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ADDRESS

By

HONORABLE HOMER CUMMINGS
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES

on the occasion
of
Washington's Fourth of July Celebration

Monument Grounds,
Washington, D. C.

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Ladies and Gentlemen:

Tonight we are met to celebrate the signing of America's compact with liberty. As I look out upon this vast gathering, I am reminded of one of the most remarkable prophecies ever made by an American statesman. When the Declaration of Independence was signed, John Adams asserted that it was the most memorable occurrence in the history of our country, and said:

"I am apt to believe that this event will be celebrated by succeeding generations, as the great anniversary festival. It ought to be commemorated as the day of deliverance, by solemn acts of devotion to God Almighty. It ought to be solemnized with pomp and parade, with shows, games, guns, bells, bonfires and illuminations, from one end of this continent to the other, from this time forward forevermore."

What was this document that inspired such a prophetic utterance? It was a bold proclamation "that these united Colonies are, and of right ought to be, free and independent States." It was, at once, a merciless indictment of arbitrary rule and a lofty expression of the true purpose of government among men.

It is difficult for us, so far removed from the events of that day, to appraise the stress under which the Declaration was uttered. Apprehension ran like an electric current throughout the colonies. Deep emotions were stirred and no man knew what the next day might bring forth. The Declaration of Independence was born in the midst of an undeclared war in defense of the rights of the colonies, a war which had broadened into a struggle for nationhood and freedom. It was the expression of patriots who loved liberty and, scornful of dangers from abroad and treachery at home, had the courage to fling the challenge of democracy in the face of autocratic power. It was a glorious moment of history and marked a deed of imperishable fame.

Since then, 162 years have swept by. We, the heirs of that great experiment in democracy, meet tonight -- a people 135 million strong, rich with unbounded resources and favored with the countless blessings of free government.

Great social and political transformations have marked the shaping of this child among the nations to become a giant among the nations. America was not finished when the Declaration of Independence was issued. That was the day when America began. Every decade since that time has presented its insistent and peculiar problems; and every decade has known its own triumphs. Let those who are fearful of the fate of our country, or who give way to pessimism in the face of inevitable and necessary change, or who are apprehensive of the effects of subversive doctrines originating here and abroad, turn their thoughts to the practical means whereby America may be made a better and better place in which to live. To make democracy work, to make it succeed, to make it serve its people with greater justice and constantly increasing efficiency, is to supply the final answer to those who have lost faith in democratic processes. Here is a cause worthy of all we have to give.

Our work is never done. 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 élan 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.

Therefore, be of good cheer! 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.

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 future of mankind -- these things cheer and strengthen us amid the problems of a modern world and confirm us in the belief that we, as a people, are destined to enter wider fields of freedom and happiness than we have thus far known.