

Don Polson The way I see it: The parade, flag, war and independence

By Don Polson

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While today is the observance of Independence Day, many parades celebrate and honor the Declaration of Independence on the 4th of July.

Those parades, together with the American flag, proudly borne, call for joyous but reverential reading of "**The Flag Goes By**," by Henry Holcomb Bennett (1863-1924):

Hats off!

*Along the street there comes, A blare of bugles, a ruffle of drums,
A flash of color beneath the sky; Hats off! The flag is passing by!*

*Blue and crimson and white it shines, Over the steel-tipped, ordered lines,
Hats off! The colors before us fly;*

*But more than the flag is passing by: Sea-fights and land-fights, grim and great,
Fought to make and to save the State:*

*Weary marches and sinking ships; Cheers of victory on dying lips;
Days of plenty and years of peace; March of a strong land's swift increase;*

*Equal justice, right and law, Stately honor and reverend awe:
Sign of a nation, great and strong, Toward her people from foreign wrong:*

Pride and glory and honor all, Live in the colors to stand or fall.

The Declaration of Independence, in addition to being a single physical document, was a process that, unbeknownst to many, began in May of 1775 in Mecklenburg County, North Carolina.

Presbyterian patriots, incensed over meddling by the British Anglican church through the Vestry and Marriage Acts of

1769 (which imposed fines on Presbyterian ministers who conducted marriage ceremonies), and outraged over word of blood shed by patriots at Lexington and Concord, revolted.

The "citizens" dissolved "the political bands which have connected us to the mother country," declared "ourselves a free and independent people" pledging "our lives, our fortunes, and our most sacred honor" to the cause of freedom.

The relatively calm and deliberate process, of writing, voting, signing and printing the Declaration of Independence, culminated in public readings up through July 8, 1776.

The birth of a new nation, together with the hitherto unutilized principles of divinely inspired self-governance contained in the Declaration, was and remains the essence and spirit of our great nation, as well as that which defines American patriotism.

The Declaration of Independence informs our understanding and appreciation of our form of government, and the moral vision outlined by the Founders.

"Toward that end they set forth a theory of legitimate government, then demonstrated how far British rule had strayed from that ideal.

But their argument served not simply to discredit British rule; in addition, it set the course for future American government.

Indeed, for more than two centuries, the ringing phrases of the Declaration have inspired countless millions around the world." (Cato Institute) In an unheard-of declaration that begins: "*We hold these Truths to be self-evident*," the Founders proclaimed that natural law and moral reasoning justified what followed.

To this day, our patriotic love for America must have at its core the acceptance of "all Men" made equal by a "Creator" that established their "unalienable Rights" including, but not limited to, "Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness."

All governments exist "to secure these Rights" and have no "Powers" except by the "Consent of the Governed."

The Founders spoke to all future Americans when they wrote that "whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these Ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government ..."

Within one and a half paragraphs, our governing inheritance is proclaimed, and nothing in the rest of the Declaration, the Constitution, or the Bill of Rights supersedes it.

The election of 1800 between Adams and Jefferson was an acrimonious but peaceful revolution to reestablish the principle that widely distributed self-governance was our standard – not strong, central and powerful federal rule. Lesson, anyone?

America's existence as a free and independent nation was not secured until re-defeating the British in the War of 1812.

The shelling of Fort McHenry in 1814, observed by Francis Scott Key, inspired our national anthem, the **Star Spangled Banner**.

The seldom- sung 4th verse contains immutable and ageless sentiments, of "freemen" standing between their homes and the desolation of war, securing "victory and peace" for "the heav'n rescued land.

"Praise the Power that hath made and preserved us a nation! Then conquer we must, when our cause it is just. And this be our motto: 'In God is our trust.'

And the star-spangled banner in triumph shall wave, O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave!"

I leave you with the words of President Ronald Reagan: "It's time we asked ourselves if we still know the freedoms intended for us by the Founding Fathers ...

This idea – that government was beholden to the people, that it had no other source of power – is still the newest, most unique idea in all the long history of man's relation to man.

This is the issue: ... Whether we believe in our capacity for self-government or whether we abandon the American Revolution and confess that a little intellectual elite in a far-distant capital can plan our lives for us better than we can plan them ourselves."

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