

John Quincy Adams's Fourth of July 1821 Address



ABOUT THE READING John Quincy Adams was Secretary of State from 1817 to 1825. During that time he helped expand the borders of the United States. In the speech quoted below, Adams highlights American ideals. He also describes the country's role in the world. His ideas about staying out of Europe's problems helped form what became the Monroe Doctrine.

VOCABULARY

inextinguishable enduring

disdainful scornful

lapse passage

asserting declaring

inveterate unchanging



As you read note what Adams says about the way America relates to other countries.

What has America done for the benefit of mankind? Let our answer be this: America, with the same voice which spoke herself into existence as a nation, proclaimed to mankind the **inextinguishable** rights of human nature, and the only lawful foundations of government. America, in the assembly of nations, since her admission among them, has invariably, though often fruitlessly, held forth to them the hand of honest friendship, of equal freedom, of generous reciprocity. She has uniformly spoken among them, though often to heedless and **disdainful** ears, the language of equal liberty, of equal justice, and of equal rights. She has, in the **lapse** of nearly half a century, without a single exception, respected the independence of other nations while **asserting** and maintaining her own. She has abstained from interference in the concerns of others, even when conflict has been for principles to which she clings, as to the last vital drop that visits the heart. She has

America has always tried to stay on good terms with all other countries. It has not always been successful.

America has stayed out of other countries' fights. This is true even when the fights are about important ideals like freedom.

Source: John Quincy Adams, Address to Congress July 4, 1821 as quoted in *John Quincy Adams and American Continental Empire: Letters, Papers and Speeches*, edited by Walter LaFeber (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1965), pp. 42–46.

seen that probably for centuries to come, all the contests of . . . the European world, will be contests of **inveterate** power, and emerging right. Wherever the standard of freedom and Independence has been or shall be unfurled, there will her heart, her [blessings] and her prayers be. But she goes not abroad, in search of monsters to destroy. She is the well-wisher to the freedom and independence of all. She is the champion and vindicator only of her own. She will commend the general cause by the countenance of her voice, and the [kind] sympathy of her example.

America wants freedom for all but will only fight for her own. She will show her support for this ideal by the way she speaks and acts.

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

1. According to Adams, how did other countries treat America when it tried to be friendly?

2. How does Adams say that America will promote freedom in the world?

3. How do you think the leaders of other countries would feel about the ideas in this address?
