
*An armed guard controls entrance to the theatre in Mosinee, Wisconsin, where "Communists" seized power on May 1, 1950, in the most dramatic of America's Cold War pageants.*

# The Russians Are Coming!
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## Pageantry and Patriotism in Cold-War America

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*New York Oxford*
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS
1998

# Introduction

## Patriotic Pageantry in America

"Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp." So begins the final verse of Emma Lazarus's "The New Colossus." Though less often recited than her paean to the golden door, these words sound a powerful theme of national identity. Americans reject the pomp and pageantry of the tired, monarchical, militaristic, oppressive Old World. They do not "stand on ceremony." During World War I, President Woodrow Wilson defined the enemy as "Governments clothed with the strange trappings and primitive authority of an age that is altogether alien and hostile to our own."[1] Negative political repercussions befall those who forget the egalitarian folklore, from John Adams to Richard M. Nixon, who garbed White House police in uniforms befitting an operetta set in Mitteleuropa.

Yet despite the democratic ethos, Americans do cherish ceremony. Absent ancient knightly orders, we join civic and fraternal organizations with comparable titles and regalia.[2] Lacking royal family or palaces, we make do with presidents, their families and the White House. Much of John F. Kennedy's appeal was the storybook glamor with which he and Jackie enlivened the White House. Aiming to demystify the imperial presidency, Jimmy Carter carried his own garment bag and heard fewer renditions of "Hail to the Chief," gestures that did little for his political standing. We denigrate pomp but have never been without it, and as patriotic activists became a growing presence in American life, they insisted that patriotism was best instilled through pomp and ceremony.[3]

As a young nation lacking ruined abbeys or royal houses, we have strained to create history out of whatever comes to hand. We are a people

of anniversaries. Twenty years after the break-in at the office of the Democratic National Committee, surviving members of the Senate Watergate Committee and its staff held a reunion. Even disasters are marked. Johnstown, Pennsylvania, celebrated the centennial of the 1889 flood that killed 2,209 of its citizens. Nor is triviality a hurdle. Spectators at the 1988 Purdue-Ohio State football game paid homage to the Buckeye national champs of twenty years earlier. In 1995 the thirty-fifth anniversary of the Barbie Doll was duly noted.[4]

America's pageantry did not originate from a single source, and it oversimplifies even to chart two points of origin. Show, ceremony, parades and ritual could arise from many places, but in general they came either from the relatively prosperous, who laid claim to being society's proper leaders, or from those of lesser stature who devised symbolic means to contest the hegemony of the "better sort." Some public observances were planned in elegant drawing rooms or atheneums; others were improvised in taverns. Often a dialo ue developed between these competing modes of representation.[5]

Near the turn of the twentieth century, America acquired a taste for pageantry. Older towns had important anniversaries—or at least long histories—to mark. As their inhabitants sensed the inroads of industrialization on rural life, the nationalizing of the culture and the economy, and the exodus of their children, the dominant note was nostalgia. In this, American pageant creators shared the attitude of fellow-enthusiasts in England who, inspired by the arts and crafts movement, cherished a simpler, innocent past. Sponsors of town pageants aimed to reestablish the authority of the older elites and build civic pride and cohesion in a time when change was scouring away the societal landscape on which the old way of life had been built.[6]

Such a pageant marked the 150th anniversary of the founding of Thetford, Vermont, in 1911. The background of its initiator, William Chauncy Langdon, included social services in New York City, work in educational reform, an enthusiasm for the Country Life movement, and training in history, literature, and theater. The pageant linked Thetford's early years, much idealized, through struggles of a more recent vintage to a future beckoning with hope. It aimed to forge a spirit of community based on a common past to meet the challenges of that future. "The pageant," said Langdon, "brings people together and kindles the spirit of enthusiastic unanimity as does nothing else." Though pageants would evolve beyond



the forms adopted in Thetford and other locales in the early twentieth century, sponsors of later varieties could agree fully with Langdon's rationale.

Pageants were not confined to small towns. Progressive-era educational and playground reformers had discovered the value of play and of history taught through play as means with which to inculcate the democratic spirit. Their efforts and those of activists in the movement for a Safe and Sane Fourth of July led, in 1908, to a parade in Springfield, Massachusetts, which included floats illustrating historical events meaningful to a wide variety of racial and ethnic inhabitants of the city. In 1910 Bostonians attended "From Cave Life to City Life: The Pageant of a Perfect City." The genre reached a peak in the 1914 Pageant and Masque of Saint Louis. Commemorating the city's sesquicentennial, this elaborate performance had a purpose beyond entertainment. Prior to it, the muckraker Lincoln Steffens had held the city government of St. Louis up to national opprobrium; shortly after it, St. Louis civic leaders won passage of a charter reform.[7]

These early twentieth-century pageants became a focus of professionalization. Founded in 1913, the American Pageant Association attempted to establish standards for the genre. The APA enjoyed its greatest influence in that decade. However, commercial firms soon assumed a growing role. After World War I, for-profit pageant-masters outstripped the influence of the reformists. For instance, the John B. Rogers Producing Company, founded in 1903, sold its skills after 1918 as a business that provided celebrating communities "a complete service . . . from money-raising campaign to final production." By 1947, they boasted having put on the Will Rogers Memorial Celebration, the North Dakota Golden Jubilee, the Lodi Grape and Wine Festival, the Wapello County Iowa State Centennial, and countless other events. The future lay with businessmen, not reformers, and more with events like Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade and Pasadena's Tournament of Roses than with Thetford or even St. Louis. The APA closed its doors in 1930.[8]

This profusion of pageantry was primarily local. In a federal republic with a history of decentralization, the sinews of nationhood were often loose and undeveloped, the Jeffersonian ideal of localism and states rights and the Madisonian concept of pluralism persisted. The onset of and American entry into World War I did much, however, to stimulate efforts to promote patriotism and to nationalize celebration.

The United States had not lacked patriotic exercises in its early years. In 1777 the Fourth of July[9] was celebrated in three cities. John Adams had expected July 2, when the Continental Congress voted for independence, to be marked with "solemn acts of devotion to God Almighty" and "pomp and parade, with shows, games, sports, guns, bells, bonfires, and illuminations, from one end of this continent to the other, from this time forward, forevermore." However, it was July 4, when the Declaration was formally approved (but not signed by most delegates), that Americans swiftly made the occasion for festivity.

Washington's Birthday also garnered patriotic salutes. The first celebration seems to have occurred in 1779 in Milton, Massachusetts. Yet neither of these two observances was, strictly speaking, a national holiday. July Fourth was widely celebrated but entirely dependent on local initiative. As sectional strife began to unravel the nation, both occasions fell into disuse in the South. Indeed, it was national news that Vicksburg, Mississippi, resumed celebrating the Fourth in 1945—a "spiritual return to the Union" after an eighty-two-year hiatus begun while General U. S. Grant laid siege to the town.[10]

Several locales claimed to have first celebrated Memorial Day (or Decoration Day), including Boalsburg, Pennsylvania, and Waterloo, New York. The occasion also had roots as a day of homage to the Confederate dead. When the women of Columbus, Mississippi, also honored the Union dead in their graveyard, their kindness worked itself into the mythology of sectional reconciliation and recommended itself as a national institution. The Grand Army of the Republic adopted Memorial Day in 1868. In 1873 New York became the first state to celebrate it. By 1891, every northern state did so. It did not for some time become a nationwide observance, as Southern states continued to celebrate Confederate Memorial Day.[11]

The emergence of an industrialized, multi-ethnic urban society prompted Americans who fretted over these trends to seek appropriate rituals to domesticate alien influences. In the 1890s patriotic consciousness and activism quickened.[12] The phrase "The New Nationalism," Teddy Roosevelt's 1912 presidential campaign theme, captioned a number of currents of concern to Progressives. Pageantry offered one way to teach citizens of an increasingly complex urban world their expanded civic duties. *Century Magazine* editorialized that "nothing is more likely to cement the sympathies of our people and to accentuate our homogeneity than a cultivation of pageants."[13]



Foreign challenges heightened the felt need to reinforce cohesion. Two world wars and their preliminaries, and threats, both real and imagined, from alien sources, stimulated self-appointed guardians of American nationality to act. The menace of drastic social change also energized keepers of tradition on numerous occasions. Red scares accelerated patriotic work. That of 1919–20 comprised not only the Palmer raids but efforts to inspire greater patriotic devotion. In the late 1930s, the conservative reaction to the New Deal and a more general response to the perceived menace of alien "isms" produced a similar patriotic renewal. Often Americans scarcely differentiated between German fascism and Soviet communism; during the Hitler-Stalin pact, such distinctions seemed vacant.

Flag Day was a patriotic byproduct of World War I. The date had enjoyed spotty local celebration prior to 1916. On June 14, 1861, the anniversary of the Continental Congress's adoption of the nation's banner, citizens of Hartford, Connecticut, flew the flag to attest support for the Union. In 1877 Congress recognized the flag's hundredth anniversary. Schools began to mark Flag Day. In 1893 it was celebrated for the first time at Philadelphia's Betsy Ross House.[14] Woodrow Wilson issued the first presidential proclamation of Flag Day in 1916, at a time both he and the nation wavered between belligerence and pacifism. Thanks to the preparedness movement, in support of which Wilson marched in a parade with an American flag draped around his torso, patriotism had entered a boom period. In 1918, the nation now fully engaged in the conflict, Flag Day opened a period of wartime patriotic activity called Loyalty Week.[15]

Wilson innovated in other forms of patriotic endeavor. In a time when massive immigration stirred unease, his administration took special interest in assimilating newcomers into American life. Various agencies worked to make immigrants literate in English, impress on them the virtues of the American system and attach them more firmly to it. Such activists deemed it crucial to prepare immigrants for citizenship, encourage them to seek it, and devise meaningful ceremonies to mark its attainment.

On May 10, 1915, President Wilson addressed 5,000 new citizens and 12,000 observers at a naturalization ceremony in Philadelphia. He declared America "too proud to fight" in the war but, more pertinently, gave an artfully balanced assessment of the immigrant's presence. On one

hand, immigration made the United States "the only country in the world which experiences this constant and repeated rebirth." While love of one's country of birth was "very sacred," Wilson warned: "You cannot become thorough Americans if you think of yourselves in groups. America does not consist of groups." [16]

The Philadelphia ceremony inspired "a wave of patriotic sentiment." On July 4, 1916, Americanization Day celebrations were held in some 150 cities. In 1916, at a Washington, D.C., Citizenship Convention, Wilson spoke, but with a sharper edge than he had in Philadelphia, reflecting a rising concern about divisions at home aggravated by the war. He warned that "Certain men,—I have never believed a great number,—born in other lands, have in recent months thought more of those lands than they have of the honor and interest of the government under which they are now living." Such a pattern "is absolutely incompatible with the fundamental idea of loyalty." [17]

The war spurred such programs. A high point was July Fourth of 1918, rechristened Loyalty Day, on which Americanizers and ethnic organizations put on a nationwide array of pageants, parades and ceremonies to demonstrate loyalty. In New York City, over forty nationality groups mounted a "parade pageant" with floats dramatizing their pasts. Some questioned the project. Viewing it as proof of "incomplete" assimilation, the *New York Times* would rather see "that it has progressed to the point where the several groups of which we are composed think of themselves as undifferentiated Americans."

The preliminaries bore out such misgivings. Italians lit into Hungarian plans to display the Hungarian flag and Magyar dress. They ought not wear the garb nor vaunt the history of an enemy land, but rather, a critic insisted, "let them come draped in mourning with ashes on their heads, and their floats covered with black veils." Others whose homelands had felt the Hungarian boot also expressed anger. One float's boast that Magyars had withstood Turkish hordes for centuries was belittled by a spokesman for Slovaks and Bohemians, who charged that they had "betrayed Christian civilization to the Turks in this war" and in the past. After heated negotiations and threats of boycott, the Hungarians agreed to forego native attire.

The spectacle succeeded, as 110,000 marchers paraded up Fifth Avenue for ten hours. Military aircraft flew over the route, and a dirigible rained down copies of "The Star-Spangled Banner." A mounted woman clad as



Joan of Arc, followed by a Spirit of '76 tableau, heralded the parade's foreign-born section, which was led by a lone Zoroastrian Parsee. Then came floats depicting Armenia's struggles, Albanians hailing President Wilson, "protector of small nationalities," the Chinese led by a baseball team, Spanish toreadors, Lithuanian knights, Swiss Guards, and Bolivian llamas. Parade authorities strictly scrutinized the messages on all floats and banners. Other locales marked the day. Washingtonians watched the pageant "Democracy Triumphant," and Wilson welcomed the diplomatic corps and delegates from thirty-three nationalities to rites at Washington's tomb. [18]

The war and ensuing Red Scare heightened concerns with Americanization. However, budgetary stringencies forced the federal government to cut back its activities in the 1920s, so that Americanization efforts had to rely mostly on state and local efforts and the energies of schools, civic organizations and patriotic groups. The Bureau of Naturalization remained the sole federal entity active in Americanization. [19]

During the Red Scare, Constitution-worship came into vogue. Localities, especially Philadelphia, had previously marked Constitution Day on September 17, when the document had been signed. For the Constitution's centennial, that city hosted a half-million visitors for a three-day observance that included parades and a speech by President Grover Cleveland. Other localities began to celebrate, and, at the time of World War I, the occasion was adopted as a cause by the National Security League, a virile guardian of Americanism; the American Bar Association; and the Sons of the American Revolution.

In troubled 1919, patriotic organizations mounted emphatic observances, and some twenty-two states and scores of cities marked Constitution Day. In 1923, the American Bar Association and National Education Association made it the anchor of their Constitution Week observance. In 1920, the original Constitution and Declaration were removed from basement storage and displayed at the State Department, presumably in hope that their totemic power would be felt in that frightsome time. In 1921 the documents were exhibited at the Library of Congress. President Coolidge dedicated the bronze and glass "Shrine" in 1924.

Still, Constitution Day remained a secondary observance except during the sesquicentennial of the Constitution. That three-year period overlapped the controversy stirred by FDR's futile 1937 effort to pack the Supreme Court. Anti-New Dealers had often seized the cloak of patriot-

ism. As plans for the sesquicentennial developed, Roosevelt and the critics of his court bill were contesting symbolic custody of the sacred document, and the tug-of-war gave particular poignance to traditionalist reverence for the old constitutional order.[20]

In the 1920s and '30s, various groups sought to instill reverence for ancient traditions, mark historic events and spread patriotic observance. Continuing fears of radicalism, concern with the effects of deep-running social forces upon customs and morals, and later, sometimes apoplectic reactions to the New Deal caused guardians of American tradition to redouble their efforts. Sponsored by the four-year-old American Legion, a National Flag Conference convened in 1923 to decide proper flag etiquette. Under the stress of war and depression, the government took a growing, if sometimes fitful, role in fostering patriotism. Despite the overall nationalizing tendency, in the commemorative events of the period after World War I, according to John Bodnar, there remained room for vernacular, local and personal themes of celebration (such as homage to the "pioneers").[21]

What is remarkable about such efforts to inculcate a sense of nationhood is less their variety and strength than the difficulty activists seemed to encounter. Just as the power to govern was dispersed under the federal system, so the elaboration of rituals of nationhood was a decentralized process subject often to local influence (or apathy) in the absence of firm national direction. Between the wars "the Nation," according to Barry Karl, "was an abstraction, a distant idea."[22] The New Deal would bring greater national focus to government and economic regulation as well as to celebrating nationhood, but progress was not always steady.

A few episodes illustrate the point. In 1932, the national commission to celebrate the bicentennial of George Washington's birth did so by erecting no edifice and holding no fair. Led by ex-impresario, then Congressman Sol Bloom of New York, the George Washington Bicentennial Commission busied itself chiefly with a "media barrage." The deepening depression militated against lavish display or spending and would have made an observance that emphasized the nation's progress bitterly ironic. There were pamphlets, homilies, artistic renderings and speeches under the bicentennial aegis, and plenty of Washingtoniana for those who had money to buy.[23] But in seeking to encourage private and local groups to celebrate and operating primarily through exhortation, the commission was pursuing an essentially federal model, one which would shape subsequent celebrations.



Flag Day also shows how spotty and contingent was federal government guidance of patriotic observance. Although Wilson had decreed it in 1916, after the war the day languished. Subsequent proclamations were not automatic. Thus, responding in 1934 to one of Flag Day's putative founders, an aide stated President Roosevelt's hope that there would be "special patriotic exercises," but since Wilson's 1916 proclamation applied to all subsequent Flag Days, another was unneeded. It was "the responsibility of the people to see that the anniversary is fittingly observed." In 1941 another aide explained that while Flag Day was indeed "a national custom," FDR was powerless to proclaim it a national holiday.[24]

Change was at hand. In the late 1930s, the federal government took up the task of building patriotism. The Great Depression, the New Deal, and the accompanying political culture sharpened the focus on the nation and its capital.[25] While FDR riveted attention through the mass media upon the White House as never before and while New Deal arts projects engaged in production of what might be termed a national culture (though regional as well), in the realm of patriotic observance the general rule of "limited government" still was in force.

The approach and conduct of another war and the persisting tensions of the ensuing Cold War would bring dramatic change. During the preliminaries to World War II the federal government created a new patriotic occasion (in response, admittedly, to local initiatives and predecessor celebrations). During the war itself techniques for consolidating homefront citizens into the war effort were honed and would provide precedent and personnel for similar campaigns to make citizens an integral part of the Cold War. Indeed, World War II and the (sometimes imagined) social solidarity that accompanied it became models for the commitment that the nation's leaders sought from citizens for the perduring struggle that the Cold War quickly seemed to impose.

# 5

# "The Cold War Belongs to Us All"

## Patriotizing the American Calendar

While willing to employ dramatic scenarios to advance their aims, patriotic and civic activists spent most of their energies inventing traditions that were more than one-shot episodes. Like religious devotion, loyalty was to be inculcated through repeated observance—in some cases daily (as in Pledging Allegiance in schools), in others occasionally (playing the National Anthem at athletic events), in still others annually. The "high" Cold War encouraged efforts to patriotize the American calendar and occasions at which such usages had previously been exceptional. Many patriotic practices which may seem to have grown up with the country are of surprisingly recent vintage.

Although Americans, it is argued, have long reverenced the state in what sociologist Robert N. Bellah labeled a "civil religion," they entered the Cold War lightly equipped with occasions for so doing. July 4, Memorial Day, and Thanksgiving were old enough to be time-honored, but the patina of age brought with it a degree of secularization. National days became occasions for leisure more than patriotic reflection.

Other patriotic observances had a tentative quality. Flag Day won national status in 1914 but languished after World War I until interest revived in the late 1930s. Not until 1949 did Congress act to raise its status.

Discussion was brief. The bill's sponsor noted that it "simply calls on the president to issue a proclamation requiring the display of the flag on all government buildings." The Republican House leader had to ask: "Does he not do that now?" "No, sir," was the reply. The House assented; armed with a terse committee report that "enactment will serve a valuable and patriotic purpose," the Senate concurred without debate.[1] And none too soon: the American Legion saw "as great a need" to support the flag and what it stood for in this "new and strange conflict," the Cold War, "as there ever was in any time of violent conflict."[2]

Flag Day came just weeks after I Am An American Day. The latter had a following that included the Legion and National Education Association and suggested a promising cold-war future. As one patriotic activist informed President Truman, despite its "Junior" status, it "has attracted greater attendance than any annual patriotic public rally in our nation's history."[3] The day now lent itself to Cold War, anti-communist rhetoric, but it no longer commanded the attention it received during World War II. Patriotic leaders devised other celebrations—some of which would have the ironic effect of killing I Am An American Day.

Armed Forces Day was one such event (and Loyalty Day another). Both holidays emerged in the first half-decade after World War II with rather specific cold-war functions. By 1950, the rise of what Daniel Yergin has labeled the "national security state" and the merger of the armed services into a single cabinet department prompted the establishment of Armed Forces Day.[4]

In 1947, for economy and efficiency Congress melded the Army and Navy plus the newly fledged Air Force into what became the Department of Defense. As World War Two's near-limitless defense spending faded into history, interservice strife over money and weapons erupted into battles royal. Each service tried to torpedo its rivals' pet projects: the Navy belittled the Air Force's giant B-36; the Air Force ridiculed the Navy's supercarrier. These rivalries made a minefield of the Pentagon.

Armed Forces Day extended unification into the ceremonial realm. It was a means of "dramatizing" the new unity of national defense. Previously, Army Day had been marked on April 6, when the U.S. had entered World War I; Navy Day, on October 27, the birthday of Teddy Roosevelt, the Navy's great booster. Air Force Day was a three-year-old tradition. One congressman even plumped for a day for the Marines. Replacing these separate days and the parochial interests they served, Armed



Forces Day was meant, in part, to sublimate interservice rivalry.[5]

Scheduling it was not easy. The first date suggested, March 23, ran afoul of bad weather, Lent, and such fund-raising efforts as that of the Red Cross. The Joint Chiefs of Staff fixed on the third Saturday in May, but new complications loomed. The Justice Department harumphed that they had ignored the fact that May's third Sunday was I Am an American Day, an event dear to it and statutorily fixed. Even so, in 1950 President Truman proclaimed the third Saturday in May as Armed Forces Day.[6]

The Defense Department attached great importance to its new day. Adopting the event as one of its projects, the Advertising Council helped publicize it. Truman agreed to offer brief remarks at a banquet in Washington on the eve of Armed Forces Day. At a similar dinner in New York the next day, Secretary of Defense Louis Johnson spoke over a nationwide radio hookup.[7]

The day called naturally for parades. The 35,000 marchers on Manhattan's Fifth Avenue included fifteen bands, units from each service arm, the West Point cadets, veterans, women's groups and contingents from such children's organizations as the American Nautical Cadets, American Girl Reservers, American Sailorettes and Blue Jacket Guards. President Truman, General Eisenhower and Admiral William D. Leahy reviewed Washington's procession. In Europe, 85,000 troops also paraded. The Berlin march symbolized American "determination to remain in this city." Many American communities held parades.

But not just parades. Eight B-36s from Carswell Air Base overflew the capital of each state in the Union. The Navy's Blue Angels looped and wheeled over Brooklyn. Military bases held open houses. A quarter-million thronged Bolling Air Force Base to see a show aimed at the "little guy who pays the bills." It starred a blimp, artillery, tanks, a parachute drop and a ninety-plane flyover. Showman Arthur Godfrey rode in the rear seat of an F-80 Shooting Star to describe the experience for the crowd. Stationary exhibits made up a sort of military petting zoo. Ten thousand people visited the Naval Ordinance Lab at White Oak, Maryland, to view a jeep and its passenger suspended by a plastic thread, a helicopter air-sea rescue, a huge airshow, infantry maneuvers, and divers in a water tank. The Navy brought 340 vessels into port and invited the public aboard. A remote-controlled four-and-a-half-foot-long model airplane trundled the streets of Washington to herald Armed Forces Day attractions.[8]

Successful devices reappeared in future years. Parades multiplied. Massive air armadas were frequent, though conditions sometimes imposed limits. Bad weather caused a 175-plane flyover of Manhattan to be scrubbed in 1951. New York's 1952 parade was "streamlined" and aerial maneuvers cancelled to save fuel during an oil strike. Open houses at land bases and on naval vessels attracted multitudes. In 1951, thousands clambered aboard the battleship *Missouri* and other ships. Hundreds of thousands attended air shows presented at Coney Island.[9]

Military hardware appeared annually in parks and squares in New York City. In 1956 there were displays at nine Manhattan sites alone. An F-84 Thunderjet was on view in City Hall Plaza. Exhibits ranged from aircraft (sometimes cut-away or wingless) and their engines to tanks to an experimental Army cold-weather suit. The Navy brought a fifty-foot-long model aircraft carrier to Gotham in 1954. At Coney Island, Air Force helicopters performed a "barn dance" maneuver. Navy salvage divers welded inside a 10,000-gallon water tank. In 1951 Bolling Air Base regaled visitors with a million square feet of exhibits. Band concerts were a heavy draw.[10]

Some promotions strained a bit. From Governor's Island in 1951, the Signal Corps sent a greeting that circled the globe in one-eighth of a second; on its return, it activated a "miniature atomic pile," whose fissioning detonated a magnesium bomb which cut a ribbon, thus releasing pigeons from a coop. In 1959 a fireworks firm aided a mock Marine beach landing on Long Island by destroying a pillbox with an "atomic" explosion. For 1955 Armed Forces Week, 116 antique cars rallied at Fort Dix. A 1958 display at New Jersey's Raritan Arsenal ranged from missiles to Girl Scout cookies. More practical was the 1955 Armed Forces Day project of some Seabees who built lean-tos at a Long Island Boy Scout camp. The De Land, Florida, Chamber of Commerce expressed the hope that Private Elvis Presley, then in training in Texas, might be detailed to sing at their 1958 Armed Forces Day gala. The Army vetoed the request for Presley's services.[11]

Some Armed Forces Day activities linked present with past challenges to American freedoms. In 1952 Columbia University students dug earthworks on Governor's Island like those their predecessors built in 1794 when a French invasion threatened. In 1954 the Army put on a costumed pageant depicting Governor's Island's three-century history. Repeated in following years, the pageant included such vignettes as the purchase of the



island from the Manhattan Indians and the soldiery of past wars. Speeches by the Dutch and British consul generals in 1955 emblematized Free World solidarity.[12]

A major theme of early Armed Forces Days was interservice unity. In 1950, newsmen at Bolling Air Base reportedly "gaped in amazement" as Air Force flacks touted the Navy's carrier plane demonstration and Navy public-relations men hyped Army and Air Force events. In proclaiming Armed Forces Day in 1952, President Truman declared the several services "welded into a unified team." In 1951, the U.S. Military Academy band, giving its first outdoor public concert in history (telecast from Radio City by NBC) played the anthems of the four services.[13]

After 1950, formal exorcism of interservice rivalry receded in importance.[14] The next three Armed Forces Days, during the Korean fighting, put more emphasis on mobilizing morale in a Cold War grown hot. Interservice cooperation remained a leitmotif, but a wider mutuality between soldiers in Korea and civilians at home took precedence. The *New York Times* warned in 1951 that the event was no "festival." "It may be dress parade and the bands playing here in the United States. It is fox holes and mortar fire and flak in Korea." New Yorkers viewed "exhibits illustrating the teamwork between industry and the military." A 1951 Armed Forces Day speech avowed that "today there is practically no delineation between those of us in uniform and those in civilian life." The secretary of labor declared in 1953 that the "soldier in the field and the worker at the machine are inseparable in plan and action." In 1958 the secretary of the navy stated: "The cold war belongs to us all."[15]

A recurrent theme of Armed Forces Day oratory was the need to gird for protracted conflict against the communist world. In 1951 Admiral Forrest P. Sherman, chief of naval operations, warned that the nation might face more "relatively small wars" for which it must maintain military strength, deploy forces around the globe, aid allies, and make sacrifices at home. Pentagon officials often used the occasion to emphasize the ongoing need for heavy defense expenditures.[16]

After the Korean War ended, talk of the urgency of a mobilization that yoked civilian and military spheres declined, but building consciousness of the military establishment remained a major goal. The armed services' role in preserving national freedom persisted as the central theme. Starting in 1953 and continuing through the 1960s, the motto of Armed Forces Day was "Power for Peace." Military correspondent Hanson

Baldwin tartly summarized the day's message in 1952 as "justification for past arms expenditures—and . . . pleas for even greater strength."

But commitment went beyond dollars. Whereas our defenders had once been professionals scarcely linked to civilian life, now, said the *New York Times*, "that is all changed. They are 'our' armed forces because they are a part of the total fabric of our lives, civilian and military." Members of many families had borne or would bear arms. As "the highest degree of loyalty and devotion" was expected of those who served, "it is right, therefore, that we give a corresponding degree of loyalty to them." Three years later, the *Times* reminded readers who took national defense for granted that it rested on "the solid foundation of personal service and often sacrifice by individual men and women." A 1961 *Times* editorial stressed that "our armed forces are still civilians under arms." [17]

Armed Forces Day frequently evoked calls for civilian gratitude. In 1954 Mayor Robert Wagner urged New Yorkers to recognize "the sacrifice and devotion to duty" of members of the armed forces. New York Governor Averell Harriman proclaimed Armed Forces Day in 1955 as a "public expression of respect" for U.S. servicemen and women. "Their calling," said the *Times* of the marchers of 1960, "is a proud one—the defense of our homes and liberties—a task which all of us . . . gladly share." [18]

The observance also permitted comment on immediate issues. In 1950, Truman speculated that had Congress passed his universal military training program, there "would have been no cold war." In an Armed Forces Day dinner speech just after he fired MacArthur, Truman urged an end to "bickering" and "playing petty politics." General Omar N. Bradley and Secretary Marshall also warned against seeking a quick military fix. At a 1954 Armed Forces Day banquet Eisenhower deplored the "unworthy scenes" of the Army-McCarthy hearings. Ike seized on festivities in North Carolina that combined Armed Forces Week and the anniversary of the signing of the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence to support Army Secretary Robert T. Stevens, then embroiled in those hearings. In 1959, just before retiring as Army Chief of Staff, General Maxwell D. Taylor restated his opposition to the administration's reliance on a defense based on "massive retaliation" at an Armed Forces Day event.[19]

Armed Forces Day allowed for some multivocality on defense issues. In 1951 General A.C. Wedemeyer urged schools to shore up the home front and dismiss "fuzzy thinkers or those identified with alien movements." History must teach patriotism. "Legends in song and story are a valuable



part of that history. I deplore the tendency to scoff at the fine old stories"—like young Washington and the cherry tree. In 1953, General Bradley, retiring as chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, leery of the Administration's "New Look" defense policy, warned the nation not to put "economy ahead of security." Defense Secretary Charles E. Wilson retorted that "We believe Uncle Sam's big old pocketbook has been open just too wide." Armed Forces Day 1955 gave Senator Stuart Symington a chance to air his warnings, soon to become a staple of Democratic criticisms of Eisenhower defense policies, that the United States lagged behind the USSR in developing an intercontinental ballistic missile.[20]

Armed Forces Day also served to reinforce aspects of nuclear deterrence doctrine. A vast 1951 atomic energy exhibit at a Manhattan armory aimed to acclimate Americans to life in the atomic age. One display, entitled "Cheer Up!" belittled the notion that "super-bombs" could cause an earth-destroying chain reaction. Civil defense workers joined the New York parade for the first time in 1952. In 1953 the secretary of the Air Force reminded visitors that the Strategic Air Command's "destructive potential" had "deterred the outbreak of another world war." [21]

The event became a sort of Free World answer to the annual Soviet May Day display of military might. The parallel was never explicitly avowed. Indeed, an account of 1950 Armed Forces Day parades stressed that in none "was the strength of American equipment and material emphasized as the Russians stress theirs in Moscow demonstrations." [22] Still, a sporadic dialogue arose. From 1951 on, Soviet military attaches sat on the reviewing stand in Washington in reciprocity for similar courtesies to American attaches at Moscow's May Day parade. A weapon glimpsed on May Day might bring a glossing response on Armed Forces Day. In 1954 the Air Force chief of staff alarmedly cited the new medium and heavy bombers unveiled on May Day. In 1955 he fretted about the swarms of long-range bombers and a new supersonic fighter observed over Moscow, and the Atlantic Fleet's commander warned that Russia was "feverishly building" a Navy which had moved in fifteen years from seventh to second largest in the world.[23]

Yet flashes of detente also sparked between the two rallies of armed might. In 1956, after "one of the briefest and least warlike" May Day parades "ever seen in Red Square," the White House responded by pruning a District of Columbia flyover from 216 B-47s back to forty-five. In 1956 a Soviet official was first welcome at the New York Armed Forces Day

parade. Soviet officers watched the Berlin parade in 1959. In 1960 a party led by the Soviet Air Force Commander was to fly an Ilyushin-18 to Washington's Armed Forces Day ceremonies, but the downing of an American U-2 "spy" plane deep in Soviet territory prompted them to postpone the invited visit to a "more suitable time."[24]

Armed Forces Day never rivaled May Day's symbolic pitch, nor perhaps its level of military readiness, but it was used to show off new weapons. The Navy Skyray interceptor was featured in 1951. Guided missiles festooned later parades. The Nike debuted in 1954, the Snark and Redstone in 1956. Though New York's 1959 parade exhibited smaller guided missiles, one reporter saw little other "military 'hardware' not familiar in the Korean War." Infantry carried the old M-1 rifle—or even 1903 Springfields.[25]

Through the 1950s, Armed Forces Day maintained a high but gradually declining profile. The 1953 presidential transition had some impact. Truman took the event seriously, reviewing all three Washington parades while president. Eisenhower held the day in less awe—not his only avoidance of the embrace of the armed services whose appropriations he struggled to restrain. On the third weekend of May 1953, Ike was heavily scheduled. He visited Williamsburg on the 177th anniversary of passage of the Virginia Burgesses' resolution favoring American independence, garnered an honorary degree at William and Mary, played golf (albeit at an officers' club in Norfolk), yachted up Chesapeake Bay, and attended church at the Naval Academy. However, his defense secretary, not he, reviewed the Armed Forces Day parade in the nation's capital. He also missed that procession in 1954. He did attend an Armed Forces Week function in North Carolina, but there the lure was the anniversary of the Mecklenburg "Declaration of Independence." His alacrity in finding alternative pageants in lieu of the main Armed Forces Day observances is noteworthy.[26]

Even with Ike's deemphasis, Armed Forces Day became a solid fixture of the American patriotic calendar. Through 1958 the Manhattan parade numbered upwards of 25,000 marchers. Crowd estimates ranged as high as 1,250,000. The last two Eisenhower years saw declines on both sides of the police barricades: 13,000 and 14,000 marchers in 1959 and 1960 and some 100,000 onlookers in each year.[27]

The services strove to provide entertainment. The displays at Bolling Field resembled "a gigantic fairgrounds" to one reporter. Army Engineers



"lent a carnival touch" to the 1954 show, erecting a "midway 'front' with gaudy sideshow signs" with messages such as "Earth Eating Dragon" captioning a bulldozer. Aerial acrobatics and ship visits always drew crowds. Weapons and simulated combat enthralled children. Kids at Bolling in 1953 used mine detectors to find dummy mines in a sandbox. In 1954 at a Bronx armory, a thousand youngsters aimed bazookas at their moms and spun about on anti-aircraft guns. In 1955, as a mock assault at Fort Jay reached a flamethrower-led climax, a throng of kids, some clad in Cub Scout or Davy Crockett gear and "brandishing side arms and pop guns," were so "carried away by the excitement" they rallied to join the attack. MPs could barely restrain these peewee reinforcements.[28]

The 1960s brought change—first apathy, then opposition. In the Kennedy years, only 10,000 marchers entertained about 50,000 spectators. Under Lyndon B. Johnson, rising opposition to the Vietnam war brought drastic alterations. Parades gave supporters of the Vietnam war a chance to show the flag—but anti-war forces mobilized too. They dogged Armed Forces Day parades and critiqued "hands-on" demonstrations and play at base open houses.

Armed Forces Day itself undermined a neighboring event. Locating it on May's third Saturday clotted a Spring patriotic calendar already crowded with Loyalty, Mother's, Memorial and Flag Day. But the heaviest damage befell I Am An American Day. It and Armed Forces Day usually shared a weekend, doubling demands on bands and marchers and producing patriotic overload. Despite its legal seniority, the patrons of I Am An American Day rescheduled their event. Their good intentions proved fatal.

By 1951, I Am An American Day sponsors like the American Bar Association, American Legion, NEA, B'nai B'rith, National Conference on Citizenship and Justice Department lobbied to move it to September 17, when the Constitution was signed, and to rename it Citizenship Day.[29] Urging the change, a Justice Department official cited both spring's patriotic gridlock and iffy weather. While Washington's 1951 Armed Forces Day lured over 200,000 people, I Am An American Day drew a mere 3,000. The fall, he said, better suited schools, which could adopt "'carry on' programs." Congress approved the shift in February 1952.[30]

Outraged I Am An American Day partisans implored Truman to reverse the deformation. One linked it to a "vicious trend" away from Americanism toward "'One World'—'World Federalism.'" The Hearst

press assailed "the little man in the White House." What next—would Citizenship Day become "World Citizenship Day"?[31] Sons of the American Revolution expressed a similar fear. Constitution Day's patrons also protested sharing September 17.[32]

Purists sought a reversal. One blamed the new date for halving attendance. It found entertainers busy with new shows, civic groups unfocused after the summer break and citizens who had welcomed a spring day in the park now contemplating winter hibernation. One founder of I Am An American Day took heart that many state governors kept on proclaiming it in spring. Also confusing, for a time some jurisdictions still used the old name "I Am An American Day" in September, and some organizations employed the old date.[33] I Am An American Day, which could once draw a million people to Central Park, was throttled, and its new incarnation also clouded the status of Constitution Day.

Patriots clamored for more events. Some latter-day isolationists would declare October 23 United States Day to counter the erosion of American liberties under "world government and law by treaty with the alien controlled United Nations." To a call for a United States Week, Frederic Fox, the presidential aide who handled observance of patriotic and devotional events, gently replied that, with Columbus Day, Citizenship Day, United Nations Day, a National Day of Prayer and Civil Defense Week, the season was too crowded already.[34]

A clergyman who wrote speeches for Eisenhower, Fox knew the limits of public observancy. His duties included energizing the annual National Day of Prayer that Congress mandated in 1952. Truman scheduled the first one on July Fourth. Subsequent dates varied; none worked well. The day lacked "focus." In 1957 Fox selected the first Wednesday in October, a nice fit on church calendars. Still no pulse. In 1958 Ike read a "longer-than-usual" Proclamation at a news conference. A special Psalm was chosen. Still, attendance at Ike's church remained flat. Only twenty-three people, bodyguards included, worshiped at the 1960 presidential service. Yet the National Day of Prayer, with "heavy holy momentum," lived on.[35]

The day coincided with a rising national religiosity. A toy firm offered a doll whose flexible knees enabled it to kneel in prayer. Congress added the phrase "under God" to the Pledge of Allegiance in 1954. Signing the law on Flag Day, Ike praised it for "reaffirming the transcendence of religious faith in America's heritage and future." The motto "In God We Trust" became official on coins and in 1954 went on a stamp. Since this stamp



would often be sent overseas, a sponsor exulted at the now-global message "that we, as Americans, believe in spiritual values." Ike, most of his cabinet and leaders of the three major faiths introduced the stamp on national television. Himself unchurched until his election, Ike understood that the nation and its leader needed to be religiously anchored.[36]

In keeping with that aim, the Fraternal Order of Eagles promoted the new stamp. The American Legion sponsored an annual "Back to God" program. On February 1, 1953, Ike filmed a message to a religious service televised from New York; on hand in person, his vice president declared Americans uniquely privileged to hear the president pray at his inauguration. On July 4, 1953, Ike, Nixon and the cabinet launched "The March of Freedom," a movement to defend the seven freedoms listed in the Twenty-third Psalm and so affirm America's "spiritual heritage" and the divine basis of its freedoms.[37]

Civic, veterans, and fraternal organizations also worked to broaden patriotic observance. Sertoma International gave copies of the Declaration of Independence to schoolkids and in 1952 began a drive to have the National Anthem sung at sports events, providing singers and handing out the lyrics. In 1955, at the American Legion's behest the National Football League changed a prescribed referee's signal. The previous sign had frustrated Legionnaires seeking to instruct grade-schoolers: they snapped off a flag salute only to find that the kids thought it denoted unnecessary roughness. In 1958 the American Heritage Foundation determined to supply every school in the nation with a high-fidelity recording of the National Anthem.[38]

Civic activists labored to make holidays more patriotic. Conscious of his role as leader of national rites, John F. Kennedy supported such efforts. In 1961 one of his aides researched how often Eisenhower had taken part in Memorial Day ceremonies at Arlington Cemetery. (He went to four and sent deputies four other times.) Though Kennedy considered the day "almost a religious holiday," he sent a substitute.[39]

On July 4, 1962, Kennedy spoke at Independence Hall in Philadelphia. In 1963 he endorsed a campaign to "Ring the Bells for Freedom." Over his signature and with his picture on the cover, *This Week Magazine* ran a story heralding the revival of bell-ringing on July Fourth, as first espoused by John Adams. "All over America, at the time the Liberty Bell in Philadelphia is given a ceremonial tap, bells in churches, schools and public buildings will ring out a message of liberty and independence."[40]

Sponsors continued to lament public inattentiveness to the numerous occasions for patriotic expression. Patriotic days shared a natural history. Early on, they had vibrancy, but then routine set in. A civic holiday was easily preempted by a beach outing. Guardians of these days protested and strove to reinfuse them with their original meanings, but often to no avail.

Los Angeles Mayor Fletcher Bowron encountered the problem in 1946. He would not make June 14, the centenary of the raising of the Bear Flag at Sonoma, a holiday. He preferred to mark the centennial of the raising of the American flag over Los Angeles, on August 13, but he also fretted that "hardly a corporal's guard" attended the city's Memorial Day rites two weeks before, "but instead the big majority spent the day in search of pleasure" and in "recreation other than for purposes patriotic."[41]

In the 1950s, distempers could strike swiftly at America's celebratory nerve. Competition offered one threat. Loyalty Day lasted longer than I Am An American Day, but its patent on May Day stood for only eleven years; then the upstart Law Day materialized. The lifespan of patriotic observances could be cruelly short.[42]

Sometimes competing purposes undercut patriotic content. In 1952, after just the third Armed Forces Day, *New York Times* military affairs correspondent Hanson W. Baldwin lamented how the observance had strayed from its original purpose. Energies were squandered on "justification for past arms expenditures" and "pleas for even greater strength." Deeper meaning had vanished. "The advertising urge in the United States, with strong backing from the Pentagon," threatened to make Armed Forces Day "like many of the other national anniversaries that have been so commercially and shamelessly exploited into an observation without a meaning, a monument of tinsel, a day without symbol."[43] Baldwin was not alone in ruing the nation's inability to celebrate seriously. Those who complained that fellow-citizens failed to approach occasions for patriotism or reverence with sufficient solemnity faced an ongoing existential struggle, one which offered occasional successes, but no final victory.