

Why the 4th of July?

In a few weeks we will once again celebrate a historical miracle that is known as America's Independence Day. As unexpected as America's victory over the British Empire was, almost equally as surprising was the emergence of July 4, 1776, as America's birthday.

The Founders could very easily have declared October 19, 1781, as our Nation's day of independence. On that day the Americans and the French secured U.S. independence by defeating General Cornwallis and his British troops at Yorktown. Alternatively, the Founders could have decreed that America "began" on September 3, 1783, when the Treaty of Paris "officially" recognized our newly liberated territory as the United States of America. Our Founders never picked either date.

Instead, our American ancestors began celebrating the Fourth of July as our Independence Day as early as 1777—when we were still at war with the British! They celebrated our American belief that people possessed unalienable rights to "Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness," and they were willing to risk their lives and fortune defending those ideals (and many would lose both).

This was a "first of its kind" moment in global history. A nation was founded based upon declared moral values and "self-evident truths" that were centered around an individual's worth, and this worth came from God. Indeed, God is referenced four times within the Declaration of Independence, as "Nature's God," "Creator," "Supreme Judge," and "divine Providence."

Additionally, a natural conclusion that followed from citizens being endowed by God with their unalienable rights was that government officials could only receive their powers from the consent of the governed citizens. Prior to 1776, the British Parliament had imposed taxes on the colonists without the colonists having any representatives in Parliament. Those taxes, such as from the Stamp Act of 1765, led to the discontent from the colonists and the phrase "no taxation without representation," as well as the Boston Tea Party and the Revolutionary War.

No one was above the law, according to the Founders. Everyone was accountable to the Rule of Law, and that Law would be subject to a legislature elected by its citizens. This standard of accountability has remained mostly intact ever since. You can still see people's eyes roll and frowns of disapproval appear whenever you mention Governor Whitmer's executive order from 2020 which told everyone to stay home for Thanksgiving...and then she held a dinner party at the Governor's residence. No one should be above the law.

Similarly, the Founders did not want royalty or an aristocracy ruling over Americans, and they declared that whenever any government became destructive or tyrannical and unjust, it was the right of the citizens to alter or abolish that government. Fortunately for America, the Founders tried to prevent our government from becoming tyrannical by separating its power among the legislative, executive, and judicial branches, as well as by diluting power through state and federal divisions of authority. America would not have a single, all powerful ruler, ruling family, or ruling class.

The "checks and balances" part of the system still works pretty well today, and was recently demonstrated when the Supreme Court ruled 9-0 in favor of Geraldine Tyler. Ms. Tyler had moved into a senior-living community and had not paid property taxes on her prior

condominium in Hennepin County, Minnesota. Over time the property tax bill grew to \$15,000, and county officials decided to seize and sell Ms. Tyler's condo. They sold the condominium for \$40,000 and then the county kept the \$25,000 in extra funds.

The Supreme Court "checked" the county officials' actions, noting that the officials violated the Fifth Amendment's Takings Clause, which prohibits the government from taking private property without "just compensation." "The taxpayer must render unto Caesar what is Caesar's, but no more," Chief Justice John Roberts wrote, which was also a reference to guidance about taxes from Jesus, as recorded in the New Testament. Hennepin County officials will now make amends.

Another check against a tyrannical government is free speech and its expression through media such as the press. Thomas Jefferson believed that the press was essential for keeping the government accountable to the people and for ensuring that the people were informed about important issues. He wrote in a letter to Edward Carrington in 1787 that "were it left to me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers or newspapers without a government, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter." We would like to give thanks to the ***Manistee News Advocate*** for providing a space for the exploration and deliberation of so many ideas critical to our lives.

Our freedom was not freely given, and without proper vigilance it can be taken. On the 4th of July as well as June 14th (Flag Day), may we each celebrate the unique symbols and opportunities we have been given by being American. May we also commit to the continued efforts necessary to uphold our unalienable rights to "Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness."

Happy Independence Day!

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