

## Presidential Documents

**Proclamation 7191 of April 30, 1999**

**Law Day, U.S.A., 1999**

**By the President of the United States of America**

### **A Proclamation**

America's founders recognized that the rule of law is the greatest guarantor of freedom and justice, the crucial barricade protecting civilization from chaos, democracy from tyranny. Among the chief grievances they enumerated in the Declaration of Independence were that "the present King of Great Britain . . . has refused his Assent to Laws, the most wholesome and necessary for the public Good. . . . He has made Judges dependent on his Will alone, for the Tenure of their Offices, and the Amount and Payment of their Salaries."

The Constitution and Bill of Rights reflect our founders' reverence for and faith in the rule of law, and they stand as an enduring charter of freedom and equality that continues to protect our fundamental rights today. But only the passage of additional laws over time has fulfilled the promise of justice enshrined in that charter. Amendments abolishing slavery and guaranteeing due process and equal protection to everyone came only after the Civil War—nearly 80 years after the ratification of the Constitution. It took almost another century, and the courageous and persistent efforts of lawyers such as Thurgood Marshall, to establish that the equal protection clause prohibits governments from enforcing segregation in schools and other public arenas. Women did not gain the right to vote until the ratification of the 19th Amendment in 1920.

During the past 4 decades, our Nation has continued to pursue the ideals of justice and equality. President Kennedy and President Johnson fought to enact what would become the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, laws that safeguard the rights of citizens to vote, to work, to use public accommodations, and to attend school free from illegal discrimination. In 1967, President Johnson signed the Age Discrimination in Employment Act to protect older Americans against discriminatory treatment in their jobs.

In 1990, President Bush signed into law the Americans with Disabilities Act, landmark legislation that recognizes the right of people with disabilities to have equal opportunity for employment and equal access to public services. Building on the Americans with Disabilities Act, I announced a new initiative in January of this year to remove significant barriers that prevent people with disabilities from joining the work force. We will invest more than two billion dollars over the next 5 years to provide tax credits to offset critical and expensive transportation costs, increased funding for assistive technology research, and greater access to health care for people with disabilities.

In May of 1998, I was proud to sign Executive Order 13087, which amends Federal equal employment opportunity policy to prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation in the Federal civilian work force. My Administration is working with congressional leaders to pass the Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA), which would prohibit most private employers from firing good workers solely because they are gay or lesbian. And we must secure equal pay legislation to ensure that women and minority employees receive fair compensation for their work.

America's trust in the rule of law and our continuing quest for equality under the law have defined our history for more than 200 years. Now, as we look forward to a new century, we must renew our commitment to the spirit of our Constitution and the strong foundation of civil rights laws that guarantee both our freedom and our security. We must reaffirm our goal of building an America where all people have an equal opportunity to reach their full potential and where no American is denied his or her rights because of race, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, religious beliefs, or disability. By doing so, we will fulfill our founders' vision of a Nation where all citizens share equally in the blessings and protections of the law.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, WILLIAM J. CLINTON, President of the United States of America, in accordance with Public Law 87-20 of April 7, 1961, do hereby proclaim May 1, 1999, as Law Day. I urge the people of the United States to consider anew how our laws protect our freedoms and contribute to our national well-being. I call upon members of the legal profession, civic associations, educators, librarians, public officials, and the media to promote the observance of this day with appropriate programs and activities. I also call upon public officials to display the flag of the United States on all government buildings throughout the day.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this thirtieth day of April, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and ninety-nine, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and twenty-third.

