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City Room

Blogging From the Five Boroughs

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Hot Dogs, Explosions and History

By [CLYDE HABERMAN](#)

When you think about it, it's pretty amazing that the Bloomberg administration encourages the hot dog eating contest held at Coney Island every Fourth of July, instead of trying to shut it down.

[The Day](#)

Clyde Haberman offers his take on the news.

Everything about this event challenges the preachy tendencies of a City Hall that has no problem telling New Yorkers where they may smoke and what kinds of cooking oils their restaurants may use.

The hot dog competition, sponsored by [Nathan's Famous](#), may be seen as an exercise in gluttony that can encourage poor eating habits and worsen the scourge of obesity that the city is trying get under control. Not to mention that frankfurters are typically high in fat and — shudders! — salt, and they're laced with nitrates and nitrites that may cause cancer. Where are those gruesome health department warnings when you need them?

For that matter, how is it that [Macy's](#) gets away with its fireworks show every Independence Day? Displays like that inevitably send a signal, especially to impressionable young people, that it is a safe, desirable way to celebrate the birth of our nation. But every July 4, across the country, thousands of Americans are injured by fireworks.

O.K., there is something to be said for City Hall's keeping its busybody hands off of these events.

The Macy's extravaganza took place on the Hudson River Monday night **to the delight of pretty much everyone**, except perhaps some in Brooklyn who want the fireworks moved back to the East River and thus closer to them. And the Coney Island event was, as ever, a silly but essentially **harmless burst of digestive excess**. For the fifth year in a row, Joey Chestnut was top dog, practically inhaling 62 franks and buns in 10 minutes. Sonya Thomas, eating 40 hot dogs, won in a separate contest for women held for the first time.

There were, of course, a few ways to absorb the meaning of Independence Day besides overeating and making things go boom. Some people reflected on the nation's early history.

One can only hope that they did so with more accuracy than some of our leading national lights who have insisted in recent weeks that Paul Revere climbed on his horse **to warn the British**, that the Battles of Lexington and Concord **were fought in New Hampshire**, and that **John Quincy Adams** was a founding father who worked tirelessly to end slavery, never mind that he was not quite 9 years old when the Declaration of Independence was signed.

By the way, that signing occurred in 1776.

Sorry if that seems a tad patronizing. But a Marist College poll of 1,003 adult Americans, released just before the holiday weekend, showed that only 58 percent **could identify the correct year**. (Do you think that maybe some in the other 42 percent believe that Paul Revere was the guy who led the 1960s rock band Paul Revere and the Raiders?) Younger people, defined as those in the 18-to-29 age bracket, were startlingly ill informed; a mere 31 percent of them came up with 1776. What can one say, except: Yikes!

A more knowledgeable exploration of documents essential to American history took place on Independence Day in the area of Central Park known as Strawberry Fields. There, for as many years as Joey Chestnut has been winning hot dog competitions, the civil liberties lawyer Norman Siegel has led readings and explications of the **Declaration and of the United States Constitution**.

On the political spectrum, the dozens of people gathered around him tilted well to the left, although on certain articles and amendments of the Constitution, their ideas paralleled the views of some Tea Party types who lean decidedly rightward.

Unlike many on the right, though, [Mr. Siegel](#) held firmly to the notion that the Constitution, far from being frozen in time, was “in fact a living document.” Of the 27 amendments, 10 were read aloud. A few of them, like the First and Fourth Amendments, were discussed at some length.

Sadly, no mention was made of the one amendment that has been a traditional favorite of many journalists. That would be the 21st.

For more local news from The Times, including [judges leaving the bench](#) because of New York’s salary freeze, details on the [shootings of New Yorkers](#) and Senator Kirsten E. Gillibrand’s [efforts to engage women in politics](#), see the N.Y./Region section.

A source says that prosecutors will drop the case against Dominique Strauss-Kahn because the credibility of the maid he is accused of raping [is so questionable](#). [New York Post] (Also see [The Wall Street Journal](#).)

Mr. Strauss-Kahn is also implicated in a [criminal complaint by a French author](#) that alleges attempted rape. [Daily News] (Also see [The Wall Street Journal](#) and [The New York Times](#).)

Three Staten Island teenagers [died in a crash](#) on the Garden State Parkway. [Daily News] (Also see [The New York Post](#).)

The Brooklyn Bridge and Prospect Parks’ Terrace Bridge are reportedly the [two worst in Brooklyn](#). [Brooklyn Paper]

About the [elevated storefronts](#) of Avenue of the Americas. [Lost City]

Reported rapes have increased by 16 percent in the New York because [more victims are reporting the crimes](#). [Daily News]

Two men were shot [on the Atlantic City Boardwalk](#). [Star-Ledger]

Some Williamsburg residents said that local Hasidic security patrols **single out members of ethnic minorities**. [Daily News]

The parks commissioner, Adrian Benepe, has **stopped rationing toilet paper** at Coney Island. [New York Post]

Many in Brooklyn **were underwhelmed** by this year's fireworks display. [mcbrooklyn]

Ostriches at New York's only farm **did not start producing eggs** until nearly Memorial Day this year because of the wet weather. [Wall Street Journal]

The **Fulton Street Transit Center** from above. [Second Ave. Sagas]