

The Quotable Fourth



‘Yesterday the greatest question was decided, which ever was debated in America, and a greater perhaps never was nor will be decided among men. A resolution was passed without one dissenting colony “that these United Colonies are, and of right ought to be, free and independent states.”’

—*John Adams, in a letter to his wife, Abigail*

‘What to the American slave is your Fourth of July? I answer, a day that reveals to him more than all other days of the year the gross injustice to which he is the constant victim. To him your celebration is a sham; your boasted liberty an unholy license...’

—*Frederick Douglass*

‘I always thought July Fourth was the best day of the year...when you got up in the morning someone would almost surely say that it was going to be a “true Fourth of July scorcher”...and of course, the best thing about the day was the anticipation of fireworks.’

—*George Plimpton*

‘Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses, yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me.
I lift my lamp, beside the Golden door.’

—*Inscription on the Statue of Liberty, written by Emma Lazarus*

‘Off with your hat as the flag goes by!
And let the heart have its say;
You’re man enough for a tear in your eye
That you will not wipe away.’

—*Henry Cuyler Bunner, ‘The Old Flag,’ 1888*

‘You observe that republics can exist and that people under that form of government can be happier than any other; that the republic created by the Declaration of Independence will continue to the end of time is my fervent prayer. That protracted existence, however, will depend on the morality, sobriety and industry of the people...’

—*Charles Carroll, the last surviving signer of the Declaration,
on July 4, 1828*

‘Let the annual return of this day forever refresh our recollections of these rights, and an undiminished devotion to them.’

—*Thomas Jefferson*

‘Within our own borders we possess all the means of sustenance, defense, and commerce; at the same time, these advantages are so distributed among the different states of this continent as if nature has in view to proclaim to us—be united among yourselves, and you will want nothing from the rest of the world.’

—*Samuel Adams, in a speech on American Independence, July 4, 1776*

‘While General Howe with a Large Armament is advancing towards New York, our Congress resolved to Declare the United Colonies Free and Independent States. A declaration for this Purpose, I expect will this day pass Congress...It is gone so far that we must now be a free independent State or a Conquered Country.’

—*Abraham Clark, member of the Continental Congress from New Jersey, in a letter to Elias Dayton, Philadelphia, July 4, 1776*

‘There can be no fifty-fifty Americanism in this country. There is room here for only 100% Americanism, only for those who are Americans and nothing else.’

—*Theodore Roosevelt, July 1918*

‘This Fourth of July is *yours*, not *mine*. *You* may rejoice, *I* must mourn. To drag a man in fetters into the grand, illuminated temple of liberty, and call upon him to join you in joyous anthems, were inhuman mockery and sacrilegious irony.’

—*Frederick Douglass*

‘I shall know but one country. The ends I aim at shall be my country’s, my God’s, and Truth’s. I was born an American; I will live an American; I shall die an American.’

—*Daniel Webster, July 1850*