

# The Fourth: Not Just a Habit for History

by Mary Mecca

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Good afternoon everyone, and a happy 4th of July to my fellow lovers of history and proud Americans. I'd like to thank Noel Kuhrt, Kim Burdick, and the Sons of the American Revolution for inviting me here speak-it's really quite an honor. I'd also like to thank all of you for coming today to celebrate with us the 236th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. Of course, 237 years ago today, only two men managed to sign -the infamous Continental Congress President John Hancock, and the lesser known Secretary of Congress Charles Thompson. But first, I'd like to direct our attention to another man of the same era, and one who I believe embodies the spirit in which liberty was demanded then and should remain a necessity now. Ladies and Gentlemen, Caesar Rodney.

Now, I don't mean to focus on him purely because he was a Delawarean and arguably the man whose actions lead to the resolution to Declare Independence. No, I mean to bring him forward for his tenacity. His fortitude. His inability to allow freedom to go unseized.

I have no doubt that most have us have heard his story; Mr. Rodney's legacy stems from his heroic ride from Dover to Philadelphia – a journey then of almost 80 miles –to decide the vote for independence for an otherwise divided Delaware. This man- Rodney was 48 years old at the time. He was a bachelor and a farmer in lower Delaware. He suffered from asthma and a rare cancer of the jaw, which left him in constant discomfort and pain and would eventually kill him. But most important was his love of country and belief in liberty. This sick man rode overnight to arrive on July 2nd, 1776 in order for Delaware's representatives to not have a moot vote in the discussion of independence. Now, has anyone here had the opportunity to go horse- back riding or ridden in a carriage for a long period of time? Throw in the 18th century cobblestone streets he had to maneuver and the sweltering summer heat, and I don't think any of us would risk our lives just to *consider* forming an unfamiliar government. (Because keep in mind here -what the men of the Continental Congress were trying to do was both treasonous and risky, and Rodney's vote for independence would only exacerbate their guilt.)

But despite every intelligent reason for Rodney to simply stay put in Dover and attempt to fight his face-deforming cancer, he did just the opposite. And as a result, we -each of us – is lucky enough to call America's freedom our own.

Independence... can we comprehend what exactly that means? It is freedom from the control, influence, support, aid, or the like, of others... Indeed, following the Intolerable Acts, the colonists wanted nothing more than to be in control of themselves and under their own influence-to not have to answer to the mother country. But, at the same time, colonists-most of them-knew that without England's support, aid, and the like, they were nothing more than a young, vulnerable country that could easily fall into another nation's clutches.

I like to think of America in this situation as playing the part of a teenager -the most rebellious sort. She wants to be her own person, go to the mall, attend a music festival, and wear what she wants. This analogy puts England in the role of parent -and an overbearing one at that. All England wants is for America to behave, so George III hand picks officials and governors to send to over and do just that -reinforce England's influence and laws. This system was flawed, yes, but it made sense and was fairly reasonable at first – England protected America, traded with her, and this may have worked for far longer than it did in reality... if not for the taxes. These taxes that England required America to pay may in this case be seen as doing the dishes – all America had to do to retain England's protection was do the dishes. However, as America grew and developed a greater sense of self, she started to question why she had to do the dishes? Why were there so many? But mostly, why didn't she have any say about doing the dishes -why did England demand she wash the pots and pans caked in grime instead of the glasses? And as a result of her bringing up these concerns with England, she was forced to do even more dishes!

Now, I equate paying taxes to England with washing plates and silverware because the taxes placed on any amount of sugar, tea or stamps was, in actuality, very small, and not nearly the same magnitude as what we pay in taxes today. So the tension between America and England wasn't truly about the taxes at all – it was about the fact that England made decisions on our behalf and without

our consent. So in turn, we -America, felt taken-advantage-of and knew that we deserved to have a say in what was required of us. Thus, we demanded emancipation from our parent; however, the decision was none too simple to make -by declaring independence, we would be declaring not only that we would no longer stand to be ruled by another, but also that we were at odds with England: possessor of the greatest navy and one of the best militaries on the planet. On top of that, as a result of becoming emancipated, we would be alone with no one to care for us or fight our battles for us -essentially, we would not only be stuck doing our own dishes now, but also doing our own laundry- aspects of which truly frightened us. So now, think back to our friend Caesar Rodney, the man who risked it all for our independence. He was like so many patriots in that he knew the consequences of liberty, and yet he demanded it.

*So with all of this in mind, what does the fourth of July- Independence Day- mean to you?*

Perhaps it is simply a bank holiday, or the perfect excuse for a mid-week party, or that magical opportunity to sleep in a couple of hours? Now think to yourself, What *should* the fourth of July mean to you? What are you doing - actively doing - to remember and memorialize our national holiday? Not just today, but every day - what can you do to keep the spirit of freedom in mind? In America, even in the midst of a recession and the greatest economic deficit we have ever seen, the possibilities are boundless... What we need today, and what each of us can do today, is stop worrying. Stop complaining. Stop doing whatever it is that we thought so individually important, and find America another Caesar Rodney. Another John Adams. Another George Washington. What we need is a hero and what each of us today can do is look for one. You may surprise yourself and find that you can be that hero. You can be that person who first voices his opinion, and then goes out into the streets and takes a stand. Do not allow unrest to go unresolved; do not allow that riveting, conversational debate about the future of America to die after everyone gets up from the dinner table and clears his place. No - you can take those ideas down to city hall and you can present them to your representatives and your senators. You can make your opinions heard and you very well should because a single idea worth fighting for can change the world.

Each of us has the opportunity to get out of bed in the morning and choose to make that day more special -more meaningful -than the last. Each of us has the ability to make a difference- to make today the day in which we change the world for the better. Each of us has the power to transform our opinions into thoughts; and those thoughts into dreams; and those dreams actions; and those actions into what may provide for a better tomorrow. So the question remains: which one of us has the gumption -no, the audacity -to make our opinions into what shapes the world as we know it? Which one of us has the courage to stand tall and declare that every erroneous system has a remedy? Which of us has the tenacity to face daunting odds with only a hope that what lies beyond may hold the key to those ideals that have escaped us? Caesar Rodney was one of those audacious, courageous, and tenacious people who stood and struggled for his cause.

Which of us will be the next?

Look around you- look to your left, your right, glance over your shoulder. Take in each of those faces you encounter, and tell me... which of them is revolutionary?

Who among us today is revolutionary?

The era of American heroes is not passed, so what can each of us as Americans do to be revolutionary? - not for the sake of our government, for a country is not simply a government, but for the sake of our brothers and sisters who stand beside us to form the United States of America. As you celebrate today the gifts of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, please keeps in mind that we each have something to be thankful for, and something to look forward to. Remember those who risked everything for what you can call your own today, and look ahead to the day when you may be called on to risk everything for our people, then ask yourself:

**What can I do to be revolutionary?**