



Americans celebrate a variety of federal holidays and other national observances throughout the year. American holidays can be secular, religious, international, or uniquely American.

New Year's Day

is January 1. The celebration of this federal holiday begins the night before, when Americans gather to wish each other a happy and prosperous coming year. Many Americans make New Year's resolutions.



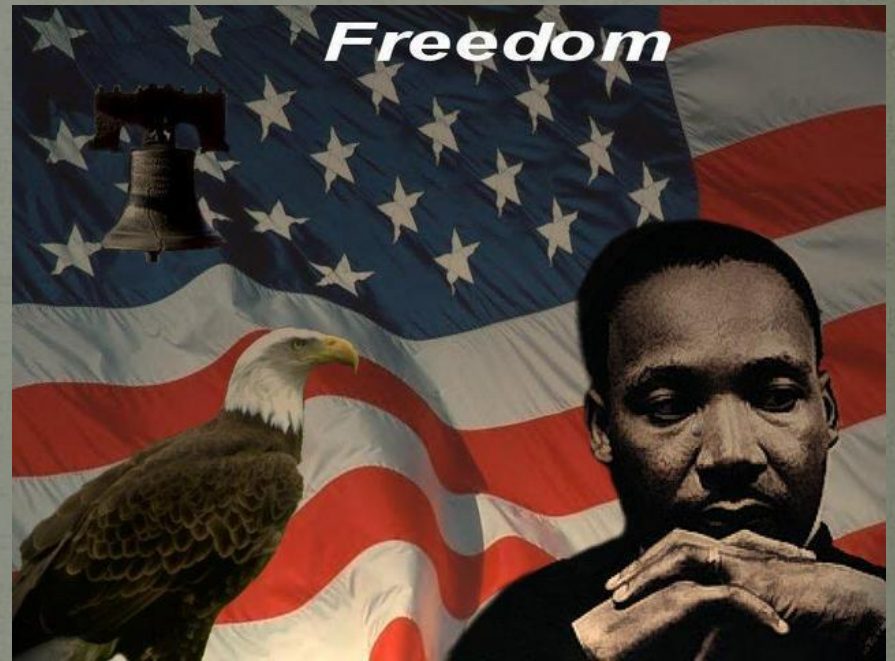
Popular New Year's Resolutions

- Drink Less Alcohol
- Eat Healthy Food
- Get a Better Education
- Get a Better Job
- Get Fit
- Lose Weight
- Manage Debt
- Manage Stress
- Quit Smoking
- Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle
- Save Money
- Take a Trip
- Volunteer to Help Others



Martin Luther King Day

is a federal holiday celebrated on the third Monday in January. The Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. was an African-American clergyman who is recognized for his tireless efforts to win civil rights for all people through nonviolent means.



Valentine's Day

- is celebrated on February 14. The day was named after an early Christian martyr, and on Valentine's Day, Americans give presents like candy or flowers to the ones they love. The first mass-produced valentine cards were sold in the 1840s.



Washington's Birthday

is a federal holiday observed the third Monday of February to honor George Washington, the first President of the United States. This date is commonly called Presidents' Day and many groups honor the legacy of past presidents on this date.



Easter

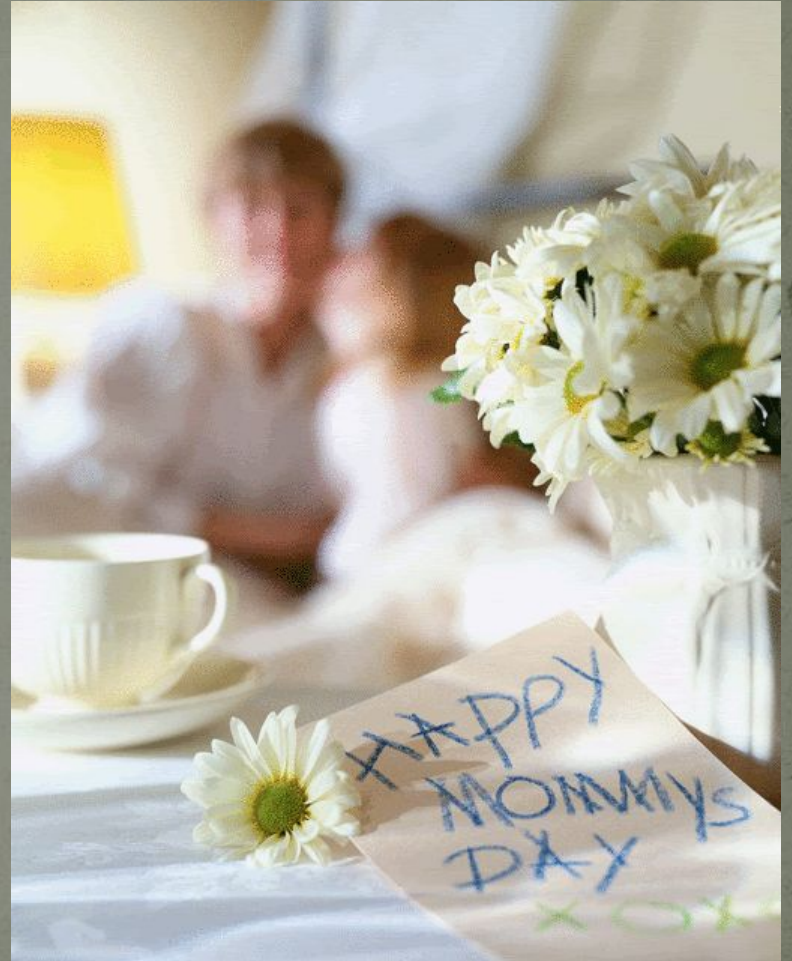
Easter falls on a spring Sunday that varies from year to year. Easter is a Christian holiday celebrating the resurrection of Jesus Christ. For Christians, Easter is a day of religious services and the gathering of family. Many Americans follow old traditions of coloring hard-boiled eggs and giving children baskets of candy.



Mother's Day

Mother's Day celebrates mothers every second Sunday of May. President Woodrow Wilson, who issued a proclamation in 1914, asked Americans to give a public expression of reverence to mothers on this day.

Carnations have come to represent Mother's Day, following President William McKinley's habit of always wearing a white carnation, his mother's favorite flower.



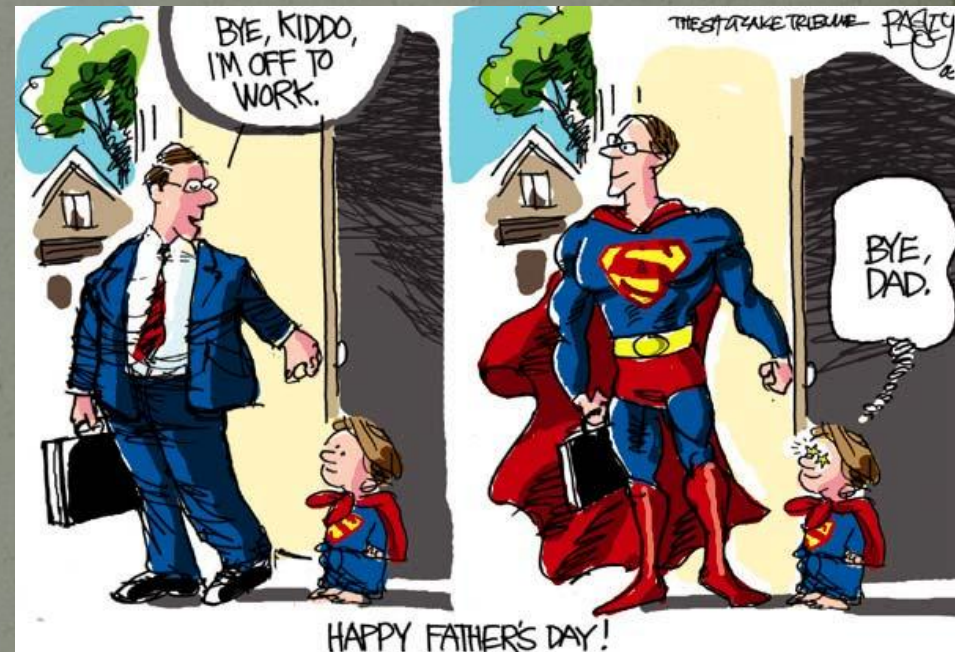
Memorial Day

is a federal holiday observed the last Monday of May. It originally honored the people killed in the American Civil War, but has become a day on which the American dead of all wars, and the dead generally, are remembered in special programs held in cemeteries, churches, and other public meeting places. The flying of the American flag is widespread.



Father's Day

Father's Day celebrates fathers every third Sunday of June. Father's Day began in 1909 in Spokane, Washington, when a daughter requested a special day to honor her father, a Civil War veteran who raised his children after his wife died. The first presidential proclamation honoring fathers was issued in 1966 by President Lyndon Johnson.



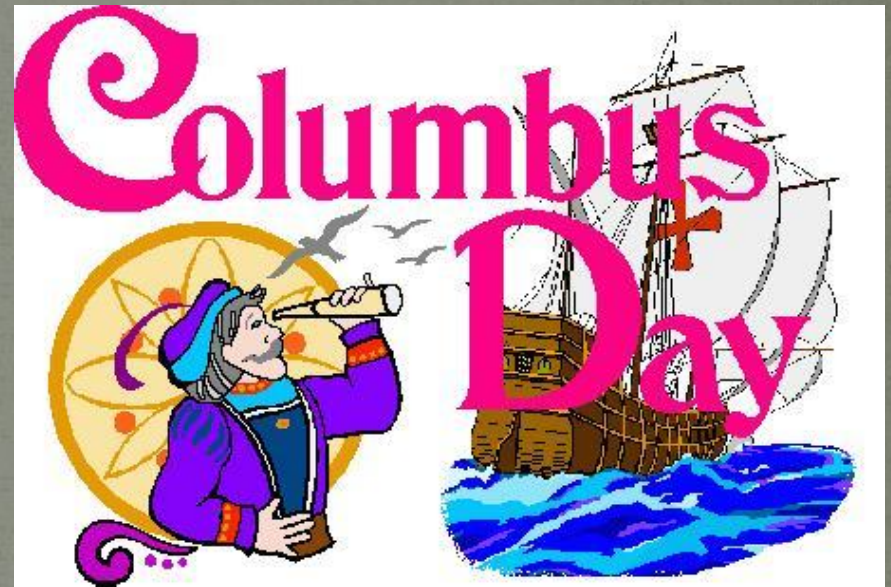
Independence Day

is July 4. This federal holiday honors the nation's birthday - the adoption of the Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1776. It is a day of picnics and patriotic parades, a night of concerts and fireworks. The flying of the American flag is widespread.



Columbus Day

- is a federal holiday celebrated on the second Monday in October. The day commemorates October 12, 1492, when Italian navigator Christopher Columbus landed in the New World. The holiday was first proclaimed in 1937 by President Franklin D. Roosevelt.



Halloween

is celebrated on October 31. On Halloween, American children dress up in funny or scary costumes and go "trick or treating" by knocking on doors in their neighborhood. The neighbors are expected to respond by giving them small gifts of candy or money.



Thanksgiving Day

- is a federal holiday celebrated on the fourth Thursday in November. In the fall of 1621, the Pilgrims held a three-day feast to celebrate a bountiful harvest. Many regard this event as the nation's first Thanksgiving. The Thanksgiving feast became a national tradition and almost always includes some of the foods served at the first feast: roast turkey, cranberry sauce, potatoes, and pumpkin pie.



Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day

- is December 7. In 1994, Congress designated this national observance to honor the more than 2,400 military service personnel who died on this date in 1941, during the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, by Japanese forces. The attack on Pearl Harbor caused the United States to enter World War II.



Christmas Day

- is a federal holiday celebrated on December 25. Christmas is a Christian holiday marking the birth of the Christ Child. Decorating houses and yards with lights, putting up Christmas trees, giving gifts, and sending greeting cards have become holiday traditions even for many non-Christian Americans.



Various ethnic and religious groups in America celebrate days with special meaning to them even though these are not national holidays. Jews, for example, observe their high holy days in September, Muslims celebrate Ramadan.



● African Americans celebrate Kwanzaa, Irish Americans celebrate the old country's patron saint, St. Patrick, on March 17, and Mardi Gras is the day before the Christian season of Lent begins and is a big occasion in New Orleans, Louisiana, where huge parades and wild revels take place. There are many other such religious and ethnic celebrations in the United States.