

"Well aware that the opinions and belief of men depend not on their own will, but follow involuntarily the evidence proposed to their minds; that Almighty God hath created the mind free, and manifested his supreme will that free it shall remain by making it altogether insusceptible of restraint; that all attempts to influence it by temporal punishments, or burdens, or by civil incapacitations, tend only to beget habits of hypocrisy and meanness, and are a departure from the plan of the Holy Author of our religion..."

Thomas Jefferson
"A Bill for Establishing Religious Freedom", Section I:3
Jefferson Memorial, Washington, D.C. National Park Service

"But let them [members of the parliament of Great Britain] not think to exclude us from going to other markets, to dispose of those commodities which they cannot use, nor to supply those wants which they cannot supply. Still less let it be proposed that our properties within our own territories shall be taxed or regulated by any power on earth but our own. The god who gave us life gave us liberty at the same time: the hand of force may destroy, but cannot disjoin them."

Thomas Jefferson
"A Summary View of the Rights of British America"
Section 4

"For in a warm climate, no man will labour for himself who can make another labour for him. This is so true, that of the proprietors of slaves a very small proportion indeed are ever seen to labor. And can the liberties of a nation be thought secure when we have removed their only firm basis, a conviction in the minds of the people that these liberties are the gift of God? That they are not to be violated but with his wrath? Indeed I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just: that his justice cannot sleep for ever"

"The whole commerce between master and slave is a perpetual exercise of the most boisterous passions, the most unremitting despotism on the one part, and degrading submissions on the other. Our children see this, and learn to imitate it. . . ."

Thomas Jefferson "Notes on the State of Virginia," Query 18:5,6

From the Rights of British America (1774)

From the nature of things, every society must at all times possess within itself the sovereign powers of legislation.

History has informed us that bodies of men, as well as individuals, are susceptible of the spirit of tyranny.

There are extraordinary situations which require extraordinary interposition. An exasperated people, who feel that they possess power, are not easily restrained within limits strictly regular.

When the representative body have lost the confidence of their constituents, when they have notoriously made sale of their most valuable rights, when they have assumed to themselves powers which the people never put into their hands, then indeed their continuing in office becomes dangerous to the state, and calls for an exercise of the power of dissolution.

From the nature of things, every society must at all times possess within itself the sovereign powers of legislation. The feelings of human nature revolt against the supposition of a state so situated as that it may not in any emergency provide against dangers which perhaps threaten immediate ruin. While those bodies are in existence to whom the people have delegated the powers of legislation, they alone possess and may exercise those powers; but when they are dissolved by the lopping off one or more of their branches, the power reverts to the people, who may exercise it to unlimited extent, either assembling together in person, sending deputies, or in any other way they may think proper.

From the nature and purpose of civil institutions, all the lands within the limits which any particular society has circumscribed around itself are assumed by that society, and subject to their allotment only. This may be done by themselves, assembled collectively, or by their legislature, to whom they may have delegated sovereign authority; and if they are allotted in neither of these ways, each individual of the society may appropriate to himself such lands as he finds vacant, and occupancy will give him title.

A free people [claim] their rights, as derived from the laws of nature, and not as the gift of their chief magistrate.

Let those flatter who fear; it is not an American art. To give praise which is not due might be well from the venal, but would ill beseem those who are asserting the rights of human nature. They know, and will therefore say, that kings are the servants, not the proprietors of the people.

The whole art of government consists in the art of being honest.

The God who gave us life gave us liberty at the same time; the hand of force may destroy, but cannot disjoin them.

1780 - 1789

What country can preserve its liberties if their rulers are not warned from time to time that their people preserve the spirit of resistance? Let them take arms. The remedy is to set them right as to facts, pardon and pacify them. What signify a few lives lost in a century or two? The tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots and tyrants. It is its natural manure.

A little rebellion, now and then, is a good thing, and as necessary in the political world as storms in the physical.

I had rather be shut up in a very modest cottage with my books, my family and a few old friends, dining on simple bacon, and letting the world roll on as it liked, than to occupy the most splendid post, which any human power can give.

I never submitted the whole system of my opinions to the creed of any party of men whatever in religion, in philosophy, in politics, or in anything else where I was capable of thinking for myself.

Our liberty depends on the freedom of the press, and that cannot be limited without being lost.

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.

Cultivators of the earth are the most valuable citizens. They are the most vigorous, the most independent, the most virtuous, and they are tied to their country and wedded to its liberty and interests by the most lasting bands. As long therefore as they can find employment in this line, I would not convert them into mariners, artisans, or any thing else. But our citizens will find employment in this line till their numbers, and of course their productions, become too great for the demand both internal and foreign.

Letter to John Jay (August 23, 1785); reported in *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. Julian P. Boyd (1953), vol. 8, p. 426.

I am conscious that an equal division of property is impracticable. But the consequences of this enormous inequality producing so much misery to the bulk of mankind, legislators cannot invent too many devices for subdividing property..[a] means of silently lessening the inequality of property is to exempt all from taxation below a certain point, and to tax the higher portions of property in geometrical progression as they rise.

Letter to James Madison (October 28, 1785).

Whenever there is in any country, uncultivated lands and unemployed poor, it is clear that the laws of property have been so far extended as to violate natural right. The earth is given as a common stock for man to labour and live on.

Letter to James Madison (October 28, 1785).

It is an axiom in my mind, that our liberty can never be safe but in the hands of the people themselves, and that too of the people with a certain degree of instruction. This it is the business of the State to effect, and on a general plan.

Letter to George Washington (4 January 1786).

What a stupendous, what an incomprehensible machine is man! Who can endure toil, famine, stripes, imprisonment and death itself in vindication of his own liberty, and the next moment, be deaf to all those motives whose powers supported him through his trial, and inflict on his fellow men a bondage, one hour of which is fraught with more misery than ages of that which he rose in rebellion to oppose.

Letter to Jean Nicholas Demeunier (24 January 1786) Bergh 17:103.

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Letter from the commissioners (John Adams, Thomas Jefferson) to John Jay, 28 March 1786, in Thomas Jefferson Travels: Selected Writings, 1784-1789, by Anthony Brandt, pp. 104-105.

The two principles on which our conduct towards the Indians should be founded, are justice and fear. After the injuries we have done them, they cannot love us

Letter to Benjamin Hawkins (13 August 1786) Lipscomb & Bergh ed. 5:390.

The basis of our government being the opinion of the people, the very first object should be to keep that right; and were it left to me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers, or newspapers without a government, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter. But I should mean that every man should receive those papers and be capable of reading them.

Letter to Colonel Edward Carrington (16 January 1787) Lipscomb & Bergh ed. 6:57.

Experience declares that man is the only animal which devours his own kind; for I can apply no milder term to the governments of Europe, and to the general prey of the rich on the poor.

Letter to Colonel Edward Carrington (16 January 1787).

The spirit of resistance to government is so valuable on certain occasions, that I wish it to be always kept alive. It will often be exercised when wrong, but better so than not to be exercised at all. I like a little rebellion now and then. It is like a storm in the atmosphere.

Letter to Abigail Smith Adams from Paris while a Minister to France (22 February 1787), referring to Shay's Rebellion. "Jefferson's Service to the New Nation," Library of Congress [image]

God forbid we should ever be twenty years without such a rebellion. The people cannot be all, and always, well informed. The part which is wrong will be discontented, in proportion to the importance of the facts they misconceive. If they remain quiet under such misconceptions, it is lethargy, the forerunner of death to the public liberty. . . . What country before ever existed a century and half without a rebellion? And what country can preserve its liberties if their rulers are not warned from time to time that their people preserve the spirit of resistance? Let them take arms. The remedy is to set them right as to facts, pardon and pacify them. What signify a few lives lost in a century or two? The tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots and tyrants. It is its natural manure.

Letter to William Stephens Smith (13 November 1787), quoted in Padover's Jefferson On Democracy.

When we get piled upon one another in large cities, as in Europe, we shall become corrupt as in Europe.

Letter to James Madison (20 December 1787), *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson* (19 Vols., 1905) edited by Andrew A. Lipscomb and Albert Ellery Bergh, Vol. VI, p. 392.

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

Letter to Edward Carrington, Paris (27 May 1788) PTJ, 13:208-9 [1]

Architecture worth great attention. As we double our numbers every 20 years we must double our houses. Besides we build of such perishable materials that one half of our houses must be rebuilt in every space of 20 years. So that in that term, houses are to be built for three fourths of our inhabitants. It is then among the most important arts: and it is desirable to introduce taste into an art which shews so much.

Hints to Americans travelling in Europe, letter to John Rutledge, Jr. (June 19, 1788); in *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. Julian P. Boyd (1956), vol. 13, p. 269.

I sincerely rejoice at the acceptance of our new Constitution by nine States. It is a good canvas, on which some strokes only want retouching. What these are, I think are sufficiently manifested by the general voice from north to south, which calls for a bill of rights.

Letter to James Madison (July 31, 1788); reported in *Memoir, correspondence, and miscellanies from the papers of Thomas Jefferson*, Volumes 1-2 (1829), p. 343.

It does me no injury for my neighbour to say there are twenty gods, or no god. It neither picks my pocket nor breaks my leg.

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Paper is poverty,... it is only the ghost of money, and not money itself.

Letter to Colonel Edward Carrington (27 May 1788) ME 7:36.

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Whenever the people are well informed, they can be trusted with their own government; that whenever things get so far wrong as to attract their notice, they may be relied on to set them to rights.

Letter to Richard Price (8 January 1789).