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Independence Day: It's revolutionary

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Many Americans think of themselves as a people hewed from a different timber than others. I hold that belief.

As a nation, we have our share of gnarls on our trunk, and I've pointed out some of them in these guest columns with the CDA Press. I've done so because a democracy can only survive and grow if it continues to be critical of itself and make changes demanded by a well-informed citizenry.

The fact that I can criticize Uncle Sam without fear of Uncle Sam arresting me, perhaps torturing or killing me, is a privilege that I suspect some Americans assume is the norm around the world. It is not.

My recent articles about China and Russia are examples of

countries where, if I were a citizen of these nations, my complaints about the government could easily lead these regimes to terminate my freedom and perhaps my life.

For this

Independence Day, one celebrating the American Revolution, let's examine three other major revolutions that also shaped the world in which we live. In relation to America, we will see the stark contrast of how these revolutions treated their citizens, the very people who brought about the rebellions. Our abbreviated case studies are France, Russia, and China.

France: The French Revolution (1789) resulted in the overthrow of centuries of monarchy rule, eventually leading to a

republic. France celebrated this extraordinary turn of events by executing Louis XVI. In addition, during this time the Reign of Terror witnessed the killing of between 16,000 and 40,000 ordinary French citizens.

One of the leaders of this carnage was Robespierre. He was also executed, which led to the next phase of mutual self destruction, called the White Terror. As with the Reign of Terror, due process was ignored as French citizens killed their countrymen. Before France settled into the republic it is today, Napoleon assumed the dictatorship of the country, leading to yet more mayhem and deaths.

Russia: In regard to murdering one's own citizens, the French were pikers in comparison to the fomenters of the

See UYLESS, A6

UYLESS

from A1

Russian Revolution (1917). Lenin and his cohorts murdered Emperor Nicholas II and his family, as well as thousands of Russians who had the misfortune of possessing holdings the Bolsheviks coveted in order to create a "just" society.

Later, Stalin's Great Purge (1936-1938) against his own (Communist) party members, unlucky peasants, or most anyone whom this megalomaniac feared resulted in over one million deaths of Russian citizens. Historians claim about 1,000 people a day were executed during this time.

While reading two books about Stalin, as well as a biography on Boris Pasternak, and already knowing the nature of the ignominious death of this man, I found myself turning

to the parts of the books that describe his agonizing ending. He was that repugnant.

China: Amazingly, Lenin and Stalin were pikers at killing their own citizens when compared to Mao Tse-Tung. From 1931 until his death in 1976, he was responsible for the death of well over 70 million Chinese, particularly during the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution.

During Mao's creation of China's first "Red State" in the provinces of Ruijin and Fujian (1931-1935), and prior to the formal creation of Communist China (1949), the population in these areas dropped by 20 percent! The decline was not attributed to fleeing, because the citizens were not allowed to leave their villages.

Mao's Chinese revolution came about not because Mao was a political ideologue. Putting it plainly, Mao was a sociopath who delighted in

seeing his comrades tortured and killed. He even scared his own henchmen.

Several years ago, I paid a visit to Tiananmen Square. Having studied Mao and the Chinese Revolution, it seemed pitiable that a huge portrait of this man was the center of attention in this public place.

America: By their very nature, most revolutions are bloody affairs, as discussed above. The American Revolution (1765-1783) was no exception. Estimates of American deaths vary widely, ranging from 4,000 to 17,000. However, there is no debate that the fiercely independent citizens (and their colonies) did not turn on one another, as has been done in so many other revolutions.

How could this have happened? I suspect each reader of this article will have an opinion. I have a number of them, but for this brief piece, I will cite two stories. On his

way to his inauguration (from Mount Vernon to New York) and shortly after taking office, Washington visited all thirteen states. This was not an easy task, as the "Interstates" of those days were little more than mud-filled trenches.

In his travels (two trips: April 16-23, 1789 and March 21-July 6, 1791), Washington recorded that he was struck that so many citizens living across such a large territory and "so different in their habits" had shown such "unanimity and good will."

After a large celebration of his visit to Boston, Washington had retired for the evening. A high-level French official was walking by the house where the new President was sleeping. He made this observation to his American companion, "Ah, this is the residence of the chief magistrate of your nation, reposing with confidence in the midst of his fel-

low citizens, and protected by their love, a defense infinitely better than bayonets. In my country, the smallest general would have had the house surrounded by sentinels."

This stark fact held true for the revolutionary leaders of France, Russia, and China, described earlier in this article. Of course, our nation held together because of other reasons, not just a public relations campaign by the President. Nonetheless, the Frenchman's simple observation summed up the character of our nation and revolution.

We Americans, partially because of our extraordinary revolution, are indeed cut from a different timber. For this July Fourth, let's find joy in knowing we are also a nation of a different timbre.

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