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January 6, 2024

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JAN 7



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Today, three years to the day after the January 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol to prevent the counting of the electoral ballots that would make Democrat Joe Biden president, officers from the Federal Bureau of Investigation arrested three fugitives wanted in connection with that attack.

Siblings Jonathan and Olivia Pollock, whose family owns Rapture Guns and Knives, described on its Facebook page as a “christian owned Gun and Knife store” in Lakeland, Florida, and Joseph Hutchinson III, who once worked there, are suspected of some of the worst violence of January 6. The FBI had offered a \$30,000 reward for “Jonny” Pollock, while the other two had been arrested but removed their ankle bracelets in March 2023 and fled.

Family members of the fugitives and of other Lakeland residents arrested for their involvement in the January 6 attack on the Capitol insist their relatives are innocent, framed by a government eager to undermine their way of life. The Pollock family has gone so far as to erect a monument “in honor of the ones who lost their lives on January 6, 2021.”

But it does not honor the law enforcement officers who were killed or injured. It honors the insurrectionists: Ashli Babbitt, shot by a law enforcement officer as she tried to break into the House Chamber through a smashed window (her family today sued the government for \$30 million for wrongful death), and

three others, one who died of a stroke; one of a heart attack, and one of an amphetamine overdose.

The monument in Lakeland, Florida, is a stark contrast to the one President Biden visited yesterday in Pennsylvania. Valley Forge National Park is the site of the six-month winter encampment of the Continental Army in the hard winter of 1777–1778. After the British army captured the city of Philadelphia in September 1777, General George Washington settled 12,000 people of his army about 18 miles to the northwest.

There the army almost fell apart. Supply chains were broken as the British captured food or it spoiled in transit to the soldiers, and wartime inflation meant the Continental Congress did not appropriate enough money for food and clothing. Hunger and disease stalked the camp, but even worse was the lack of clothing. More than 1,000 soldiers died, and about eight or ten deserted every day. Washington warned the president of the Continental Congress that the men were close to mutiny.

Even if they didn't quit, they weren't very well organized for an army charged with resisting one of the greatest military forces on the globe. The different units had been trained with different field manuals, making it hard to coordinate movements, and a group of army officers were working with congressmen to replace Washington, complaining about how he was prosecuting the war.

By February 1778, though, things were falling into place. A delegation from the Continental Congress had visited Valley Forge and understood that the lack of supplies made the army, and thus the country, truly vulnerable, and they set out to reform the supply department. Then a newly arrived Prussian officer, Baron Friedrich von Steuben, drilled the soldiers into unity and

better morale. And then, in May, the soldiers learned that France had signed a treaty with the American states in February, lending money, matériel, and men to the cause of American independence. When the soldiers broke camp in June, they marched out ready to take on the British at the Battle of Monmouth, where their new training paid off as they held their own against the British soldiers.

The January 6 insurrectionists were fond of claiming they were echoing these American revolutionaries who created the new nation in the 1770s. The right-wing Proud Boys' strategic plan for taking over buildings in the Capitol complex on January 6 was titled: "1776 Returns," and even more famously, newly elected representative Lauren Boebert (R-CO) wrote on January 5, 2021: "Remember these next 48 hours. These are some of the most important days in American history." On January 6, she wrote: "Today is 1776."

Trump has repeatedly called those January 6 insurrectionists "patriots."

Biden yesterday called Trump out for "trying to steal history the same way he tried to steal the election."

Indeed. The insurrectionists at the Capitol were not patriots. They were trying to overthrow the government in order to take away the right at the center of American democracy: our right to determine our own destiny. Commemorating them as heroes is the 21st century's version of erecting Confederate statues.

The January 6th insurrectionists were nothing like the community at Valley Forge, made up of people who had offered up their lives to support a government pledged, however imperfectly in that era, to expanding that right. When faced with hunger,

disease, and discord, that community—which was made up not just of a remarkably diverse set of soldiers from all 13 colonies, including Black and Indigenous men, but also of their families and the workers, enslaved and free, who came with them—worked together to build a force that could establish a nation based in the idea of freedom.

The people at the Capitol on January 6 who followed in the footsteps of those who were living in the Valley Forge encampment 246 years ago were not the rioters. They were the people who defended our right to live under a government in which we have a say: those like the staffers who delayed their evacuation of the Capitol to save the endangered electoral ballots, and like U.S. Capitol Police officers Eugene Goodman, Harry Dunn, Caroline Edwards, and Aquilino Gonell and Metropolitan Police officer Michael Fanone, along with the more than 140 officers injured that day.

Fanone, whom rioters beat and tasered, giving him a traumatic brain injury and a heart attack, yesterday told Emily Ngo, Jeff Coltin, and Nick Reisman of *Politico*: “I think it’s important that every institution in this country, every American, take the responsibility of upholding democracy seriously. And everyone needs to be doing everything that they can to ensure that a.) Donald Trump does not succeed and b.) the MAGA movement is extinguished.”

Unlike the violence of the January 6th insurrectionists, the experience of the people at Valley Forge is etched deep into our national identity as a symbol of the sacrifice and struggle Americans have made to preserve and renew democracy. It is so central to who we are that we have commemorated it in myths and monuments and have projected into the future that its

meaning will always remain at the heart of America. According to *The Star Trek Encyclopedia*, the Federation Excelsior-class starship USS *Valley Forge* will still be fighting in the 24th century... against the Dominion empire.

Notes:

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