

David and Goliath: Individualism and Liberty in the Italian Renaissance and the
American Revolution

Jennifer McConnell

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Committee:

Dr. Michael Allen

Dr. Lauren Montgomery

Dr. Matthew O'Leary

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Dedication

This paper is dedicated to my family for all of their support and love:

To my Mom and Dad for helping me pursue my dreams, for inspiring me, and for being an extra set of parents to my children.

To my husband, Kim, for being patient with me in my pursuit of higher education—thank you for supporting me emotionally and financially throughout the entire process.

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And the Philistines stood on a mountain on the one side, and Israel stood on a mountain on the other side: and there was a valley between them.

And there went out a champion out of the camp of the Philistines, named Goliath, of Gath, whose height was six cubits and a span.

And he stood and cried unto the armies of Israel, and said unto them, Why are ye come out to set your battle in array? Am not I a Philistine, and ye servants to Saul? Choose you a man for you, and let him come down to me. If he be able to fight with me, and to kill me, then will we be your servants: but if I prevail against him, and kill him, then shall ye be our servants, and serve us. And the Philistine said, I defy the armies of Israel this day; give me a man, that we may fight together.

When Saul and all Israel heard those words of the Philistine, they were dismayed, and greatly afraid.

And the Philistine drew near morning and evening, and presented himself forty days.

And David said to Saul, Let no man's heart fail because of him; thy servant will go and fight with this Philistine.

And Saul said to David, Thou art not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him: for thou art but a youth, and he a man of war from his youth.

David said moreover, The Lord that delivered me out of the paw of the lion and out of the paw of the bear, he will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine. And Saul said to David, Go, and the Lord be with thee.

And he took his staff in his hand, and chose him five smooth stones out of the brook, and put them in a shepherd's bag which he had, even in a scrip; and his sling was in his hand: and he drew near to the Philistine.

And when the Philistine looked about, and saw David, he disdained him: for he was but a youth...

And it came to pass, when the Philistine arose, and came and drew nigh to meet David, that David hasted, and ran toward the army to meet the Philistine.

And David put his hand in his bag, and took thence a stone, and smote the Philistine in his forehead, that the stone sunk into his forehead; and he fell upon his face to the earth.

So David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and with a stone, and smote the Philistine and slew him; but there was no sword in the hand of David.

Introduction

The biblical story of David and Goliath exemplifies the strength of will in one incredible individual fighting against tyranny. While the Israelites were confronting the real possibility of death or slavery, their fate changed with the actions of a single young man. The courage and character of one individual who was willing to fight for his people and defeat a giant of immense strength has gone down in history as a model of power, perseverance, and liberty.

During the Italian Renaissance between 1350 and 1550, one small city-state identified with the young David—the Republic of Florence. While Rome and the Catholic Church held most of the power throughout the territories of Italy, Florence refused to be subjugated by Rome or other dominant cities such as Milan or Venice. With the self-governing and intellectual people of Florence standing firm in their opposition to their larger and more powerful neighbors, David became a national symbol for the republic.

Over two centuries later, the small colonies of the New World had become accustomed to self-governance and the spirit of individualism when England began to impose new taxation upon them. While England technically ruled the colonies, it had left them in a state of salutary neglect for some time; therefore any projection of force or unwarranted regulations by the British was seen as unjust by the colonists. The resulting revolution could also be compared to a David and Goliath conflict with the small band of new colonies declaring their independence from Great Britain, one of the most powerful nations in the world.

These examples demonstrate the ability and potential of those who are often underestimated yet through their determination and convictions persevere. While David was fighting for the freedom of his people under God's command, Florence and the American colonies were also fighting for their freedom from what they perceived as tyrannical rule. Consequently, the unique individuals that emerged from these situations are products of societies which value liberty. This paper will focus on the symbiotic relationship between individualism

and liberty and the thoughts and ideas of the Italian Renaissance that influenced the American Revolution.

The ideals of individualism and the effects they have on society have been studied intensely by scholars of various disciplines. However, the numerous definitions of the term “individualism” have created barriers for a clear comprehension and have caused misunderstandings. While there are numerous connotations, the Italian Renaissance and the American Revolution are examples of a certain classification of the term that supports the advancement of the individual as well as the social order. The Renaissance ideals promoted individualism and encouraged the development of talents and character in each citizen to better serve society. The leaders of the American colonies also believed in these ideals yet understood that they were extremely difficult to develop while under a repressive government such as the British Empire.

There are many similarities between the Italian Renaissance and the formation of the United States, however many aspects are often overlooked. Historian Edward Muir points out the connection between the two periods in that “...the experience of the educated-in-the-classics, civic-minded, self-governing citizens of Renaissance Italy spoke a message that Americans can best understand, a message about the ideological and institutional underpinnings of republics.”¹ While the philosophers and humanists of the Renaissance are credited with rediscovering the Greco-Roman Classics, these ideas traveled and evolved throughout the Italian Renaissance, the Protestant Reformation, and the Enlightenment to the intellectuals of the American colonies who built upon them to form a new nation. Rejecting the options of a monarchy, oligarchy, or hereditary aristocracy, the Founding Fathers chose a democratic republic, a government with checks and balances that was by the people and for the people.

¹ Edward Muir, “The Italian Renaissance in America”, *The American Historical Review* 100 (1995): 1096.

There is much written on these separate historical periods, and on the perspectives of individualism and liberty, but many questions remain concerning the connection of the two eras. Through historical analysis, this thesis will focus on the similar political, philosophical, and religious structures that were in place in Italy, as well as the colonies, that encouraged or repressed individualism and liberty. Another question that has not been fully discussed in other research is whether the Italian Renaissance had a direct influence on the Founding Fathers during the American Revolution in terms of ideology and political formation. In addition, how Renaissance Florence and the American Colonies developed their influence despite opposition from larger, more powerful entities will be examined. Due to the scope of the research, issues regarding women, minorities, or slavery will not be discussed.

Section I

Individualism: Incompatible Definitions

“Each great civilization is a new beginning at ever new stages along the pathway that all mankind is travelling toward the Self and its realization.”²

Every generation develops a new definition of individualism, which builds upon previous definitions and adds to the confusion surrounding the term. The idea that each person is a unique entity within the social construct has many different cultural and philosophical interpretations. There are also variations of the origin of the self, whether it is inherently developed within certain individuals or whether it is the result of community ideals. While the word “individualism” was not conceived until the 19th century as a result of the French Revolution, the concept was imbedded in Renaissance and American ideals as well as ancient Greco-Roman Classics. Scholars argue between the various interpretations of the term including those who say individualism leads to anarchy, social destruction, selfishness, and dissolution of culture as it was understood during the French Revolution to those who understand that individualism promotes a successful, highly functioning society. Some argue every spectrum in between the two extreme definitions.³

Steven Lukes’ comprehensive examination of individualism is widely read and accepted in academia but he focuses on the 19th century definitions and does not thoroughly explore the Renaissance or the American ideas of the term. Still, the 19th century understandings of individualism add some basis and historical context for the diverse connotations. The term “*individualisme*” was first utilized as a response to the French Revolution anarchists whose actions and beliefs were deemed chaotic, anti-social, and irrational. The French journalist Louis Veillot, in his propaganda, succinctly described the extreme notion of the term:

² Gottfried Richter, *Art and Human Consciousness* (Great Barrington, MA: Steiner Books, 1985), 1-2.

³ Steven Lukes, “The Meanings of ‘Individualism’”, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 32 (1971), 45-66

The evil which plagues France is not unknown; everyone agrees in giving it the same name: *individualism*. It is not difficult to see that a country where individualism reigns is no longer in the normal conditions of society, since society is the union of minds and interests, and individualism is division carried to the infinite degree.

These negative sentiments are still believed and understood by many European scholars as the only valid definition of individualism and is reflected in much of their literature. However, the term *individualité* also emerged during this period which is more aligned with the positive concepts of “personal independence and self-realization”. Alexandre Vinet accurately described the terms *individualisme* and *individualité* as “two sworn enemies; the first an obstacle and negation of any society; the latter a principle to which society owes all of its savor, life and reality.”⁴

The Renaissance and American ideals of individualism create a “complete” individual who is better able to serve the common good. Jakob Burckhardt’s 1860 work *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* was possibly the first to connect the Renaissance with individualism. Quentin Skinner points to the idea of *vir virtutis*, or the individual who has achieved his highest potential of excellence. This ideal was the foundation for civic humanism in the Renaissance and is significant in classical republicanism as well.⁵ The American ideals of republicanism as stated by Wood —“its spirit, its morality, its freedom, its sense of friendship and duty, and its vision of society”—were also based on the merit and virtue of the individual.⁶ Other scholars in various disciplines address the values, freedoms, rights, and worth of individuals within all areas of society; they generally recognize how beneficial individualism is to a culture’s progress rather than its destruction.⁷

⁴ Lukes, “Meanings of Individualism”, 49.

⁵ Quentin Skinner, *Liberty Before Liberalism*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

⁶ Gordon S. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), 99.

⁷ H.W. McCready, “The Defence of Individualism”, *Queen’s Quarterly*, 52 (1945); Peter Steinfels, “Individualism: No Exit”, *Hastings Center Studies*, 2 (1974) ; William M. Sullivan, “Interdependence in American Society and Commitment to the Common Good”, *Applied Developmental Science*, 15 (2011).

However, there is a rising opposition among scholars who seek to define individualism within these progressive and idealist paradigms, specifically in modern American society. Many scholars have reconsidered the accepted histories and conclude that the American principle of individualism was not widespread but actually the result of propaganda spread by the educated elite to incite a revolution, and this propaganda is still used today to promote nationalist or socioeconomic agendas. In addition, recent historians, sociologists, and even psychologists have argued that the ideas of individualism were not prevalent in American society at the time of the Revolution but rather, a more collectivist culture was the predominant feature of American life.⁸ Adding to this concept is the belief that individualism and a cohesive society are in direct contrast with one another, much like the connotations of the French Revolutionary *individualisme*. Although critics of individualism present valid arguments concerning the application of the term and its exploitation at times, there is still significant evidence of the positive and constructive elements of individualism as understood by Renaissance scholars and the American Revolutionaries.

John Stuart Mill also wrote extensively on the qualities of individualism as well as liberty. The aim for continued progress within a society was the basis for his work and individualism is a fundamental means. Progress, Mill says, is “always the work of great individuals” and “lack of [individual significance] may lead to stagnation or mass mediocrity” throughout a society. Adolf Hitler, as H. W. McCready points out, attempted a “complete suppression of individual liberty on the ground of social utility.” The importance of a free society that encourages individualism is clearly stated in:

...progress can continue if society maintains conditions which permit them [individuals] to appear and develop; only if society makes it possible for the venturesome to experiment and initiate, cast tradition aside and

⁸ Edward Grabb, Douglas Baer, and James Curtis, “The Origins of American individualism: Reconsidering the Historical Evidence”, *Canadian Journal of Sociology*, 24 (1999).

follow their own bent; only if they are, in a word, free to be individuals, even eccentrics.⁹

⁹ McCready, *Defense of Individualism*, 72-73.

Section II

Liberty: Cultivation of Individualism

“A new principle was at work now, shaping both the single human being and the community and raising them up to a higher reality: individualizing and yet community forming.”¹⁰

The writings of the Greco-Roman philosophers as well as scholars throughout the Renaissance and the American Revolution identify the symbiotic relationship between a free, cooperative society and the individual. The two concepts must be cultivated simultaneously and continuously to ensure the existence of both. Niccoló Machiavelli used the example of the Roman Empire to explain “how the action of particular men contributed to the greatness of Rome and produced in that city so many beneficial results.”¹¹ Without great individuals, there would not be Rome, yet without Rome, there would not have been great individuals. However, once one factor is removed, the other starts to disintegrate. Leonardo Bruni, the Italian humanist, also points to the power of Rome within the individual “when the pathway to greatness is opened up, men will raise themselves up with greater ease, whereas when it is closed off to them, they fall back into idleness.” Bruni also explained the fall of the Empire and the resulting consequences as “with the loss of liberty came the waning of their strength.”¹² The Florentine jurist, Paolo Soderini, believed that liberty consisted of “*virtù* and *partecipazione*”.¹³ Liberty, in the Renaissance, ensured honor, glory, and fame among the citizens willing to defend it.

The ideas of republicanism and other political structures were studied in depth throughout the Renaissance and the American colonial era. The Humanists and the Revolutionaries alike were greatly concerned with liberty and the overthrow of tyrannical rulers. Both groups also understood the importance of securing freedom and controlling the factors that may jeopardize it

¹⁰ Richter, *Art and Human Consciousness*, 132.

¹¹ Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 158.

¹² Skinner, *Liberty*, 84.

¹³ J.G.A. Pocock, *Machiavellian Moment*, (Princeton University Press, 1975), 232.

once it was gained. These ideals are much more easily established in a representative form of government than in an oligarchical or monarchical system. Therefore, it is understandable that Florence, many other Italian city-states, and the American colonies constructed governments that allowed for the growth of the individual as well as maintain a functional society.

Within a republic, representation of many classes, not just nobility, is essential in the creation of a free and balanced government. Although Machiavelli is renowned for *The Prince* in which he describes the various ways to retain power, most notably through a hereditary monarchy, he later concurred in his *Discourses on Livy* that a government by the people is much preferable to the rule of princes in the fact that they are generally better electors of magistrates, more prudent, stable, and trusted, and are also capable of sounder judgment—overall the common good is protected and promoted under a self-governing population.¹⁴ While the Dominican friar, Savonarola, addressed the success of many monarchical governments across Renaissance Italy, the small city-state of Florence, he said, was most suited for a republic, as it had been accustomed to freedom since its founding.¹⁵ The citizens of Florence were renowned for “dedicating themselves to upholding its traditional liberties”. However, if the representative government shifted to an oligarchic system (as it did under the rule of Savonarola), the individual citizen would suffer as well as Bruni lamented of Rome: “after the Republic was transferred into the hands of a single man, famous and talented minds can be found no more.”¹⁶

The success of Florence during the Renaissance was thus directly related to its republican governmental structure and the humanist influence. The cultivation of individual talents during the period has never been surpassed, as seen by the vestiges of Renaissance art still present throughout the city. Florentine dedication to displays of beauty and craftsmanship for the citizens and by the citizens was promoted within the culture of the Republic. In Bruni’s

¹⁴ Skinner, *Liberty*, 157-159.

¹⁵ Skinner, *Liberty*, 74.

¹⁶ Skinner, *Liberty*, 81-83.

Oration, this culture is described as “outstanding talent and industry due to freedom of citizens, their competitiveness, and engagement with community”. Poggia Braccolini, the Italian scholar and humanist, also praised the Florentine people in their ability to work together for the common good while their liberty stimulated them to pursue “the cultivation of virtues”.¹⁷

Nothing encapsulates the shift into an awareness of individuality better than the explosion of art throughout the Renaissance. While art during the earlier medieval period consisted of two-dimensional, elongated figures of saints surrounding the Madonna and Christ child, the artists of the Renaissance forever changed the way art was created and how it was perceived. It became more than a representation of other-worldly beings adorned by golden halos and evolved into a movement that transformed Western Civilization.

Much like the philosophical resurgence, the sculptors in the Renaissance began by turning toward the ancient Greeks for guidance. The perfection and adoration of the human form returned while studies in anatomy, both human and animal, brought the realism of statues to a new level. The artists became more interested in man on earth than in his heavenly state. Unconventional methods and new techniques emerged through the innovation of courageous individuals.¹⁸

With the patronage and vision of wealthy nobles, merchants, and bankers, specifically starting with Cosimo “The Elder” Medici, Florence became the epicenter of a new creative impulse. Cosimo’s liberal arts education and the influence of Humanist philosophy gave him the foresight to invite promising artists to the city and encourage them to develop their own style. The succeeding Medici and other leaders of Florence followed his example, and masters such as Donatello, Raphael, and Michelangelo were accepted into the inner circles of Florentine society. With their talent in high demand, never before had artists taken such pride in their work and

¹⁷ Skinner, *Liberty*, 80.

¹⁸ Donald J. Wilcox, *In Search of God and Self: Renaissance and Reformation Thought*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1975).

flourished as creators rather than working class men.¹⁹

Similar to the explosion of art as a form of self-expression during the Renaissance, the political and philosophical writings of the Founding Fathers of the American colonies also exemplified the ideals of individualism and liberty. The works of Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, James Madison, and Alexander Hamilton became some of the most influential writings at the time of the Revolution as well as present day. Just as art defined the Renaissance in terms of individuality, political writings defined the American Revolution. The leaders of Florence endorsed individual talents in the form of art and architecture while the leaders of the Revolution encouraged the citizens to voice their opinions in the eloquent style of their writings.

The libraries of many of these men also contained the works of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, and Machiavelli, which “furnished the theories of popular sovereignty, mixed government theory, and natural-law that laid the foundations of the U.S. Constitution and the Bill of Rights.”²⁰ Private and public correspondence among the colonists demonstrate a strong sense of liberty, hatred of tyranny, and the importance of civic service all influenced by the philosophy of the Greco-Roman classics.²¹

Another aspect of liberty essential to both the Renaissance and the American Revolution was freedom from outside forces. In Florence, these included threats from nearby cities such as Milan or Pisa, the Pope, France, Spain, and from those in power who had less than honorable aspirations. For the colonists the threats included the King of England himself, unjust taxation, and the positioning of English governors within the colonies. However dire the threats may have been, any resistance had to come from within. The use of mercenaries was usually disastrous because those who did not possess a personal motive to fight for their own freedom

¹⁹ Wilcox, *In Search of God and Self*.

²⁰ Carl J. Richards, “Classical Roots of the American Founding”, in *The American Founding: Its Intellectual and Moral Framework*, ed. Daniel N. Robinson and Richard N. Williams, (New York: Continuum International Publishing, 2012), 35.

were often unreliable, not as effective, and did not give fully to the cause. Machiavelli was also wary of unscrupulous politicians stating that, “those in power propose laws to augment their own power rather than for the common good” which would eventually destroy the society.²²

²² Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, 165

Section III

Philosophical Influence

“Know thyself.” *Socrates*

The Italian Renaissance is renowned for the rediscovery and translations of Classic manuscripts that led to an expansion of scholarship, education, and philosophy. Scholars point to the works of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle and Cicero, which became widely read and studied during this period as the significant writings that had the most profound impact on the values of human virtue and purpose. Thus, the philosophy of the Renaissance scholars was directly influenced by that of the Classic Greek philosophers as the Italian humanist and Father of the Renaissance, Francesco Petrarch, illuminated so dramatically. With the newfound passion for ancient writings, the Classics also had a significant influence on the culture of the Renaissance. From Socrates’ “Know thyself” promoting the separation of a public persona and a personal conscience to Cicero’s dedication to republicanism, individualism and liberty were key elements.

The thoughts and ideals of *virtù* as the significant representation of Renaissance character are found throughout the historical works of philosophers and humanists. *Virtù* was understood as the ultimate moral value by society of the time. Consequently, this element was held as the highest attribute of a person and was to be defended above all else. According to the humanists, man is in constant struggle with earthly desires but to become a virtuous being he must deny all other desires except that of *virtù*. As Augustine states in Petrarch’s *Secret Book*, “The desire for virtue is a large part of virtue”.²³

Virtù can be defined as the ideal qualities one must cultivate and possess in order to become an individual of honor and excellence. The exercise of justice, wisdom, temperance and fortitude was essential. For one to be virtuous, he must demonstrate high morality and courage

²³ Francesco Petrarch, *Petrarch’s Secret*. Trans. William H. Draper, Connecticut Hyperion Press. <http://www-rohan.sdsu.edu/~amtower/SECRET.HTM>

in times of fear or temptation. Furthermore, one must aim for a chaste and honest character while maintaining humility and grace. Although highly regarded, living up to these attributes was easier said than done. However, because *virtù* was so revered, men went to great lengths and even war to defend the virtue of a woman or his own honor.

Fortune, or *fortuna*, also played a significant role in Renaissance character. The idea of all events that occur without any rational or logical reasons are caused by *fortuna* was very much imbedded in Renaissance belief. However, *fortuna* also provides the possibility for an individual to affect the outcome of an event by way of *virtù*. By fostering one's *virtù* and employing it at times of uncertain *fortuna*, a person has the ability to determine his own destiny which was understood as *virtù vince fortuna*. Yet, if a person has neglected his obligation in developing his *virtù*, he will most likely react inadequately, thus leading to his malignant fortune and detriment. Therefore, in order to respond appropriately to *fortuna*, an individual should be constantly seeking to strengthen his *virtù*.

Although there were several divisions of humanist thought that advanced during this period, a comprehensive education was of utmost importance throughout all of them. Quentin Skinner proves this essential quality by stating "The ideal now being held out for imitation is that of the so-called 'Renaissance man', the man who aims at nothing less than universal excellence".²⁴ This ideal of *vir virtutis* can only be achieved through the prudent and continual exercise of one's virtue. Specialized education, rhetoric, and morality as emphasized by the Humanists during the Renaissance can lead an individual to attain his highest potential, thus obliging him to become a guide of *virtù* for others. Being educated in all things appropriate for one's station in life was vital, according to scholars, and developing one's talents to the fullest potential were the ultimate goals. Aesthetics were also highly valued and thus art became the visual representation of Renaissance ideals.

²⁴ Skinner, *Modern Political Thought*, 9.

Civic humanism was one of the branches of humanism that emerged in this time and it revolved around public life, the arts, and ideas. While Italy was unique in its culture with the acceptance of diversity, social classes, and especially illegitimate children, this was not the case in Northern Europe. In Italy, those with power and money were compelled by this responsibility of civic humanism to become patrons to those with specific talents, especially of an artistic nature. The talents of many Renaissance individuals, such as the great artists Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo, could not have been developed had it not been for the obligation of civic duty expressed by humanist thought. As a result, this led to the cultivation of some of the world's greatest artists, specifically in Florence where they were notorious for being "free-thinkers". Therefore, patrons commissioned many of the most well-known works of art such as Michelangelo's *David* and Filippo Brunelleschi's Duomo for public displays, demonstrating the idealized and virtuous aspects of humanist culture.

This development and encouragement of individual talents in support of the common good clearly defines the ideals of Italian Renaissance individualism. While some believe that an individual will more naturally act solely in his best interest, the idea of *virtù* is fundamental in humanist tradition and reasons that one will work for the common good without force. Although similar to Christian virtue, *virtù* focused on the creation of gentlemen and ladies through diverse education and the values of morality, dignity, and intelligence. Thus, *virtù* inspired the consciousness of man to be an individual and to gain a sense of increased worth.²⁵

While virtue was highly revered during the Renaissance, it was also one of the main characteristics esteemed by the American colonists. A majority of the writings by the Founding Fathers mention the ideals and the necessity for virtue among leaders as well as the citizens. The aspirations of "frugality, simplicity, temperance, fortitude, love of liberty, selflessness, and honor" were of utmost importance in one's pursuit of virtue and these attributes were included in

²⁵ Marvin Perry, *Western Civilization: A Brief History*, (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1997), 31.

the 1776 Virginia Bill of Rights.²⁶ An individual's character was to be guarded and improved upon constantly. John Adams took these ideals seriously and believed whole-heartedly that the Revolution was justified in terms of virtue and freedom: "I sometimes tremble to think that although we are engaged in the best cause that ever employed the human heart, yet the prospect of success is doubtful, not for want of power or of wisdom but of virtue."²⁷

Much like the Italian Renaissance, the Greco-Roman Classics of Plato and Aristotle had a significant impact on the philosophies of the early leaders of America. The foundation for the emerging republic was based on the principles "Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness", credited to John Locke's influence, and is a validation of the values and philosophy of the American colonists. Sources have pointed specifically to the aspirations of individual virtue, character, justice, and self-reliance that became the basis of American society. However, the limitations of personal liberty and individualism under the constraints of the British Empire are also understood as central motivations for the American Revolution.

The American sense of Republican virtue permeated throughout the colonies. The "willingness to sacrifice his private interests for the good of the community—such patriotism or love of country" was coined public virtue, similar to the *virtu* of the Renaissance.²⁸ With the rebellious spirit intent on freeing themselves from the Monarchy and tyrannical rule, a genuine social transformation took place in the colonies that made the success of the campaign possible. In *Machiavellian Moment*, J.G.A. Pocock reiterates this idea, "By joining together the energies of many men, the republic achieved virtue and —what was very nearly the same thing— stability...it ceased to depend upon the virtue of one man."²⁹

²⁶ Thomas G. West, "The Universal Principles of the American Founding" in *The American Founding: Its Intellectual and Moral Framework*, ed. Daniel N. Robinson and Richard N. Williams, (New York: Continuum International Publishing, 2012), 61.

²⁷ Michael Novak, "The Jewish and Christian Principles of the Founders" , in *The American Founding: Its Intellectual and Moral Framework*, ed. Daniel N. Robinson and Richard N. Williams, (New York: Continuum International Publishing, 2012), 23.

²⁸ Gordon S. Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787*, (University of North Carolina, 1998), 68.

The Founding Fathers spoke at length on the concept of the individual. The unique environment of America and the effect of England's long term salutary neglect generated a sense of self—one who was responsible to himself only but also to the common good of society. The idea of “individual liberty and the public good were easily reconcilable” due to the political ideology of most of the colonies³⁰. By taking care of one's self, by gaining an adequate education, and by doing no harm to others a good citizen thus constructs a good society. Jefferson wanted to instill this in his own children and in schools throughout the colonies: “[Education] must cultivate in them the moral and civic virtues that are the foundation of self-government: Independence, self-reliance, personal responsibility, discretion, and judgment.”³¹

A majority of the colonists were from an agrarian society and individualism developed in the form of self-reliance, together with communal aspects such as religious and government institutions. The vast distance between neighbors made these factors necessary for survival and the colonies flourished under these conditions. Historians also point to the number of colonists who owned land, which in itself provided a sense of freedom and individual responsibility. In addition, the ability to buy and sell land, and move to different areas of the colonies lessened the social and familial ties to one particular place, which was unlike the primogeniture culture of Europe. These factors allowed a new generation of “Renaissance Men” such as Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin to emerge and shape the future of the colonies.

²⁹ Pocock, *Machiavellian Moment*, 92.

³⁰ Wood, *Creation of the American Republic*, 61

³¹ Jean M. Yarbough, *American Virtues: Thomas Jefferson on the Character of a Free People* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1998), 151.

Section IV

Religious Authority

“Let us with caution indulge the supposition that morality can be maintained without religion. Reason and experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle.”³²

The Judeo-Christian beliefs played a significant role in both the Renaissance and the American colonies. The God of David and the Israelites was known as the Creator and provided a moral compass throughout a person’s life. The Hebrews were the first civilization concerned with having an individual relationship with God. As he delivered David and the Israelites out of oppression and slavery, his people then had a “moral responsibility to overcome injustice.”³³ The sense of “self” and individual consciousness arose from this relationship: “This new conception of God made possible a new awareness of the individual. In confronting God, the Hebrews developed an awareness of his or her own person, moral autonomy, and personal worth. The Hebrews believed that God, who possessed total freedom, had bestowed on people moral freedom—the capacity to choose between good and evil.”³⁴ Had David not experienced this connection with God and a sense of individual worth, would he have been willing or compelled to take on the giant Goliath?

Moreover, the Hebrews became aware of historical time unlike any other civilization of the time in order to learn and celebrate God’s divine intervention. During the Middle Ages and the age of Christendom, the connection to history was lost until the Renaissance humanists were “reawakened” and “established new ties with [antiquity].”³⁵ While the scholars attempted to reconcile the pre-Christian works of the ancient philosophers with Christian ideals, the idea of a

³² George Washington, “Farewell Address 1796”. <http://gwpapers.virginia.edu/documents/farewell/transcript.html>

³³ Perry, *Western Civilization*, 33.

³⁴ Perry, *Western Civilization*, 31-32.

³⁵ William Manchester, *A World Lit Only by Fire: The Medieval Mind and the Renaissance*, (Boston: Little and Brown, 1992), 104.

“*homo universal*, the universal man: creator, artist, scholar, and encyclopedic genius in the spirit of the ancient *paideia*,” was formed.³⁶

During those centuries of darkness, the people of the Middle Ages lived only for the afterlife. What was done on earth should only be in preparation for an eternal life with God. Throughout the Holy Roman Empire, the Catholic Church maintained their power as the intermediary between God and man and therefore man’s salvation and place in the afterlife was thoroughly dependent on the church. The individual relationship of the Hebrews had been forgotten over centuries, most likely because of anti-Semitic feelings as well as the Church’s foundation of control over the general population. The Church was the absolute and stable authority. However, with the outbreak of the Black Plague, the little ice age famine, an economic depression, and wars raging throughout Europe, the people looked to the Church. Scholars, religious and secular, began searching for answers elsewhere when the Church was unable to provide them.³⁷

Prior to the Protestant Reformation, the Roman Catholic Church had been the overarching religious and political structure throughout most of Europe. The popes held much of the power through their land ownership of Papal States, alliances with various rulers throughout the Holy Roman Empire, and the direct relationship with God as an intermediary for an individual’s salvation. While scholars attempted to reconcile the pre-Christian ideas of the philosophers with the beliefs of the Church by reason and faith, charges of heresy became prevalent and led to the Roman Inquisition of the 16th century. Historian William Manchester describes the power of the popes as often a result of their ruthlessness: “At any given moment the most dangerous enemy in Europe was the reigning pope.”³⁸ However, the smaller city-states, especially Florence, continued to limit the Pope’s influence and authority within their regions.

³⁶ Manchester, *A World Lit Only by Fire*, 105.

³⁷ Wilcox, *In Search of God and Self*.

³⁸ Manchester, *A World Lit Only by Fire*, 37.

The audacity of Florence taking on Rome and the Pope established a connection between Florence and the biblical story of David and Goliath, thus moving the small city-state to see David as their own symbolic representative.

With a renewed emphasis on the value of the individual, the humanists became concerned with living and enjoying the earthly life as well as preparing for the afterlife. In *The Dignity of Man*, the great humanist Giovanni Pico della Mirandola explains man's place on earth as one of an intermediary between the divine and the lower, earthly creatures. It is a place of envy and intelligence; man is on earth to admire and contemplate the creation of God. Pico also pointed to man's ability to transform his own nature as a God-given privilege, or natural right: "Neither an established place, nor a form belonging to you alone, nor any special function have We given to you, O Adam, and for this reason, that you may have and possess, according to your desire and judgment, whatever place, whatever form, and whatever functions you shall desire."³⁹

The emerging awareness of self, which had been dormant for centuries, was a catalyst for new ideas, inventions, and learning. While the monopoly of education had been under the control of the Roman Catholic Church, it was transferred in the direction of the individual and consequently, the desire for learning and enlightenment led to the first universities and academies. Historians believe this led to an enormous expansion of intellectuals outside of the clergy. As a result, innovative ideas of government, spirituality, humanity, and virtue evolved from an individualist perspective rather than an orthodox church standpoint. The Humanist movement emphasized the need to learn "how" to think rather than "what" to think. With the church no longer monopolizing what was taught, an exchange of ideas and knowledge erupted throughout Europe. Consequently, the Church, concerned with a loss of power, denounced many of the great philosophers, writers, scientists, and even artists during the Renaissance and throughout the resulting Protestant Reformation.

³⁹Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, "The Dignity of Man" in *The Portable Renaissance Reader*, ed. James Bruce Ross and Mary Martin McLaughlin, (New York: Penguin Group, 1977), 478.

The colonies also dealt with a powerful central religious organization that was interconnected with the authoritative government. The Church of England, depending on the reigning monarch, was often intolerant of various religious affiliations. With the discovery of the New World, radical Protestants and some Catholics, along with other denominations, found a new home far from the unpredictable reign of the Church. As each colony was formed, there was differing degrees of tolerance between the many denominations. The first act of the Continental Congress was to request a session of prayer. However, since there was a multitude of religious affiliations present, concern rose over the appropriate course of action. On September 7, 1774, an Episcopalian Reverend read Psalm 35, a Jewish prayer, from *The Book of Common Prayer* to the Continental Congress thus beginning the new nation as one of religious tolerance by practice, not only in theory.⁴⁰ After the Revolution, one of the most significant results was the First Amendment in the Bill of Rights which clearly stated, “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof...”. This ensured that the newly found nation would not be a theocracy but that individual beliefs could be practiced without interference from the government.

Many of the leaders of the American colonies, despite their own religious beliefs, considered the Judeo-Christian tradition a suitable guide in forming the new government as it reinforced moral codes and virtue. Though many of them, including Thomas Jefferson and John Adams, were suspicious if not loathe of organized religion, they understood the implications of a society without it. Along with the scholars of the Renaissance, many of the Founders who were influenced by the Enlightenment writings used reason in conjunction with faith. Jefferson believed religion, especially the Judeo-Christian doctrine, was utterly dependent on individual consciousness. After studying the gospels of Christ, Jefferson stated they were “the most sublime and benevolent code of morals which has ever been offered to man” thus obliging

⁴⁰Novak, “Jewish and Christian Principles”, in *The American Founding*, 25-26.

individuals a duty to society with Christ as an example.⁴¹ Madison concurred, “Because we hold it for a fundamental and undeniable truth, ‘that Religion or the duty which we owe to our Creator and the manner of discharging it, can be directed only by reason and conviction, not by force or violence.’”⁴² George Washington also reflected on the Enlightenment philosophy along with religious beliefs, “Reason and Experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle. Promote, then, as an object of primary importance, institutions for the general diffusion of knowledge.” Therefore, the Founding Fathers were able to understand the place of religion within a society and that it was an individual choice and freedom, not one to be forcibly mandated by the ruling authorities.

⁴¹ Jean Yarbrough, *American Virtues: Thomas Jefferson on the Character of a Free People*, (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1998), 50-51

⁴² Novak, “Jewish and Christian Principles”, in *The American Founding*, 21.

Section V

Emerging Political Structures

“The people are the only legitimate fountain of power, and it is from them that the constitutional character, under which the several branches of government hold their power, is derived.”⁴³

History dictates that there is survival in numbers, and alliances should be made in order to strengthen one’s position. This is true in both Renaissance Italy and the American colonies. The emergence of small city-states with their own unique governments first appeared in the central regions of Italy in the mid-15th century. Humanism also played a vital role in politics. Wilcox states, Humanists of all branches fundamentally believed that “because of their commitment to experience as a path to knowledge, they supported an active political life”.⁴⁴ Scholars have concluded that this had a tremendous impact on the power distribution and that it influenced later governmental structures. In fact, the emergence of the political power of merchant guilds, especially in Florence, is well noted by historical sources to have shifted the power and responsibility from the nobles to the working class. This was also true for the colonies, where regular citizens were able to take part in political associations despite their common status. In both cases, mass civilian participation encouraged “the creation of articulate and sophisticated citizens through education and technical training”.⁴⁵

These new entities struggled to form successful and lasting organizations while maintaining their autonomy, yet the main functions of these governments were to ensure liberty, rebel against tyranny, and control corruption. There was also an emphasis on the need for a constitution within the central government that would ensure individual rights and freedoms. The Florentine constitution was established in 1293 and remained relatively unchanged until the

⁴³ James Madison, “Method of Guarding Against the Encroachments of Any One Department of Government by Appealing to the People Through a Convention,” *The Federalist Papers* No. 49, published in *Independent Journal*, 1788. <http://www.constitution.org/fed/federa49.htm>

⁴⁴ Wilcox, *In Search of God and Self*, 77.

⁴⁵ Wilcox, *In Search of God and Self*, 27.

grand duchy came into power in 1569.

Much like the city-states of central Italy, the American colonies struggled to find cohesive governmental unions that would function independently within each colony or state. Historians have concluded that the colonists' unified opposition to tyranny and oppression was the driving force of the Revolution. Scholars also point to the compromise of power over independent states and the union as a critical feature in American politics.²⁶

The constant fear and possibility of the fall of the republic was justified. Florence, for example, began as a city-state and guild republic (arguably ruled by the Medici dynasty), then briefly to an oligarchy led by the Dominican friar, Savonarola, and eventually to a duchy under another Medici. New forms of government and new nations are often formed in response to a crisis, according to historian, Felix Gilbert. The Florentines were concerned with the direction of their leadership after the fall of the Medici and with the continuous struggle with Rome and the Papal States. The question was how was it “possible to maintain a free government and regain republican *virtù*?”⁴⁶

Likewise, the crisis with England created a clear need for unity of the American colonies. the advantages of a shared culture, language, hatred of tyranny and a common endeavor against England, the Colonies hastily created a temporary constitution. However, once the crisis with England was over, the flaws of their first attempt were obvious. The Founding Fathers had reasons to be concerned with the “American experiment”. There needed to be a constant balance between liberty and order—each could lead to an anarchistic society and another loss of freedom if one gained too much power over the other.⁴⁷ They understood that “liberty was a project, not an achievement.”⁴⁸

One of the reasons the Florentines identified with David was that they believed they were

⁴⁶ Muir, “The Italian Renaissance in America,” 1110.

⁴⁷ Ron Chernow, *Alexander Hamilton*, (New York: Penguin Group, 2005), 70.

⁴⁸ Christopher Clark, “Exemplariness and the American Revolution,” *The Historical Journal*, 41 (1998), 306.

the “sole defenders of liberty in Italy.” Just as the Israelites owed their freedom to the brave youth, Italy retained part of its glory and republican ideals through the “stubborn and determined commitment to liberty” as the Florentines “held off the tyrant (Giangaleazzo of Milan) and saved Italy from enslavement.”⁴⁹ Florence also had constant power struggles with the Catholic Church and the Holy Roman Empire yet, persevered throughout most of history due to the principles of liberty.

The concept of *civitas libera*, or a free state, was significant in Roman law and ensured civil liberty to citizens. This civil liberty, being a strictly political facet, guaranteed the freedom of the subjects and the state powers. Machiavelli spoke at length on this topic, declaring that individual freedom is a benefit of a good government and that *vivere libero*, to live free, is the ultimate goal for a community. Yet, at the same time, liberty is also dependent on the individuals of society. The capacity for self-governance by each member of society is the foundation for the consent to be governed.⁵⁰ Cicero defined liberty as the ability to maintain a constitution and allow equal opportunity. However, a man’s upright character, excellence in virtue, and individuality were equally important in delivering freedom. A citizen’s worth was determined by his ability to develop talent and also in his ability to serve the common good, according to Cicero’s definition.

There are still many disagreements about the relationship between civil liberty and personal liberty. Freedom of speech, movement, and contracts during the Renaissance were understood as important values just as life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness came to be foundations for English and American freedom. Thomas Hobbes argued that physical ability and legal allowance are the only dependent factors in individual liberty, rather than the absence of restraints. On the other hand, the Roman age of *civitas libera* promoted the freedom of an

⁴⁹ Wilcox, *In Search of God and Self*, 79-80.

⁵⁰ Niccolò Machiavelli, *Discourses Upon the First Ten Books of Titus Livius 1517*, trans. Henry Neville 1772. <http://history.hanover.edu/courses/excerpts/350machdis.html>

individual that permitted the attainment of “glory and greatness” as well as “unconstrained enjoyment of specific civil rights”. In a more severe sense, the Roman historian, Livy, believed that once an individual loses his liberty, he enters into slavery. Quentin Skinner describes difficulty coming to a consensus in, “One side argues that the state can hope to redeem this pledge simply by ensuring that its citizens do not suffer any unjust or unnecessary interference in the pursuit of their chosen goals. But the other side maintains that this can never be sufficient, since it will always be necessary for the state to ensure at the same time that its citizens do not fall into a condition of avoidable dependence on the goodwill of others.”⁵¹

Along with governmental structures, the significance of a universal compact or constitution with a clear balance of power was extremely important to the survival of the newly independent of the United States. The church had once been the ultimate ruler—the Roman Catholic Church in the Renaissance and the Church of England in the colonies. Yet the ideas and values of individualism resulted in a clear break from unchecked theocratic governance. With ever-changing monarchs, laws are always at the mercy of the ruler. Under a republic or a limited constitutional monarchy, however, the laws and rules remain the same, giving more security and freedom to the citizens. Like the merchant guilds of Florence, voluntary associations of all sorts surfaced and many gained political momentum in the colonies. The enduring freedom of each depended upon the strength in their alliance while maintaining autonomy.

The different branches of government and electoral processes also emerged during these periods along with constitutions and independent associations. Because Florence was a major port and trade center, the rise of the merchant class, and middle class, encouraged citizens to become active participants in the city government. Elections to office, limited terms of service, and division of power among the governing bodies were significant in the success of the

⁵¹ Skinner, *Liberty Before Liberalism*, 119.

Republic of Florence.⁵² The colonies, also highly dependent on trade commerce, followed suit in the formation of their own government structure. These configurations made balance of power possible and ensured the protection of rights of many classes and industries.

Had the British not imposed their authority and forced the colonists to unite, there may have never been a revolution. Nonetheless it is possible that the individualist nature of the colonists would have led to anarchy or the creation of several independent nation-states. Historians argue that having been self-reliant and self-governing for decades during a period of “salutary neglect” by the British, the colonists took exception when the threat of oppression became clear. The taxes imposed upon the colonists without representation, specifically the Stamp Act and the Sugar Act, along with other British reforms, were authoritarian actions unacceptable to the colonial culture that had emerged. Although these were relatively minute taxes, John Dickinson argued “the smaller the illegitimate tax the greater the danger, since the more easily it would be accepted by the incautious, thereby establishing a precedent for greater encroachments.”⁵³

Historians assert that the threat of losing their way of life and replacing their liberty with a monarchical rule was so intolerable that the colonists risked everything to prevent it from happening. Skinner states, “It is perhaps not always sufficiently emphasized that the decisive act of defiance on the part of the thirteen colonies took the form of a Declaration of Independence; that is, a declaration of an end to their state of dependence upon—and hence enslavement to—the British crown.”⁵⁴ With the writing of the Declaration of Independence the ideals of individual freedoms, rights, and equality firmly established the American character that had been exemplified by brave and unique individuals. Had they failed in their pursuit of liberty, the leaders of the Revolution would have lost everything they had worked for and been charged

⁵² Wilcox, *In Search of God and Self*, 25-26.

⁵³ Richard, “Classical Roots” in *The American Founding*, 41.

⁵⁴ Skinner, *Liberty Before Liberalism*, 50.

with treason which was punishable by death. When the revolutionaries signed the Declaration of Independence, they signed their potential death warrant. Not only would they have suffered greatly, but their families as well would have been held accountable and also punished.

While Locke's works most definitely influenced many of the Founders writings and ideas, Cato's writings and Renaissance scholars, such as Machiavelli, left an impact as well. Civic republicanism gained much momentum during the years prior to the Revolution causing some historians to argue that the fight was "for virtue's sake and not for commerce".⁵⁵ Resembling the ideals of civic humanism in citizenship, participation and virtue, civic republicanism appealed to the Founders as fundamental in establishing their cause. Although Locke's philosophy is often interpreted as promoting self-interest, his political ideologies combined with the influence of Renaissance ideals for the common good and civic virtue, form the basis for a government that allows individualism to flourish. James Madison, in describing the optimum characteristics of Republican citizens, endorses "health, virtue, intelligence, and competency in the greatest number of citizens."⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Steven M. Dwoletz, *The Unvarnished Doctrine: Locke, Liberalism, and the American Revolution*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990), 7.

⁵⁶ Yarbrough, *American Virtues*, 61.

Section VI

The Fight for Freedom

The Revolution of the United States was the result of a mature and reflecting preference of freedom, and not of vague or ill-defined craving for independence. It contracted no alliance with the turbulent passions of anarchy; but its course was marked, on the contrary, by a love of order and law. It was never assumed in the United States, that the citizen of a free country has a right to do whatever he pleases; on the contrary, more social obligations were there imposed upon him than anywhere else.⁵⁷

The American colonists had assumed that since they were by birthright British citizens and under British rule that they would be ensured the protections of British law.

Although the colonists were quite different in culture, style, manners, and character from their English counterparts, most of them still considered England the motherland. After a long and expensive war with the French, England was in financial ruin and needed extra sources of revenue. This, of course, led to the various acts that taxed the colonists. The Stamp Act, the Townshend Acts, the Tea Act, and the Intolerable Acts were the string of taxes and laws that were catalysts to the Revolution. The colonists understood that taxation without representation went against British law. The lack of representation was just one aspect of their concerns — other actions and decrees of King George and the British parliament were perceived as tyrannical.

While most of the colonists were not as radicalized as Samuel Adams or Thomas Paine, the consensus among them was that a resolution with Britain was much more favorable to war. The possibility of an armed conflict with England was only to occur as a last resort and it would most likely end in disaster for the colonists. Myles Cooper, an Anglican clergyman in New York and mentor to Alexander Hamilton, was astounded by the notion of taking on the

⁵⁷ Alexis de Toqueville, *Democracy in America*, ed. Richard D. Heffner, (New York: The New American Library, 1956) 62.

British military, noting, “To believe America able to withstand England is a dreadful infatuation.”⁵⁸ The demands of the colonists were the revocation of the duties, westward expansion, and adequate representation in parliament. However, the British scoffed at the insolent demands and denied their requests. Like Goliath underestimating the insignificant shepherd boy, David, the English refused to acknowledge the seriousness of the colonists’ claims. When faced with the possibility of enslavement and the loss of freedom, the young David utilized an unconventional approach to defeat his much stronger and capable opponent. Likewise, the colonists would use exceptional tactics, the strength of will and the overwhelming desire for freedom to eventually defeat the British.

The British injustices were unacceptable to the leaders of the Revolution. In 1774, Thomas Jefferson wrote *A Summary View of the Rights of British North America* in which he states the justification for the colonies’ grievances as well as delineating the wrongful duties imposed by England. The writing, presented to the First Continental Congress, displayed the genius of Jefferson in compelling arguments and graceful discourse. According to Jefferson, the colonies had been settled and established by individuals without assistance from England and only “after the colonies had become established on a firm and permanent footing”, complete with a wealth of resources and residents, did England intrude into colonial commerce for its own profit. He then delivers a scathing review of the English “princes” and reminds his fellow colonists that “History has informed us that bodies of men, as well as individuals, are susceptible of the spirit of tyranny.”⁵⁹

The patriot leaders were adamant that they had competently governed themselves for quite a long time and to give up self-governance would be considered slavery. Alexander Hamilton believed that if it came to war, the Americans had a good chance, due to the favorable

⁵⁸ Quoted in Chernow, *Alexander Hamilton*, 57.

⁵⁹ Thomas Jefferson, “A Summary View of the Rights of British North America,” 1774. In T.J.Stiles, ed., *The American Revolution: First-Person Accounts by the Men who Shaped our Nation* (New York: Penguin Group, 1999), 48-49.

numbers of the colonists and, most importantly, their cause of defending liberty. According to Hamilton, “the courage of Americans has been tried and proved.”⁶⁰ His confidence in the colonists’ determination for independence was proven through his eloquent compositions and also in his unhesitant willingness to fight alongside and as a leader of the militias. However, he and other well-educated leaders also recognized the uncertainty of the situation and the need for constant balance between order and freedom.

Taking into account Machiavelli’s suggestion that mercenaries are “useless and dangerous” and the “ruin of Italy” was because of reliance on foreign soldiers, the revolutionaries had a supreme advantage over the English soldiers, many of whom were, in fact, mercenaries or Hessians.⁶¹ The fight was on their own soil and they were defending their homes, families, and freedom. Unconventional warfare brought new tactics that were unexpected by the traditional English soldiers. On the other hand, the English soldiers were far from home, fighting because there was no other occupation for them, and paid little. In other words, they were fighting without a cause.

When it was clear that England would not rescind the duties or their position towards the colonists, the thirteen separate colonies came together in a most impressive manner. Prior to British interference, the colonies “had been tantamount to separate countries, joined by little sense of common mission or identity.”⁶² However, with a mutual cause and in banding together in support of Boston, communications and ideas of unity evolved rapidly. Patrick Henry, when addressing the First Continental Congress stated it most succinctly: “The distinction between Virginians, Pennsylvanians, New Yorkers, and New Englanders, are no more. I am not a Virginian, but an American.”⁶³ Several months later, while urging Virginia to join the Revolution, Henry gave his most famous “Give me liberty, or give me death” speech.

⁶⁰ Stiles, ed., *The American Revolution*, 57.

⁶¹ Machiavelli, *The Prince*, (New York: Fall River Press, 2008), 56-57.

⁶² Chernow, *Alexander Hamilton*, 55.

⁶³ Stiles, *The American Revolution*, 43

Like Britain fighting the American colonies, if Goliath had defeated David, the Philistines would have enslaved the Israelites. Goliath stood by himself and called out for one of the Israelites to fight him. He taunted them for 40 days, promising to subjugate them with his inevitable victory. Not one Israelite soldier stood up to the task to defend their freedom until David volunteered. The possibility of enslavement terrified them more than the danger of taking a chance of beating the giant and enslaving the Philistines. Yet David, seen as unqualified, young, ill-equipped, overconfident, and basically senseless (much like the American colonies), stood up to Goliath and preserved the freedom of the Israelites.

The colonists had grown accustomed to their way of life and their freedom in America. When the British began imposing unjust regulations and discounting the determination of the colonists, they knew that in order to maintain their existence, they would have to take a stand. Although seen by many as lacking in the ability to achieve such a task, the young colonies fought for rights that they perceived as God-given and inherent in every individual. The Revolution bound them to each other with a common goal—to retain their freedom.

The sense of individualism was naturally born into each colonist. The space between the top rung of society and the bottom were much closer in Colonial America than in most parts of the world, especially England. The emergence of the middle class during the formation of the colonies created a unique environment. Every man was responsible for himself and his well-being. No longer were they held to the primogeniture and caste culture of the homeland. Each man had the power and the opportunity to make his own history, to live in a way that suited him, and the freedom to transform himself as he felt appropriate.⁶⁴ Pocock points out that, “Men lose their *virtù* because they have lost their autonomy,” which explains the connection of individualism and liberty, without one ideal the others are at risk.⁶⁵ The other pressing issue was England’s refusal to allow settlements beyond the Appalachian Mountains. The rising

⁶⁴ Tocqueville, *Democracy*

⁶⁵ Pocock, *Machiavellian Moment*, 212.

population, the agrarian culture, and the “wandering spirit” of the colonists, as described in Frederick Jackson Turner’s *Frontier Thesis*, the land west of the Proclamation Line was wanted and needed in the colonists’ opinion. Thomas Jefferson also believed that it was the colonists’ well-earned rights, not that of the British Parliament:

America was conquered, and her settlement made, and firmly established, at the expense of individuals, and not of the British public. Their own blood was spilt in acquiring lands for their settlements, their own fortunes expended in making that settlement effectual; for themselves they fought, for themselves they conquered, and for themselves alone they have right to hold.⁶⁶

The Founding Fathers also realized the fundamentals of freedom and the purpose of the individual ideals as they struggled toward independence and an environment that cultivated and promoted these ideals. Losing their sense of freedom would represent a loss of individual control, and be replaced by a sense of slavery. The Revolution symbolized more than a revolt against minor taxes, it was a fight for everything that America had become. Polin writes, "Whatever may be the political structures and the circumstances of his existence, in the last resort, the individual must, in his liberty, defend himself, free himself, save himself."⁶⁷

The connection and interdependence of liberty and the spirit of the individual are thoroughly examined in John Stuart Mill’s *On Liberty*. Written in 1859, the work has been regarded as one of the most important writings on political theory of its time. In this passage, Mill describes the summation of liberty and the relationship with the individual:

⁶⁶ Jefferson, *A Summary View*, in *The American Revolution*, ed. T.J. Stiles, 48.

⁶⁷ Raymond Polin, “The Status of the Individual” (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1968), 482.

This, then, is the appropriate region of human liberty. It comprises, first, the inward domain of consciousness; demanding liberty of conscience in the most comprehensive sense; liberty of thought and feeling; absolute freedom of opinion and sentiment on all subjects, practical or speculative, scientific, moral, or theological (freedom of speech/publishing inseparable but is often seen as conduct which concerns others)...Secondly, the principle requires liberty of tastes and pursuits; of framing the plan of our life to suit our own character; of doing as we like, subject to as may follow: without impediment from our fellow-creatures, so long as what we do does not harm them, even though they should think our conduct foolish, perverse, or wrong. Thirdly, from this liberty of each individual, follows the liberty, within the same limits, of combination among individuals; freedom to unite, for any purpose not involving harm to others: the persons combining being supposed to be of full age, and not forced or deceived.⁶⁸

American individualistic ideals resonate with those of the “Renaissance Man”. Virtuous in all personal and public matters, well-educated in several diverse subjects and an expert in many, every person had a duty to improve himself for his personal benefit and that of his community. "The concrete individual, the individual par excellence, is the individual existing because of an internal obligation, he who animates the efficient works of his freedom with reasonable meaning; in his works, reason and freedom are identified for himself and for others, in spite of, by virtue of, their strict individuality."⁶⁹ Thomas Jefferson, Alexander Hamilton, and Benjamin Franklin exemplify the many men during the construction of America who possessed these qualities. Without a free society, one in which each individual is allowed to cultivate his own interests without constraints of governmental or societal interference, the development of these unique individuals is unviable.

⁶⁸ John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty* (New York: City University, 1975), 13-14.

⁶⁹ Polin, “Status of the Individual”, 483.

Conclusion

The Resulting Society

There are strong connections and similarities between Italian Renaissance ideals in individualism and liberty and those of the American Revolution. The constructive aspects of individualism along with the symbiotic relationship with liberty, created unique and solid societies based on these principles. However, while the Renaissance produced vast amounts of art and culture together with the rediscovery of the Classics, it foundered politically in part because the people turned their backs on the principles and foundations that made them great. If modern politics and society ignore the values of individualism and liberty, it is appropriate and crucial to examine nations with similar histories. As Samuel Adams stated, “While the people are virtuous they cannot be subdued; but when they lose their virtue then they will be ready to surrender their liberties to the first external or internal invader.”

Just as David defeated Goliath and became a king, David’s later years were not always as glorious. While he remains a prominent figure in history and made many significant contributions, he possessed several character flaws. Likewise, every culture and society is bound to have imperfections. The Italian Renaissance in Florence, though brief in time, left an indelible mark in history with its immense amount of culture, scholarship, and art. The transformation in Europe through the Reformation, created a substantial shift in society and eventually Florence sank into the background. Will the United States face the same fate? Will the once disparate colonies that unified in order to repel the British Empire to become a powerful nation, fall?

It is clear, according to the research that although the Founding Fathers were heavily influenced by the Greco-Roman Classics, and that the rediscovery and interpretations of them by the scholars of the Renaissance were instrumental in providing the Americans a basis for a functional society. The educational systems that were implemented during the Renaissance created good and capable citizens and encouraged exemplary goals in each individual. Like the

scholars of the Renaissance, the Founding Fathers of America used faith and religion in conjunction with reason to instill a moral and virtuous culture. The balanced governmental structures put in place during both periods created societies governed by the people. In addition, the fight against tyranny allowed these freedoms, especially of individualism, to flourish.

If the sense of individualism, as it was known in the Renaissance and the founding of America, is eventually construed to be destructive to our society the result will, in fact, be disastrous. No longer will brilliant minds and talents be cultivated due to the perceived unfairness and inequality of such exemplary values. Progress will come to a dramatic halt. Once individualism is identified as harmful to the greater society, freedoms that were taken for granted will be lost as well. The Founding Fathers knew the smallest encroachment on their liberties would pave the way for much larger impositions. They were well versed in the histories of past nations and republics, and they understood the consequences if they failed. Yet their love for liberty and individualism compelled them to take on a giant, not only in the sheer power of Great Britain but also in the enormous task of building a strong and enduring country.

Apart from the peculiar tenets of individual thinkers, there is also in the world at large an increasing inclination to stretch unduly the powers of society over the individual, both by the force of opinion and even by that of legislation; and as the tendency of all the changes taking place in the world is to strengthen society, and diminish the power of the individual, this encroachment is not one of the evils which tend spontaneously to disappear, but, on the contrary, to grow more and more formidable.⁷⁰

Machiavelli warns about the dangers to society if we do not learn from history, especially in terms of liberty. In his second Discourse he states, “ So that soon there arises a Tyranny over a free society, the least evil which results to that

⁷⁰ Mill, *On Liberty*, 15.

City is for it not to progress further, nor to grow further in power or wealth.”⁷¹

Throughout his writings, Machiavelli looked to the example of Rome when it was a great republic hoping that if a society could emulate Rome, that society would have success as well. However, as values and cultures change, it becomes increasingly difficult to enforce or even encourage the ancient ideals. Thomas Paine understood this concept as he said, “Whenever we are planning for posterity, we ought to remember that virtue is not hereditary.”⁷²

⁷¹ Machiavelli, Discourses on Livy

⁷² Thomas Paine, “Of the Present Ability of America: With Some Miscellaneous Reflections” *Common Sense*, 1776.
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