

Beyond Our Independence Daze

Secession, Common Sense, and “the Spirit of 1777”

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A long habit of not thinking a thing wrong, gives it a superficial appearance of being right, and raises at first a formidable outcry in defense of custom. But the tumult soon subsides. Time makes more converts than reason.

— Thomas Paine, *Common Sense*, 1776

This month—July—marks a moment every year when citizens all over this country celebrate the writing of the “Declaration of Independence.” Penned by Thomas Jefferson in 1776 at the behest of Philadelphia’s first Continental Congress, the Declaration made a series of bold statements about the nature of the human condition, and the relationship between citizens and governments. We know these radical words well, and there is power and meaning in them.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.

That whenever any form of government becomes destructive to these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness.

In the midst of our twenty-first-century independence daze—the brouhaha and barbecues, the bunting and the beer—most of us imagine these famed and oft-quoted words marked “a new birth of freedom” (to quote Abraham Lincoln in his 1863 Gettysburg Address) and the creation of the United States as a nation. Not so. The United States would not be born until 1783, with the official signing of the Treaty of Paris—and only then as a loosely allied group of thirteen sovereign states under the Articles of Confederation. Make no mistake—the Declaration of Independence was about secession.

The document marked the official declaration of independence from Great Britain by a small group of committed English colonists tired of being governed from afar by King George, London’s Parliament, and large multinational monopolies like the East India Tea Company. Corruption, cronyism, and government by fiat drove these colonists—rebels all—to question their attachments to the richest and most powerful empire on earth (the British Empire, over which, it was said, the sun never set), and to begin to imagine new possibilities for their lives and those of their children.

We too easily forget that all of our founding fathers and mothers—George Washington, Abigail Adams, James Madison, Molly Pitcher, Ben Franklin, and the rest of the cast and crew—were, in fact, secessionists, and that the very first active verb in Jefferson’s famous 1776 “shout heard ’round the world” is: “dissolve.” Remember?

When, in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of

the earth, the separate and equal station to which the laws of nature and of nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

Almost one year to the day after the signing of the Declaration of Independence, citizens here in the Green Mountains created the first Vermont republic—independent of any control by the British, the Yorkers, and, for a time, the new United States government—with the July 8, 1777, signing of Vermont's first constitution in the town of Windsor. For the next fourteen years, the independent republic of Vermont convened an elected assembly, coined its own money (upon which was inscribed "Vermont res publica"), operated a postal service, conducted military operations and diplomatic relations and trade, recruited and commanded its own militia, and wrote its own laws in a legislature elected at town meeting, where the people also elected the governor and his twelve-member council. This fourteen-year period—the "Spirit of 1777"—marks a decisive historic moment for the citizens of this sovereign state, a time when Vermonters governed themselves and ran their own affairs, in concert with the rest of the world, rather than being governed by a distant government as a very small cog in a much larger machine.

We urge Vermonters to once again consider choosing this path. For the richest and most powerful nation of the twenty-first-century world is no longer Great Britain, but the United States.

And, as we have argued in these pages for three years now, the United States is no longer a constitutional republic responsive to the will of its citizens, but an aggressive empire acting at the behest of the few at the expense of the many. We face a twenty-first-century world very different from the twentieth.

"Let facts," as Jefferson said, "be submitted to a candid world."

- The twin twenty-first-century challenges of climate change and peak oil, which will compel us toward relocalization and "power down" living much more quickly than we may realize.
- The U.S. government's global (and profitable) pursuit of a policy of "full-spectrum dominance" by building an "empire of bases" (as many as 1,000) to engage in a multisequential energy war whose ultimate goal is to control oil-rich parts of the planet (a war that "will not end in our lifetimes").
- Federal implementation of a whole host of mandates that undermine our most basic rights and cherished freedoms: the USA PATRIOT Act, a proposed National Animal ID System, and the ever-increasing use of radio frequency ID, biometrics, and other "total information" surveillance technologies.
- Stupendous electoral fraud committed by collusion between political party hacks and corporately owned proprietary electronic voting codes and machines.
- Massive corporate corruption and a globalized "tapeworm economy" sanctioned by both major political parties.

All of this demands that we in Vermont reconsider our relationship with this "Leviathan" called the United States. Both Thomas Jefferson and Thomas Paine were right in 1776. "'Tis time to part." Secession is simple common sense, and Vermont's "Spirit of 1777" offers us a way forward. As Paine's *Common Sense* words remind us, time is on our side.

Free Vermont. Long live the *Untied* States.