

Released for newspaper use eleven o'clock  
in the forenoon, Saturday, July 4, 1936.

INDEPENDENCE DAY ADDRESS

BY

HONORABLE HOMER CUMMINGS  
C. G.

ATTORNEY GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES

DELIVERED JULY 4, 1936, AT

A MEETING OF THE SOCIETY OF TAMMANY or COLUMBIAN  
ORDER OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK.

Members and Friends of the Society of Tammany or  
Columbian Order in the City of New York:

When our forefathers issued the Declaration of Independence they not only established a new nation, but they also recorded the triumph of ideals of government to which we have ever since adhered.

The Fourth of July is not a date on the calendar. It is the seal of America's compact with liberty.

Implicit in the revolutionary phrases of the Declaration of Independence are the sanctions of all just governments, as well as the stirring concept that such governments are the servants and not the masters of human need. Of necessity, such a government as ours was an experiment; but it was a glorious, a successful experiment, and it stands today as the hope of modern civilization. In many quarters there are those who, pointing to the swift and even fundamental changes that have overtaken other peoples in other parts of the world, freely predict a break-up of the foundations of our institutions. These forebodings of disaster were especially frequent in 1932 and during the early part of 1933, when our country found itself in a period of unexampled industrial and financial chaos. Sheer necessity gnawed at the roots of democracy. For reasons which it is not here necessary to explore, our government had ceased to be effective. It no longer served the people it was set up to serve. In large areas of our country, amongst disillusioned and embittered groups of our people, serious outbreaks were recurring with alarming frequency. Hunger and fear, the twin breeders of revolution, stared at us with menacing eyes. Since that time, under the inspiring leadership of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, hunger has been appeased, fear has been banished, hope has re-

entered American homes, orderly governmental processes have been restored, and a great cleansing and rebuilding program is proceeding towards its legitimate conclusion. These achievements are fresh tributes to American statesmanship and to the resilience and patience of our people. They demonstrate of what stout stuff America is made. But they teach us, too, how essential it is that the freedom our fathers won should not be forfeited by a complacent acquiescence in the face of old evils that recur in new forms. Indeed, the lessons of the revolution would be entirely lost to us if we imagined that all that freedom means is political liberty.

Jefferson saw much farther than that and set up in the Declaration of Independence standards of guidance for the government that made it not only an instrument of resistance to tyranny from whatever source that tyranny came, but also a means whereby the needs of our people should be satisfied and their safety and happiness assured as time progressed.

After the struggle for religious liberty had been won and the struggle for political liberty was the urgent cause of the day, many leaders, unconscious of what was going forward, still talked in terms of the previous conflict. Now that political liberty has been won, and our fundamental rights, including the right to assemble, to petition, to vote, to aspire to office, to maintain a free press, free discussion and the right of free speech, are no longer challenged and no longer in peril, there are men, and the names of many of them will occur to you, who still talk in ancient phrases, worry about uncontraverted things, vex our ears with impotent discussion about matters already settled, and have neither words nor thought nor concern for the struggle to secure a larger measure of economic freedom. President Roosevelt

expressed this issue with extraordinary clarity when, a few days ago, he declared, in a speech that is destined to become one of the great historic utterances of American statesmen:

"Liberty requires opportunity to make a living - a living decent according to the standard of the time, a living which gives man not only enough to live by, but something to live for."

"For too many of us the political equality we once had won was meaningless in the face of economic inequality. \* \* \* For too many of us life was no longer free; liberty no longer real; men could no longer follow the pursuit of happiness."

"Today we stand committed to the proposition that freedom is no half and half affair. If the average citizen is guaranteed equal opportunity in the polling place, he must have equal opportunity in the market place."

Nor is it strange that the necessity has arisen to stress these modern aspects of liberty. America was not finished when the Declaration of Independence was issued. That was the day when America began. We are no longer a nation whose problems are merely local.

Manufacturing, merchandising, transportation, agriculture, mining, mass production, problems of employment and unemployment, strikes and other labor difficulties are upon a national scale; or, if local in scope, are national in effect. Child labor in one state may disrupt an industry in another. Sweat shops not only degrade the workers who are immediately exploited but, also, spread their poison throughout the land. Predatory

crime and roving bands of bank robbers and kidnapers do not pause at state or county lines and ask permission to pass.

We have learned, indeed, we had to learn, that local law enforcement agencies, no matter how well trained or effective in their local spheres, could not cope with interstate crime without national aid. Goods and people now move as quickly from San Francisco to New York as they once moved from New York to Philadelphia. From Chicago to Washington is no more distant in time, today, than from Concord to Boston, by foot or horse, one hundred years ago.

President Washington was never heard at one time by more than a small fraction of the people; nor was Lincoln or even Wilson. The immortal words of Jefferson reached the people of America by a very slow process, covering weeks of time.

The theory of our government has not changed, but the times have changed, and invention has altered the scope and tempo of our life. There are many influential and intelligent citizens who are disturbed by these things and indulge fears, largely artificial, that something terrible is happening to America. They seek to interpret the law and the Constitution as a check rather than as a guide to the flow of life. They fling themselves athwart the currents of existence and order them to pause. These futile gestures bring only disappointment and bitterness to those who indulge them. Nothing is happening to America, except that it is growing and that it is insisting that it shall not lose its freedom in the process.

In the presence of chaos, disaster or economic breakdown, justice will not tolerate the futile plea, "it cannot be done". In a word, what we seek

is to make democracy work. No living institution is ever finished; no rigid formula for the solution of human problems is ever apt to be devised. The teachings of history repeatedly admonish us that what one period regards as radical another comes to consider as conservative. The equity stirring today becomes the law of tomorrow. Jefferson foresaw this clearly and pointed it out time and time again. Society, and even the State, in the ultimate analysis, is life and not something built to a formula. It grows, it lives, it survives by virtue of some inner force which is the life current of its era. No one can note the superb elan with which men have met the problems and the tribulations of these latter days without believing that this current is still undefiled and capable of carrying us safely to our destination.

And, so we turn, again and again, with increasing gratitude, to the Declaration of Independence. Its far-seeing philosophy, its friendly, human touch, its faith in the destiny of man --- these things cheer and strengthen us amid the problems of a modern world and confirm us in the faith that America is destined to enter wider fields of freedom than we have thus far known.

- - - - -