

The American Tradition of Natural Law

Cotton Mather:

“*Government* is called, the *ordinance* of God . . . it should vigorously pursue those noble and blessed *ends* for which it is *ordained: the good of mankind.*”

—“Bonifacius, An Essay Upon the Good,”
1710.

Alexander Hamilton:

“The sacred rights of mankind are not to be rummaged for among old parchments or musty records. They are written, as with a sunbeam, in the whole volume of human nature, by the Hand of the Divinity itself, and can never be erased or obscured by mortal power.”

“The Farmer Refuted,” 1775.

Benjamin Franklin:

“Tyranny is so generally established in the rest of the world that the prospect of an asylum in America for those who love liberty gives general joy, and our cause is esteemed the cause of all mankind. . . . We are fighting for the dignity and happiness of human nature. Glorious it is for the Americans to be called by Providence to this post of honor.”

Abraham Lincoln:

“The Declaration of Independence was formed by the representatives of American liberty from 13 states of the Confederacy. These communities, by their representatives in Old Independence Hall, said to the whole world of men, ‘We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, and that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.’ This was their majestic interpretation of the economy of the universe. This was their lofty, and wise, and noble understanding of the justice of the Creator to His creatures. Yes, gentlemen, to all His creatures, to the whole great family of man.”

—August 17, 1858