


Ex-Presidents
Send Letters of Regret


In 1826, ceremonies were planned throughout the country to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of Independence Day. The citizens of Quincy, Massachusetts invited the ailing 91-year-old John Adams to join in their festivities. The mayor of Washington, D.C. sent a similar invitation to the indisposed 83-year-old Thomas Jefferson. In sending their regrets, both ex-presidents heralded the significance of the day.

Letter from John Adams to the Citizens of Quincy

Quincy, June 7, 1826

Sir,

Your letter of the 3rd Instant, written on behalf of the Committee of Arrangements, for the approaching celebration of our National Independence; inviting me to dine, on the fourth of July next, with the Citizens of Quincy, at the Town Hall, has been received with the kindest emotions. The very respectful language with which the wishes of my Fellow Townsmen have been conveyed to me, by your Committee, and the terms of affectionate regard toward me, individually demand my grateful thanks, which you will please to accept and to communicate to your Colleagues of the Committee.

The present feeble state of my health will not permit me to indulge the hope of participating with more than by my best wishes in the joys and festivities and the solemn services of that day, on which will be complete the *fiftieth year* from its birth, the *independence of the United States*: A memorable epoch in the annals of the human race, destined, in future history, to form the *brightest or the blackest page* according to the use or the abuse of these political institutions by which they shall, in time to come, be shaped by the *human mind*.

I pray you, sir, to tender, in my behalf to our fellow-citizens, my cordial thanks for their affectionate good wishes, and to be assured that I am very truly and affectionately yours and their friend and fellow-townsmen,

J. Adams

Letter from Thomas Jefferson to the Mayor of Washington

Monticello
June 24, 1826

Respected Sir,

The kind invitation I received from you, on the part of the citizens of the city of Washington, to be present with them at their celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of American Independence, as one of the surviving signers of an instrument pregnant with our town, and the fate of the world, is most flattering to myself, and heightened by the honorable accompaniment proposed for the comfort of such a journey. It adds sensibly to the sufferings of sickness, to be deprived by it of a personal participation in the rejoicing of that day...

I should, indeed, with peculiar delight, have met and exchanged there congratulations personally with the small band, the remnant of that host of worthies, who joined with us on that day, in the bold and doubtful election we were to make for our country, between submission or the sword; and to have enjoyed with them the consolatory fact, that our fellow-citizens, after half a century of experience and prosperity, continue to approve the choice we made. May it be to the world, what I believe it will be (to some parts sooner, to others later, but finally to all), the signal of arousing men to burst the chains under which monkish ignorance and superstition had persuaded them to bind themselves, and to resume the blessings and security of self-government...

All eyes are opened, or opening, to the rights of man. The general spread of the light of science has already laid open to every view the palpable truth, that the mass of mankind had not been born with saddles on their backs, nor a favored few booted and spurred, ready to ride them legitimately, by the grace of God. These are grounds of hope for others. For ourselves, let the annual return of this day forever refresh our recollections of these rights, and an undiminished devotion to them...

With my regret that ill health forbids me the gratification of an acceptance, be pleased to receive for yourself, and those for whom you write, the assurance of my highest respect and friendly attachment.

Th. Jefferson