

# **The Founder's Studies at The College of William & Mary**

## **An Ordinary American's Perspective #4**

**Robert W. Owen**

**January 20, 2010**

### **Introduction:**

For the past several years, I've been having a recurring vision and in this ongoing vision The College of William & Mary establishes a study center for Freedom and Liberty. The Principles used by the Founders to form The United States of America could be an outline for the courses (The Founders' Studies) offered by the Center for Freedom and Liberty. It would offer an interdisciplinary curriculum including, Business, Economics, Government, History, Law, Philosophy and Religion.

I am a 1967 graduate of William and Mary with a major in Business. I have been active in my class reunions, a six year member of the Fund for William and Mary board, and a lifetime member of the President's Council. In addition, my wife Peggy and I were delegates to the World Forum on the Future of Democracy which was the subject of my first An Ordinary American's Perspective. The World Forum was the final event (October 2007) held in Williamsburg in honor of the Jamestown 400 celebration.

### *Concern at the Lincoln Forum*

Peggy and I attended the 2009 Lincoln Forum Symposium held in Gettysburg, PA on the 16<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> of November to honor Lincoln. A ceremony and the annual reading of the Gettysburg Address were held at Soldiers' National Cemetery on November 19<sup>th</sup>, the anniversary of the event. Richard Dreyfuss read The Gettysburg Address this year, and The Honorable Sandra Day O'Connor, who is William and Mary's current Chancellor, won The Richard Nelson Current Lincoln Forum Award of Achievement for 2009. The Distinguished Professor Current is a respected American historian. Many attendees at the forum are deeply concerned that Americans today do not have a good understanding of how and why our Republic was established with limited government. Incidentally, Justice O'Connor recently founded [www.OurCourts.org](http://www.OurCourts.org) a website dedicated to offering engaging interactive civics lessons to help address this issue for students and teachers. Because of the general lack of civics knowledge by students today, Richard Dreyfuss announced that he would fund a new program designed to help students become better citizens by improving their knowledge of civics. Thank you Richard!

### **What's the Problem?**

Outside Independence Hall when the Constitutional Convention of 1787 ended, Mrs. Powel of Philadelphia asked Benjamin Franklin, "Well, Doctor, what have we got, a republic or a monarchy?" With no hesitation whatsoever, Franklin, responded, "A republic, if you can keep

it.” Thomas Jefferson often said: In order for our Republic to survive, it is important that the people of The United States of America be: educated, moral and engaged. The Founders gave a high priority to public education for all citizens that would include a “classical” education with an emphasis on teaching the populace their responsibilities through an understanding of civics.

*Public Universities should be part of the solution*

When Jefferson, Madison, and other leading Virginians signed the plan for the University of Virginia, they knew it needed to be compelling to the legislature that commissioned it. For the university to have a claim to state funding, it needed a public purpose. One benefit envisioned by Jefferson and Madison was that the university would preserve the nation’s memory and increase its general store of knowledge. In addition, Jefferson and Madison made specific proposals for the civics curriculum. It included works by John Locke and Algernon Sidney for “the general principles of liberty,” the Declaration of Independence for the “distinctive principles” of the U.S. government, The Federalist for the “genuine meaning” of the U.S. Constitution, and Washington’s Farewell Address for “political lessons of peculiar value.”

*Fast Forward to Today*

Fast forward to today. The Intercollegiate Studies Institute (ISI) has been conducting Civic Literacy surveys of the American people for the past three years. The most recent survey took place in May 2008 with a total of 2,508 American adults responding. Some of the major findings were:

1. Americans Fail the Test of Civic Literacy
  - 71% fail test with average score of 49%
  - Liberals (49%) and Conservatives (48%) equally fail
  - Less than half of all Americans can name the branches of government
2. College Adds Little to Civic Knowledge
  - The average score for those with a bachelor’s degree is 57%
  - Only 24% of college graduates know the First Amendment prohibits establishing an official religion for the United States
  - Only 54% can correctly identify a basic description of the free enterprise system, in which all Americans participate
3. Elected Officials Score Lower than the General Public
  - On average, officeholders score 44%
  - 30% of elected officials do not know that “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” are the inalienable rights referred to in the Declaration of Independence
4. Americans Agree: Colleges Should Teach America’s Heritage
  - 74% of Conservatives and 71% of Liberals
  - A large majority agrees that colleges should prepare citizen leaders by teaching America’s history, key texts, and institutions

## *Conclusion*

After all the time, effort, and money spent on college, students emerge no better off in understanding the fundamental features of American self-government. Policymakers, educators, parents, donors and alumni have all let down our “Founders” and future generations of Americans. The Republic can not continue to exist if we lose our knowledge of the founding principles used to create this very unique nation under God.

Are you more knowledgeable than the average citizen? Take a sample of the Civics Quiz:  
<http://www.americancivilliteracy.org/resources/quiz.aspx>

You can learn more about Intercollegiate Studies Institute (ISI) by visiting:  
[http://www.isi.org/about\\_isi.html](http://www.isi.org/about_isi.html)

### **Are The Founders Credible Today?**

Abraham Lincoln is considered by many Americans to be one of our greatest Presidents. He studied the Constitution and the history surrounding the founding of America, including The Founders. In fact, Lincoln often thought that the structure of our American Government and its attendant Freedom for individuals was a beacon of hope to all peoples of the world. For example, Lincoln gave reference to America’s destiny in a number of speeches. Here are a couple of examples:

1. In the final paragraph of the December 1, 1862 annual report to Congress where Lincoln spoke about saving the Union: “We shall nobly save or meanly lose the last best hope of earth.”
2. The Gettysburg Address: “...and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.”

Lincoln’s most important address, The Cooper Union speech, provides a defense for the Founding Fathers who had been portrayed as tacitly supporting the expansion of slavery. We were only three generations removed from the Constitution and Washington’s presidency, but the public had grown to accept the notion that The Founder’s would not have objected to the expansion of slavery through the Kansas-Nebraska Act. Through very thorough research on the Founders, Lincoln was able to completely dispel the notion that the Founders intended slavery to continue indefinitely. Lincoln made the argument that the anti-slavery position of the North was the principled intention of the Founders. In fact, the Civil War brought about the understanding by Lincoln that America could not survive without the extinction of slavery. In essence, it became an extension of the revolution.

Perhaps future generations would say that because The Founders didn’t deal with slavery and woman’s suffrage, their work wasn’t fully credible. The Declaration of Independence is The Founders’ road map for ultimately dealing with these important issues. They gave us the governmental framework to enable these issues to be dealt with in the future. We are fortunate that the people of the United States, led by Lincoln, refused to let The Union die even though confronted with a great human and property sacrifice.

Today, we are in the midst of a great struggle between those who view that we should be governed by a “living” Constitution and those who think the universal principles of liberty, including Natural Law as understood by The Founders, are still the foundation for our system of government. It is difficult for both views to coexist long term. Will the path America is following today end in our nation becoming a European-style, centralized state? Is this good? Is it bad? Does it matter? This is an important debate that has enormous consequences on future generations.

### **Historical Perspective:**

The title of a popular book commemorating the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the formation of our government in 1787 is: A Miracle that Changed the World: The 5,000 Year Leap. The premise for the book is that mankind had not made much economic and political progress until The U.S. Government had been structured with all the Power in the People.

The story really begins in the initial Jamestown (1607) settlement where the Colonists struggled to survive economically and politically. The most striking thing about the settlers of Jamestown was their startling similarity to the ancient pioneers who built settlements in other parts of the world 5,000 years earlier. The settlers of Jamestown had come in a boat no larger and no more commodious than those of the ancient sea kings. Their tools still consisted of shovel, axe, hoe, and a stick plow which were only slightly improved over those of China, Egypt, Persia, and Greece.

All these ancient systems could be described as similar to other pre-industrial agrarian domination systems. Typical features of the pre-industrial Agrarian Domination Systems are:

1. Ruled by a few—elites (king, aristocratic families and high government officials) with power and wealth
2. Exploitative—2/3 of economic wealth with 1% of the population. The accumulation of wealth through direct land ownership and the power to tax
3. Religiously legitimated—social order reflected by God
4. Chronically violent—oppression and wars initiated by the ruling elites

It was in Jamestown that communal economics were experimentally tried out by these European immigrants, who found them to be worse than Plato had described them. Eventually, it was in Jamestown that a system of free enterprise principles began to filter up through the years of “starving time” to impress on the settlers those dynamic ideas which were later refined and developed in Adam Smith’s famous book, The Wealth of Nations.

It was among these early settlers of Virginia that a sufficiently large population finally congregated to permit the establishment of the first popular assembly of legislative representatives in the western hemisphere. The descendants of these Virginia settlers also produced many of the foremost intellects who structured the framework for the new society

which became known as the United States of America. From among them came Thomas Jefferson, author of the Declaration of Independence; James Madison, “father” of the Constitution; George Washington, hero-general of the War for Independence; and George Mason, author of the first American Bill of Rights in Virginia. Virginia was the largest of the thirteen colonies, with half-a-million inhabitants, and she furnished four of the first five Presidents of the United States.

The spirit of freedom which moved out across the world in the 1800s was primarily inspired by the fruits of freedom in the United States. The climate of free-market economics allowed science to thrive in an explosion of inventions and technical discoveries. When Alexis de Tocqueville visited the U.S. in 1831, he expected to see an economic disaster, but instead, he found incredible economic activity and inventions which he ascribed to the unleashing of human freedom and liberty.

### **The 28 Great Ideas (Principles) that Changed the World:**

There was hardly a single idea which the American Founding Fathers put into their formula that someone hadn't thought of before. However, the singularity of it all was the fact that in 1787, when the Constitution was being written, none of those ideas was being substantially practiced anywhere in the world. It was in America that the Founding Fathers assembled the 28 great ideas that produced the dynamic formula for success which proved such a sensational blessing to modern man.

Summarizing the 28 major principles on which the American Founders established the first free people in modern times.

Principle #1: *The Only Reliable Basis for Sound Government and Just Human Relations is Natural Law.* What is Natural Law? The answer can be found in the writings of one of the American Founders' favorite authors, Marcus Tullius Cicero.

Principle #2: *A Free People Cannot Survive Under a Republican Constitution Unless They Remain Virtuous and Morally Strong.*

Principle #3: *The Most Promising Method of Securing a Virtuous and Morally Stable People is to Elect Virtuous Leaders.*

Principle #4: *Without Religion the Government of a Free People Cannot be Maintained.* See the Northwest Ordinance and Washington's Farewell Address.

Principle #5: *All Things Were Created by God, Therefore upon Him All Mankind are Equally Dependent, and to Him They are Equally Responsible.* The Founders were in harmony with the thinking of John Locke as expressed in his famous Essay Concerning Human Understanding.

Principle #6: *All Men are Created Equal.*

- Principle #7: *The Proper Role of Government is to Protect Equal Rights, Not Provide Equal Things.*
- Principle #8: *Men are Endowed by Their Creator with Certain Unalienable Rights.* Sir William Blackstone had written about three Great Natural Rights which had been understood by English defenders of the common law—personal security, personal liberty and right to private property. The Founders agreed that many other “unalienable” or natural rights existed.
- Principle #9: *To Protect Man’s Rights, God has Revealed Certain Principles of Divine Law.* Again, there are many references to Sir William Blackstone and the Holy Scriptures.
- Principle #10: *The God-given Right to Govern is Vested in the Sovereign Authority of the Whole People.* Algernon Sidney, John Locke and all Founders are referenced here.
- Principle #11: *The Majority of the People may Alter or Abolish a Government which has Become Tyrannical.*
- Principle #12: *The United States of America shall be a Republic.* The Founders were for a Republic not a Democracy.
- Principle #13: *A Constitution Should be Structured to Permanently Protect the People from the Human Frailties of their Rulers.*
- Principle #14: *Life and Liberty are Secure Only so long as the Right to Property is Secure.* Redistribution of the Wealth is Unconstitutional. Note Lincoln’s comments and references to John Locke.
- Principle #15: *The Highest Level of Prosperity Occurs when there is a Free-market Economy and a Minimum of Government Regulations.* The Founders were greatly influenced by Adam Smith’s *The Wealth of Nations*.
- Principle #16: *The Government should be Separated into Three Branches—Legislative, Executive, and Judicial.* Baron Charles de Montesquieu introduced to the Founders the concept of a government based on “separated” but “coordinated” powers. Montesquieu is credited with the concept of dividing government into the three branches.
- Principle #17: *A System of Checks and Balances Should be Adopted to Prevent the Abuse of Power.* James Madison explains “Checks and Balances” with 5 Federalist Papers (47 to 51).
- Principle #18: *The Unalienable Rights of the People are Most Likely to be Preserved if the Principles of Government are Set Forth in a Written Constitution.*
- Principle #19: *Only Limited and Carefully defined Powers Should be Delegated to Government, All others Being Retained in the People.* See the Ninth and Tenth Amendments.

Principle #20: *Efficiency and Dispatch Require Government to Operate According to the Will of the Majority, but Constitutional Provisions Must be Made to Protect the Rights of the Minority.*

Principle #21: *Strong Local Self-government is the Keystone to Preserving Human Freedom.*

Principle #22: *A Free People Should be Governed by Law and Not by the Whims of Men.*

Principle #23: *A Free Society Cannot Survive as a Republic Without a Broad Program of General Education.*

Principle #24: *A Free People Will Not Survive Unless They Stay Strong.*

Principle #25: *Peace, Commerce, and Honest Friendship with All Nations—Entangling Alliances with None.*

Principle #26: *The Core Unit Which Determines the Strength of Any society is the Family; Therefore, the Government Should Foster and Protect Its Integrity.*

Principle #27: *The Burden of Debt is as Destructive to Freedom as Subjugation by Conquest.*

Principle #28: *The United States Has a Manifest Destiny to be an Example and a Blessing to the Entire Human Race.*

Much of this section is taken directly from the book: [The 5,000 Year Leap](#) by Dr. W. Cleon Skousen (1913-2006). Dr. Skousen is founder of the National Center for Constitutional Studies; he received his juris doctorate from The George Washington University and was admitted to practice law in the District of Columbia. His background includes 16 years with the FBI, 4 years as Chief of Police in Salt Lake City, and 17 years as editorial director of the nation's leading police magazine, while at the same time he served for 13 years as a university professor. He also authored 23 books, including 6 college texts and the national best seller, [The Naked Communist](#).

For more information about the National Center for Constitutional Studies: [www.nccs.net](http://www.nccs.net)

### **The Alma Mater of a Nation:**

A recent William & Mary Alumni Association trip promotion had the following headline.

#### ***In the Footsteps of Jefferson: Paris & Bordeaux***

The College claims four of the first five Presidents as alumni. In December 1779, the College became a university under the leadership of Thomas Jefferson then Governor of Virginia. It became known as Thomas Jefferson's College with a number of curriculum changes, such as, fine arts and the law of nature and nations added to the teaching responsibilities for the professor

of moral philosophy. George Wythe, a signer of the Declaration of Independence, became the first professor of law and police, the first chair in North America. Sixteen additional W & M graduates signed The Declaration of Independence, and they all knew it was like signing a death warrant. John Marshall, later Chief Justice of the United States, was briefly one of George Wythe's early students.

The College has a number of firsts and great traditions. The College founded Phi Beta Kappa in 1776, it's considered one of the few "Public Ivy's" today, and continues its reputation for attracting teachers who love to teach with one of the lowest ratios of students to teacher in the world.

The Williamsburg triangle area (Jamestown, Williamsburg and Yorktown) are all steeped in the founding history of The United States of America. The College of William & Mary, like that of Jefferson's day, is committed to educating students who can serve their nation and the world in exemplary ways. Isn't it important for students to have a solid foundation in the principles that built our Republic? Doesn't it make sense for The Founder's Studies to be at The College of William & Mary?

### **What Would the Center for Freedom and Liberty Do at W&M?**

The Founders Studies at The College of William & Mary fulfills much of "Our Vision" as established by the current W&M strategic planning process. William & Mary: *A Liberal Arts University of Compelling Academic Distinction.*

### **Our Vision**

*William & Mary will continue to be one of the world's great liberal arts universities. Already a university of compelling academic distinction, the College will expand its interdisciplinary study, global relevance, and faculty-student research, as well as its lifelong ties with alumni. Our students come wanting to change the world and will leave with the tools to do it.*

### **Link to the strategic planning process:**

<http://www.wm.edu/about/administration/strategicplanning/?svr=web>

The Founder's Studies Program at W&M would establish a curriculum in an interdisciplinary environment. The curriculum could revolve around the Founding 28 Principles that changed the world and their impact on institutions, history, and free market economies. W&M is strategically advantaged for this type of endeavor, given its own history and its proximity to some of the great foundering sites in America's history. There also could be a research component, drawing in visiting professors who would want to do archival research, as well as teach at the center.

The University could expand the courses offered through adult education organizations like the Sir Christopher Wren Society. In addition, it could expand into teacher (K-12) continuing education courses during the summer. I can also imagine a "speaker's bureau" that could attract writers and experts in the field of The Founders Studies. I'm sure Dr. Joseph Ellis, who is a



W&M graduate, would be honored to talk about some of his books on the Founders, such as his *The Founding Brothers and His Excellency*.

I'm sure each of you can imagine a topic that should be studied as part of The Founders Studies. The following ideas are outlined by area of study, such as business, economics, etc. in order to facilitate discussion and creativity.

**Business & Law:** Business tends to thrive in an environment where the rule of law is sanctified and where a credible infrastructure exists, such as independent courts to resolve disputes. Additionally, The Constitution of the United States in Section 8 of Article I granted some limited powers to the federal government to promote uniformity of interstate commerce. The Founders were concerned with “trade wars” among the states and with foreign governments. Has the original intent of the clause in The Constitution been significantly altered in practice, by Congress or by the Courts? Where does the current debate on health insurance take us?

**Economics, Government & Philosophy:** We know that The Founders were greatly influenced by Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations*. Do you need political order for free markets to exist? What is the role of monetary and fiscal policy by governments? How do you think Plato and Aristotle would react to The Founders' Vision?

**History & Religion:** Historians agree that a most singular and important feature of the settlers of America was their overpowering sense of mission—a conviction that they were taking part in the unfolding of a manifest destiny of divine design which would shower its blessings on all mankind. John Fiske, an historian, said: “They (The Founders) believed that they were doing a wonderful thing. They felt themselves to be instruments in accomplishing a kind of “manifest destiny.” Their exodus (from Europe) was that of a chosen people who were at length to lay the everlasting foundations of God's kingdom upon earth... Did The Founders' craft a unique government in the history of mankind? Although The Founders agreed that the government would not endorse a single religion - did they envision a “total” separation of religion from the “public” square? Did Lincoln “oversee” the Second Revolution?

Some of the 28 Principles could be titles of courses offered. For example, Principle #14: *Life and Liberty are Secure Only so long as the Right to Property is Secure*. This exercise is just to start thinking about how W&M might structure courses in The Founder's Studies.

## **How Would the Various W&M Constituents Benefit?**

**Students:** As indicated earlier, Americans have been failing basic civics knowledge at an alarming rate in recent years. At some universities (some very prestigious), the average score of freshman students is higher than seniors attending the same university. In essence, they went backward in their civics knowledge of our country. Strengthening W&M students with the understanding of the Founding of our country will help them in any endeavor that they may undertake. Alexander Hamilton on Principles—“Those who stand for nothing fall for anything”.

**The College of William and Mary:** It would enhance the curriculum and the prestige of the College. It could also be a differentiator for students and their parents when considering

alternative universities. There is also a disconnect today between many universities and the average American who leans toward being a conservative (more than 50% of the country). The perception is that students attending universities (the more elite; the more the disconnect) are “indoctrinated” with a “leftist” view of the world. I sensed these concerns when talking to some alumni as a representative of the Fund for William & Mary.

*Fund Raising could be enhanced*

Hillsdale College and Grove City College receive no federal funding at all, including student loans and grants, have raised significant funds from “friends” of the schools because their teaching the principles of Freedom and Liberty. Both of these schools require their students to take some courses dealing with the founding of the country. For example, a course on the US Constitution is required for a liberal arts degree. In addition, they have been able to offer lectures and disseminate speeches from nationally and internationally known authorities on various topics pertaining to freedom and liberty.

**The Williamsburg Triangle:** There could be a brisk conference and tourism angle with partnerships with Colonial Williamsburg, Jamestown, Yorktown and The USS Monitor Center at The Mariner’s Museum. The Historic Triangle would not only become a place to visit, but a place to learn about the people who shaped the founding of America. A good example of the type of activity that could be generated is The World Forum on the Future of Democracy conference held at the Williamsburg Inn in September 2007 which was part of the Jamestown 400 Year Celebration.

*Colonial Williamsburg and “Education for Citizenship”*

Colonial Williamsburg is in the process of introducing a new secondary school curriculum in civics/American History with a similar emphasis. It is called The Idea of America and is a digitally based program to be distributed nationally in 2010. It focuses on the founding principles and the debates that have been constant since they were articulated in the declaration, the Constitution, The Bill of Rights and the Federalist Papers; debates rooted in the tensions between Freedom and equality, law and ethics, private wealth and common wealth, unity and diversity. This is a major “education for citizenship” initiative for Colonial Williamsburg. If the College of W&M had The Founder’s Studies program, could there be any synergy with Colonial Williamsburg?

**The State of Virginia Triangle:** The Williamsburg, Charlottesville and Washington connection. The possibilities are breath taking—here are a few:

1. The University of Virginia and Monticello could contribute information and speakers regarding a Jefferson symposium.
2. Washington/Mt. Vernon likewise could sponsor a Washington symposium
3. George Mason University could offer symposiums on its namesake

The public might become more receptive to State support of W&M if they knew that it would educate students in civics and the Founding Principles used to establish our Republic. The tourism and visitor opportunities are enormous which will also benefit the State.

**America and the World:** The greater the number of Americans who understand our revolutionary history and the importance of protecting individual rights, the better world emissaries they become. I think of Patrick Henry’s famous cry in the Virginia House of Burgess—Give me Liberty or give me Death! Individual freedom and liberty are still pillars in our society, and we have developed an impressive history of protecting minority rights. The Founders would be quite pleased to learn how their governmental experiment had blossomed into such a world power.

### **A Call to Action & Summary:**

A recent Rasmussen poll of Americans indicated that they continue to support capitalism over socialism, but by a slim margin of 53% to 47%. Noteworthy, those individuals under 30 are equally divided. This result is a direct failure of our educational system to teach our younger generation about the great debate our Founders had in constructing our “Republic”. History is full of failed societies when government controls our lives through centralized power. Communism and Fascism operate with tyranny while socialism is just an early form of Fascism. In their day, The Founders viewed Monarchies as centralized governments even though there may have been some benevolent ones throughout history.

Does The Founders Studies fit into the current strategic planning activities at The College? I think it does, but what about you? Do you know or have a working relationship with any of the Planning Steering Committee Members?

<http://www.wm.edu/about/administration/strategicplanning/psc/index.php>

Do you know or have a working relationship with any of the Planning Steering Subcommittee Members—Challenge 1—Liberal Arts University?

<http://www.wm.edu/about/administration/strategicplanning/psc/subcommittees/index.php>

Would you be interested in helping to make The Founder’s Studies at The College of William & Mary a reality? Do you have any ideas about how funds can be raised to help establish The Founder’s Studies? For example, The Honorable Sandra Day O’Connor might be willing to lead a special fund raising effort to initially establish The Founder’s Studies at The College of William and Mary.

Thank you for taking the time to consider this project. I am very interested in your feedback. Bob Owen [rowen@benefitinsurancegroup.com](mailto:rowen@benefitinsurancegroup.com) or (484)367-0261