

"Some Elements of the American Character" Independence Day Oration by John Fitzgerald Kennedy, Candidate for Congress from the 11th Congressional District, July 4, 1946

Mr. Mayor; Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen.

We stand today in the shadow of history.

We gather here in the very Cradle of Liberty.

It is an honor and a pleasure to be the speaker of the day – an honor because of the long and distinguished list of noted orators who have preceded me on this platform, a pleasure because one of that honored list who stood here fifty years ago, and who is with us here today, is my grandfather.

It has been the custom for the speaker of the day to link his thoughts across the years to certain classic ideals of the early American tradition. I shall do the same. I propose today to discuss certain elements of the American character which have made this nation great. It is well for us to recall them today, for this is a day of recollection and a day of hope.

A nation's character, like that of an individual, is elusive. It is produced partly by things we have done and partly by what has been done to us. It is the result of physical factors, intellectual factors, spiritual factors.

It is well for us to consider our American character, for in peace, as in war, we will survive or fail according to its measure.

Religious Element

Our deep religious sense is the first element of the American character which I would discuss this morning.

The informing spirit of the American character has always been a deep religious sense.

Throughout the years, down to the present, a devotion to fundamental religious principles has characterized American thought and action.

Our government was founded on the essential religious idea of integrity of the individual. It was this religious sense which inspired the authors of the Declaration of Independence:

"We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights."

Our earliest legislation was inspired by this deep religious sense:

"Congress shall make no law prohibiting the free exercise of religion."

Our first leader, Washington, was inspired by this deep religious sense:

"Of all of the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports."

Lincoln was inspired by this deep religious sense:

"That this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom, and that government of the people, by the people and for the people shall not perish from the earth."

Our late, lamented President was inspired by this deep religious sense:

"We shall win this war, and in victory we shall seek not vengeance, but the establishment of an international order in which the spirit of Christ shall rule the hearts of men and nations."

Thus we see that this nation has ever been inspired by essential religious ideas. The doctrine of slavery which challenged these ideas within our own country was destroyed.

Recently, the philosophy of racism, which threatened to overwhelm them by attacks from abroad, was also met and destroyed.

Today these basic religious ideas are challenged by atheism and materialism: at home in the cynical philosophy of many of our intellectuals, abroad in the doctrine of collectivism, which sets up the twin pillars of atheism and materialism as the official philosophical establishment of the State.

Inspired by a deeply religious sense, this country, which has ever been devoted to the dignity of man, which has ever fostered the growth of the human spirit, has always met and hurled back the challenge of those deathly philosophies of hate and despair. We have defeated them in the past; we will always defeat them.

How well, then, has de Tocqueville said: "You may talk of the people and their majesty, but where there is no respect for God can there be much for man? You may talk of the supremacy of the ballot, respect for order, denounce riot, secession – unless religion is the first link, all is vain."

Idealistic Element

Another element in the American character that I would bring to your attention this morning is the idealism of our native people – stemming from the strong religious beliefs of the first colonists, developed as they worked the land.

This idealism, this fixed regard for principle, has been an element of the American character from the birth of this nation to the present day.

In recent years, the existence of this element in the American character has been challenged by those who seek to give an economic interpretation to American history. They seek to destroy our faith in our past so that they may guide our future. These cynics are wrong, for, while there may be some truth in their interpretation, it does remain a fact, and a most important one, that the motivating force of the American people has been their belief that they have always stood at the barricades by the side of God.

In Revolutionary times, the cry "No taxation without representation" was not an economic complaint. Rather, it was directly traceable to the eminently fair and just principle that no sovereign power has the right to govern without the consent of the governed. Anything short of that was tyranny. It was against this tyranny that the colonists "fired the shot heard 'round the world."

This belief in principle was expressed most impressively by George Washington at the Constitutional Convention in 1783. "It is probable that no plan we propose will be adopted. Perhaps another dreadful conflict is to be sustained. If, to please the people, we offer what we ourselves disapprove, how can we afterwards defend our work? Let us raise a standard to which the wise and honest can repair, the event is in the hands of God."

This idealism, this conviction that our eyes had seen the glory of the Lord – that right was right and wrong was wrong – finally led to the ultimate clash at Bull Run and the long red years of the war between the States.

Again, the cynics may apply the economic interpretation to this conflict: the industrial North against the agricultural South; the struggle of the two economies. Say what they will, it is an undeniable fact that the Northern Army of Virginia and the Army of the Potomac were inspired by devotion to principle: on the one hand, the right of secession; on the other, the belief that the "Union must be preserved."

In 1917, this element of the American character was stimulated by the slogans "War to End War" and "A War to Save Democracy," and again the American people had as their leader a man, Woodrow Wilson, whose idealism was the traditional idealism of America. To such a degree was this true that he was able to say, "Some people call me an idealist. Well, that is the way I know I am an American. America is the only idealistic nation in the world."

It is perhaps true that the American intervention in 1917 might have been more effective if the case for American intervention had been represented on less moralistic terms. As it was, the American people eventually came to look upon themselves as giving food and guns to a general cause in which all other people had material ends and in which they alone had moral ends.

The idealism with which we had entered the battle made the subsequent disillusionment all the more bitter and revealed a dangerous facet to this element of the American character, for this bitterness, a direct result of our inflated hopes, brought a radical change in our foreign policy and a resulting withdrawal from Europe. We failed to make the adjustment between what we had hoped to win and what we actually could win. Our idealism was too strong. We would not compromise.

And thus we brought to our shoulders much of the burden of the responsibility for World War II – a burden which we would not then acknowledge but for which we have paid full price in recent years on distant shores, on faraway fields and valleys and hills, on pieces of foreign soil which will be forever ours.

It was perhaps because of this failure that the second world war never did become a crusade as did the first.

Our idealism had become tarnished, but extraordinary efforts were made to evoke it, and it is indubitably true that the great majority of Americans had strong convictions as to which side spoke for the right before our entry into the war.

It is now in the postwar world that this idealism – this devotion to principle--this belief in the natural law – this deep religious conviction that this is truly God's country and we are truly God's people – will meet its greatest trial.

Our American idealism finds itself faced by the old-world doctrine of power politics. It is meeting with successive rebuffs, and all this may result in a new and even more bitter disillusionment, in another ignominious retreat from our world destiny.

But, if we remain faithful to the American tradition, our idealism will be a steadfast thing, a constant flame, a torch held aloft for the guidance of other nations.

It will take great faith.

Our idealism, the second element of the American character, is being severely tested. Now, only time will tell whether this element of the American character will be true to its historic tradition.

Patriotic Element

The third element of the American character that I would bring to your attention this morning is the great patriotic instinct of our people.

From our pioneer days, perhaps because we were a people who developed from a beachhead on a tremendous continent, this American patriotism has always had as its core a strange and almost mystical love of the land.

Early in our history we acquired, as James Truslow Adams has pointed out, "a sense of unlimited energy face to face with unlimited resources."

Land, land, land, stretching with incredible richness across half a world. Its sheer vastness has made it a challenge to the American spirit. The endless land stretching to, the western sun caught the imagination of men who founded this nation and awakened the patriotic spirit that has become a characteristic of the American people.

In the words of America's poet, Walt Whitman, we note this deep sense of the land:

"Land of the pastoral plains, the grass-field of the world, land of those sweet-air'd interminable plateaus!

Land of the herd, the garden, the healthy house of adobe!

Land where the northwest Columbia winds, and where the southwest Colorado winds!

Land of the eastern Chesapeake! Land of the Delaware!

Land of Ontario, Erie, Huron, Michigan! Land of the Old Thirteen! Massachusetts land! Land of Vermont and Connecticut!

Land of the ocean shores! Land of sierras and peaks!

Land of boatmen and sailors! Fishermen's land!"

This preoccupation with the land records itself in the catalogue of the colonists' grievances against George III. It has always been reflected in the highest moments of our patriotism, for, throughout the years, in the early days here at home and in recent years abroad, Americans have been ever ready to defend this native land.

From the birth of the nation to the present day, from the Heights of Dorchester to the broad meadows of Virginia, from Bunker Hill to the batteries of Saratoga, from Bergen's Neck, where Wayne and Maylan's troops achieved such martial wonders, to Yorktown, where Britain's troops surrendered, Americans have heroically embraced the soldier's alternative of victory or the grave. American patriotism was shown at the Halls of Montezuma. It was shown with Meade at Gettysburg, with Sheridan at Winchester, with Phil Carney at Fair Oaks, with Longstreet in the Wilderness, and it was shown by the flower of the Virginia Army when Pickett charged at Gettysburg. It was shown by Captain Rowan, who plunged into the jungles of Cuba and delivered the famous message to Garcia, symbol now

of tenacity and determination. It was shown by the Fifth and Sixth Marines at Belleau Wood, by the Yankee Division at Verdun, by Captain Leahy, whose last order as he lay dying was "The command is forward." And in recent years it was shown by those who stood at Bataan with Wainwright, by those who fought at Wake Island with Devereaux, who flew in the air with Don Gentile. It was shown by those who jumped with Gavin, by those who stormed the bloody beaches at Salerno with Commando Kelly; it was shown by the First Division at Omaha Beach, by the Second Ranger Battalion as it crossed the Purple Heart Valley, by the 101st as it stood at Bastogne; it was shown at the Bulge, at the Rhine, and at victory.

Wherever freedom has been in danger, Americans with a deep sense of patriotism have ever been willing to stand at Armageddon and strike a blow for liberty and the Lord.

Individualistic Element

The American character has been not only religious, idealistic, and patriotic, but because of these it has been essentially individual.

The right of the individual against the State has ever been one of our most cherished political principles.

The American Constitution has set down for all men to see the essentially Christian and American principle that there are certain rights held by every man which no government and no majority, however powerful, can deny.

Conceived in Grecian thought, strengthened by Christian morality, and stamped indelibly into American political philosophy, the right of the individual against the State is the keystone of our Constitution.

Each man is free.

He is free in thought.

He is free in expression.

He is free in worship.

To us, who have been reared in the American tradition, these rights have become part of our very being. They have become so much a part of our being that most of us are prone to feel that they are rights universally recognized and universally exercised. But the sad fact is that this is not true. They were dearly won for us only a few short centuries ago and they were dearly preserved for us in the days just past. And there are large sections of the world today where these rights are denied as a matter of philosophy and as a matter of government.

We cannot assume that the struggle is ended. It is never-ending.

Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty. It was the price yesterday. It is the price today, and it will ever be the price.

The characteristics of the American people have ever been a deep sense of religion, a deep sense of idealism, a deep sense of patriotism, and a deep sense of individualism.

Let us not blink the fact that the days which lie ahead of us are bitter ones.

May God grant that, at some distant date, on this day, and on this platform, the orator may be able to say that these are still the great qualities of the American character and that they have prevailed.

Source: David F. Powers Personal Papers, Box 28, "Faneuil Hall, Boston, MA, 4 July 1946."
John F. Kennedy Presidential Library.

John F. Kennedy – ‘City Upon a Hill’ Speech - January 09, 1961

Description: Address of President-Elect John F. Kennedy Delivered to a Joint Convention of the General Court of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, The State House, Boston, January 9, 1961.

"City Upon a Hill" speech

I have welcomed this opportunity to address this historic body, and, through you, the people of Massachusetts to whom I am so deeply indebted for a lifetime of friendship and trust.

For fourteen years I have placed my confidence in the citizens of Massachusetts--and they have generously responded by placing their confidence in me.

Now, on the Friday after next, I am to assume new and broader responsibilities. But I am not here to bid farewell to Massachusetts.

For forty-three years--whether I was in London, Washington, the South Pacific, or elsewhere--this has been my home; and, God willing, wherever I serve this shall remain my home.

It was here my grandparents were born--it is here I hope my grandchildren will be born.

I speak neither from false provincial pride nor artful political flattery. For no man about to enter high office in this country can ever be unmindful of the contribution this state has made to our national greatness.

Its leaders have shaped our destiny long before the great republic was born. Its principles have guided our footsteps in times of crisis as well as in times of calm. Its democratic institutions--including this historic body--have served as beacon lights for other nations as well as our sister states.

For what Pericles said to the Athenians has long been true of this commonwealth: "We do not imitate--for we are a model to others."

And so it is that I carry with me from this state to that high and lonely office to which I now succeed more than fond memories of firm friendships. The enduring qualities of Massachusetts--the common threads woven by the Pilgrim and the Puritan, the fisherman and the farmer, the Yankee and the immigrant--will not be and could not be forgotten in this nation's executive mansion.

They are an indelible part of my life, my convictions, my view of the past, and my hopes for the future.

Allow me to illustrate: During the last sixty days, I have been at the task of constructing an administration. It has been a long and deliberate process. Some have counseled greater speed. Others have counseled more expedient tests.

But I have been guided by the standard John Winthrop set before his shipmates on the flagship Arbella three hundred and thirty-one years ago, as they, too, faced the task of building a new government on a perilous frontier.

"We must always consider," he said, "that we shall be as a city upon a hill--the eyes of all people are upon us."

Today the eyes of all people are truly upon us--and our governments, in every branch, at every level, national, state and local, must be as a city upon a hill--constructed and inhabited by men aware of their great trust and their great responsibilities.

For we are setting out upon a voyage in 1961 no less hazardous than that undertaken by the Arbella in 1630. We are committing ourselves to tasks of statecraft no less awesome than that of governing the Massachusetts Bay Colony, beset as it was then by terror without and disorder within.

History will not judge our endeavors--and a government cannot be selected--merely on the basis of color or creed or even party affiliation. Neither will competence and loyalty and stature, while essential to the utmost, suffice in times such as these.

For of those to whom much is given, much is required. And when at some future date the high court of history sits in judgment on each one of us--recording whether in our brief span of service we fulfilled our responsibilities to the state--our success or failure, in whatever office we may hold, will be measured by the answers to four questions:

First, were we truly men of courage--with the courage to stand up to one's enemies--and the courage to stand up, when necessary, to one's associates--the courage to resist public pressure, as well as private greed?

Secondly, were we truly men of judgment--with perceptive judgment of the future as well as the past--of our own mistakes as well as the mistakes of others--with enough wisdom to know that we did not know, and enough candor to admit it?

Third, were we truly men of integrity--men who never ran out on either the principles in which they believed or the people who believed in them--men who believed in us--men whom neither financial gain nor political ambition could ever divert from the fulfillment of our sacred trust?

Finally, were we truly men of dedication--with an honor mortgaged to no single individual or group, and compromised by no private obligation or aim, but devoted solely to serving the public good and the national interest.

Courage--judgment--integrity--dedication--these are the historic qualities of the Bay Colony and the Bay State--the qualities which this state has consistently sent to this chamber on Beacon Hill here in Boston and to Capitol Hill back in Washington.

And these are the qualities which, with God's help, this son of Massachusetts hopes will characterize our government's conduct in the four stormy years that lie ahead.

Humbly I ask His help in that undertaking--but aware that on earth His will is worked by men. I ask for your help and your prayers, as I embark on this new and solemn journey.

President John F. Kennedy's Inaugural Address (1961)

Citation: Inaugural Address, Kennedy Draft, 01/17/1961; Papers of John F. Kennedy: President's Office Files, 01/20/1961-11/22/1963; John F. Kennedy Library; National Archives and Records Administration.

On January 20, 1961, President John F. Kennedy delivered his inaugural address in which he announced that "we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe to assure the survival and success of liberty."

The inaugural ceremony is a defining moment in a president's career — and no one knew this better than John F. Kennedy as he prepared for his own inauguration on January 20, 1961. He wanted his address to be short and clear, devoid of any partisan rhetoric and focused on foreign policy.

Kennedy began constructing his speech in late November, working from a speech file kept by his secretary and soliciting suggestions from friends and advisors. He wrote his thoughts in his nearly indecipherable longhand on a yellow legal pad.

While his colleagues submitted ideas, the speech was distinctly the work of Kennedy himself. Aides recounted that every sentence was worked, reworked, and reduced. The meticulously crafted piece of oratory dramatically announced a generational change in the White House. It called on the nation to combat "tyranny, poverty, disease, and war itself" and urged American citizens to participate in public service.

The climax of the speech and its most memorable phrase — "Ask not what your country can do for you — ask what you can do for your country" — was honed down from a thought about sacrifice that Kennedy had long held in his mind and had expressed in various ways in campaign speeches.

Less than six weeks after his inauguration, on March 1, President Kennedy issued an executive order establishing the Peace Corps as a pilot program within the Department of State. He envisioned the Peace Corps as a pool of trained American volunteers who would go overseas to help foreign countries meet their needs for skilled manpower. Later that year, Congress passed the Peace Corps Act, making the program permanent.

His Inaugural Address - 17 January, 1961

Vice President Johnson, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Chief Justice, President Eisenhower, Vice President Nixon, President Truman, Reverend Clergy, fellow citizens:

We observe today not a victory of party but a celebration of freedom--symbolizing an end as well as a beginning--signifying renewal as well as change. For I have sworn before you and Almighty God the same solemn oath our forbears prescribed nearly a century and three-quarters ago.

The world is very different now. For man holds in his mortal hands the power to abolish all forms of human poverty and all forms of human life. And yet the same revolutionary beliefs for which our forebears fought are still at issue around the globe--the belief that the rights of man come not from the generosity of the state but from the hand of God.

We dare not forget today that we are the heirs of that first revolution. Let the word go forth from this time and place, to friend and foe alike, that the torch has been passed to a new generation of Americans--born in this century, tempered by war, disciplined by a hard and bitter peace, proud of our ancient heritage--and unwilling to witness or permit the slow undoing of those human rights to which this nation has always been committed, and to which we are committed today at home and around the world.

Let every nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe to assure the survival and the success of liberty.

This much we pledge--and more.

To those old allies whose cultural and spiritual origins we share, we pledge the loyalty of faithful friends. United there is little we cannot do in a host of cooperative ventures. Divided there is little we can do--for we dare not meet a powerful challenge at odds and split asunder.

To those new states whom we welcome to the ranks of the free, we pledge our word that one form of colonial control shall not have passed away merely to be replaced by a far more iron tyranny. We shall not always expect to find them supporting our view. But we shall always hope to find them strongly supporting their own freedom--and to remember that, in the past, those who foolishly sought power by riding the back of the tiger ended up inside.

To those people in the huts and villages of half the globe struggling to break the bonds of mass misery, we pledge our best efforts to help them help themselves, for whatever period is required--not because the communists may be doing it, not because we seek their votes, but because it is right. If a free society cannot help the many who are poor, it cannot save the few who are rich.

To our sister republics south of our border, we offer a special pledge--to convert our good words into good deeds--in a new alliance for progress--to assist free men and free governments in casting off the chains of poverty. But this peaceful revolution of hope cannot become the prey of hostile powers. Let all our neighbors know that we shall join with them to oppose aggression or subversion anywhere in the Americas. And let every other power know that this Hemisphere intends to remain the master of its own house.

To that world assembly of sovereign states, the United Nations, our last best hope in an age where the instruments of war have far outpaced the instruments of peace, we renew our pledge of support--to prevent it from becoming merely a forum for invective--to strengthen its shield of the new and the weak--and to enlarge the area in which its writ may run.

Finally, to those nations who would make themselves our adversary, we offer not a pledge but a request: that both sides begin anew the quest for peace, before the dark powers of destruction unleashed by science engulf all humanity in planned or accidental self-destruction.

We dare not tempt them with weakness. For only when our arms are sufficient beyond doubt can we be certain beyond doubt that they will never be employed.

But neither can two great and powerful groups of nations take comfort from our present course--both sides overburdened by the cost of modern weapons, both rightly alarmed by the steady spread of the deadly atom, yet both racing to alter that uncertain balance of terror that stays the hand of mankind's final war.

So let us begin anew--remembering on both sides that civility is not a sign of weakness, and sincerity is always subject to proof. Let us never negotiate out of fear. But let us never fear to negotiate.

Let both sides explore what problems unite us instead of belaboring those problems which divide us.

Let both sides, for the first time, formulate serious and precise proposals for the inspection and control of arms--and bring the absolute power to destroy other nations under the absolute control of all nations.

Let both sides seek to invoke the wonders of science instead of its terrors. Together let us explore the stars, conquer the deserts, eradicate disease, tap the ocean depths and encourage the arts and commerce.

Let both sides unite to heed in all corners of the earth the command of Isaiah--to "undo the heavy burdens . . . (and) let the oppressed go free."

And if a beachhead of cooperation may push back the jungle of suspicion, let both sides join in creating a new endeavor, not a new balance of power, but a new world of law, where the strong are just and the weak secure and the peace preserved.

All this will not be finished in the first one hundred days. Nor will it be finished in the first one thousand days, nor in the life of this Administration, nor even perhaps in our lifetime on this planet. But let us begin.

In your hands, my fellow citizens, more than mine, will rest the final success or failure of our course. Since this country was founded, each generation of Americans has been summoned to give testimony to its national loyalty. The graves of young Americans who answered the call to service surround the globe.

Now the trumpet summons us again--not as a call to bear arms, though arms we need--not as a call to battle, though embattled we are-- but a call to bear the burden of a long twilight struggle, year in and year out, "rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation"--a struggle against the common enemies of man: tyranny, poverty, disease and war itself.

Can we forge against these enemies a grand and global alliance, North and South, East and West, that can assure a more fruitful life for all mankind? Will you join in that historic effort?

In the long history of the world, only a few generations have been granted the role of defending freedom in its hour of maximum danger. I do not shrink from this responsibility--I welcome it. I do not believe that any of us would exchange places with any other people or any other generation. The energy, the faith, the devotion which we bring to this endeavor will light our country and all who serve it--and the glow from that fire can truly light the world.

And so, my fellow Americans: ask not what your country can do for you--ask what you can do for your country.

My fellow citizens of the world: ask not what America will do for you, but what together we can do for the freedom of man.

Finally, whether you are citizens of America or citizens of the world, ask of us here the same high standards of strength and sacrifice which we ask of you. With a good conscience our only sure reward, with history the final judge of our deeds, let us go forth to lead the land we love, asking His blessing and His help, but knowing that here on earth God's work must truly be our own.

Address at Independence Hall - 4 July 1962

Excerpt of President Kennedy's Speech at Independence Hall, 4 July 1962

Governor Powell, Your Excellency the Archbishop, Governor Lawrence, Mayor Tate, Senator Clark, Congressman Green, distinguished Governors, ladies and gentlemen, citizens of Philadelphia:

It is a high honor for any citizen of our great Republic to speak at this Hall of Independence on this day of Independence. To speak as President of the United States to the Chief Executives of our 50 States is both an opportunity and an obligation. The necessity for comity between the National Government and the several States is an indelible lesson of our long history.

Because our system is designed to encourage both differences and dissent, because its checks and balances are designed to preserve the rights of the individual and the locality against preeminent central authority, you and I, Governors, recognize how dependent we both are, one upon the other, for the successful operation of our unique and happy form of government.

Our system and our freedom permit the legislative to be pitted against the executive, the State against the Federal Government, the city against the countryside, party against party, interest against interest, all in competition or in contention one with another.

Our task--your task in the State House and my task in the White House--is to weave from all these tangled threads a fabric of law and progress.

We are not permitted the luxury of irresolution. Others may confine themselves to debate, discussion, and that ultimate luxury--free advice. Our responsibility is one of decision--for to govern is to choose.

Thus, in a very real sense, you and I are the executors of the testament handed down by those who gathered in this historic hall 186 years ago today.

For they gathered to affix their names to a document which was, above all else, a document not of rhetoric but of bold decision. It was, it is true, a document of protest--but protests had been made before. It set forth their grievances with eloquence--but such eloquence had been heard before. But what distinguished this paper from all the others was the final irrevocable decision that it took--to assert the independence of free States in place of colonies, and to commit to that goal their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor.

Today, 186 years later, that Declaration whose yellowing parchment and fading, almost illegible lines I saw in the past week in the National Archives in Washington is still a revolutionary document. To read it today is to hear a trumpet call.

For that Declaration unleashed not merely a revolution against the British, but a revolution in human affairs. Its authors were highly conscious of its worldwide implications.

And George Washington declared that liberty and self-government everywhere were, in his words, "finally staked on the experiment entrusted to the hands of the American people."

This prophecy has been borne out. For 186 years this doctrine of national independence has shaken the globe--and it remains the most powerful force anywhere in the world today.

There are those struggling to eke out a bare existence in a barren land who have never heard of free enterprise, but who cherish the idea of independence. There are those who are grappling with overpowering problems of illiteracy and ill-health and who are ill-equipped to hold free elections. But they are determined to hold fast to their national independence. Even those unwilling or unable to take part in any struggle between East and West are strongly on the side of their own national independence.

If there is a single issue that divides the world today, it is independence--the independence of Berlin or Laos or Viet-Nam; the longing for independence behind the Iron Curtain; the peaceful transition to independence in those newly emerging areas whose troubles some hope to exploit.

The theory of independence is as old as man himself, and it was not invented in this hall. But it was in this hall that the theory became a practice; that the word went out to all, in Thomas Jefferson's phrase, that "the God who gave us life, gave us liberty at the same time."

And today this Nation--conceived in revolution, nurtured in liberty, maturing in independence--has no intention of abdicating its leadership in that worldwide movement for independence to any nation or society committed to systematic human oppression.

As apt and applicable as the Declaration of Independence is today, we would do well to honor that other historic document drafted in this hall--the Constitution of the United States. For it stressed not independence but interdependence--not the individual liberty of one but the indivisible liberty of all.

In most of the old colonial world, the struggle for independence is coming to an end. Even in areas behind the Curtain, that which Jefferson called "the disease of liberty" still appears to be infectious.

With the passing of ancient empires, today less than 2 percent of the world's population lives in territories officially termed "dependent." As this effort for independence, inspired by the American Declaration of Independence, now approaches a successful close, a great new effort--for interdependence--is transforming the world about us. And the spirit of that new effort is the same spirit which gave birth to the American Constitution.

That spirit is today most clearly seen across the Atlantic Ocean. The nations of Western Europe, long divided by feuds far more bitter than any which existed among the 13 colonies, are today joining together, seeking, as our forefathers sought, to find freedom in diversity and in unity, strength.

The United States looks on this vast new enterprise with hope and admiration. We do not regard a strong and united Europe as a rival but as a partner. To aid its progress has been the basic object of our foreign policy for 17 years. We believe that a united Europe will be capable of playing a greater role in the common defense, of responding more generously to the needs of poorer nations, of joining with the United States and others in lowering trade barriers, resolving problems of commerce, commodities, and currency, and developing coordinated policies in all economic, political, and diplomatic areas. We see in such a Europe a partner with whom we can deal on a basis of full equality in all the great and burdensome tasks of building and defending a community of free nations.

It would be premature at this time to do more than indicate the high regard with which we view the formation of this partnership. The first order of business is for our European friends to go forward in forming the more perfect union which will someday make this partnership possible.

A great new edifice is not built overnight. It was 11 years from the Declaration of Independence to the writing of the Constitution. The construction of workable federal institutions required still another generation.

The greatest works of our Nation's founders lay not in documents and in declarations, but in creative, determined action. The building of the new house of Europe has followed the same practical, purposeful course. Building the Atlantic partnership now will not be easily or cheaply finished.

But I will say here and now, on this Day of Independence, that the United States will be ready for a Declaration of Interdependence, that we will be prepared to discuss with a united Europe the ways and means of forming a concrete Atlantic partnership, a mutually beneficial partnership between the new union now emerging in Europe and the old American Union founded here 175 years ago.

All this will not be completed in a year, but let the world know it is our goal.

In urging the adoption of the United States Constitution, Alexander Hamilton told his fellow New Yorkers "to think continentally." Today Americans must learn to think intercontinentally.

Acting on our own, by ourselves, we cannot establish justice throughout the world; we cannot insure its domestic tranquility, or provide for its common defense, or promote its general welfare, or secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity. But joined with other free nations, we can do all this and more. We can assist the developing nations to throw off the yoke of poverty. We can balance our worldwide trade and payments at the highest possible level of growth. We can mount a deterrent powerful enough to deter any aggression. And ultimately we can help to achieve a world of law and free choice, banishing the world of war and coercion.

For the Atlantic partnership of which I speak would not look inward only, preoccupied with its own welfare and advancement. It must look outward to cooperate with all nations in meeting their common concern. It would serve as a nucleus for the eventual union of all free men--those who are now free and those who are vowing that some day they will be free.

On Washington's birthday in 1861, standing right there, President-elect Abraham Lincoln spoke in this hall on his way to the Nation's Capital. And he paid a brief but eloquent tribute to the men who wrote, who fought for, and who died for the Declaration of Independence.

Its essence, he said, was its promise not only of liberty "to the people of this country, but hope to the world . . . [hope] that in due time the weights should be lifted from the shoulders of all men, and that all should have an equal chance."

On this fourth day of July, 1962, we who are gathered at this same hall, entrusted with the fate and future of our States and Nation, declare now our vow to do our part to lift the weights from the shoulders of all, to join other men and nations in preserving both peace and freedom, and to regard any threat to the peace or freedom of one as a threat to the peace and freedom of all.

And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor."

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:40 a.m. in Independence Square in Philadelphia. In his opening words he referred to Governor Wesley Powell of New Hampshire, chairman of the Governors' Conference, the Most Reverend John Krol, Archbishop of Philadelphia, Governor David L. Lawrence of Pennsylvania, Mayor James H. J. Tate of Philadelphia, and U.S. Senator Joseph S. Clark and U.S. Representative William J. Green, Jr., of Pennsylvania.

Included in the audience were members of the 54th National Governors' Conference.