Reservation Era, Native people incorporated their cultural practices into US holidays, such as Independence Day, as a way to continue their then-outlawed dances and ceremonial life.

It was actually 'illegal' to do 'Indian things' like dance or continue ceremonies, so participating in holidays like Independence Day was actually a subversive way to continue traditions and keep the US government at bay at the same time.

American flags would come to be associated with the only celebrations that were still allowed by government agents.

Sometimes, when you look at the sheer amount of diverse items that had beaded flags put on them, it seems as though the beader thought, "Stick a flag on it so we won't be thrown in jail, or shot and murdered."

One great example is how the American flag became a popular design motif among the Sioux during the latter part of the 19th century. The flag symbol was actually adopted into their culture and represents a number of meanings. It could have been a coup that was taken as a war honor, and later it became a symbol of protection.
Shirts decorated like the one above are often identified as garments of a highly select group of leaders among the Sioux. The decorations on these fine shirts have prestigious connotations, and they become popular among the elderly war veterans and the members of the tribal police. This one has flag symbols through the shirt, demonstrating how important this symbol would become in the late 1800s.

The girl's dress below is one of my favorite dresses from this era. A couple of things are significant about this dress. First, it is fully beaded. Fully beaded girls' dresses are rare – this dress was probably intended to bring prestige to a respected family. Secondly, you can see the American flag symbol at the top of the yoke. But even though the flags have red and white stripes, their white stars on blue background don't look like the traditional American 5-point stars because they aren't. These 4-point stars represent the single morning star. The morning star features greatly in Plains Indian symbolism and oral tradition. I love how the beader made this important alteration.
Many of the activities that made life meaningful were no longer possible to do. Only the women were able to maintain some of their traditional occupations. So the fact that these women combined the important roles of clothing-maker with the changing worlds around them (such as including these new symbols of protection) is really quite significant.

In memory of that era, I wish you all a safe and happy 4th of July.

*Note: The shirt and dress are from the [Fenimore Art Museum](http://www.fenimoreart.org).*

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