



INDEPENDENCE DAY

JULY 4

BY THE MIDDLE OF THE 1700s, the thirteen colonies that made up part of England's empire in the "New World" were growing impatient with the laws and **restrictions** set by a king 3,000 miles away. They were resentful about taxes **imposed** upon them; they felt that they should not have to pay British taxes because they were not allowed representatives in Parliament. Their **sentiments** were expressed in the slogan "Taxation without representation is **tyranny!**" Many colonists wanted to be self-governing and free from British rule. But independence would be a **gradual** and painful process. Some colonists could not forget that they were British citizens, and felt that they owed **allegiance** to King George III. Others wanted the protection of the "Mother Country." Yet almost all colonists were dissatisfied with the way they were governed by Britain.

Unrest and tensions continued

to grow, and by 1765 many colonists had joined secret groups called "Sons of Liberty" to plan action or even violence against British authority. This angered the king and he sent more troops to enforce British law. The colonists sometimes **taunted** the British soldiers or threw stones at them.

Finally, two major events strongly united the colonists against Britain, and hurried **destiny**. On March 5, 1770, British troops fired on an angry group of Boston citizens, kill-

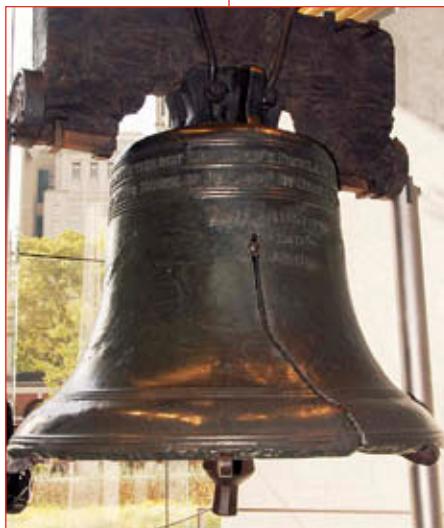
ing five and injuring others. The incident, called the "Boston Massacre," stunned and infuriated the colonists.

The second major event involved a tax on tea. Tea was a popular **commodity** in the colonies, but England's tax laws gave an unfair **advantage** to one tea merchant, the British-owned East India Company. This made the colonists angry, and they decided to stop buying and drinking tea from the East India Company. To **dramatize** the protest, Samuel Adams and other men of Boston organized the "Boston Tea Party." On December 16, 1773, they dressed up as American Indians, boarded an East India Company ship and dumped its **cargo** of tea into Boston Harbor. King George responded by closing Boston Harbor and **enacting** more restrictions and punishments. In addition, he required citizens of Boston to **house** and feed British soldiers.

Representatives in the Virginia colony took the first step toward in-

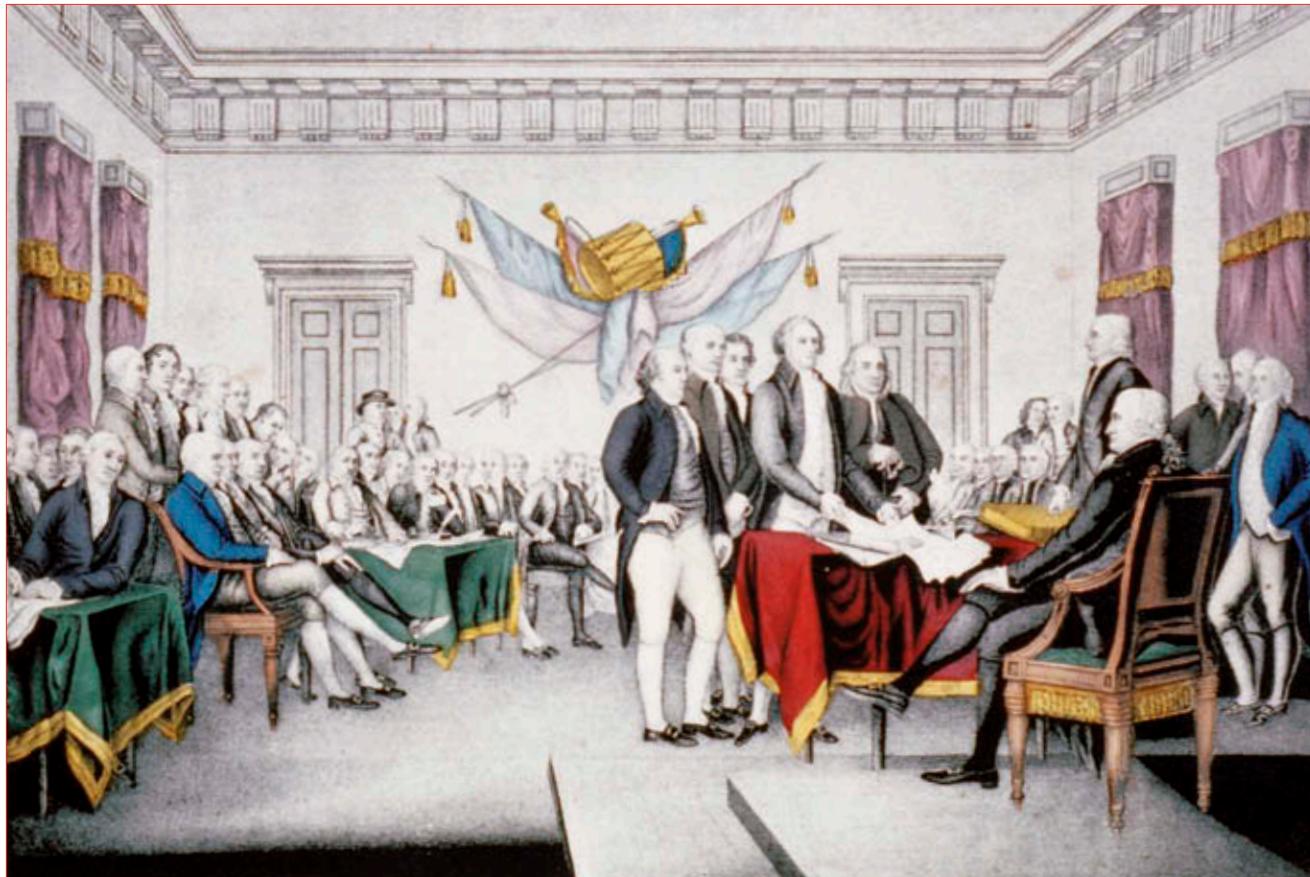
dependence by voting to set up a committee, the Continental Congress, to represent the colonies. The First Continental Congress met in September of 1774 and had delegates from twelve colonies. They drew up a list of **grievances** against the **crown**, and this became the first draft of the Declaration of Independence. In the meantime, colonists continued to organize protests against Britain, and to train their own **militias**.

The Revolutionary War began on April 19, 1775, when British



PREVIOUS PAGE: On every Fourth of July in Washington, D.C., a large display of fireworks fills the skies over the Capitol Building and the monuments.

ABOVE: The Liberty Bell, which originally came from England in 1752, rang to announce the signing of the Declaration of Independence on July 8, 1776.



troops tried to **raid** the Massachusetts militia. Colonists were quick to form fighting units and resist the British troops. In May of 1775 the Second Continental Congress met, and elected Virginia delegate George Washington to be Commander in Chief of the Continental Army. He led American troops against the British throughout the war. For the next eight years, colonists fought **ferventely** for independence. They were not as well trained or well equipped as British troops, but they had other advantages: They had a fierce and united purpose; they fought on familiar **terrain**; and they used new **tactics** learned from the Native **inhabitants**. They often had no uniforms, but their clothing helped **camouflage** them in the forests, while the British soldiers, called “Red Coats,” were highly visible in their bright red uniforms.

During the fight for freedom, another war—a war of words—was being **waged** in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. On July 2, 1776, the Continental Congress prepared a second draft of the

list of grievances. John Hancock, president of the Continental Congress, was the first to sign. The document, the Declaration of Independence, was considered **treasonous** by the crown, and the fifty-six men who signed it were in danger of being **executed**. Yet on July 4, 1776, the Continental Congress approved the Declaration of Independence, officially breaking bonds with England and forming a new independent nation, the United States of America.

Independence Day is celebrated on July 4 because on that day independence from Britain was officially declared. On July 8, 1776, the Declaration of Independence was read publicly for the first time and people celebrated. Bells rang out, bands played, and ships fired their guns; people lit candles and set off firecrackers. But the War of Independence dragged on until 1783 when independence was finally won. That year, Independence Day was made a holiday in the thirteen new states. But not until 1941 was Independence Day officially declared a federal legal holiday.

ABOVE: The Declaration of Independence was signed on July 4, 1776 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

John Adams, who became the Second President of the United States, was one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence. He wrote to his wife, “I...believe that it will be celebrated by succeeding generations as the great anniversary festival.... It ought to be [celebrated] with pomp and parades, with shows, games, sports, guns, bells, bonfires and illuminations from one end of this continent to the other...”

John Adams’ words may have predicted or inspired future Independence Day celebrations. Early Independence Day, or “Fourth of July,” celebrations did, indeed, include games and sports events, shows, military parades, fireworks, and the liberal firing of guns and cannons. But the firearms and fireworks caused many injuries, and even deaths. So in the early 1900s, citizens convinced officials to prohibit guns and to control the use of fireworks on Independence Day. The phrase, “a safe and sane Fourth” became a popular slogan, and is still used today to encourage safety and common sense on the Fourth of July. Today, many cities prohibit fireworks or allow only small items like cherry bombs and sparklers. Some cities organize a local fireworks show, run by trained pyrotechnics specialists.

Every Fourth of July Americans have a holiday from work or school. Communities and families have all-day picnics with favorite foods like hot dogs and hamburgers, potato salad, baked beans, pie, and watermelon. Afternoon activities would not be complete without lively music, a friendly baseball game, or Frisbee toss, and maybe, a three-legged race, and a pie-eating or watermelon-eating contest. Some cities have parades with people dressed as the original “founding fathers” or early colonists, who march to the music of high school bands. At dusk, people gather to watch the city fireworks display. In many areas of the country, special events take place.

For example, a Freedom Festival is held in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, at Independence Hall, where the Declaration of Independence was signed. Costumed Americans often reenact historical scenes, and read the Declaration of Independence for the crowd. In Massachusetts, the ship *U.S.S. John F. Kennedy* may come in to Boston

Harbor in full sail on the Fourth of July, and the Boston Pops Orchestra will play a musical concert of patriotic songs as hundreds of people watch fireworks burst over the water.

The Liberty Bell

“Proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof.”

The sight and sound of a ringing bell on the Fourth of July symbolizes freedom to most Americans and brings to mind the Liberty Bell, which rang out in Philadelphia when the new country was born.

The Liberty Bell once hung in the Old State House, which later became Independence Hall, in Philadelphia. It was rung at every important national event, such as presidential elections, statesmen’s funerals, and of course, the Fourth of July. The bell came to Philadelphia from a foundry in England in 1752. But the very first time the bell was rung, it cracked! Repairs were made and for the next eighty-three years, the bell tolled on special occasions—the most significant on July 8, 1776 to announce the signing of the Declaration of Independence.

Sometime after 1846, the Liberty Bell cracked again and it was removed from the bell tower to protect it from further damage. It was placed on display in Independence Hall. Today, the bell is housed in the Liberty Bell Center, which is open to visitors year round, and is part of the Independence National Historic Park.

At one time, the foundry in England that had made the bell generously offered to take the cracked bell, melt it down and cast it anew, at no charge. But American officials decided to keep the old Liberty Bell as it was. They felt that the American people loved the old bell, and that the crack in the bell was a cherished part of its character and legacy.

America, The Beautiful

From time to time, it is suggested that the song, “America the Beautiful” be made the national anthem, in place of “The Star-Spangled Banner.” [See Flag Day, p. 87] Proponents of this idea argue that “America the

Beautiful” is a better national anthem because it praises the whole country, not only the flag, and it was not written as a result of a war.

FOLLOWING PAGE: Mount Shasta in the Cascades rises magnificently to 4,317 meters above northern California.



America, The Beautiful

1. O beau-ti-ful for spa-cious skies, For am-ber waves of grain, For
2. O beau-ti-ful for pil-grim feet Whose stern im-pas-sion'd stress A
3. O beau-ti-ful for he-roes prov'd In lib-er-at-ing strife, Who
4. O beau-ti-ful for pa-triot dream, That sees be-yond the years Thine

pur-ple moun-tain maj-es-ties A - bove the fruit-ed plain. A -
thor-ough-fare for free-dom beat A - cross the wil-der-ness. A -
more than self their coun-try lov'd And mer-cy more than life. A -
al-a-bas-ter cit-ies gleam, Un-dimmed by hu-man tears. A -

mer-i-ca! A - mer-i-ca! God shed His grace on thee, And
mer-i-ca! A - mer-i-ca! God mend thine ev-ry flaw, Con -
mer-i-ca! A - mer-i-ca! May God thy gold re-fine Till
mer-i-ca! A - mer-i-ca! God shed His grace on thee, And

crown thy good with broth-er-hood From sea to shin-ing sea.
firm thy soul in self-con-trol, Thy lib-er-ty in law.
all suc-cess be no-ble-ness, And ev-ry gain di-vine.
crown thy good with broth-er-hood From sea to shin-ing sea.

Also, it is much easier to sing. “America the Beautiful” was written in 1893 by Katherine Lee Bates, a writer and professor at Wellesley College. While on vacation, she took a ride up Pike’s Peak, a mountaintop in Colorado, and saw a spectacular view that few people in those days had the opportunity to see. The “spacious skies” and “purple mountains” inspired her to write a poem, which was eventually published. The public loved the poem, and it was often put to music using any tune that fit the lyrics. Eventually, the poem was set to the music of a **hymn**, “Materna,” by Samuel Ward, and this is the song that Americans know and love today as the most beautiful tribute to their country.

Glossary

restriction(s): *n.* rules; regulations
impose(d): *v.* to force upon
sentiment(s): *n.* strong feelings
slogan: *n.* saying or phrase that expresses the feelings or cause of a group
tyranny: *n.* unjust or cruel use of power
gradual: *adj.* slow; little by little
allegiance: *n.* loyalty
unrest: *n.* public dissatisfaction or rebellion
tension(s): *n.* strained or hostile relations
taunt(ed): *v.* to tease in a hostile way
destiny: *n.* fate; future
massacre: *n.* execution of a large number of people
stun(ned): *adj.* shocked; surprised
infuriate(d): *adj.* greatly angered
commodity: *n.* product or good which is bought or sold
advantage: *n.* benefit, gain, or profit
dramatize: *v.* to emphasize in a vivid or emotional way
dress(ed) up: *v. phrase.* to wear a costume
cargo: *n.* a load of goods or raw materials carried by ship or airplane
enact(ing): *v.* to make official; to make into a law
house: *v.* to provide lodging or shelter
grievance(s): *n.* complaint
crown: *n.* monarchy; the king and his rule
militia(s): *n.* local, state or reserve military force, called in for emergencies
raid: *v.* to attack for the purpose of stealing goods and supplies

fervently: *adv.* strongly; passionately
terrain: *n.* land and its physical features
tactic(s): *n.* strategies; methods
inhabitant(s): *n.* resident; person who lives in a specific place
camouflage: *v.* to hide or conceal by blending in with the surroundings
visible: *adj.* able to be seen; clearly seen
wage(d): *v.* to engage in; to carry on
treasonous: *adj.* acting against one’s own country
execute(d): *v.* to kill by official order
firecracker(s): *n.* type of firework that explodes with a bang and a flash of light when lit. See **fireworks**.
pomp: *n.* great ceremony or display
bonfire(s): *n.* large public fire used for celebration or other event
predict(ed): *v.* to suggest or see the future
fireworks: *n.* any type of explosive that produces a bright display or loud noise, used for celebration
liberal: *adj.* free; uncontrolled; excessive
firearm(s): *n.* gun, cannon, or other such weapon
prohibit: *v.* to not allow; to forbid
sane: *adj.* mentally stable; using good judgement
cherry bomb(s): *n.* small round explosive that looks like a cherry and explodes with a loud crack when thrown on the ground
sparkler(s): *n.* a type of fireworks on a long stick which sends out sparks and flashes of light when lit
pyrotechnics specialist(s): *n. phrase.* person trained in the safe use of fireworks and skilled in elaborate fireworks presentations
Frisbee: *n.* brand name of a flat, round, plastic disk that is thrown and caught as a sports activity
three-legged race: *n. phrase.* a foot race in which one person’s left leg is tied to another person’s right leg, and they run tied together on “three legs”
founding fathers: *n. phrase.* the men who wrote and signed the Constitution and led the United States in its early years
reenact: *v.* to perform or act out a scene or event from the past
burst: *v.* to explode or break open with force
foundry: *n.* factory where items are made from melted ore and metal
toll(ed): *v.* to ring
bell tower: *n.* a tall structure where bells are hung

cast: *v.* to shape melted metal

anew: *adv.* in a new manner; once more

cherish(ed): *adj.* loved and respected

legacy: *n.* special history or anything that is handed down from one generation or era to the next

anthem: *n.* a song that is symbolic of a people, a group, a culture, a movement; usually a song of praise

proponent(s): *n.* one who supports or agrees with a cause or idea

spacious: *adj.* having a lot of space; wide and open

hymn: *n.* religious song or melody