

# WHAT THE FOURTH OF JULY WAS NOT

<https://www.2thepointnews.com/what-the-fourth-of-july-was-not/>

Our national Fourth of

July holiday—currently the nation’s 247<sup>th</sup> since the first in 1776—marks the birth of the United States.

The iconic Declaration of Independence was published on the 4<sup>th</sup> and largely written by Thomas Jefferson. Its core sentence would become among the most famous words in American history:

*“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.”*

Those aspirations at the outset pledged the new American nation to hold to its promises “that all men are created equal.”

In other words, so-called white males established a foundational document whose inherent logic was that the millions of Americans not yet born—who would not necessarily look like them, or share their ancestry—would become their political equals.

Most nation founders do not envision the future of their country in terms that might not privilege those of their own tribe.

In contrast, today it would be difficult for a foreign national to become a full-fledged Chinese, Mexican, or Iranian citizen, with full equal rights, who either did not look like, or embrace a religion different from, the majority population.

What followed from the Declaration was a constant demand from many quarters for America to live up to its own exalted words.

Eighty-five years later, that promise culminated in a horrific Civil War that cost 700,000 American lives to remove the stain of slavery, and to honor the promise of the Fourth.

“All men are created equal” further entailed another century of protest and reform, until the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s finally enshrined into law equality of opportunity statutes.

But note what the Declaration was *not*.

There was no full embrace of all the later French Revolutionary slogans of *Liberté, égalité, fraternité*.

Instead, the Declaration promised that all men should *start out* equally through guaranteed protections to live their lives as they please and ensure their liberty.

The new government made, then, no claims that all Americans must be egalitarian. There was no promise that Americans must be equal in *all* aspect of their lives—or else.

Such mandated sameness might threaten the idea of “liberty,” and the ability of each citizen to pursue one’s own version of happiness.

Nor did the Declaration pledge a common “fraternity.” Americans were under no compulsion to embrace some collective brotherhood or shared orthodox political sentiments.

So Americans would not be ensured an equality of result—or what we may know now as “equity.”

Unlike other revolutionary governments, the founders of America never promised to create utopian “new men” who would become alike in all aspects of their being.

The foundational date of our “new order” was canonized as 1776. Yet note it was not some pretentious Jacobin “Year 1”—as if everything in the past was to be erased.

Unlike revolutionary France’s 1789 “Declaration of the Rights of Man,” the American Declaration was far more modest in its confidence in what government could or should achieve.

Jefferson inserted no such French wording about government power concerning “social distinctions” or “disturbing the public order” or “in proportion to their means.”

Other republics birthed parliamentary systems. They usually spawned multiple splinter parties. They were characterized by sudden creations and collapses of ruling governments, depending on volatile public mood swings.

Often backroom deals were common to appoint new presidents and prime ministers—or dismiss them.

Instead, our Constitution, in classical fashion, established a bicameral Congress, an executive president and a supreme court.

Their quite different powers were all checked and balanced by one another.

Then their prerogatives were further limited by a federal system of individual states' rights to form their own laws not entailed by the Constitution.

Regularly scheduled elections, a formal Bill of Rights, a two-party system, and a single continuous Constitution naturally followed.

Few consensual governments have ever emulated the more difficult American model—and thus so far never achieved a 247-year continuity of a single republican system.

Certainly, Americans went through a variety of crises that challenged the viability of the Declaration—the Civil War, the Great Depression, two World Wars, the culture war of the 1960s, and the current woke revolution of the 2020s.

Terrible laws of discrimination were and are still sometimes passed contrary to both the Constitution and the Declaration.

But so far, the sparse wording of the Declaration has prevailed.

America's Constitution was not hijacked by the likes of a French Napoleon.

There has been no Nazi take-over of our democracy as in 1930s Germany.

We have not been plagued by dozens of brief ad-hoc coalition governments akin to Italy's volatility.

So on this Fourth let us cherish the Fourth of July for what it promised—and what it thankfully did not.

---

*Victor Davis Hanson is an American military historian, author, classics professor emeritus, and scholar of ancient warfare. He is currently the Martin and Illie Anderson Senior Fellow at Stanford University's Hoover Institution.*

Copyright ©2024 **2 The Point News** unless otherwise noted.