

Law Day 2009 Fact Sheet

What Is Law Day? A national day set aside to celebrate the rule of law. Law Day underscores how law and the legal process have contributed to the freedoms that all Americans share.

How Did Law Day Begin?

1957—American Bar Association (ABA) President Charles S. Rhyne, a Washington, D.C., attorney, envisions a special day for celebrating our legal system.

1958—President Dwight D. Eisenhower establishes Law Day to strengthen our great heritage of liberty, justice, and equality under law.

1961—May 1 is designated by joint resolution of Congress as the official date for celebrating Law Day.

When Is It Celebrated? May 1 is the official date, but in fact Law Day can be celebrated on any date. It often becomes Law Week (or Weeks) as Law Day planners reach out to a broad segment of the community.

How Is It Celebrated? Law Day programs are designed to help people understand how law keeps us free and how our legal system strives to achieve justice. Law Day is celebrated in schools across the country and in programs designed to reach the adult public. Thousands of programs are conducted every year.

Who Puts On Law Day? Law Day is often planned by state and local bar associations, courts, and schools in communities throughout the country. Often these groups work together to reach the largest possible audience.

What Is the Law Day 2009 Theme? A Legacy of Liberty – Celebrating Lincoln’s Bicentennial.

Why Is This Theme Important? In 2009 we will mark the bicentennial of the birth of Abraham Lincoln, regarded by many as our nation’s greatest and most eloquent president. Lincoln, who devoted much of his adult life to the practice of law, was the quintessential American lawyer-president. His background in the law informed both his actions and his oratory.

In his Gettysburg Address of 1863, Lincoln articulated his vision of American constitutional union, to be forged in the crucible of a “great civil war” and tested by the shared anguish of national sacrifice. For Lincoln, this vision begins— fourscore and seven years before—with the Declaration of Independence. The Declaration marks the origins of “a new nation, conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.”

Do the animating principles of which Lincoln spoke at Gettysburg still represent “unfinished work”? What is the role of law in fulfilling the promises of the Declaration of Independence? For Law Day 2009, we encourage efforts nationwide to commemorate Lincoln by exploring this rich and resonant theme—*A Legacy of Liberty*.