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# **Patriotic Holidays**

# Meaning of Holidays

We offer insights and ideas regarding key traditions celebrated in the United States. We hope more people will celebrate holidays closer to the intent behind their creation.

A “holiday” is a day set apart for religious observance or for the commemoration of some extraordinary event or distinguished person, or for some other public occasion. Holidays typically are characterized by partial or total cessation of work and normal business activities and are generally accompanied by public and private ceremonies, including feasting (or fasting), parades and carnivals, or displays of flags and speechmaking.

The word *holiday* is derived from “holy day.” In ancient times, holidays were predominantly religious in character and linked to natural events such as the annual course of the sun or the phases of the moon. Subsequently, secular holidays commemorating historical occasions or distinguished persons outnumbered holy days, although many ancient religious rituals and customs have been carried over into modern times and incorporated into both secular and religious observations.

In modern times, the most significant holidays are of religious observance and include abstention from normal work routines, often taking place on Sunday for Christians, Saturday for Jews, and Friday for Muslims. In the U.S., Sunday is not only a religious holiday but also is the only common-law holiday.

National holidays are days set aside by official government proclamation. Congress and the President designate legal holidays for the District of Columbia and the federal territories. Independence Day and other holidays are observed on a national scale as a result of action by the states. A number of states also commemorate important events in their history.

## Ethics of Observance

We understand many people become accustomed to habits and benefits, preferring not to change. At the risk of stating an opinion unpopular to some, we believe more people and organizations need to admit that patriotic holidays often are not observed as intended but rather treated only as vacation days for recreation or leisure. Results include an excessive loss in national productivity as well as opportunities for personal enrichment.

We advocate honoring holidays as intended, even if at a minimal level, to contribute to the individual and national psyche through understanding and renewal of commitment. When we are at war, and our economy and military need extra support, the “business as usual” habit of taking patriotic holidays as mere vacation deserves reconsideration. In extraordinary times, we advocate extraordinary action. We encourage you, your family, and organizations with which you are affiliated to identify how you should honor holidays, choosing to increase remembrance, inspiration, and service—especially when times are tough.



The Big Three Patriotic Holidays are Independence Day, Veterans Day, and Memorial Day.

Independence Day is a celebration of America becoming an independent nation, an opportunity to remember the courage and sacrifice needed to birth a country.

Veterans Day is a celebration to appreciate and honor veterans who defend our nation and consider how we can achieve peace. A wise society also will learn lessons from veterans applicable to students and others in civilian life, as in character education.

Memorial Day is a time to remember those no longer with us and appreciate sacrifice given by them and their loved ones.