



The Fifth of July Letter

Remember. Reflect. Renew.

THE FIFTH OF JULY LETTER

An Open Letter to the American People

July 5, 2026

"Remember the days of old; consider the years of many generations."

Deuteronomy 32:7 (ESV)

Dear America,

Every family tells stories.

Every nation does too.

Yesterday...

you celebrated your birthday.

And you should have.

Nations should celebrate God's goodness.

Families should gather.

Children should laugh.

Songs should be sung.

Birthdays matter.

But birthdays do more than celebrate where we are.

They invite us to remember how we arrived.

Yesterday...

America celebrated her promise.

Today...

let us remember the price.

Because there has always been more than one American experience.

The America celebrated yesterday...

was not the only America that has been lived.

Some inherited liberty.

Others waited generations for liberty to reach their doorstep.

Some passed down family names with pride.

Others are still searching for names that disappeared somewhere between an auction block and a census record.

I know something about that search.

For years I have traced my own family's story through courthouse records, church records, military records, and faded census pages, searching for names that history nearly erased.

That journey taught me something.

History is never merely about events.

History is about people.

People who laughed.

People who prayed.

People who suffered.

People who hoped.

People who believed this nation could become everything it promised to be.

America...

if we are going to celebrate your story...

let us tell your whole story.

The beautiful chapters...

and the broken ones.

The victories...

and the victims.

The promises...

and the price.

The greatest threat to our future...

is not remembering too much.

It is remembering too little.

History is never dangerous because it tells the truth.

History becomes dangerous when only part of the truth is remembered.

Yesterday...

we celebrated your birth.

Today...

we remember your journey.

Because before America can write her next chapter...

she must first have the courage...

to read every page that came before it.

II

Pull Up Another Chair

The Witnesses

America...

If we are going to tell your story...

we must first hear from your people.

History is not merely made of dates.

It is made of lives.

Lives that loved.

Lives that labored.

Lives that suffered.

Lives that persevered.

Pull up another chair.

John Ross has something to tell us.

As Principal Chief of the Cherokee Nation, he pleaded for justice through every legal means available to him. Yet in 1838 thousands of Cherokee men, women, and children were forced from the land of their ancestors. The journey became known as the Trail of Tears. More than four thousand Cherokee people died before reaching what is now Oklahoma.

The road still remembers their footsteps.

America...

Remember them.

Pull up another chair.

Harriet Jacobs has something to tell us.

Born into slavery, she hid for years in a space scarcely large enough for a person to survive, choosing confinement over surrender so she could remain near her children. Through her own words, she showed the world that slavery stole far more than labor.

It tore apart families.

It fractured identities.

It broke hearts.

America...

Remember her.

Pull up another chair.

J. B. Stradford has something to tell us.

He built one of the finest hotels in Greenwood, Tulsa—a community that became known across America for Black enterprise, faith, and perseverance. Then, in 1921, violence reduced homes, churches, schools, and businesses to ashes.

The buildings were destroyed.

The dignity of the people was not.

America...

Remember them.

Pull up another chair.

Medgar Evers has something to tell us.

He wore the uniform of the United States during World War II.

He returned home believing the liberty he defended abroad should also flourish here.

Instead of giving up, he gave himself to the cause of justice until hatred ended his life in 1963.
Even then...
his hope outlived his murder.
America...
Remember him.
These are not interruptions to your story.
They are your story.
Not all of it.
But a part of it no nation can afford to forget.
If we celebrate the Declaration of Independence...
let us also remember those who waited for its promise.
If we celebrate liberty...
let us also remember those who carried its cost.
If we celebrate freedom...
let us also remember those who prayed until freedom became more than words written on paper.
History is not made only by presidents...
or generals...
or judges.
History is also made by mothers who refused to stop loving...
fathers who refused to stop working...
pastors who refused to stop preaching...
churches that refused to stop praying...
and ordinary Americans who refused to surrender hope.
Yesterday...
we celebrated America's birth.
Today...
we have listened to some of her witnesses.
Tomorrow...
the question belongs to us.
What kind of America will our testimony leave behind?

III

America's Answer

The witnesses have spoken.
Their testimony has been entered into the record.
Now...
America...
it is your turn.
Frederick Douglass asked his question on July 5, 1852.

History has been answering it ever since.

Not with one speech.

Not with one election.

Not with one Supreme Court decision.

Not with one president.

But one generation...

after another.

Sometimes...

America answered with courage.

Sometimes...

with silence.

Sometimes...

with justice.

Sometimes...

with fear.

There were moments when the promise of America seemed almost within reach.

Families reunited.

Churches multiplied.

Schools were built.

Businesses flourished.

Communities believed that liberty was finally finding its way to every doorstep.

For a moment...

it seemed that the words written on parchment...

might finally become reality in everyday life.

But history reminds us...

progress has never traveled a straight road.

Every step toward justice met resistance.

Every door that opened...

was met by another that closed.

Every victory carried the weight of another struggle still unfinished.

Yet something remarkable happened.

Hope refused to die.

Pastors kept preaching.

Teachers kept teaching.

Parents kept believing.

Children kept learning.

Neighbors kept helping neighbors.

The Black Church kept singing.

The Native elder kept remembering.
The immigrant kept believing.
The soldier kept serving.
Ordinary Americans kept building a nation...
even when that nation had not yet become everything it promised to be.
That...
is also America's story.
Not merely suffering.
But perseverance.
Not merely injustice.
But resilience.
Not merely broken promises.
But people who refused to stop believing that promises could still be kept.
America...
remember them too.
Because every generation leaves an answer...
to Frederick Douglass.
The question is no longer...
"What did they do?"
The question is...
"What will we do?"
History has handed us the pen.
The next chapter...
has not yet been written.

IV

The America We Leave Behind
Yesterday...
our children watched fireworks.
Tomorrow...
they will read history.
The question is not whether they will remember America.
The question is...
which America will they remember?
Will they inherit a story polished until every scar disappears?
Or a story honest enough to make them wiser?
Will they know the names of presidents...
but never the names of mothers whose prayers carried generations?
Will they know military victories...

but never the courage of children who walked into classrooms knowing hatred waited at the door?

Will they know famous speeches...

but never the quiet faith of ordinary people who kept believing that America could become better than she had been?

History belongs to all of us.

Not because every American has lived the same story.

But because every American now shares the same responsibility.

To tell it honestly.

To preserve it faithfully.

To pass it on courageously.

The greatest inheritance we can leave our children...

is not wealth.

Not monuments.

Not political victories.

It is truth.

Truth builds trust.

Truth builds character.

Truth builds nations.

America...

if we love you...

let us love you honestly.

If we celebrate you...

let us celebrate you truthfully.

If we tell your story...

let us tell your whole story.

Not to shame those who came before us.

But to honor those who endured...

and to better serve those who will come after us.

Yesterday...

we celebrated your birth.

Today...

we have remembered your journey.

Tomorrow...

our children will decide what kind of nation they will become.

May they inherit more than our celebrations.

May they inherit our honesty.

May they inherit our courage.

May they inherit our willingness to face every chapter of our history with humility...

and every chapter of our future with hope.
Because America's greatest days...
will never be found by forgetting yesterday.
They will be found by learning from it.
And perhaps...
the greatest gift we can give the next generation...
is not the illusion of a perfect past...
but the courage to build a more faithful future.
May God grant America the wisdom to remember...
the humility to learn...
the courage to change...
and the grace to become.

V

The Question That Still Remains

Nearly one hundred seventy-five years ago...
Frederick Douglass stood before America on July 5, 1852, and asked a question that reached far
beyond his own generation.
He did not ask whether America was powerful.
He did not ask whether America was prosperous.
He did not ask whether America was admired.
He asked whether America would become what she claimed to be.
His question has echoed through every generation since.
It echoed through Reconstruction.
It echoed through the long years of segregation.
It echoed through church sanctuaries where prayers rose for justice.
It echoed across bridges where peaceful marchers faced violence.
It echoed in classrooms...
courtrooms...
neighborhoods...
and homes.
It still echoes today.
Because every generation must answer the same question.
Not merely with words.
But with the lives it lives.
America...
History is not asking whether our ancestors were perfect.
They were not.
History is asking whether we are willing to learn from both their greatness...

and their failures.

Will we tell our children only what makes us comfortable?

Or will we trust them with the truth?

Will we preserve only monuments?

Or will we also preserve memory?

Will we celebrate freedom...

while forgetting those who waited for its promises?

Or will we have the courage to say...

"This is all of our story."

Because truth does not weaken a nation.

Truth strengthens it.

Truth humbles it.

Truth prepares it for tomorrow.

The question Frederick Douglass asked has not disappeared.

It has simply become ours.

America...

How will we answer?

VI

A Prayer for America

There is one final chair at this table.

It belongs to every one of us.

For history has spoken.

The witnesses have testified.

The question has been asked.

Now...

our answer will not be written only with ink.

It will be written with the kind of people we choose to become.

I love America.

I thank God for her blessings.

I celebrate her courage.

I honor those who built her.

I grieve the wounds she has carried.

And I believe...

with all my heart...

that our greatest days will not come because we forget our past.

They will come because we learn from it.

Scripture teaches us,

"You shall know the truth, and the truth will set you free." (John 8:32, ESV)

Freedom has never feared the truth.
Only fear fears the truth.
So today...
I pray for America.
May God give us the courage...
to remember honestly.
The humility...
to repent where necessary.
The wisdom...
to preserve what is good.
The grace...
to forgive where forgiveness is needed.
And the faith...
to believe that the Author of history...
is still writing.
The compassion to honor every life.
And the faith to keep reaching toward the ideals we have not yet fully attained.
May He teach us to love our country enough...
to tell her the truth.
May He teach us to love one another enough...
to listen before we speak.
May He teach us to leave our children more than celebrations.
May we leave them character.
More than monuments.
May we leave them truth.
More than memories.
May we leave them hope.
Yesterday...
we celebrated America's birth.
Today...
we remembered America's story.
Tomorrow...
let us write a chapter worthy of those who will one day remember us.
With hope.
With humility.
With gratitude.
And with faith in Almighty God,
Pastor Teron V. Gaddis

"He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" Micah 6:8 (ESV)