

4th of July

Independence Day of the United States of America



The Daily Star

Special Supplement

The Fourth of July

by John Updike

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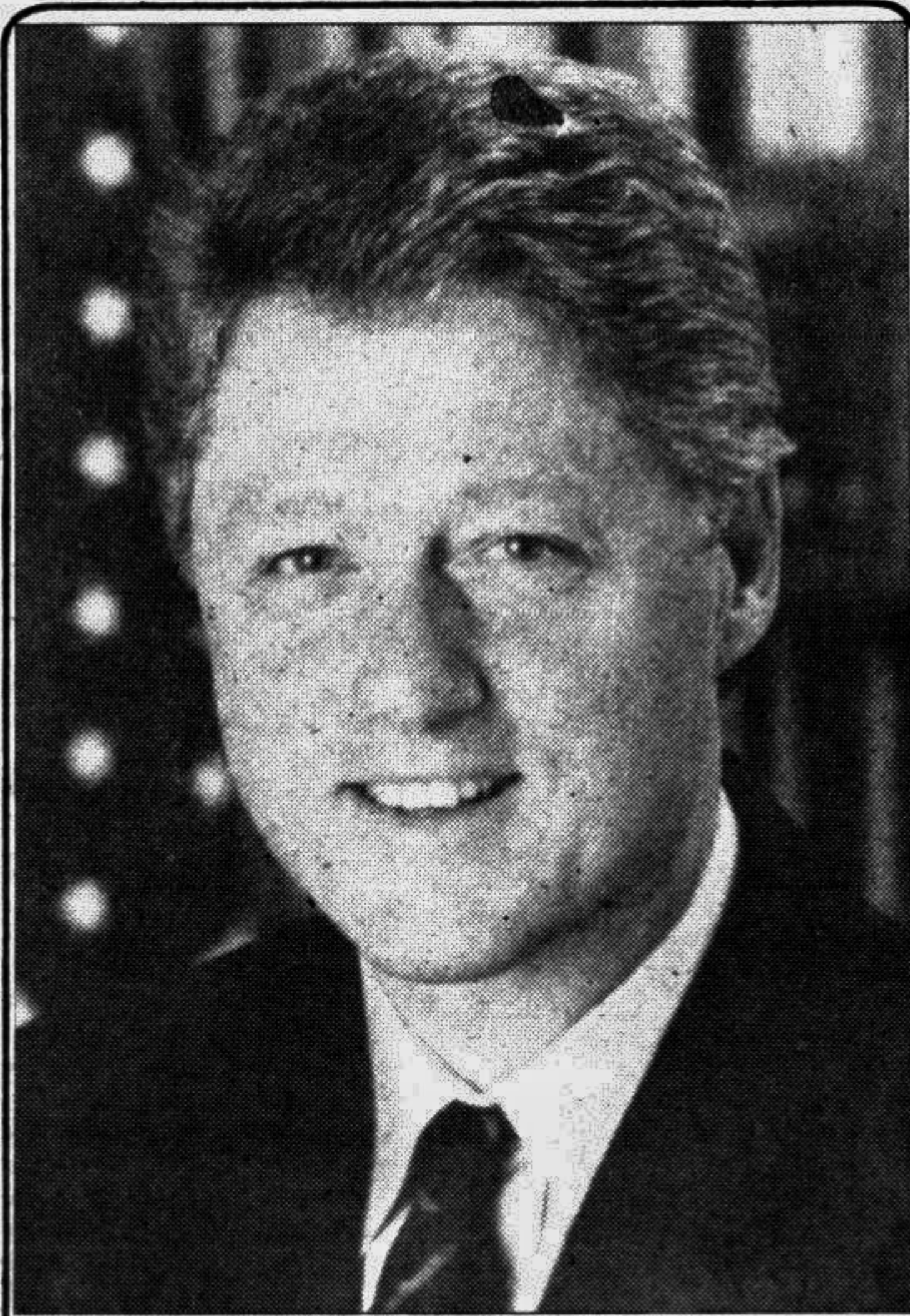
On July 4 — Independence Day — Americans celebrate the adoption in 1776 of their Declaration of Independence. In this essay the well-known novelist John Updike calls forth the rich store of images and feelings that his countrymen traditionally associate with "this most American of holidays."

It is a human providence that scatters the holidays around so conveniently on the calendar. The American summer has three days to mark its phases — Memorial Day to signal its beginning, the Fourth of July to mark the start of high summer, and Labor Day to bring it to a gentle close. Of these three, the first and third were invented and bestowed upon the year by government fiat, and even the Fourth is somewhat arbitrary. The Continental Congress actually declared that "these United Colonies are, and of right ought to be, Free and Independent States" on July 2, 1776, and on the Fourth merely voted to adopt the Declaration of Independence, which was publicly read in the yard of the Pennsylvania statehouse in Philadelphia on July eighth. It was not copied onto parchment and signed by the delegates in attendance until August second, and the last of the 56 signatories, Thomas McKean of Delaware, did not affix his name before 1777. The first anniversary of the Fourth of July was celebrated that year in Philadelphia, with parades and oratory and fireworks and the ringing of bells, and the custom spread and has

lasted. This most American of holidays serves to remind us, if we care, that our founding fathers, wearing wigs and lace-trimmed frockcoats, met and debated in a fearful sweat, and delicately and artfully stitched together our national fabric amid the muggy, buggy heat of a Philadelphia summer before air-conditioning and pesticides. The northern Europeans who came here encountered hotter summers than they had known, and they were slow to compromise their costumes. For most of the nineteenth century, the middle class kept buttoned up and voluminously swathed in dark colors, and only the underprivileged enjoyed the privilege of dressing light. The Fourth of July still reminds us of that end-of-century loosening up — the arrival of straw hats and linen dresses, the resort to wide-porch summer hotels and sandy cliffs climbed by flights of wooden stairs, the discovery of the American summer as another continent, a land of ice and ice cream and baseball and beach picnics and outdoor concerts, of freedom felt in the body itself. We have brought forth a new world of nearly naked red men and brown women camping out

and cooking out by seaside and lakeside. Sea and lake and mountain are where King Summer reigns, and the Fourth of July fireworks are his announcement of possession. Yet fireworks have a sadness. They are expensive, somewhat dangerous and soon over. Quickly subsiding into their final shreds and sparks, they impose our passion and mortality on the night sky. Though the Fourth marks the beginning of true summer warmth, already the long June evenings are drawing in, and by the end of the month the shimmering days have become perceptibly nipped shorter. The holiday has an undertow of perfect ripeness; it reaches its climax in the dark, not long before bedtime — in contrast to Easter and Christmas, whose glad tidings arrive in the morning, and Thanksgiving, which sluggishly creeps in midafternoon. Slightly melancholy, too, seems the Fourth's great show of red, white, and blue, hearkening back to a primitive patriotism that can only make us feel a bit gully and inadequate, as Washington's Birthday used to before it was unceremoniously lumped into President's Day — a holiday without a sa-

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President Clinton's Message

I am pleased to join my fellow Americans across the nation and around the world in celebrating Independence Day.

On this day each year, we gather with family and friends to commemorate the anniversary of the signing of our Declaration of Independence. With vision and courage, our Founders stated unequivocally to the world: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. These were literally revolutionary concepts, and they fundamentally changed the course of human history."

Today we are living through another period of profound and historic change in the way we work, the way we live, the way we relate to one another and to the rest of the world. But the truths set down in our Declaration of Independence are immutable, and they continue to light our path into the challenges and possibilities of the future. Equality, individual rights, life, freedom, opportunity — we still cherish these values, and we must continue to reaffirm them daily.

America is a work in progress, and we have strived through decades of challenge and change to become what our Founders envisioned on our first Independence Day. As we continue that endeavor, let us work together to create an America that remains the world's strongest force for peace, justice, and freedom. Let us work for an America that is not driven apart by differences but instead is united around shared values and respect for our diversity. Let us work for an America in which every one of us, without regard to race or religious belief or gender or station in life, can achieve our dreams. In this way we will best pay tribute to those who, 220 years ago, pledged their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honour to guarantee our freedom.

Best wishes for a memorable Fourth of July.

MESSAGE

It is a special privilege and honour to issue these greetings celebrating the 220th anniversary of American Independence.

On July 4, 1776, the signers of the Declaration of Independence declared that the 13 British colonies in North America ought to be a new free and independent nation. Their lofty principles were, that all men are created equal, and that they are endowed by God with the "unalienable rights" of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

The struggles and efforts to establish and preserve our democracy that started then continue to the present.

On that fateful day Ben Franklin remarked: "Gentlemen, may we all hang together for if not we will most certainly all hang separately."

The War of Independence continued against great odds for another seven years. Then 11 more years passed before the first presidential election.

From 1860-1865 brother fought brother in a great and tragic civil war that took more American lives than all other wars since then, combined.

More recently, in 1920 women first received voting rights; in 1974 a president was forced from office under the premise that not even a sitting president is above the law; and over the past 40 years, great efforts have been made to ensure that all Americans — regardless of race, ethnicity, and gender — have equal access to the political system.

Americans believe that when the people are given a vested interest in how their country is governed, government is more responsive to the needs of the people, standards of living increase, the quality of life improves, and long-term solutions to national problems are discovered.

It is especially gratifying to recall the events that established American democracy in light of the demonstrated commitment to democracy shown by the people of Bangladesh over recent months. The people of the United States congratulate all the political parties and all the men and women who participated in the recent election. The entire process was a testimony to the vibrancy of democracy in Bangladesh. As President Clinton has noted, "the election and the peaceful transition of power lay the groundwork for an era of strengthened democracy, domestic tranquil-

lity, and economic growth."

On this holiday I also mark the cooperation between our two countries in development, health, agriculture and food, and economic reform. With a fuller democracy, these can lead to a fuller and richer life for the people of Bangladesh.

Mrs. Merrill and I extend to the American community, and to all our Bangladeshi friends, our wishes for a happy Fourth of July.



David N Merrill
Ambassador of the United States of America to Bangladesh

Glorious Fourth: Celebrating America's Birthday

by Peggy Robbins

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THE Second of July, 1776, will be the most memorable epoch in the history of America. I believe that it will be celebrated by succeeding generations as the great anniversary festival. It ought to be commemorated as the day of deliverance, as solemn acts of devotion to God Almighty. It ought to be solemnized with pomp and parade, with shows, games and sports, guns, bells, bonfires and illuminations, from one end of this continent to the other, from this time forward, forevermore." So wrote John Adams to his wife — the next day, July 3. Of course, he was wrong.

America's schoolchildren have always been taught that July 4, 1776 — when the Second Continental Congress, meeting in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, adopted the Declaration of Independence from England — is America's birthday. That tends to oversimplify the matter, as only one signature was placed on the document that day — that of John Hancock, president of the Congress. The Declaration of Independence, as a completely executed document, was not the work of a day.

The actions in the Congress relating to signing a document of independence extended from June 7 to August 2. On June 7, Richard Henry Lee, leader of the Virginia delegates to the Congress, introduced three resolutions. The first and most important declared 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." John Adams of Massachusetts immediately seconded Lee's motion. A very spirited debate followed, as many delegates still hoped for a peaceful reconciliation with the mother country.

Three days later, Congress appointed a committee of five — Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, Roger Sherman and Robert Livingston — to draft a formal declaration of independence. Jefferson wrote a document, and for three weeks the com-

mittee members and then the Congress worked over it, making minor changes. Then, on July 2, before the members quite got to the act of approving the declaration, Lee's first resolution was debated briefly and approved. This was the impetus for Adams' excited letter to his wife. As it turned out, Lee's resolution was treated as only a preface for the adoption of the Declaration — on Thursday, July 4, when John Hancock signed it "by order of and on behalf of the Congress." The opening words of the document were "In Congress, July 4, 1776."

The Declaration had not yet been properly prepared — "engrossed on parchment by an expert penman" — to receive signatures and become an enduring document. It was not until August 2 that an official copy was signed by all members of Congress present; the signatures of those absent that day were added later, the last signature in 1781. Official copies were delivered to all states in January 1777. One signer — Richard Stockton of Princeton, New Jersey — renounced his signature because the British had threatened to burn his fine home.

Philadelphia waited only until the Monday following John Hancock's July 4 signing to observe the adoption of the Declaration. There was a mass meeting in State House Yard (later to be called Independence Square), and the Declaration was read from an old platform erected seven years earlier by the American Philosophical Society. According to John Adams, who was present: "Three cheers rent the welkin (heavens). Battalions paraded on the Common and gave us the feu de joie, notwithstanding the scarcity of powder. Bells rang all day and almost all night. Even the Christ Church chimed away. [The rector of Christ Church was a staunch royalist]."

Other contemporary accounts of the event that July 8 in Philadelphia differ somewhat from Adams': "I was in the old State House yard when the Declaration of Independence was read," wrote one citizen, "and I noted that there were very few respectable persons present."

And a lady who lived in a house facing the square wrote that "the first audience of the Declaration was neither very numerous nor composed of the most respectable class of citizens."

The next day, July 9, on order of General George Washington, the Declaration was read to his Continental troops in City Hall Park in New York. As the news spread to other towns and to the remote areas of the colonies, loyal patriots celebrated.

Independence Day Takes Shape

John Adams may have been wrong when he said that July 2 would forever be celebrated as Independence Day, but he certainly was right in predicting that America's birthday would be honored annually "with pomp and parade" and a great variety of celebratory activities.

On the first anniversary, in 1777, cities and towns celebrated spontaneously. There were parades everywhere — quite elaborate ones in Philadelphia; Charleston, South Carolina; and Boston, Massachusetts. Streets were decorated, cannon boomed, bells rang, bonfires were lit and fireworks (imported from England) spangled the night skies. Colonial soldiers at Morristown were given an extra gill of rum that day, and, reportedly, a favourite individual activity in several towns was to drink — or attempt to drink — 13 toasts to the 13 states. The General Court of Massachusetts urged citizens to "make every Preparation for drinking Success to the Thirteen United States."

In Philadelphia, a Hessian band that had been captured at Trenton, New Jersey, was required to play in the streets and at a midafternoon dinner attended by notables. John Adams, after walking around Philadelphia that night and seeing lighted candles in most windows, wrote his young daughter: "It was the most splendid illumination I ever saw... I was amazed at the universal joy and alacrity, considering the lateness of the design and the suddenness of the execution, and at the brilliancy and splendor of every part of the day's exhibition." Adams

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Education in the United States

OVER 58 million students are enrolled in American schools, which range from kindergartens to high schools, small colleges and large universities, as well as a variety of institutions for adult education and vocational training. Americans place a high value on education for themselves and their children, and universal access to quality education has been one of the nation's historic goals.

More than 100 years before the signing of the Declaration of Independence, European settlers in Massachusetts passed laws requiring all communities to hire schoolmasters, larger towns had to establish grammar schools to train children for the university. America's first college, Harvard, was founded in Massachusetts in 1636; the second, William and Mary, was established in Virginia in 1693.

Higher education was revolutionized in 1862 by the Morrill Act, which granted federal lands to each state for the creation of agricultural and mechanical colleges. These "land grant" institutions legitimized vocational and technical education.

defined in large part by its schools.

Perhaps the most noteworthy feature about American education is the absence of a national administration or structure. Each of the 50 states controls and directs its own schools. Most states require that children attend school from the time they reach six or seven years old until they are 16 or 17. Educational requirements are set by the state legislatures, and public schools are managed by local committees, divided into about 15,600 state school districts.

But what do American public schools teach? Public school education is constantly debated and continually evolving. In the late 1960s, public schools experimented with the curriculum and expanded the number of "elective" subjects, deemphasizing the traditional "three Rs" — reading, writing and arithmetic. During the mid-1970s, schools moved back to an emphasis on the basics, and many states began to administer proficiency tests to students graduating from high school. And in the 1980s, schools have supplemented the basics with new programs to familiarize students with such rapidly changing fields as computer technology.

There is no uniform school organization or curriculum throughout the nation, but certain common features exist. Preschool education consists of nursery schools and kindergartens, although in recent years the latter is usually part of the elementary schools. Elementary and secondary

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