

The Founding Fathers Knew Property Rights Were Essential to Freedom and Prosperity

When our Founders wrote the Declaration of Independence, they knew property rights were essential to freedom and prosperity.

Under the feudal system, kings granted property to workers in turn for outstanding service. But the crown never completely surrendered its ownership.

That is why our Declaration protects the people from erratic governments by turning to God as the origin for our rights.

In the 1700s, people understood God and the Bible. The New England Primer, the main student textbook, contained passages from the King James Bible. Teachers used Bible verses and the 10 Commandments to teach children to read.

When the Founders proclaimed that our rights came from our Creator, no future president or governing body could ever change, or rescind them, because they did not render them.

This act ensured that our property rights were free from seizure. If we paid attention.

To our Founding Fathers, property meant more than land. As James Madison explained in his 1792 treatise, *Property*, the term “embraces everything to which a man may attach a value and have a right ...”

He goes on to list merchandise, money, opinions, free communication of opinions, religious opinions and the practice dictated by them, personal safety and liberty, the free use of your faculties and the free choice of the objects upon which

to use your faculties.

Over the centuries, Americans have forgotten the meaning of property rights, and of God's role in their protection.

Today we see the consequences of that lapse.

- The federal government uses conservation easements to confiscate landowners' development rights in perpetuity, while offering limited payments in return.
- HUD's "upward mobility" program resettles low-income families into affluent areas, often against their will, and with no choice for the current homeowners in the targeted locations.
- The Fish and Wildlife Service deemed themselves the authority to strip landowners' rights by declaring personal property a natural habitat, even if no protected species currently lives there or even can live there.

Today Americans believe that issues like climate change and discrimination transcend property rights. That it is selfish to think only of your rights and that global citizens must place humankind's good before personal rights.

So divorced are we from understanding property rights that millions of Americans unquestioningly applaud their loss as insignificant, compassionate or even necessary.

Madison wrote that:

It "is not a just government ... where the property which a man has in his personal safety and personal liberty, is violated by arbitrary seizures of one class of citizens for the service of the rest."

Yet in direct violation of our founders' intent, programs like Social Security seize up to 15 percent of workers' earnings and redistribute them according to legislative whim.

- The Affordable Care Act uses hidden taxes, collected in the name of healthcare, to snatch the property of one individual and redirect it to another.
- Our founders did not use the term property rights in the Declaration of Independence. Instead, they wrote of "Life, Liberty and the pursuit Happiness."

To the authors, liberty and property were synonymous. They understood that the ownership of property was the only means to liberty and freedom. If people could not own property, they were condemned to slavery.

An example illustrates what our Founders meant:

Imagine you visit your internist's office for a persistent cough. She asks you to complete a new form containing questions about your mental health, private thoughts, sexual activities and whether or not you own a firearm. Stunned, you complain the questions are invasive and not even related to your cough. Your physician agrees.

"But, under the Affordable Care Act," she says, "I must ask these questions and enter the information into our Electronic Medical Records that are shared with the Department of Health and Human Services."

"If you don't complete the form," she explains, "Medicare will not fully reimburse me for your visit."

You both are in a bind doing something neither wants. If you do own a gun, but feel it is none of the doctor's or the government's business, then you may decide to falsify the form to keep your privacy.

Either way, your doctor's income and your personal information are each your private property.

The unknown is what other restrictions the government will apply. It might increase your healthcare deductible because

the government decides you can afford it or implement a new tax on high premium policies to raise more revenue.

By violating your property rights, the government now controls your behavior. When government controls what you own and how you act, you become its servant.

Our founders saw this problem more than 200 years ago. They understood the propensity of governments to confiscate property rights; both to amass wealth and power for the political class, and to keep the population dependent. That is why they wrote:

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.

In the 18th century, people understood the permanency of the term, "endowed by their Creator." Students learned an appreciation for the stability of God's word in public classrooms.

Over the years teaching changed. Public schools decreasingly referenced God, and religion became an intellectual exercise forbidden in the public square.

- In 1872's *Minor v. Board of Ed*, the Ohio Supreme Court, following four years of court challenges often referred to as the Cincinnati Bible Wars, removed Bible readings from the school day.
- John Dewey's progressive approach to education in the early 20th century had an indelible impact on religion in public schools. Dewey, a proponent of secular humanism, believed it was possible to be ethical and moral without religion and that God was not omnipotent.
- The Supreme Court in 1962 in *Engel v. Vitale* and in 1963, *Abington School District v. Schempp*, issued similar decisions that school prayer violated the first

amendment.

Schoolchildren soon forgot why the Creator is so critical to our rights.

The excision of God from classrooms may be why in 2001, Barack Obama revealed his ignorance of Natural Law and our founding documents when he opined:

“[The Constitution] says what the states can’t do to you. Says what the federal government can’t do to you, but doesn’t say what the federal government or state government must do on your behalf.”

Obama missed that our Creator already endowed us with our basic rights and requirements to respect one another’s rights. Our founding documents are about protecting “we the people” from the government, not adding responsibilities on the people’s behalf.

To echo James Madison’s words:

Government is instituted to protect property of every sort...

Throughout thousands of years of history, governments have never changed. Whether ancient Egypt, the European Union or the Obama presidency, those in power want more. For more than 100 years, our government has sought to trivialize God’s role in our rights and presence in our schools to open the doorway for that power.

Perhaps it is time for another “fundamental transformation” in our classrooms. After all, we are already “endowed by our Creator” with that “unalienable right.” {eoa}

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