

4th of July

Independence day is a federal holiday in the United States commemorating the adoption of the Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1776, declaring independence from the Kingdom of Great Britain.

Overview

During the American Revolution, the legal separation of the Thirteen Colonies from Great Britain occurred on July 2, 1776, when the Second Continental Congress voted to approve a resolution of independence that had been proposed in June by Richard Henry Lee of Virginia declaring the United States independent from Great Britain. After voting for independence, Congress turned its attention to the Declaration of Independence, a statement explaining this decision, which was prepared by a Committee of Five, with Thomas Jefferson as its principal author.

History

Relations between the colonies and the England had been deteriorating since the end of the Seven Years' War in 1763. The war had plunged the British government deep into debt, and so Parliament enacted a series of measures to increase tax revenue from the colonies. Parliament believed that these acts, such as the stamp tax, tea tax, and various other taxes of 1765, were a legitimate means of having the colonies pay their fair share of the costs to keep the colonies in the British Empire.

Many colonists, however, had developed a different conception of the empire. Because the colonies were not directly represented in Parliament, colonists argued that Parliament had no right to levy taxes upon them. This tax dispute was part of a larger divergence between British and American interpretations of the British Constitution and the extent of Parliament's authority in the colonies.^[10] The orthodox British view, dating from the Glorious Revolution of 1688, was that Parliament was the supreme authority throughout the empire, and so by definition anything Parliament did was constitutional.

by 1774 American writers such as Samuel Adams, James Wilson, and Thomas Jefferson were arguing that Parliament was the legislature of Great Britain only, and that the colonies, which had their own legislatures, were connected to the rest of the empire only through their allegiance to the Crown.

Thirteen Colonies:

The thirteen colonies were: Delaware, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Georgia, Connecticut, Massachusetts Bay, Maryland, South Carolina, New Hampshire, Virginia, New York, North Carolina, and Rhode Island and Providence Plantations. Each colony developed its own system of self-government. Residents of these colonies were mostly independent farmers, who owned their own land and voted for their local and provincial government. In 1772 Benjamin Franklin, after examining the poor living conditions in Scotland surrounding the luxurious mansions of the land owners, wrote that in New England "every man" is a property owner, "has a Vote in public Affairs, lives in a tidy, warm House, has plenty of good Food and Fuel, with whole clothes from Head to Foot, the Manufacture perhaps of his own family."^[1] Following a series of protests in the 1760s and 1770s, these colonies united militarily in opposition to Great Britain and the rule of King George III with the outbreak of the American Revolutionary War in 1775. In 1776 they declared their independence and formed a new nation, the United States of America.

The Committee of Five:

On June 11, 1776, Congress appointed a "Committee of Five", consisting of John Adams of Massachusetts, Benjamin Franklin of Pennsylvania, Thomas Jefferson of Virginia, Robert R. Livingston of New York, and Roger Sherman of Connecticut, to draft a declaration.

Declaration of Independence:

John Adams persuaded the committee to select Thomas Jefferson to write the original draft of the document, which congress would edit to produce the final version. The Declaration was ultimately a formal explanation of why Congress had voted on July 2 to declare independence from Great Britain, more than a year after the outbreak of the American Revolutionary War. The national birthday, the Independence Day is celebrated on July 4, although Adams wanted July 2.

The sources and interpretation of the Declaration have been the subject of much scholarly inquiry. The Declaration justified the independence of the United States by listing colonial grievances against King George III, and by asserting certain natural and legal rights, including a right of revolution. Having served its original purpose in announcing independence, references to the text of the Declaration were few for the next four score years. Abraham Lincoln made it the centerpiece of his rhetoric (as in the Gettysburg Address of 1863), and his policies. Since then, it has become a major statement on human rights.

Famous Passages:

1. *“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.”*
2. *“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.”*
3. *“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 affect their Safety and Happiness.”*
4. *“All experience hath shewn, that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security.”*

Passage 2 has been called "one of the best-known sentences in the English language", containing "the most potent and consequential words in American history." The passage has come to represent a moral standard to which the United States should strive. This view was notably promoted by Abraham Lincoln in his famous Gettysburg Address, and has continued to inspire work for the rights of marginalized people throughout the world. It provided inspiration to numerous national declarations of independence throughout the world.

A day earlier, John Adams had written to his wife Abigail:

“The second day of July, 1776, will be the most memorable epoch in the history of America. I am apt to believe that it will be celebrated by succeeding generations as the great anniversary festival. It ought to be commemorated as the day of deliverance, by solemn acts of devotion to God Almighty. It ought to be solemnized with pomp and parade, with shows, games, sports, guns, bells, bonfires, and illuminations, from one end of this continent to the other, from this time forward forever more.”

In an amazing coincidence, both John Adams and Thomas Jefferson, the only signers of the Declaration of Independence later to serve as Presidents of the United States, died on the same day: July 4, 1826, which was the 50th anniversary of the Declaration. Although not a signer of the Declaration of Independence, but another Founding Father who became a President, James Monroe, died on July 4, 1831, thus becoming the third President in a row who died on this memorable day. Calvin Coolidge, the 30th President, was born on July 4, 1872, and, so far, is the only President to have been born on Independence Day.

Signers

There were 56 signers of the Declaration. The first, largest, and most famous signature is that of John Hancock, President of the Continental Congress. The youngest signer was Edward Rutledge (age 26). Benjamin Franklin (age 70) was the oldest. Two future presidents signed: John Adams (second President) and Thomas Jefferson (third President).



Celebrations

- In 1777, thirteen gunshots were fired in salute, once at morning and once again as evening fell, on July 4 in Bristol, Rhode Island. Philadelphia celebrated the first anniversary in a manner a modern American would find quite familiar: an official dinner for the Continental Congress, toasts, 13-gun salutes, speeches, prayers, music, parades, troop reviews, and fireworks. Ships were decked with red, white, and blue decorations.
- In 1778, General George Washington marked July 4 with a double ration of rum for his soldiers and an artillery salute. Across the Atlantic Ocean, Ambassadors John Adams and Benjamin Franklin held a dinner for their fellow Americans in Paris, France.
- In 1779, July 4 fell on a Sunday, so the holiday was celebrated on Monday, July 5.
- In 1781 the Massachusetts General Court became the first state legislature to recognize July 4 as a state celebration.
- In 1791 the first recorded use of the name "Independence Day" occurred.
- In 1820 the first Fourth of July celebration was held in Eastport, Maine which remains the largest in the state.
- In 1870, the U.S. Congress made Independence Day an unpaid holiday for federal employees.
- In 1938, Congress changed Independence Day to a paid federal holiday.

In Rwanda, July 4 is an official holiday known as Liberation Day, commemorating the end of the 1994 Rwandan Genocide in which the US government also played a role.

Questions

-what is independence?

-what are the responsibilities a government must have to its people?

-How do we ensure that our government does not have too much power?

-What is Freedom? Is it doing whatever you want to do?