We celebrate today the oldest and the most American of all our national holidays. From the earliest days of the Republic, this anniversary of our declared national status has been observed in the glorious manner—the louder the more glorious. Our people have been ingenious in the devices used to create noise for the Fourth of July—cannon, shotgun, churchbell, factory whistle, firecracker and dishpan—all of these have created the din by which we have boasted our independence.

Not content with artificial noise, the human voice is added to the din. Annually for nearly two centuries, Americans have subjected themselves to outpourings of patriotic oratory—oratory which pointed with pride to national virtues and viewed with alarm any deviation from the guiding principles of the forefathers, real or imagined.

Our style of commemorating this date has undergone change. A population more and more compacted into urban communities decrees that unbridled use of explosives is a public danger, and the "grand and glorious" Fourth has given way to the "safe and sane." Our tastes in oratory have changed, too—not because we are less patriotic than our predecessors but because the mid-twentieth century's problems seem to require quiet resolve more than lengthy exhortation.

Diffidently but proudly, I join in the tradition that calls for talk on this occasion. It behooves me to seek and promptly state some theme appropriate for an Independence Day in our time.

The Fourth of July does not commemorate actual American independence. That was won through five years of struggle, suffering and privation. What occurred on this date, one hundred and eighty-six years ago, was a declaration of principle—one that went far beyond the political schism between the American colonies and the British crown. Thomas Jefferson and his colleagues proclaimed an audacious manifesto that was to be the seed of worldwide democratic revolution. Their doctrine, that all men are created equal, flared like a torch—not only to lead our own protest against oppression, but to ignite the fires of human freedom—first in France, later in Germany and the rest of Europe, and finally in Latin America. The democratic ideal spawned by Jefferson ever since then has been our most influential export—making America the philosophical beacon light of every man's hope to be master of his own destiny.
Jefferson is the author of the Declaration whose anniversary we celebrate; we are gathered in the shadow of a great monument to Washington. In this centennial period of Civil War, we must think also of Lincoln.

In the City of Washington there was no public celebration of Independence Day in the grim year of 1862. Isolated noise-making and bonfires—no public assemblies, no exciting oratory, no organized displays of fireworks. The Army of the Potomac was suffering humiliating reverses in the Peninsular campaign. Lincoln rode beside a tragic procession for a distance on that day, talking with wounded men about the details of a deathly struggle but a few miles away. Out of consideration for the thousands hospitalized in converted churches throughout this "city of the wounded," the traditional ringing of church bells had by common consent been abandoned.

Lincoln's vigil at the White House was interrupted a hundred years ago by a slim column of veterans of the 1812 War. They had marched from the Post Office Building and were received briefly by the President in the Oval Room. His impromptu speech to them did not mention the anniversary of independence, and we can only speculate whether Lincoln's thoughts turned to the patriotic theme of the day, independence. We know, however, that he already had firmly in mind and in preliminary draft the historic Emancipation Proclamation which became effective the following New Year's Day.

If Lincoln looked out upon the pastoral scene that is now this park, he saw no assemblage such as this. The shaft in whose shadow we now gather was but half completed. The war and financial troubles had halted it, and left it a truncated and ungainly abbreviation of its present grandeur.

That half-finished monument must have been a symbol to Lincoln that he headed a half-finished Nation. Four score and six years before, Jefferson had proclaimed independence of colonial rule; but independence alone had not created a nation. Things remained to be done: the forging of political unity and the emergence of national solidarity. Lincoln, with his almost mystic prescience, must have known his destiny even at that time. His was the task, within the scant period of time remaining to him, of fulfilling a major part of Jefferson's prophecy—the assertion of national power with finality, establishing for all time the political unity of the several States.

A century later the task of carrying forward the traditions of Jefferson and Lincoln presses upon us as firmly as ever. Just as Lincoln could see a nation half completed, so also do we find things yet undone to achieve national self-realization. A democratic society is incomplete so long as any segment of its population is excluded from participation in its government or from the full and equal enjoyment of its privileges. Jefferson proclaimed the equality of men. Lincoln declared the personal freedom of the enslaved. It remains for us to make both independence and emancipation a political and social reality for all. Short of that goal, to call ourselves free is arrogant assumption.
The statesmen of 1776, whose words we recall today, backed up their declaration of principle with a pledge of their lives, their fortunes and their sacred honor. As the heirs of that great legacy, we rededicate our lives, our fortunes and our sacred honor to the true freedom of all Americans. The full vigor of national life can emerge only from our ultimate commitment to the democratic ideal. Only this will complete the construction of the Nation declared by the patriots of '76 and preserved in the cauldron of Civil War.

The patriotism demanded by our time transcends nationalistic competition. Ours must be a constant rededication to the ideal that has made America the symbol of true democracy everywhere.

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