

When We Were Virtuous...

I'm writing this on a one-day break from my latest adventure – commuting daily to Philadelphia to decide whether or not to adopt a Declaration of Independence. It's a bold document, and voting for it might just result in my colleagues and me being summarily hanged by a British court-martial.

But I like my odds. In this case, Philadelphia is the set of "John Adams," a high-budget HBO miniseries being shot near Mechanicsville. And the outcome – a successful revolution which transforms the delegates to the Continental Congress from reluctant rebels into the masters of a new nation – is a foregone conclusion.

Still, it's interesting to pretend.

So far, it's been a tough shoot. On Tuesday, my first day, I reported at 4:30 a.m. to begin the hour-long business of getting into costume, wig and make-up. Then, after 45 minutes of instruction in standing, walking and bowing like proper 18th-century gentlemen – taught by a lovely Williamsburg lady – we trooped down the street to a garden set where we spent the day standing in the 86-degree sun for take, after take – after take.

Apparently, the cast of "The West Wing" wasn't alone in governing on their feet. Our Founding Fathers – at least in the HBO version – stood up for American liberty by standing, and standing – and standing.

That first day, the movie people – unprepared for June weather in March – overlooked our need for things like water. Only the boldest Founders – myself being one – dared venture from our garden to locate the nearest port-a-john or snag a bottle of water from the crew.

By 2:30 – lunchtime – most of us wouldn't have cared all that much if a British regiment had hanged us. But a good meal renewed our courage. We stood on into the dusk. Then, after another hour of dewigging and undressing, we signed out.

It was 9 p.m., ample time to drive home for a few hours' sleep before the next day's 5:30 a.m. call. Wednesday was easier – ten degrees cooler – but again, we spent it in the sun and on our feet.

Before he and his friends got down to declaring independence, Ben Franklin should clearly have invented the chair.

We delegates are slated for five more days of this. Thanks to my SAG card, all this overtime will add up to a nice payday – but the best thing about the experience is the chance to participate in retelling the story of a time when Americans were noted for their rationality, virtue and courage.

A few weeks ago, a friend from my book club passed along *The Moral Minority: Our Skeptical Founding Fathers*, by Brooke Allen – a book which refutes the current blather about the Founders being deeply

religious men who set out to create a "Christian nation."

In a brisk, highly readable style, Allen summarizes the religious thinking of Franklin, Washington, Adams, Jefferson, Madison and Hamilton – probably the six most important Founders – none of whom would have fared well in today's religious politics.

They – like most educated American of their day – were products of the Enlightenment. Most began their lives as conventional Christians, and – being leaders in their communities – continued to attend church occasionally. But each, in his own way, strayed ever farther from what we moderns think of as Christianity.

As scholarly men, they assumed the Bible was an artifact of its times – not the product of divine revelation. They questioned the content of the creeds, including the divinity of Jesus. None had much faith in miracles or divine intervention in human events.

And yet – they were men of considerable private virtue. They worked hard. They studied all their lives. They had little patience with frivolous amusements. They were personally honest. They did their duty.

And they had tremendous courage – the kind it takes to challenge the world's greatest empire to a life-and-death struggle for liberty.

They were, in short, very different from modern Americans.

To be sure, most folks I know work pretty hard and are personally honest. But we are all – every one of us – prisoners of a culture of amusement and self-indulgence rather than study and reason. For all our piety, we moderns seem far more attached to the seven deadly sins than our rationalist forebears.

I've just started another possible book club choice entitled *Consumed: How Markets Corrupt Children, Infantilize Adults, and Swallow Citizens Whole*. Its author, Benjamin Barber, is best known for *Jihad vs. McWorld*.

I look forward to diving into Barber's text, but the title's enough to know he and I are on the same page. I suspect the Founders would have been horrified by the America he describes.

But no reading today. I've got to finish this piece, run a few errands, and get a good night's sleep.

Tomorrow and next week, it's back to that strange contradictions – a Hollywood movie set filming a project about the virtuous, rational men who gave us this country.

It's as close as I expect to get to our virtuous Founders.



Rick Gray



LETTERS To The Editor

Thank You for the Support

To the Editor:

On behalf of the Chester Station Camp #1503, Sons of Confederate Veterans, I would like to thank the Chester community for coming out to support the Battery Dantzler dedication ceremony. Hundreds of volunteers worked in many different ways on this two-year restoration project. I would especially like to thank Scott Williams of Chesterfield County Environmental Engineering for helping research the history of Battery Dantzler and designing all of the interpretive signs. Also the Chesterfield Military History Committee for supplying matching funds for the cost of the signs. While working on this site we have met many people from the area and from out of town who were visiting the park. This is a clear indicator the investment Supervisor Dickie King made to support Battery Dantzler with funds from the Bermuda District Improvement Fund are earning a return.

I also want to thank Boy Scout Travis Elder for raising the funds for restoration and installation of new interpretive signs for Howlett Line Park. With these two parks nearly finished the Chester Station Camp can focus on creating the new Ware Bottom Church Park on land recently donated to Chesterfield County.

Eric Chandler
Commander, Chester Station
Camp #1503, S.C.V.

Mr. Wilson's Credibility

To the Editor:

I read with interest the recent interviews with Jack Wilson and Dorothy Jaeckle. While I appreciate certain points Ms. Jaeckle made, I must take issue with one comment about Mr. Wilson and his legal work. I have attended every Planning Commission meeting and Board of Supervisors zoning meeting in the last two and a half years, save maybe one or two, and I don't recall ever making Ms. Jaeckle's acquaintance. I have rarely observed Mr. Wilson not participate in a case, and never has that happened on a case affecting the Bermuda District. To the contrary, his extensive experience and willingness to work cooperatively with citizens would be beneficial to the citizens of Bermuda.

Andrea Epps

King's Departure: Good News/Bad News

To The Editor:

Last week's announcement that Dickie King would not be seeking re-election comes under the heading of good news / bad news.

The good news is that after four years Mr. King will be able to spend time with his family and business. He deserves to be able to do these things after his hard work and sacrifice on behalf of the citizens of Chesterfield. It's also good news that at least one politician remembers the "one-term pledge" he made during his campaign. If all Congressmen and those serving in state legislatures were removed who broke this pledge their chambers would look like a gathering of

volunteers for root canal work.

The bad news is obvious. Mr. King has been accessible and it's been many years since someone in Chesterfield combined the willingness and ability to work on behalf of the business community, our young people, schools and the elderly at the same time.

I find it interesting that any criticism of Mr. King cannot be made without including the numbers 18,000 or 22. One of these criticisms was corrected immediately and the other is one of perception and is not illegal and certainly did not affect his job performance. Mr. King's biggest short coming was his failure to reach the state of perfection, which certainly some of his detractors have attained.

L.E. Nugent

Virginians for a Healthy Future "Clears the Air" About Smoke-Free Restaurant Policy

Virginians for a Healthy Future (VFHF) wants to clear the air about Governor Kaine's amendments to HB 2422.

The tobacco and hospitality industries continue to employ scare tactics with the people of Virginia. Although the Governor's amendments are clear – that indoor smoking in restaurants is prohibited – Big Tobacco has purposefully launched a campaign designed to mislead the public and members of the General Assembly by implying the Governor's amendments would affect things like outdoor dining, hot dog carts and even NASCAR races!

We are here today to dismiss the ridiculousness of these accusations and to protect the health of all Virginians by continuing our fight for clean INDOOR air. VFHF reminds legislators that a full 71% of all Virginians surveyed by Mason-Dixon indicated last fall they would support a prohibition on smoking in the following places: public buildings, offices, bars and restaurants.

There are many hospitality associations across the country that have opted to protect the health of their employees and customers and supported statewide bans and initiatives. These associations realize that their members have nothing to fear from a smoke-free law. As the U.S. Surgeon General concluded in his June 2006 report, "Evidence from peer-reviewed studies shows that smoke-free policies and regulations do not have an adverse impact on the hospitality industry."

And, as it happens, exposure to secondhand smoke is a double whammy on restaurant workers—not only are they exposed to second hand smoke, the vast majority of restaurants don't provide health insurance coverage for their wait staff. Imagine being diagnosed with cancer and you don't even have insurance!

The statistics prove the point,

although 76 percent of white-collar workers are covered by smoke-free policies only 43 percent of food service workers benefit from these protections. So while Big Tobacco argues that restaurant workers who don't want to be exposed to second-hand smoke can simply find another job, there just aren't enough smoke-free restaurants to accommodate those who wish to work in a smoke-free environment.

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