

Happy birthday, America

This weekend, thank heaven for our freedoms

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July Fourth is the day we commemorate the 250th anniversary of the founding of the United States.

It is a day we should celebrate the lesser-known, almost forgotten Founders, as well as thank them all for Mel Brooks.

Bear with me on this one. Thomas Paine was a radical political writer whose views make those of some of our current politicians pale in comparison. Paine wrote “Common Sense,” which quickly became one of the guiding lights of the Founding Fathers as they faced the crises of the Declaration of Independence and Revolutionary War.

Paine is faintly remembered for writing these lines: “These are the times that try men’s souls. The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of his country; but he who stands it now deserves the love and thanks of man and woman.”

In his 47-page pamphlet, Paine wrote, “Government, even in its best state, is but a necessary evil; in its worst state, an intolerable one.”

In the same work, he wrote, “As to religion, I hold it to be the indispensable duty of government to protect all conscientious professors thereof, and I know of no other business which government hath to do therewith.”

That thought gave rise to the First Amendment, which not only preserves our freedom of religion but also our freedom of speech and the press.

Paine also foresaw the need for revolution. In “Common Sense,” he wrote, “It is the violence, which is done and threatened to our persons, the destruction of our property by an armed force; the invasion of our country by fire and sword, which conscientiously qualifies the use of arms; and the instant, in which such a mode of defense becomes necessary.”

George Washington praised “Common Sense,” noting that it was changing the minds of many Colonists. Many men of the Continental Congress read it and became followers of Paine’s logic and reasoning.

Another of the Founders we should not forget is Richard Henry Lee, a signer of the Declaration of Independence. In the movie “1776,” he is made out to be a brash fool under the influence of John Adams and Benjamin Franklin. But Lee was no fool. On June 7, 1776, he proposed what came to be known as the “Lee Resolution,” which declared that the Colonies “are, and of right ought to be, free and independent States.” Lee’s resolution led directly to the Declaration.

Thomas Jefferson relied on Paine’s logic and Lee’s words in drafting the Declaration. The thoughts of the two men were instrumental in writing our Constitution.

Their logic did not create capitalism in the United States, but it was (and is) the natural consequence of the freedoms they helped produce. It was Adam Smith’s “The Wealth of Nations,” also published in 1776, that took the idea of capitalism to its great height. Smith had several warnings for the capitalist state. One was that “the first duty of the sovereign, that of protecting the society from the violence and invasion of other independent societies, grows gradually more and more expensive, as the society advances in civilization.

The military force of society, which originally cost the sovereign no expense either in time of peace or in time of war, must, in the progress of improvement, first be maintained in time of war and afterwards in time of peace.” In other words, as Washington said in his 1790 address to Congress, “To be prepared for war is one of the most effectual means of preserving peace.” Democrats — who are now refusing to support the supplemental funding for the Pentagon to replenish our arms after the Iran war — would do well to remember that, but they will not.

What on earth does all that have to do with Mel Brooks, who turned 100 on Sunday? Mr. Brooks is a perfect example of the freedoms we enjoy as Americans. Nowhere else could he have produced films such as “Blazing Saddles,” which pokes fun at racism, “The Producers” or even “Robin Hood: Men in Tights.” All are parodies of our society, which no dictators or despots would have tolerated.

We are blessed by the Constitution, which does not grant our freedoms; it preserves them as rights created by God.

It is as the anonymous German World Cup soccer fan reportedly said: “If you want to hate America, watch the news. If you want to love America, drive through it!”

This week, and every other week, we should thank heaven that we are lucky enough to be Americans.

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