

**The original documents are located in Box 35, “7/2/76 - Remarks at a Bicentennial Ceremony at the National Archives” of the President’s Speeches and Statements: Reading Copies at the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library.**

### **Copyright Notice**

The copyright law of the United States (Title 17, United States Code) governs the making of photocopies or other reproductions of copyrighted material. Gerald Ford donated to the United States of America his copyrights in all of his unpublished writings in National Archives collections. Works prepared by U.S. Government employees as part of their official duties are in the public domain. The copyrights to materials written by other individuals or organizations are presumed to remain with them. If you think any of the information displayed in the PDF is subject to a valid copyright claim, please contact the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library.

REMARKS AT NATIONAL ARCHIVES

FRIDAY, JULY 2, 1976

~~THE INCIDENT HAS SEEN.~~

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

NATIONAL ARCHIVES

THANK YOU, MR. VICE PRESIDENT

MR. SPEAKER

MR. CHIEF JUSTICE

DISTINGUISHED GUESTS

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN

I AM STANDING BEFORE THE GREAT CHARTERS OF AMERICAN

LIBERTY UNDER LAW•

MILLIONS OF AMERICANS, BEFORE ME AND AFTER ME, WILL  
HAVE LOOKED AND LINGERED OVER THESE PRICELESS DOCUMENTS THAT  
HAVE GUIDED OUR 200 YEARS OF HIGH ADVENTURE AS "A NEW  
NATION, CONCEIVED IN LIBERTY AND DEDICATED TO THE PROPOSITION  
THAT ALL MEN ARE CREATED EQUAL."

THOSE WERE LINCOLN'S WORDS, AS HE LOOKED TO THE  
DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE FOR GUIDANCE WHEN A RAGING  
STORM OBSCURED THE CONSTITUTION. WE ARE GATHERED HERE  
TO HONOR BOTH.

EVEN THE WAY THESE PARCHMENTS ARE DISPLAYED IS

INSTRUCTIVE:

-- TOGETHER, AS THEY MUST BE HISTORICALLY UNDERSTOOD;

-- THE CONSTITUTION AND ITS FIRST 10 AMENDMENTS ON

AN EQUAL PLANE;

-- THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE PROPERLY CENTRAL /

AND ABOVE ALL.

THE DECLARATION IS THE POLARIS OF OUR POLITICAL ORDER /

THE FIXED STAR OF FREEDOM. IT IS IMPERVIOUS TO CHANGE

BECAUSE IT STATES MORAL TRUTHS THAT ARE ETERNAL.



THE CONSTITUTION PROVIDES FOR ITS OWN CHANGES,

HAVING EQUAL FORCE WITH THE ORIGINAL ARTICLES. IT BEGAN

TO CHANGE SOON AFTER IT WAS RATIFIED WHEN THE BILL OF RIGHTS

WAS ADDED. WE HAVE SINCE AMENDED IT 16 MORE TIMES AND

BEFORE WE CELEBRATE OUR 300TH BIRTHDAY THERE WILL BE MORE

CHANGES.

BUT THE DECLARATION WILL BE THERE, EXACTLY AS IT WAS  
WHEN THE CONTINENTAL CONGRESS ADOPTED IT -- AFTER ELIMINATING  
AND CHANGING SOME OF JEFFERSON'S DRAFT, MUCH TO HIS  
ANNOYANCE. JEFFERSON'S IMMORTAL WORDS WILL REMAIN, AND  
THEY WILL BE PRESERVED IN HUMAN HEARTS EVEN IF THIS ORIGINAL  
PARCHMENT SHOULD FALL VICTIM TO TIME AND FATE. , LISTEN:

"WE HOLD THESE TRUTHS TO BE SELF-EVIDENT, THAT ALL  
MEN ARE CREATED EQUAL, THAT THEY ARE ENDOWED BY THEIR  
CREATOR WITH CERTAIN UNALIENABLE RIGHTS, THAT AMONG THESE  
ARE LIFE, LIBERTY, AND THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS -- THAT TO  
SECURE THESE RIGHTS, GOVERNMENTS ARE INSTITUTED AMONG MEN  
DERIVING THEIR JUST POWERS FROM THE CONSENT OF THE GOVERNED."

THE ACT OF INDEPENDENCE, | THE ACTUAL SEPARATION OF

COLONIES AND CROWN TOOK PLACE 200 YEARS AGO TODAY, WHEN

THE DELEGATIONS OF 12 COLONIES ADOPTED RICHARD HENRY LEE'S

RESOLUTION OF INDEPENDENCE.

THE FOUNDERS EXPECTED THAT JULY <sup>2nd</sup> WOULD BE CELEBRATED AS

THE NATIONAL HOLIDAY OF THE NEWBORN REPUBLIC, BUT THEY TOOK

TWO MORE DAYS TO DEBATE AND APPROVE THIS DECLARATION, AN

ANNOUNCEMENT TO THE WORLD OF WHAT THEY HAD DONE AND OF THE

REASONS WHY.

THE DECLARATION AND OTHER GREAT DOCUMENTS OF OUR  
HERITAGE REMIND ME OF THE FLYING MACHINES ACROSS THE MALL  
IN THE NEW MUSEUM WE OPENED YESTERDAY. FROM THE SPIRIT  
OF ST. LOUIS TO THE LUNAR ORBITAL CAPSULES WE SEE VEHICLES  
THAT ENABLED AMERICANS TO CROSS VAST DISTANCES IN SPACE.

IN OUR ARCHIVES AND LIBRARIES WE FIND DOCUMENTS TO TRANSPORT

US ACROSS CENTURIES IN TIME -- BACK TO MOUNT SINAI AND THE

SEA OF GALILEE, \ TO RUNNYMEDE, \ TO THE PITCHING CABIN OF THE

MAYFLOWER, \ AND TO SWELTERING PHILADELPHIA IN MIDSUMMER

OF 1776.

IF WE MANEUVER OUR TIME VEHICLE ALONG TO 1787 WE

SEE THE SAME CHAMBER OF INDEPENDENCE HALL, WHERE THE

CONSTITUTION IS BEING DRAFTED UNDER THE STERN EYE OF

GEORGE WASHINGTON•

SOME FACES ARE FAMILIAR•



BENJAMIN FRANKLIN IS THERE, OF COURSE, AND ROGER SHERMAN

OF CONNECTICUT. THOMAS JEFFERSON HAS GONE TO PARIS;

THE QUIET GENIUS OF THIS CONVENTION IS JAMES MADISON.

BUT JEFFERSON'S GREAT PRINCIPLES ARE VERY MUCH

PRESENT. THE CONSTITUTION, WHEN IT IS DONE, WILL TRANSLATE

THE GREAT IDEAS OF THE DECLARATION INTO A LEGAL MECHANISM

FOR EFFECTIVE GOVERNMENT, WHERE THE UNALIENABLE RIGHTS OF

INDIVIDUAL AMERICANS ARE SECURE.

IN GRADE SCHOOL, WE WERE TAUGHT TO MEMORIZE THE  
FIRST AND LAST PARTS OF THE DECLARATION. NOWADAYS EVEN  
MANY SCHOLARS SKIP OVER THE LONG RECITATION OF ALLEGED  
ABUSES BY KING GEORGE III AND HIS MISGUIDED MINISTERS.

BUT OCCASIONALLY WE OUGHT TO READ THEM BECAUSE THE

INJURIES AND INVASIONS OF INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS LISTED THERE ARE

THE VERY EXCESSES OF GOVERNMENTAL POWER WHICH THE CONSTITUTION,

THE BILL OF RIGHTS AND SUBSEQUENT AMENDMENTS WERE DESIGNED

TO PREVENT.

THE FAMILIAR PARTS OF THE DECLARATION DESCRIBE THE

POSITIVES OF FREEDOM; | THE DULL PART THE NEGATIVES. NOT ALL

THE RIGHTS OF FREE PEOPLE, NOR ALL THE NECESSARY POWERS OF

GOVERNMENT, CAN BE ENUMERATED IN ONE WRITING OR FOR ALL TIME,

AS MADISON AND HIS COLLEAGUES MADE PLAIN IN THE 9TH AND

10TH AMENDMENTS.

BUT THE SOURCE OF ALL UNALIENABLE RIGHTS, THE PROPER  
PURPOSES FOR WHICH GOVERNMENTS ARE INSTITUTED AMONG MEN,  
AND THE REASONS WHY FREE PEOPLE SHOULD CONSENT TO AN EQUITABLE  
ORDERING OF THEIR GOD-GIVEN FREEDOM, HAVE NEVER BEEN BETTER  
STATED THAN BY JEFFERSON IN OUR DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE•

"LIFE, \ LIBERTY \ AND THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS"

ARE CITED AS BEING AMONG THE MOST PRECIOUS ENDOWMENTS OF

THE CREATOR, BUT NOT THE ONLY ONES. EARLIER, JEFFERSON

WROTE THAT "THE GOD WHO GAVE US LIFE | GAVE US LIBERTY

AT THE SAME TIME."

THIS BETTER EXPLAINS THE BOLD ASSERTION THAT

"ALL MEN ARE CREATED EQUAL" WHICH AMERICANS HAVE DEBATED

FOR TWO CENTURIES. WE OBVIOUSLY ARE NOT EQUAL IN SIZE,

OR WISDOM, OR STRENGTH, OR FORTUNE. BUT WE ARE ALL BORN --

HAVING HAD NOTHING AT ALL TO SAY ABOUT IT.



AND FROM THE MOMENT WE HAVE A LIFE OF OUR OWN WE HAVE A LIBERTY

OF OUR OWN, AND WE RECEIVE BOTH IN EQUAL SHARES•

WE ARE ALL BORN FREE IN THE EYES OF GOD•

THAT ETERNAL TRUTH IS THE GREAT PROMISE OF THE  
DECLARATION; BUT IT CERTAINLY WAS NOT SELF-EVIDENT TO MOST  
OF MANKIND IN 1776; | I REGRET TO SAY IT IS NOT UNIVERSALLY  
ACCEPTED IN 1976• YET THE AMERICAN ADVENTURE NOT ONLY  
PROCLAIMED IT; | FOR 200 YEARS WE HAVE CONSISTENTLY SOUGHT  
TO PROVE IT TRUE•

THE DECLARATION IS THE PROMISE OF FREEDOM; THE CONSTITUTION  
CONTINUOUSLY SEEKS THE FULFILLMENT OF FREEDOM.

THE CONSTITUTION WAS CREATED AND CONTINUES AS ITS PREAMBLE  
STATES "TO SECURE THE BLESSINGS OF LIBERTY TO OURSELVES  
AND OUR POSTERITY."

THE GREAT PROMISE OF THE DECLARATION REQUIRES FAR MORE  
THAN THE PATRIOT SACRIFICES OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION,  
MORE THAN THE LEGAL STABILIZER OF THE CONSTITUTION, MORE THAN  
LINCOLN'S SUCCESSFUL ANSWER TO THE QUESTION OF WHETHER A NATION  
SO CONCEIVED AND SO DEDICATED COULD LONG ENDURE•

WHAT DOES THE DECLARATION DECLARE?

-- THAT ALL HUMAN BEINGS HAVE CERTAIN RIGHTS AS

A GIFT FROM GOD•

-- THAT THESE RIGHTS CANNOT LAWFULLY BE TAKEN AWAY

FROM ANY MAN OR WOMAN BY ANY HUMAN AGENCY, MONARCHY

OR DEMOCRACY•

-- THAT ALL GOVERNMENTS DERIVE ~~ALL~~ THEIR JUST POWERS  
FROM THE PEOPLE, WHO CONSENT TO BE GOVERNED IN ORDER TO  
SECURE THEIR RIGHTS AND TO EFFECT THEIR SAFETY AND HAPPINESS.  
THUS, BOTH RIGHTS AND POWERS BELONG TO THE PEOPLE;  
THE RIGHTS EQUALLY APPORTIONED TO EVERY INDIVIDUAL; / THE POWERS  
TO THE PEOPLE AS A WHOLE.

THIS NOVEMBER, ~~THE~~ AMERICAN PEOPLE WILL,  
UNDER THE CONSTITUTION, AGAIN GIVE THEIR CONSENT TO BE GOVERNED.  
THIS FREE AND SECRET ACT SHOULD BE A REAFFIRMATION, BY EVERY  
ELIGIBLE AMERICAN, OF THE MUTUAL PLEDGES MADE 200 YEARS AGO  
BY JOHN HANCOCK AND THE OTHERS WHOSE UNTREMBLING SIGNATURES  
WE CAN STILL MAKE OUT.

JEFFERSON SAID THAT THE FUTURE BELONGS TO THE LIVING;

WE STAND AWED IN THE PRESENCE OF THESE GREAT CHARTERS NOT BY

THEIR BEAUTY, NOT BY THEIR ANTIQUITY, BUT BECAUSE THEY BELONG

TO US. WE RETURN THANKS THAT THEY HAVE GUIDED US SAFELY

THROUGH TWO CENTURIES OF NATIONAL INDEPENDENCE, BUT THE

EXCITEMENT OF THIS OCCASION IS THAT THEY STILL WORK.



ALL AROUND OUR NATION'S CAPITAL ARE PRICELESS

COLLECTIONS OF AMERICA'S GREAT CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE WORLD,

BUT MANY OF THEM ARE MACHINES NO LONGER USED, INVENTIONS

NO LONGER NEEDED, CLOTHES NO LONGER WORN, BOOKS NO LONGER

READ, SONGS NO LONGER SUNG.

NOT SO THE CONSTITUTION, WHICH WORKS FOR US DAILY,  
CHANGING SLOWLY TO MEET NEW NEEDS. NOT SO THE BILL OF RIGHTS,  
WHICH PROTECTS US DAY AND NIGHT IN THE EXERCISE OF OUR  
FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS - TO PRAY, TO PUBLISH, TO SPEAK  
AS WE PLEASE.

ABOVE ALL STANDS THE MAGNIFICENT DECLARATION, STILL  
THE FIXED STAR OF FREEDOM FOR THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

LET EACH OF US, IN THIS YEAR OF OUR BICENTENNIAL,

JOIN WITH THOSE BRAVE AND FAR-SIGHTED AMERICANS OF 1776.

LET US HERE AND NOW MUTUALLY PLEDGE TO THE ENNOBLING AND

ENDURING PRINCIPLES OF THE DECLARATION OUR LIVES,

OUR FORTUNES AND OUR SACRED HONOR.

AND LET US DO SO, AS THEY DID, WITH FIRM RELIANCE  
ON THE PROTECTION OF DIVINE PROVIDENCE, THAT THE FUTURE  
OF THIS LAND WE LOVE MAY BE EVER BRIGHTER FOR OUR CHILDREN  
AND FOR GENERATIONS OF AMERICANS YET TO BE BORN.

END OF TEXT