



The Founders' Vision Versus Ours

The celebration of our founders' 1776 revolt against King George III and the English Parliament is over. Let's reflect how the founders might judge today's Americans and how today's Americans might judge them.

In 1794, when Congress appropriated \$15,000 to assist some French refugees, James Madison, the acknowledged father of our Constitution, stood on the floor of the House to object, saying, "I cannot undertake to lay my finger on that article of the Constitution which granted a right to Congress of expending, on objects of benevolence, the money of their constituents." He later added, "(T)he government of the United States is a definite government, confined to specified objects. It is not like the state governments, whose powers are more general. Charity is no part of the legislative duty of the government." Two hundred years later, at least two-thirds of a multi-trillion-dollar federal budget is spent on charity or "objects of benevolence."

What would the founders think about our respect for democracy and majority rule? Here's what Thomas Jefferson said: "The majority, oppressing an individual, is guilty of a crime, abuses its strength, and by acting on the law of the strongest breaks up the foundations of society." John Adams advised, "Remember democracy never lasts long. It soon wastes, exhausts, and murders itself. There never was a democracy yet that did not commit suicide." The founders envisioned a republican form of government, but as Benjamin Franklin warned, "When the people find they can vote themselves money, that will herald the end of the republic."

What would the founders think about the U.S. Supreme Court's 2005 *Kelo v. City of New London* decision where the court sanctioned the taking of private property of one American to hand over to another American? John Adams explained: "The moment the idea is admitted into society that property is not as sacred as the laws of God, and that there is not a force of law and public justice to protect it, anarchy and tyranny commence. If 'Thou shalt not covet' and 'Thou shalt not steal' were not commandments of Heaven, they must be made inviolable precepts in every society before it can be civilized or made free."

Thomas Jefferson counseled us not to worship the U.S. Supreme Court: "(T)he opinion which gives to the judges the right to decide what laws are constitutional and what not, not only for themselves in their own sphere of action but for the Legislature and Executive also in their spheres, would make the Judiciary a despotic branch."

How might our founders have commented about last week's U.S. Supreme Court's decision upholding our rights to keep and bear arms? Justice Samuel Alito, in writing the majority opinion, said, "Individual self-defense is the central component of the Second Amendment." The founders would have responded "Balderdash!" Jefferson said, "What country can preserve its liberties if its rulers are not warned from time to time that their people preserve the spirit of resistance? Let them take arms."

George Mason explained, "(T)o disarm the people (is) the best and most effectual way to enslave them." Noah Webster elaborated: "Before a standing army can rule, the people must be disarmed. ... The supreme power in America cannot enforce unjust laws by the sword; because the whole body of the people are armed, and constitute a force superior to any band of regular troops that can be, on any pretense, raised in the United States. A military force, at the command of Congress, can execute no laws, but such as the people perceive to be just and constitutional; for they will possess the power, and



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jealousy will instantly inspire the inclination, to resist the execution of a law which appears to them unjust and oppressive.”

Contrary to Alito’s assertion, the central component of the Second Amendment is to protect ourselves from U.S. Congress, not street thugs.

Today’s Americans have contempt for our founders’ vision. I’m sure our founders would have contempt for ours.

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