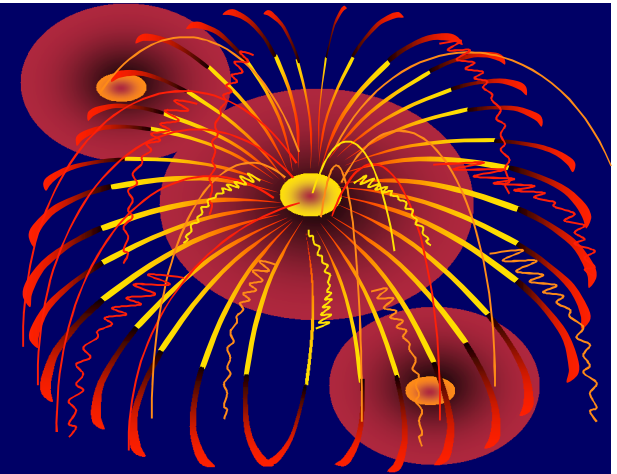


American Holidays



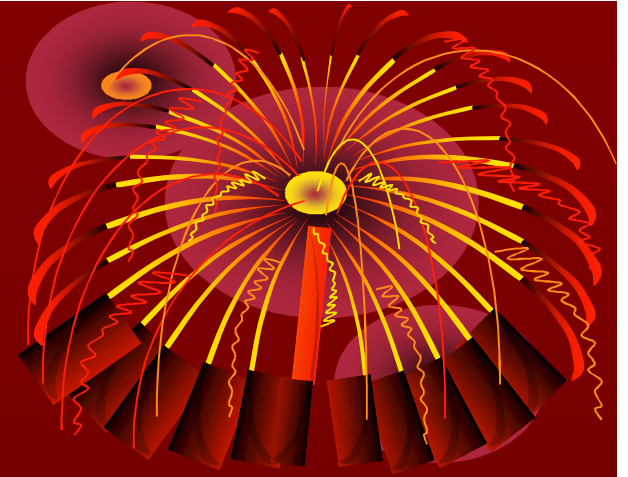


President's Day



Until the mid-1970s, the February 22 birthday of George Washington, hero of the Revolutionary War and first president of the United States, was a national holiday. In addition, the February 12 birthday of Abraham Lincoln, the president during the Civil War (1861-1865), was a holiday in most states. In the 1970s, Congress declared that in order to honor all past presidents of the United States, a single holiday, to be called Presidents' Day, would be observed on the third Monday in February. In many states, however, the holiday continues to be known as George Washington's birthday.

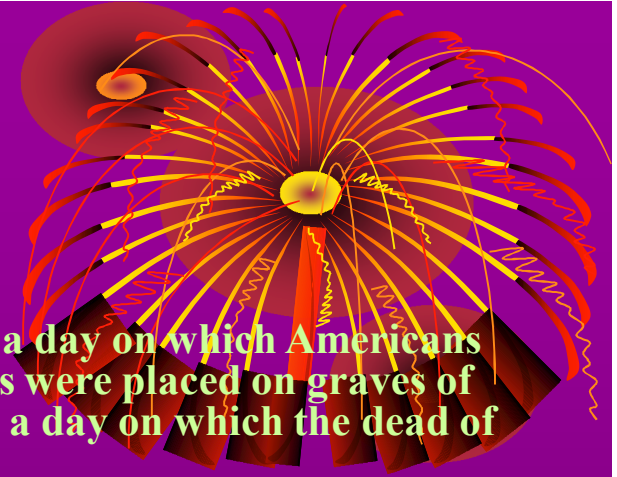
Veteran's Day



Originally called Armistice Day, this holiday was established to honor Americans who had served in World War I. It falls on November 11, the day when that war ended in 1918, but it now honors veterans of all wars in which the United States has fought.

Veterans' organizations hold parades or other special ceremonies, and the president customarily places a wreath on the Tomb of the Unknowns at Arlington National Cemetery, across the Potomac River from Washington, D.C.

Memorial Day



This holiday, on the fourth Monday of every May, is a day on which Americans honor the dead. Originally a day on which flags and flowers were placed on graves of soldiers who died in the American Civil War, it has become a day on which the dead of all wars and all other dead are remembered the same way.

In 1971, along with other holidays, President Richard Nixon declared Memorial Day a federal holiday on the last Monday in May. Cities all around the United States hold their own ceremonies on the last Monday in May to pay respect to the men and women who have died in wars or in the service of their country. In many communities, special ceremonies are held in cemeteries or at monuments for the war dead by veterans of military services. Some hold parades and others hold memorial services or special programs in churches, schools or other public meeting places.

Memorial Day is not limited to honor only those Americans from the armed forces. It is also a day for personal remembrance. Families and individuals honor the memories of their loved ones who have died. Church services, visits to the cemetery, flowers on graves or even silent tribute mark the day with dignity and solemnity.

On Memorial Day, the President or Vice President of the United States gives a speech and lays a wreath on the tombs. Members of the armed forces shoot a rifle salute in the air. Veterans and families come to lay their own wreaths and say prayers. It is a day of reflection.

However, to many Americans the day also signals the beginning of summer with a three-day weekend to spend at the beach, in the mountains or at home relaxing.



Valentine's Day



One other day that most Americans observe, even though it is not an official holiday, is February 14, Valentine's Day, named for an early Christian martyr whose feast day was once observed on that day. On this day, Americans give special symbolic gifts to people they love. They also send special greeting cards called Valentines to such people. Most commonly, the gifts are candy or flowers.





Labor Day

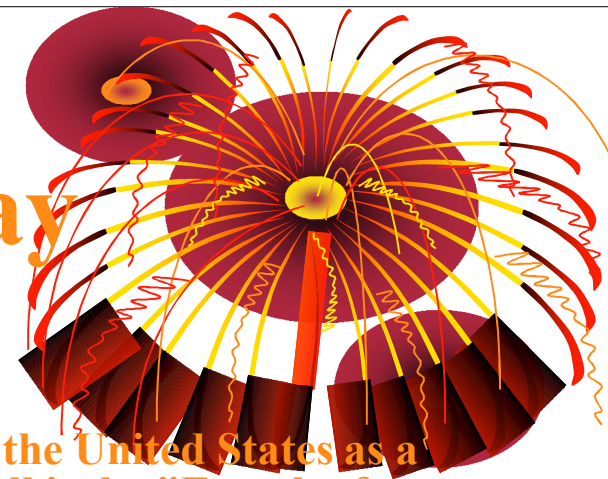


This holiday, which always is observed on the first Monday of September has been a federal holiday since 1894, but was observed in some places before that day as a result of a campaign by an early organization of workers called the Knights of Labor. Its purpose is to honor the nation's working people. In many cities the day is marked by parades of working people representing the labor unions.

Most Americans consider Labor Day the end of the summer, and the beaches and other popular resort areas are packed with people enjoying one last three-day weekend. For many students it marks the opening of the school year.



Independence Day



Independence Day is regarded as the birthday of the United States as a free and independent nation. Most Americans simply call it the "Fourth of July," on which date it always falls.

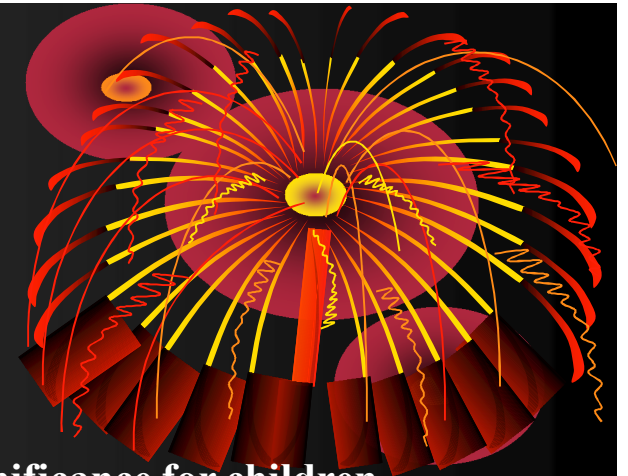
The holiday recalls the signing of the Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1776. At that time, the people of the 13 British colonies located along the eastern coast of what is now the United States were involved in a war over what they considered unjust treatment by the king and parliament in Britain. The war began in 1775. As the war continued, the colonists realized that they were fighting not just for better treatment; they were fighting for freedom from England's rule. The Declaration of Independence, signed by leaders from the colonies, stated this clearly, and for the first time in an official document the colonies were referred to as the United States of America.

It is a day of picnics and patriotic parades, a night of concerts and fireworks. The flying of the American flag (which also occurs on Memorial Day and other holidays) is widespread. On July 4, 1976, the 200th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence was marked by grand festivals across the nation.

Independence Day 2001 commemorated the 225th anniversary of the signing of the U.S. Declaration of Independence.



Hallowe'en



Halloween, the last day of October, has a special significance for children, who dress in funny or ghostly costumes and knock on neighborhood doors shouting "Trick or Treat!" Pirates and princesses, ghosts and witches all hold bags open to catch the candy or other goodies that the neighbors drop in.

Since the 800's November 1st is a religious holiday known as All Saints' Day. The Mass that was said on this day was called Allhallowmas. The evening before became known as All Hallow e'en, or Halloween. Like some other American celebrations, its origins lie in both pre-Christian and Christian customs.

Today school dances and neighborhood parties called "block parties" are popular among young and old alike. More and more adults celebrate Halloween. They dress up as historical or political figures and go to masquerade parties. In larger cities, costumed children and their parents gather at shopping malls early in the evening. Stores and businesses give parties with games and treats for the children. Teenagers enjoy costume dances at their schools and the more outrageous the costume the better!

Certain pranks such as soaping car windows and tipping over garbage cans are expected. But partying and pranks are not the only things that Halloweeners enjoy doing. Some collect money to buy food and medicine for needy children around the world.



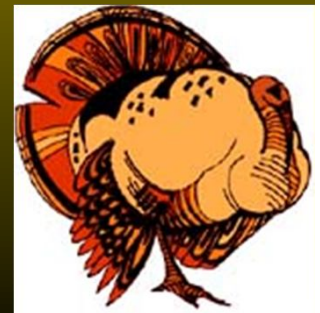
Thanksgiving Day

Thanksgiving Day is the fourth Thursday in November, but many Americans take a day of vacation on the following Friday to make a four-day weekend, during which they may travel long distances to visit family and friends.

The holiday dates back to 1621, the year after the Puritans arrived in Massachusetts, determined to practice their dissenting religion without interference. After a rough winter, in which about half of them died, they turned for help to neighboring Indians, who taught them how to plant corn and other crops. The next fall's bountiful harvest inspired the Pilgrims to give thanks by holding a feast.

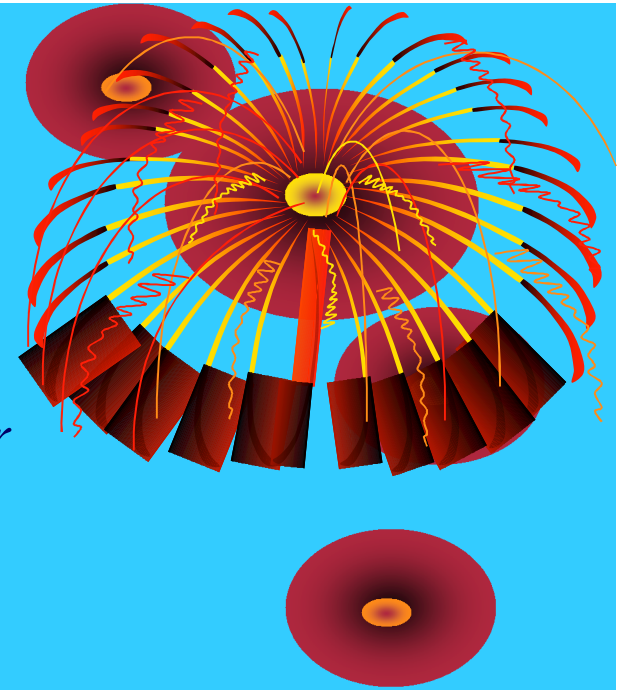
The Thanksgiving feast became a national tradition — not only because so many other Americans have found prosperity but also because the Pilgrims' sacrifices for their freedom still captivate the imagination.

To this day, Thanksgiving dinner almost always includes some of the foods served at the first feast: roast turkey, cranberry sauce, potatoes, pumpkin pie. Before the meal begins, families or friends usually pause to give thanks for their blessings, including the joy of being united for the occasion.



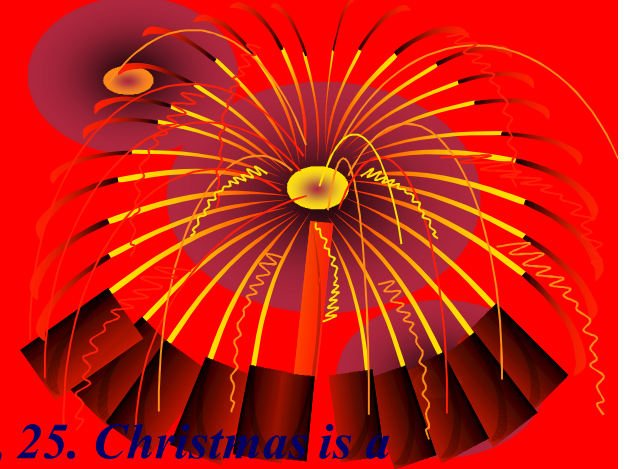
Columbus Day

This day commemorates Italian navigator Christopher Columbus' landing in the New World on October 12, 1492. Most nations of the Americas observe this holiday on October 12, but in the United States, annual observances take place on the second Monday in October. The major celebration of the day takes place in New York City, which holds a huge parade each year.





Christmas



Americans celebrate Christmas on December, 25. Christmas is a religious holiday and one of the happiest holidays of the year, because it is the day that Christians celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ.

Most Americans send greeting cards to their friends and family at Christmas time. Some people who are friends or relatives and live great distances from each other may not be much in contact with each other during year - but will usually exchange greeting cards and often a Christmas letter telling their family news.

The decorating of homes for Christmas is very common. Most American who observe Christmas have a Christmas tree in their homes. This may be a real evergreen tree or an artificial one. In either case, the tree is decorated and trimmed with small lights and ornaments. Other decorations such as lights and wreaths of evergreen and signs wishing a "Merry Christmas" can be found inside and outside of many homes.

