
Sources of American Republicanism: Ancient Models in the U.S. Capitol

Steele Brand

The King's College

The American people have collectively channeled ancient models through the building that houses their lawmakers. The U. S. Capitol was first conceived in the 1790s, and its current footprint was completed by the 1860s. During those eight decades it underwent substantial changes, and it remains an evolving building to the current day. Its ongoing alterations reflect the shifting civic sentiments of the American people as they have attempted to capture what their republic embodies. Its design and decoration showcase the models that inspired America, especially those from ancient history. The ancient polities emphasized in the Capitol are the Hebraic Republic, Greek city-states like Athens and Sparta, the Roman Republic, and the Roman Empire. The Capitol portrays aspects of these ancient polities—their moral character, institutional strengths, and civic virtues—but it also hints at the corrupting influences that can undermine republics both ancient and modern. The building thus provides the discerning citizen with a choice based on the examples of ancient history. Though the models presented have been portrayed historically as offering a straightforward idea—i.e., America as a new Jerusalem, a new Sparta, or a new Rome—I will suggest that it is more helpful to understand the ancient examples as providing a choice between two broader alternatives. The United States can either

The Capitol's design showcases the models that inspired America.

STEELE BRAND is Assistant Professor of History at the King's College.

be: (1) a limited republic of self-reliant citizens or (2) a consolidated, magisterial republic worthy of glorification.

Historical analogies are a tricky business, but modern nations such as the United States have demonstrated a penchant for them, which, for historically conscious observers, deserve more reflection. Playing with history like this may make professional historians justifiably uncomfortable, but employing historical models is a time-honored use of the past that keeps history alive and applicable. Using the muse of the Capitol, I will summarize how the ancient models were applied by the founders and modified by later generations. First, I will examine the influence of the Hebraic Republic, which was transferred from early modern Europe to the American colonies. Second, I will explore the application of the classical models, especially Rome. Third, I will explore the tensions in these ancient polities as displayed in the Capitol. Its architecture and decoration raise the question of which qualities should inspire American republicans the most. I will conclude by recommending that the best way to heed the Capitol's best features is to promote the United States as a limited republic of self-reliant citizens.

A New Jerusalem?

From his perch in the rear of the U.S. House Chamber, Moses oversees the lower body of America's legislature. As in the famous statue by Michelangelo in Rome, the legendary Israelite is etched with the charisma of a young face and the wisdom of a flowing beard. His is also the only artistically disfigured among the 23 reliefs of lawgivers because the artists of the 1949-50 House Chamber remodel followed Michelangelo in giving him the famous divine "horns." These horns reflected the residual spark of divinity that remained on Moses when he met YHWH face to face. Moses' relief is given pride of place in the House Chamber. He resides in the center of the north wall, directly across from the speaker's platform. And he is the only lawgiver privileged with a frontal profile, with each of the other 22 lawgivers featured in side profile.

The Architect of the Capitol's official website mistakenly explains that all the side profiles look back to Moses, which would be a remarkable artistic choice because the history of

human law, including American law, would all hearken back to Moses. In fact, each of the lawgivers instead faces a quotation from the nineteenth-century U.S. Senator and Secretary of State Daniel Webster. Webster asks America's lawgivers to remember the legal models of history and strive to "see whether we also in our day and generation may not perform something worthy to be remembered."¹ The artistic meaning is still potent, however, because American law finds its most important precedent in Moses, who rests directly opposite the Speaker or President when he speaks in the House. The reliefs chronologically misplace Moses before Hammurabi in order to highlight ancient Israel's role as the most important legal model for America to emulate. The House Chamber Moses earned his home in the middle of the twentieth century, meaning that Israel's legacy in America was still strong less than a century ago. The designers in 1949 had not only captured a sentiment of early Americans, from John Winthrop to John Adams, but they also asserted the ongoing relevance of Israelite history and biblical law for modern American civics.

Like all historical contests about who is great or what is a wonder of the world, there was controversy about who belonged in the House Chamber reliefs. Democratic representative John E. Rankin, for example, proposed a bill to rid the House of so many foreigners, lest good Americans be so ashamed they deliver speeches blindfolded (there were only two Americans out of the 23 reliefs). The "ancient caricatures," Rankin exclaimed, must be replaced by "distinguished Americans." He was particularly annoyed by the Catholic and European monarchs. Middle Eastern figures such as Hammurabi and Maimonides surely stirred him into a frenzy. The debate identified two aspects of the Capitol's ongoing mission to define American civic culture. On the one hand, Americans were celebrating the Western legal traditions that distinguished their republicanism from fascism and communism. On the other hand, many were gripped by Cold War xenophobia that condemned anything un-American.²

¹ "Moses," Architect of the Capitol Web Site, <http://www.aoc.gov/capitol-hill/relief-portrait-plaques-lawgivers/moses>, (Accessed 23 July 2014). The older book gets it correct in *Art in the United States Capitol* (United States Government Printing Office: Washington, 1976), 282, 398.

² "Rankin Asks House Plaques be Taken Out: Replace Foreigners with

Some colonists sought toleration among Christians; others did not.

Despite the brouhaha stirred up by flamboyant critics like Rankin, the selection of Jewish figures like Moses and Maimonides were appropriate representations of how the Old Testament remained a powerful influence on law and culture well into the twentieth century. The Bible had influenced American thinking from the beginning. A key factor in the colonial church-state relations that laid the foundation for America's constitution was that many colonists sought a new place of worship as religious dissenters. Some of them sought toleration among Christians, like William Penn and Roger Williams. Many others did not. They wanted to build a new sort of Christendom.

"City upon a hill" was a spiritual, not political, metaphor.

The Puritan lawyer and Governor of Massachusetts Bay Colony, John Winthrop, for example, famously described the experiment across the Atlantic as erecting a "city upon a hill." Winthrop's reference was biblical, referring to Matthew 5:14, which follows the beatitudes. Christ describes the character and ethics of those who belong to the Kingdom of God. The "city upon a hill" is one of a series of metaphors illustrating the radical nature of Christ's spiritual disciples in the heavenly kingdom.³ It is an interesting passage in this sense because Winthrop, and those Americans who have followed his use of the phrase, such as John F. Kennedy and Ronald Reagan, referred to a temporal, political community. George W. Bush went even further and compared America to Christ who is the light in the darkness.⁴

Americans, Says Congressman," *The Washington Post* (15 Feb. 1951). See also Teresa B. Lachin, "Gender and Public Space: Women and Art in the United States Capitol, 1860-2001," in *American Pantheon: Sculptural and Artistic Decoration of the United States Capitol*, ed. Donald R. Kennon and Thomas P. Somma (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2004), 238.

³ John Winthrop, "A Modell of Christian Charity," in *Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society* (Boston: 1838).

⁴ John F. Kennedy, "'City Upon a Hill' Speech," <http://millercenter.org/president/speeches/speech-3364> (accessed 10 November 2014); Ronald Reagan, "Farewell Speech," <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/primary-resources/reagan-farewell/> (accessed 10 November 2014); George W. Bush, "September 11 Anniversary Address," <http://www.presidentialrhetoric.com/speeches/09.11.02.html> (accessed 10 November 2014). Reagan said that Winthrop "wrote it to describe the America he imagined." But Winthrop had never thought of something called "America" as a "city on a hill," much less a "shining city on a hill," as in Reagan's frequent usage. The metaphor is one of many Christian phrases adopted for use in the

Winthrop's sermon uplifting the Puritan colonists as the next "city upon a hill" was appropriately timed. It was recorded aboard the *Arbella* in 1630 during the transatlantic journey of Puritans en route to New England. The Puritans sought religious freedom and political opportunities in the new world. The Pilgrims who preceded Winthrop by a decade were Separatists who went a step further and broke from the Church of England. When they arrived in North America the language they used in the Mayflower Compact was that they would "covenant and combine ourselves together into a civil body politic." The term "covenant" was a biblical one where God served as a witness—and, in the Israelite context, as a party—to the civil and spiritual constituting of a people.

The idea of a "civil body politic" was a biblical concept as well. In its ancient context, Israelite covenantalism offered some novel political ideas. The biblical writers emphasized constitutional features such as the rule of law, popular consent, divided sovereignty, and civic participation. The Pentateuch paved a separate path that avoided the well-trodden institutions related to the imperial monarchies, patriarchal tribalism, and city-state military aristocracies of the day. The Sinai narrative in Exodus, Numbers, and the Deuteronomic "speech of Moses" both followed the Hittite treaty structure. Their purpose was similar to Hittite treaties—normalize relations between a sovereign and vassal and stipulate the terms of the new relationship. The Israelite covenant went further, however, and established a political system that many have properly described as a constitutional order.⁵

course of American history. See Richard M. Gamble, *In Search of the City on a Hill* (New York: Continuum, 2012).

⁵ On the ancient Israelite covenant and ancient Near Eastern treaties, see V. Korosec, *Hethitische Staatsverträge* (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs'sche, 1931); George E. Mendenhall, "Covenant Forms in Israelite Tradition," *The Biblical Archaeologist* 17, no. 3 (1954); Meredith G. Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972); J. A. Thompson, *The Ancient Near Eastern Treaties and the Old Testament* (London: Tyndale Press, 1964); Kenneth A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), 283-307. For modern takes on Israel's constitutionalism and republicanism, see Joshua A. Berman, *Created Equal: How the Bible Broke with Ancient Political Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Daniel Judah Elazar, *Covenant & Polity in Biblical Israel: Biblical Foundations & Jewish Expressions* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1995); William R. Everdell, *The End of Kings: A History of Republics and Republicans* (Chicago: The

Israelite covenanters were unified by pan-tribal monotheism, their own political power, and every man's need to defend this community. The biblical covenant thus used a contemporary treaty format to tweak the Israelites' default tribalism into a unique political system in which common farmers were turned into empowered citizens and citizen-soldiers. This proto-republican arrangement was hardly an early modern republic, but that didn't prevent later generations in the Judeo-Christian tradition from using it as an inspiration.

In the eighteenth century the notion of ancient Israel's historical "Hebraic Republic" had just reached the peak of its fame as a model. The seventeenth century, often called the "Biblical Century," saw an explosion of the Bible's use for political theory. The printing press and Protestant Reformation combined to spread the biblical text throughout Europe, and Protestants were keen to see ancient Israel as governed by a political constitution that provided valuable lessons for their own political situations. Protestants welcomed rabbinic exegesis on Hebraic republicanism, and their own scholarship on Israel's ancient republic soon followed. This began in the sixteenth century in the Dutch Republic, and scholars in the British Isles began completing their own treatments of the Hebraic Republic by the end of seventeenth.⁶

The Hebraic Republic was warmly received in the American colonies, where religious dissenters and civic republicans were aplenty. Thomas Paine's famous pamphlet *Common Sense* cited several passages from scripture to make the case that monarchy is "evil," and Paine was one of many Revolutionary figures who used biblical passages to score political points. Paine is the most widely read revolutionary thinker on this topic today. He was one of the most widely read in the Revolutionary era as well, but in the late eighteenth century he was accompanied by hundreds more who were speaking and writing about the Bible's applicability to America. Every Sunday

*During
1770s, most
published
political tracts
were printed
sermons.*

University of Chicago Press, 2000), 16-27; S. Dean McBride, John T. Strong, and Steven Shawn Tuell, eds., *Constituting the Community: Studies on the Polity of Ancient Israel in Honor of S. Dean McBride, Jr.* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2005).

⁶ Eric Nelson, *The Hebrew Republic: Jewish Sources and the Transformation of European Political Thought* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 2-20.

preachers would harangue, cajole, and inspire their parishioners with lengthy sermons on every topic imaginable—and politics was one of the more popular topics during the founding era. During the 1770s about 80 percent of political tracts in circulation were printed sermons. Not surprisingly, these sermons focused on books like Deuteronomy, Exodus, and 1 and 2 Samuel that described the Israelite political system, as the ministers used the Bible to argue for or against a break with England.⁷

The biblical tradition informed nascent American political thought. Donald Lutz, for example, surveyed and categorized citations in political literature from 1760 to 1805, finding that the Bible was the heaviest at 34%, with Enlightenment (22%), Whig (18%), common law (11%), classical (9%), and other (6%) references following.⁸ The use of the Bible by American political actors should not come as a surprise. Like their European progenitors, American colonists were overwhelmingly Christian, even if their church attendance was sometimes low. Efforts to deny this early American affinity for Christian culture must rely on dodgy statistics, impossibly stringent definitions, or quirky reasoning. This is a passionate debate with few non-partisans, but Chief of the Manuscript Division at the Library of Congress James Hutson offers a relatively dispassionate overview, and he estimates adherents of Christianity in 1776 at around a minimum of 70%.⁹

American colonists were overwhelmingly Christian.

A supermajority of Americans may have read and used the Bible, but their approaches to the text varied. John Witte divided American views on public theology and church-state relations into four categories: Puritan, Evangelical, Enlightenment, and Republican. Each of these was interested in how the Hebraic Republic could apply to the United States, but to varying degrees and with different conclusions. In the

⁷ Donald S. Lutz, *The Origins of American Constitutionalism* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988), 140, 142. See, for example, the popular collections of sermons in John Wingate Thornton, ed. *Pulpit of the American Revolution* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1860); David R. Williams, ed. *Revolutionary War Sermons* (Delmar: Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 1984).

⁸ Lutz, 140-141.

⁹ James Hutson, *Forgotten Features of the Founding: The Recovery of Religious Themes in the Early American Republic* (New York: Lexington Books, 2003), 111-132.

eighteenth century each group recognized the authority of the Bible, if only as an influential historical document. Separatists like the Pilgrims and Puritans following Winthrop might use it as a legal guide for specific laws, but evangelicals like John Leland would have preferred to keep the entire concept of a biblical commonwealth out of bounds.¹⁰ Some, like Jefferson, the American poster child for the Enlightenment, disapproved of what he saw as the Old Testament's draconian picture of God. John Adams, the most popular civic republican in America, may have shared Jefferson's suspicion of the trinity, but he still found the Old Testament a useful political work. Adams praised the Pentateuch's "doctrine of a supreme, intelligent, wise, almighty sovereign of the universe, which I believe to be the great essential principle of all morality, and consequently of all civilization." He exclaimed, "I will insist that the Hebrews have done more to civilize men than any other nation."¹¹

John Adams viewed the Bible as indispensable as a text of political philosophy.

Adams and Jefferson had different views on the Bible because each was impacted by the Enlightenment's biblical skepticism to different degrees. Jefferson admired the morality of Christ, but found much of the Bible incompatible with reason, which is why he famously created his own by excising the miraculous portions. Adams, on the other hand, believed that the Bible was indispensable as a text of political philosophy. He remarked that "the Bible is the best book in the World. It contains more of my little Philosophy than all the Libraries I have seen: and such Parts of it as I cannot reconcile to my little Philosophy I postpone for future Investigation."¹² Both men were intrigued by biblical criticism that questioned the details of Israel's history.¹³ For Adams, however, the Bible was useful as a legal and civic manual for a "commonwealth."¹⁴ He wrote in his diary:

¹⁰ John Witte, Jr., *Religion and the American Constitutional Experiment: Essential Rights and Liberties* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2000), 25-36.

¹¹ Charles Francis Adams, ed., *The Works of John Adams, Second President of the United States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), IX, 609-610. See also, *Ibid.*, X, 235.

¹² Lester J. Cappon, ed., *The Adams-Jefferson Letters: The Complete Correspondence between Thomas Jefferson and Abigail and John Adams* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 412. See also *ibid.*, 340.

¹³ See, e.g., *ibid.*, 394-397, 405, 421.

¹⁴ Adams, ed., II, 7.

Suppose a nation in some distant region should take the Bible for their only law-book, and every member should regulate his conduct by the precepts there exhibited! Every member would be obliged, in conscience, to temperance and frugality and industry; to justice and kindness and charity towards his fellow men; and to piety, love, and reverence, towards Almighty God.¹⁵

Compared to Adams and Jefferson, Fisher Ames, a leading Federalist and representative from Massachusetts, and James Wilson, who was a signer of the Declaration and one of the first Supreme Court justices, were more traditional in their approach to biblical historicity and Christian theology. Like John Adams, Fisher Ames believed that the Bible was more than a morality text or emotional crutch. It was a legal and civic guide that inculcated character in citizens. This is why Ames believed the Bible should be read early as a school text. The earlier it was taught, the more lasting would be its impression.¹⁶

Wilson believed the author of the Pentateuch was the “inspired historian and legislator,” and he assumed the veracity of the Old Testament’s historical claims.¹⁷ Wilson was well trained in classical jurisprudence and quoted liberally from Roman law. Nonetheless, the Hebraic laws as recorded in the Old Testament were more foundational than Roman law because the Hebrews were more ancient. Instead of beginning political theory with a theoretical state of nature, Wilson began with the Pentateuch’s Creation account. Hebrew metaphysics also provided the starting point for his arguments on property and law. He traced the development of property rights from the Pentateuch through Roman law.¹⁸ The same could be said of family law.¹⁹ Juridical practices in the Hebrew world established the principle of public courts, which extended down into the constitutions of the United States. That such a feature

James Wilson traced development of property rights from the Pentateuch through Roman law.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, II, 6-7.

¹⁶ Fisher Ames, *Works of Fisher Ames*, ed. W. B. Allen (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1983), 11-12.

¹⁷ James Wilson, *Collected Works of James Wilson*, ed. Kermit L. Hall and Mark David Hall (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2007), 693.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 386-394. For a summary of the impact of Hebrew metaphysics on the American founding, see Michael Novak, *On Two Wings: Humble Faith and Common Sense at the American Founding* (San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2002), 5-13.

¹⁹ Wilson, 1069.

had carried over from the second millennium BC should be no surprise because, according to Wilson, Moses was “of legislators the first and wisest.”²⁰ The famous French visitor Alexis de Tocqueville later remarked on this American tendency to directly apply Old Testament law. Citing seventeenth-century Connecticut as an example, he explained the shocking tendency for America’s first law codes in the colonies to have derived straight from biblical texts, especially the Pentateuch.²¹

Americans were comfortable using Old Testament law in this manner because many saw the colonial governments and fledgling republic as a reincarnated Israel. They were familiar with biblical parallels to America, especially when delivered from the pulpit. Harvard graduate and Massachusetts pastor Abiel Abbot summarized the view accordingly: “It has been often remarked that the people of the United States come nearer to a parallel with Ancient Israel, than any other nation upon the globe. Hence our American Israel is a term frequently used; and common consent allows it apt and proper.”²²

References to the Bible and Christianity abound throughout the Capitol.

References to the Bible and Christianity abound throughout the Capitol. The Rotunda boasts some of the most significant works of Christian art. Columbus lands with praying soldiers and a cross-toting friar. DeSoto discovers the Mississippi while his men plant a crucifix before overawed Native Americans. Pocahontas is baptized. The Pilgrims pray with the Bible in hand. There is also the “Prayer Window” with a depiction of George Washington praying to the Christian God and surrounded by an Old Testament verse in the Congressional Prayer Room. Priests like Arizona’s Eusebio Kino and California’s Father Damien; friars like California’s Junipero Serra; ministers like California’s Thomas Starr King, Rhode Island’s Roger Williams, and Pennsylvania’s John Peter Gabriel Muhlenberg; missionaries like Oregon’s Jason Lee, Washington’s Marcus Whitman, and Wisconsin’s Pere Jacques Marquette have all enjoyed statutory residence in the Capitol’s halls. These examples testify to the historical importance of Americans’ biblical worldview, even if that worldview has be-

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 943.

²¹ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, ed. Eduardo Nolla, trans. James T. Schleifer (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2012), 61-64.

²² Abiel Abbot, *Traits of Resemblance in the People of the United States of America to Ancient Israel* (Haverhill: Moore & Stebbins, 1799).

come more of a relic today.

Some scholars and activists take evidence such as this to affirm the notion that America is indeed a biblical “city upon a hill.” Not only was America dominated by Christian culture, but it was designed as a Christian nation in the political sense. Some take the matter even further, arguing that America was intentionally Christian, especially in its politics, and that the U.S. should be publicly Christian today in its legislation, ceremonies, and symbols. This view is commonly called the “Christian America” thesis. In David Barton’s *A Spiritual Heritage Tour of the United States Capitol*, for example, he argues that the U.S. Capitol exemplifies America’s Christian nature, both in history and in practice. Advocates of the Christian America thesis would agree with Congregationalist minister Elizur Goodrich who claimed in 1787 that “We have also a Jerusalem, adorned with brighter glories of divine grace, and with greater beauties of holiness than were ever displayed in the most august solemnities of the Hebrew-temple-worship This is our Jerusalem.”²³

Sparta, Athens, and Rome

Ironically, the Capitol is one of the worst possible examples Barton or any advocate of the Christian America thesis should be exploring. Barton’s methodology is problematic, but more importantly he misses the overarching theme of the Capitol, which is based on very different models from antiquity. From its perspective, the biblical tradition is clearly subordinate to the classical. Classical references abound; its architecture, portraits, paintings, busts, statues, reliefs, frescoes, murals, and sculptures demand that the visitor recall the forms and ideals of ancient Greece and Rome.

Classical references in Capitol outnumber those from biblical tradition.

This was both en vogue and intentional. Neoclassical art and architecture were aspects of the Enlightenment that were all the rage across Europe and the Americas in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The American founders were also

²³ Ellis Sandoz, ed., *Political Sermons of the Founding Era* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1998), 913-914. Conrad Cherry compiled an anthology of America’s eschatological and messianic views in Conrad Cherry, ed., *God’s New Israel: Religious Interpretations of American Destiny* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998).

For American founders, Rome's virtues as a republic were unmatched in classical world.

educated in the classical tradition and wanted to pay homage to Greek and Roman ideals such as republicanism, the rule of law, democracy, free speech, citizen-soldiering, and civic virtue.²⁴

The classically educated American founders quoted liberally from the histories of Greece and Rome, but they gave preference to Rome for two reasons. Roman republicanism was seen as the culmination of that which was best from the classical world. Rome also surpassed the Greeks in its republicanism. Although oligarchic—or, as John Adams styled it, an “aristocratical republic”—Rome’s virtues as a pastoral, mixed government republic were unmatched in the classical world.²⁵ Two ancient authors in particular lent credence to these views: Polybius (200-118 BC) and Plutarch (46-120).

Polybius surveyed the best constitutions of the Mediterranean in Book VI of his *Histories*. He found much to praise in Carthage, Sparta, and Rome, and Rome was the best of these. Democracies like Athens and Thebes, on the other hand, modeled failure better than success. The primary obstacle to Athenian and Carthaginian virtue was their nature as commercial, seafaring republics. Polybius treated the Roman Republic’s mixed constitution at length, but its agricultural economic system was just as important. Roman farmers were insulated from the corrupting effects of trade, and their simplicity made them pious citizens who valued virtue over profit. They also made sturdier soldiers. Polybius argued that Rome’s victories over Carthage in the Punic Wars were due in no small measure to the former’s pastoralism (VI.51-56).

Plutarch used Greek and Roman history as fertile soil from which he would pluck out the best and worst statesmen as character studies for his *Parallel Lives*. His biographies were fa-

²⁴ On the classical and neoclassical influences on the founding generation, see Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), 23-26; David J. Bederman, *The Classical Foundations of the American Constitution: Prevailing Wisdom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 1-49; Barbara Borngasser, “Neoclassical and Romantic Architecture in the United States of America,” in *Neoclassicism and Romanticism: Architecture, Sculpture, Painting, Drawing 1750-1848*, ed. Rolf Toman (Cologne: H. F. Ullmann, 2006); Carl J. Richard, *The Founders and the Classics: Greece, Rome, and the American Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 12-38.

²⁵ Adams, ed., IV.542.

mous in the ancient world, and they had become useful in the early modern period as well. English versions of his lives, especially John Dryden's seventeenth-century translation, were widely used by the eighteenth-century founders. Plutarch compared Greek and Roman statesmen, with Romans usually earning more favor. The Athenian democracy itself was often a villain in his biographies. The worst villains were those men responsible for the destruction of republicanism, like Marius, Sulla, and Marc Antony.²⁶

*Plutarch's
Parallel Lives
influenced
founders . . .*

The founders essentially adopted the thinking of Polybius and Plutarch: Sparta was to be preferred to Athens since the latter was exceedingly problematic, but Rome was even better than Sparta. Whether or not Polybius' estimation of the ancient republics was right, the founders still found his articulation of Roman mixed government convincing. John Adams thought his wisdom was indispensable for modern republics, especially America's. As a civic republican, advocate of checks and balances, and Federalist, Adams could find no better model for America's own mixed government than what Polybius had outlined for Rome.²⁷

*. . . as did
Polybius'
description of
Roman mixed
government.*

Thomas Jefferson may have been Adams's political rival and philosophical opposite in American political thought, but he still found much to admire about Rome. His affinity for the Roman Republic grew out of his love of farming and the virtues of agricultural life. He believed the United States was uniquely blessed with abundant land, and this would provide the setting for America's "citizenry of Virgilian farmers."²⁸ Incidentally, this provided one of the key motivations for his uncharacteristically unconstitutional move to secure the Louisiana Purchase, which guaranteed more farmland for America's pastoral republic.

Like Israel and the Greek city-states in the fifth century BC, Rome relied on farmers to fight its wars. This started to change in the second century, and Plutarch pinned the blame for its demise on Marius' reforms that professionalized the army at around 100 B.C., although this process was actually

²⁶ For a summary of Plutarch's "Heroes and Villains," see Robert Lamberton, *Plutarch* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 115-142.

²⁷ Adams, ed., IV.434.

²⁸ Richard, 158.

more complicated than he allows (*Gaius Marius*, 9). Benjamin Rush agreed with Plutarch and other founders in citing Marius and Sulla as the two principal villains who used corruption and money to end the virtue and austerity of the Roman Republic.²⁹

Rome's republican history was seen as a golden age ruined by Plutarch's villains. All that was best of the classical world was found in the history of pre-imperial Rome. For the founding generation, the "Roman republic was virtuous; the later Roman Empire was decadent, aggressive, and evil."³⁰ Common anti-models from the classical world were the Roman emperors, Roman militarism, and the statesmen who caused Rome's collapse. Philip and Alexander were comparable anti-models from Greek history.³¹ Greek democracy as a whole was just as problematic—Athens was the easiest target when it came to historical examples of ambitious demagogues and reckless assemblies.³²

*Athenian
democracy
provided
examples of
what to avoid.*

A number of American thinkers followed ancient authors like Plato, Aristotle, Polybius, and Plutarch by critiquing the political institutions of the Hellenic states. In *Athens on Trial* Jennifer Tolbert Roberts concludes that "for the framers of the American constitution the story of Athens was the story of failure."³³ Modern Americans may look at the ancient model of democracy to derive some valuable lessons, but "this belief contrasts strikingly with the conviction of America's founders that what little Athens had to teach was entirely of the negative variety."³⁴ Even the anti-Federalists with their democratic tendencies were reluctant to use Athens as a model.³⁵ The same could not be said of Rome, Roberts concluded:

The Romans fared somewhat better, most obviously in the shaping—and naming—of the Senate and in the adoption of Roman mottos and catchwords such as *E pluribus unum* and *Novus Ordo Saeclorum* Despite the rejection of Athenian-style democracy, the classical ideal of republican government served

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 214.

³⁰ Bederman, 31.

³¹ This is surveyed in Richard, 87-94.

³² *Ibid.*, 94-95, 116-117.

³³ Jennifer Tolbert Roberts, *Athens on Trial: the Antidemocratic Tradition in Western Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 176.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 175.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 185.

as an important legitimizing tool for American constitutionalists seeking to demonstrate the ancient pedigree of accountable and nonmonarchic governments.³⁶

Roman patriotism, courage, and pastoralism were lauded as the best virtues of the classical world. Rome's constitutional features were also the most praised. The constitutions of Athens, Sparta, Carthage, Thebes, Crete, and Rome were discussed during the creation of the American republic, but the Roman constitution was by far the most influential. A bicameral legislature, the Senate and its "advise and consent" role, property qualifications, Congressional war authorization, Rome's more robust federalism, age requirements for officeholders, term limits, and, of course, the vast corpus of Roman law and Latin legal terminology made Rome the uncontested classical favorite for the art and science of American republicanism.³⁷ It should thus be no surprise that the architecture and symbology in the Capitol is inspired more by Rome than any other ancient polity.

Framers borrowed much from Roman constitution.

A New Rome?

The founders' use of their classical education was not always a sophisticated affair. Not wholly unlike adolescent boys adulating one another as superheroes in a comic book shop, the founders likened themselves to classical heroes. Thomas Jefferson compared John Adams to Themistocles, although Adams preferred Cicero for himself. James Wilson adored Cicero as well. Abigail Adams compared the future Vice-President for Madison, Elbridge Gerry, to Cato. And George Washington was often compared to Fabius Maximus.³⁸

An even more popular parallel for Washington was Cincinnatus. Cincinnatus was given special attention when Brumidi painted his first mural in the House Agricultural Committee Room, *Calling of Cincinnatus from the Plow*. The subject was Cincinnatus, the exiled Roman commander who was farming his small plot of land when summoned by the Roman people

³⁶ Ibid., 184. See also, Ibid., 179.

³⁷ These constitutional features are explored in depth in Bederman, 95-175.

³⁸ An overview of the founders' penchant for classical models can be found in Richard, 53-84.

*Cincinnatus
an important
Roman
exemplar.*

to rescue the state from invaders. Instead of maintaining his power, however, he surrendered it and returned to his farm. Cincinnatus did all this in sixteen days. It took Brumidi much longer to recreate the scene in paint from January to March of 1855.³⁹ The Cincinnatus anecdote was a powerful one during the American Revolution, and Brumidi acknowledged Cincinnatus' exemplarity by painting *Calling of Putnam from the Plow to the Revolution* across from him in the same room.

The comparison of generals such as Washington and Putnam to the Cincinnatus legend represented one of the most important analogies to ancient Rome. Preserved for future generations in the Capitol building, stories like this were meant to instruct lawgivers and citizens with regard to their civic ideals. But the ideals of the classical world were not static, and their application to modern states could uplift contradictory notions of goodness in politics.

Once again, the Capitol provides an apt example. The building was to serve the obvious purpose of housing the bicameral legislature. The two leading statesmen behind the Capitol's design, Washington and Jefferson, also sought to use it for other purposes. Washington saw an acute need for a majestic symbol that would awe citizens and visitors, and Jefferson desired an educational edifice that would instruct onlookers about ancient architecture and secular civic principles.⁴⁰ Washington and Jefferson approved the initial design and commissioned the first architects of the Capitol with these purposes in mind. After a lackluster design contest, the plans put forward by William Thornton won approval. The Capitol was subsequently transformed into its present state by its first architects, B. Henry Latrobe (1803-1817), Charles Bulfinch (1818-1829) and Thomas U. Walter (1851-1865).

Thornton's design was indeed majestic and educational in the classical mode. However, it was not modeled after the open, public spaces where assemblies convened and legislation was passed, such as the Roman Comitium, the Field of

³⁹ Henry Hope Reed, *The United States Capitol: Its Architecture and Decoration* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2005), 162.

⁴⁰ William C. Allen, "Pantheon on the Potomac: The Architectural Evolution of the Capitol Rotunda," in *American Pantheon: Sculptural and Artistic Decoration of the United States Capitol*, ed. Donald R. Kennon and Thomas P. Somma (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2004), 2-6.

Mars, or the Athenian Pnyx. Instead the model employed was a temple. The architecture of classical religious edifices provided both majesty and meaning. The majesty was obvious enough. A stone temple on a hill is imposing, especially if it boasts a dome, and no domes existed yet in America. Thomas Jefferson even sketched a plan for the Capitol based exactly on the Pantheon and its dome. Thornton's design promised not one but two domes in a magisterial rotunda between the wings that housed Congress.

But what purpose would the rotunda serve? The Israelite temple held divine instruments and the words of God—the treaty covenant between YHWH and the Israelites. Greek and Roman temples sheltered an image of the divine himself (or herself). The latter was more of what Thornton and the first architects of the Capitol had in mind. If the Capitol was an American temple, then there could be no greater god than Washington. His death in 1799 provided the perfect opportunity for Thornton and his rotunda. Thornton proposed that Washington's body be moved into the rotunda, which would serve as his mausoleum. Congress approved of the plan, as they had already resolved to prepare a tomb there. Thornton would even include a winged figure that spirited Washington heavenward like a deified Roman emperor. Unfortunately for Thornton, when Jefferson assumed the presidency, the democratic president buried the scheme to bury Washington there.⁴¹

A compromise was eventually reached with Brumidi's famous *Apotheosis of Washington*, where Washington sits enthroned among thirteen maidens representing the colonies. He is flanked by Liberty, who holds the Roman *fasces* and the U.S. Constitution, and Fame/Victory, who proudly blares her trumpet. These features were distinctly Roman. Rome cornered the propaganda market with regard to liberty as a legal status and glory as the objective of warfare. Washington was the central figure who sits in his robed glory, brandishes his sword, and points to the Constitution with outstretched finger.

In some ways, the Capitol fresco reminds one of the Sistine

⁴¹ Ibid., 6-9. The scheme was forever ended when a new bid for the coveted corpse in 1832 sparked a spirited contest that was won by Virginia and Washington's heirs.

chapel fresco. At the center of Michelangelo's work is God, imparting life to Adam with his outstretched finger. As God sparked life within man, so Washington sparked life within American government. Michelangelo was painting in a religious edifice, and Brumidi in a secular, but their themes were equally religious in theme and intensity. If function follows form, what then was the Capitol's message?

As indicated by all of these symbols, the majesty of the Capitol was matched by its symbolic meaning. Bibles, steeples, crosses, and other symbols of the Old and New Testaments are noticeably absent or subordinated. Though Christian and biblical symbols were present in the background, America would not be an established-church Christian nation like its European ancestors. Instead, America's civic symbols prioritized the classical tradition. Jerusalem was not the model, but, rather, Athens and Rome. Moreover, citizens were to place faith in this civic tradition, not unlike citizens of Athens or Rome who were expected to prioritize the political. What determined American identity was not a Christian creed but a civic one.⁴²

*Harmonious
blending of
secular politics
and biblical
Christianity
envisioned.*

Ancient Christians had already identified the troubling, Greco-Roman "primacy of the political" centuries before. They could not share the classical sense of duty and loyalty to country because their prior allegiance was to Christ. When they refused to offer the proper patriotism to the Roman authorities, they were systematically targeted, oppressed, and massacred. Their stories had been popularized in the sixteenth century by John Foxe's famous work of Protestant history, *Acts and Monuments*, also called the *Book of Martyrs*. The founders were familiar with Foxe's work, but the tension between the classical primacy of politics and biblical Christianity did not tax them. They envisioned a harmonious combination of the two ancient models. Samuel Adams, for example, announced that America would be a new sort of fusion between classical and Christian. It would be a "Christian Sparta."⁴³

The Capitol modeled *neo*-classical architecture. It could thus

⁴² Wiltshire makes a similar argument regarding the Bill of Rights in Susan Ford Wiltshire, *Greece, Rome, and the Bill of Rights* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992), 184-186.

⁴³ The quote and its context are briefly discussed in Gordon S. Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic 1776-1787* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 114-118.

theoretically reference both the classical and the biblical. In the beginning, this was a logical conclusion because American national power was weak. The federal principle of prioritizing state and local governments characterized the American political ethos. Tocqueville accurately observed that Americans were more likely to identify with their voluntary associations, local churches, communities, and states. Physical interaction with their local institutions and organizations created the American spirit. He wrote:

It is within political associations that the Americans of all the states, all minds and all ages, daily acquire the general taste for association and become familiar with its use. There they see each other in great number, talk together, understand each other and become active together in all sorts of enterprises. They then carry into civil life the notions that they have acquired in this way and make them serve a thousand uses.⁴⁴

From colonization until Tocqueville's day, experiences of local associations and devotion to them informed Americans' conception of broader political interactions. Local government was more important than national.

America was also to be a land free from the monarchic papacy and continental persecutions. Throughout his visit Tocqueville observed that Protestant religion and politics worked harmoniously to create American "*mores*." Even Catholic parishes in America were more republican and democratic in the American style because of the Atlantic separation. The term *mores* here is interesting because it is the Latin term for customs and the force of culture. During the Roman Republic, cultural and social *mores* often had more force for Roman citizens than laws or swords.⁴⁵

Cultural and social mores more powerful than laws or swords.

This older model of federalism and localism was already in Tocqueville's day beginning to give way to centralization and nationalism. The shift would challenge the way classical *mores* would be applied. Some of the causes for America's nineteenth-century shift remind one of Rome's transition from humble republic trying to stay alive to empire trying to acquire ever more, with slavery, territorial expansion, and skepticism for religion being three of the most obvious parallels.

⁴⁴ Tocqueville, 916. See also *ibid.*, 273-275, 479-480, 895-902.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 466-480.

However, other factors unknown to the ancient world were influencing the new republic as well, including Napoleonic nationalism, Romanticism, and industrial expansion. By the mid-nineteenth century, these forces also affected the spiritual nature of centralized government. Congressman Rufus Choate captured this sentiment in a quotation inscribed in the Capitol's House Corridor:

We Have Built No Temple
But The Capitol
We Consult No Common Oracle
But The Constitution⁴⁶

That a political document and its underlying philosophy could serve as the religious guide for a people was no novel notion when Choate uttered the claim. It stemmed from one strand of the Enlightenment that was decidedly secular, and this civil religious claim indicated a very different model for a city on a hill than covenantal Jerusalem.

The seventy-five years following the Revolution and Constitution moved America further away from the simplicity of a pastoral republic. This was captured in the U.S. Capitol's increasingly magisterial architecture between the initial plans and the completion of the building's present skeleton during the Civil War. The Civil War itself was the transformative event that constitutionally redefined the nature of American federalism. It also elevated the United States as a nation-state to unprecedented heights as young American men were sacrificed in droves on the altar of republican nationalism. Lincoln pushed forward with the Capitol's completion in the midst of the war to provide an icon for American civil religion.⁴⁷

In fact the Capitol is literally named after a very different sort of hill, the Capitoline in Rome. Upon it was built the Temple to Jupiter Optimus Maximus, one of the earliest monuments in Rome. The Capitoline Temple was more than a religious symbol. It was erected during the regal period of Rome, probably in the sixth century BC, by kings conscious of the need to earn prestige and unify their subjects with monu-

⁴⁶ *Art in the United States Capitol*, 318.

⁴⁷ The war years of the Capitol's construction are discussed in William C. Allen, *History of the United States Capitol: A Chronicle of Design, Construction, and Politics* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2001), 307-335.

mental building projects.⁴⁸ It symbolized the civil religion of the Roman state. Roman civil religion was meticulously transferred into the Republic, and it was likewise maintained when Rome grew into an empire.

Imperial Rome is represented by the majesty of the U.S. Capitol's dome. Unlike Jefferson's Pantheon-inspired scheme, the dome itself was baroque, recalling both the absolute monarchies and the high religious tone of that period. The strongest of these symbols in the eighteenth century were St. Paul's Cathedral in London, Les Invalides and the Pantheon in Paris, and St. Peter's Basilica in the Vatican. St. Paul's was the most common reference for American colonials. Constructed at the turn of the eighteenth century, it was London's towering testament to the restored monarchy and Anglicanism as the city was reconstructed in the wake of the Great Fire of 1666. St. Peter's was and probably still is the single most significant testament to grandeur and monarchy in existence. It is the residence of the Roman pontiff. Les Invalides was both political and religious—as were all things for Louis XIV, who intended it as a royal chapel. Like the Pantheon in Paris, it hearkened back to the original dome muse, the Pantheon, which was the Roman temple to every god.

Each of these models challenged the simplicity of both the Hebraic and Roman Republics. Simplicity was not what Architect of the Capitol Walter had in mind in following these muses. Instead it was majesty, and not only of the Roman Empire, but of the Catholic, British, and French as well. The U.S. Capitol would be a cathedral to American republicanism, and by the mid-nineteenth century this republicanism was classical in the imperial sense of the Pantheon—it was majestic, centralized, overawing, and civically religious.⁴⁹

A cathedral to American republicanism.

The classical models of the Capitol's architecture hint at the tyrannical "primacy of politics" that classical virtues and

⁴⁸ On the debate surrounding the construction of the temple, see Christopher John Smith, "Early and Archaic Rome," in *Ancient Rome: The Archaeology of the Eternal City*, ed. Jon Coulston and Hazel Dodge (Oxford: Oxford University School of Archaeology, 2011), 29. On the links to Washington's Capitol, see Allen, *History of the United States Capitol: A Chronicle of Design, Construction, and Politics*, 10.

⁴⁹ Allen provides Walter's comments on these muses in *ibid.*, 226. See also *ibid.*, 185, 189.

models can inflict. The Americans who began the building of the Capitol had the covenantal Hebraic Republic much in their minds, but the Americans who finished it in the mid nineteenth-century were more concerned with the national idol of the classical republics. The extent to which the civil religion of Greece and Rome would be mirrored in the American republic was evolving. Americans did not believe that Washington actually was an emperor or a god, but they did copy an ancient model that artistically demonstrated his divinity. In fact, they surpassed Greek, Roman, and early modern architecture in their deifying artistry and used the Egyptian obelisk for the Washington Monument.

Most Christians in eighteenth and early nineteenth century America were also not ready to see a very great separation between church and state, especially at the state and local levels, but they consciously followed a tradition that subordinated or transferred the holy to the civic.⁵⁰ The evangelist Matthew's ancient biblical metaphor of a "city upon a hill" could have referred to any number of examples, but in its day, Jerusalem and Rome would have been foremost for Matthew's readers. Jerusalem was the spiritual capital for Jews and Christians, and Rome was the political capital of the world's sprawling empire. Americans were equally aware of these two republican models from the distant past. Both influenced the founding, but perhaps only one would define America's imperial destiny. By incorporating this classical tradition so carefully, especially with regard to the Capitol, Americans suggested that the kind of "city upon a hill" they hoped to emulate was not Jerusalem, but Rome.

Pastoral Virtues and Self-Reliant Republicans

Israelites like Moses and Romans like Cincinnatus seem to have very little in common at first glance. These two ancient personalities prominent in the Capitol were separated perhaps by a millennium and occupied very different cultures in the Mediterranean (some scholars question whether the figures even existed at all). But both men represented ancient versions of the republican, civic military ideal. Moses led the famous re-

*Parallels
between
Moses and
Cincinnatus.*

⁵⁰ William T. Cavanaugh, *Migrations of the Holy: God, State, and the Political Meaning of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011).

bellion of Israelite slaves against Egyptian tyrants and forged a covenant among the sons of Israel that endowed them with political power while expecting military service from them. According to the Old Testament and early American thinkers familiar with the story, Moses was more than a great lawgiver. He was the commander of a divinely chosen body of citizen-soldiers. Cincinnatus was the same sort of republican leader. In the traditional history of early Rome, he was part of the second generation of leaders after the Romans ejected their kings. His accomplishments in peace were as important as his valor in war. Another anecdote that looks suspiciously like a doublet has him once again summoned to take command of the Roman state, but this time he puts down a monarchic conspiracy and restores peace among the vying factions of the city (Livy 4.13-16).

The unique political orders that Moses and Cincinnatus led were also agricultural. As republican polities Israel and Rome distinguished themselves from other ancient states like Egypt and Persia, which were viewed as overbearing autocracies. As land-based, agrarian republics, they also outpaced Greek city-states such as Athens, which were denounced by both ancients and moderns—whether fairly or unfairly—for their commercialism, inconstancy, and democratic tempestuousness.⁵¹ Farming may have been ubiquitous in the ancient world, but politically empowered farmer-citizens were not, and militarily proficient farmer-citizen-soldiers rarer still. Israel and Rome thus challenged the world with new ideas. When the world fought back, both polities wielded their civic militarism with deadly effects against their enemies. They transformed hard-working farmers into hardy killers willing to sacrifice themselves and their enemies on the altar of republican glory. This ancient narrative was invaluable to American revolutionaries. They cast their cause as being as righteous as Moses' rebellion against Egypt and their character as being as noble as the self-denying Cincinnatus. Americans, like the idealized Israelites and Romans, envisioned themselves as innocent, hard-working farmers forced to offer their lives by taking up

⁵¹ This theme has been emphasized in works such as Roberts, *Athens on Trial*, and Loren J. Samons, II, *What's Wrong with Democracy?* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

arms in defense of liberty.

Unfortunately, these parallels are often overlooked. Much is made today of the tensions that arise in American cultural life from following either the model of Rome or that of Jerusalem. Most often, these tensions surface over church-state disputes. These battles look back to the divergences between the Hebraic and Roman republics. Will America be covenantal, devout, and dedicated to righteousness? Or will it be civic, pagan, and dedicated to honor?

Only the imagination can make use of historical examples.

Perhaps a choice need not be made. The intellectual exercise above has, it is hoped, reminded readers about the way the founders approached biblical and classical models. The earth may belong to the living, as Jefferson quipped, but ignoring the testimony of the dead is like piloting a ship without maps, compasses, or star charts. One can do it, but one is not likely to get anywhere. It is wiser to follow the currents and avoid the shoals of human civilization that have been identified by those who came before us. Historical models will always be with us, but only the political imagination can enable them to instruct us. When the American founders sought the wisdom of the ancients, this is precisely what they were doing with the Hebraic and Roman Republics. The modern debates over whether America was designed as a Christian nation or a neoclassical secular state of the Enlightenment miss the novelty of how the founders played with history. In their minds the commonalities between covenantal and civic republicanism were what mattered. Both ancient states provided useful examples for the sort of governments Americans should create and the sort of virtue Americans should emulate. Early Americans were justified in appreciating Moses and Cincinnatus because the similarities between their two ancient polities were more important than their differences. Israel and Rome shared two guiding principles that inspired Americans. First, the best polity should be a republic based on pastoral virtues. Second, citizens should be self-reliant and willing to defend it.

America's economy will never be as agricultural as it was during the founding, and even at that time the amount of industry and trade in America surpassed even Athens and Carthage. Nonetheless, that magisterial rotunda ironically captures how America was already perceiving itself as a pastoral

republic in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Brumidi and Filippo Costaggini painted the Frieze of American History which gives preference to the pastoral virtues of the early Americans. The fresco begins with Spanish colonization in all its monarchic grandeur. Columbus dazzles the natives, and Cortes and Pizarro conquer them. DeSoto is buried ceremoniously. The Frieze portrays them as the dashing conquistadors in search of riches and glory, with Catholic missionaries in tow. The Spaniards are followed by the fantastic romantic tale of John Smith and Pocahontas, which was probably just too saucy to ignore.

The next scenes portray what English colonization was supposed to embody. The Pilgrims piously land at Plymouth in 1620. Next, Penn treats with the Indians in 1682. New England is colonized in the next panel, and the final colonial scene is of Governor Oglethorpe treating with the Indians in 1732. The frescoes are magnificent, but the people in them are not. Compared to the Spanish frescoes, they are positively prosaic. The pilgrims are simply clothed, lacking the armor and mounts of the Spanish. They are praying or working with chests and bundles of sticks and tools. The Colonization of New England panel shows the colonists hard at work, chopping wood, installing beams, and erecting buildings. The point here is simple: the English colonists who made the thirteen colonies came to work and build a new life. The colonists in the Penn and Oglethorpe panels are also clothed plainly when they treat with the Indians. Unlike the Spanish panels, these two panels show the colonists on equal terms with the Indians. They did not come as conquerors, but as settlers seeking a peaceful place to make their homes.

The contrasts may be overstated, but they nonetheless represent the peaceful pastoralism Americans wanted to remember about their history. Industry, frugality, simplicity, and austerity governed the colonists as they had governed the ancient republicans millennia ago. The Rotunda Frieze is only one of the many pastoral scenes throughout the Capitol. Others include the *Apotheosis of Democracy* sculpture in the House Pediment, the *Calling of Putnam from the Plow to the Revolution*, the bottom scenes of the Senate bronze doors, the Senate's east entry, the *Progress of Civilization* sculpture in the Senate Pedi-

*American
pastoralism
a frequent
theme . . .*

ment, the *Embarkation of the Pilgrims at Delft Haven* hanging in the Rotunda, and *Agriculture*, the top scene of the Right Valve in the Amateis bronze doors.

... as is that
of the citizen-
soldier.

The second principle was the colonists' civic militarism. If pastoral republics are to remain republics, they must also be defended by self-reliant citizens willing to set aside the plow. As discussed above, the citizen-soldiers of America were seen to have antecedents as far back as ancient Israel and Rome. Covenantal and civic virtue for the pastoral republic must translate on the battlefield to civic militarism because citizens were afforded liberty only as long as they were willing to fight for it. These themes were prevalent in many of the pastoral scenes throughout the Capitol, like the Cincinnatus painting. Similar artworks existed elsewhere: the Senate's bronze doors include the image of another American farmer-soldier fighting a Hessian mercenary, and the Senate chamber's east entry sports an engraving of a citizen-soldier with one arm brandishing a sword and one hand leaning on his plow. Cincinnatus thus represented the spirit of the American citizen-soldier, from commanders such as Washington and Putnam to the ideal of the nameless, average militiaman.

The Rotunda Frieze emphasizes the martial values necessary to defend the hard work of the colonists. Following Oglethorpe's Peace the next scenes are the Battle of Lexington, the Reading of the Declaration of Independence, and the Surrender of Cornwallis at Yorktown. The citizen-soldiers fight the professional British armies at Lexington and win the victory over them at Yorktown six years later. The American soldiers do not need professionals to defend them because this is a task they demand of themselves. They will build their own homes, tend their own fields, and fight their own battles.

The Declaration scene is telling from another perspective. It does not show the writing or approval of the Declaration in private chambers, but the reading of it in the public square. Adams, Jefferson, and Franklin are positioned amidst the Philadelphia commoners, who receive the Declaration with jubilation. The scene testifies to every republic's two essentials: the leadership of good men and the consent of a devoted citizenry.

In these scenes, American virtue has two complementary

dimensions. First, there are the sacrificial leaders such as Putnam, Franklin, Jefferson, and Adams. They have the wisdom of Moses' horns and Cincinnatus' disdain for power. Unlike the preposterously divine and monarchic *Apotheosis of Washington*, these men are attired like and positioned amidst their fellow republicans. They lead by the power of their own arguments and examples. The fellow, average republicans constitute the other dimension. Republics need wise and sacrificial leaders, but they also need a broad base of virtuous citizens. The soldier with the plow and sword above the Senate's east entry and the soldier-farmer fighting the Hessian mercenary in the Senate's bronze doors represent this common citizen. He communes with the earth as a farmer during peacetime, but serves his republic as a citizen-soldier during war. He is a man worthy of the leadership of Putnam, Adams, Jefferson, and Franklin.

This hardy citizen both willing and able to defend his republic did not need the patronage of monarchs, administrators, and bureaucrats. The citizen who wielded his own plow and his own rifle was self-reliant. He rebelled against large, intrusive states that presumed to organize his life and provide for him. Liberty was far more valuable than majesty. Self-reliance rippled outward so that communities and states also sought to provide for themselves before seeking provision from a centralized national government.

*Self-reliance
a prerequisite
for liberty.*

If Americans wish to take their country's history seriously, they must also take seriously the ancient republics that inspired the founders. Not only so, but they must make the right choices about what historical examples they will follow. I have tried to demonstrate that the Capitol is a complex structure that appropriately identifies the many historical strands that have brought the United States to where it is. Some of these reflect the currents of the founding, and some of them indicate later tendencies that sailed against this current. The real debate about the Hebraic and Roman Republics' influence is not which will define American church-state relations, but which will define the soul of American republicanism. Both Jerusalem and Rome left the legacy of a republic that was imperfect, but also virtuous, simple, and pious. Their pastoral cultures

cultivated virtue. Their constitutions were well-balanced to counter corruption. Their citizens were capable of defending and expanding the liberties and laws of the republic. If America seeks a future inspired by the virtues of its past, then it must derive inspiration not merely from the founders but also from the Hebraic and Roman Republics that inspired them. Moreover, it must avoid the corruption of majesty and centralization that destroyed those earlier models.