



Freedom's Feast INDEPENDENCE DAY

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



INDEPENDENCE DAY

Celebrating Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness

A Quick History Lesson

On Independence Day, July 4, we celebrate the day when the Declaration of Independence was approved by the Continental Congress - it's really the birthday of America.

The United States Declaration of Independence is a statement adopted by the Second Continental Congress on July 4, 1776. It announced that the thirteen American colonies, then at war with Great Britain, were now independent states and no longer part of the British Empire. Written primarily by Thomas Jefferson, the Declaration is a formal explanation of why Congress voted on July 2 to declare independence from Great Britain, more than a year after the outbreak of the American Revolutionary War.

Although the Declaration had no effect of law, it identified the ideals that serve as our nation's core beliefs. They set a high aspirational bar for what it means to be a U.S. citizen. The statement set us apart from all other nations at the time and charted the path for our independence and our form of government. Most significantly, the Declaration declares that all men are created equal, and asserts certain natural rights --including those of *life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness*.

When the Declaration was signed, however, the confederation of thirteen colonies - the original United States of America - did *not* include the rights of all people. At that time, Native Americans, African American slaves, and women were not granted these same rights. We have made great progress to make good on the promise of full rights and equal representation for all in the U.S. Just as Americans during the colonial period and centuries after struggled to fulfill the aspirations of the Declaration, today we must continue to take responsibility for securing, understanding, respecting, and protecting these rights for all.

This year, we celebrate our 250th birthday. We've had two and a half centuries to realize the vision of our founders.

If they were alive today, what do you think they'd say about the job we are doing as a nation?

On a scale of 1 to 5 how do you rate us?



1

2

3

4

5

1=unsatisfactory 2=needs improvement 3=meets expectations 4=exceeds expectations 5=outstanding

*You may say I'm a dreamer, but
I'm not the only one.*

*I hope someday you'll join us,
and the world will be as one.*

JOHN LENNON
MUSICIAN, 1940-1980

*Ours is the only country
deliberately founded on an ideal.*

JOHN GUNTHER
JOURNALIST, 1901-1970

*For what avail the plough or sail,
or land or life, if
freedom fail?*

RALPH WALDON EMERSON AUTHOR,
1803-1882

*Yes, we did produce a near
perfect Republic. But will
they keep it? Or will they, in their
enjoyment of plenty lose the
memory of freedom? Material
abundance without character is
the path of destruction.*

THOMAS JEFFERSON
THIRD U.S. PRESIDENT,
1743-1826

*You have to love a nation that
celebrates its independence every
July 4, not with a parade of guns,
tanks, and soldiers who file by
the White House in a show of
strength and muscle, but with
family picnics where kids throw
Frisbees, the potato salad gets
iffy, and the flies die from
happiness. You may think you
have overeaten, but it is
patriotism.*

ERMA BOMBECK
HUMORIST, 1927-1996