

The revolting stories behind Independence Day

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Hollywood, MD - As solid, law-abiding, loyal and, for the most part, contented Americans, we have learned to dread rebellion and revolt. Creating chaos is behavior that so many of us find distasteful and unacceptable. The thing is, this land of contentment wouldn't exist without it.

The discontent that was manifested in Philadelphia during the summer of 1776 was no kneejerk reaction—it had been festering for some time. It was July 4 of that year that the Second Continental Congress declared the 13 colonies a sovereign, independent nation. A torch in the form of a pamphlet published earlier in the year—a work by Thomas Paine called “Common Sense”—helped light the fuse that changed the colonists’ destinies. Four Marylanders—including a Charles County native born into privilege, Thomas Stone—were among the many who signed the Declaration of Independence. Not every continental congressman was on board. One delegate favored reconciliation with Great Britain. He opted to resign. Another delegate believed his colleagues were jumping the gun. However, the Continental Congress, while each member may have had the money, had not the appetite to hire a consultant to see if rebellion was prudent and feasible.

So how did all this play out in the media? Data compiled by historians shows that a segment of the British press thought the whole thing was folly. A writer for Scots Magazine declared the colonists were “talking nonsense.” Another British publication blamed “priests and demagogues” for leading the colonists who were upset with British taxation.

As for the proponents of the action, celebrations occurred all over the colonies. Supporters of independence began fasting, another group held a ceremony where a crown—like the one wore by King George III—was placed on a Bible and divided into 13 parts. In New York, a metal statue of King George was taken down, melted and used to make bullets. Muskets were fired in the air by revelers in Princeton, New Jersey.

The American Revolutionary War, which was already underway, would span nine years. Maintaining the independence is a task that continues to this day. While it goes without saying it has been severely tested many times, the truth is every single day is an adventure in autonomy. Complacency and calm are not remedies.

Demanding conformity—especially in regards to rituals that are designed to demonstrate loyalty—seems to have an adverse effect. Why? Because then we find ourselves instead celebrating the continental congressmen who didn't care to rock the boat and were satisfied with being boot-licking subjects of the king.

Independence Day is an occasion to celebrate our nation—now 242-years-old. As we wave Old Glory, watch the fireworks explode and enjoy each other's company and commonality, let's remember freedom and bravery are synonymous, and the adventure that is true independence continues. Happy Independence Day and Happy Birthday, America!

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