

# Coins, the Relics of American Liberty

On a shelf in my study is a large Chock full o' Nuts coffee can. Whenever I return from a shopping trip, I throw all the coins in my pocket into that can.

Every three or four months, my grandkids and I carry that can to the grocery store and dump the change into the Coinstar, which the kids find amusing. After the machine counts the change, takes its slice of the total, and spits out a ticket, we cash in that ticket and then have a blast buying fruit, granola bars, and other treats.

Last night I dug a handful of coins from the coffee can and pondered them for a little while. Stamped on them, of course, are men we once regarded as American heroes. Famous buildings or scenes from American history also adorn these coins. And on every one of these pennies, nickels, dimes, and quarters there is engraved the word "Liberty" and the United States' motto, "In God We Trust."

For over 200 years Americans have understood the connection between that motto and liberty. John Adams even underlined this connection between faith and freedom in [a 1798 speech](#), saying, "Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious People. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other." Now circumstances seem to suggest that both liberty and faith are being forgotten.

Liberty was once the heart of the American body politic, a fact evidenced by many names and sayings in the founding years of our nation. A pre-Revolutionary War organization was called "The Sons of Liberty." Boston once featured a "Liberty Tree." The most famous words of the Declaration of Independence are "Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."

Furthermore, the Constitution contains a Bill of Rights, the central focus of which is on natural law and liberty. School kids who once recited the Pledge of Allegiance were constantly reminded that they lived in a country whose ideal was “liberty and justice for all.” The Statue of Liberty, also known as “Lady Liberty,” still stands on Liberty Island in New York Harbor. Americans once sang “My country ‘tis of thee, Sweet land of liberty.” A common schoolyard boast of my boyhood was, “Hey, it’s a free country,” meaning we had rights no others were allowed to quash.

This all-important idea of liberty was [aptly expressed by Benjamin Franklin](#) when he said, “Those who would give up essential Liberty, to purchase a little temporary Safety, deserve neither Liberty nor Safety.” Yet many Americans have spent the last two years of an unprecedented pandemic doing exactly what Franklin warned against—giving up liberty for safety. When our governments ordered lockdowns of businesses, schools, and churches, the vast majority of citizens complied, trusting the experts and surrendering freedom in hopes of defeating the Wuhan flu. Dissenting voices were punished by censorship or by accusations that they were spreading misinformation.

And where has this exchange of liberty for safety gotten us? Our liberties are diminished; the power of our government has only grown stronger and more onerous, and safety from the virus (not to mention from the governmental responses) has eluded us.

Our American Founders knew they had inherited certain God-given rights which no government had the power to bestow or to take away. These were the natural rights belonging to men and women everywhere by virtue of their humanity. This was the real radical and revolutionary idea behind our Declaration of Independence, “that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights.”

Now we seem willing to give up our rights, as Esau did in the Bible, for a mess of pottage. Rather than accept the duties and responsibilities that are part of the contract with liberty, we look to government for solutions. As a result, our bureaucracy has grown fat and powerful, dictating how we are to conduct our lives in 10,000 ways. Even long before the pandemic we were trading away liberty, as Franklin put it, for some temporary and illusory security.

In a sense, “In God We Trust” and “Liberty” have become as devalued as the coins which bear these sentiments. As I shuffled through the coins, I wondered whether someone a millennium from now might hold some of them and regard them as I do some of the Roman coins in my possession, as relics from a dream long dead.

Then an uglier thought intruded.

What if these coins are already fast-becoming those relics?

In concluding the Declaration of Independence, Our Founders declared “with a firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes, and our sacred Honor.”

Let’s honor their memory and their sacrifices by doing whatever is legitimately in our power to preserve our liberties.

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