

“I Learned to Call It Independence Day”

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By David Gortler

WASHINGTON, D.C.—Most Americans think nothing of calling our nation’s birthday “the Fourth of July.” But I learned the hard way not to do that in my Army Reserve Officer Training Corps days in college.

I’ll never forget the day Sgt. Thayer, a regular Army soldier, decided to randomly quiz our ROTC squad on American history while we were in formation. One of the questions was: “What American holiday do we celebrate in July?”

“The Fourth of July, Sergeant.”

Sgt. Thayer’s response?

In a strong voice, he said: “Get on the ground! Count them out!”

Then he called on another cadet. Same question, same answer, more push-ups.

This was repeated several times until one of the putatively better-educated members of the squad, whose family had an extended and extensive military past, finally answered: “Independence Day.”

I guess I’d never really given it due thought until that day.

I learned plenty from being a cadet, but the appropriate labeling of this historically significant event is one lesson I think all Americans should also learn as we prepare to celebrate the 250th anniversary of our Founding Fathers’ declaration of colonial independence from Great Britain.

America was founded on a set of beliefs and convictions—what Thomas Jefferson described as self-evident truths (actually, Jefferson originally wrote “sacred and undeniable,” which was revised to the more secular “self-evident”) that were proclaimed in the 1776 Declaration of Independence and then protected by the Bill of Rights and the Constitution.

The declaration established the first modern country founded on principles of individual freedoms. It also led to the selection of America’s government leaders by the people, rather than through an inherited bloodline of kings and nobles.

Why is the American holiday celebrating this reduced to its calendar date by seemingly everyone? This kind of labeling debases the magnitude of what the day represents.

Calling it Independence Day honors the foundational designation and the values of liberty and freedom that the holiday represents. Nobody refers to Christ-

mas day as the 25th of December; nobody greets you on New Year's Day with "happy January first." The same should go for recognizing the celebration of America's independence.

Calling the holiday Independence Day connects the event directly to its historical significance.

It's become necessary because a shocking number of young people are clueless about what the "Fourth of July" represents—let alone the importance of the Committee of Five or the location of Valley Forge. They do not know who the Founding Fathers were or what they accomplished. According to the above-linked video, many can't even spell the word *independence*.

Public schools have failed to educate American students on the fundamentals of civics. Leftist universities tend to focus their far-left "antifounder" lenses on America's failures rather than its successes. Putting John Trumbull's famous painting of the Declaration of Independence signing on the back of the two-dollar bill apparently wasn't enough. Perhaps a verbal grassroots renaissance by patriot readers of this article using the proper convention will at least audibly point countrymen in the right direction.

A Celebration of America

Independence Day is unlike Memorial Day, which is a somber day to valorize those who died in wars to protect our liberties. Many Americans, unfortunately, see Memorial Day as nothing more than a long weekend for vacations, barbecues and other leisurely indulgences. Even "on-brand" Democrat members of Congress lecturing Americans about liberty and freedom fail to comprehend the solemn meaning of Memorial Day.

Independence Day, on the other hand, is unquestionably a nonpartisan day that celebrates our heritage, our Founding Fathers, their principled example and America's declaration of freedom.

"The Fourth of July" is just a date on the calendar.

- What happened on the Fourth of July in 1776 was the Continental Congress voting to adopt the written Declaration of Independence, but just "declaring" it wasn't enough.

- The preceding and subsequent American Revolutionary War to actually make it part of history took more than eight years (April 19, 1775, to Sept. 3, 1783).

Besides, there is historical disagreement over the exact date on which we should celebrate—illustrating that the date itself seems far less important than the actual celebration of American independence.

In fact, our second U.S. president, John Adams, was quoted as stating: "The Second Day of July 1776, will be the most memorable Epocha, in the History of America. I am apt to believe that it will be celebrated by succeeding generation, 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."

President Adams also presciently warned us, "Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate [for] the government of any other." One of those morals must be to teach its citizens about the excellence and successes of the American experiment and why our independence and freedoms are special and the envy of others.

Independence Day is a monumental occasion meant for celebration and festivities, but Americans should at least label the occasion by its proper name to invite reflection rather than just say a date.

The American dream was not born from "magic soil," and our freedoms did not emerge organically. It was born out of the honor, courage and sacrifices of our founding politicians, soldiers and citizens.

America would not exist if it were not for God-fearing American patriots who sacrificed and lost everything they had, often dying penniless (including the noteworthy friend of George Washington, Haym Salomon) so that we may celebrate and have the freedoms we all enjoy today.

It is critical that we live up to the principles of America's Founding Fathers. Don't take freedom for granted. Start by teaching yourself to call the day by its name: Independence Day. You'll remind yourself and others what the day represents.

And, if you forget, drop and give yourself 20.