

Eagle Forum Report

founded by Phyllis Schlafly

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The Semiquincentennial is Here!

AMERICA'S GREAT RELIGIOUS DOCUMENT

by Phyllis Schlafly, founder of Eagle Forum

The Fourth of July is America's birthday. The anniversary of the declaring of our independence gives us a good chance to reflect on our nation's religious roots.

The best way to observe our nation's birthday is to re-read and re-examine our Declaration of Independence, and to rededicate ourselves to the principles of our nation's founding document.

Did you know that the Declaration of Independence is America's great religious document?

The Declaration of Independence is the official and unequivocal affirmation by the American people of their belief and faith in God. It affirms God's existence as a "self-evident" truth that requires no further discussion or debate. The nation created by the great Declaration is God's country. The rights it defines are God-given. The actions of its signers are God-inspired.

The Declaration of Independence proclaims God as Creator.

The Declaration contains five references to God: God as supreme Lawmaker, God as Creator of all men, God as the Source of all rights, God as the world's supreme Judge, and God as our Protector on whom

we can rely.

The Declaration of Independence declares that each of us is created. If we were created, we must have had a Creator. The Declaration of Independence declares that each of us is created equal. This means equally endowed with unalienable rights. It does not mean that all are born with equal capabilities, as obviously they are not. Nor does it mean that all of us can be made equal, as Communist dogma alleges. Obviously and realistically, as the modern discovery of DNA now confirms, each of God's creatures is unequal and different in every other way from every other person who has ever lived or ever will live on this earth.

The Declaration of Independence proclaims natural rights as gifts of God.


The Declaration of Independence proclaims that life and liberty are the unalienable gifts of God — natural rights — which no person or government can rightfully take away. It af-

firms that the purpose of government is to secure our God-given unalienable individual rights, and that government derives its powers from the consent of the governed. Our Dec-



laration reduced government from master to servant, for the first time in history.

Knowledge of our Declaration of Independence should be required of all schoolchildren.

The unchangeable Declaration of Independence forever pledges the firm reliance of the American people on the continued protection of God's Divine Providence. Schoolchildren should be taught that many of the men who signed it paid dearly for their courage, which is why we are able to enjoy our freedom and independence. 

FALLING IN LOVE, AGAIN

by Matthew Spalding is the Kirby Professor in Constitutional Government and Dean of the Van Andel Graduate School of Government at Hillsdale College and oversees the Allan P. Kirby, Jr. Center for Constitutional Studies and Citizenship at Hillsdale's Washington, D.C. campus.

There are many reasons why one might come to love one's country. It first appears in the connection to place, a bond to a physical location, usually associated with where one grew up. It extends from parents and family to home and hearth, school and church, neighborhood, community and town. These are the familiar places that define civil society, which form what Alexis de Tocqueville called "*les habitudes de coeur*," the habits of the heart.

Love of country is an extension of these affections, this love of a place, its people, and its way of life.

But such attachments are personal and can easily become superficial unless they are transformed into firm commitments with real substance. This deepened attachment occurs when connections reach beyond ourselves, to extended family, to those of other generations, to ancestors unknown. Links to those before us broaden our perspective, provide us with a sense of place in time and make us part of a larger narrative and a shared experience. We begin to sense a tradition worth preserving and passing along to those who come after us.

Tocqueville made this point in *Democracy in America* by distinguishing between *instinctive patriotism*, rooted in custom and a sense of belonging based on place and personal loyalty, and *reflective patriotism*, based more on the opinions of free citizens, who understand their common liberties and their shared responsibilities with their fellow citizens. Indeed, one of the reasons Tocqueville admired America so much was that it bred both types of patriotism,

a spirited attachment to American self-government as well as a reasoned devotion to the general principles of natural right and human liberty.

Tocqueville concluded that a patriotism in which particular loyalties and universal purposes reinforce each other was the source of the community bond and national cohesion needed to perpetuate democratic societies. Without patriotism — instinctive patriotism for sure, but especially reflective patriotism — democratic peoples would become preoccupied with narrow, private concerns and come to neglect their civic duties. The result is societal division and civic apathy, as formerly self-governing citizens become themselves passive subjects in a modern, impersonal nation-state. Without this dual patriotism of both the heart and the head, America's thriving republic, Tocqueville famously warned, would be overtaken by a new form of democratic despotism that flattens the human spirit.

Today, patriotism is often misunderstood and criticized as an unthinking allegiance to chauvinistic urges. Yet it is a love of country that is thoughtful as well as passionate — not "the Impostures of pretended patriotism" that Washington warned us against — that stands confident against the cultural relativism that plagues our society and which undermines the defense of liberty by its disingenuous embrace and tendency toward despotic self-assertion. Patriotism, rightly understood, has always been the civic antidote to what C.S. Lewis called "the poison of subjectivism."

The American Founders understood this most challenging aspect



of their work, which we see reflected throughout their writings, especially in those about education. In a republican regime, built on equal rights and the consent of the governed, education not only shapes the private character that allows the individual to govern the self but also imparts the principles necessary for those individuals to practice the arts of self-government. The student is transformed into the citizen through the expansion and deepening of the natural attachments as well as the cultivation of the civic knowledge necessary to perpetuate free government.

"The Education of youth is, in all governments, an object of the first consequence," Noah Webster wrote in opening his 1788 essay on the topic. "The impressions received in early life, usually form the characters of individuals; a union of which forms the general character of a nation." Education begins at home, when the habits and manners are established, first by parents, who have the primary responsibility for the upbringing of their children, and then by family, church, community, and the first lessons of early instruction.

Like the great nations of Europe, Webster maintained that the formal educational system to be adopted and pursued in America should focus on the foundations of knowledge: reading, writing, and arithmetic, as well as a basic understanding of the sciences and the outlines of geogra-

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phy and history. But in republican America, Webster argued that popular education must also “implant, in the minds of the American youth, the principles of virtue and of liberty; and inspire them with just and liberal ideas of government, and with an inviolable attachment to their own country.” At a young age, this inculcation was especially to be done by teaching history:

[E]very child in America should be acquainted with his own country. He should read books that furnish him with ideas that will be useful to him in life and practice.

As soon as he opens his lips, he should rehearse the history of his own country; he should lisp the praise of liberty, and of those illustrious heroes and statesmen, who have wrought a revolution in her favor.

Thomas Jefferson and James Madison concurred in a report they authored as commissioners of the University of Virginia. Beyond improving the faculties and morals, the objects of a general education should be for the student “to understand his duties to his neighbors and country, and to discharge with competence the functions confided to him by either,” and “to instruct the mass of our citizens in these, their rights, interests and duties, as men and citizens.” The objects of “the higher branches of education” — the colleges and universities scattered around the country — were “to develop the reasoning faculties of our youth, enlarge their minds, cultivate their morals, and instill into them the precepts of virtue and order” and “to form them to habits of reflection and correct action, rendering them examples of virtue to others, and of happiness within themselves.” American higher education should “form the statesmen, legis-

lators and judges, on whom public prosperity and individual happiness are so much to depend.” Colleges and universities, too, had an obligation to make good citizens.

The document around which this citizen education was to be constructed, the creed of America’s civic life and political identity, its temporal scripture and its epic poetry, was the Declaration of Independence.

The Declaration is the defining act of the great drama that is the American Founding. When Jefferson and Madison outlined an educational curriculum with “especial attention to the principles of government which shall be inculcated therein,” their first reading was the Declaration, which Jefferson called “an expression of the American mind.” Although a “merely revolutionary document,” the Declaration of Independence contains, as Abraham Lincoln wrote on the eve of Civil War, “an abstract truth, applicable to all men and all times,” put there “that to-day, and in all coming days, it shall be a rebuke and a stumbling-block to the very harbingers of re-appearing tyranny and oppression.”

Lincoln also said once that public opinion “always has a ‘central idea,’ from which all its minor thoughts radiate.” America’s central idea is the Declaration, and everything else radiates from that.

The Making of the American Mind is the story of the making and meaning of the Declaration, of how in the summer of 1776, a band of iron men from thirteen separate colonies banded together and declared independence from — and declared war against — the most powerful nation in the world. It also recalls how the American mind, years if not decades in the making, came to be written down in that way, and expressed in the Declaration’s powerful words. Rather than focusing on one aspect or emphasizing one per-


son, as is usually the case, this work is a commentary on the Declaration as a whole, allowing its narrative, and its argument, to unfold on its terms, as the Continental Congress understood itself to be speaking to “the opinions of mankind.” We should approach the document like a great symphony, composed of different movements, different sounds and rhythms, yet all in harmony, forming one complete work.

It was St. Augustine said that nothing can be truly loved unless the object of love is known, known in its nature and its very being. By defining our common loves — our native country and our common commitment to republican government based on equal rights, political liberty, and the consent of the governed — the Declaration unites our hearts and our minds in a civic friendship of enlightened patriotism. We must know the Declaration if we truly are to love America.

We are now in the 250th year of our country’s life. As a nation, we should take this rare opportunity not only to celebrate but also to relearn our history, the history of “the good People of these Colonies” who struggled and resisted, dreamed and created, fought and died, to found this country.

We must also rediscover those truths that are self-evident. The Declaration of Independence draws us to things that are beyond the material, allowing us to see a world imbued with meaning and to grasp the transcendent truth that sets us free. In our history guided by that truth, we may even be surprised joyfully to find a fleeting glimpse of the eternal.

I invite you to join me in falling in love with America again, or perhaps for the first time.

This essay is adapted with permission from the author from *The Making of the American Mind: The Story of Our Declaration* (Encounter Books, 2025). 

CELEBRATING THE SEMIQUINCENTENNIAL!

by Kristen A. Ullman, JD, President, Eagle Forum

The inspiring words of the Declaration of Independence changed the course of world history. On July 4, 1776, a nation was born from that Declaration. ‘It stands forever, a light of admonition to the rulers of men; a light of salvation and redemption to the oppressed.’ So said John Quincy Adams on its 45th anniversary.

As we prepare to celebrate our Nation’s 250th birthday, Eagle Forum is honored to join the America 250 Civics Education Coalition (also called the Freedom 250 Coalition) to work with Secretary of Education Linda McMahon and over 60 other organizations to ensure Americans understand our legacy, recommit ourselves to its ideals, and work tirelessly to strengthen our future.

The Coalition will be working to promote Freedom 250, a series of events designed by the White House to celebrate America’s story. These activities will be taking place in Washington, D.C., and across the nation. More details can be found at Freedom250.org. Some of the highlights include:

Freedom Trucks Mobile Museum

A fleet of six Mobile Museums, known as “Freedom Trucks,” is traveling throughout 2026, bringing the story of American independence to students, families, and citizens in every corner of our country. With interactive and inspiring content for visitors of all ages, the exhibit tells the harrowing story of how the 13 colonies declared independence, defeated the greatest empire in the world, and secured American sovereignty 250 years ago.

National Jubilee of Prayer, Praise and Thanksgiving

May 17, Washington, D.C.: Americans from every state are invited to come to the nation’s capital to give thanks and praise to God for 250 years of His Providence for the United States, to pray that God bless and protect America for the next 250 years, and to solemnly rededicate our country as One Nation under God. The gathering will bear witness to the



extraordinary story of how God has powerfully and wondrously shaped the United States of America — remembering the people, sacrifices, and defining moments in which God has powerfully manifested Himself in our history.

Great American State Fair


June 25-July 10, Washington, D.C.: The National Mall will be transformed into the biggest, boldest state fair ever! From Maine lobster rolls to Hawaii’s shimmering hula stage, Texas-sized steaks to Alaska’s towering ice carvings, all fifty states, territories, and federal agencies will showcase their food, culture, and pride to one unforgettable, coast-to-coast celebration.

Sail4th 250 Parade of Tall Ships and International Naval Review

New York Harbor, July 4-8: The world’s largest peacetime armada of tall ships and naval vessels from more than 30 countries sails into New York Harbor on July 4, 2026, in a spectacular parade, naval review, and Blue Angels flyover, sparking a week of fireworks, festivals, and global unity under the Statue of Liberty’s torch.

Other events to look forward to include Salute to America: The Nation’s 250th Birthday Fireworks Celebration on July 4th, the Presidential 1776 Award Civics competition for high school students, and the Patriot Games, a first-of-its-kind athletic competition that will spotlight male and female high school athletes from every state and territory, to be held in the fall.

Hillsdale College and Prager U have partnered with the White House to produce a series of excellent videos that tell the remarkable story of American Independence and the amazing life of our Founders. These can be accessed at Freedom250.org as well.

This momentous year is joyous. All Americans should prepare now to celebrate the 250th Anniversary of American Independence! 

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