

THOMAS JEFFERSON
WORDS OF WISDOM

The strongest reason for the people to retain the right to keep and bear arms is, as a last resort, to protect themselves against tyranny in government.

I would rather be exposed to the inconveniences attending too much liberty than to those attending too small a degree of it.

“Laws that forbid the carrying of arms...disarm only those who are neither inclined nor determined to commit crimes... Such laws make things worse for the assaulted and better for the assailants; they serve rather to encourage than to prevent homicides, for an unarmed man may be attacked with greater confidence than an armed man.”

The beauty of the Second Amendment is that it will not be needed until they try to take it.

The policy of the American government is to leave their citizens free, neither restraining nor aiding them in their pursuits.

No man has a natural right to commit aggression on the equal rights of another, and this is all from which the laws ought to restrain him.

To take from one because it is thought that his own industry and that of his father's has acquired too much, in order to spare to others, who, or whose fathers, have not exercised equal industry and skill, is to violate arbitrarily the first principle of association—the guarantee to every one of a free exercise of his industry and the fruits acquired by it.

I think myself that we have more machinery of government than is necessary, too many parasites living on the labor of the industrious. (*Back then!*)

When the people fear their government, there is tyranny; when the government fears the people, there is liberty.

I am not a friend to a very energetic government. It is always oppressive.

In matters of style, swim with the current;
In matters of principle, stand like a rock.

What country can preserve its liberties if its rulers are not warned from time to time that their people preserve the spirit of resistance?

The spirit of resistance to government is so valuable on certain occasions that I wish it to be always kept alive. It will often be exercised when wrong, but better so than not to be exercised at all.

The majority, oppressing an individual, is guilty of a crime, abuses its strength, and by acting on the law of the strongest breaks up the foundations of society.

When wrongs are pressed because it is believed they will be borne, resistance becomes morality.

Were we directed from Washington when to sow and when to reap, we should soon want bread.

The price of freedom is eternal vigilance.

God forbid we should ever be twenty years without such a rebellion. The people cannot be all, and always, well informed. The part which is wrong will be discontented, in proportion to the

importance of the facts they misconceive. If they remain quiet under such misconceptions, it is lethargy, the forerunner of death to the public liberty.... And what country can preserve its liberties, if its rulers are not warned from time to time, that this people preserve the spirit of resistance? Let them take arms. The remedy is to set them right as to the facts, pardon and pacify them. What signify a few lives lost in a century or two? The tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time, with the blood of patriots and tyrants. It is its natural manure.

Of liberty I would say that, in the whole plenitude of its extent, it is unobstructed action according to our will. But rightful liberty is unobstructed action according to our will within limits drawn around us by the equal rights of others. I do not add "within the limits of the law," because law is often but the tyrant's will, and always so when it violates the right of an individual.

It is strangely absurd to suppose that a million of human beings, collected together, are not under the same moral laws which bind each of them separately.

Liberty is the great parent of science and of virtue; and a nation will be great in both in proportion as it is free.

He who knows nothing is closer to the truth than he whose mind is filled with falsehoods and errors.

I predict future happiness for Americans if they can prevent the government from wasting the labors of the people under the pretense of taking care of them.

I have sworn on the altar of God eternal hostility against every form of tyranny over the mind of man.

I have never been able to conceive how any rational being could propose happiness to himself from the exercise of power over others.

To compel a man to furnish funds for the propagation of ideas he disbelieves and abhors is sinful and tyrannical.

In a government bottomed on the will of all, the...liberty of every individual citizen becomes interesting to all.

I'm a great believer in luck, and I find the harder I work the more I have of it.

Say nothing of my religion. It is known to God and myself alone. Its evidence before the world is to be sought in my life: if it has been honest and dutiful to society the religion which has regulated it cannot be a bad one.

The democracy will cease to exist when you take away from those who are willing to work and give to those who would not.

Most bad government has grown out of too much government.

Timid men prefer the calm of despotism to the tempestuous sea of liberty.

The two enemies of the people are criminals and government, so let us tie the second down with the chains of the Constitution so the second will not become the legalized version of the first.

A wise and frugal government, which shall restrain men from injuring one another, which shall leave them otherwise free to regulate their own pursuits of industry and improvement, and shall not take from the mouth of labor and bread it has earned. This is the sum of good government.

I never will, by any word or act, bow to the shrine of intolerance or admit a right of inquiry into the religious opinions of others.

Sometimes it is said that man cannot be trusted with the government of himself. Can he, then, be trusted with the government of others?

A free people [claim] their rights as derived from the laws of nature, and not as the gift of their chief magistrate.

The right of self-government does not comprehend the government of others.

An elective despotism was not the government we fought for.

History, in general, only informs us what bad government is.

If there is one principle more deeply rooted in the mind of every American, it is that we should have nothing to do with conquest.

It is better to tolerate that rare instance of a parent's refusing to let his child be educated, than to shock the common feelings by a forcible transportation and education of the infant against the will of his father.

The natural progress of things is for liberty to yield and government to gain ground.

The man who reads nothing at all is better than educated than the man who reads nothing but newspapers.