

Founders, Framers, and Freedom: Fourth of July 2010: John Witherspoon, NJ; Benjamin Franklin, PA; Thomas Jefferson, VA; the Founders vis-à-vis Today's Politicians**New Jersey: John Witherspoon:**

John Witherspoon was born in the parish of Yester, near Edinburgh, Scotland, on the fifth of February, 1722. He was a lineal descendant of the great reformer, John Knox. His father was a minister in the Scottish church, at Yester, and was greatly beloved. He took great pains to have the early education of his son based upon sound moral and religious principles, and early determined to fit him for the gospel ministry. His primary education was received in a school at Haddington, and at the age of fourteen years he was placed in the University of Edinburgh. He was a very diligent student, and, to the delight of his father, his mind was specially directed toward sacred literature. He went through a regular theological course of study, and at the age of twenty-two years he graduated, a licensed preacher (1744).

In 1766 he was invited, by a unanimous vote of the trustees of New Jersey College, to become its president, but this, too, he declined, partly on account of the unwillingness of his wife to leave the land of her nativity. But being strongly urged by Richard Stockton (afterward a fellow signer of the Declaration), then on a visit to that country, he accepted the appointment, and sailed for America. He arrived at Princeton with his family, in August 1768, and on the seventeenth of that month he was inaugurated president of the College.

When the British army invaded New Jersey, the College at Princeton was broken up, and the extensive knowledge of Dr. Witherspoon was called into play in a vastly different arena. He was called upon early in 1776, to assist in the formation of a new Constitution for New Jersey, and his patriotic sentiments and sound judgment were there so conspicuous that in June of that year, he was elected a delegate to the General Congress. He had already formed a decided opinion in favor of Independence, and he gave his support to the resolution declaring the States free forever.

He took his seat in Congress, on the twenty-ninth of June, 1776. On the first of July, when the subject of the Declaration of Independence was discussed, a distinguished member remarked, that "the people are not ripe for a Declaration of Independence." Doctor Witherspoon observed: "In my judgment, sir, we are not only ripe, but rotting." On the second of August, 1776, he affixed his signature to the Declaration.

About two years before his death, he lost his eyesight, yet his ministerial duties were not relinquished. Aided by the guiding hand of another, he would ascend the pulpit, and with all the fervor of his prime and vigor, break the Bread of Life to the eager listeners to his message.

As a theological writer, Doctor Witherspoon had few superiors, and as a statesman he held the first rank. In him were centred the social elements of an upright citizen, a fond parent, a just tutor, and humble Christian; and when, on the tenth of November, 1794, at the age of nearly seventy-three years, his useful life closed, it was widely felt that a "great man had fallen in Israel."

Pennsylvania: Benjamin Franklin:

Benjamin Franklin was born in Boston, Massachusetts, on the seventeenth day of January, 1706. His father was a true Puritan, and emigrated hither from England, in 1682.

The parents of Benjamin wished him to be a minister of the gospel, and they began to educate him with that end in view, but their slender means were not adequate for the object, and the intention was abandoned. He was kept at a common school for a few years, and then taken into the service of his father and (later) put under the instruction of an elder brother, who was a printer. There he continued until he became quite proficient, and all the while he was remarkable for his studiousness, seldom spending an hour from his books, in idle amusement.

At length the harmony between himself and brother was interrupted, and he left his service and went on board of a vessel in the harbor, bound for New York. He proceeded on foot to Philadelphia, where he arrived on a Sabbath morning. He was then but seventeen years old, friendless and alone, with but a single dollar in his pocket. He soon found employment as compositor [typesetter] in one of the two printing establishments then in Philadelphia, and was at once noticed and esteemed by his employers, for his industry and studious habits.

In 1732, Franklin began his useful annual, called "Poor Richard's Almanac." It was widely circulated in the Colonies, and in England, and was translated into several Continental languages of Europe. By constant, persevering study, he acquired a knowledge of the Latin, French, Spanish, and Italian languages. He wrote many pamphlets containing essays upon popular subjects, which were read with avidity, and made him very popular. With his popularity, his business increased, and his pecuniary [financial] circumstances became easy in a few years.

In 1734, he was appointed government printer for Pennsylvania, and in 1736 he received the appointment of Clerk of the General Assembly. The next year he was made postmaster of Philadelphia. The income arising from these offices, and from his business, relieved him from constant drudgery, and left him leisure for philosophical pursuits, and the advancement of schemes for the public good.

He organized fire companies in Philadelphia, the first on the Continent, and he devised means for paving the streets and lighting the city with gas. In 1742, he published a treatise on the improvement of chimneys, and invented the celebrated stove which bears his name. This invention he gave to the public.

In 1744 he was elected a member of the General Assembly, and was annually re-elected, for ten consecutive years. It was about this time that he made some of his philosophical discoveries, upon the mysterious wings of which his fame spread world-wide.

His attention was powerfully drawn to the subject of electricity, in consequence of some experiments which had been exhibited by Europeans in Boston; and he not only repeated them all with success, but he was led to such investigations of the nature and effects of electricity, as to discover many astounding truths such as the identity of lightning and the electrical spark of a machine.

In 1757, Franklin was sent by the General Assembly of the Province, to London, as its counsel in a dispute with the governor; and he so managed the case as to obtain a verdict for the Assembly.

In 1764, he was again sent to England as agent for the Colony and he was there when the Stamp Act was passed, loudly and boldly protesting against it. His opinions had great weight there; and, having been appointed agent for several of the Colonies, the eyes of statesmen at home and abroad were turned anxiously to him, as the storm of the Revolution rapidly gathered in dark and threatening clouds. He labored assiduously to effect conciliation, and he did much to arrest for a long time the blow that finally severed the Colonies from the mother country. Satisfied at length that war was inevitable, he returned home in 1775, and was at once elected a delegate to the General Congress. He was again elected in 1776, and was one of the committed appointed to draft a Declaration of Independence, voted for its adoption, and signed it on the second of August.

In 1787, he was in the Convention which framed the present Constitution of the United States, and this was the last public duty he performed. The gout and stone, with which he had been afflicted many years, terminated his life on the seventeenth day of April, 1790, in the eighty-fourth year of his age.

Congress directed a universal mourning throughout the United States for thirty days. In France, and indeed throughout Europe, the news of his death was received with profound grief. In the National Assembly of France, the eloquent [Comte de] Mirabeau \mē-ra-bō\ announced his death, and in a brief but brilliant eulogium, he used these words:

“Franklin is dead! The genius which gave freedom to America, and scattered torrents of light upon Europe, is returned to the bosom of the Divinity! The sage, whom two worlds claim; the man disputed by the history of the sciences, and the history of empires, holds, most undoubtedly, an elevated rank among the human species. Political cabinets have too long notified the death of those who were never great but in their funeral orations; the etiquette of courts have but too long sanctioned hypocritical grief. Nations ought only to mourn for their benefactors; the representatives of freemen ought never to recommend any other than the heroes of humanity to their homage.

“Antiquity would have elevated altars to that mortal, who, for the advantage of the human race, embracing both heaven and earth in his vast and extensive mind, knew how to subdue thunder and tyranny! Enlightened and free Europe at least owes its remembrance and its regrets, to one of the greatest men who has ever served the cause of philosophy and of liberty.”

Virginia: Thomas Jefferson:

Mr. Jefferson’s family was among the early British emigrants to Virginia. His ancestors came from Wales, from near the great Snowdon mountain.¹ His grandfather settled in Chesterfield, and had three sons, Thomas, Field, and Peter. The latter married Jane, daughter of Isham Randolph, of Goochland, of Scotch descent; and on the thirteenth of April, 1743, she became the mother of the subject of this sketch. They resided at that time at Shadwell, in Albemarle county, Virginia. Thomas was the eldest child. His father died when he was fourteen years old, leaving a widow and eight children – two sons, and six daughters.

¹ “**Snowdon** \snōd'-ēn\ or *Welsh* Yr Wyddfa \er'-wid'-fa\. Massif in Gwynedd \gwi'-neth\ county, northwest Wales; has five peaks, the highest 3560 feet being the highest mountain in Wales” (*Merriam-Webster’s Geographical Dictionary*, 3d ed., s.v.: “Snowdon.”)

He left a handsome estate to his family; and the lands, which he called Monticello \män-ta-che'-lō\, fell to Thomas where the latter always resided when not engaged in public duty, and where he lived at the time of his death.

Thomas entered a grammar school at the age of five years, and when nine years old he commenced the study of the classics with a Scotch clergyman named Douglas.

On the death of his father, the Reverend Mr. Maury became his preceptor [teacher]; and in the spring of 1760, he entered William and Mary College, where he remained two years. From Doctor William Small, a professor of mathematics in the college, he received his first philosophical teachings, and the bias of his mind concerning subjects of scientific investigation seemed to have received its initial impetus from that gentleman. Through his influence, in 1762, young Jefferson was admitted as a student-at-law in the office of George Wythe \with\, the intimate friend of Governor [Francis] Fauquier \faw'-kir\, at whose table our subject became a welcome guest.

In 1765, while yet a student, Jefferson heard the celebrated speech of Patrick Henry against the Stamp Act; and fired by its doctrines, he at once stood forth the avowed champion of American freedom. So manifest were his talents, that in 1769 he was elected a member of the Virginia Legislature, and became at once active and popular there. He filled that station until the period of the Revolution, when he was called to the performance of more exalted duties in the national council.

When the system of committees of correspondence was established in 1773, Mr. Jefferson was a member of the first committee in Virginia, and was very active with his pen. In 1774, his powerfully written pamphlet was published, called, "A Summary View of the Rights of British America." It was addressed to the king, and was published in England, under the auspices of Edmund Burke.

This pamphlet gave great offence to Lord Dunmore,² the royal governor of Virginia, who threatened to prosecute him for high treason. And because his associates in the Virginia Assembly sustained Jefferson, Dunmore dissolved it. They assembled in a private capacity, and grew up a remonstrance, which had a powerful effect upon the people. The governor perceived that his acts were futile, and he allowed the matter to rest.

Jefferson was elected a delegate to represent Virginia in the Continental Congress of 1775, and for several years he was one of the most efficient members of that body. He soon became distinguished among the men of talents there, although comparatively young; and when, in the succeeding year, a committee was appointed to draught a DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE, he was chosen one of the members. Although the youngest member of the committee, he was appointed chairman, and was requested by the others to draw up the instrument, which he did, and his draught was adopted, with a very few verbal amendments, on the fourth of July, 1776. This instrument forms an everlasting monument to his memory, and gives, by far, a wider range to the fame of his talents and patriotism, than eloquent panegyric or sculptured epitaph.

During the summer of 1776, he was elected to a seat in the Virginia Assembly, and, desirous of serving his own State, he resigned his seat in Congress and returned to Virginia.

² John Murray, 4th Earl of Dunmore. British administrator; governor of Virginia, 1771–76.

In 1796, he was the republican candidate for President, in opposition to John Adams. Mr. Adams succeeded, and Mr. Jefferson was elected Vice-President.³ In 1800, he was again nominated for President, and received a majority of votes over Mr. Adams.

Mr. Jefferson's administration continued eight years, he having been elected for a second term. The most prominent measure of his administration, was the purchase of Louisiana from France;⁴ the sending of an exploring company to the region of the Rocky mountains, and westward to the Pacific Ocean. This expedition was under the direction of Captains Meriwether Lewis and William Clarke [*sic*], and they made the toilsome overland journey from the Mississippi to the mouth of the Columbia River.

Meriwether Lewis. 1774–1809. American explorer, born Albemarle County, Virginia. Private secretary to President Jefferson (1801–03). Named by Jefferson to lead expedition to explore the Louisiana Purchase; selected William Clark as coleader. Lewis and Clark expedition went up the Missouri River to its source, crossed the Great Divide, and descended Columbia River to the Pacific Ocean; brought back valuable information on natural features of country, its flora, fauna, Indian tribes, etc. Governor of Louisiana Territory (1807–09).

William Clark. 1770–1838. Born Caroline County, Virginia. Invited (1803) by Capt. Meriwether Lewis to join with him in leading expedition to penetrate Louisiana Purchase and to Pacific Ocean, which left St. Louis (May 14, 1804), crossed continent, reached mouth of Columbia River (November 1805), returned by land, reached St. Louis (September 23, 1806). Superintendent of Indian affairs for Louisiana Territory (1807–21); governor of Missouri Territory (1813–21).⁵

In the spring of 1826, his bodily infirmities greatly increased, and in June he was confined wholly to his bed. About the first of July he seemed free from disease, and his friends had hopes of his recovery; but it was his own conviction that he should die, and he gave directions accordingly. On the third, he inquired the day of the month. On being told, he expressed an ardent desire to live until the next day, to breathe the air of the fiftieth anniversary of his country's independence.

His wish was granted: and on the morning of the fourth, after having expressed his gratitude to his friends and servants for their care, he said with a distinct voice, "I resign myself to my God, and my child to my country." These were his last words, and about noon on that glorious day he expired.

It was a most remarkable coincidence that two of the committee (Mr. Adams and Mr. Jefferson) who drew up the Declaration of Independence; who signed it; who successively held the office of Chief Magistrate, should have died at nearly the same hour on the fiftieth anniversary of that solemn act.

He was a little over eighty-three years of age at the time of his death. Mr. Jefferson's manner was simple but dignified, and his conversational powers were of the rarest value.

³ At that time, the candidate receiving the next highest number of votes to the one elected president, was vice president. The constitution, on that point, has since been altered.

⁴ The United States agreed to pay fifteen millions of dollars to France for Louisiana, an area of more than a million of square miles.

⁵ *Merriam-Webster's Biological Dictionary*, rev. ed., s.v.: "Lewis, Meriwether" and Clark, William."

He was exceedingly kind and benevolent, an indulgent master to his servants, liberal and friendly to his neighbors. He possessed remarkable equanimity of temper, and it is said he was never seen in a passion.

During his presidency, [Alexander von] Humboldt, a celebrated traveler, once visiting him, discovered in a newspaper upon his table, a vile and slanderous attack upon his character.

“Why do you not hang the man?” asked Humboldt.

“Put the paper in your pocket,” said Jefferson, with a smile, “and on your return to your country, if any one doubts the freedom of our press, show it to him, and tell him where you found it.”⁶

Were the men we have recognized this morning, and others who have unfortunately been left unmentioned, have had the prophetic insight to see into our nation’s twenty-first century, they would have, post haste, convened a Second Constitutional Convention and added laconic, forceful, and imperative addenda to protect us from the madness that presently threatens the tranquility of our Republic.

With the same sharpness of retort and eloquence of argument, they would have sealed the Constitution so tightly that no Progressive idealist bent on distorting its directives could have been successful and his very effort would have been the subject of a condemnatory amendment stripping him of further public service and the imputing to him public humiliation and embarrassment.

Such is not the case. Today we are witnessing the systematic destruction of the Constitution and the assertion that the Declaration of Independence has no real meaning or impact since it is not a legal document. Yet its claims ring true today as clearly as they did when the Liberty Bell tolled its passage in Philadelphia. See if you agree:

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.

⁶ Lossing, *Biographical Sketches of the Signers of the Declarations of American Independence*, 20–21; 27–30, 32; 44–46; 50–52; 71–73; 81–84; 105–109, 111; 174–77, 180–83.

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 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. 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. Such has been the patient Sufferance of the Colonies; and such is now the Necessity which constrains them to alter their former Systems of Government.⁷

The next scheduled opportunity to “throw off” of our present “Form of Government” is the second of November 2010. Until then, our duty before God is to continue our pursuit of truth so that Jesus Christ, Who controls history, will be responsive to our efforts and return our nation to its rightful station where life, liberty, and possession of property are again sacrosanct. May God almighty allow us to once more “Proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof.”

⁷ The Declaration of Independence, paragraphs 1–2.