

NO DAY LIKE THIS

It is unlikely that we will be discussing the Founding Fathers or the finer points of the Declaration of Independence. But just before we all dig into the hot dogs and brats and potato salad and watermelon and ice cream we will join in a prayer of thanks for the feast, for the United States and for the privilege of being Americans. And although we will not say anything specifically about it, we will share in that solemn though generally subliminal American sense that there is no day like this in the world. None in all of human history.

No other nation's founding could be so happily, indifferently, noisily, diversely, inspiringly, mawkishly, carelessly, embarrassingly, or fervently celebrated, because no other nation can claim to be what we are, the first self-constituted, self-declared, self-created people in the history of the world.

Somehow, despite slips here and there, we have managed to balance in the main that combination of "private rights and public happiness" so proudly extolled by James Madison. Despite all the encroachments on our freedoms, despite all the growth of our government, we remain more free than anyone, anywhere, and in an ineffable way that no one else but an American or would-be American can completely understand. We are the people of a fabulous country, as Thomas Wolfe wrote, "the only fabulous country; it is the only place where miracles not only happen, but where they happen all the time."

Zoom out into space and look back at the Earth. Where, and when, would you live if you had an unfettered choice? There is only one sensible answer to that question: In America, now. There is nothing wrong with liking other places, or complaining about the government or the culture or the people of America, but it is a great sin to do so absent context, and the reality is that Americans who are alive now have won the grand prize in the cosmic lottery. Of all the people in all the world in all of human history, we live in America today. To be ungrateful for this is absurd.

July Fourth. Independence Day. It is the exceptional day of an exceptional country. It is the bright and happy measure of our freedom within the security, the plenty, the enduring challenges of this astounding enterprise, the United States of America.