

Inter- Dependence Day Celebration

How to turn July 4 or other national holidays into a meaningful celebration ...

of what is good in America while acknowledging our interdependence with all people on the planet.

FACED WITH JULY 4TH CELEBRATIONS THAT ARE focused on militarism, ultra-nationalism, and “bombs bursting in air,” many American families who do not share those values turn July 4th into another summer holiday focused on picnics, sports, and fireworks, while doing their best to avoid the dominant rhetoric and bombast.

The Network of Spiritual Progressives believes that this is a net loss. There is much worth celebrating in American history that deserves attention on July 4th, though it is rarely the focus of public events.

We also acknowledge that in the twenty-first century there is a pressing need to develop a new kind of consciousness—one that recognizes the interdependence of everyone on the planet. A new revolution is necessary—one in which our actions reflect a realization that our wellbeing depends on the wellbeing of everyone else on the planet and of the planet itself.

We've designed the following material as a possible guide for





people who share the values we hold. We hope that families will reflect on the themes raised in these pages at their celebrations, and that churches, synagogues, unions, community organizations, and neighborhood associations will incorporate elements of this material into their public celebrations of July 4th. Pick and choose from the following ideas to select the pieces that work for you.

Celebrating What is Good about the United States of America

TODAY, HUNDREDS OF MILLIONS OF AMERICANS WILL CELEBRATE all that is good in the history of the United States of America. Even though we know there is much to criticize about America (including the use of the word “America” as synonymous with the United States, thereby ignoring Canada, Mexico, Central and South America) there is also much to celebrate.

Today we mark the signing of the Declaration of Independence, a document that still inspires many Americans today. We’re going to read the declaration aloud. As we do, listen for those ideas that you find inspiring, resonant, or in some other way pertinent for our lives in twenty-first-century America

{Read the Declaration of Independence aloud. Then go around the table and ask people to comment on any parts of the document that seem applicable or inspiring today.}

Unfortunately, the high ideals expressed in the Declaration, “that all men are created equal and endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights, among them life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness,” were not actually put into practice when the Constitution was created and the United States came into existence. The word “men” was not applied in a general sense to include women, but rather to only include men. And, in fact, for the first decades of our country the only people who could vote were white men who owned property. Worse, slavery was permitted and African Americans were counted as $3/5$ of a European American in the census that determined how many people living in a given area deserved representation in the Congress. Native Americans—those who had survived the near genocide of European settlement—did not figure at all in these equations.

Some of these distortions were rectified through the democratic process that had been set up by the founders of our country. History books focus on the people who were in power as if all change comes from those in positions of authority. The truth is that ordinary citizens created much of what we love about America. Often they encountered resistance from those in power; sometimes they found allies in power who joined in the struggle.

At this celebration, let’s give thanks for the ordinary and extraordinary Americans whose struggles brought about those changes. As I read each of the following, let’s enjoy a bite of (whatever food item you choose) in celebration of their achievement!

- To the waves of immigrants from all parts of the world who struggled to accept each other and find a place in this country.
- To the escaped slaves and their allies, particularly Quakers, evangelical Christians, and freedom-loving secularists, who built the Underground Railroad and helped countless people to freedom.
- To the coalitions of religious and secular people—women and men, black and white—who built popular support for the emancipation of the slaves.
- To the African Americans and allies who went to prison, lost their livelihoods, and were savagely beaten in the struggle for civil rights.
- To the working people who championed protections like the eight-hour day, minimum wage, workers’ compensation, and the right to organize, often at great personal cost to themselves.
- To the immigrants who fought against “nativist” tendencies and refused to close the borders of this country to new groups of immigrants, and who continue to support a policy of “welcoming the stranger,” just as this country opened its gates to their ancestors when they were the immigrants and strangers.
- To the women who risked family, job security, and their own constructed identities to shift

our collective consciousness about men and women and raise awareness of the effects of patriarchy.

- To all those who risk scorn and violence and often lost connection to their families to lead the struggle for the acceptance of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered, and queer people.
- To those who continue to work for equal access for people with disabilities.
- To those who have developed ecological awareness and who advocate for sensitivity to animals and to the earth itself.
- To those who fought to extend democratic principles, not only in politics, but also in the work place and in the economy.
- To all of the innovators and artists who have brought so much beauty and usefulness into our lives.
- To those who developed innovations in science and technology, in literature and art, in music and dance, in film and in computer science, in medical and communication technologies, and in methods to protect ourselves from the destructive impacts of some of these new technologies.
- To those who developed psychological insights and increased our ability to be sensitive to our impact on others.
- To those who brought the insights of their own particular religious or spiritual traditions which emphasized love and caring for others and generosity towards those who had been impoverished—and sought to turn those ideas not only into a call for personal charity, but also into a mission to transform our economic and political systems in ways that would reflect those values.
- To those who fought for peace and non-violence, and who helped stop many wars



Melinda Weekes, left, from Boston, Mass., and Lanre Olugbade, right, originally from Nigeria, hold up signs during a demonstration outside the Sudanese Embassy in protest of the Sudanese government's role in atrocities in the Darfur region, Friday, April 28, 2006 in Washington. (AP Photo/Pablo Martinez Monsivais)

{Invite other attendees to offer “toasts” to other groups who have contributed to the things that are good about America.}

{Sing songs of the civil rights movement, the suffrage movement, the labor movement, or any other song of struggle. Two such songs appear below. You can find recordings and lyrics for others at <http://www.labor-studies.org/> (click on “labor songs”) and at <http://creative-folk.com/equalityday.html#music>.}

All that we celebrate today in America involved struggles to overcome entrenched ways of thinking. Adding to the difficulty of the larger struggles were the struggles among groups of people working for liberation. Sometimes people in oppressed groups would say to each other, “My suffering is more intense and more important than your suffering,” which undermined, rather than built, solidarity. Sometimes people with power used one oppressed group to fight against another oppressed group. Some people in each previously oppressed group would seize their hard-won power and turn their backs on the needs of others, even discriminating against or looking down on others whose struggles had not yet been won. It was sad and shocking when people struggling for peace found that some of their allies were racist, sexist, homophobic, anti-Semitic, anti-Islamic, anti-Christian, or that they held hateful views about all religious people, all secular people, all white people, or about all men. Sometimes that would lead people to give up. Luckily, many others did not give up, and so the struggles for human freedom dignity, human rights, economic security, and civil liberties were not abandoned. Those struggles continue today, and it could easily take many more decades before they are fully realized.

So many people have retained their basic decency and caring for others. We are surrounded by people who care. True, it's often hard to see this in our society. When first approached, many people express indifference to the well being of others. Our economic system encourages selfishness, me-first-ism, “looking out for number one,” and indifference to the ecological and ethical impacts of our activities. Acting counter to those attitudes feels not only unfamiliar but risky.



Most of us yearn for a different kind of world, but think it is “unrealistic” to struggle for what we really believe in, since we are convinced that nobody else shares that desire with us. This is part of the reason we’ve created a Network of Spiritual Progressives to support each other in building a world that really does reflect our highest values. If peace, social justice, ecological sensitivity, full implementation of human rights and a society based on love is “unrealistic,” then we say “screw realism”—being realistic in a deeper sense is not accepting “reality” as it is currently presented to us. We want a different kind of world and we have to engage in non-violent struggles to build it. This has always been the way we have won the battles for precisely the things that make us proud of the victories of the American people: it was always people who were told that what they wanted was “unrealistic” and who essentially said “screw realism—we’re going to fight for what is right” who became the real heroes of the American story. Of course, the powerful often obscure that history and teach us to think that all the human rights and liberties and freedoms were “given to us,” but actually it was precisely the ordinary people like us who made the big changes that have made this country worthy of celebration.

Today we celebrate the moments when the United States and the American people have acted not only from self-interest but also from genuine caring. We in this country have a huge amount of goodness in us, and we’ve shown that side to the world as well. We showed it when we supported the Second World War efforts to stop Hitler and the fascists. We showed it when we stopped the war in Vietnam. We showed it when we reacted with revulsion at the torture being done in our name at Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo. And we are showing it today when we’ve finally been told enough truth about the war in Iraq that we are turning against the war in massive numbers.

{Ask people to share their own stories about times when they’ve felt proud of the United States or of Americans. If there is a large group, break into smaller groups of four to five people. After allocating at least three minutes for each person, resume the larger group conversation.}

We are proud of our country. We love its physical beauty. Many of us come from immigrant families who found refuge here when there were few other societies on the planet that would welcome our ancestors. Let us once again commit to overcoming the fear of the other and cultivating a spirit of generosity and love toward the stranger.

We are proud of the people of this country in many of the same ways that we are proud of our own families. Despite the sometimes overwhelming problems, we still care very deeply and are committed to working things through.

Celebrating Global Interdependence

WITH THE ADVENT OF A DEEPER UNDERSTANDING of how our global environment works, and with the increasing integration of the economies of all countries into a global economy, we’ve come to see that the well-being of everyone on this planet is interconnected. We are all fundamentally interdependent. And we’ve learned the same thing about Nature—when we pour poisons into the air, ground, or oceans, those toxins eventually come back to hurt us and other people around the world. Yet the ideal of individualism persists, and we’re encouraged to act as if we need no one else, no community support.

Despite the persistence of an individualist mindset, our impact on others and theirs on us is huge, and manifests not only in personal and cultural ways, but also in relationship to economic and political conditions. Today, close to 3 billion people (half the people in the world) live on less than two dollars a day, and close to half of that number live on one dollar a day. Huge numbers of people are starving even as we read this and enjoy our good meal and playful celebration. Is it any wonder that some of these people and those who care about them (even if they themselves are not poor), are very angry at the way the world’s politics and economics are set up? We don’t think it is good or legitimate when their anger gets expressed in violent ways. But we also have to take some responsibility for benefiting from a world order that is so unfair and so cruel. According to UN figures, somewhere between 20,000 and 30,000 children under the age of five will die today, and again tomorrow, and again the

next day, because they lack the food and basic medical supplies that could have kept them alive. That's over 12 million children a year—the equivalent of two Holocausts per year.

The Network of Spiritual Progressives wants to change this, both by changing the terms of global trade agreements so that they work on behalf of the poor and the hungry, and by establishing (first in the United States, and then in all the advanced industrial societies) a Global Marshall Plan that would allocate between 1–2 percent of our Gross Domestic Product each year for the next twenty years toward the goal of ending once and for all both domestic and global poverty, homelessness, inadequate education, and inadequate health care. On this celebration of our Interdependence, we want to reaffirm our shared commitment to these goals and commit to working with the Network of Spiritual Progressives on the best ways to achieve these goals.

{Download the text of the Global Marshall Plan, which is available on our website. Go to www.spiritualprogressives.org and click on “Guiding Ideas” at the top. Distribute it to attendees rather than reading it aloud.}

The Global Marshall Plan is the first step toward providing the sense of mutual trust that will allow for the next step needed by humanity in the twenty-first century: a global plan for how to allocate the world's resources and regulate what is put into the environment by individuals and corporations. We cannot save the planet from ecological destruction if we are not willing to develop a coherent rational plan and then use it to guide our use of the resources of the planet. Such a global plan will not be workable until the peoples of the world truly understand their interdependence. So, our celebration of Interdependence Day is an important part of the process of building that new consciousness. For that reason, we need to ask each other now to make a pledge to bring more people next year into this celebration.

Yet, our interdependence with the world goes deeper than that. Every human being on the planet is valuable, created in the image of God, and fundamentally deserving of love, caring, kindness, and generosity. We know that there is a huge cultural and intellectual richness in the variety of cultures, religions, spiritual practices, music, literature, and shared wisdom of the societies that make up our world. On this Interdependence Day we not only commit to helping improve the material conditions of the rest of the world, but also to learning from the rest of the world. We approach this task in a spirit of humility, aware that we in the United States have sometimes appeared to the rest of the world as a big bully and not as a society genuinely interested in sharing its cultural and intellectual and material gifts or in learning from others about their own particular cultural and spiritual heritages. The impression of arrogance is particularly intense at this historical moment when the war in Iraq and the attempts by the United States to manipulate other countries is so visible to many of the people on our planet, but it will be a problem even after we stop the war in Iraq.

We want to communicate to the peoples of the world our own deep sorrow and repentance at the ways that our wonderful country has taken wrong turns in its foreign policy, the ways that it has acted with arrogance and insensitivity to the needs of others, and the ways it has supported an economic system whose insensitivity to the needs of the environment and its preaching of “me-firstism” has already done immense damage.

{Sing here songs of other cultures and bring their poetry and fiction and spiritual practices as well, or go around the table sharing aspects of other cultures that you find inspiring.}

We are happy to celebrate this Interdependence Day on Independence Day for the United States.

Some of us wish to invoke God's blessing on our country, and will do so now. But we also wish to invoke God's blessings on all people on our planet and on the planet itself. We know



Union demonstrators wave flags as they gather for a rally against the Free Trade Area of the Americas conference Thursday, Nov. 20, 2003 in Miami.



that nationalist chauvinism, thinking that we are or can be better than everyone else, the manic need to be “number one,” can lead us into wars and destructive behavior. Instead, we want to bless everyone on the planet, to celebrate with everyone. So we rejoice in the people of this country, we rejoice with them as we celebrate all that is beautiful and good in this country, and at the same time we affirm our deep connection to all people on this planet and invoke God’s blessing on all of us, together, and pray that we soon will see a triumph of a new spirit of kindness, generosity, love, caring for others, ecological sensitivity, and celebration with joy, awe and wonder at all the good that surrounds us and keeps us alive.

{Sing here: Oh beautiful for spacious skies.}

Oh beautiful, for spacious skies,
For amber waves of grain,
For purple mountain majesties
Above the fruited plain!
America! America! God shed His grace on thee,
And crown thy good with brotherhood, from sea to shining sea.
Oh beautiful, for pilgrims’ feet
Whose stern, impassioned stress
A thoroughfare for freedom beat
Across the wilderness!
America! America! God mend thine ev’ry flaw;
Confirm thy soul in love for all, thy liberty in law!
Oh beautiful, for heroes proved
In liberating strife,
Who more than self their country loved
And mercy more than life!
America! America! May God thy gold refine,
’Til all success be nobleness, and ev’ry gain divine!
Oh beautiful, for patriot dream
That sees beyond the years,
Thine alabaster cities gleam
Undimmed by human tears!
America! America! God shed Her grace on thee,
And crown thy good with brotherhood, from sea to shining sea!

{Offer prayers for the well being of all peoples. Allow participants to offer blessings from their own traditions.} ■

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