

This Day in History... September 9, 1776

The “United Colonies” Become “United States”

On September 9, 1776, the Second Continental Congress declared that the United Colonies would now be known as the United States.

Richard Henry Lee may have been one of the first people to officially refer to America as the “United States.” On June 7, 1776, he submitted a resolution to Congress stating “That these United Colonies are, and of right ought to be, free and independent States, that they are absolved from all allegiance to the

British Crown, and that all political connection between them and the State of Great Britain is, and ought to be, totally dissolved.” Congress approved his resolution on July 2 – a date future president John Adams believed would be one of the most celebrated in American history. However, the approval of Thomas Jefferson’s Declaration of Independence two days later received that honor.



Jefferson is often credited with coining the phrase, “United States of America.”

Jefferson is also largely credited with introducing the phrase “United States.” In the rough draft of his declaration, he included a headline that read, “A Declaration by the Representatives of the UNITED STATES OF AMERICA in General Congress assembled.” This was changed in the final version to read, “The unanimous Declaration of the thirteen united States of America.” His Declaration also stated “That these United Colonies are, and of Right ought to be FREE AND INDEPENDENT STATES.” For these inclusions, Jefferson is often credited as having coined the phrase.



1992 stamp with “USA” as the central design element



These stamps commemorate the First Continental Congress, which met in 1774. The Second Continental Congress convened the following year to manage the war effort and declare independence, among other things.



1869 Declaration of Independence Pictorial picturing 42 people!

By September, the Declaration of Independence was drafted, signed, and sent to Great Britain. When Congress met on September 9, they passed a number of important resolutions, including payments for the army. Their fifth resolution that day read, “That in all continental commissions, and other instruments, where, heretofore, the words ‘United Colonies’ have been used, the stile be altered for the future to the ‘United States.’”

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