

FOURTH OF JULY CELEBRATION  
ABERDEEN, NORTH CAROLINA  
July 3, 1976

The great thing about a Fourth of July Celebration like this is that we do not have to have one. In other countries, citizens are called upon by the government to turn out for compulsory demonstrations. It is considered their duty to march through the streets to make a show of their patriotism.

But here in America, nobody tells us to parade through the streets, quoting the verses of our leaders out of little red, white and blue books. We have a parade for one reason only -- because we want to. But the choice is ours.

That, in a nutshell, is the secret of American democracy.

That, in a nutshell, is the idea of government our forefathers

fought and died for two hundred years ago. They fought and died for a form of government which was completely backwards.

That's right -- it was backwards from the normal way of doing things. If you had asked any eighteenth century monarch to discourse on the relationship between citizens and the government, he would have given you a list of the rights of government, and the duties of the citizens.

But the people who came to these shores shook the dust of Europe off their heels and turned things around. Two hundred years ago this very day, they declared that government was to have the duties, and the citizens were to have the rights. That was backwards -- and it was revolutionary.

The early Americans were adamant about this -- especially

Tar Heels. Did you know that North Carolina once chose to be a sovereign nation, rather than to join the brand-new United States.

North Carolinians did not vote for George Washington the first time around, and even considered collecting import duties on products from the United States. The fact is that six years after the Revolutionary War was won, Tar Heels meeting in Hillsborough refused to ratify the Constitution because it did not yet contain a list of the rights of citizens. The rights of individuals, which government could not take away, were not written down in black and white.

The North Carolina delegates drew up a list of 25 amendments to the Constitution, and the gist of them became

the Bill of Rights. They stuck up for that "backwards" way of doing things, and the Bill of Rights is the rock this country has stood upon ever since.

Our constitution enumerates a citizen's rights and not his duties; and throughout our history, we Americans have often demonstrated our willingness to defend, maintain, and preserve this constitution. And we shall defend it again whenever the need arises.

What people who misjudge us fail to understand - and what we ourselves sometimes forget - is that our citizens do not have the duty to vote, for instance, but the privilege of voting, for to be an American means that we are free to vote or not to vote; it means that the choice is ours.

Our citizens do not have the duty to support and respect those in power but more importantly the privilege of supporting and respecting them. Again the choice is ours, for to be an American means that we are free to support our leaders or not to support them.

And our citizens do not have the duty to believe in the ideals upon which our nation was founded but much more importantly, we Americans are free to believe in these ideals or not to believe in them as our reason dictates and not as a ruler dictates.

We must remember that the greatness of America lies in our ability to take our patriotism, our ideology, and our freedom for granted, for only a people whose freedom is not endangered by its government can do so.

We must try hard not to forget this greatness of America even when we are sometimes tempted to. If we are to be true to our heritage, we must not let extreme actions make us forget that we Americans are free in a way that few people are free anywhere else upon this earth.

The only thing that proves whether or not one is truly a patriotic American is the extent of his love of and devotion to freedom - his own and everyone else's. It is not the boom of our rhetoric that matters nor the size of our demonstrations but rather the extent of our respect for the rights of others. The true test of American patriotism is the extent to which we as individuals are willing to go in defending freedom from attack, both from within our land and from beyond its borders.

The depth of this resolution, to be sure, sometimes requires that we be willing to fight to preserve this freedom, but at other times, it requires that we be tolerant of the acts and beliefs of others when they are exercising freedom and not threatening it. The depth of this resolution requires that we present the case for freedom whenever the need and occasion arises, but it also requires that we sometimes listen to the sincere and honest disagreement of others, for the ability to express our disagreements is one of our greatest freedoms.

Devotion to freedom is a complex devotion; it is not simple minded as totalitarian devotion is to conformity. For freedom in itself sometimes tends to be divisive and spawn repression. Thus freedom is a tender object which needs to be

handled with care. We cannot abuse it -- as extremists

sometimes do -- for freedom is fragile. We cannot repress

it -- as totalitarians do -- for freedom is destructable.

We can only love it -- as we would a child -- and protect

it -- and nurture it -- sometimes to tolerate it -- but always

to honor it.