



WE the PEOPLE
GUIDE BOOK

VOLUME I

INTRODUCTION

We stand at the beginning of a great awakening. More and more Americans are discovering what we don't know about our own history and our nation's most basic ideas and principles. And we want to learn.

We The People is here to help. The program is divided into three parts.

First, we cover some basic — and exciting — history, America's founding principles, and the challenges to those principles.

Second, we focus on the Constitution; why it matters, how it was designed to work, how it has been under attack, and what we can do to save it.

Third, we show why free markets are essential for a free people and expose some of the bad economic ideas that threaten both our prosperity and our freedom.

Ideas have consequences — if we understand and act on them. We The People is not just about where we came from. It's about where we need to go from here. It's not enough to simply revere the idea of freedom. It's time for "We the People" to put freedom back at the center of American public life.

GUIDE BOOK WRITTEN BY
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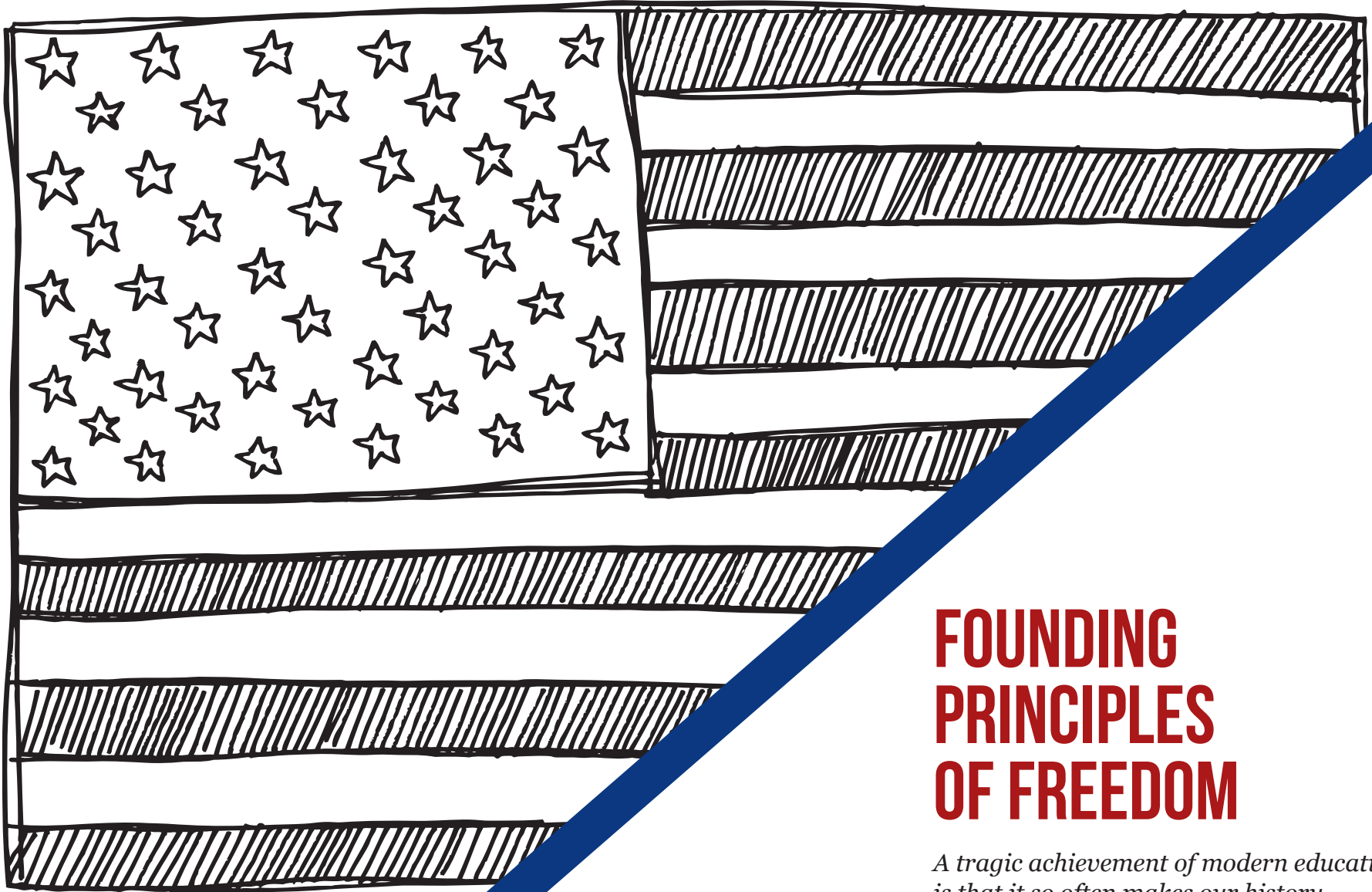
ABOUT WE THE PEOPLE

We The People provides citizens a deeper understanding of the roots of our liberty. Through our series of educational stories about American founding principles, the Constitution, and economic freedom, as well as videos, podcasts, and blog posts at WeThePeopleHQ.org, we are "equipping today's revolutionaries."

We the People is a project of the State Policy Network — a nationwide network of state-based, pro-freedom policy groups. We are committed to preserving and strengthening a free society where all Americans enjoy the blessings of liberty and opportunity. Find out more at www.SPN.org.

Find all of the We the People essays at
www.WethePeopleHQ.org.





FOUNDING PRINCIPLES OF FREEDOM

VOLUME I

A tragic achievement of modern education is that it so often makes our history boring. In truth, American history is a collection of remarkable and often unexpected stories. It is — at least, it should be — exciting, and it's essential to understanding our legacy of freedom.



THE COURSE OF HUMAN EVENTS: THE PATH TO INDEPENDENCE

Volume I, Episode I

As Americans, we have the advantage that our history is intertwined with the principles of freedom. Here, we begin our story in small-town America — Lexington, Mass. — on April 19, 1775. Why were ordinary people willing to risk their lives?

The odds were against them. The soldiers were well-armed and well-trained; many were hardened veterans. The townspeople were the opposite.... By offering any opposition to the soldiers, the people risked their lives, possessions, families — everything. Yet hundreds and later thousands would step away from ordinary lives and decide that they, too, were willing to stand, to fight — even to die.

They stood up against oppressive government, against bureaucratic excess, against arrogant officials. They stood up for their families, their communities and their principles — for what they believed was right and good.

When we stand up for those same principles, we stand on their shoulders. Whatever sacrifice we make today is a shadow of the sacrifices made there on the Lexington Green and throughout American history.

KEY POINTS

I. Lexington, Massachusetts, April 19, 1775

- Ordinary people choose to face the British Empire's powerful army
- Defeat at Lexington leads to victory at Concord and Boston
- Why it matters to us today

II. America's early history is a story of entrepreneurs

- Explorers ventured into the unknown in search of knowledge, fortune and glory
- Jamestown colonists were traditional entrepreneurs in search of profit
- The Puritans were religious and political entrepreneurs
- Communities of dissenters became models of religious freedom

III. The French-and-Indian (or Seven-Years) War

- War deficits leave the British Empire with crushing debt
- American colonists discover the Empire is not invincible
- Leaders — including George Washington — are raised up

IV. The Path to Independence

- After the French-and-Indian War, Britain begins "taxation without representation"
- The Colonies had flourished under Britain's neglect
- Colonists had grown accustomed to liberty and local representative government
- Edmund Burke recognized America's "spirit of liberty"

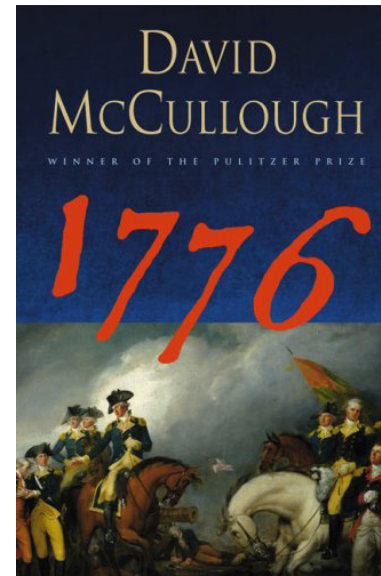
REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Who was Lexington's militia captain on April 19, 1775? How was he chosen?
2. How many men died on Lexington Green? How many were wounded?
3. What battle came after Lexington? What happened there?
4. What does Mare Tenebrosum mean?
5. When did the settlement of Jamestown finally take hold? Along what bay was it located?
6. What Puritan leader said, "We shall be as a city upon a hill"?
7. Who rallied faltering British soldiers at the Battle of Monongahela? How old was he?
8. Who was Edmund Burke?

PATRIOT EXERCISES

1. Find and read the Mayflower Compact.
2. Research the names of the men who died at Lexington Green. See if you can find out something about each of them. Look back at your list on Memorial Day.
3. Make some notes and then tell the story of Lexington or Monongahela to someone or a group of people. There is no better way to learn something, and to think about its importance, than by teaching it to someone else. Tell them why it matters.

FREEDOM'S BOOKSHELF



David McCullough's *1776* tells the story of the crucial year of the War for Independence. It introduces key figures in the American Founding, describes their high hopes and very real fears, and offers one of the best introductions to American history. The illustrated version of *1776* is an outstanding teaching tool.

DISCUSSION TOPICS

- Were the men at Lexington "heroes"? That word is mostly banished from modern history books and classes. Why might the idea of heroism make "progressive" historians uncomfortable?
- The American Colonies developed under a largely accidental policy that Edmund Burke called "salutary neglect." We usually think of "neglect" as a bad thing. Why did this neglect seem to have such positive results?



WE HOLD THESE TRUTHS: THE ARGUMENT FOR LIBERTY

Volume I, Episode 2

What do we celebrate on the Fourth of July? Not military victory — in fact, the summer of 1776 was a low point in the War for Independence. And not formal independence, since the Continental Congress passed the resolution for independence two days earlier, on July 2, and it wasn't accepted by Britain until 1783. The birthday of the United States is a celebration of the Declaration of Independence — the celebration of self-evident truths.

...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....

Even progressive historian Carl Becker wrote, "In the Declaration, the foundation of the United States is indissolubly associated with a theory of politics, a philosophy of human rights, which is valid, if at all, not for Americans only, but for all men." What a way to start a nation! This is what Abraham Lincoln spoke of when he described "a new nation, conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal."

The Declaration of Independence was and is revolutionary. It is not merely the statement of a particular group of Americans declaring their independence under particular circumstances. It is an appeal to — and a promise to base government on — a universal and permanent standard of justice.

KEY POINTS

I. The Second Continental Congress

- Began meeting a month after the Battles of Lexington and Concord
- Adopted the militias that were already surrounding the British at Boston
- Appointed George Washington to command the new army
- Sent the "Olive Branch Petition" to King George; he rejected it
- Passes a resolution for independence on July 2, 1776

II. The Declaration of Independence: "Laws of Nature and of Nature's God"

- There is design and purpose evident in the natural world
- Religion and reason both recognize a human nature
- Each person is his own natural ruler with capacity for self-government
- Each person is also prone to allow his passions to overrule his reason

III. The Declaration of Independence: Equal rights

- All people are equal in our fundamental (natural) rights
- Natural rights pre-exist government
- All people and governments must respect the natural rights of other people
- The Founders recognized slavery as a contradiction and flaw

IV. The Declaration of Independence: "Consent of the governed"

- Required because of our shared nature and equal natural rights
- Government is an agreement among the people about how to secure rights
- Not the same thing as pure democracy — majority cannot violate others' rights

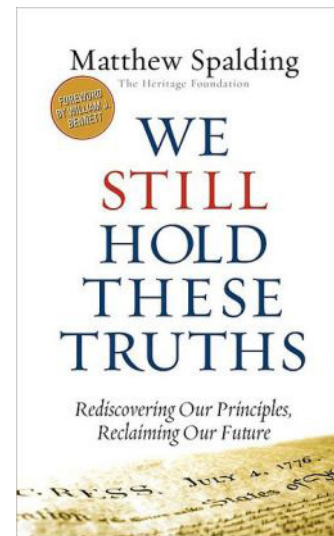
REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What was King George's response to the Olive Branch Petition?
2. Who proposed the resolution for independence? What colony did he represent?
3. Which part of the British government does the Declaration call a "foreign" power?
4. In which two famous Federalist essays does James Madison write about human nature?
5. What is the difference between natural and civil rights?
6. Name one of the founders of Pennsylvania's anti-slavery group.
7. What is the ultimate form of consent that was also the justification for independence?
8. Who called the Declaration "a rebuke and a stumbling block to ... tyranny and oppression"?

PATRIOT EXERCISES

1. Read the complete Declaration of Independence. The text and high-quality images of the original are online at www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/declaration.html.
2. Memorize the Declaration, from "We hold these truths..." to "...consent of the governed," hopefully together with a family member or friend (it's more fun that way).
3. Look at a list of the signers of the Declaration. Choose one you don't know about and research his role in the American founding.

FREEDOM'S BOOKSHELF



The 10 essential principles of the American Founding are explained in Matthew Spalding's *We Still Hold These Truths*, from which this essay was taken. Access the first chapter, a discussion guide, and other helpful resources at www.westillholdthesetruths.org, part of The Heritage Foundation's First Principles Initiative.

DISCUSSION TOPICS

- A great resource on the writing and ideas of the Declaration is Carl Becker's *The Declaration of Independence: A Study in the History of Political Ideas*. Yet Becker, a progressive, in the end claims it is pointless to ask whether the principles of the Declaration are true or false. Belief in the Declaration's principles led to constitutionally limited government; what sort of government comes from belief in relativism?
- A lot of reporting and analysis of politics today focuses on interests (what someone gets out of supporting or opposing a policy) and biases (irrational preferences) to the exclusion of talking about ideas or principles. Why would some people want to avoid talking about ideas? What are the effects of downplaying the role of ideas in politics and government?



DECLARING DEPENDENCE: PROGRESSIVISM AND MODERN LIBERALISM

Volume I, Episode 3

Don't confuse "motion" with "progress," the old saying goes. "Progress" is supposed to mean motion that is actually taking us where we want to go. But in American politics, "progressive" has come to be a catch-word for discarding the principles of the American Founding and pressing on toward ... well, something else.

The election of 1912 pitted conservative Republican William Howard Taft against incumbent progressive-leaning Republican Teddy Roosevelt — running on the third-party "Bull Moose" ticket — and Democrat Woodrow Wilson. A former professor and university president, Wilson was an outspoken progressive. With Republicans split, Wilson won, and American progressivism leapt from academia into politics.

Woodrow Wilson ... believed the old notion that we are born with inalienable rights amounted to little more than corny "Fourth of July sentiments." In a speech dedicated to honoring Thomas Jefferson, Wilson told an audience that, "If you want to understand the real Declaration of Independence, do not repeat the preface." Never mind that it is the preface that proclaims that our natural, inalienable rights are the rock upon which the whole American experiment rests. ...

Wilson was the first president to speak of imposing a "vision" on the United States. At the core of that vision was the belief that the individual must "marry his interests to the state."

Progressivism was and is an attempt to move away from the ideas of the American founding — the ideas that made this an exceptional nation — toward a European model of government. That model contains no essential limits on what government can take from or do to the people. Progressivism (or modern American "liberalism") is opposed to the idea of limited government, free markets and free people.

KEY POINTS

I. Roots of progressivism

- France: Rousseau says rulers must follow the "general will," but not the people
- Germany: Hegel says the state is divine and gives human beings their only value
- New ideas in biology and physics were manipulated to support progressivism

II. The beginnings of American progressivism

- Woodrow Wilson and Teddy Roosevelt were fans of German statism
- Many intellectuals admired Germany and desired to be "social engineers"
- Progressives used World War I as a model for breaking down limits on government
- American voters rejected Wilson and the progressives after World War I
- Progressives looked to the Soviet Union and Mussolini's Italy as examples

III. Franklin Roosevelt's progressivism

- The Depression, like World War I, provided an excuse to grow government
- The New Deal brought back Wilson's policies of central economic control
- Because the "progressive" label was unpopular, FDR used "liberal" instead

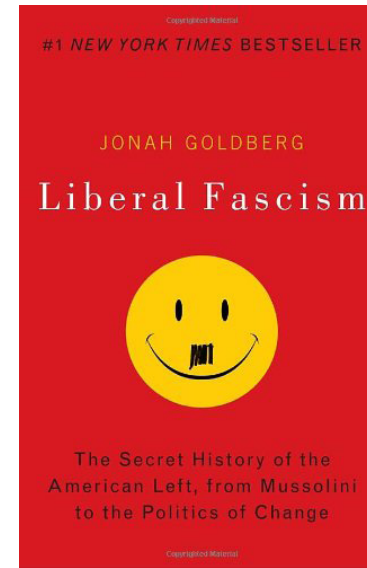
REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Would Wisconsin's original progressives have accepted or supported Barack Obama?
2. What French philosopher advanced the idea of the "general will"?
3. About how many people were killed in the terror of the French Revolution?
4. What French philosopher coined the terms "sociology" and "positivism"?
5. The intellectual godfather of progressivism, Herbert Croly, was baptized into what religion?
6. In what country did many of America's early progressive academics study?
7. Which American President warned against reading the beginning of the Declaration?
8. William James and the progressives said society needed what "equivalent of war"?
9. How much did federal spending grow from 1930 to 1933 (the Hoover years)?

PATRIOT EXERCISES

1. You can't persuade someone until you know what they believe and why. Most progressives do want the best for themselves and our country — their path is paved with good intentions. Make some notes about why progressive or liberal policies are attractive to people.
2. Starting from your notes about why some people are attracted to big government ideas, write down an argument against big government that is designed to persuade — or at least raise questions for — a progressive person.
3. Part of progressivism is the bias toward solving all problems with government — the idea that bigger government is always best. Identify a proposal in your local government that shows this bias and write a letter to the editor or blog post offering a private-sector solution.

FREEDOM'S BOOKSHELF



America's early progressives were often active racists and fans of European fascism. Jonah Goldberg tells the story in *Liberal Fascism: The Secret History of the American Left, from Mussolini to the Politics of Change*. It's a startling and frightening history that helps make sense of the modern political left.

DISCUSSION TOPICS

- Some participants in the American War for Independence believed the French Revolution was the next logical advance — including Thomas Paine and, for a time, Thomas Jefferson. Why did the French Revolution lead to bloodshed and, eventually, to even worse tyranny, while the American Revolution produced stability, security, prosperity and liberty?
- German "historicism" and the influence of Hegel spread quickly among students and academics, first in Europe and then in America. Why would those in academia be so attracted to such ideas?
- "Progressive" or "liberal" — does it matter what we call today's advocates for big government?



CONSERVING LIBERTY AND RESTORING AMERICA

Volume I, Episode 4

Does progress require setting aside American principles? Calvin Coolidge warned that moving away from true principles is never progress, even if demanded by political “Progressives.” Speaking in defense of the Declaration of Independence, he said,

If all men are created equal, that is final. If they are endowed with inalienable rights, that is final. If governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed, that is final. No advance, no progress can be made beyond these propositions. If anyone wishes to deny their truth or their soundness, the only direction in which he can proceed historically is not forward, but backward toward the time when there was no equality, no rights of the individual, no rule of the people. Those who wish to proceed in that direction cannot lay claim to progress. ...

Yet they do, of course, make that claim. It is up to the defenders of American principles to make the case—and do the work—to preserve “the Blessings of Liberty for ourselves and our Posterity.”

KEY POINTS

I. Calvin Coolidge

- a. Humble origins: the only President sworn into office by his father
- b. Penetrating insight: spoke out against “reactionary” progressivism

II. The change we need

- a. A renewal of foundational principles and constitutional wisdom
- b. The need for “prudence at its very boldest”
- c. A new era of constitutional responsibility for all three branches of government
- d. Reasoned argument can help reduce cynicism and scorn toward officials

III. Can we do it?

- a. It is up to “We the people” whether we will succeed
- b. The “tea party” and rising interest in American history offer reason for hope
- c. Those who stood at Lexington only learned later what came of their bravery

FREEDOM

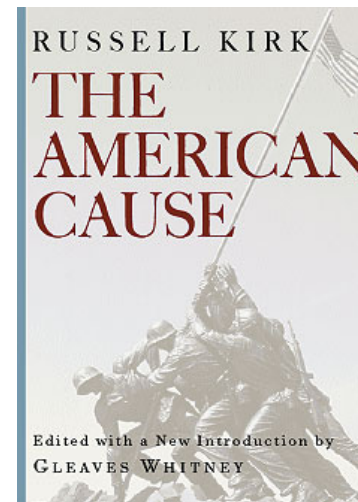
REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Why did Calvin Coolidge become president in 1923?
2. Coolidge warned Progressives want to take America in what direction?
3. Which branches of the federal government are limited by the Constitution?
4. Which branches of the federal government are responsible for upholding the Constitution?
5. Who said, “As a nation of freemen, we must live through all time, or die by suicide”?
6. Did the men who stood at Lexington know their fight would ultimately succeed?
7. According to James Austin, “the spirit of liberty must be preserved” by whom?

PATRIOT EXERCISES

1. The We The People essays are full of stories from American history that help us connect with our past and our principles. What is a story you can use to help explain why you care so much—or why someone else should care so much—about returning to our American principles? Make some notes so that you can tell it to someone else, or to a group of people.
2. As of 2011, the U.S. House of Representatives required every new bill to include a “Constitutional Authority Statement” identifying where the Constitution gives Congress power to do whatever the bill is attempting to do. Research some of these—you can search the Congressional Record at <http://thomas.loc.gov>—and find some you believe are legitimate, and some you believe are not.
3. Mentioned in the closing anecdote, Justice Joseph Story was one of the most prominent, long-serving U.S. Supreme Court Justices. Find his “Commentaries on the Constitution” online and read his explanation of whatever constitutional provision interests you most.

FREEDOM’S BOOKSHELF



Russell Kirk is another figure who contended against the forces of big government during the 20th Century. He wrote many books, but in *The American Cause* Kirk summarizes what he believes are America’s basic principles and why they are worth conserving. This edition is from ISI Books, which offers many important books.

DISCUSSION TOPICS

- It turns out, when we study Calvin Coolidge, that people have been working against progressivism and big government for a long time. Does that make you more optimistic or pessimistic? What can we learn from those who came before us in this political struggle?
- We need officials who make substantive arguments grounded in principles and the Constitution. Yet is that a winning campaign strategy? What does it take to elevate such people to positions where they can make a difference? What are some strategies you might use in your own community to get some—or more—such people into office?
- How much of a difference does it make if we think we’re winning versus losing? The men at Lexington and then at Concord had very little hope of winning, but they stood up anyway. Why do you think they did that? What lesson does it leave us with today?

★ ANSWERS

VOLUME I, EPISODE 1

1. John Parker; he was elected.
2. 7 killed, 9 wounded (as best we know) on Lexington Green
3. The Battle of Concord; the British retreated back to Boston
4. The Sea of Darkness
5. 1607; Chesapeake Bay
6. John Winthrop
7. George Washington; 23
8. A British Member of Parliament (he spoke in defense of the American Colonists)

VOLUME I, EPISODE 2

1. A Royal Proclamation of Rebellion and the promise “to bring the Traitors to Justice.”
2. Richard Henry Lee; Virginia
3. Parliament (the colonies’ charters were agreements with the King)
4. Federalist essays 10 and 51
5. Natural rights exist before government, civil rights are created by government
6. Benjamin Franklin and Benjamin Rush
7. The right of revolution
8. Abraham Lincoln

★ ANSWERS

VOLUME I, EPISODE 3

1. Probably not (Wisconsin’s early progressives were mostly racist and eugenicist)
2. Jean-Jacques Rousseau
3. 50,000 people
4. Auguste Comte
5. The Religion of Humanity (the worship of human beings as a group)
6. Germany
7. Woodrow Wilson
8. A new “moral equivalent of war”
9. Federal outlays tripled

VOLUME I, EPISODE 4

1. Coolidge was Vice President when President Warren Harding died
2. “backward”
3. All three
4. All three
5. Abraham Lincoln
6. No
7. “by the people who enjoy it”—that is, by us