

Why we celebrate Independence Day

Written by Timothy Houston
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*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. -**Declaration of Independence*** Last week America had a national holiday celebrating the drafting, signing, and approval of the Declaration of Independence. The Declaration of Independence was a statement adopted by the Continental Congress on July 4, 1776, which announced that the thirteen American colonies, then at war with Great Britain, regarded themselves as independent states, and no longer a part of the British Empire. A committee was assembled to draft the formal declaration, to be ready when congress voted on independence. Adams persuaded the committee to select Thomas Jefferson to compose 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 Declaration of Independence is one of the most important documents in the history of America and the African American people. This document later became the catalyst for other key documents including the Emancipation Proclamation, 13th amendment abolishing slavery, and the 15th amendment prohibiting the denial of suffrage based on race or color. Having served its original purpose in announcing independence, the text of the Declaration was initially ignored after the American Revolution. Since then, it has come to be considered a major statement on human rights, particularly its second sentence: 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.

Although the United States was at the beginning of its existence, the passage came to represent a moral standard to which the United States should strive. This view was notably promoted by Abraham Lincoln, who considered the Declaration to be the foundation of his political philosophy, and argued that the Declaration is a statement of principles through which the United States Constitution should be interpreted. It has inspired work for the rights of oppressed people throughout the world, and it served as a key foundation in the Black civil rights movement here in the United States.

We all should celebrate Independence Day because it is a celebration of freedom. The United

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States has come a long way in a short time in advancing human rights issue throughout the world. This is a very young nation only 236 years old compared to China, Egypt, and Japan who have existed between 5000 and 35,000 years. Although we are still in our infancy, because of documents such as the Declaration of Independence, we were able to abolish slavery, elect a Black president, and continue the work on Dr King's dream of speeding up that day when all of God's children, Black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual, "Free at last! Free at last!

Thank God Almighty, we are free at last!"

Timothy Houston is an author, minister, and motivational speaker who is committed to guiding positive life changes in families and communities. For questions, comments or more information, go to www.tlhouston.com .