

Timely Lessons About Tyranny from the Father of the Constitution

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Global Research, June 13, 2024

Region: [USA](#)
Theme: [Law and Justice](#), [Police State & Civil Rights](#)

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"Take alarm at the first experiment on our liberties." — James Madison

James Madison, often referred to as the "Father of the Constitution," once predicted that the Bill of Rights would become mere "parchment barrier," words on paper ignored by successive generations of Americans.

How right he was.

Although Madison initially felt that the inclusion of a bill of rights in the originally ratified Constitution was unnecessary to its success, Thomas Jefferson persuaded him that "a bill of rights is what the people are entitled to against every government on earth, general or particular, & what no just government should refuse, or rest on inferences."

The Bill of Rights drafted by Madison—the first ten amendments to the Constitution—was a document so revolutionary at the time that it would come to be viewed as the epitome of American liberty. The rights of the people reflected in those ten amendments encapsulated much of Madison's views about government, the corrupting influence of power, and the need for safeguards against tyranny.

Madison's writings speak volumes to the present constitutional crisis in the country.

Read them and weep.

“The accumulation of all powers, Legislative, Executive, and Judiciary, in the same hands, whether of one, a few, or many, and whether hereditary, self-appointed, or elective, may justly be pronounced the very definition of tyranny.” — James Madison

“The people are the only legitimate fountain of power, and it is from them that the constitutional charter, under which the several branches of government hold their power, is derived.” — James Madison

“If men were angels, no government would be necessary. If angels were to govern men, neither external nor internal controls on government would be necessary. In framing a government which is to be administered by men over men, the great difficulty lies in this: you must first enable the government to control the governed; and in the next place oblige it to control itself.” — James Madison

“A standing military force, with an overgrown Executive will not long be safe companions to liberty. The means of defence against foreign danger have been always the instruments of tyranny at home.” — James Madison

“Wherever the real power in a Government lies, there is the danger of oppression.” — James Madison

“Knowledge will forever govern ignorance: And a people who mean to be their own Governors, must arm themselves with the power which knowledge gives.” — James Madison

“I believe there are more instances of the abridgement of the freedom of the people by gradual and silent encroachments of those in power than by violent and sudden usurpations.” — James Madison

In the years since the founders laid their lives on the line to pursue the dream of individual freedom and self-government, big government has grown bigger and the rights of the citizenry have grown smaller.

However, there are certain principles—principles that every American should know—which undergird the American system of government and form the basis of our freedoms.

The following seven principles are a good starting point for understanding what free government is really all about.

First, the maxim that power corrupts is an absolute truth. Realizing this, those who drafted the Constitution and the Bill of Rights held one principle sacrosanct: a distrust of all who hold governmental power. As James Madison proclaimed, “All men having power ought to be distrusted to a certain degree.” Moreover, in questions of power, Thomas Jefferson warned, “Let no more be heard of confidence in man, but bind him down from mischief by the chains of the Constitution.” As such, those who drafted our founding documents would see today’s government as an out-of-control, unmanageable beast.

The second principle is that governments primarily exist to secure rights, an idea that is central to constitutionalism. In appointing the government as the guardian of the people’s rights, the people give it only certain, enumerated powers, which are laid out in a written constitution. The idea of a written constitution actualizes the two great themes of the

Declaration of Independence: consent and protection of equal rights. Thus, the purpose of constitutionalism is to limit governmental power and ensure that the government performs its basic function: to preserve and protect our rights, especially our unalienable rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, and our civil liberties. Unfortunately, the government today has discarded this principle and now sees itself as our master, not our servant. The obvious next step, unless we act soon, is tyranny.

The third principle revolves around the belief that no one is above the law, not even those who make the law. This is termed rule of law. Richard Nixon's statement, "When the President does it, that means it is not illegal," would have been an anathema to the Framers of the Constitution. If all people possess equal rights, the people who live under the laws must be allowed to participate in making those laws. By that same token, those who make the laws must live under the laws they make.

Fourth, separation of powers ensures that no single authority is entrusted with all the powers of government. People are not perfect, whether they are in government or out of it. As history makes clear, those in power tend to abuse it. The government is thus divided into three co-equal branches: legislative, executive and judicial. Placing all three powers in the same branch of government was considered the very definition of tyranny. The fact that the president today has dictatorial powers would have been considered an offense to every principle for which the Framers took their revolutionary stand.

Fifth, a system of checks and balances, essential if a constitutional government is to succeed, strengthens the separation of powers and prevents legislative despotism. Such checks and balances include dividing Congress into two houses, with different constituencies, term lengths, sizes and functions; granting the president a limited veto power over congressional legislation; and appointing an independent judiciary capable of reviewing ordinary legislation in light of the written Constitution, which is referred to as "judicial review." The Framers feared that Congress could abuse its powers and potentially emerge as the tyrannous branch because it had the power to tax. But they did not anticipate the emergence of presidential powers as they have come to dominate modern government or the inordinate influence of corporate powers on governmental decision-making. Indeed, as recent academic studies now indicate, we are now ruled by a monied oligarchy that serves itself and not "we the people."

Sixth, representation allows the people to have a voice in government by sending elected representatives to do their bidding while avoiding the need of each and every citizen to vote on every issue considered by government. In a country as large as the United States, it is not feasible to have direct participation in governmental affairs. Hence, we have a representative government. If the people don't agree with how their representatives are conducting themselves, they can and should vote them out. However, as the citizenry has grown lazy and been distracted by the entertainment spectacles of modern society, government bureaucrats churn out numerous laws each year resulting in average citizens being rendered lawbreakers and jailed for what used to be considered normal behavior.

Finally, federalism is yet another constitutional device to limit the power of government by dividing power and, thus, preventing tyranny. In America, the levels of government generally break down into federal, state and local branches (which further divide into counties and towns or cities). Because local and particular interests differ from place to place, such interests are better handled at a more intimate level by local governments, not a bureaucratic national government. Remarking on the benefits of the American tradition of

local self-government in the 1830s, the French historian Alexis de Tocqueville observed: “Local institutions are to liberty what primary schools are to science; they put it within the people’s reach; they teach people to appreciate its peaceful enjoyment and accustom them to make use of it. Without local institutions a nation may give itself a free government, but it has not got the spirit of liberty.”

These seven vital principles have been largely forgotten in recent years, obscured by the haze of a centralized government, a citizenry that no longer thinks analytically, and schools that don’t adequately teach our young people about their history and their rights.

Yet here’s the rub: while Americans wander about in their brainwashed states, their “government of the people, by the people and for the people” has largely been taken away from them.

The answer: get un-brainwashed.

Learn your rights.

Stand up for the founding principles.

Make your voice and your vote count for more than just political posturing.

Never cease to vociferously protest the erosion of your freedoms at the local and national level.

Most of all, do these things today.

If we wait until the votes have all been counted or hang our hopes on our particular candidate to win and fix what’s wrong with the country, “we the people” will continue to lose.

Whether we ever realize it not, the enemy is not across party lines, as they would have us believe. It has us surrounded on all sides.

Even so, we’re not yet defeated.

We could still overcome our oppressors if we cared enough to join forces and launch a militant nonviolent revolution—a people’s revolution that starts locally and trickles upwards—but that will take some doing.

It will mean turning our backs on the political jousting contests taking place at all levels of government and rejecting their appointed jesters as false prophets. It will mean not allowing ourselves to be corralled like cattle and branded with political labels that have no meaning anymore. It will mean recognizing that all the evils that surround us today—endless wars, drone strikes, invasive surveillance, militarized police, poverty, asset forfeiture schemes, overcriminalization, etc.—are not of our making but came about as a way to control and profit from us.

It will mean “[voting with our feet](#)” through sustained, mass civil disobedience.

Ultimately, as I make clear in my book [Battlefield America: The War on the American People](#) and in its fictional counterpart [The Erik Blair Diaries](#), it will mean refusing to be divided, one

against each other, by politics and instead uniting behind the only distinction that has ever mattered: “we the people” against tyranny.

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This article was originally published on [The Rutherford Institute](#).

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