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Faculty Scholarship

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On being immoderate

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NOW WITHOUT HESITATION

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On being immoderate

Watching the John Adams miniseries (I know, long after it came out) -- I'm surprised to realize something that of course was true: the people who made the American revolution were not moderates. It was hard, really hard, for many of the colonists to decide they wished to be independent. Doing so was full of risk, not least the danger of being hung for treason. For many the natural thing, which the new Congress tried in 1775, was to petition the king for a redress of grievances. British rejection of these efforts gradually pushed people towards independence. But so did men like John Adams, who argued passionately in favor of tangible support for the Massachusetts militia in its early battles with the British. Abigail Adams was equally committed, though she could express her desires with more diplomacy than John sometimes managed. But these are not, as a group, the takers of sober counsel, the careful managers of complex situations. These were revolutionaries. It makes one remember that wisdom and tempered judgment are not always the path to the world we want. Perhaps that is because few people achieve expertise in changing the world; most of us, as we age, become experts in managing in the world as it is. So it's the non-experts, full of passion and dreaming of a world that does not yet exist, who can turn the old order over.
