



By: TA | AP Insight

America celebrates its 250th birthday gripped by political polarization



The 250th anniversary of American independence is colliding with a country gripped by political polarization and a heat wave bearing down on millions of people across multiple states as celebrations get underway across the United States on Saturday.

The signing of the Declaration of Independence, one of history's most celebrated articulations of democratic ambitions, is being marked in myriad ways.

President Donald Trump, set to take a central role in festivities, plans to speak on the National Mall in Washington ahead of what's being billed as a historically enormous fireworks show that will rain down over the nation's capital.

The president was in South Dakota at Mount Rushmore on Friday, where he delivered a **dark speech** about the threat of communism in the U.S. as the chiseled images of four of his most prominent predecessors loomed behind him.

Elsewhere, fireworks are scheduled to be set off Saturday over Navy Pier in Chicago and against the skyline of New York City.

New York hosted a ball drop at midnight to usher in the holiday with the same fanfare as New Year's Eve and saw tall ships parade pass the Statue of Liberty in a call back to the fanfare around America's 200th anniversary in 1976.

Bristol, Rhode Island, describes itself as home of the nation's oldest Independence Day celebrations dating to 1785.

In Los Angeles, Queen Latifah will host a concert featuring performances by The Smashing Pumpkins and Chris Stapleton. Chaka Khan is billed as a special guest.

Anticipation for the milestone holiday has been building for much of the year, serving as an opportunity for Americans to reflect on their complicated history as onetime colonists of an empire who became a superpower of their own.

Celebrations months in the making had to adjust or cancel activities entirely as much of the East Coast sweltered under heat that approached and in many cases surpassed triple digits.

Heat is defining the big weekend in many places

In Washington, the **Great American State Fair** was closed for several hours Friday afternoon during the worst of the heat.

The city's main Independence Day parade scheduled for Saturday was canceled, but a smaller one rolled along in the Capitol Hill neighborhood in the morning as onlookers sought shade under trees along the route.

To the chagrin of many on the East Coast, the weather was downright pleasant on the other side of the country. The Pacific Northwest enjoyed temperatures in the 60s on Friday with a few light showers.

Plenty of other American pastimes are overlapping with the holiday

Plenty of other American pastimes are overlapping with the holiday.

More than a dozen Major League Baseball games are on the schedule for Saturday.

The World Cup, being hosted in the U.S. for the first time in 32 years, will have matches in Houston and Philadelphia on Saturday following a nail-biter overtime win by Argentina over Cape Verde on Friday outside Miami.

Pop culture enthusiasts can obsess over Taylor Swift's Friday wedding to football player Travis Kelce at New York City's Madison Square Garden. And Madonna released her 15th studio album, a collection of dance tracks.

An uneasy nation gets ready to celebrate

The celebrations are unfolding against the backdrop of a deep divide this election year that has been expanding for years, visible in everything from political expression to cultural norms to age-old questions over race, class and immigration.

At Mount Rushmore on Friday, Trump spoke of communism as a "mortal threat to American liberty."

"It is the greatest threat to our country, including World War I, World War II, Pearl Harbor or even 9/11," the Republican president said.



At Mount Rushmore, Donald Trump spoke of communism as a "mortal threat to American liberty"

Without naming Trump, New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani, a Democrat who is also a democratic socialist and recently backed several successful congressional candidates in their primaries, appeared to reference Trump during a speech Friday.

"Those ideals upon which our nation was built – they are strong enough to endure any authoritarian regime, but only if we reach for them," he said.

To former Democratic President Bill Clinton, this anniversary milestone comes at a time of "renewed questions about America's future and role in the world, and serious threats to our own institutions and to our democracy itself."

While critical of "the people in charge," he said in a statement that "there is still nothing wrong with America that cannot be cured by what's right with America."

Ahead of the holiday, auto technician Joe Fuqua-Bejarano in Topeka, Kansas, sized up "what makes us awesome" as a people. It is clearly not the politics, in his view, but rather resilience.

"We've just all got to find unity somewhere, whether that's in laughter or perseverance, and keep everybody cool," he said from the fireworks stand where he is doing a booming business as a side hustle.

Jerry Chin of Newcastle, Washington, said he wasn't aware that the U.S. was celebrating its 250th anniversary and planned to stay low-key around the holiday.

He and his wife generally skip the fireworks and instead stay home with their fearful dogs to keep them calm.

"America's a great place," he said, "but there are some concerns."