

The Oxford Dictionary of

# Political Quotations

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**Sound bites 2000–4**

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**Diane Abbott** 1953–

British Labour politician

- 1 Being an MP is the sort of job all working-class parents want for their children—clean, indoors and no heavy lifting. in *Independent* 18 January 1994

**Bella Abzug** 1920–98

American politician

- 2 Richard Nixon impeached himself. He gave us Gerald Ford as his revenge. in *Rolling Stone*; Linda Botts Loose Talk (1980)

**Accius** 170–c.86 BC

Latin poet and dramatist

- 3 Let them hate, so long as they fear. *Atreus*

**Dean Acheson** 1893–1971

American statesman

on *Acheson*: see **Pearson** 285:4

- 4 I will undoubtedly have to seek what is happily known as gainful employment, which I am glad to say does not describe holding public office. in *Time* 22 December 1952
- 5 Great Britain has lost an empire and has not yet found a role. speech at the Military Academy, West Point, 5 December 1962
- 6 The first requirement of a statesman is that he be dull. in *Observer* 21 June 1970
- 7 A memorandum is written not to inform the reader but to protect the writer. in *Wall Street Journal* 8 September 1977
- of President Eisenhower:*
- 8 I doubt very much if a man whose main literary interests were in works by Mr Zane Grey, admirable as they may be, is particularly equipped to be the chief executive of this country, particularly where Indian Affairs are concerned. attributed

**Lord Acton** 1834–1902

British historian

- 9 Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely. letter to Bishop Mandell Creighton, 3 April 1887; see **Pitt** 289:10  
*often quoted as ‘All power corrupts . . .’*
- 10 Great men are almost always bad men, even when they exercise influence and not authority. letter to Bishop Mandell Creighton, 3 April 1887

**Abigail Adams** 1744–1818wife of John **Adams**, 2nd President of the USA, and mother of John Quincy **Adams**

- 11 In the new code of laws which I suppose it will be necessary for you to make I desire you would remember the ladies, and be more generous and favourable to them than your ancestors. Do not put such unlimited power into the hands of the husbands. Remember all men would be tyrants if they could. letter to John Adams, 31 March 1776

- 1 These are times in which a genius would wish to live. It is not in the still calm of life, or the repose of a pacific station, that great characters are formed . . . Great necessities call out great virtues. letter to John Quincy Adams, 19 January 1780
- 2 Patriotism in the female sex is the most disinterested of all virtues. Excluded from honours and from offices, we cannot attach ourselves to the State or Government from having held a place of eminence . . . Yet all history and every age exhibit instances of patriotic virtue in the female sex; which considering our situation equals the most heroic of yours. letter to John Adams, 17 June 1782

### Franklin P. Adams 1881–1960

American journalist and humorist

- 3 When the political columnists say ‘Every thinking man’ they mean themselves, and when candidates appeal to ‘Every intelligent voter’ they mean everybody who is going to vote for them. *Nods and Becks* (1944)
- 4 The trouble with this country is that there are too many politicians who believe, with a conviction based on experience, that you can fool all of the people all of the time. *Nods and Becks* (1944)
- 5 Elections are won by men and women chiefly because most people vote against somebody rather than for somebody. *Nods and Becks* (1944)

### Gerry Adams 1948–

Northern Irish politician; President of Sinn Féin

- 6 We want him to be the last British Prime Minister with jurisdiction in Ireland.  
*of Tony Blair* in *Irish Times* 18 October 1997
- 7 Peace cannot be built on exclusion. That has been the price of the past 30 years. in *Daily Telegraph* 11 April 1998
- 8 Well done, David.  
*at the Sinn Féin annual conference, on hearing that the Ulster Unionist Council had given its support to David Trimble and the Northern Ireland peace agreement* in *Independent on Sunday* 19 April 1998

### Henry Brooks Adams 1838–1918

American man of letters

- 9 Politics, as a practice, whatever its professions, has always been the systematic organization of hatreds. *The Education of Henry Adams* (1907)
- 10 A friend in power is a friend lost. *The Education of Henry Adams* (1907)
- 11 [Charles] Sumner’s mind had reached the calm of water which receives and reflects images without absorbing them; it contained nothing but itself.  
*of the American politician and orator Charles Sumner* *The Education of Henry Adams* (1907)
- 12 The progress of evolution from President Washington to President Grant was alone evidence to upset Darwin. *The Education of Henry Adams* (1907)
- 13 Practical politics consists in ignoring facts. *The Education of Henry Adams* (1907)

## John Adams 1735–1826

1st Vice-President of the United States and 2nd President; father of John Quincy Adams and husband of Abigail Adams  
 see also **Last words** 214:2

- 1 The law, in all vicissitudes of government . . . will preserve a steady undeviating course; it will not bend to the uncertain wishes, imaginations, and wanton tempers of men . . . On the one hand it is inexorable to the cries of the prisoners; on the other it is deaf, deaf as an adder to the clamours of the populace.
- 2 There is danger from all men. The only maxim of a free government ought to be to trust no man living with power to endanger the public liberty.
- of the Boston Tea Party:*
- 3 There is a dignity, a majesty, a sublimity, in this last effort of the patriots that I greatly admire. The people should never rise without doing something to be remembered—something notable and striking.
- 4 A government of laws, and not of men.  
*later incorporated in the Massachusetts Constitution (1780)*
- 5 I agree with you that in politics the middle way is none at all.
- 6 Yesterday, the greatest question was decided which ever was debated in America, and a greater perhaps never was nor will be decided among men. A resolution was passed without one dissenting colony, ‘that these United Colonies are, and of right ought to be, free and independent States.’
- 7 I must study politics and war that my sons may have liberty to study mathematics and philosophy.
- of the vice-presidency:*
- 8 My country has in its wisdom contrived for me the most insignificant office that ever the invention of man contrived or his imagination conceived.
- 9 Democracy never lasts long. It soon wastes, exhausts, and murders itself. There never was a democracy that did not commit suicide.
- 10 The fundamental article of my political creed is that despotism, or unlimited sovereignty, or absolute power, is the same in a majority of a popular assembly, an aristocratic council, an oligarchical junto, and a single emperor.
- 11 The jaws of power are always opened to devour, and her arm is always stretched out, if possible, to destroy the freedom of thinking, speaking, and writing.
- 12 Liberty cannot be preserved without a general knowledge among the people, who have a right . . . and a desire to know; but besides this, they have a right, an indisputable, unalienable, indefeasible, divine right to that most dreaded and envied kind of knowledge, I mean of the characters and conduct of their rulers.
- 13 The happiness of society is the end of government.
- 14 Fear is the foundation of most governments.
- argument in defence of the British soldiers in the Boston Massacre Trials, 4 December 1770; see **Sidney** 332:5
- Notes for an Oration at Braintree (Spring 1772)
- diary, 17 December 1773
- in *Boston Gazette* (1774)
- letter to Horatio Gates, 23 March 1776
- letter to Abigail Adams, 3 July 1776
- letter to Abigail Adams, 12 May 1780
- letter to Abigail Adams, 19 December 1793
- letter to John Taylor, 15 April 1814
- letter to Thomas Jefferson, 13 November 1815
- A Dissertation on the Canon and the Feudal Law* (1765)
- A Dissertation on the Canon and Feudal Law* (1765)
- Thoughts on Government* (1776)
- Thoughts on Government* (1776)

- 1 The judicial power ought to be distinct from both the legislative and executive, and independent upon both, that so it may be a check upon both, as both should be checks upon that.

*Thoughts on Government* (1776)

## John Quincy Adams 1767–1848

6th President of the USA and son of the 2nd President, John Adams, and Abigail Adams  
see also **Last Words** 214:1

- 2 Think of your forefathers! Think of your posterity!
- 3 *Fiat justitia, pereat coelum* [Let justice be done, though heaven perish]. My toast would be, may our country be always successful, but whether successful or otherwise, always right.
- 4 This house will bear witness to his piety; this town [Braintree, Massachusetts], his birthplace, to his munificence; history to his patriotism; posterity to the depth and compass of his mind.

*Oration at Plymouth* 22 December 1802

letter to John Adams, 1 August 1816; see **Decatur** 103:9, **Mansfield** 241:11, **Mottoes** 262:3

epitaph for John Adams, 1829

## Samuel Adams 1722–1803

American revolutionary leader

- 5 Let us contemplate our forefathers, and posterity, and resolve to maintain the rights bequeathed to us by the former, for the sake of the latter.
- 6 What a glorious morning this is.  
*on hearing gunfire at Lexington, 19 April 1775*
- 7 A nation of shopkeepers are very seldom so disinterested.
- 8 We cannot make events. Our business is wisely to improve them . . . Mankind are governed more by their feelings than by reason. Events which excite those feelings will produce wonderful effects.

speech, 1771

J. K. Hosmer *Samuel Adams* (1886); see **Misquotations** 256:1

*Oration in Philadelphia* 1 August 1776 (the authenticity of this publication is doubtful); see **Napoleon** 265:1, **Smith** 333:8

J. N. Rakove *The Beginnings of National Politics* (1979)

## Frank Ezra Adcock 1886–1968

British classicist and historian of Greece and Rome

- 9 Rome under Sulla was like a bus, with half the passengers trying to drive, and the rest trying to collect the fare.

lecture at Cambridge in the 1940s

## Joseph Addison 1672–1719

English poet, playwright, and essayist; co-founder of *The Spectator*

- 10 What pity is it  
That we can die but once to serve our country!
- 11 From hence, let fierce contending nations know  
What dire effects from civil discord flow.

*Cato* (1713)

*Cato* (1713)

**Konrad Adenauer** 1876–1967

German statesman, first Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany, 1949–63

- 1 It was at the Congress of Vienna, when you so foolishly put Prussia on the Rhine as a safeguard against France and another Napoleon.  
*identifying England's greatest mistake in its relations with Germany*
- 2 A thick skin is a gift from God.

answering his own question to Noel Annan in 1945; Noel Annan *Changing Enemies: the Defeat and Regeneration of Germany* (1989)

in *New York Times* 30 December 1959

**Aeschylus** c.525–456 BC

Greek tragedian

- 3 Do not taint pure laws with mere expediency  
Guard well and reverence that form of government  
Which will eschew alike licence and slavery.  
And from your policy do not wholly banish fear  
For what man living, freed from fear, will still be just?
- 4 Everyone's quick to blame the alien.

*The Eumenides*

*The Suppliant Maidens*

**Herbert Agar** 1897–1980

American poet and writer

- 5 The truth which makes men free is for the most part the truth which men prefer not to hear.

*Time for Greatness* (1942)

**Spiro T. Agnew** 1918–96

American Republican politician, Vice-President 1968–73; he resigned the vice-presidency on 10 October 1973 amid charges of financial wrong-doing while Governor of Maryland

- 6 I didn't say I wouldn't go into ghetto areas. I've been in many of them and to some extent I would say this: If you've seen one city slum you've seen them all.
- 7 A spirit of national masochism prevails, encouraged by an effete corps of impudent snobs who characterize themselves as intellectuals.
- 8 In the United States today, we have more than our share of the nattering nabobs of negativism.

in *Detroit Free Press* 19 October 1968

speech in New Orleans, 19 October 1969

speech in San Diego, 11 September 1970

**Bertie Ahern** 1951–

Irish Fianna Fáil statesman, Taoiseach since 1997

- 9 It is a day we should treasure. Today is about the promise of a bright future, a day when we hope a line will be drawn under the bloody past.
- 10 This is the first time since 1918 in an act of self-determination that everyone on this island, on the one issue, has had the opportunity to pass their verdict.  
*opening the Fianna Fáil referendum campaign*

in *Guardian* 11 April 1998

in *Irish Times* 9 May 1998 'This Week They Said'