

The Revolution In America in 1776 Opened An Asylum for Mankind and Started a Movement for Democracy *by John M Repp*

“Every spot of the old world is overrun with oppression. Freedom hath been hunted round the globe...O! receive the fugitive, and prepare in time an asylum for mankind.” Thomas Paine, 1776

This is a quote from [Common Sense](#), a 47 page pamphlet issued in January 1776. The phrase tells us that at that time many colonists in America saw the new world as a place where refugees and asylum-seekers from around the world were welcome, and where they could live **in freedom**.

[Common Sense](#) became a instant best seller. The author did not sign the document. It would have been a death sentence for him because he advocated independence from Great Britain as a solution to the problems in the colonies, especially the issue of taxation without representation.

From [1765-1775, the American colonists](#) mounted three major nonviolent resistance campaigns against British rule, against the Stamp Acts of 1765, the Townsend Acts of 1767, and the Coercive Acts of 1774, resulting in *de facto* independence by 1775. A shooting war began at Lexington and Concord on April 19, 1775. Then on July 4, 1776, 250 years ago this coming July, the Declaration of Independence was signed with the famous words:

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.-- That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed....

These were powerful words, written by men [who as children had lived near native American societies and were welcomed as children into their wigwams and given their favorite fruits](#). They learned about a **dramatically different set of values** than was common in British or European society. Native American society was much more egalitarian than European feudal society, and much more democratic. We know that the Iroquois Confederacy was the model for federalism, self-government, and liberty that influenced the founders writing of the U.S. Constitution in 1787.

We in the United States of America have not lived up to the ideals expressed in the language of the Declaration. For centuries, before and after the Declaration, **we were a settler state**, meaning we took land from the native Americans and, if they resisted, we made war on them. While many of the founders owned slaves, they would write that all men were created equal, indicating they did not see slaves as real human beings.

But the Declaration was **the first instance of a nation declaring its independence from a colonial, imperialist power in the modern era**. The American example inspired several centuries of anti-imperialist movements. Then, with the Spanish-American war, the USA started extra-continental conquests and became itself an imperial power.

One way we tried to advance our democracy was the expansion of voting rights. At first, voting was limited to a small group of white male landowners. After that, there were many political struggles to expand voting rights, struggles that were eventually successful. One of the more well known was the large number of nonviolent demonstrations from 1913 to 1919 for woman's suffrage. Closer to our time, the civil rights movement from 1955 to 1968 used a variety of nonviolent methods, including bus boycotts, demonstrations, and marches to win the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, to make sure black people had the right to vote in the old Confederacy.

Now, [there is an effort by the Trump Administration](#), facing a defeat in the upcoming November elections, to weaken the representation of minority people in cities in the south by [gerrymandering](#). Trump's efforts were possible because of the activist and itself corrupt Supreme Court in decisions like [Citizens United which made political bribery legal](#). However recently, [there was a law passed in Hawaii prohibiting corporations who operate in their state from spending money on elections](#). Fourteen other states are considering such a law.

There are other ways besides the expansion of voting rights to measure how much progress we have made in advancing democracy. We now have **international organizations that try to measure things like freedom of the press, life expectancy, the wealth gap, and happiness**. Sadly, during the last 50 years we have experienced losses in press freedom, shorter life expectancy, and less happiness.

[Reporters Without Borders](#) has established [a measurement of press freedom](#). USA was 48th in 2019 and 64th in 2026. [Life expectancy is the best measure of the health of a population](#). In 2023, our life expectancy was 79.3 years. Japan's was 84.7. We have slipped in our position relative to the other prosperous countries. [The Gini coefficient](#) is a measure of the gap between the rich and poor. The gap has been widening here and that has caused many problems. There is [a correlation between wealth gap and the happiness and health of the people in a country](#). There is a [World Happiness chart](#). [Finland is the happiest country in the world](#). [The United States is 23rd](#).

Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis (1856–1941) is believed to have said: **“We can have democracy in this country, or we can have great wealth concentrated in the hands of a few, but we can't have both”**. The quote was published in the newspaper *Labor* in 1933. The quote puts the finger on the same struggle we are facing today, a struggle against money and power concentrated in the hands of a few.

Paradoxically, [the recent speech by the current king of England, Charles III](#) reminded us that, with the Magna Carta (1215) there should be **limits to power**. In a democracy, **power must be subject to the rule of law**, something the current Trump administration avoids. [J. Michael Luttig, the distinguished Constitutional scholar, wrote in May 2026 that because of the Trump administration the rule of law has ended](#) in our country and we face the worst Constitutional crisis in our history.

The rule of law is how in an democracy the game of life is played. Imagine a game where there were no norms and rules. It would be chaos: a stage we are approaching as the rich and powerful, aided by the Trump Administration, try to grab more money, power, and try to steal elections. [The corruption of the Trump family is shocking](#). Trump acts like the “mad King George III” against whom our Founders rebelled.

As we approach our celebration of 250 years as a nation, we need to start planning for and working for the real resurgence of democracy. We need **to get big money out of our politics and reform the Supreme Court**. We must **tax the wealthy** and **tax, regulate, and break up the near-monopolistic corporations**. We must **rebuild the labor movement** by outlawing strike replacements.

Then, we can finally pass as legislation what FDR called [the Second Bill of Rights](#): the right to a useful and remunerative job, enough income for adequate food, clothing and recreation, the right of farmers and business-people to trade without fear of unfair competition or monopolies, the right to a decent home, adequate medical care and better health, protection from the economic fears of old age, sickness, accident, and unemployment, and the right to a good education. Only then can we keep our democracy.



The picture above was painted a generation after the actual event. It shows the presentation of the Declaration of Independence to the second Continental Congress on July 4, 1776 on July 4, 1776, the date we use to celebrate the origin of our country..

