



# Freedom's Feast

# LABOR DAY

On-line resources to get the most out of your AMERICAN holiday celebrations.

**LEADER:** Welcome to Labor Day 2021! The pandemic continues to challenge us—especially around our work. Millions of Americans have lost their jobs and many (women in particular) cannot afford to re-enter the labor market at low wage jobs. Millions of others have redefined the way they work. However we have been affected, we know that work is essential to our identity and well-being and are more aware than ever of workplace challenges we must address.

**READER:** An official National Holiday since 1894, Labor Day honors the working men and women of our nation and the work that they do.

**READER:** Ten thousand workers marched in the first Labor Day parade in New York City on September 5, 1882. Many risked their jobs and took an unpaid day from work to show their growing organizational power and to call for improved working conditions.

**READER:** In the late 19th century, the average laborer usually worked a 12-hour work day, seven days a week without any employee protections.

**READER:** **Children under the age of 16 were often forced to work** in dangerous and low-paying jobs until Congress passed the national Fair Labor Standards Act in 1938.

**READER:** It's hard to imagine a time when workers had no rights, children weren't entitled to a high school education, and workplace safety wasn't monitored or regulated.

**READER:** Establishing a national Labor Day was a big achievement for the growing labor movement. It happened because Pullman workers (essential workers on the country's passenger trains) staged a nation-wide strike. They wanted to draw attention to unjust workplace conditions and the key role that laborers played in our economy.

**READER:** Yet even with workplace injustices, people have always come to America with dreams for a better future. Waves of immigrants followed the Pilgrims in the early 1600s. Each of our colonies developed a special character reflecting a wide range of religious and political beliefs.

**READER:** And a new type of citizen emerged. Freed from Europe's rigid class system, he was independent, hard-working, well-schooled, and resourceful. Most importantly, her success depended on her own merit.

**READER:** **Benjamin Franklin**, one of our oldest Founding Fathers, was one of America's early self-made men.

**READER:** A writer, scientist, businessman, inventor, and philosopher, Franklin was also America's foremost foreign diplomat. He established America's first library and hospital, invented bifocals, the lightning rod, and the glass armonica. "Poor Richard's Almanack," a collection of popular sayings that he edited to entertain Americans, encouraged habits for success, hard work, and frugality.

**ALL:** *Eat to live, and not live to eat.  
No pains, no gains.  
Early to bed and early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise.*

**READER:** Franklin never forgot how others helped him achieve success. After learning about compounding interest, he established two trusts in his will for Boston and Philadelphia. He wanted the funds to give start up loans to



Child laborers stringing beans in a Baltimore company. (Lewis Hine/June 7, 1909)

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Young boys working the night shift at a Virginia glass factory. (Lewis Hine/June 1911)

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young craftsmen and support public works projects. In 1990, 200 years after his death, **the funds** were worth nearly \$7 million. At his direction, they were distributed. His foresight enabled others to pursue their dreams.

**READER:** For nearly 400 years, America has been a land of dreams for oppressed people everywhere. If we are not Native Americans, we were all, at some time, immigrants. We have come from Ireland, Russia, Poland, Scandinavia, Germany, Italy, China, India, Mexico... (*call out your own ancestral country if it has not been named*). Immigrants have been our railroad workers and our miners, our fishermen, lumberjacks and lawyers, our shipbuilders, entertainers, factory workers, our doctors, inventors and shop owners, our farmers, athletes, policemen, firefighters and ourselves. (*Call out the jobs represented in your group*).

**READER:** We must always remember that an entire group of Americans came here against their will. Torn from their homeland and families, African slaves helped to lay the foundations of this country. Out of slavery came citizens who have built up our nation with their many gifts. (*Name some of these gifts*).

**READER:** When we know that our government's power depends on our consent and that our rights are protected, we can spend our time and energy differently from those who are fighting persecution and oppression.

**READER:** We can create, protest, learn, rest, organize, and invent. We can dream of the job we want and work to fulfill our dream. Listen to these Americans who loved their work and made a difference in other's lives. (*Ask participants to read the following quotes in rotation, citing the author.*)

*I never did anything by accident, nor did any of my inventions come by accident; they came by work.* **THOMAS A. EDISON, INVENTOR, 1847-1931**

*Never interrupt someone doing what you said couldn't be done.* **AMELIA EARHART, AVIATION PIONEER, 1897-1937**

*Hard work beats talents when talent doesn't work hard.* **TIM NOTKE, HIGH SCHOOL BASKETBALL COACH**

*Make it good, George, it might be important.* **MOISE GERSHWIN TO SON GEORGE, WHILE GEORGE WAS WORKING ON "RHAPSODY IN BLUE"; GEORGE GERSHWIN, COMPOSER, 1898-1937**

*There is no shortcut to achievement. Life requires thorough preparation-veneer isn't worth anything.* **GEORGE WASHINGTON CARVER, SCIENTIST AND INVENTOR, 1864 (?)-1943**

*If at first, an idea is not absurd, then there is no hope for it.* **ALBERT EINSTEIN, SCIENTIST, 1879-1955**

*Ability is of little account without opportunity.* **LUCILLE BALL, ENTERTAINER, 1911-1989**

*The reward for work well done is the opportunity to do more.* **JONAS SALK, POLIO VACCINE CREATOR, 1914-1995**

*One small step for man, one giant leap for mankind.* **NEIL ARMSTRONG, ON THE MOON, 1969, ASTRONAUT, 1930-2012**

*Be true to your work, your word and your friend.* **HENRY DAVID THOREAU, AUTHOR, 1817-1862**

*Give the lady what she wants.* **MARSHALL FIELD, DEPARTMENT STORE PIONEER, 1836-1906**

**ALL:** In the year ahead, may we be granted good health, rewarding work, new jobs if we need them, and the opportunity for our work to be a blessing to ourselves and those around us.

**Enjoy your Labor Day holiday!** Try "What Did You Do at Work Today?" to enrich your conversations. It was originally developed with our Raising Citizens partner, the Children's Museum of Manhattan. Please visit us again for Thanksgiving at [www.freedomfeast.us/thanksgiving](http://www.freedomfeast.us/thanksgiving).



THANKSGIVING



PRESIDENTS' DAY



MLK DAY



MEMORIAL DAY



INDEPENDENCE DAY

**Your Ben Franklin moment: What personal thought or quote about work would you like to share with others?**

