Fourth of July Celebration

Contributed by Wes Riddle
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So what are we celebrating on the Fourth of July? Something’s there behind those parades and barbeque: it’s Freedom, and how freedom was born in these United States. On June 11, 1775 Congress appointed a committee to prepare a declaration in support of a resolution Richard Henry Lee of Virginia had made on the 7th—namely, that “these United Colonies are, and of right ought to be, free and independent States.” Congress appointed Ben Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, Robert Livingston, Roger Sherman and John Adams to that committee, and the committee in turn asked Jefferson to write the draft. On 28 June the committee reported to Congress, and the “Declaration of Independence” was so powerful and persuasive that Congress unanimously adopted Lee’s resolution on July 2nd. After two more days of debating form and content of the Declaration, the amended instrument was approved without dissent. This date (the Fourth of July) thus marks our country’s “official” birthday. Coincidentally, both Adams and Jefferson who would later become presidents were born on the Fourth of July. Over the next few weeks, the Declaration was engrossed on parchment and signed by every member of Congress, who pledged to each other ‘our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor.’ Next to the Constitution, written only after we won the Revolution, the Declaration is our most important document. Together with the Constitution, they comprise the organic law of the American People. The Declaration even more than the Constitution, espouses a political theory that was radical in 1776 and still has radical implications. Drawing upon natural rights political philosophy, Jefferson basically compiled a list of abuses by the king of England and listed them in the Declaration. He assumed the British Empire to be a confederation of free peoples and implied that certain acts of the king showed a design to subject Americans to arbitrary control. He reasoned that arbitrary control illegitimated rule over the Colonies, and he asserted the right and duty of the Colonies to dissolve their tie with the Empire and declare themselves independent states since no people have a right to govern any other people without the consent of the governed. The Declaration was severely criticized in England for expressing exactly this theory: a minority opinion about government which reasons men are by nature free and equal, and may not, without their own consent, be governed by another people!

Having studied U.S. history in England, there is still a consistent puzzlement and amazement about the American Revolution. Brits ask themselves why and still don’t get it. After all, the Colonies were better off than any other part of the British Empire—wages were 100% higher on average than in the homeland. Sure there were taxes imposed by Parliament, but these were to pay for debts incurred during the French and Indian War. The Colonies had participated in the war and benefited from a British victory! And by European and British standards, King George III was certainly no tyrant. But there’s the proverbial rub, because Americans had made their own standards when it came to rights. Jefferson remarked that a revolution occurred in the American mind before the fighting started in 1775. Of course long years of real fighting were required after the Declaration, since that document was a point of no return or compromise. Americans all had in effect, pledged themselves to fight for a permanent secession from Great Britain, in order to secure their God-given, unalienable rights—natural rights given to them by their Creator that were bound to be respected by other men, because God intended it that way. To many this new nation was a holy city, a New Jerusalem fulfilling Bible prophecy. “And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honor into it” (Rev 21: 24). The Declaration did not usher in the kingdom of heaven or reign of perfect harmony—but it did usher Freedom and how it was born in these United States. And Freedom you see is the start of everything dear that matters, even fear of the Lord and a living, practical faith that conforms word and deed, thought to action, motive to conduct. That’s what the celebration is all about, why small town parades achieve incredible grandeur and Texas barbeques taste so good. Why even a voice that isn’t coached sounds beautiful singing a song that is also a prayer: “God Bless America, Land that I love; Stand beside her, And guide her Through the night With a light From above; From the mountains, To the prairies To the oceans, White with foam; God bless America, My home Sweet home.”

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