



Have you ever wiped a tear from the corner of your eye during the national anthem at a ballgame? Standing there with your hand or hat over your heart, the flag waving on the field, the voices of your neighbors united with yours?

Sure, you might feel a little silly in the moment; who wants to be swept away with emotion while surrounded by thousands of spectators? But it's not embarrassment over the *sentiment* that motivates you to claim you got a dab of sunscreen in your eye; it's just a preference not to be that vulnerable in front of a bunch of guys carrying plastic tubs filled with ice and beer.

There's no shame in patriotism, even if there are those who equate the word with ugly, ignorant ideas that are, in fact, decidedly unpatriotic. In a country where citizens of every sex, nationality, background, and preference achieve bold and challenging goals every day, it's surprising that anyone could be anything but grateful to be here.

Recently, this lack of gratitude seems to have become the norm. It's difficult to fathom how individuals who have more freedom and more opportunities than anyone else in the world can choose to discount their incredible fortune. And ironically, those same individuals refuse to respect the founders who made it possible for them to be vocally unpatriotic without penalty.

A monarch can demand loyalty by insisting that subjects bend the knee and promise to respect his reign, whether they like it or not. And a dictator ... well, he can force *compliance*, which makes loyalty irrelevant.

But in the “New World,” scores of courageous men and women fought to guarantee their descendants a *reason* to be patriots. They didn’t ask for it. They didn’t demand or mandate. By building a system in which citizens can disagree with and replace our leaders, the Founding Fathers gave the people of the United States the best possible reason to be patriots: we were granted the freedom not to be.

The nation’s founders created a system of government that had never been tried before, and they did such a good job, it’s still running (albeit a bit worse for wear) 250 years later. Anyone who has ever tried to complete a huge group project, especially with a collection of teammates with radically different personalities and priorities, knows how hard it is to get anything accomplished in such an environment.

If the Founding Fathers had been crafting the Constitution today, they would have had the advantage of collaboration tools like Zoom and Google Docs, which would have allowed remote participation for those who preferred not to travel during the sweltering summer of 1787. On the other hand, given the difficulties today’s Americans have with constructive discourse, they might have given up before the document was finished and signed.

Thankfully, in 1787, there was something more important to the delegates than egos, hurt feelings, and “personal truths.” Building a foundation of universal liberty was so important to every one of them, they managed to craft “the greatest vision of human freedom in history.”

[\(National Constitution Center\)](#)

Sure, the original Constitution was not as inclusive as it would later become, but those who cite that as a failure by the original authors miss the entire point. The remarkable thing – the thing that deserves to be remembered and celebrated – is that the Constitution did not *exclude* anyone. Women were not *denied* the vote, and citizens were not *required* to own slaves. Nothing had to be crossed out and rewritten to extend rights to additional groups.

We were given an incredibly simple foundation worthy of respect, appreciation, and gratitude. Our success as a nation owes as much to what the Convention delegates left *out* of the Constitution as it does to the words on the page. By keeping our focus on the original intent of the Founding Fathers – the desire to protect and preserve above all else our rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, our path forward is as clear as it was for Thomas Jefferson as he sat down to pen the Declaration of Independence.

In a couple of weeks, we’ll be celebrating the founding of our nation. Throughout the country, friends and family members will come together to relax and enjoy a day of fellowship before gathering on lawn chairs and blankets for a rousing pyrotechnics show.

Of course, some will choose not to celebrate. The unpatriotic among us will grumble about injustices that happened long ago, rather than marveling at how dramatically things have changed for the better. If we cannot honor and celebrate *all* of our history, they'll argue, we should honor none of it.

The rest of us, while not dismissing those long-ago transgressions, recognize that only a country founded upon truly great principles could possibly repair the damage once done and move forward. When patriots celebrate our history on Independence Day, what we're really celebrating is the enduring legacy we benefit from every day of the year. Today. Tomorrow. Into the future.

So on July 4th, many of us will look around at the joyful faces of our loved ones, lit with spectacular light and color, and be suddenly overcome with the realization that Americans have been celebrating our independence annually on this date for more than 200 years.

And we'll know in our hearts that we the people will overcome all obstacles. Because the Founding Fathers gave us the tools to keep their dream alive, and we have the courage, the commitment, and the gratitude to see to it that their gift to us is eternally honored.

So go ahead and tear up a little. Nobody's watching.

###