

LIVING

Taking a Fresh Look at the Fourth of July

Volunteering, virtual tours and reflections on a different holiday this year

By [Brette Sember](#) July 2, 2020



Credit: Adobe

This July 4th holiday may be a bit different.

The [COVID-19 pandemic](#) has cancelled some civic fireworks displays and many people are choosing to stay home. Large gatherings are banned in some areas, leaving Americans without their usual plans for the Fourth. Between [the pandemic](#), civil unrest that began with [George Floyd's murder in Minneapolis](#) and the high level of political disagreement in our country, there's room to rethink the holiday and its meaning.

What Does Patriotism Mean?

A [2019 Mood of the Nation poll by the McCourtney Institute for Democracy](#) found that more than half of Americans of all political affiliations agreed patriotism means showing respect, loyalty and love of one's country. More than 50% of people over 45 reported that patriotism is an important part of daily life for them.

Cheryl Hosmer, 55, of Brighton, Mich., agrees with that definition and calls herself "old-school."

Other people take a less traditional view.

Sue Marquette Poremba, 57, of State College, Penn., says: "I don't think [patriotism] means flying a flag in front of your house or putting your hand over your heart during the national anthem." Instead, she says, it's about "understanding basic civics, voting regularly, actively following what's happening with our government and respecting those who exercise their rights in different ways than myself."

For Elizabeth Gardner, 63, of Riverside, Ill., patriotism means "wanting my country to be what it says it aspires to be and learning as much as I can about our history." She believes patriotism is "coming to terms with the ways the country has fallen short. It's recognizing when other countries are living up to our ideals better than we are. And it's revering what's good about the past and being open to what could be good about the future."

Patriotism is a call to action for Joanne Wilton, age 63, of Depew, N.Y.

She feels it means "recognizing and celebrating the freedoms that I have per the Constitution and supporting and advocating for others who are entitled to, but do not enjoy, the same freedoms, whether they are minority groups, immigrants or others who don't have an equal voice. It means holding myself accountable and responsible to use my voice and do my part to uphold equality, justice and fair and humane treatment for everyone. It means working against racism, prejudice, violence and oppression and the beliefs that fuel them, and working toward the common good."

Some take a much dimmer view of patriotism.

Jim Wysocki, 51, of Beaverton, Ore., says: "Patriotism needs either an overhaul or to be retired. Too often, it leans into the notion of nationalism and we are told that if we don't believe in 'America First,' we aren't patriotic. I am not proud of my country. In traveling abroad during the last nine years, I have realized I am ashamed of it, mostly because of its hypocrisy and arrogance. If I'm patriotic at all, it is with respect to the human race. There are some truly evil people out there...but there are some absolutely beautiful people, and that gives me hope."

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Find Your Own Meaning

This Independence Day, Lynne Schoenl McMennamin, 52, of Bel Air, Md., will participate in a local bike parade. "It's easy to keep social distancing. Anyone participating decorates their bike and we'll ride through our neighborhood," she says.

Poremba plans to watch the movie musical *1776* and read a biography about one of the founding fathers.

Gardner jokes that she expects to "invite a couple of friends to bring their dinner over and sit at the other end of our six-foot patio table while we fix the world."

Celebrate Those Who Serve

If you want to celebrate by thanking hospital workers on the COVID-19 front lines, sending food or donations to a local hospital is one way to do it. However, Brian Bowden, director of stewardship and donor relations for the Mercy Health Foundation in Baltimore recommends contacting the hospital's development office to make sure your donation can be accepted and will get to the people who can best benefit from it.

Other options include donating to the [COVID-19 Response Fund](#), [donating PPE \(personal protective equipment\) to medical workers](#), or [donating blood](#).

If you want to support the troops, the USO (United Service Organizations), known for its shows for overseas troops, is selling a [limited edition USO 'Official Uniform of the Military Supporter' T-shirt](#) for \$25, with funds going to the organization. Other options include donating to a [military or veterans charity](#), [volunteering at a veterans' cemetery](#) or [handcrafting items for the military](#).

Exercise Your American Spirit

Taking actions that support your beliefs is another way to get in the spirit this year.

Consider [registering to vote](#), becoming an [election worker](#), or just taking a walk and picking up trash on the side of the road. You could also donate to causes that stand for American freedoms you believe in, such as [freedom of the press](#), [freedom of speech](#), [civil liberties](#) or [the right to bear arms](#).

Ooh and Aah From Home

If you'll be missing your regular fireworks display or concert, you could tune in to the [Boston Pops' Salute to Our Heroes](#) live virtual concert celebration on the Fourth or PBS' [A Capitol Fourth](#) (pretaped around the country without a live audience) or the [Philadelphia Wawa Welcome America](#) seven-day virtual celebration which includes virtual fireworks, concerts and museum tours.

Check your local listings for information about local virtual celebrations as well.

From Sea to Shining Sea: 9 Places to Visit Virtually

You may not be able to travel to important U.S. sites linked with the American Revolution and founding of the country, but that doesn't mean you can't go there virtually to celebrate Independence Day. All of the following offer virtual tours:

[Boston Freedom Trail](#)

[Library of Congress](#)

[Museum of the American Revolution](#)

[National Archives](#)

[National Portrait Gallery](#)

[Smithsonian Museum of American History](#)

[Statue of Liberty](#)

[U.S. Capitol](#)

[Washington, D.C. monuments](#)

Binge Watch America With These 13 Films

This is the perfect year to sit on the couch and watch a movie about American history and the American spirit. The movie of the musical *Hamilton* is being released on Disney+ on July 3.

Other movies highlighting American history, government, and values include:

13th

Apollo 13

Gettysburg

Glory

Harriet

Hidden Figures

Lincoln

Loving

Mr. Smith Goes to Washington

Saving Private Ryan

Selma

The Right Stuff

No matter how you celebrate or what your beliefs, Independence Day is a day to remember we are all Americans with a shared history and a future to shape together.



By [Brette Sember](#)

Brette Sember is the author of many books about divorce, child custody, business, health, food, and travel. She writes online content and does indexing and editing.

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