

# Remember why we celebrate

Like most other modern holidays, on the Fourth of July, we enjoy time with family and friends, eating great food without truly considering the underlying events that should be the motivating cause for our celebration.

Although July Fourth is celebrated as America's official split from Britain's rule and the beginning of the American Revolution, the actual series of events leading up to war took far longer than a single day.

For example, most of us learned in grade school about the Boston Tea Party, where colonists complained of "taxation without representation!" That was the battle cry of the 13 colonies in America who were forced to pay taxes to England's King George III with no representation in Parliament.

On the evening of Dec. 16, 1773, a group of men calling themselves the "Sons of Liberty" went to the Boston Harbor. The men were dressed as Mohawk Indians. They boarded three British ships — the Beaver, the Eleanor and the Dartmouth — and dumped 45 tons of tea into the Boston Harbor.

Over a period of years, dissatisfaction grew and British troops were sent in to quell any signs of rebellion. Repeated attempts by the colonists to resolve the crisis without war proved fruitless.

As a result, in May 1776, the first Continental Congress was held in Virginia. Richard Henry Lee introduced a resolution for the colonies to become free and independent states, and the Congress appointed a committee to draft the formal declaration of independence. The committee included Thomas Jefferson, Ben Franklin, John Adams, Robert Livingston and



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Roger Sherman. Jefferson, who was considered the strongest and most eloquent writer, was chosen to write the first draft.

The Declaration consists of two parts. The preamble describes the people's rights and it states that "all Men are created equal" and have the God-given right to "Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness." The second part declares independence from Britain and lists the colonies' issues against the British government.

Without question, the Declaration of Independence introduced a fundamental change in the view of government. Thomas Jefferson declared that governments were created to serve the people and could act only with consent of the people. It created the first truly democratic government.

The final version, the document that we know as the Declaration of Independence, was officially adopted by the Continental Congress on July 4, although the resolution that led to the writing of the Declaration was actually approved two days earlier.

History has remembered our Founding Fathers kindly. But, at the time, their signatures on the Declaration of Independence were considered treasonous against the crown, and the 56 men who signed the document were in danger of being executed. More than 200 years later, it is often easy to forget

the remarkable act of courage it took for our Founding Fathers to place their signatures on the Declaration.

We should all be glad they did. Because by renouncing their allegiance to the King of England and proclaiming the birth of a new United States of America, the brave signers of the Declaration of Independence started a chain of events that would quite literally change the world. History would show that these powerful words started a revolution in America, led to the fall of the European monarchies and would eventually motivate the human spirit to spread democracy all over the globe.

It would be nearly another 200 years before the concepts of true freedom and equality became a reality for all Americans.

However, the revolutionary ideas expressed in the Declaration of Independence were a foundation for the abolitionist movement that ended slavery, the suffrage movement that fought to give women the right to vote and the civil rights movement of the 1960s.

And if we are to remain a great nation (which I am certain we will), these ideals will continue to be the bedrock of our success.

Yes, July Fourth is an extraordinary day in our nation's history. So, fire up the grill, get some rest and enjoy the fireworks. But, while you are enjoying the day, please take a moment to remind your friends and family why we are celebrating.

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