

AN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY GLOSSARY

Common Good: General conditions that are equally to everyone's advantage. In a **republic**, held to be superior to the good of the individual, though its attainment ought never to violate the **natural rights** of any individual.

Democracy: From the Greek, *demos*, meaning "rule of the people." Had a negative connotation among most Founders, who equated the term with mob rule. The Founders considered it to be a form of government into which poorly-governed **republics** degenerated.

English Rights: Considered by Americans to be part of their inheritance as Englishmen; included such rights as property, petition, and trials by jury. Believed to exist from time immemorial and recognized by various English charters as the Magna Carta, the Petition of Right of 1628, and the English Bill of Rights of 1689.

Equality: Believed to be the condition of all people, who possessed an equality of rights. In practical matters, restricted largely to land-owning white men during the Founding Era, but the principle worked to undermine ideas of deference among classes.

Faction: A small group that seeks to benefit its members at the expense of the **common good**. The Founders discouraged the formation of factions, which they equated with political parties.

Federalism: A political system in which power is divided between two levels of government, each supreme in its own sphere. Intended to avoid the concentration of power in the central government and to preserve the power of local government.

Government: Political power fundamentally limited by citizens' rights and privileges. This limiting was accomplished by written charters or constitutions and bills of rights.

Happiness: The ultimate end of government. Attained by living in **liberty** and by practicing **virtue**.

Inalienable Rights: Rights that can never justly be taken away.

Independence: The condition of living in **liberty** without being subject to the unjust rule of another.

Liberty: To live in the enjoyment of one's rights without dependence upon anyone else. Its enjoyment led to **happiness**.

Natural Rights: Rights individuals possess by virtue of their humanity. Were thought to be "**inalienable**." Protected by written constitutions and bills of rights that restrained government.

Property: Referred not only to material possessions, but also to the ownership of one's body and rights. Jealously guarded by Americans as the foundation of liberty during the crisis with Britain.

Reason: Human intellectual capacity and rationality. Believed by the Founders to be the defining characteristic of humans, and the means by which they could understand the world and improve their lives.

Religious Toleration: The indulgence shown to one religion while maintaining a privileged position for another. In pluralistic America, religious uniformity could not be enforced so religious toleration became the norm.

Representation: Believed to be central to republican government and the preservation of **liberty**. Citizens, entitled to vote, elect officials who are responsible to them, and who govern according to the law.

Republic: From the Latin, *res publica*, meaning “the public things.” A government system in which power resides in the people who elect representatives responsible to them and who govern according to the law. A form of government dedicated to promoting the **common good**. Based on the people, but distinct from a **democracy**.

Separation of Church and State: The doctrine that government should not enforce religious belief. Part of the concept of **religious toleration** and freedom of conscience.

Separation of Powers/Checks and Balances: A way to restrain the power of government by balancing the interests of one section of government against the competing interests of another section. A key component of the federal Constitution. A means of slowing down the operation of government, so it did not possess too much energy and thus endanger the rights of the people.

Slavery: Referred both to chattel slavery and political slavery. Politically, the fate that befell those who did not guard their rights against governments. Socially and economically, an institution that challenged the belief of the Founders in **natural rights**.

Taxes: Considered in English tradition to be the free gift of the people to the government. Americans refused to pay them without their consent, which meant actual **representation** in Parliament.

Tyranny: The condition in which **liberty** is lost and one is governed by the arbitrary will of another. Related to the idea of political **slavery**.

Virtue: The animating principle of a **republic** and the quality essential for a republic’s survival. From the Latin, *vir*, meaning “man.” Referred to the display of such “manly” traits as courage and self-sacrifice for the **common good**.