

Independence Day, 2002 Stan Stahl, Ph.D.

“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.”

Happy birthday, America. Two hundred twenty-six years young and more powerful than ever.

If any one ever doubted that mere words can change the future for the better, one need only consider the world two hundred twenty-six years after these thirty five powerful words were published in Congress on July 4, 1776.

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.

So we celebrate the 226th birthday of our freedoms.

Happy birthday, America.

But this year, our celebrations are different from those of years past. This year we celebrate in the shadow of 9-11. This year we celebrate in the shadow of those who would deny the world its freedom. This year there is an unease in our celebrations, wondering if today will be the day that terrorists next attack.

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal ...” We are all equal with respect to our life, our liberty and the pursuit of our happiness. A self-evident assertion of our fundamental human right— a postulate, an axiom, a statement requiring no justification for its truth other than its simple assertion.

Maybe these words were self-evident to Adams, Jefferson, and the other founding fathers, but they certainly weren't self-evident to George III. Not only were they not self-evident, they were downright treasonous.

Nor are these words self-evident to Osama bin Laden and the Taliban. We saw how they stole the freedom of the peoples of Afghanistan and we witnessed the rejoicings of the Afghans when their freedoms were returned.

Nor, unfortunately, are these words self-evident to many of our own citizens. We have seen a rise in hate crimes since 9-11. In the months since 9-11, we have witnessed increasing numbers

of crosses being burned, more temples and mosques defaced, and more peoples of color attacked¹.

Two hundred twenty-six years ago, our founding fathers asserted *freedom* as the moral justification for our war against King George.

Today we assert *freedom* as the moral justification for our war against terrorism.

All the more important then that we redouble our efforts to make a reality of freedom, working to create a world in which ever-increasing numbers of us are truly free, *completely equal with respect to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness*. The ideal can never be less than that all the peoples of the world are free.

When I think of *freedom* I am reminded of a passage from Deuteronomy that, applied to the subject of freedom, would read

Thou shalt love freedom with all thy heart, with all thy soul, and with all thy might; these words shall be upon your heart; and thou shalt teach them diligently to thy children; and thou shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thy house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.

Happy birthday, America.

Let freedom ring.

¹ See the *Intelligence Project* at the *Southern Poverty Law Center*, <http://www.splcenter.org/>.
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