

8 Founding Father Quotes on Human Nature

America's Founding Fathers were the men who "gave us stars to steer by," in the words of David McCullough. Their values shaped their vision, which in turn shaped the great American Experiment undertaken in 1776.

The Framers were rather fond of looking back on antiquity to better understand the human story. It helped them better understand themselves and, in the words of Edith Hamilton, allowed them to "catch sight of values that are stable... the hard-won possessions of humanity."

Americans today often turn back to the Framers and their ideals to better our own story and, hopefully, capture stable values. Below are eight things these architects of democracy said on human nature.

1) "As there is a degree of depravity in mankind which requires a certain degree of circumspection and distrust: So there are other qualities in human nature, which justify a certain portion of esteem and confidence. Republican government presupposes the existence of these qualities in a higher degree than any other form."

-James Madison, Feb. 15, 1788 (Federalist No. 55)

2) "We must take human nature as we find it, perfection falls not to the share of mortals."

-George Washington, Aug. 15, 1786 (letter to John Jay)

3) "There is a certain enthusiasm in liberty, that makes human nature rise above itself, in acts of bravery and heroism."

-Alexander Hamilton, Feb. 23, 1775 (*The Farmer Refuted*)

4) "In reality there is perhaps no one of our natural Passions so hard to subdue as Pride. Disguise it, struggle with it, beat it down, stifle it, mortify it as much as one pleases, it is still alive, and will now and then peek out and show itself."

- Benjamin Franklin, 1771 (*Autobiography*)

5) "Ambition must be made to counteract ambition. The interest of the man, must be connected with the constitutional rights of the place. It may be a reflection on human nature, that such devices should be necessary to control the abuses of government. What is government itself but the greatest of all reflections of human nature?"

-James Madison, Feb. 8, 1788 (*Federalist No. 51*)

6) "Human nature itself is evermore an advocate for liberty. There is also in human nature a resentment of injury, and indignation against wrong. A love of truth and a veneration of virtue. These amiable passions, are the "latent spark" . . . If the people are capable of understanding, seeing and feeling the differences between true and false, right and wrong, virtue and vice, to what better principle can the friends of mankind apply than to the sense of this difference?"

-John Adams, Jan. 23, 1775 (*Novanglus No. 1*)

7) "And you will, by the dignity of your Conduct, afford occasion for Posterity to say, when speaking of the glorious example you have exhibited to Mankind, had this day been wanting, the World had never seen the last stage of perfection to which human nature is capable of attaining."

-George Washington, March 15, 1783 (*The Newburgh Address*)

8) "The latent causes of faction are thus sown in the nature of man."

-James Madison, Nov. 23, 1787 (Federalist No. 10)

—

[Jon Miltimore](#) is the Senior Editor of [Intellectual Takeout](#).

He is the former Senior Editor of *The History Channel Magazine* and a former Managing Editor at Scout Media.

Follow him on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).