

“My Family Came From Soviet Union, Appreciates America’s Freedoms”

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By Karol Markowicz

NEW YORK, N.Y.—Every year, our family celebrates the day we arrived in America from the Soviet Union. The date our family was free is July 20. It has always been important to me to acknowledge how differently my life could have gone.

Nothing is promised and nothing is guaranteed, but getting to be an American had always filled me with pride and optimism. America is that shining city on a hill, and I have been blessed to inhabit it. I always believed we would overcome any problem we faced through our sheer Americanness. Our founding documents would lead us. Our common goals would blaze our path forward. We were unstoppable.

This is the first Americaversary I feel somewhat less optimistic.

On Jan. 5, 1967, in his inaugural address as California governor, Ronald Reagan famously said, “Freedom is a fragile thing, and it’s never more than one generation away from extinction.” That freedom was tested during the pandemic and came out bruised and scarred. We’ve largely moved on—talking about the abuses suffered (whether it’s the poorest children being denied the ability to go to school or people fired for not taking the vaccine) is considered living in the past.

But that recent past is having a damaging effect on our present. Last year, Americans lost trust in everything. A 2022 Gallup poll found a dramatic drop in the way Americans saw their major institutions. It wasn’t just the president and Congress: “Five other institutions are at their lowest points in at least three decades of measurement, including the church or organized religion (31 percent), newspapers (16 percent), the criminal justice system (14 percent), big business (14 percent) and the police.”

A Gallup survey this month didn’t show much improvement. Faith in “14 institutions remains near last year’s relatively low level, with none of the scores worsening or improving meaningfully.”

It wasn't just pandemic practices. The government conspired with social-media outlets to censor this newspaper's true and correct reporting on the Hunter Biden laptop to influence the 2020 presidential election. We're expected to pretend people can change their gender—or risk getting fired or arrested.

When Reagan talks of freedom, he doesn't just mean getting to vote on Election Day. I feel this lack of faith acutely, and I worry about what it means for the country I so love. While we focus on our lack of confidence in institutions, we've really lost faith in each other. We preserve our freedom through a cohesive unity we are sorely lacking—indeed, it's been under attack the last few years.

We're not supposed to acknowledge our country's uniqueness. We're not supposed to celebrate our founding. Statues of American heroes like Abraham Lincoln and Theodore Roosevelt are ripped down without a second thought. Columbus Day commemorations are largely diminished. Thanksgiving and the Fourth of July are clearly on the chopping block.

With nothing to connect us, no shared history to celebrate, we're susceptible to the exact loss of freedom Reagan warned of. When we don't trust each other or rely on each other, our country frays.

There's no easy fix. It's not as simple as one election or a change in leadership—though in the case of the divisive Biden administration it would surely help. We have to hold accountable the institutions that have so let us down.

But, more than anything, we must tune out the voices who tell us to hate our country and be ashamed of our history. There is no perfect country, and the one we have is closer than most.

The rest is up to us individually.

- Find your way back to family who have been lost over political disagreement.
- Return to religious and civic institutions and help rebuild them if they have faltered.
- Preserve our collective freedom whenever you can. We have the greatest country in the history of the world to defend.
- Those of us with an Americaversary should celebrate it loud and proud and remember, along with those blessed enough to be born here, how lucky we all are.

That shining city on a hill has times of trouble, and we are in those times now. But we have overcome those times before and should have every expectation that we will again.