

FEDERAL HOLIDAYS



IN UNITED STATES OF
AMERICA

Martin Luther King Jr. Day / January

Martin Luther King Day is a federal holiday held on the third Monday of January.

It celebrates the life and achievements of Martin Luther King Jr., an influential American civil rights leader.

He is most well-known for his campaigns to end racial segregation on public transport and for racial equality in the United States.

What Do People Do?

Martin Luther King Day is a relatively new federal holiday and there are few long standing traditions. It is seen as a day to promote equal rights for all Americans, regardless of their background. Martin Luther King Day, also known as Martin Luther King's birthday and Martin Luther King Jr Day, is combined with other days in different states. For example, it is combined with Civil Rights Day in Arizona and New Hampshire, while it is observed together with Human Rights Day in Idaho.

Background

Martin Luther King was an important civil rights activist. He was a leader in the movement to end racial segregation in the United States. His most famous address was the "I Have A Dream" speech. He was an advocate of non-violent protest and became the youngest man to be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. He was assassinated in 1968.

In 1968, shortly after Martin Luther King died, a campaign was started for his birthday to become a holiday to honor him. After the first bill was introduced, trade unions lead the campaign for the federal holiday. It was endorsed in 1976. Following support from the musician Stevie Wonder with his single "Happy Birthday" and a petition with six million signatures, the bill became law in 1983. Martin Luther King Day was first observed in 1986, although it was not observed in all states until the year 2000. In 1990, the Wyoming legislature designated Martin Luther King Jr/Wyoming Equality Day as a legal holiday.



Martin Luther King Jr statue©iStockphoto.com/Camrocke

New Year's Day / January 1

New Year's Day falls on January 1 and marks the start of a new year according to the Gregorian calendar.

It marks the end of New Year's Eve celebrations in the United States and gives many Americans a chance to remember the previous year.

What Do People Do?

The start of New Year's Day, at midnight, is heralded by fireworks, parties and special events, which are often televised. In some towns and cities, parades are held and special football games are played. The birth of the first baby in the New Year is often celebrated with gifts to his or her parents and appearances in local newspapers and on local news shows. Many people make New Year's resolutions. These are usually promises to themselves that they will improve something in their own lives.

Background

The Gregorian calendar is widely used in many countries such as the United States. This was introduced in 1582 by Pope Gregory XIII. According to the Gregorian calendar, the first day of the year is January 1.

A common symbol of New Year's Day is Baby New Year. This is often a white male baby dressed in a diaper, a hat and a sash. The year he represents is printed on his sash. According to mythology, Baby New Year grows up and ages in a single year. At the end of the year he is an old man and hands his role over to the next Baby New Year.

Other symbols of New Year's Day are spectacular fireworks exploding over landmarks and clocks striking midnight as the year begins.



Aerial view of a large fireworks display over the Chicago. ©iStockphoto.com/chrisp0

Washington's Birthday (Presidents' Day) / February

Washington's Birthday, also known as Presidents' Day, is a federal holiday held on the third Monday of February. The day honors presidents of the United States, including George Washington, the USA's first president.

What Do People Do?

Washington's Birthday officially honors the life and work of George Washington, the first president of the United States. The day commemorates past presidents of the USA. Washington's Birthday is sometimes known as Presidents' Day. Some states pay particular attention to Abraham Lincoln, as his birthday was also in mid-February. In the weeks or days leading up to the holiday, schools often organize events and lessons for students about the presidents of the United States and George Washington in particular. It is a popular day for stores to start their sales.

Background

George Washington was the first president of the United States of America. His first term as president was from 1789 to 1793 and his second term from 1793 to 1797. Before he became president, he played important roles in the military, leading the American Continental Army to victory over the British in 1783. Washington is often seen as the father of the United States and is probably the best known American politician ever.

The holiday was originally held on the anniversary of George Washington's birth, on February 22. In 1971, this holiday was moved to the third Monday in February.

This holiday is legally designated as "Washington's Birthday". Though other institutions such as state and local governments and private businesses may use other names, it is the federal government's policy to always refer to holidays by the names designated in the law.



Mount Rushmore National Memorial©iStockphoto.com/Richard McMillin

Memorial Day in the United States / May

Memorial Day is observed on the last Monday of May. It was formerly known as Decoration Day and commemorates all men and women who have died in military service for the United States. Many people visit cemeteries and memorials on Memorial Day and it is traditionally seen as the start of the summer season.

What Do People Do?

It is traditional to fly the flag of the United States at half staff from dawn until noon. Many people visit cemeteries and memorials, particularly to honor those who have died in military service. Many volunteers place an American flag on each grave in national cemeteries. Memorial Day is combined with Jefferson Davis' Birthday in Mississippi.

Many people choose to hold picnics, sports events and family gatherings on this weekend. This day is traditionally seen as the start of the summer season for cultural events.

Background

Memorial Day started as an event to honor Union soldiers who had died during the American Civil War. It was inspired by the way people in the Southern states honored their dead. After World War I, it was extended to include all men and women who died in any war or military action.

Memorial Day was originally known as Decoration Day. The current name for this day did not come into use until after World War II. Decoration Day and then Memorial Day used to be held on May 30, regardless of the day of the week, on which it fell. In 1968, the Uniform Holidays Bill was passed as part of a move to use federal holidays to create three-day weekends. This meant that that, from 1971, Memorial Day holiday has been officially observed on the last Monday in May.



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Independence Day / July 4

Independence Day is annually celebrated on July 4 and is often known as "the Fourth of July". It is the anniversary of the publication of the declaration of independence from Great Britain in 1776. Patriotic displays and family events are organized throughout the United States.

What Do People Do?

Independence Day is a day of family celebrations with picnics and barbecues, showing a great deal of emphasis on the American tradition of political freedom. Activities associated with the day include watermelon or hotdog eating competitions and sporting events, such as baseball games, three-legged races, swimming activities and tug-of-war games.

Many people display the American flag outside their homes or buildings. Many communities arrange fireworks that are often accompanied by patriotic music. Above all, people in the United States express and give thanks for the freedom and liberties fought by the first generation of many of today's Americans.

Background

In 1775, people in New England began fighting the British for their independence. On July 2, 1776, the Congress secretly voted for independence from Great Britain. Two days later, on July 4, 1776, the final wording of the Declaration of Independence was approved, and the document was published. The first description of how Independence Day would be celebrated was in a letter from John Adams to his wife Abigail on July 3, 1776. He described "pomp and parade, with shows, games, sports, guns, bells, bonfires, and illuminations" throughout the United States. However, the term "Independence Day" was not used until 1791.

Interestingly, Thomas Jefferson and John Adams, both signers of the Declaration of Independence and presidents of the United States, died on July 4, 1826 - exactly 50 years after the adoption of the declaration.



Labor Day / September

Labor Day is on the first Monday of September every year. It was originally organized to celebrate various labor unions' strengths of and contributions to the United States' economy.

What Do People Do?

Labor Day is a day of rest or the last chance for many people to go on trips before the summer ends. For students, it is the last chance to organize parties before school starts again. In some neighborhoods, people organize fireworks displays, barbecues and public arts or sports events. The American football season starts on or around Labor Day and many teams play their first game of the season during Labor Day weekend.

Background

The first Labor Day was held in 1882. Its origins stem from the desire of the Central Labor Union to create a holiday for workers. It became a federal holiday in 1894. It was originally intended that the day would be filled with a street parade to allow the public to appreciate the work of the trade and labor organizations. After the parade, a festival was to be held to amuse local workers and their families.

In latter years, prominent men and women held speeches. This is less common now, but is sometimes seen in election years. One of the reasons for choosing to celebrate this on the first Monday in September, and not on May 1, which is common in the rest of the world, was to add a holiday in the long gap between Independence Day and Thanksgiving.



Labor Day is a day off in the US. ©iStockphoto.com/Martin Novak

Columbus Day / October

Columbus Day, which is on the second Monday of October, remembers Christopher Columbus' arrival to the Americas on October 12, 1492. This holiday is controversial because the European settlement in the Americas led to the demise of the history and culture of the indigenous peoples.

What Do People Do?

Some Americans celebrate the anniversary of the discovery of their country with church services and other activities. In some towns and cities, special church services, parades and large events are held. Many celebrations happen in the Italian-American community.

Many states now celebrate Native Americans' Day/Indigenous People's Day instead of Columbus Day.

Background

Christopher Columbus is often portrayed as the first European to sail to the Americas. However, this is controversial on many counts. There is evidence that the first Europeans to sail across the Atlantic were Viking explorers from Scandinavia. In addition, the land was already populated by indigenous peoples, who had 'discovered' the Americas thousands of years before.

Columbus Day originated as a celebration of Italian-American heritage and was first held in San Francisco in 1869. In 1937, Columbus Day became a holiday across the United States. Since 1971, it has been celebrated on the second Monday in October. Columbus Day celebrations are controversial because the settlement of Europeans in the Americas led to the deaths of a very large proportion of the native people. It has been argued that this was a direct result of Columbus' actions. It is clear that the arrival of the European settlers led to the demise of a large proportion of the history and culture of the indigenous peoples of the Americas. It has also been argued that Columbus should not be honored for discovering North America, as he only went as far as some islands in the Caribbean and never got as far as mainland America.



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Veterans Day / November

In the USA, Veterans Day annually falls on November 11. This day is the anniversary of the signing of the armistice, which ended the World War I hostilities between the Allied nations and Germany in 1918. Veterans are thanked for their services to the United States on Veterans Day.

What Do People Do?

Veterans Day is intended to honor and thank all military personnel who served the United States in all wars, particularly living veterans. It is marked by parades and church services and in many places the American flag is hung at half mast. Veterans Day is officially observed on November 11.

Background

On the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month of 1918 an armistice between Germany and the Allied nations came into effect. On November 11, 1919, Armistice Day was commemorated for the first time. In 1919, President Wilson proclaimed the day should be "filled with solemn pride in the heroism of those who died in the country's service and with gratitude for the victory".

This day was originally intended to honor veterans of World War I. In 1954, the veterans service organizations urged Congress to change the word "Armistice" to "Veterans". Congress approved this change and on June 1, 1954, November 11 became a day to honor all American veterans, where ever and whenever they had served.



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Thanksgiving Day / November

Thanksgiving Day in the United States is a holiday on the fourth Thursday of November. It precedes Black Friday.

What Do People Do?

Thanksgiving Day is traditionally a day for families and friends to get together for a special meal. The meal often includes a turkey, stuffing, potatoes, cranberry sauce, gravy, pumpkin pie, and vegetables. Thanksgiving Day is a time for many people to give thanks for what they have.

Thanksgiving Day parades are held in some cities and towns on or around Thanksgiving Day. Some parades or festivities also mark the opening of the Christmas shopping season. Some people have a four-day weekend so it is a popular time for trips and to visit family and friends.

Background

Thanksgiving Day has been an annual holiday in the United States since 1863. Not everyone sees Thanksgiving Day as a cause for celebration. Each year since 1970, a group of Native Americans and their supporters have staged a protest for a National Day of Mourning at Plymouth Rock in Plymouth, Massachusetts on Thanksgiving Day. American Indian Heritage Day is also observed at this time of the year.

There are claims that the first Thanksgiving Day was held in the city of El Paso, Texas in 1598. Many people trace the origins of the modern Thanksgiving Day to the harvest celebration that the Pilgrims held in Plymouth, Massachusetts in 1621. However, their first true thanksgiving was in 1623, when they gave thanks for rain that ended a drought. In the second half of the 1600s, thanksgivings after the harvest became more common and started to become annual events. George Washington, the first president of the United States, proclaimed the first national Thanksgiving Day in 1789.



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Christmas Day / December

Many people in the United States celebrate Christmas Day on December 25. The day celebrates Jesus Christ's birth. It is often combined with customs from pre-Christian winter celebrations. Many people erect Christmas trees, decorate their homes, visit family or friends and exchange gifts.

What Do People Do?

People celebrate Christmas Day in many ways. In the days or even weeks before Christmas Day, many people decorate their homes and gardens with lights, Christmas trees and much more. It is common to organize a special meal, often consisting of turkey and a lot of other festive foods, for family or friends and exchange gifts with them. Children, in particular, often receive a lot of gifts from their parents and other relatives and the mythical figure Santa Claus. Many Sunday schools, churches and communities organize special events.

Background

The original meaning of Christmas is a special church service, or mass, to celebrate the birth of Christ. The story of the Nativity, or the events surrounding the birth of Jesus, are particularly important in religious celebrations of Christmas. These include the importance of candles and decorations made from evergreen bushes and tree, symbolizing everlasting light and life.

In Roman times, a mid-winter festival was held. This was a relaxing time with a lot of parties and merry making. It was also common to give other people small gifts, such as dolls for children and candles for adults. This festival culminated with the celebration of the winter solstice, which fell on December 25 in the Roman calendar. These customs have influences how Christmas Day is celebrated today in the United States.

During Reformation and up until the middle of the 1800s, Christmas was often not celebrated because partying and merry making was seen as unchristian. From about 1840, celebrating Christmas became more widespread. December 25 was declared a federal holiday in the United States in 1870.



<https://www.timeout.com/newyork/blog/the-rockefeller-center-christmas-tree-arrives-this-weekend-111017>