

Waiting On My Turn To Feel Patriotic

On this 4th of July, many Black citizens of the United States are waiting for reasons to partake in patriotism.

Murjani Rawls
6 min 1



“Happy 4th of July!”

Honestly, I don't even know how to respond to that. Depending on what side of the country you live in, it may feel like you've been living through a continuous loop of the 4th of July. One of the lynchpins of the holiday, fireworks, has been ringing off on a nightly basis. This year's edition of Independence Day is going to look vastly different. Sure, hot dogs and burgers are going to be cooked. The beaches are going to be crowded - well, maybe you don't share a huge beach towel or that food plate. There will be masks, social distancing, flag shirts, and hats. It's truly a strange time.

Every time I think of Independence Day, it's either Bill Pullman's [speech](#) in the movie of the same name or [the scene](#) in *The Sandlot*. I also wonder to myself, when is this just going to mean more than a long weekend for me? The swell of patriotism that saturated within a day like this seems to exclude and/or betray many. A question has been on my mind and it may echo the thoughts of many. When are Black people and people of color going to have reasons to feel patriotic that isn't steeped in "just be happy to be here." "It could be so much worse." "At least you have your freedom." Is Independence Day an exclusive club that you have to be a card-carrying member to get through the velvet rope for?

On July 2nd, 1776, the then Continental Congress got together and made a declaration that the 13 colonies were free from the tyranny of King George III. It would be ratified two days later, which is why we celebrate Independence Day on the 4th. About 11 years later, the 1787 Constitutional Convention would take place in Pennsylvania and the Three-Fifths Compromise would be reached. In trying to determine how slaves would be counted in a state's population for legislative and taxation purposes - the amount was settled at 3/5ths. In 2020, many of us feel like we are still fighting for the missing 2/5th to make us whole.

"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"

Those words were added to the Declaration of Independence by our third president, Thomas Jefferson. The same man who owned about [600 slaves](#) within his lifetime. Many of these clauses that America's forefathers put forth come with caveats and small fine print. There's always a but or and if. Reminders are on our currency and enshrined in statues and monuments. History has provided a contract and paid out basic human rights in crumbs over time. We've paid more into that agreement that we've received. Black people have fought wars alongside the promise of freedom only to have it snatched away when they returned home. The color red stands as one of the three main colors in our flag - we've all lost blood to make it an everlasting symbol.

It's been months since the death of George Floyd, but there's still so much to fight for. The story of Elijah McClain and [the mocking](#) that happened after. It's been more than 100 days since the murder of Breonna Taylor and no justice has been found yet. On the precipice of the most important election of our time, voting restrictions continue to be upheld. Polling places have been shut down in impoverished areas and people stand in line to wait up to three hours to vote in primaries. Even with the awareness, the companies statements, and the donations - injustices are still happening at an alarming rate. For some, today will be a day of an adjusted normal. For minorities in America, it's both a longing and a pinch of paranoia.

After game two of the 2009 Finals, the Los Angeles Lakers went up 2-0 on the Orlando Magic. In the post-game press conference, the late Kobe Bryant showed his trademark poker face and declared that ["the job wasn't finished."](#) You don't celebrate until you've won the championship. I will admit that making these widespread changes to America's structure that's stood for centuries will take a very long time. It needs to happen. Independence Day needs to mean more than just a day off. We need to ensure that everybody has something to celebrate.

So, as our country celebrates the day that America declared itself free from British rule, I'll be waiting for the 2021 iteration. Or the next one. Or perhaps the next one. For a Black or person of color, waiting to embrace the full meaning of Independence Day is like waiting near a cold and frosty window for an absent parent to visit on Christmas. A present that may never come.

"No, no, they promised they would come this time!" At some point, you grow up. Your heart hardens and you realize you've been had. You start to see that broken promise in everything.

Trust me, we would love to partake in the patriotism that invokes the love out of many. We would just want the country that we have given so much to - given so much of our blood, sweat, and tears...to love us back.

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