

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
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AN ADDRESS

By

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DELIVERED

At The

NATIONAL 4-H CLUB  
CITIZENSHIP CEREMONY

Jefferson Memorial

Washington, D.C.

Tuesday, June 17, 1947

2:00 P. M.

I am especially happy to talk to you on this inspiring occasion - the citizenship ceremony of the 4-H Clubs.

The Thomas Jefferson Memorial is a most appropriate setting for this impressive occasion.

This Shrine of Democracy, only recently dedicated, honors the man who nearly 175 years ago, set forth the basic principles of our national life. His expression "inalienable rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" has stood the test of time - lighting liberty's torch everywhere.

As you pledge your head to clearer thinking, your heart to greater loyalty, your hands to larger service, and your health to better living, for your club, for your community, and for your country, you are subscribing to the principles of Jefferson and to the code of good citizenship.

The 4-H Clubs of America have made an enviable record since their national birth more than 30 years ago.

During World War II, when the liberties of our country were imperiled and the United Nations needs were desperate, the contribution of the 4-H Clubs was miraculous.

In one year during the war, you produced enough food to feed one million fighting men. In the years following Pearl Harbor, you collected millions of pounds of scrap, bought millions of dollars worth of war bonds, and rendered many other services to help our country.

Also there were about 800,000 members and former members of 4-H Clubs doing their part in the armed services.

You are familiar with these contributions to our country's needs, but I am glad to emphasize them at this inspirational moment when we are stressing the worth and meaning - the duties and responsibilities of American citizenship.

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Now, in this post-war era, as our Nation and the world grope for a lasting peace, you have set new high goals for achievement.

In your future Club work you are following ten guideposts that lead to good citizenship, as you:

Develop talents for greater usefulness; join with friends for work, fun, and fellowship; learn to live in a changing world; choose a way to earn a living; produce food and fiber for home and market; create better homes for better living; conserve nature's resources for security and happiness; build health for a strong America; share responsibilities for community improvement, and serve as citizens in maintaining world peace.

I wish I had time to talk with you about each of these guideposts that point the way to a mentally, physically and spiritually effective citizenry.

Citizenship in the United States is truly a precious thing.

Throughout its history this Nation has molded a way of life in keeping with the principles and ideals on which it was founded - the American way - a model yearned for by liberty-loving peoples everywhere.

This way of life, that for the rest of the world is not much more than a distant aspiration, has often been taken for granted by some Americans.

At times, our people have even lost sight of how this precious treasure was attained, and what it means. Not having to fight for it nor to defend it, they did not know what it would mean to live without it.

We should always remember that our American Charter of Liberty - a voice in our government, freedom in our speech and in our worship, private enterprise in our business - all the freedoms to which the soul of man aspires - did not come into being without pain and price.

It took generations of struggle, suffering and sacrifice to achieve our Freedoms - to build our America. We are determined they shall not be destroyed.

Almost forty million immigrants have come here since the Republic was founded. They came from every part of the globe. They settled on our farms, helped to establish our industries and to construct our cities.

But the story of this country is not just a narrative of what our forefathers endured, and of what they accomplished. It is the story of you and me, your neighbors and mine, their parents and ours.

And, most of all, it is the record of how we, the present generation, are dealing with the legacy of democracy.

The maintenance of the American way was not assured by the Founding Fathers. That we ourselves must do.

We must look upon democracy, not as an accomplished fact, but as a matter for continuous concern and action. We must not sleep at the switch.

The tenets of democracy will continue to shape the future of our Nation, if we recognize them - see them - not merely as privileges to be enjoyed, but as trusts to be maintained and defended at all times and all costs; for life without these Freedoms would not be worth the effort to live. That is how true Americans feel about it.

America will be as great as her people are great. She will grow as her people grow.

The bedrock of our democracy lies in the communities of America - in local self-government - in strong local law enforcement. We must not permit our National Government to dominate local government. To do so will destroy our democracy, make slaves of our people and turn our beloved America to totalitarianism.

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Our responsibilities are not vague and distant. They are clear, definite, day-by-day things, right before us in our homes, on our farms and in our communities.

They are part of our relationships with our fellow man - members of our family, our neighbors.

To have brotherhood, we must begin at home to show understanding, tolerance and fellowship.

We must, at home, make sure that justice and brotherhood prevail among all races and creeds. We must see that no artificial barriers - social, religious, or economic - deny to fellow citizens the privileges of freedom on which our democracy was founded, on which our Nation was built. We must respect our laws and enforce them vigorously.

Among our many other obligations as citizens, we must each carry our share of responsibility in government. Here we have a voice in the workings of democracy - a precious privilege, indeed.

In this connection, I am reminded of two contrasting incidents that happened in the last year of the late war.

Immediately after the American soldier boys had taken Rome, a king was placed upon the Italian throne.

The people did not get the chance to say whether they wanted a king. But they got him.

It was entirely different in America. Here democracy was at work! An election was held! - Six months before VE-Day.

Candidates for the Presidency of the United States, and all others running for office throughout the land, waged political campaigns.

The voice of the people was heard on election day. In the greatest world crisis in history, the true principles of our government again prevailed.

Every real American was thrilled at this happening - a working example of democracy that will be recorded as long as history books are written.

Ours is a democracy which functions through a representative form of government. Through the voice of the people, representatives are chosen to speak and act with authority on matters that concern all the people.

Yet, sad to relate, millions of our citizens do not take the trouble to vote in Presidential elections or to cast their ballots in local elections.

With all of our emphasis upon suffrage, they fail to exercise this precious heritage of American citizenship.

In the 1944 Presidential election, only 53 percent of those qualified voted. Forty-one million disenfranchised themselves.

31 percent of the qualified voters did not even know that an election would be held in 1946.

58 percent could not give the names of the United States Senators from their own States who represent them in Congress; and

49 percent could not give the names of the Congressmen from their own Districts.

Some of our prominent citizens, members of Chambers of Commerce, civic clubs, patriotic organizations, ministerial bodies, bar and medical associations, and women's clubs, still refrain from taking part in politics. I trust you will not follow this example. You must take an active part.

Yours is the responsibility to change this picture of the vanishing voter.

May you cherish the principle of suffrage - and keep the ballot box inviolate.

Honest elections, participated in by all eligible voters, will guarantee an enduring democracy.

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People like you, the volunteer salesmen of the American way of life, becoming fully aware of the responsibilities in this new era, will assure the country of the guarding of the principles and ideals that inspire this way of life and will make our country greater.

You are, indeed, living in a changing and challenging world.

I feel confident that you will meet this challenge.