



# RESOURCE GUIDE

## INDEPENDENCE DAY

### OVERVIEW

The Fourth of July, or Independence Day, is a holiday celebrated in the United States to observe the day the Continental Congress, government representatives of the 13 colonies, formally adopted the Declaration of Independence. Thus, creating America's governmental framework and valued principles, including all men are created equal, and Great Britain's reign over the American Colonies. On June 7, 1776, when the Continental Congress met, Virginia delegate Richard Henry Lee introduced a motion calling for the colonies' independence at the Pennsylvania State House. The delegation appointed a five-man committee to draft a formal declaration. The committee consisted of Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, Roger Sherman, Benjamin Franklin, and Robert Livingston. This is just over a year after the Revolutionary War began, in April 1775. Although, the war began as only a couple of colonies seeking independence, but with this resolution the fight with a few colonies became a full-scale war.



Congress officially voted in favor of Lee's resolution on July 2; however, we celebrate on July 4 because it was two days after the vote that the declaration was adopted. After the vote, John Adams wrote in a letter to his wife that Independence Day will be celebrated for generations with parades, games and sports, concerts, and fireworks all across the nation. Philadelphia held the first annual commemoration of independence on July 4, 1777, even in the midst of the ongoing war. Massachusetts became the first state to make July 4 an official state holiday.

The Revolutionary War ended in 1783, but it was after America faced Great Britain again in the War of 1812 that the patriotic celebration of July 4 became more widespread. In 1870, the U.S. Congress made the Fourth of July a federal holiday. John Adams' proclamation would prove accurate. Many people gather for family time and barbecues, often concerts are held in parks, sports teams hold patriotic traditions, all accompanied by elaborate firework shows. Americans spend over \$1 billion on fireworks annually.

For some communities, the holiday is a more sensitive subject. Independence Day, the rights and privileges that it represents, has been a difficult concept for some Americans because of the historic and present day struggle for freedom and equality for people of color. This has been well documented in Frederick Douglass' speech, "What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?" Still, this day has been an opportunity for all Americans to connect with family, reflect on our country's birth and its potential for the future.

## CONVERSATION STARTERS

- Engage with friends, family, and colleagues in discussions about United States history, popular American figures and holiday traditions, and global contributions America has made:
  - Did you know John Adams disagreed with celebrating Independence Day on July 4 because the vote took place on July 2?
  - What is your favorite Fourth of July tradition?
  - Participate in community events on July 4.
- Engage in critical dialogue around the United States' complicated history regarding race/ethnic relations. For example:
  - How can we honor the birth of the United States but remain sensitive to the Native American perspective of the country's history?
  - What are your thoughts on African Americans' irresolution with independence and founding principle that all men are created equal not applying to their community?
  - How can we most positively affect the perception of the United States nationally and globally?

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## ACTION STEPS

- Discuss the things you read, listen to, or watch regarding United States History and do not be afraid to ask difficult questions.
- Educate yourself and your loved ones on the history of Fourth of July traditions and form your own.
- Be critical of yourself, your own communities, organizations, departments, and teams. Ask if there are marginalized individuals that have reservations about calling the holiday Independence Day based on their identities.

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## RESOURCES



### WEBSITES

- [Museum of the American Revolution](#)
- [Smithsonian - Independence Day: July 4th](#)



### VIDEOS/FILMS

- [Independence Day Documentary | Classic History](#)
- [America the Story of Us: Declaration of Independence | History](#)
- ['What To The Slave Is The Fourth Of July?': Descendants Read Frederick Douglass' Speech | NPR](#)



### READINGS

- [Fourth of July - Independence Day by History.com](#)
- [Library of Congress: Independence Day](#)
- A People's History of The United States by Howard Zinn