



## THE RIGHTS AND OBLIGATIONS OF LIBERTY

"No country upon earth ever had it more in its power to attain these blessings than United America. Wondrously strange, then, and much to be regretted indeed would it be, were we to neglect the means and to depart from the road which Providence has pointed us to so plainly; I cannot believe it will ever come to pass." --George Washington

In a recent discussion with a colleague, I lamented the fact that too few American citizens understand their obligation, before all others, to support and defend our Constitution, much less, engender the ability to do so. She responded that, though she considered herself a conservative (mostly because she identifies closely with some conservative principles), understanding our Constitution was not her "passion."



My friend holds degrees from the nation's finest academic institutions and is professional in all her endeavors. However, like most Americans under 50 years of age, she never had a basic civics course and consequently has a difficult time articulating even the most fundamental constitutional principles.

The fact is, as Americans, we not only enjoy the rights affirmed by our Constitution, we have *obligations* to understand the mechanics of that affirmation in order to sustain it for our generation and those to come.

No matter what our calling, our occupation or our passion, we have a debt and duty as citizens to both learn about and support our Constitution, and we are

obliged to do so above and before all other pursuits, for without constitutional Rule of Law, there *are* no other pursuits.

Of course, because ignorance is institutionalized by most government education systems, including those of "higher learning," and because ignorance is apparently considered virtuous by some social subcultures, there is little probability that a too large portion of Americans will ever comprehend this obligation, much less honor it.

Fortunately, in the words of Samuel Adams, "It does not take a majority to prevail ... but rather an irate, tireless minority, keen on setting brushfires of freedom in the minds of men."

But, what of those like my well-educated colleague, who is among America's "best and brightest", who are, however, uninformed about their obligations as citizens of the greatest experiment in human history? What of those who, as one consequence of enjoying the highest standard of living on the planet, tend to take our legacy of liberty for granted and have become complacent about its attendant responsibilities?

George Washington noted at the conclusion of the American Revolution, "The value of liberty was thus enhanced in our estimation by the difficulty of its attainment, and the worth of characters appreciated by the trial of adversity."

These days, most Americans believe that liberty is their birthright. They enjoy the (relative) personal freedom of our great society but forget the corresponding personal responsibility. For most of us have never had to fight for liberty and, thus, have little concept of its value or any sense of gratitude for its accumulated cost.

In his 1833 Commentaries on the Constitution, Justice Joseph Story wrote, "Let the American youth never forget, that they possess a noble inheritance, bought by the toils, and sufferings, and blood of their ancestors; and capacity, if wisely improved, and faithfully guarded, of transmitting to their latest posterity all the substantial blessings of life, the peaceful enjoyment of liberty, property, religion, and independence."

Likewise, John Adams noted, "Liberty cannot be preserved without a general knowledge among the people, who have a right, from the frame of their nature, to knowledge, as their great Creator, who does nothing in vain, has given them understandings, and a desire to know..." He added, "Wisdom and knowledge, as well as virtue, diffused generally among the body of the people, [are] necessary for the preservation of their rights and liberties."

To that end, James Madison wrote, "What spectacle can be more edifying or more seasonable, than that of Liberty and Learning, each leaning on the other for their mutual and surest support?"

James Wilson, a signer of the Declaration of Independence and one of George Washington's original Supreme Court justices, put it most concisely: "Law and liberty cannot rationally become the objects of our love, unless they first become the objects of our knowledge."

Unfortunately, this wisdom has fallen upon deaf ears. The popular support of the current Democrat hegemony is evidence aplenty of just how uninformed the majority of Americans are regarding their Constitution and the Rule of Law.

That most erudite of contemporary economists, Walter E. Williams, wrote this week in [American Idea](#), "At the heart of the American idea is the deep distrust and suspicion the founders of our nation had for government, distrust and suspicion not shared as much by today's Americans. Some of the founders' distrust is seen in our Constitution's language such as Congress shall not: abridge, infringe, deny, disparage,

violate and deny. ... Other founder distrust for government is found in the Constitution's separation of powers, checks and balances and the several anti-majoritarian provisions such as the Electoral College and the requirement that three-quarters of state legislatures ratify changes in the Constitution."

However, writes Williams, "The three branches of our federal government are no longer bound by the Constitution as the framers envisioned and what is worse is American ignorance and acceptance of such rogue behavior. ... The American people, along with our elected representatives, whether they're Republicans or Democrats, care less about what is and what is not permissible under our Constitution. They think Congress has the right to do anything upon which they can secure a majority vote, whether they have the constitutional or moral authority to do so or not."

Williams concludes, "We are losing what's made our country great. Instead of moving toward greater liberty, we're moving toward greater government control of our lives."

Indeed, I was speaking with another colleague recently who is a Slovak national -- he was a "Young Pioneer" raised under Communist tyranny in Czechoslovakia. He has spent five years undergoing the rigors required to become a U.S. citizen (I suggested he should have simply walked across the Mexican border instead), yet he questions his pursuit of citizenship now that the U.S. is rapidly devolving into the sort of tyrannical regime he left behind.

Natural-born Americans have never experienced such a regime, and so we proceed headlong into that authoritarian abyss like so many lemmings following the ignoble piper, [Barack Hussein Obama, mmm, mmm, mmm](#).

Of such pipers, Alexander Hamilton wrote, "Of those men who have overturned the liberties of republics, the greatest number have begun their career by paying an obsequious court to the people, commencing demagogues and ending tyrants."

Regarding the wayward affections for socialism of Obama's minions, Washington wrote, "[W]e ought to deprecate the hazard attending ardent and susceptible minds, from being too strongly, and too early prepossessed in favor of other political systems, before they are capable of appreciating their own."

"If a nation expects to be ignorant -- and free," wrote Thomas Jefferson, "it expects what never was and never will be."

But, ignorance is bliss -- at least until it runs head-on into reality, and reality is just around the corner.

Samuel Adams assured us that, "No people will tamely surrender their Liberties, nor can any be easily subdued, when knowledge is diffused and Virtue is preserved. On the contrary, when People are universally ignorant, and debauched in their manners, they will sink under their own weight without the Aid of foreign Invaders."

It is for this reason that *The Patriot* launched the [Essential Liberty Project](#) on Constitution Day last.

[Essential Liberty](#) is the most cost effective means for educating Americans of all ages and all walks of life about the proper context for understanding our Constitution and the liberty it preserves and safeguards.

We have created through Essential Liberty a foundation to accomplish the most important task we have ever undertaken. Our mission is based on the principles outlined in the [Legacy of American Liberty](#) and will utilize a whole series of educational tools to accomplish this mission.

I will continue to write concerning the Essential Liberty Project in the next couple of months, as we move to full throttle for 2010.

We must never forget our debt of obligation to those generations of American Patriots who have extended, at great cost in their fortunes and lives, the legacy of liberty to us, and we must remain steadfast and irrevocably committed with *our* fortunes and lives to extend that legacy to our posterity.