



June 12, 1776: The Day the American Republic Was Born in Spirit

While the Fourth of July is rightly celebrated as the day when the Declaration of Independence was adopted, any honest student of our American birth must also remember and revere June 12, 1776, a day that is arguably more foundational than even July 4. For it was on that day that the Second Continental Congress took the revolutionary step of empowering the Colonies to form their own independent governments, an act that was nothing short of secession in spirit, in law, and in consequence.



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John Adams, Roger Sherman, Robert Livingston, Thomas Jefferson, and Benjamin Franklin

Formalizing Secession

To understand the gravity of this day, we must recall the context of June 1776. The Colonies had been in a state of open warfare with Great Britain for over a year. Lexington and Concord, Bunker Hill, and the siege of Boston had already baptized the cause of liberty in blood. Yet, astonishingly, the official stance of the Continental Congress was still one of reconciliation with King George III. The Olive Branch Petition — penned less than a year earlier — was a final, almost desperate plea for peace. But it was not peace at any price the patriots desired; it was liberty, ordered liberty under law, that they sought. And when that hope was dashed by the king's perfidious response and his proclamation branding the Colonists as traitors, the hearts of many turned finally and firmly toward independence.

It was on June 12, 1776, that Congress formalized this transformation. On that day, a committee composed of Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, Roger Sherman, and Robert R. Livingston, men chosen not merely for their eloquence but for their deep political and philosophical understanding, began work drafting what would become the Declaration of Independence. But even more momentously, Congress adopted a resolution urging the Colonies to write new constitutions, declaring



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That a plan of confederation be prepared and transmitted to the respective Colonies for their consideration and approbation.

A Legal Revolution

What is the significance of this? In plain constitutional terms, it was nothing short of a legal revolution. Prior to this date, the Colonies were still considered parts of the British Empire, however estranged. After this resolution, Congress effectively sanctioned the severance of all political ties with the Crown and authorized the Colonies to become sovereign states. The United Colonies were united no longer as British provinces, but as independent political entities bound by voluntary association — a league of liberty. It was, in a word, secession.

And this secession was not sudden or rash. It was carefully reasoned, biblically grounded, philosophically fortified, and legally justified. These men were not rebels without a cause; they were defenders of rights endowed by the Creator and preserved by common law. As Jefferson would later pen in the Declaration, governments exist to secure rights, not to grant them. And when a government ceases to serve that purpose and becomes a weapon of tyranny, “it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it.”

What June 12 represents is the moment the Colonies did just that.

It is fitting that on that very same day, Virginia adopted the Virginia Declaration of Rights, drafted by George Mason, a document that would serve as the model not only for the Bill of Rights but for the entire American theory of government. Consider these immortal words:

That all men are by nature equally free and independent, and have certain inherent rights ... among which are the enjoyment of life and liberty, with the means of acquiring and possessing property, and pursuing and obtaining happiness and safety.

Sound familiar? Of course it does. For this was the philosophical and moral soil from which the Declaration of Independence would blossom three weeks later.

A Federal Government, Not a National Government

The genius of June 12 lies in its boldness and brilliance: Congress did not wait for July 4 to begin acting as an independent body. They authorized new governments, they encouraged intercolonial cooperation, and they laid the groundwork for a permanent union of free states. The spiritual birth of the Republic happened then, not with fireworks and fanfare, but with parchment and principle.

Let us also remember that this day demonstrates the federated nature of the American founding. The Continental Congress did not declare a single national government to replace the British Crown. Instead, it respected the sovereignty of each Colony, and encouraged the Colonies to create their own independent constitutions. That act alone is an irrefutable rebuke to modern centralizers and would-be despots who attempt to consolidate all power in a single federal leviathan. The men of 1776 knew better. They understood what St. George Tucker would later write: “The government of the United States is federal, and not national.”



Setting the Constitutional Course in Motion

And so, as we reflect on the true spirit of American independence, we must restore June 12 to its rightful place in our collective memory. June 12 is not a day that calls for parades or pageants. It is a day that demands reverence, study, and celebration by those who still cherish the blessings of ordered liberty. It is the day when the legislative body of a people under siege boldly defied the most powerful empire on Earth and declared — not with cannon, but with conviction — that they would govern themselves henceforth.

Indeed, we would do well to revive the words of John Dickinson, who — though initially hesitant about separation — ultimately recognized the moral and political necessity of independence. In his final speech before voting on the Articles of Confederation, he said:

Let our government be like that which is taught us by our Constitution — the government of laws and not of men.

It was June 12, 1776, that set that constitutional course in motion.

To forget this date is to forget the nature of the American Revolution itself. It was not merely a war of bullets and bayonets, it was a war of ideas. June 12 marks the moment when those ideas became policy; when theory became action; when the right to self-government became an act of self-governance.

A Day That Demands Reverence

Let us, then, not relegate June 12 to the dustbin of historical trivia. Let us celebrate it for what it is: the legal and constitutional moment of American independence. A moment when delegates — many of them lawyers, farmers, merchants, and ministers — looked tyranny in the face and said in effect:

We will no longer ask for our chains to be lightened. We will throw them off altogether.

And with that, the tide of human liberty surged forward. Not only for the Colonists, but for millions yet unborn, including you and me. It is our solemn obligation to honor that legacy — not with lip service, but with lives dedicated to defending that same spirit of constitutional, local, God-given liberty.

So, when you next raise your glass to American independence, don't wait for July 4.

Raise it first on June 12.



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