

LESSON 1: The Purpose & Role of Government Part 1

Your Call to Active Citizenship

Reclaiming True Liberty in the USA



THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE— A REFLECTION OF THE AMERICAN MIND

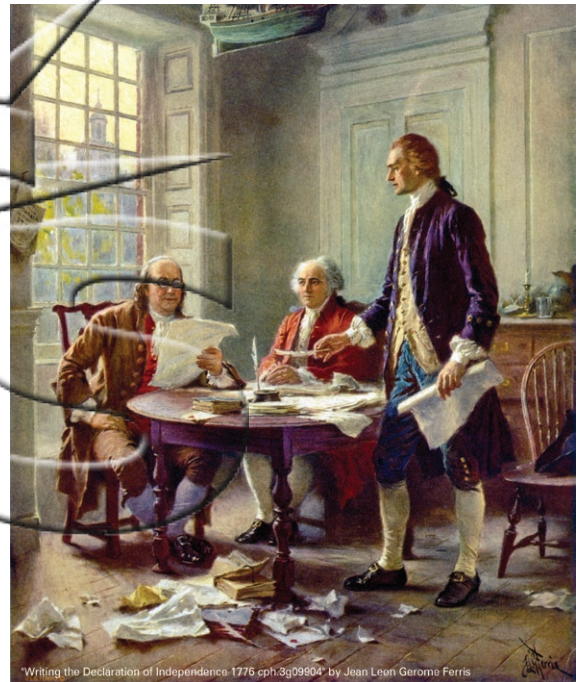
*The
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The Ideas Drafted in the Declaration

What is the purpose and role of government? Well, that is clearly set forth in the birth certificate of the United States of America, known as the Declaration of Independence. In fact, Thomas Jefferson, who was the drafter of the Declaration of Independence, said that it was a reflection of the American mind. What does he mean by that?

He means that the Declaration reflected the ideas of Americans, and in fact, the Declaration of Independence that he drafted was not unique. He was the author of the original draft, but he wasn't really the creator of the ideas.

These were common ideas of the time. That's why he called the Declaration a reflection of the American mind.



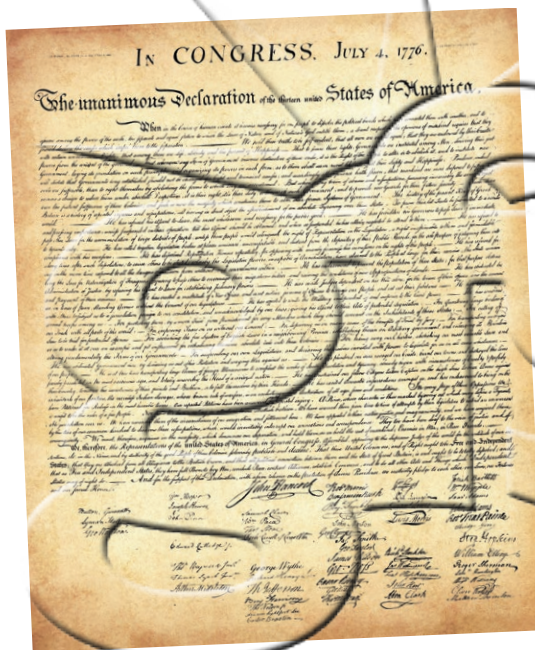
Government Must Follow the Laws of Nature and Nature's God

Many people haven't looked to the Declaration to find out what the purpose and role of government is to be, but it is clearly stated. Let's walk through the beginning of the Declaration of Independence.



The heart of the Declaration defines the purpose and role of government

“When in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature’s God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.”



In other words, whenever a time in history comes where a group of people in a particular government have to separate from that government and create a new government—a government that’s consistent with the “Laws of Nature and Nature’s God”—then it is incumbent upon them when they make that break with the government that they declare the purposes which impel them to that decision. That is what the Declaration of Independence is all about. It sets forth the groundwork, and it then describes

the specific issues that cause them to make the decision to separate.

Government Must Acknowledge Man’s God-Given, Unalienable Rights

Let’s go to the very heart of the Declaration of Independence because it clearly defines the purpose and role of American government:

“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,



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that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness. — That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, — That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.”

The Declaration of Independence goes on to say:

“Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shewn, that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security.”

Then, it goes on to say that's exactly what happened to Americans at that point in history. The rest of the Declaration of Independence is a point-by-point indictment as to the causes that impel them to that separation. The very purpose and foundation of American government is in that paragraph.

“We hold these truths,” the Declaration says, “to be self-evident.”

They are self-evident because they don't need to be taught. They're just as self-evident as the sun and the moon, daylight and nighttime. They are intuitive that



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these self-evident ideas and notions are that all of us are created equal. Why? It's because we are endowed by our Creator with certain unalienable rights.

That's very important because the Declaration of Independence shows that our presupposition of government is based upon the existence of God who is the Creator and who created each one of us in His image. Just as a painter infuses his or her ideas into each of their paintings, God infused in each one of us certain unalienable rights—rights that the government cannot grant and that the government cannot take away. Juan Torres, Central Florida Director of Bear Witness Central and Libertad USA, says, “Definitely, our rights come from God, not from any government, not from the Supreme Court, not from any president. They are rights and nobody can take them away from us.” Among these rights, it says, are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

The Declaration tells us that governments have what purpose? They are to secure these rights. In other words, the government's role is to protect these God-given, pre-existing rights that pre-date government.

The Declaration goes on to say that whenever any form of government—whether it's the government in America or, at that time, in Great Britain—begins to

develop a pattern, not just a misstep here and there, but a pattern of abuses and no longer protects those God-given, unalienable rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, then it's not only our right, but indeed it's also our duty to throw off that government and to provide a new government that will do exactly what government is designed to do: to protect these God-given, pre-existing liberties.

A depiction of the Sons of Liberty destroying the statue of King George III after the Declaration was read by George Washington to citizens and his troops in New York City on July 9, 1776.



"Pulling Down the Statue of King George III, N.Y.C." by Johannes Adam Simon Oertel



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The Declaration of Independence could not be any clearer as to what the purpose and role of government is. That was the reflection of the American mind. That was the mindset that ultimately led the Founders and those who followed them to sign the Declaration of Independence. It is our birth certificate, and in many cases, it was their death certificate. They knew that they were pledging their lives, their fortunes and their sacred honor to do exactly what was necessary at that time—to throw off a government that was tyrannical and was no longer protecting these God-given, religious liberties and unalienable rights.



John Trumbull's painting, Declaration of Independence, depicting the five-man drafting committee of the Declaration of Independence presenting their work to the Congress.

The United States and France Had Contrasting Views of Government

If you compare the United States of America during the American Revolution with the revolution that was happening at the same time in France, you see two contrasting views of the role of government. In France during the French Revolution, we see the idea that there is no God and that man is the measure of all things. Therefore, since there is no God, there are no absolutes, and without absolutes, who makes the rules? It's "enlightened" individuals who make the rules.



The American Revolution was based on the idea that there is a God, a Creator who infused us with unalienable rights that government cannot give or take away

So, in the French Revolution, the rights of men didn't come from God, they were not pre-existing. They were not unalienable rights. Instead, they came from government. Government can give you the rights, and government can take away the rights. However, in France, if you objected, they killed you! The symbol of the French Revolution is the guillotine.

The symbol of the American Revolution is the Statue of Liberty, which welcomes people from all shores to come here and have the freedom that we enjoy in America.

The two different roles of government are clearly reflected with these two times in history. Again, the French Revolution said that there was no God, and therefore, rights came from the people, not God. In contrast, the American Revolution said that there is a God, a Creator who infused us with unalienable rights that government cannot give and that government cannot take away. In addition, it declared that government, as its duty and purpose, is to protect those pre-existing, God-given rights. That is the role and purpose of government.



The Duty of Elected Officials

Whenever you elect any individual or whenever someone is serving in any level of office, what is that person's duty? Their duty is to be consistent with the purpose and role of government. Government is designed to protect these God-given, pre-existing liberties. Each elected official obviously needs to



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George Washington said:

“The man must be bad indeed who can look upon the events of the American Revolution without feeling the warmest gratitude towards the great Author of the universe whose divine interposition was so frequently manifested in our behalf.”



In a letter written on February 2, 1807, John Adams said:

“The Bible contains the most profound Philosophy, the most perfect Morality, and the most refined Policy, that ever was conceived upon earth. It is the most Republican Book in the World, and therefore I will still revere it.”

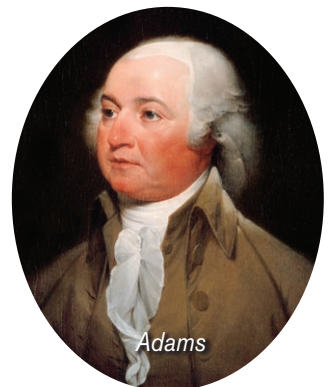


John Jay, first Chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court, said:

“The Bible is the best of all books, for it is the Word of God and teaches us the way to be happy in this world and in the next. Continue therefore to read it and to regulate your life by its precepts.”

John Adams also said:

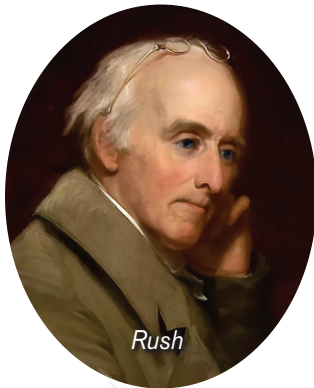
“Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.”



Benjamin Rush, one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence, said:

“The only foundation for useful education in a republic is to be laid in religion. Without this there can be no virtue, and without virtue there

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can be no liberty; and liberty is the object and life of all republican governments."

Chief Justice John Jay also said:

"The moral or natural law was given by the Sovereign of the universe to all mankind; with them it was co-eval, and with them it will be co-existent. Being rounded by infinite wisdom and goodness on essential right, which never varies, it can require no amendment or alteration."

Thomas Jefferson said:

"We are not in a world un governed by the laws and the power of a Superior Agent. Our efforts are in His hand, and directed by it; and He will give them their effect in His own time."



Charles Carroll, a leader of the American Revolution and signer of the Declaration of Independence, said:



"Without morals a republic cannot subsist any length of time; they, therefore, who are decrying the Christian religion, whose morality is so sublime and pure, [and] which denounces against the wicked eternal misery, and insures to the good eternal happiness are undermining the solid foundation of morals, the best security for the duration of free government."

In his farewell address, George Washington said:

"Of all the dispositions and habits, which lead to political prosperity, Religion and Morality are indispensable supports."



The rule of law has a rich tradition through which the government and its leaders are under the law

In the summer of 1787, Congress revisited the issue of religion in the new western territories, and on July 13, 1787, they passed the famous Northwest Ordinance. Article 3 of the Ordinance said:

“Religion, Morality, and knowledge being necessary to good government and the happiness of mankind, Schools and the means of education shall be forever encouraged.”

The final quote I want to share with you is from Benjamin Franklin. During a speech he gave to the Constitutional Convention on June 28, 1787, he said:

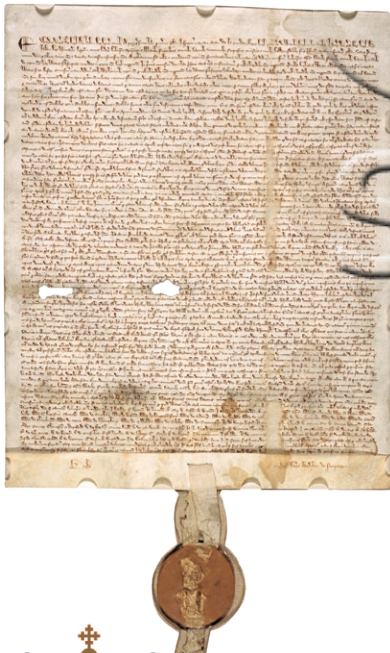
“I have lived, Sir, a long time, and the longer I live, the more convincing proofs I see of this truth—that God governs in the affairs of men. And if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without His notice, is it probable that an empire can rise without His aid?”

THE RULE OF LAW

Place in American History

Many people talk about the rule of law. They think that the rule of law is anything that a judge or a legislative body says it is. However, the rule of law has a different and much more significant place in American and Western history. The rule of law has a rich tradition wherein the government and its leaders are under the law.

If you go back to the time of the Magna Carta (1215 A.D.), the king of that day thought he was above the law. In addition, because of their nature, kings had historically believed they were the law and that they could change the rules from day to day simply because they were their countries' ultimate decision



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makers. Kings believed they were the ultimate repository of law. But when the Magna Carta was signed, even the king himself was placed under the law.

By the time of the American Revolution and the founding of America, the idea was clear that God is the ultimate Arbiter of law and that there are certain natural laws that are part of God's natural created order.

The Declaration of Independence lists some of those laws of nature and of nature's God to be life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. These laws transcend government. They pre-date government, and government must conform to these laws. In fact, in his *Commentaries on the Laws of England*, Sir William Blackstone said that if there's a law that is contrary to God's law, it is no law at all. That was not a new concept because that was the idea that had been advanced by Christianity and by Western civilization for centuries.

In a "Letter from Birmingham Jail," Martin Luther King, Jr., answered the question about why he obeyed some laws, while others he did not obey. For him, it was simple. He said that some laws are just, and you have to obey them. You may not like them, but you must obey them. But there are other laws that are unjust, and you have a moral duty to disobey those laws. Those are laws that are clearly contrary to God's natural law or God's natural created order. They are completely contrary and are merely a man-made law.



Martin Luther King
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As Blackstone and many others said throughout history, a law that is in conflict with God's natural created order—God's natural law—is simply no law at all.



The rule of law says that there is a higher law, a higher principle that pre-dates government

A Higher Law

The rule of law says that there is a higher law, a higher principle that pre-dates government. In fact, it says that all government must be subjected to the rule of law. It's not simply what a judge says or what a legislator says because that might change from one day to the next. The rule of law is something much more profound. We must continue to recapture the idea that this is a nation of laws and that we operate under a rule of law that comes from a higher Authority. Then, we must respect and obey those laws.



Laws exist to punish the evil-doer and to protect the good, as Romans 13 clearly states. The rule of law held sway through much of American history, but we have recently seen government officials intentionally disobeying the rule of law. When rulers do that, a republic collapses into chaos. We need to recapture the idea of the rule of law.

CIVIL MAGISTRATES AS MINISTERS OF JUSTICE

This Key Idea Greatly Influenced Western Thought

The idea of civil magistrates as being ministers of justice may be new to many Americans, but it is an ancient concept that has been woven throughout Western civilization and has shaped who we are as Americans. It has also influenced the entirety of Western culture.



A minister of justice is to administer justice to the people that is consistent with the higher law; man-made law must be made in conformity to that higher law

Who is a Civil Magistrate?

A civil magistrate is anyone who is performing work on behalf of the civil government, whether they are in the federal, state, or local levels. These are civil magistrates. The concept includes judges.

Throughout Western civilization, civil magistrates have been considered to be ministers of justice, which puts a different spin and idea concerning their role. When we're talking about ministers of justice, we are talking about people who are operating under the rule of law. Their obligation is to administer justice to the people that is consistent with not only the higher law, but also with the man-made laws that must be made in conformity to that higher law.

If they don't act as ministers of justice, these civil magistrates have violated their role and have stepped outside of their mandate to be ministers of justice. All magistrates at any level need to understand this crucial fact and operate as though they are ministers of justice.

When our elected officials understand this idea and when you, the voter, understand that you are voting for and electing ministers of justice, it puts an entirely different view as to their role in protecting your rights. Now, you understand what the role and purpose of government actually is.

