



Written by [Joe Wolverton, II, J.D.](#) on March 5, 2024

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Algernon Sidney: Martyr for Liberty

For myself, I can hardly consider the name of Algernon Sidney as anything other than an American name, — American in all its associations, and American in all its influences, — and not unworthy to be held up with the proudest and loftiest names of our own land, to the contemplation and admiration of every son and every daughter of our beloved Union.

— Robert Winthrop, spoken at a Sidney memorial held in 1853 in Boston



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Can you believe that a man who Thomas Jefferson said wrote the “best elementary book of the principles of government” that our youth should read “as soon as their minds are sufficiently matured” is all but forgotten by Americans today?

Can you believe that a book that Thomas Jefferson identified as one of the primary sources for the principles of the Declaration of Independence is not found in the home of every American patriot?

Can you believe that a book that Jefferson and James Madison mandated that every incoming student at the University of Virginia had to read before matriculating is a book nearly no one in America today has even heard of?

Can you believe that that book, which cost the author his head, is unknown to most U.S. history professors and teachers today?

Can you believe that a man revered by the Founding Fathers as an honorary American and a martyr of republican government, and after whom towns and universities were named, is now almost completely unheard of?

How is that possible? How can such a man be unknown to Americans today? Regardless of *how* it happened, it happened, and it is just plain wrong.

We can begin righting that wrong by restoring to the American people the knowledge of the patron saint of republicanism — of the “Good Old Cause” — Colonel Algernon Sidney.

Aside from sacred texts, it’s hard to find words more powerful than those written by Algernon Sidney (1623–1683). At the time of the War for Independence, Sidney was the world’s most celebrated martyr for free speech. Today, he is forgotten by the very people whose freedom and form of government he inspired.

While millions of Americans can recall and discuss the most minute details from the *Harry Potter* book and movie series, or can relate intimate details of the lives of the Kardashian family, the name Algernon Sidney is never mentioned in our homes — even among those claiming to be advocates of republican government and experts in American history.



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Remarkably, Colonel Sidney's name and fame were once so universal that the editor of the first edition of Sidney's *Discourses Concerning Government* wrote in its introduction, "It is not necessary to say anything concerning the person of the author," and Thomas Jefferson said Sidney was so universally acclaimed that it would be "superfluous, and even presumptuous, for an individual to add his feeble breath to the gale." Today, it is not only necessary, it is *urgent*, as the gale is reduced to less than a breeze.

Unbelievably, there has not been a new edition of *Discourses Concerning Government* printed in England since 1772 or in France since 1796, and prior to Liberty Fund's edition in 1996, the last U.S. edition was published in 1810! This is how complete the establishment's *damnatio memoriae* ("condemnation of memory") against Algernon Sidney has been.

As for biographies of Colonel Sidney, there has never been a comprehensive one published. Jonathan Scott's work is the closest we've come, and that work is more a historiography of Sidney's times and his influences than a proper biography. I am happy to announce, however, that I am currently working on a biography of Algernon Sidney, and it should be ready for publication on the anniversary of his martyrdom in 2024.

Until that larger work is ready for publication, what follows is a brief biography of a man whose influence on the government of the United States and on the men who framed it is beyond measure.

Algernon Sidney was the second son of Robert, Earl of Leicester, and Lady Dorothy Percy, daughter of Henry, Earl of Northumberland. His great uncle on his father's side was the heroic and talented Sir Philip Sidney, whom Queen Elizabeth I called "the jewel of her times" and whose life was famously described by Scottish poet Thomas Campbell as "poetry put into action."

Posthumous vindication: The Glorious Revolution of 1688, five years after Sidney's death, saw a benign invader, William of Orange (shown here landing on the English coast with his forces), welcomed into London and made England's first monarch with truly limited powers. It was under the reign of William and Mary that the American Colonies flourished under the freest government the world had ever seen. (Public Domain)



The exact date of Algernon's birth is uncertain, although most scholars now agree that it was sometime on or about January 15, 1623, the date recorded of a payment made to a midwife for attending to Sidney's mother, Dorothy, herself a descendant of the historically pertinent Percy family.



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English politician and diplomat Sir William Temple described Algernon's father as a man of profound learning and truthfulness, a sentiment echoed by English statesman Edward Hyde, 1st Earl of Clarendon, and others. Under his father's guidance, Algernon received a comprehensive classical education, fully embracing and utilizing these opportunities. From a young age, he displayed exceptional talent and wit, as noted in a letter from his mother. "[Algernon is] much commended by all that comes from you ... [for] a huge deal of wit and much sweetness of nature," she wrote to her husband.

At about age 10, Algernon joined his father and elder brother on a diplomatic mission to Denmark. Four years later, they went to Paris, where Algernon's interest in politics began to develop amid the reign of Louis XIII and Cardinal Richelieu's formidable rule. He later studied in Rome, absorbing the legacy of figures such as Brutus and Cicero.

At 19, through his father's influence, Algernon commanded a troop of horse in Ireland, under his brother, to quell Irish insurgents. However, military life wasn't his true calling. Upon returning from Ireland, he boldly supported the Parliament and the people against King Charles I in the English Civil War. In 1644, he became a captain in the parliamentary cavalry, and was soon promoted to lieutenant colonel. He demonstrated bravery during the Battle of Marston Moor, where he was severely injured and nearly captured, only to be saved by a soldier who refused any reward or recognition for his act of valor.

Sidney's life and this anonymous soldier's heroism showcase the transcendent nature of human kindness and courage, regardless of social status.

Recovering quickly, Sidney led a regiment of horse under Sir Thomas Fairfax and Oliver Cromwell, bearing the motto "The sacred love of country gives the impulse." By age 24 he was in the House of Commons, and he was soon appointed lieutenant general of horse in Ireland and governor of Dublin Castle. Later he was made governor of Dover Castle.

In 1648, he was selected as a commissioner for King Charles I's trial. After attending initial sessions, though, he withdrew, opposing the proceedings based on principle, as revealed in a letter in which he challenged Cromwell directly.

Despite opposing the trial, Sidney believed Charles had abused his power and that his deposition was necessary. He saw it as a warning against tyranny, aligning with the belief that monarchy should give way to a government by the people.

Refusing to support Cromwell's increasingly tyrannical regime, Sidney spent some time in retirement, partly at Penshurst in Kent and partly in the Hague, where he befriended statesman John De Witt. During this time, he laid the groundwork for his *Discourses Concerning Government*.

Returning to Parliament, he was assigned as a peace mediator between Sweden and Denmark. Watching England's political shifts from afar, he resolved to serve only if the government upheld republican principles. However, with the restoration of the monarchy under King Charles II, he refused to engage with a government he viewed as treacherous and tyrannical, declining offers for personal gain.

On August 30, 1660, Sidney wrote a letter expressing his resolve to not return to England under conditions that would compromise those principles:



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I confess we are naturally inclined to delight in our own country, and I have a particular love of mine; I hope I have given some testimony of it. I think that being exiled from it is a great evil and would redeem myself from it with the loss of a great deal of my blood. But when that country of mine, which used to be esteemed a paradise, is now like to be made a stage of injury; the liberty of which we hoped to establish, oppressed; luxury and lewdness set up in its height, instead of the piety, virtue, sobriety, and modesty which we hoped God by our hands would have introduced; the best of our country made prey to the worst.... What joy can I have in my own country in this condition? Whilst I live I will endeavor to preserve my liberty, or at least not consent to the destroying of it. I hope I shall die in the same principles in which I have lived and will live no longer than they preserve me.... To conclude, the tide is not to be diverted nor the oppressed delivered, but God in his time will have mercy on his people. He will save and defend them, and avenge the blood of those who, in their pride, think nothing is able to oppose them. Happy are those whom God shall make instruments of his justice in so blessed a work.

It is this spirit and this commitment to the cause of God and of liberty that guaranteed that Algernon Sidney would be removed from the reading list in American schools.

Sidney's letters were praised for their eloquence and sentiment, and reflect his steadfast commitment to liberty and integrity.

That courageous commitment was never more evident than in an episode during his exile, when Sidney visited a university in Copenhagen and wrote the following motto in Latin in a guest book, a phrase boldly declaring his fearless resistance to tyranny: *Manus haec inimica tyrannis, ense petit placidam sub libertate quietem.*

Translated into English, Sidney's inscription reads, "This hand, enemy to tyrants, by the sword seeks calm peacefulness under liberty."

Remarkably, the latter half of that inscription remains the state motto of the state of Massachusetts!

Sidney's refusal to return to England without compromising his values led him to spend many years on the Continent. He lived in various German cities and in Rome, where he faced financial difficulties and familial estrangement. Eventually, he found refuge in the villa of Belvedere near Frascati, Italy, where he devoted himself to study and solitude, finding peace in nature, reading, and reflection.

It was during this period that Sidney penned his book *Court Maxims*, a work that took aim at King Charles II and encouraged the Dutch to lend their support to the republican cause against him. *Court Maxims* comprises 15 dialogues featuring discussions between the republican character Eunomius and the royal courtier Philalethes. Within these dialogues, they delve into maxims promoting political absolutism, including statements such as "monarchy is the best form of government" and "monarchy ought to be absolute and hereditary."

Eunomius, represented by Sidney, fervently upheld the doctrine of a "higher law," a concept previously championed by Cicero. He steadfastly argued that if rulers were to undermine the well-being of their subjects, they should no longer be regarded as benevolent figures, such as fathers or shepherds — terms associated with love and kindness — but rather as malevolent figures akin to thieves, wolves, and tyrants — the most hostile of adversaries. In the Ninth Dialogue, Sidney explains through the character



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Eunomius:

The essence of the law consists solely in the justice of it: if it be not just, it is not law. The justice of it depends upon the end: if it conduces not to a good end, it cannot be just. Laws are made for the right regulating and preservation of societies, and to obviate offenses tending to the disturbance thereof. Those acts or decrees which tend not thereunto have no justice in them, nor in any respect deserve the name or power of laws. Instead of landmarks to warn and prevent dangers, they become snares to catch and destroy men unawares.

Is it any wonder in the age of “plan-demics” that such plain and powerful prose would be kept from the American people? A people raised on such works, as our Founding Fathers were, would never fall for such “snares” as Covid-19 lockdowns and the economic fallout that followed them.

Despite enjoying this tranquil life, Sidney felt the need for a more active role. He left Italy, traveling through Switzerland to Brussels, but faced constant danger from royalist forces. His steadfastness to the parliamentary cause made him a target for assassination attempts, and his efforts to volunteer for military service in Hungary were thwarted by British intervention. This relentless persecution highlighted his unyielding commitment to his principles, making him a symbol of incorruptibility.

Even as Sidney’s life neared its end, he faced continued challenges and opposition. He bravely attempted to run for Parliament in Guildford, Surrey, with the support of William Penn, but faced resistance and unfair practices that led to his defeat. After a dissolved Parliament and a new election, Sidney tried again for a seat, this time in Bamber, Essex. Despite Penn’s strong backing, the election ended ambiguously, and Sidney’s candidacy was eventually dismissed.

The hostility against Sidney persisted, with accusations linking him to various plots against the government, and even a baseless charge of riot involvement. Feeling unsafe in England, he planned to return to the Continent, and even bought a property in France under a friend’s name.

However, his aspirations for a peaceful retirement went unfulfilled. In 1681, Sidney was involved in drafting a response to the “King’s Declaration,” criticizing Parliament’s repeated dissolutions. This document, revised by Sir William Jones and Lord John Somers, was later published under the title “A Just and Modest Vindication of the Proceedings of the Two Last Parliaments.” During this period, Sidney also completed his *Discourses Concerning Government*, a testament to his unwavering commitment to liberty.

As political tensions heightened with the prospect of a Catholic successor to the throne, Sidney and his allies, including the Duke of Monmouth, Earl Essex, and William Lord Russell, formed a secret council to oppose this succession. Though many council members faced tragic fates, their efforts laid the groundwork for the eventual Glorious Revolution of 1688.

Sidney’s involvement in these political maneuvers led to his arrest in 1683. He was charged with high treason, and his trial was a notorious miscarriage of justice, led by the infamous Judge George Jeffreys. Despite a lack of concrete evidence and in violation of the requirements for prosecuting someone for treason, Sidney was found guilty largely based on his own writings about government and liberty, writings which were illegally seized and used by the government in its prosecution and persecution of him.



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At one point in the trial, Jeffreys chastised Colonel Sidney, saying, "I pray God work in you a temper fit to go unto the other world, for I see you are not fit for this."

Sixty years old, cold, and emaciated from nearly half a year's imprisonment, Colonel Algernon Sidney pulled up the sleeve of his prisoner's tunic, exposing his arm to Jeffreys, and replied with dignity and defiance:

"My Lord, feel my pulse."

"I bless God, I never was in better temper, than I am now," he added.

After the miscarriage of justice and haughty display of judicial tyranny, Sidney was sentenced to execution by beheading. On the scaffold, his dignified and resolute demeanor was evident. There he offered a prayer, and, given the popular modern trend to identify everyone from the Enlightenment period as some sort of deist or closeted atheist, republishing a part of his final words is appropriate here, if for no other reason than to restore the affirmation of his Christianity and that of those who revered him so profoundly. Sidney said:

The Lord sanctify these my sufferings unto me and though I fall as a sacrifice unto the idols, suffer not idolatry to be established in this land. Bless thy people and save them. Defend thy own cause, and those that defend it. Stir up such as are faint. Direct those that are willing. Confirm those that waver. Give wisdom and integrity unto all. Order all things so, as may most redound unto thine own glory. Grant that I may die glorifying Thee for all thy mercies, and that at the last thou hast permitted me to be singled out as a witness of thy truth, and even by the confession of my opposers, for that Old Cause, in which I was from my youth engaged, and for which thou hast often and wonderfully declared thyself.

Those are not the words of a deist. Those are the words not only of a Christian, but of a man with confidence before the throne of Christ that he had done that which pleased his Lord.

I invite you to re-read those words and see if Sidney's prayer is not in every syllable appropriate and applicable to the condition of the United States, their people and government, today, 340 years after being written.

The injustice of Sidney's trial and execution was not forgotten. Within a few years, the Glorious Revolution brought about significant changes in England's political landscape. William and Mary's ascension to the throne under a Declaration of Right, which echoed Sidney's ideals, marked a new era of liberty. One of their first acts was to annul Sidney's conviction, a posthumous acknowledgment of his enduring contribution to the cause of freedom.



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Coronation: The joint crowning of William and Mary at the end of the Glorious Revolution ushered in an era of limited government in England not seen since the Anglo-Saxon apogee. The crowning achievement was the signing by the new king and queen of the English Bill of Rights, which became a model for the American Bill of Rights a century later.

Sidney's life, principles, discourses, and death had an even greater impact on the American War for Independence of 1775-1783 than on the Glorious Revolution of 1688. In fact, our revolution can be seen as the natural progression and culmination of what began in England. Of the impact of that influence on the written works produced by our Founding Fathers, Harvard University historian Bernard Bailyn stated, "Above all, they referred to the doctrines of Algernon Sidney."

Read that again: "Above all"!

It's in America, more than anywhere else, that Sidney's legacy truly resonates. Here, his cherished ideal of a republic is no longer just a dream but a tangible reality, offering its immense benefits to all within its reach. This makes his unwavering commitment to liberty, his belief in a republic, and his trust in the people's ability to govern themselves all the more relevant. Sidney's writings and example significantly guided and motivated the founding figures of our country, contributing in unmatched measure to the creation of the institutions we cherish today.

As historian Alan Craig Houston observed:

To the colonists, the single most important fact about Sidney's life was the manner of his death. By his unselfish devotion to liberty, Sidney set a standard against which men repeatedly measured themselves; by his martyrdom, he graphically demonstrated the evils of unchecked power.

Colonial Americans also read the *Discourses Concerning Government* with care and precision. They cited Sidney on a wide range of issues, from the corruption of men to the rule of law, and from the representative nature of government to the right of revolution.

Sidney's martyrdom was the most powerful piece of evidence that could have been given to verify the truth of his writings. As the latter preached, so the former graphically demonstrated the consequence of permitting one man to enjoy arbitrary and unlimited power. Had Sidney not been a martyr, it is unlikely



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the *Discourses* would have been so widely read in 18th-century America; had he not written the *Discourses*, on the other hand, it is unlikely his death would have received the attention it did.

Sadly, after winning and securing their independence from England, Americans found increasingly less use for the revolutionary principles set forth in *Discourses Concerning Government*, and the book and its author were quickly erased from our cultural memory and from our history lessons.

Today, we find ourselves once again facing the abolition of our liberty by tyrants, so perhaps it's time we dust off that old worn copy of *Discourses* and start studying the words of Algernon Sidney once again.

Quotable Quotes From Algernon Sidney

Sidney on Why Tyranny Is So Detestable:

The last kind of despotical government is naturally, universally, and eternally unjust, detestable and abominable, that men naturally endowed with gifts, fit to govern themselves, and live for and unto God, their country, and themselves, should by fraud or violence be brought to live to and for another man equal to or worse than themselves, when they have no way forfeited the liberty to which they were born.

— *Court Maxims*, p. 128

Sidney on Tyranny as Peace:

This peace is in every wilderness: The Turks have established it in the empty provinces of Asia and Greece. Where there are no men, or if those men have no courage, there can be no war. Our ancestors the Britains observed, that the peace which in that age the Romans established in the provinces, consisted in the most wretched slavery and solitude: *Miserrimam servitutem pacem appellunt*. And in another place, *solitudinem faciunt, pacem vocant*.

This is the peace the Spaniards settled in their dominions of the West Indies, by the destruction of forty millions of souls.

The countries were very quiet, when wild beasts only were left to fight in them, or a few miserable wretches, who had neither strength nor courage to resist their violence.

— *Discourses*, Chapter 2, Section 15

Sidney on the Duty of the Creature to the Creator:

The creature having nothing, and being nothing but what the creator makes him, must owe all to him.

— *Discourses*, Chapter 3, Section 33

Sidney on When Seditious Is Good:

If it be said that the word seditious implies that which is evil; I answer, that it ought not then to be applied to those who seek nothing but that which is just; and tho the ways of delivering an oppressed people from the violence of a wicked magistrate, who having armed a crew of lewd villains, and fattened them with the blood and confiscations of such as were most ready to oppose him, be extraordinary, the inward righteousness of the act doth fully justify the authors. He that has virtue and power to save a people, can never want a right of doing it. Valerius Asiaticus had no hand in the death of Caligula; but when the furious guards began tumultuously to enquire who had kill'd him, he appeased them with wishing he had been the man.



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No wise man ever asked by what authority Thrasybulus, Harmodius, Aristogiton, Pelopidas, Epaminondas, Dion, Timoleon, Lucius Brutus, Publicola, Horatius, Valerius, Marcus Brutus, C. Cassius, and the like, delivered their countries from tyrants. Their actions carried in themselves their own justification, and their virtues will never be forgotten whilst the names of Greece and Rome are remembered in the world.

— *Discourses*, Chapter 2, Section 24

Sidney on the Relationship of Virtue and Liberty:

The secret counsels of God are impenetrable; but the ways by which he accomplishes his designs are often evident: When he intends to exalt a people, he fills both them and their leaders with the virtues suitable to the accomplishment of his end; and takes away all wisdom and virtue from those he resolves to destroy.

— *Discourses*, Chapter 2, Section 12

Sidney on People as Ultimate Sovereigns Who Can Take Power Back From Magistrates, and the Purpose of Government:

The only ends for which governments are constituted, and obedience render'd to them, are the obtaining of justice and protection; and they who cannot provide for both, give the people a right of taking such ways as best please themselves, in order to their own safety.

— *Discourses*, Chapter 2, Section 33

Sidney on Liberty Being Natural and How the People Limit the Powers of Their Political Servants:

If any man ask how nations come to have the power of doing these things, I answer, that liberty being only an exemption from the dominion of another, the question ought not to be, how a nation can come to be free, but how a man comes to have a dominion over it; for till the right of dominion be proved and justified, liberty subsists as arising from the nature and being of a man. Tertullian speaking of the emperors says, *ab eo imperium a quo spiritus*; and we taking man in his first condition may justly say, *ab eo libertas a quo spiritus*; for no man can owe more than he has received. The creature having nothing, and being nothing but what the creator makes him, must owe all to him, and nothing to anyone from whom he has received nothing. Man therefore must be naturally free, unless he be created by another power than we have yet heard of.

— *Discourses*, Chapter 2, Section 33

Sidney on the True Meaning of "Safety" in a Free Society:

Besides, if the safety of the people be the supreme law, and this safety extend to, and consist in the preservation of their liberties, goods, lands and lives, that law must necessarily be the root and beginning, as well as the end and limit of all magistratical power, and all laws must be subservient and subordinate to it. The question will not then be what pleases the king, but what is good for the people; not what conduces to his profit or glory, but what best secures the liberties he is bound to preserve: he does not therefore reign for himself, but for the people; he is not the master, but the servant of the commonwealth.

— *Discourses*, Chapter 2, Section 16

Sidney on How Absurd It Is to Believe That a Tyrant Must Be Obeyed:

If Julius and Octavius Caesar did successively become lords and fathers of their country, by slaughtering almost all the senate, and such persons as were eminent for nobility or virtue, together



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with the major part of the people, it cannot be denied, that a thief, who breaks into his neighbour's house, and kills him, is justly master of his estate; and may exact the same obedience from his children, that they render to their father.

— *Discourses*, Chapter 1, Section 16

Sidney on Why Men Separate From One Society and Form Another:

For the choice of that society, and the liberty of framing it according to our own wills, for our own good, is all we seek.

— *Discourses*, Chapter 1, Section 10

Sidney on When the “Law” Should Be Disobeyed:

That which is not just, is not Law; and that which is not Law, ought not to be obeyed.

— *Discourses*, Chapter 3, Section 11

Praise for Algernon Sidney From the Founding Era:

The world has so long and so generally sounded the praises of his *Discourses on Government*, that it seems superfluous, and even presumptuous, for an individual to add his feeble breath to the gale. They are in truth a rich treasure of republican principles, supported by copious & cogent arguments, and adorned with the finest flowers of science. It is probably the best elementary book of the principles of government, as founded in natural right which has ever been published in any language: and it is much to be desired in such a government as ours that it should be put into the hands of our youth as soon as their minds are sufficiently matured for that branch of study.

— *Thomas Jefferson, Letter to Parson Weems, December 13, 1804*

Algernon Sidney fills this Tomb,
An Atheist for disdaining Rome
A Rebel bold for striving still
To keep the Laws above the Will
Of Heaven he sure must needs despair
If holy Pope be turnkey there
And Hell him ne'er will entertain
For there is all Tyrannick Reign
Where goes he then? Where he ought to go.
Where Pope, nor Devil have to do.

— *John Adams, Epitaph for Sidney's Tomb, found in Adams' diary, entry sometime between September 22 and October 5, 1772*

I give to my son, when he shall arrive to the age of fifteen years, Algernon Sidney's Works, John Locke's Works, Lord Bacon's Works, Gordon's Tacitus, and Cato's Letters. May the spirit of liberty rest upon him!

— *Last Will and Testament of Josiah Quincy, Jr., February 28, 1774*

The English language might be taught by grammar, in which some of our best writers as Tillotson, Addison, Pope, Algernon Sidney, Cato's Letters, etc. should be classics, the styles principally to be cultivated being the clear and the concise.

— *Benjamin Franklin, "Proposals Relating to the Education of Youth in Pennsylvania," 1749*



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The want of gratitude in mankind, their little attention to their true interest, and the consequent fate of many of their friends, are really disagreeable reflections, but if Brutus, and Cassius, Hampden, Sidney, Harrington &c. had lived in inglorious ease, they might have died in a few months after in languishing, and painful sickness without fame without the applause of the virtuous of all ages. I have strong faith that the now rough and perilous paths of politicks will soon be smoothed and that our sons may walk in them without danger, especially if we submit the instruction of them to friends who will certainly form them to virtue and establish that integrity that will secure them at least good consciences.

— *Mercy Otis Warren, Letter to John Adams, June 14, 1744*

All men by nature are equal; that kings are but the ministers of the people; that their authority is delegated to them by the people for their good, and they have a right to resume it, and place it in other hands, or keep it themselves, whenever it is made use of to oppress them. Doubtless there have been instances, when these principles have been inculcated to obtain a redress of real grievances, but they have been much oftener perverted to the worst of purposes. These are what are called revolution-principles. They are the principles of Aristotle and Plato, of Livy and Cicero, of Sidney, Harrington and Locke.—The principles of nature and eternal reason.

— *John Adams, January 23, 1775*

All its [the Declaration of Independence] authority rests then on the harmonising sentiments of the day, whether expressed, in conversations in letters, printed essays or in the elementary books of public right, as Aristotle, Cicero, Locke, Sidney Etc.

— *Thomas Jefferson, Letter to Henry Lee, 8 May 1825*

On the 7th of this Month [December], 1683, was the honorable Algernon Sidney, Esq. beheaded, charged with a pretended plot, but whose chief crime was the writing an excellent book, entitled, Discourses on Government. A man of admirable parts and great integrity.

— *Benjamin Franklin, "Poor Richard Improved," December 1750*

I have lately undertaken to read Algernon Sidney on Government. There is a great difference in reading a book at four and twenty, and at eighty-eight, as often as I have read it; and fumbled it over; it now excites fresh admiration, that this work has excited so little interest in the literary world—As splendid an Edition of it, as the art of printing can produce, as well as for the intrinsic merit of the work, as for the proof it brings of the bitter sufferings of the advocates of Liberty from that time to this, and to show the slow progress of Moral philosophical political Illumination in the world ought to be now published in America.

— *John Adams, Letter to Thomas Jefferson, September 18, 1823*

For myself, I can hardly consider the name of Algernon Sidney as anything other than an American name — American in all its associations, and American in all its influences — and not unworthy to be held up with the proudest and loftiest names of our own land, to the contemplation and admiration of every son and every daughter of our beloved Union.

— *Robert C. Winthrop, "Algernon Sidney: A Lecture delivered before the Boston Mercantile Library Association," December 21, 1853*

Shall crimes and tyrants cease but with the world?

What! are thy triumphs, sacred Truth, belied?

Why then hath Plato lived — or Sidney died?



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— *Thomas Campbell (1777-1844) "The Pleasures of Hope" (Excerpt)*

British Cassius, fearless bled;
Of high determin'd spirit, roughly brave,
By antient learning to th' enlightened love
Of antient freedom warm'd.

— *John Thomson, "Freedom," 1791*

Ense Petit Placidam Sub Libertate Quietem.

— The state motto of Massachusetts, taken from a longer inscription left by Colonel Sidney in a guest book at Copenhagen University (*Manus haec inimica tyrannis, ense petit placidam sub libertate quietem.*)



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