength and security, cherish public credit. One method of preserving it is to use it as little sparingly as possible, avoiding occasions of expense by cultivating peace, but remembering also that timely disbursements to prepare for danger frequently prevent much greater disbursements to repel it; avoiding likewise the accumulation of debt, not only by shunning occasions of expense, but by vigorous exertions in time of peace to discharge the debts which unavoidable wars may have occasioned, not ungenerously throwing upon posterity the burthen which we ourselves ought to bear.”⁷⁵
– President George Washington, *Farewell Address*, 17 September 1796

“I find, by repeated experiment and observation in my school, that human nature is more easily wrought upon and governed by promises, and encouragement, and praise, than by punishment, and threatening, and blame. But we must be cautious and sparing of our praise, lest it become too familiar and cheap, and so, contemptible; corporal as well as disgraceful punishments depress the spirits, but commendation enlivens and stimulates them to a noble ardor and emulation.”⁷⁶ – John Adams, Diary, 21 February 1756

“The foundation of national morality must be laid in private families. ... (M)others are the earliest and most important instructors of youth. The vices and examples of the parents cannot be concealed from the children. How is it possible that children can have any just sense of the

sacred obligations of morality or religion, if, from their earliest infancy, they learn their mothers live in habitual infidelity to their fathers, and their fathers in as constant infidelity to their mothers?”⁷⁷ – John Adams, Diary, 2 June 1778

“With you, gentlemen [of the Senate], I sincerely deprecate all spirit of innovation, which may weaken the sacred bond that connects the different parts of this nation and government; and with you I trust, that, under the protection of Divine Providence, the wisdom and virtue of our citizens will deliver our national compact unimpaired to a free, prosperous, happy, and grateful posterity. To this end it is my fervent prayer, that, in this city, the fountains of wisdom may be always open, and the streams of eloquence forever flow. Here may the youth of this extensive country forever look up without disappointment, not only to the monuments and memorials of the dead, but to the examples of the living, in the members of Congress and officers of government, for finished models of all those virtues, graces, talents, and accomplishments, which constitute the dignity of human nature, and lay the only foundation for the prosperity or duration of empires.”⁷⁸
– President John Adams, Reply to Answer of the Senate, November 1800

“The happiest moments of my life have been the few which I have past at home in the bosom of my family.”⁷⁹ – Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson, letter to Francis Willis, 13 April 1790

“For advantages so numerous and highly important it is our duty to unite in grateful acknowledgements to that Omnipotent Being from whom they are derived, and in unceasing prayer that He will endow us with virtue and strength to maintain and hand them down in their utmost purity to our latest posterity.”⁸⁰
– President James Monroe, *First Annual Message* to Congress, 2 December 1817

“When we view the great blessings with which our country has been favored, those which we now enjoy, and the means which we possess of handing them down unimpaired to our latest posterity, our attention is irresistibly drawn to the source from whence they flow. Let us, then, unite in offering our most grateful acknowledgments for these blessings to the Divine Author of All Good.”⁸¹ – President James Monroe, *Second Annual Message*, 16 November 1818

“With the strict observance of ... the Constitution, with ... respect and love for the [nation] ... which our fathers cherished and enjoined upon their children, and with the aid of that overruling Providence which has so long and so kindly guarded our liberties and institutions, we may reasonably expect to transmit them, with their innumerable blessings, to the remotest posterity.”⁸² – President Zachary Taylor, *First Annual Message* to Congress, 4 December 1849

“We owe these blessings, under Heaven, to the happy Constitution and Government which were bequeathed to us by our fathers, and which it is our sacred duty to transmit in all their integrity to our children.”⁸³ – President Millard Fillmore, *Third Annual Message*, 5 December 1852

“Who will not join with me in the prayer that the Invisible Hand which has led us through the clouds that gloomed around our path will so guide us onward to a perfect restoration of fraternal affection that we of this day may be able to transmit our great inheritance of State governments in all their rights, of the General Government in its whole constitutional vigor, to our posterity, and they and theirs through countless generations?”⁸⁴
– President Andrew Johnson, *First Annual Message* to Congress, 4 December 1865

“We find ourselves under the government of a system of political institutions, conducting more essentially to the ends of civil and religious liberty, than any of which the history of former times tells us. We ... found ourselves the legal inheritors of these fundamental blessings. We toiled not in the acquirement or establishment of them—they are a legacy bequeathed us, by a *once* hardy, brave, and patriotic, but *now* lamented and departed race of ancestors. Theirs was the task ... to uprear ... a political edifice of liberty and equal rights; ‘tis ours only, to transmit these ... unprofaned ... undecayed ... and untorn by usurpation—to the latest generation that fate shall permit the world to know. This task of gratitude to our fathers, justice to ourselves, duty to posterity, and love for (mankind), all imperatively require us faithfully to perform.”⁸⁵
– Abraham Lincoln, Member, Illinois House of Representatives, “*The Perpetuation of Our Political Institutions*” (speech), 27 January 1838

Honesty, Integrity, Truth, Courage, Duty, Accountability

“When I was first honored with a call into the service of my country, then on the eve of an arduous struggle for its liberties, the light in which I contemplated my duty required that I should renounce every pecuniary compensation. From this resolution I have in no instance departed; and being still under the impressions which produced it, I must decline as inapplicable to myself any share in the personal emoluments which may be indispensably included in a permanent provision for the executive department, and must accordingly pray that the pecuniary estimates for the station which I am placed may during my continuance in it be limited to such actual expenditures as the public good may be thought to require.”⁸⁶
– President George Washington, *First Inaugural Address*, April 30, 1789

“(T)ruth will ultimately prevail where there is pains to bring it to light.”⁸⁷
– President George Washington, letter to Charles M. Thruston, 10 August 1794

“I hold the maxim no less applicable to public than to private affairs that honesty is always the best policy.”⁸⁸ – President George Washington, *Farewell Address*, 17 September 1796

“(T)here are times when the cause of religion, of government, of liberty, the interest of the present age and of posterity, render it a necessary duty for a man to make known his sentiments and intentions boldly and publicly.”⁸⁹ – John Adams, *Diary*, 20 August 1770

“I must tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, as far as I know it. ... Upon the whole, truth must be my shield; and if the shafts of interested malice can pierce through this, they shall pierce me.”⁹⁰ – John Adams, letter to Arthur Lee, 9 June 1779

“We have no need of such aids as political lies. Our character for truth, sincerity, and candor, is more real strength, than ever can be derived from such impostures, however artfully performed. The influence this practice [of lies] has upon the world, in destroying confidence, and in poisoning the morals of the people, the pure and single source of which is truth, ought to induce us to discountenance the practice by all means.”⁹¹
– Ambassador John Adams, Paris, letter to William Lee, 20 July 1780

“The great principles of right and wrong are legible to every reader; to pursue them requires not the aid of many counselors. The whole art of government consists in the art of being honest.”⁹² – Thomas Jefferson, Esq., Member of the Virginia House of Burgesses, *A Summary View of the Rights of British America*, 1774

“(P)ursue the interests of your country ... and your own interests also, with the purest integrity, the most chaste honor. The defect of these virtues can never be made up by all the other acquirements of body and mind. Make them your first object. Give up money, give up fame ... rather than do an immoral act. And never suppose, that in any possible situation, or under any circumstances, it is best for you to do a dishonorable thing, however slightly so it may appear to you. Whenever you are to do a thing, though it can never be known but to yourself, ask yourself how you would act were all the world looking at you, and act accordingly. Encourage all your virtuous dispositions, and exercise them whenever an opportunity arises; being assured that they will gain strength by exercise, as a limb of the body does, and that exercise will make them habitual. From the practice of the purest virtue, you may be assured you will derive the most sublime comforts in every moment of life, and in the moment of death.”⁹³

– Thomas Jefferson, Ambassador to France, Paris, letter to Peter Carr, 19 August 1785

“It is of great importance to set a resolution ... never to tell an untruth. There is no vice so mean, so pitiful, so contemptible; and he who permits himself to tell a lie once, finds it much easier to do it a second and third time, till at length it becomes habitual; he tells lies without attending to it, and truths without the world’s believing him. This falsehood of the tongue leads to that of the heart, and in time depraves all its good dispositions. An honest heart [is] the first blessing”⁹⁴

– Thomas Jefferson, Ambassador to France, Paris, letter to Peter Carr, 19 August 1785

“This I hope will be the age of experiments in government, and that their basis will be founded in principles of honesty, not of mere force. ... Either force or corruption has been the principle of every modern government.”⁹⁵

– Thomas Jefferson, letter to Vice President John Adams, 28 February 1796

“Facts indeed of his [George Washington’s] own writing & inditing [words, dictation], must be believed by all who knew him; and opinions, which were his own, merit veneration and respect; for few men have lived whose opinions were more unbiased and correct. Not that it is pretended he never felt bias. His passions were naturally strong; but his reason, generally, stronger. ... He possessed the love, the veneration, and confidence of all. ... Had Genl. Washington himself written from these materials a history of the period they embrace, it would have been a conspicuous monument to the integrity of his mind, the soundness of his judgment, and its powers of discernment between truth and falsehood; principles and pretensions.”⁹⁶

– Former President Thomas Jefferson, writing about former General and President George Washington, 4 February 1818

“(T)he past omission of a duty could not justify a further omission.”⁹⁷

– Dr. Benjamin Franklin, *Constitutional Convention*, 28 June 1787

“All men having power ought to be distrusted to a certain degree.”⁹⁸

– James Madison, *Constitutional Convention*, 11 July 1787

“I deem it proper to present ... the sound principles of our Government. The people being with us exclusively the sovereign, it is indispensable that full information be laid before them on all important subjects, to enable them to exercise that high power with complete effect. If kept in the dark, they must be incompetent of it. We are all liable to error, and those who are engaged in the management of public affairs are more subject to excitement and to be led astray by their particular interests and passions than the great body of our constituents, who, living at home in

the pursuit of their ordinary avocations, are calm but deeply interested spectators of events and of the conduct of those who are parties to them. To the people every department of the Government and every individual in each are responsible, and the more full their information the better they can judge of the wisdom of the policy pursued and of the conduct of each in regard to it. From their dispassionate judgment much aid may always be obtained, while their approbation will form the greatest incentive and most gratifying reward for virtuous actions, and the dread of their censure the best security against the abuse of their confidence.”⁹⁹

– President James Monroe, *Seventh Annual Message*, 2 December 1823

“In discharging the responsible trust confided to the Executive ... it is my settled purpose to ask nothing that is not clearly right and to submit to nothing that is wrong.”¹⁰⁰

– President Andrew Jackson, *First Annual Message*, 8 December 1829

“I should shrink from a clear duty did I fail to express my deepest conviction that we can place no secure reliance upon any apparent progress if it is not sustained by national integrity, resting upon the great truths affirmed and illustrated by divine revelation.”¹⁰¹

– President Franklin Pierce, *First Annual Message*, 5 December 1853

“Duties have been mine; consequences are God’s.”¹⁰²

– President Andrew Johnson, *Inaugural Address*, 17 April 1865

Humility

“I am ... earnestly desirous of searching out the truth, and of knowing whether there does not exist a probability that the government would be just as happily and effectually carried into execution without my aid as with it. ... (If I should receive the appointment, and if I should be prevailed upon to accept it, the acceptance would be attended with more diffidence and reluctance than I ever experienced before in my life. It would be, however, with a fixed and sole determination of lending whatever assistance might be in my power to promote the public weal, in hopes that at a convenient and early period my services might be dispensed with, and that I might be permitted once more to retire”¹⁰³

– George Washington, letter to Alexander Hamilton, 3 October 1788

[Upon receiving the emissary with the official documentation “of his unanimous election to the office of President of the United States of America,” in his reply, Washington said]: “While I realize the arduous nature of the task which is imposed upon me, and feel my own inability to perform it, I wish, however, that there may not be reason for regretting the choice, for, indeed, all I can promise is only to accomplish that which can be done by an honest zeal.”¹⁰⁴

– George Washington, Mount Vernon, Virginia, 14 April 1789

“(T)he magnitude and difficulty of the trust to which the voice of my country called me [to be the first President], being sufficient to awaken in the wisest and most experienced of her citizens a distrustful scrutiny into his qualifications, could not but overwhelm with despondence one who (inheriting inferior endowments from nature and unpracticed in the duties of civil administration) ought to be peculiarly conscious of his own deficiencies.”¹⁰⁵

– President George Washington, *First Inaugural Address*, April 30, 1789

“The wisdom of Solomon, the meekness of Moses, and the patience of Job, all united in one character, would not be sufficient to qualify a man to act in the situation in which I am at present; and I have scarcely a spice of either of these virtues.”¹⁰⁶ – John Adams, Diary, 9 February 1779

“I have received at this place the honor of your letters ... and am truly flattered by your nomination of me to the very dignified office of Secretary of State for which permit me here to return to you my very humble thanks. Could any circumstance induce me to overlook the disproportion between its duties and my talents, it would be the encouragement of your choice. But when I contemplate the extent of that office, embracing as it does the principal mass of domestic administration, together with the foreign, I can not be insensible to my inequality to it.”¹⁰⁷ – Thomas Jefferson, letter to President George Washington, 15 December 1789

“I can particularly have no feelings which would revolt at a secondary position [as Vice President] to Mr. Adams. I am his junior in life, I was his junior in Congress, his junior in the diplomatic line, and his junior lately in our civil government.”¹⁰⁸
– Thomas Jefferson, letter to James Madison, 1 January 1797

“Called upon to undertake the duties of the first executive office of our country, I ... declare a sincere consciousness that the task is above my talents, and that I approach it with those anxious and awful presentments which the greatness of the charge and the weakness of my powers so justly inspire. ... (M)ay that Infinite Power which rules the destinies of the universe lead our councils to what is best, and give them a favorable issue for your peace and prosperity.”¹⁰⁹
– President Thomas Jefferson, *First Inaugural Address*, 4 March 1801

“The small progress we have made after four or five weeks close attendance and continual reasonings with each other—our different sentiments on almost every question ... is methinks a melancholy proof of the imperfection of the Human Understanding. We indeed seem to feel our own want of political wisdom, since we have been running about in search of it. We have gone back to ancient history for models of Government, and examined the different forms of those Republics which having been formed with the seeds of their own dissolution now no longer exist. And we have viewed Modern States all round Europe, but find none of their Constitutions suitable to our circumstances.

“In this situation of this Assembly, groping as it were in the dark to find political truth, and scarce able to distinguish it when presented to us, how has it happened, Sir, that we have not hitherto once thought of humbly applying to the Father of lights to illuminate our understandings? In the beginning of the Contest with G. Britain, when we were sensible of danger we had daily prayer in this room for the divine protection.—Our prayers, Sir, were heard, and they were graciously answered. All of us who were engaged in the struggle must have observed frequent instances of a superintending providence in our favor. To that kind providence we owe this happy opportunity of consulting in peace on the means of establishing our future national felicity. And have we now forgotten that powerful friend? or do we imagine that we no longer need His assistance? I have lived, Sir, a long time, and the longer I live, the more convincing proofs I see of this truth—*that God Governs in the affairs of men*. And if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without His notice, is it probable that an empire can rise without His aid? We have been assured, Sir, in the sacred writings that ‘except the Lord build the House they labour in vain that build it.’ I firmly believe this; and I also believe that without His concurring aid we shall succeed in this political building no better than the Builders of Babel.”¹¹⁰ – Dr. Benjamin Franklin, *Constitutional Convention*, 28 June 1787

“In compliance with ... our Federal Constitution ... in the career upon which I am about to enter, I appear, my fellow-citizens, in your presence and in that of Heaven to bind myself by the solemnities of religious obligation to the faithful performance of the duties allotted to me in the station to which I have been called. ... Knowing that ‘except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain,’ with fervent supplications for His favor, to His overruling providence I commit with humble but fearless confidence my own fate and the future destinies of my country.”¹¹¹ – President John Quincy Adams, *Inaugural Address*, 4 March 1825

“I only look to the gracious protection of the Divine Being whose strengthening support I humbly solicit, and whom I fervently pray to look down upon us all.”¹¹²
– President Martin Van Buren, *Inaugural Address*, 4 March 1837

“In assuming responsibilities so vast I fervently invoke the aid of that Almighty Ruler of the Universe in whose hands are the destinies of nations and of men ... With a firm reliance upon the wisdom of Omnipotence to sustain and direct me in the path of duty”¹¹³
– President James K. Polk, *Inaugural Address*, 4 March 1845

“In entering upon this great office I must humbly invoke the God of our fathers for wisdom and firmness to execute its high and responsible duties in such a manner as to restore harmony and ancient friendship among the people of the several States and to preserve our free institutions throughout many generations.”¹¹⁴
– President James Buchanan, *Inaugural Address*, 4 March 1857

“This ... solemn sense of responsibility with which I contemplate the duty I owe to all the people of the land. Nothing can relieve me from anxiety lest by any act of mine their interests may suffer ... (L)et us not trust to human effort alone, but humbly acknowledging the power and goodness of Almighty God, who presides over the destiny of nations, and who has at all times been revealed in our country’s history, let us invoke His aid and His blessing upon our labors.”¹¹⁵
– President Grover Cleveland, *Inaugural Address*, 4 March 1885

Leadership: Honor, Integrity, Diligence, Firmness, Servant

“Though I prize as I ought the good opinion of my fellow citizens, yet, if I know myself, I would not seek or retain popularity at the expense of one social duty or moral virtue.”¹¹⁶
– George Washington, letter to Henry Lee, in Congress, 22 September 1788

“(I)f ... opposition is still given to the due execution of the law, I have no hesitation in declaring, if the evidence of it is clear and unequivocal, that I shall, however reluctantly I exercise them, exert all the legal powers with which the executive is invested to check so daring and unwarrantable a spirit. It is my duty to see the laws executed. To permit them to be trampled upon with impunity would be repugnant to it; nor can the government longer remain a passive spectator of the contempt, with which they [government officers] are treated.”¹¹⁷ – President George Washington, to Secretary of the Treasury Alexander Hamilton, 7 September 1792

“Having staked my life, my reputation, my fortune, my ease, tranquility, and happiness, in support of the Government and Independence of our Country”¹¹⁸ – Former President George Washington, private letter to Secretary of War James McHenry, 10 August 1798

“(E)xhibited to the admiration and anxiety of the wise and virtuous of all nations for eight years under the administration of a citizen [President George Washington] who, by a long course of great actions, regulated by prudence, justice, temperance, and fortitude, conducting a people inspired with the same virtues and animated with the same ardent patriotism and love of liberty to independence and peace, to increasing wealth and unexampled prosperity, has merited the gratitude of his fellow-citizens, commanded the highest praises of foreign nations, and secured immortal glory with posterity.”¹¹⁹ – President John Adams (praising former President George Washington), *Inaugural Address*, 4 March 1797

“(M)agistrates [are to be] a terror to evil doers and a praise to them that do well.”¹²⁰
– President John Adams, *Proclamation*, 6 March 1799

“You have seen my name lately tacked to so much of eulogy and of abuse In truth, I did not know myself under the pens either of my friends or foes. It is unfortunate for our peace, that unmerited abuse wounds, while unmerited praise has not the power to heal. These are hard wages for the services of all the active and healthy years of one’s life. ... (N)o man will ever bring out of that office the reputation which carries him into it. ... I love to see honest and honorable men at the helm, men who will not bend their politics to their purses, nor pursue measures by which they may profit, and then profit by their measures.”¹²¹
– Thomas Jefferson, letter to Edward Rutledge, 27 December 1796

[IDPPC note: Jefferson was speaking first about his decades in public service; and second about the office of the Presidency, though he clearly excepted George Washington by his own acclamations in the years following his Presidency; and thirdly of honorable men like Washington, John Adams, James Madison, and, I add, himself.]

“Were I to undertake to answer the calumnies of the newspapers, it would be more than all my own time, and that of 20 aids could effect. For while I should be answering one, twenty new ones would be invented. I have thought it better to trust to the justice of my countrymen, that they would judge me by what they *see* of my conduct on the stage where they have placed me, and what they knew of me *before* the epoch since which a particular party has ... vilify me in the public eye.”¹²² – Vice President Thomas Jefferson, letter to Samuel Smith, 22 August 1798

[President George Washington] “had determined to decline re-election at the end of his first term ... but he was finally persuaded to acquiesce in a second election, to which no one more strenuously pressed him than myself, from the conviction of the importance of strengthening, by longer habit, the respect necessary for that office, which the weight of his character only could effect. ... What a treasure will be found in General Washington’s cabinet, when it shall pass into the hands of as candid a friend of truth as he was himself!”¹²³
– Former President Thomas Jefferson, letter to Justice William Johnson, 12 June 1823

Morality, True Religion, and Self-Government Essential to Preserve Liberty & Constitutional Government

“(T)he foundation of our national policy will be laid in the pure and immutable principles of private morality, and the preeminence of free government be exemplified by all the attributes which can win the affections of its citizens and command the respect of the world. I dwell on this prospect with every satisfaction which an ardent love for my country can inspire, since there

is no truth more thoroughly established than that there exists in the economy and course of nature an indissoluble union between virtue and happiness; between duty and advantage; between genuine maxims of an honest and magnanimous policy and the solid rewards of public prosperity and felicity; since we ought to be no less persuaded that the propitious smiles of Heaven can never be expected on a nation that disregards the eternal rules of order and right which Heaven itself ordained; and since the preservation of the sacred fire of liberty and the destiny of the republican model of government are justly considered, perhaps, as deeply, as finally, staked on the experiment intrusted to the hands of the American people.”¹²⁴

– President George Washington, *First Inaugural Address*, 30 April 1789

“Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports. In vain would that man claim the tribute of patriotism who should labor to subvert these great pillars of human happiness—these firmest props of the duties of men and citizens. The mere politician, equally with the pious man, ought to respect and cherish them. A volume could not trace all their connections with private and public felicity [happiness, blessedness, prosperity, enjoyment of good]. Let it simply be asked, Where is the security for prosperity, for reputation, for life, if the sense of religious obligation desert the oaths which are the instruments of investigation in courts of justice? And let us with caution indulge the supposition that morality can be maintained without religion. Whatever may be conceded to the influence of refined education ... reason and experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle.”¹²⁵

– President George Washington, *Farewell Address*, 17 September 1796

“Statesmen ... may plan and speculate for liberty, but it is Religion and Morality alone, which can establish the Principles upon which Freedom can securely stand.”¹²⁶

– John Adams, Philadelphia, letter to Zabdiel Adams, 21 June 1776

“From all that I had read of history and government, of human life and manners, I had drawn this conclusion, that the manners of women were the most infallible barometer to ascertain the degree of morality and virtue in a nation. All that I have since read, and all the observations I have made in different nations, have confirmed me in this opinion. The manners of women are the surest criterion by which to determine whether a republican government is practicable in a nation or not. The Jews, the Greeks, the Romans, the Dutch, all lost their public spirit, their republican principles and habits, and their republican forms of government, when they lost the modesty and domestic virtues of their women.”¹²⁷ – John Adams, *Diary*, 2 June 1778

“As the safety and prosperity of nations ultimately and essentially depend on the protection and blessing of Almighty God, and the national acknowledgement of this truth is not only an indispensable duty which the people owe to Him, but a duty whose natural influence is favorable to the promotion of that morality and piety without which social happiness can not exist nor the blessings of a free government be enjoyed. ... [Pray that] the principles of genuine piety and sound morality may influence the minds and govern the lives of every description of our citizens, and that the blessings of peace, freedom, and pure religion may be speedily extended to all the nations of the earth.”¹²⁸ – President John Adams, *Proclamation* for a national “day of solemn humiliation, fasting, and prayer,” 23 March 1798

“We have no government armed with power capable of contending with human passions unbridled by morality and religion. Avarice, ambition, revenge, or gallantry, 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.”¹²⁹ – President John Adams, To Officers of Militia of Massachusetts, 11 October 1798

“(T)he dissemination among [the people] of those principles, subversive of the foundations of all religious, moral, and social obligations ... produced incalculable mischief and misery.”¹³⁰
– President John Adams, *Proclamation*, 6 March 1799

“I view great cities as pestilential to the morals, the health and the liberties of man. True, they nourish some of the elegant arts, but the useful ones can thrive elsewhere, and less perfection in the others, with more health, virtue and freedom, would be my choice.”¹³¹
– Vice President Thomas Jefferson, *Letter to Dr. Benjamin Rush*, 23 September 1800

“(M)ost of our political evils may be traced up to our commercial ones, as most of our moral may to our political.”¹³² – James Madison, Member of Continental Congress, letter to Thomas Jefferson, Ambassador to France, 18 March 1786

United States Heads of State Quoted:

George Washington (1732-1799), 1st President (1789-1797)
John Adams (1735-1826 [July 4]), 2nd President (1797-1801)
Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826 [July 4]), 3rd President (1801-1809)
James Madison (1751-1836), 4th President (1809-1817)
James Monroe (1758-1831), 5th President (1817-1825)
John Quincy Adams (1767-1848), 6th President (1825-1829)
Andrew Jackson (1767-1845), 4 March 1833, 7th President (1829-1837)
Martin Van Buren (1782-1862), 4 March 1837, 8th President (1837-1841)
William Henry Harrison (1773-1841), 9th President (1841)
John Tyler (1790-1862), 10th President (1841-1845)
James Polk (1795-1849), 11th President (1845-1849)
Zachary Taylor (1784-1850), 12th President (1849-1850)
Millard Fillmore (1800-1874), 13th President (1850-1853)
Franklin Pierce (1804-1869), 14th President (1853-1857)
James Buchanan (1791-1868), 15th President (1857-1861)
Abraham Lincoln (1809-1865), 16th President (1861-1865)
Andrew Johnson (1808-1875), 17th President (1865-1869)
General Ulysses S. Grant (1822-1885), 18th President (1869-1877)
Rutherford B. Hayes (1822-1893), 19th President (1877-1881)
James A. Garfield (1831-1881), 20th President (1881)
Chester Arthur (1830-1886), 21st President (1881-1885)
Grover Cleveland (1837-1908), 22nd & 24th President (1885-1889, 1893-1897)

Wisdom quotes from other Heads of State are desired and can be added.

The original source – including name, title, location, occasion, and date – and a copy of the verifiable documentation must be provided. Please include the entire statement, speech, or writing.

The leader must be worthy of emulation, and the content appropriate for inclusion.

Please send documentation to:
Thomas W. Jacobson
International Diplomacy & Public Policy Center
12159 Eaglescout Court, Cincinnati, Ohio 45249-1019 USA
Email: TJacobson@IDPPCenter.com Phone: 1-719-651-3366

Presidential quotes are also available on the www.IDPPCenter.com web site for the following:

- (1) *Liberty and Responsibility; Freedoms of Conscience, Religion, Speech, Press; Equality; Human Rights; Religion & Government; Education; Private Property; and*
- (2) *Laws of Nature and of Nature's God; Lawful Limited Constitutional Government; Separation of Powers; Elections; Taxes and Public Debts; Military Character and Leadership; Foreign Affairs.*

Endnotes

- ¹ Included in footnote with General Washington's letter to Major Benjamin Tallmadge, New Windsor, 27 June 1779. *The Writings of George Washington*, collected and edited by Worthington Chauncey Ford (New York & London: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1889), Volume VII (1778-1779), p. 475.
- ² *George Washington: A Collection*, compiled by W. B. Allen (Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1988), p. 243.
- ³ *Ibid.*, *George Washington: A Collection*, p. 383.
- ⁴ *Op. cit.*, *The Writings of George Washington*, Volume XI (1785-1790), p. 317.
- ⁵ *Op. cit.*, *The Writings of George Washington*, Volume XI (1785-1790), p. 250.
- ⁶ *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1897*, published by authority of Congress, compiled by Honorable James D. Richardson (Bureau of National Literature and Art, 1910), Vol. I, p. 213.
- ⁷ *The Works of John Adams, Second President of the United States*, compiled by his grandson, Charles Francis Adams (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1850), Vol. II, p. 14.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, *The Works of John Adams, Second President of the United States*, Vol. II, p. 29.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, *The Works of John Adams, Second President of the United States*, Vol. II, p. 65.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, *The Works of John Adams, Second President of the United States*, Vol. II, p. 145.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, *The Works of John Adams, Second President of the United States*, Vol. II, p. 250.
- ¹² *Ibid.*, *The Works of John Adams, Second President of the United States*, Vol. II, p. 294.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*, *The Works of John Adams, Second President of the United States*, Vol. II, p. 332, footnote 1.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, *The Works of John Adams – Second President of the United States*, Vol. I, p. 195.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, *The Works of John Adams – Second President of the United States*, Vol. I, p. 195-196.
- ¹⁶ *Adams Family Papers*, Adams Electronic Archive, The Massachusetts Historical Society.
<http://www.masshist.org/digitaladams>
- ¹⁷ *Op. cit.*, *The Works of John Adams – Second President of the United States*, Vol. IX, p. 401.
- ¹⁸ *Op. cit.*, *Adams Family Papers*.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, *The Works of John Adams – Second President of the United States*, Vol. VII, p. 211.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, *The Works of John Adams – Second President of the United States*, Vol. VII, p. 590-591.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, *The Works of John Adams, Second President of the United States*, Vol. VI, p. 206.
- ²² *Ibid.*, *The Works of John Adams, Second President of the United States*, Vol. VI, p. 219.
- ²³ *Ibid.*, *The Works of John Adams, Second President of the United States*, Vol. VIII, p. 454-455.
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*, *The Works of John Adams, Second President of the United States*, Vol. VI, p. 520.
- ²⁵ *Op. cit.*, *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1897*, Vol. I, p. 220.
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*, *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1897*, Vol. I, p. 275.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1897*, Vol. I, p. 295.
- ²⁸ *Op. cit.*, *The Works of John Adams – Second President of the United States*, Vol. IX, p. 603.
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*, *The Works of John Adams – Second President of the United States*, Vol. IX, p. 636.
- ³⁰ *Ibid.*, *The Works of John Adams – Second President of the United States*, Vol. X, p. 386.
- ³¹ *The Works of Thomas Jefferson*, 12 Volumes, Federal Edition, collected and edited by Paul Leicester Ford (New York & London: G.P. Putnam's Sons, The Knickerbocker Press, 1904), Vol. V, p. 282-283.
- ³² *Ibid.*, *The Works of Thomas Jefferson*, Vol. V, p. 423.

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- ³³ Thomas Jefferson, *Letter to Thomas Jefferson Smith*, Monticello, February 21, 1825, op. cit., Thomas Jefferson: Writings, Merrill D. Peterson, compiler (Library of America, 1984)[ISBN 0-940450-16-X], p. 1499.
- ³⁴ Ibid., Thomas Jefferson: Writings, p. 1500.
- ³⁵ The Writings of James Madison, Gaillard Hunt, editor, 9 Volumes (New York & London: G.P. Putnam's Sons, The Knickerbocker Press, 1902), Vol. III, p. 67-72.
- ³⁶ Op. cit., A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1897, Vol. I, p. 776.
- ³⁷ Op. cit., The Writings of George Washington, Volume VI (1777-1778), p. 390.
- ³⁸ Ibid., The Writings of George Washington, Volume VII (1778-1779), p. 181.
- ³⁹ Ibid., The Writings of George Washington, Volume VII (1778-1779), p. 219.
- ⁴⁰ Op. cit., The Works of John Adams – Second President of the United States, Vol. I., p. 143.
- ⁴¹ Ibid., The Works of John Adams – Second President of the United States, Vol. IX, p. 417-420.
- ⁴² Ibid., The Works of John Adams, Second President of the United States, Vol. IX, p. 291.
- ⁴³ Ibid., The Works of John Adams – Second President of the United States, Vol. IX, p. 635.
- ⁴⁴ Ibid., The Works of John Adams – Second President of the United States, Vol. X, p. 34.
- ⁴⁵ Op. cit., Thomas Jefferson: Writings, p. 815.
- ⁴⁶ Ibid., Thomas Jefferson: Writings, p. 1080-1081.
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- ⁵¹ Ibid., A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1897, Vol. VII, p. 5076.
- ⁵² Op. cit., The Writings of George Washington, Volume II (1758-1775), p. 442-443.
- ⁵³ Ibid., The Writings of George Washington, Volume XII (1790-1794), p. 470.
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- ⁵⁵ Ibid., The Works of John Adams, Second President of the United States, Vol. III, p. 501-502.
- ⁵⁶ Ibid., The Works of John Adams, Second President of the United States, Vol. III, p. 531.
- ⁵⁷ Ibid., The Works of John Adams – Second President of the United States, Vol. I, p. 193.
- ⁵⁸ Ibid., The Works of John Adams – Second President of the United States, Vol. I, p. 193.
- ⁵⁹ Ibid., The Works of John Adams – Second President of the United States, Vol. IX, p. 401.
- ⁶⁰ Ibid., The Works of John Adams, Second President of the United States, Vol. V, p. 490.
- ⁶¹ Ibid., The Works of John Adams, Second President of the United States, Vol. VI, p. 61.
- ⁶² Ibid., The Works of John Adams – Second President of the United States, Vol. IX, p. 315.
- ⁶³ Ibid., The Works of John Adams – Second President of the United States, Vol. X, p. 281.
- ⁶⁴ Op. cit., The Works of Thomas Jefferson, Vol. I, p. 123.
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- ⁶⁷ Ibid., The Writings of James Madison, Vol. III, p. 403.
- ⁶⁸ Op. cit., The Works of John Adams, Second President of the United States, Vol. II, p. 152.
- ⁶⁹ Ibid., The Works of John Adams, Second President of the United States, Vol. II, p. 250-251.
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- ⁷¹ Ibid., The Works of John Adams, Second President of the United States, Vol. II, p. 332, footnote 1.
- ⁷² Op. cit., The Works of Thomas Jefferson, Vol. VIII, p. 264.
- ⁷³ Op. cit., The Writings of George Washington, Volume X (1782-1785), p. 238.
- ⁷⁴ Ibid., The Writings of George Washington, Volume X (1782-1785), p. 257.
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- ⁷⁶ Op. cit., The Works of John Adams, Second President of the United States, Vol. II, p. 6.
- ⁷⁷ Ibid., The Works of John Adams, Second President of the United States, Vol. III, p. 171.
- ⁷⁸ Ibid., The Works of John Adams – Second President of the United States, Vol. IX, p. 147-148.
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- ⁸³ Ibid., A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1897, Vol. IV, p. 2718.
- ⁸⁴ Ibid., A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1897, Vol. V, p. 3568-3569.

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- ⁸⁵ Address to the Young Men’s Lyceum of Springfield, Illinois, Abraham Lincoln: Speeches and Writings, 1832-1858, compiled by Don E. Fehrenbacher (The Library of America, 1989), p. 28.
- ⁸⁶ Op. cit., A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1897, Vol. I, p. 45.
- ⁸⁷ Op. cit., The Writings of George Washington, Volume XII (1790-1794), p. 452.
- ⁸⁸ Op. cit., A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1897, Vol. I, p. 215.
- ⁸⁹ Op. cit., The Works of John Adams, Second President of the United States, Vol. II, p. 249.
- ⁹⁰ Ibid., The Works of John Adams – Second President of the United States, Vol. VII, p. 96-97.
- ⁹¹ Ibid., The Works of John Adams – Second President of the United States, Vol. VII, p. 231.
- ⁹² Op. cit., Thomas Jefferson: Writings, p. 121.
- ⁹³ Ibid., Thomas Jefferson: Writings, p. 814-815.
- ⁹⁴ Ibid., Thomas Jefferson: Writings, p. 815.
- ⁹⁵ Op. cit., The Works of Thomas Jefferson, Vol. VIII, p. 219.
- ⁹⁶ *The Anas. 1791-1806. Selections*, op. cit., Thomas Jefferson: Writings, p. 661-662.
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- ⁹⁸ Op. cit., The Writings of James Madison, Vol. III, p. 403.
- ⁹⁹ Op. cit., A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1897, Vol. I, p. 776-777.
- ¹⁰⁰ Ibid., A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1897, Vol. II, p. 1006.
- ¹⁰¹ Ibid., A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1897, Vol. IV, p. 2740.
- ¹⁰² Ibid., A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1897, Vol. V, p. 3503.
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- ¹⁰⁵ Ibid., A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1897, Vol. I, p. 43.
- ¹⁰⁶ Op. cit., The Works of John Adams, Second President of the United States, Vol. III, p. 189.
- ¹⁰⁷ Op. cit., The Works of Thomas Jefferson, Vol. VI, p. 27-28.
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- ¹⁰⁹ Op. cit., A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1897, Vol. I, p. 309, 312.
- ¹¹⁰ Op. cit., The Writings of James Madison, Vol. III, p. 309-311.
- ¹¹¹ Op. cit., A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1897, Vol. II, p. 860, 865.
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- ¹¹³ Ibid., A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1897, Vol. III, p. 2223.
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- ¹¹⁷ Ibid., The Writings of George Washington, Volume XII (1790-1794), p. 182.
- ¹¹⁸ Ibid., The Writings of George Washington, Volume XIV (1798-1799), p. 69.
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- ¹²⁰ Ibid., A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1897, Vol. I, p. 276.
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- ¹²² Ibid., The Works of Thomas Jefferson, Vol. VIII, p. 446.
- ¹²³ Op. cit., Thomas Jefferson: Writings, p. 1471.
- ¹²⁴ Op. cit., A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1897, Vol. I, p. 44-45.
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- ¹²⁷ Ibid., The Works of John Adams, Second President of the United States, Vol. III, p. 171.
- ¹²⁸ Op. cit., A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1897, Vol. I, p. 258-259.
- ¹²⁹ Letter to the Officers of the First Brigade of the Third Division of the Militia of Massachusetts, October 11, 1798, op. cit., The Works of John Adams – Second President of the United States, Vol. IX, p. 229.
- ¹³⁰ Op. cit., A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1897, Vol. I, p. 275.
- ¹³¹ Op. cit., Thomas Jefferson: Writings, p. 1081.
- ¹³² Op. cit., The Writings of James Madison, Vol. II, p. 228-229.

The following sources can be found at <http://oll.libertyfund.org>:
The Writings of George Washington; The Works of John Adams – Second President of the United States;
The Works of Thomas Jefferson; The Writings of James Madison