



Written by [Joe Wolverton, II, J.D.](#) on November 21, 2023

Published in the December 11, 2023 issue of [the New American](#) magazine. Vol. 39, No. 23

---

## The Founding Fathers & Self-reliance

The United States of America, a country of unparalleled liberty and unique federal structure, was founded on the bedrock principles of liberty and independence. Much of the character of our country is directly attributable to the visionary wisdom of its Founding Fathers. Among the paramount virtues that served as polestars guiding their revolutionary voyage, the quality of self-reliance was of inestimable value to our Founding Fathers. Embodying this quality, their writings, actions, and deep-seated beliefs not only molded the country's foundation, but also blazed a trail to be followed by a society that reveres individual freedom and limited government intervention.



### The Founding Fathers and Self-reliance: An Unwavering Commitment

Self-reliance, in the context of the Founding Fathers, was far more than a personal virtue. To fully grasp the depth of their commitment to self-reliance, we must examine their own words and deeds, which eloquently bear testament to their profound belief. While this is certainly no complete collection of the testimonies of our Founding Fathers on the importance of self-reliance and its inextricable relationship with freedom, the following selections should suffice to demonstrate to the reader the devotion of our Founding Generation to that principle.

#### Benjamin Franklin: The Quintessential Self-reliant American

Benjamin Franklin, a polymath of the American Enlightenment, epitomized self-reliance in both his personal life and his political philosophy. His *Poor Richard's Almanack* brimmed with aphorisms that exalted virtues such as hard work, thrift, and individual responsibility. Within its pages, Franklin succinctly encapsulated the essence of self-reliance with the phrase, "God helps them that help themselves." This maxim serves as a timeless reminder of the spirit of self-reliance, in which individuals are not just encouraged, but expected, to take the initiative and diligently labor to enhance their own lives.

Franklin's commitment to self-reliance transcended his personal ethos; it extended into his fervent advocacy for self-governance. He ardently argued that a self-reliant citizenry was not just desirable but absolutely crucial for the success of a republic. Franklin firmly asserted, "Only a virtuous people are capable of freedom." His belief was that a self-reliant populace, grounded in moral virtue, would collectively make judicious decisions and contribute to the common good without the crutch of



Written by [Joe Wolverton, II, J.D.](#) on November 21, 2023

Published in the December 11, 2023 issue of [the New American](#) magazine. Vol. 39, No. 23

---

government intervention.

## **Thomas Jefferson: The Individualist Champion of Agrarian Ideals**

Thomas Jefferson, revered as the principal author of the Declaration of Independence, emerged as a staunch advocate of individualism and self-reliance. His vision for the United States was deeply rooted in agrarian ideals, in which yeoman farmers and landowners played a pivotal role. In Jefferson's view, these self-reliant individuals, diligently tilling their land and responsibly managing their affairs, constituted the very bedrock of a robust and free society. In his *Notes on the State of Virginia*, Jefferson explained his opinion on why farmers were uniquely qualified to thrive in a republic:

Those who labour in the earth are the chosen people of God, if ever he had a chosen people, whose breasts he has made his peculiar deposit for substantial and genuine virtue. It is the focus in which he keeps alive that sacred fire, which otherwise might escape from the face of the earth. Corruption of morals in the mass of cultivators is a phenomenon of which no age nor nation has furnished an example. It is the mark set on those, who not looking up to heaven, to their own soil and industry, as does the husbandman, for their subsistence, depend for it on the casualties and caprice of customers.

Jefferson's immortal words in the Declaration of Independence resonate profoundly with the spirit of self-reliance: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness." Here, the pursuit of happiness, a concept intrinsically linked to individual self-determination, is emphatically highlighted as an inherent right, best realized through self-reliance.

## **George Washington: Leading by the Example of Self-reliance**

George Washington, the indispensable figure of the American War for Independence and the union's inaugural president, embodied self-reliance through his leadership and actions. His life story, from a young surveyor to a military commander and statesman, underscored the immeasurable value of self-reliance in shaping one's destiny.

In his "Farewell Address," Washington imparted a sage warning against excessive reliance on government, stating, "As a very important source of strength and security, cherish public credit. One method of preserving it is to use it as sparingly as possible, avoiding occasions of expense by cultivating peace." This wisdom reflects his unwavering belief in fiscal responsibility and individual self-sufficiency.

Later in that same discourse, Washington tied the fate of liberty in America to the security of each citizen in the protection of his personal rights and personal property. Washington declared:

Liberty itself will find in such a government, with powers properly distributed and adjusted, its surest guardian. It is, indeed, little else than a name, where the government is too feeble to withstand the enterprises of faction, to confine each member of the society within the limits prescribed by the laws, and to maintain all in the secure and tranquil enjoyment of the rights of person and property.



Written by [Joe Wolverton, II, J.D.](#) on November 21, 2023

Published in the December 11, 2023 issue of [the New American](#) magazine. Vol. 39, No. 23

---



## **John Adams: Defender of Liberty Through Self-reliance**

John Adams, the second president of the United States and a resolute advocate for American independence, recognized that self-reliance was not just a personal virtue but also a bulwark for liberty. In his “A Dissertation on the Canon and the Feudal Law,” No. 3, published in 1765, Adams eloquently declared, “Liberty must at all hazards be supported. We have a right to it, derived from our Maker. But if we had not, our fathers have earned and bought it for us, at the expense of their ease, their estates, their pleasure, and their blood.”

Adams astutely understood that a populace capable of relying on its own efforts and sacrifices for its well-being was less susceptible to the seductive promises of luxury and ease offered by tyrannical governments. Self-reliance, in his view, constituted a formidable defense against despotic designs to deny our people liberty — the liberty granted to us by God and secured by us through hard work, virtue, and vigilance.

## **James Madison: Property and Virtue Provide Prosperity**

Known to history as the “Father of the Constitution,” James Madison was a man of unrivaled virtue. In response to a question about Madison’s comportment while a student at Princeton, Dr. John Witherspoon, who was president of that university during Madison’s years there, said, “In the whole career of Mr. Madison at Princeton, [I] had never known him to do or say an indiscreet thing.” That’s certainly not something most of us could say of our own behavior while in college!

Madison’s virtue was matched by his erudition. He was a man who from his earliest years was given to long hours of study and contemplation. He was born with delicate health but a vigorous mind. Of all the top tier in the pantheon of Founding Fathers, Madison is perhaps the one possessed of the widest and deepest understanding of the lessons learned from studying history.

In his survey of the history of past and present commonwealths called “Notes on Ancient and Modern Confederacies,” Madison noted the sad habit of formerly self-governing societies to gradually descend



Written by [Joe Wolverton, II, J.D.](#) on November 21, 2023

Published in the December 11, 2023 issue of [the New American](#) magazine. Vol. 39, No. 23

---

into despotism. Madison surmised from his study of thousands of years of history of republics that without a regularly reinforced commitment by every citizen to practice virtue, vigilance, and valor, a commonwealth was not sustainable. To that end, he made the following observation and recommendation:

The life of the husbandman is pre-eminently suited to the comfort and happiness of the individual. Health, the first of blessings, is an appurtenance of his property and his employment. Virtue, the health of the soul, is another part of his patrimony, and no less favored by his situation. Intelligence may be cultivated in this as well as any other walk of life. If the mind be less susceptible of polish in retirement than in a crowd, it is more capable of profound and comprehensive efforts. Is it more ignorant of some things? It has a compensation in its ignorance of others. Competency is more universally the lot of those who dwell in the country, when liberty is at the same time their lot. The extremes of both want and of waste have other abodes.

## **Self-reliance Woven Into the Nation's Fabric**

The Founding Fathers' commitment to self-reliance was not a mere abstraction; it was intricately woven into the very structure of the American federation.

## **Limited Government: A Vehicle for Self-reliance**

The Founding Fathers' deep-seated skepticism of centralized power found eloquent expression in the U.S. Constitution. This foundational document, with its ingenious system of checks and balances, was meticulously designed to limit the government's reach and zealously safeguard individual liberties. This system tacitly acknowledged that a self-reliant citizenry, capable of governing its own affairs and making decisions in its best interests, formed the cornerstone of a thriving commonwealth.

If every person's right to provide for himself and to protect that right was enshrined in the Constitution, the Founders realized, then a community of such people could be prosperous. If a government was allowed to encroach on and interfere in the lives of individuals, however, then the path to prosperity would be strewn with tyrannical traps and regulatory redirection. It was essential to the vitality of the country, then, for individuals to be guaranteed a government granted only those "few and defined" powers absolutely necessary to keep the path to prosperity clear of obstacles. Left to their own devices, Americans were a people able and willing to work for all they obtained....

*This is part of an article originally published in our Collector's Edition "Self Reliance: the Foundation of Freedom." [Click here](#) to order the Collector's Edition.*

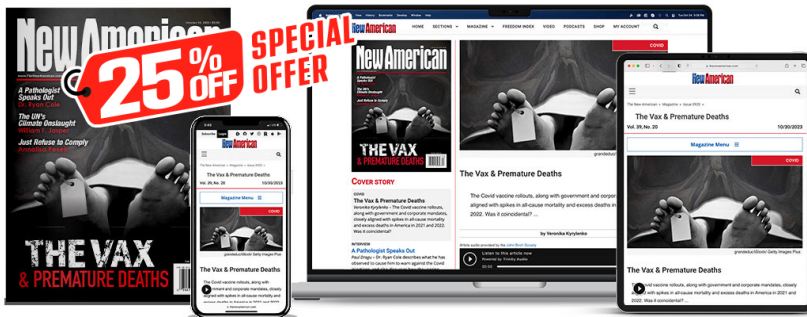


## Subscribe to the New American

Get exclusive digital access to the most informative, non-partisan truthful news source for patriotic Americans!

Discover a refreshing blend of time-honored values, principles and insightful perspectives within the pages of "The New American" magazine. Delve into a world where tradition is the foundation, and exploration knows no bounds.

From politics and finance to foreign affairs, environment, culture, and technology, we bring you an unparalleled array of topics that matter most.



[Subscribe](#)

### What's Included?

- 24 Issues Per Year
- Optional Print Edition
- Digital Edition Access
- Exclusive Subscriber Content
- Audio provided for all articles
- Unlimited access to past issues
- Coming Soon! Ad FREE
- 60-Day money back guarantee!
- Cancel anytime.