

a state of independence

reflections on the declaration of our freedom, its symbol, and its celebration



When in the Course of human Events, it becomes necessary for one People to dissolve the Political Bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the Powers of the Earth, the separate and equal Station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent Respect to the Opinions of Mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the Separation.

We hold these Truths to be self-evident, that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness – That to secure these Rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just Powers from the Consent of the Governed, that whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these Ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its Foundation on such Principles, and organizing its Powers in such Form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness. . .

. . . *We, therefore, the Representatives of the UNITED STATES OF AMERICA*, in GENERAL CONGRESS, Assembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the World for the Rectitude of our Intentions, do, in the Name, and by Authority of the good People of these Colonies, solemnly Publish and Declare, That these United Colonies are, and of Right ought to be, FREE AND INDEPENDENT STATES; that they are absolved from all Allegiance to the British Crown, and that all political Connection between them and the State of Great-Britain, is and ought to be totally dissolved; and that as FREE AND INDEPENDENT STATES, they have full Power to levy War, conclude Peace, contract Alliances, establish Commerce, and to do all other Acts and Things which INDEPENDENT STATES may of right do. And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm Reliance on the Protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes, and our sacred Honor.

The Declaration of Independence was first read on July 8, 1776 in Philadelphia. Bells and band music filled the air commemorating the occasion. One year later, Philadelphia again celebrated by adjourning Congress. Bonfires were lit, bells were rung, and fireworks were launched.

This was the beginning of the celebration of our Nation's Independence. Speeches, picnics, military displays, and fireworks and observations became even more popular as new wars were waged and won as time passed. On the 50th Anniversary of the writing of the document, Thomas Jefferson was invited to celebrate in Washington D.C. Unable to attend due to poor health, he wrote of the Declaration,

"May it be to the world, what I believe it will be ... the signal of arousing men to burst the chains ... and to assume the blessings and security of self-government. That form, which we have substituted, restores the free right to the unbounded exercise of reason and freedom of opinion. All eyes are opened, or opening, to the rights of man. ... For ourselves, let the annual return of this day forever refresh our recollections of these rights, and an undiminished devotion to them."

Congress declared July 4th, Independence Day, a legal Federal holiday, in 1941. Today, our Nation continues to mark this major midsummer holiday with parades, fireworks, picnics, and the playing of the "Star Spangled Banner" and marches by John Philip Sousa, and remembering our forefathers – the architects of our freedom.



Old Glory



On June 14, 1777 the Continental Congress passed an Act to establish an official flag for the new nation. The resolution ordered that “the flag of the United States be made of thirteen stripes, alternate red and white; that the union be thirteen stars, white in a blue field, representing a new constellation.” On August 3, 1949, President Truman commemorated the occasion by officially declaring June 14 as Flag Day.

While no one knows the exact origin of the first American flag, some historians believe it was designed by Congressman Francis Hopkinson and sewn by Philadelphia seamstress Betsy Ross.

Between 1777 and 1960, Congress passed several acts that changed the shape, design, and arrangement of the flag and allowed for additional stars and stripes to be added to reflect the admission of each new state.

Today the flag consists of thirteen horizontal stripes, seven red alternating with six white. The stripes represent the original 13 colonies; the stars represent the 50 states of the Union. The colors of the flag are symbolic as well; red symbolizes hardiness and valor; white symbolizes purity and innocence; and blue represents vigilance, perseverance, and justice.

Francis Scott Key was so inspired by the sight of the American flag still flying over Baltimore’s Fort McHenry after a British bombardment that he wrote the “Star-Spangled Banner” on September 14, 1814. It officially became our national anthem in 1931.

The National Museum of American History is currently working to conserve and restore the enormous 1814 garrison flag that was the inspiration for our National Anthem.

Conservation efforts began with the removal of the linen support backing that was sewn into place in 1914 using 1.7 million stitches. Steps to preserve the flag include pH readings to measure the levels of acid or base in the fabric, color readings to analyze dyes in the fabric, and fiber analysis through microscopic examination. A thorough vacuuming of all surfaces and large-format photographing of every section of the flag to benchmark its condition were completed prior to any conservation efforts.

In 1892, the flag inspired James B. Upham and Francis Bellamy to write the “Pledge of Allegiance.” It was first published in a magazine called “The Youth’s Companion.”

Flag Etiquette

The flag is usually displayed from sunrise to sunset. It should be raised briskly and lowered ceremoniously. In inclement weather, the flag should not be flown.

The flag should be displayed daily and on all holidays, weather permitting, on or near the main administration buildings of all public institutions. It should also be displayed in or near every polling place on election days and in or near every schoolhouse during school days.

When displayed against a wall or a window, the blue field should be uppermost and to the left of the observer.

When the flag is raised or lowered as part of a ceremony as it passes by in parade or review, everyone, except those in uniform, should face the flag with the right hand over the heart.

The U.S. Flag should never be dipped toward any person or object, nor should the flag ever touch anything beneath it.

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