

Greg Carter, PCC
National Patriotic Instructor

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“Today, we celebrate our Independence Day!” – Bill Pullman

To remind our brethren of the celebratory nature of July 4th seems unnecessary, however, it is not. The month of July is one of national celebration in the United States, but the United States is not alone. July is marked by celebrations of independence in seventeen additional countries. The most recent addition is the country of South Sudan, whose people endured over 30 years of war, famine, and genocide in order to achieve recognition as an independent nation.

The Declaration of Independence is one of the most cherished and famous documents in world history, and many have argued its value is timeless. Every American should read it, and read it carefully. What we all know is the end result, or the Cliff's Notes, but rarely the full story. Let us examine some points briefly here:

First, we know the document was drafted by Thomas Jefferson. What is often forgotten is that several individual colonies issued their own declarations months before the famous document was complete. Pieces of those documents influenced and are found in the Declaration.

Second, we know the committee to draft the declaration was formed June 11, 1776, but the wording had been debated openly in congress since as early as April, well before the final draft was issued. This committee and its actions remain debated to this day, because the members kept no minutes recording their proceedings.

The committee of men who drafted the final declaration included John Adams (Massachusetts), Benjamin Franklin (Pennsylvania), Thomas Jefferson (Virginia), Robert R. Livingston (New York), and Roger Sherman (Connecticut). These men drafted a document after three weeks of intense debate and then presented the document for congress to edit and improve. Prior to its adoption on July 4, 1776, the entire congress analyzed every word of the document.

Therein lays the beauty of this document. Not only does it outline the “fundamental rights” that have guided American thought for centuries, but those beliefs are contained within a document that was analyzed and perfected, word by word. When reading this founding document of American values and basic rights, remember the care that went into its creation. Not only is the general meaning of the document important, but every tenet argued within it is also, and this we know. The founding fathers debated every single word in the document. Every word. Every single word in the document was carefully placed to give *specific* meaning. Few documents in American history have been so carefully scrutinized and assembled.

In July of 1865, the war was at an end. The final Confederate army had surrendered at the end of June, the conspirators who plotted the assassination of President Lincoln were put to death, and the trials of war criminals Henry Wirz and Champ Ferguson were set in motion. The month also saw the formation of two organizations who celebrate their sesquicentennials this year. The first was the United States Secret Service, formed in response to the assassination of President Lincoln, and the second was the Salvation Army. Each organization formed with a core group of less than ten people. Today the secret service continues its original missions of protecting US currency and protecting our presidents and their families. The Salvation Army today provides charitable aid to an average of 32 million people in need every year.

As we look forward to our national encampment in a few short weeks, let us remember the dedicated attention to detail shown by our founding fathers, and let us remember our sesquicentennial associates in the Salvation Army and our mutual dedication to Charity, final cardinal virtue of our Order.