

July 4, 2021

Dear Friends,

Happy 4th of July!

Who knows where it all started—this spark, this freedom—that makes us Americans? Wherever it started, by April 1775, the spark had set off wildfires. As the King's troops advanced to Concord, Paul Revere was on his midnight ride sounding the alarm. Shortly after, the "shot heard round the world" was fired and the Colonies and the Empire were at war.

On June 11, 1776, the Second Continental Congress in Philadelphia voted on a resolution by the Virginia delegation that "these colonies are, and of right, ought to be, free and independent states." The resolution passed and a committee was formed to draft a formal Declaration of Independence. A young Virginia lawyer and planter, Thomas Jefferson was chairman. The committee included Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, Phillip Livingston, and Roger Sherman.

Amazingly, it took Jefferson just one day to write the first draft, and 17 days later, after some minor changes by Adams and Franklin, it was adopted. The vote was 9 colonies for, 2 colonies against, one colony undecided, and one colony abstaining. Copies of the Declaration were sent to the Colonies. What resulted from this historic document was not just a declaration of independence, but a call for the birth of a noble nation with equality and liberty for all.

By July 8, the sparks of freedom were ablaze throughout the colonies as the Declaration was read to cheering crowds. Its most famous words are in its second sentence, and they became the spiritual anchor of the American Experience. "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."

Fifty years later, June 24, 1826, Jefferson wrote in his last letter: "May it be to the world, what I believe it will be...all eyes...opening to the rights of man... let the annual return of this day forever refresh our recollections of these rights, and an undiminished devotion to them."

Ten days later, July 4, 1826, the 50th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, both Adams and Jefferson died. Jefferson's last words were "Is it the 4th?" and Adams' last words were "Thomas Jefferson survives." After 50 years, we were on our own, their work was done.

Today the second sentence of the Declaration is still at the center of our life together. In the last 245 years we have become a melting pot of people from many places seeking life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Our American heritage goes back through immigrants seeking what Jefferson wrote about. We are Christians, Jews, Muslims, Buddhist, Hindus, and dozens of other religions. We are almost every color of the rainbow. Our rich diversity and our multicultural heritage are our greatest strengths.

On July 4, In the 1940's there was a celebration in Central Park in New York City called "I Am an American Day." It was a time for fireworks, family, patriotism, and reflection. In 1941 just before Pearl Harbor, Harold Ickes, a cabinet member for President Roosevelt, spoke:

"What constitutes an American? Not color nor race nor religion. Not the pedigree of his family nor the place of his birth. Not the coincidence of his citizenship. Not his social status nor his bank account. Not his trade nor his profession. An American is one who loves justice and believes in the dignity of man. An American is one who will fight for his freedom and that of his neighbor. An American is one who will sacrifice property, ease, and security in order that he and his children may retain the rights of free men. An American is one in whose heart is engraved the immortal second sentence of the Declaration of Independence."

I believe Mr. Ickes is right. If we are Americans then we have these words engraved in our hearts: that all of us are created equal, endowed by our Creator with certain unalienable rights, and among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. So let us celebrate "I Am an American Day" this 4th of July. Happy 245th birthday, America.

God bless America land that we love. May our nation be the "City on the Hill" that patriot John Winthrop called us to be, shining the light of freedom and liberty into all the dark place of injustice and suffering.

As always, thank you for the honor of working with you and serving you. Happy 4th of July, dear friends.

In gratitude,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Gene".

C. Gene Jester, CFP®, CPWA®, CRPS®

The Jester Group

Director

Private Wealth Management

1414 Raleigh Road Suite 420

Chapel Hill, NC 27517

(o) (919) 918-2900 | (800) 274-9990 | (f) (919) 918-2850

gjester@rwbaird.com | rwbaird.com | JesterGroupBaird.com