



President George Washington

“Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, *religion* and *morality* are indispensable supports. In vain would that man *claim the tribute of patriotism* who should labor to subvert these great pillars of human happiness... The politician and the pious man ought to *respect* and *cherish* them...”

Washington's
Farewell Address

What Does It Mean to Be American?

Written by Aaron Ferguson

Several years ago, I visited Washington D.C. As an American citizen, there are few places that are better to stir up one's patriotic passions. Like a good American, I wanted to see the *Declaration of Independence*, the *Constitution*, and the *Bill of Rights*, so I made a trip to the National Archives. I saw the phrase in the *Declaration*, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal...”

From there, I walked across the plaza to the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History. In one of the wings there was a large exhibit dedicated to Darwin entitled, “The Evolution of Evolution.” The wing praised his ideas for the origin of our species and extolled the unfounded virtues of natural selection. It was not an exhibit that I expected to see in a nation built on creationism.

Who Are We?

I left the Smithsonian deeply saddened. We protect a document under lock and key, in a building with metal detectors and armed guards, a document that gives evidence of our values; but, we dedicate a wing to the development of an idea that is the opposite of our beginning, a theory that is not at all self-evident, because it has no evidence at all to support it.

Are we confused or just ignorant? Why are we spending millions of dollars to enshrine a lie when that big piece of paper from 1776 tells us a truth that is self-evident? That's when it hit me. We are not confused. *We're trying to hide something, our heritage, our true identity.*

As I have witnessed the dissolution of our Republic, it has caused me frustration and heartache. *As Americans, we condone philosophies and activities that are, at their core, un-American.* What do I mean? Before I can explain the things that are not American, I must first define what it means *to be American.*

Just as many Christians don't know what it means *to be Christian*, so also many Americans don't know what it means *to be American.* The definition of American entails more than being born here, living here, or becoming a citizen. It also entails more than simply loving this great land or being willing to fight or die for it.

National Archives



What Does It *Mean* to Be *American*?



Declaration of Independence

“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 *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.

“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, 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 affect their safety and happiness.”

Americanism

The definition of American is comprised of elements that I will call *Americanism*. I realize that term is viewed by many in a negative light. They have been taught that Americanism refers to rugged individualism, greedy profiteering, stealing land, warmongering, or taking advantage of others. The term *Americanism*, like many of our words today, has been redefined by those who despise our heritage. I will show you that *none of these characteristics is American at all*. In fact, they contradict the heart of what it means to be American.

Americanism is a set of ideas. Thus, *to be American is to embrace those ideas that are unique to our country*. They are ideas that have made the United States distinct among the nations of history. In 1831, a Frenchman named Alexis de Tocqueville visited the U.S.; he remarked, “The position of the Americans is *quite exceptional*. It may be believed that no people will ever be placed in a similar one” (*Democracy in America*). This objective observer recognized that *Americanism is exceptional*.

Historian David Barton defines America's exceptionalism as “the unprecedented stability, freedom, and prosperity that is the result of the institutions and policies produced by a unique governing philosophy” (*Exceptional*). Notice that our stability, freedom, and prosperity were produced by our institutions and policies; but, that which produced our institutions and policies was our “unique governing philosophy.” The *fruit* of our national tree is the product of its *roots*. What, then, are those roots that produced such fruit?

The Root of the Fruit

The roots of America's exceptionalism are the principles upon which our nation was founded. What are those principles, and where can they be found? While American fundamentals are replete in the papers and publications of our founding era, they are highlighted in four primary documents – the *Declaration of Independence*, the *Constitution of the United States*, the *Bill of Rights*, and George Washington's *Farewell Address*.

Of these documents, the principles are most concisely summarized in our nation's birth certificate – the *Declaration of Independence*. For a brief understanding of Americanism, let's begin there. We will consider five fundamentals unique to Americanism. The *Constitution*, *Bill of Rights*, and *Farewell Address* reflect these principles. They are identified in the first 182 words of the *Declaration* (written in the left margin).

The Creator

The first American principle is that *all men are created equal*. Thus, to be American is to acknowledge the reality of the Creator. That means for our nation to deny or reject the existence of the Creator or to hold to unfounded theories of man's existence is fundamentally un-American. It defies our birth certificate!

The acknowledgment of the Creator is significant for several reasons. First, it affirms that *God preceded man*. God was not created by man, but man was created by God. Second, to acknowledge the Creator is to recognize that *there is a*

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higher power than man. Third, since God is the higher power and man was created by Him, then it naturally follows that *man is accountable to Him.* Fourth, the fact that all men are a work of this divine Creator *makes them equals.* Anyone who promotes inequality by way of gender, color, ethnicity, social status, or any other reason, is promoting an idea which is blatantly un-American. *We are equals before God.*

Natural Law

The second principle is this – *our institutions are based on the Laws of Nature.* That is the term the Founders used for the laws of God, which all men instinctively know. They are branded on our conscience. Why does that matter? First, as God is our Creator and higher power, and as all men are accountable to Him, *God makes the rules; His laws are supreme.* Second, His laws are not to be offended, by men or nations, *without consequences.* Third, because He is the all-wise Creator and Sovereign, and as He knows best how to establish order, peace, and prosperity, *those who would build a society upon His divine laws would inherit His favor and blessings.* Fourth, under God's pure and immutable laws, *all men are united and measured by one standard,* thus producing an enduring stability and true justice for all people.

Where do we find the Laws of Nature? Though all men know them intuitively, because of conscience (every man knows it is wrong to lie, cheat, steal and murder), God has given us His moral law in the *Ten Commandments* and the teachings of Jesus. In these, *we have the best system of morality in history.* No other code has pro-

duced more peace, prosperity, or liberty. Therefore, to be American would be to *ensure that our laws compliment rather than contradict God's laws.* To replace or reject His laws would be to elevate ourselves above God, a pathway that has, historically, led to death (*Proverbs 14:12*).

Unalienable Rights

The third principle is that *our rights come from God not man.* The Founders called them “unalienable rights,” given to men by their Maker, antecedent to any human authority, and which no man can give or take away. If our rights were given to us by men (i.e. government), then *it would follow that we would only retain those rights at their pleasure.* Therefore, any leader or institution that infringes upon our rights is committing an act that is un-American.

Like our conscience, *rights are inherent.* All men are created by God, made in His image. Therefore, every person has value, meaning, and purpose; and every person has rights to be protected, no matter what his age, gender, color, ethnicity, etc. *To enslave one person is to threaten the rights of all people.* In America, we preserve our God-given rights!

Purpose of Government

The fourth principle is that *the purpose of civil government is to protect our rights.* In the *Declaration*, it states, “that to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men.” Notice two things here. Our rights are antecedent to government, meaning that they existed before government existed; and, civil governments are instituted *by men for men.* Abraham Lincoln



Alexis de Tocqueville

“Upon my arrival in the United States, the religious aspect of the country was the first thing that struck my attention; the longer I stayed, the more I perceived the great political consequences resulting from this new state of things. *Religion in America must be regarded as the foremost of the political institutions* of that country... I do not know whether all Americans have a sincere faith in their religion, for who can search the human heart? But, I am certain that *they hold it to be indispensable to the maintenance of republican institutions.* This opinion is not peculiar to a class of citizens or a party, but it belongs to the whole nation, to every rank of society.

“I sought for the key to the greatness and genius of America... Not until I went into the churches of America and heard her pulpits, aflame with righteousness, did I understand the secret of her genius and power. America is great because America is good; and, *if America ever ceases to be good, America will cease to be great.*”

Democracy in America

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American or Un-American?

Our spiritual enemy, who knows that this country is the best example of a godly civilization, has done *all within his power to undermine our principles*. Most hurtful has been his attack on our public recognition of the Creator. In our schools and universities, we teach the atheist tenets of secular humanism, which are un-American. We have embraced the doctrines of Darwinian evolution; but, if men are accidents of nature, can they have inherent rights and value? How can they? Rights must then come from another place, like civil government. But wait, that too is un-American!

What about the Court's decision to reject the *Ten Commandments* or the concept that man's person and possessions belong to the State, that the government has a right to take, do, and give whatever it wants? How about the invasion of a baby's right to live, the censoring of free speech, the threat to remove our right to self-defense, or religious liberty? What about forcing citizens to pay into limitless tax and social programs, to buy certain healthcare packages, or to tolerate activities against their conscience? Are these American ideas? Of course not!

Our education system, sadly, is doing what it was designed to do -- *produce graduates that are ignorant of true Americanism*. Our political leaders, who swear to uphold American values, have, for decades, condoned activities that are un-American; and, as a result, liberty is being supplanted by tyranny and slavery. *If these ideas are un-American, are they not by nature anti-American?*

affirmed this principle in his *Gettysburg Address*, when he described our federal government as “of the people, by the people, and for the people.”

Civil government is a divine institution but its structure is a creature of the people, meaning that under God, the people are the highest authority, and that which they construct is under their control. In other words, *civil government was made for man; man was not made for civil government*. Furthermore, *civil government is the servant, not the master, of the people*. It exists to protect their rights and liberties, not to prohibit them. When we idolize the State (or subject our lives to its unfettered control), then we are defying an American principle. Therefore, ideas like Communism, socialism, fascism, progressivism, and welfarism are un-American.

Limited Government

The fifth principle is that *for liberty to last, civil government must be limited*. We know that men are imperfect and corrupt, and that *no one who has power should be trusted*. With power, men must have accountability. Since civil government is comprised of men, it tends to be corrupt and abusive. It also tends to expand and gain more control. Therefore, *civil government must be kept in check*, particularly by those who establish it.

The way that the American people restricted their civil government was by the *Constitution*. While our officials are given power, that power is separated into three branches and, then, limited in its scope. Each branch has narrow responsibilities.

Everything outside of its jurisdiction is to be left to the people and their states.

Even then, our officials are representatives of the people, elected to do their will and none other. As all men are equals, all men are to be represented; and *equals do not rule equals without their consent*. Thus, any proposed legislation, union, or national direction must be representative, ratified not coerced.

The bottom line is that *a limited civil government allows for a greater degree of liberty and individual self-government*, while an ever-expanding civil government assumes more control and, thus, consumes more of the people's rights and liberties. *No human government can be trusted*; it must be kept in line with its original purposes.

American in Name Only

Thomas Jefferson penned the *Declaration of Independence*. He wrote, in a letter to Henry Lee, that it was “intended to be *an expression of the American mind*.” To be American, then, is to embrace the ideas expressed in that document, *ideas that are not of man but of God*. However, many people feign the name “American” while *despising everything America stands for*. They won't acknowledge the Creator, because they don't want to admit that they are accountable to Him. *Without Him in the picture, they can play His role and call the shots, molding America into their image*. That image is what we are seeing today – division, disorder, tyranny, and oppression. *United by our true identity, we can be free*; but, if we replace *true Americanism* with secular ideals, then *we will be enslaved*.