

# WHAT SO ★ PROUDLY ★ WE HAIL

*The American Soul in Story, Speech, and Song*

## Independence Day

WENDELL BERRY

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*Not everyone celebrates Independence Day with parades, barbecues, and fireworks, or with a reading of the Declaration of Independence. In this poem, the prolific author, cultural critic, and farmer Wendell Berry (b. 1934) celebrates the holiday in the woods.*

*What does he mean by suggesting that, “As America from England, [so] the woods stands free from politics and anthems”? The poet claims that it is “in the woods [where] I stand free, knowing my land.” What does he mean? Is America the land? Are the woods America? Is our freedom at bottom not at all civic or political? (Compare Berry on this with William Cullen Bryant’s presentation of our original natural liberty in “The Antiquity of Freedom.”)*

*What is Berry suggesting by transforming “My country, ’tis of thee, sweet land of liberty, of thee I sing” into “My country, tis of the drying pools along Camp Branch I sing”? What, according to the poem, are the songs of God? Does this way of celebrating Independence Day represent a fulfillment of the American idea of freedom—which includes a secure right to pursue happiness, as each of us sees fit—or is it a distortion of it? To what extent does our freedom to enjoy private life—and the world of nature—rest on our political institutions and on the attachment of our fellow citizens to the well being of the republic—that is, on politics and anthems?*

Between painting a roof yesterday and the hay  
harvest tomorrow, a holiday in the woods  
under the grooved trunks and branches, the roof  
of leaves lighted and shadowed by the sky.

Read the complete poem at

<http://books.google.com/books?id=P7CkOmkkZZMC&lpg=PA46&dq=wendell%20berry%20independence%20day%20between%20%20painting&pg=PA46#v=onepage&q=wendell%20berry%20independence%20day%20between%20%20painting&f=false>.