

THE AMERICAN TRADITION OF

Service

We are a nation born out of service to others.

The American Revolution created not just a new form of government, but a new idea of citizenship rooted in service, responsibility, and the belief that ordinary people can and should shape the world around them.

Our selfless commitment to service is at the heart of American ideals of liberty, democracy, and civic duty.

THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION 1776-1787 WETA 250 YEARS

AMERICAN SERVICE FOR THE FUTURE

Our nation's past and future is the story of service in support of democracy.

"We the People" wasn't just rhetoric—it was a call to action for every citizen to take part in building and sustaining a just society.

The founders' inclusion of the process to amend provided an essential tool for future generations to challenge the limits of the founding documents, ensuring the continuous, and often difficult, expansion of the American narrative toward including ALL PEOPLE.

The "American Experiment"—rapidly became a revolutionary model for self-governance across the world. The lasting legacy of the American idea is the enduring core value of service to others that drives the American people and the nation itself.

Origins

The early social fabric of America was woven from threads of service by inhabitants of diverse cultures. Inspiration to serve came from many sources.

- The teachings of Europeans settling a distant land.
- Philosophical writings
- Science & Enlightenment ideals
- Early governance and state constitutions.
- The personal values of "The Framers".

Over time, competition and cooperation forged a new nation based on shared values and a commitment to others.

The Colonies Unite!

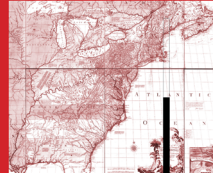
The American colonies joined forces to oppose abuses of the British crown and parliament and found ways to advance their own interests while at the same time working to serve the greater good of the whole.

The Challenge

Throughout human history there has always been tension between serving the greater good and choosing self interest.

Could any democratic government survive if individuals and states focused primarily on selfish interests regardless of the consequences for the nation as a whole?

The new United States was able to navigate constantly conflicting visions, and stark disagreements to find balances of power and cooperation in communities, states and a new form of government.



For the Public Good

The new American government immediately put the **ethic of service** into practice.


The actions of the First Congress and President George Washington's administration—including the passage of the Bill of Rights and the creation of essential public agencies—were a clear manifestation of their dedication to the common good.

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The founding generation of new Americans continued to champion and embody this service ideal.

Among them were:


- Alfred Adams**, one of John Adams, opposed slavery and advocated for women's rights, urging the Continental Congress to "Remember the Ladies".
- Benjamin Franklin** served through research, invention, diplomacy, and was the founder of the first formally recognized volunteer fire company.
- Benjamin Rush**, a physician and the first professor of Chemistry in America, advocated for women and used his scientific knowledge as a form of public service.
- Theodore DeWitt** successfully argued the case of the enslaved woman Elizabeth Freeman, "Dombey" in 1781, helping to end legal support for slavery in Massachusetts.
- George Washington** recognized how important it was to have a strong and dedicated military to build the nation.



SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS CARRY THE TRADITION OF SERVICE INTO THE FUTURE.

American values of service remain strong today and visions for the future inspire more Americans to expand their service to the nation while honoring our traditions.

The history of service organizations like Rotary, Peace Corps, Boys & Girls Clubs and CAIE embody our modern and future passion for expanding the nation's potential while supporting our traditional ideals of liberty, democracy, and civic duty.



"Every CARE PACKAGE is a personal contribution to the world peace our nation seeks. It expresses America's concern and friendship in a language all peoples understand."

-President John F. Kennedy, 1961



The Declaration of Independence

A commitment to put service over self is powerfully inscribed in the closing lines of the Declaration of Independence.

"...we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor."

Service can be seen as both an early American virtue and a plan of action for creating a new nation with an innovative model of democracy.

"We hold these truths..."

"...to preserve these rights governments are created..."

"we mutually pledge to each other our lives our fortunes and our sacred honor"

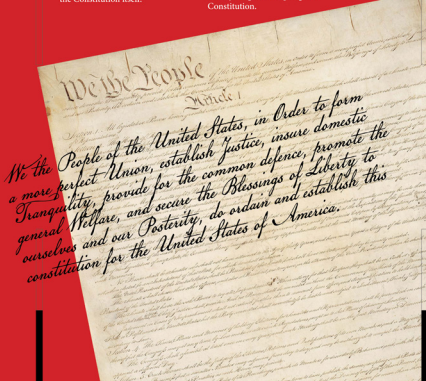


The Constitution of the United States

The spirit of service is at the heart of the US Constitution. The document opens with the reasons and motives for creating the Constitution itself.

Visions of human connection, mutual respect and helping others are revealed as shared values in the Federalist Papers and the debates of the states as they weighed accepting the Constitution.

"We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this constitution for the United States of America."




Signing of the Declaration of Independence

Neither the Declaration of Independence nor the Constitution were written for everyone. Many people in the new nation were not seen as beneficiaries of the rights and privileges of American citizenship.

In the beginning "We The People" excluded: women, native peoples, black and brown skinned people, Catholics, Jews, non-property holders and others.

Those who were excluded, nevertheless, served the new nation in vital ways. Without the service of All The People, The Revolution and the "American Experiment" would never have succeeded. As We The People gradually began to include ALL the people, our nation grew stronger from everyone's service.



THE AMERICAN SPIRIT OF SERVICE IS ACTIVE AND INSPIRING

ALL AMERICANS CAN PARTICIPATE IN SERVICE TO OTHERS.



THERE ARE MANY WAYS TO CARRY SERVICE INTO THE FUTURE.

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