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CONSTITUTION DAY/CITIZENSHIP DAY ADDRESS
THE PENTAGON
MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 17, 2007

DISTINGUISHED GUESTS: MEN AND WOMEN OF THE U.S.

ARMED FORCES AND THE DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE; FELLOW

AMERICANS.

WORDS CANNOT CONVEY, TO THOSE OF YOU JOINING US

AT THE PENTAGON AND THOSE LISTENING TO ME ELSEWHERE

IN THE WORLD, THE DEEP HUMILITY I FEEL AT THIS MOMENT,

HAVING BEEN ASKED TO SHARE WITH ALL OF YOU SOME

CONSTITUTION DAY THOUGHTS. ON BEHALF OF THE ENTIRE

STAFF OF THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS

ADMINISTRATION, MAY I BEGIN BY OFFERING OUR SINCEREST

THANKS TO THE MEN AND WOMEN IN UNIFORM AROUND THE

WORLD AND AT D.O.D. FOR DEFENDING OUR RIGHTS, OUR
GOVERNMENT, AND OUR WAY OF LIFE WITHIN ABSOLUTE
RELIANCE ON THE LEGITIMACY OF THE UNITED STATES
CONSTITUTION.

I AM ALLEN WEINSTEIN, THE NINTH ARCHIVIST OF THE
UNITED STATES, AND AS ARCHIVIST, IT IS MY PRIVILEGE EACH
DAY TO STAND SYMBOLIC GUARD DUTY AT THE NATIONAL
ARCHIVES HEADQUARTERS BUILDING ON THE MALL IN
WASHINGTON, D.C. OVER OUR CHARTERS OF FREEDOM: THE
DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE, THE UNITED STATES
CONSTITUTION, AND THE BILL OF RIGHTS.

ADD TO THIS EXTRAORDINARY LIST THE EMANCIPATION
PROCLAMATION AND THE ONE BILLION ADDITIONAL
DOCUMENTS STORED IN WASHINGTON, D.C. AND THE NINE

BILLION STORED ELSEWHERE IN THE REPOSITORIES OF THE
NATIONAL ARCHIVES—INCLUDING OUR REGIONAL ARCHIVES,
FEDERAL RECORDS CENTERS, AND PRESIDENTIAL LIBRARIES—
AND YOU CAN BEGIN TO SEE THE SCOPE OF MY
RESPONSIBILITIES.

I HAVE BEEN ASKED TO SPEAK BRIEFLY ON THE MEANING
AND IMPORTANCE OF THE U.S. CONSTITUTION ON THIS
CONSTITUTION AND CITIZENSHIP DAY. OUR PURPOSE THIS
MORNING IS TO COMMEMORATE THE CONSTITUTION WHICH,
SINCE 1787, HAS STEERED THE AMERICAN REPUBLIC THROUGH
THE PERILOUS NIGHT. SURELY, THE FOUNDERS ARE WITH US
TODAY IN SPIRIT—PERHAPS TROUBLED YET STILL HOPEFUL—
MUCH AS THEY WERE WHEN THEY ADJOURNED THEIR

UNSETTLED DELIBERATIONS AT MID-POINT IN PHILADELPHIA
TWO CENTURIES AGO.

ON THAT JULY 1787 DAY, THE DELEGATES WERE STILL
UNCERTAIN AS TO WHETHER THEIR EFFORTS COULD BREAK
THE LONG DEADLOCK AT THE CONVENTION OR WHETHER THE
MEETING WOULD COLLAPSE SOON UPON THEIR RETURN. EVEN
GEORGE WASHINGTON, WHO CHAIRED THE CONVENTION,
“DESPAIR[ED] OF SEEING A FAVORABLE ISSUE TO THE
PROCEEDINGS.”

WE HAVE A SPECIAL OBLIGATION ON THIS SEPTEMBER
DAY TO PAY HOMAGE TO THE SKILL AND TENACITY WITH
WHICH WASHINGTON AND THE OTHER DELEGATES
SUBORDINATED THEIR MANY DIFFERENCES TO PRODUCE THE
DOCUMENT WHOSE DURABILITY WE NOW CELEBRATE. ON

THIS DAY, AS WE REFLECT ON THE CONSTITUTION, DO
AMERICANS REALIZE WHAT AN EXTRAORDINARY
ACHIEVEMENT IT REMAINS? PLEASE RECITE WITH ME THE
FIFTY-TWO STILL-CRUCIAL WORDS OF THE PREAMBLE TO THE
CONSTITUTION, ON WHICH OUR COUNTRY'S LIBERTIES ARE
BASED.

WE, THE PEOPLE OF THE UNITED STATES, IN ORDER TO FORM A
MORE PERFECT UNION, ESTABLISH JUSTICE, INSURE DOMESTIC
TRANQUILITY, PROVIDE FOR THE COMMON DEFENSE, PROMOTE
THE GENERAL WELFARE, AND SECURE THE BLESSINGS OF
LIBERTY TO OURSELVES AND OUR POSTERITY, DO ORDAIN AND
ESTABLISH THIS CONSTITUTION FOR THE UNITED STATES OF
AMERICA.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, PLEASE NOTE, NOT A WASTED
WORD.

WE BEAR WITNESS TODAY TO THESE SAME
CONSTITUTIONAL GUARANTEES, WHICH BALANCE THE RIGHTS
OF CITIZENSHIP AND ITS OBLIGATIONS IN THE AMERICAN
REPUBLIC: “IF MEN WERE ANGELS,” JAMES MADISON
REMINDED US IN FEDERALIST 51, “NO GOVERNMENT WOULD BE
NECESSARY...IN FRAMING A GOVERNMENT WHICH IS TO BE
ADMINISTERED BY MEN OVER MEN, THE GREAT DIFFICULTY
LIES IN THIS; YOU MUST FIRST ENABLE THE GOVERNMENT TO
CONTROL THE GOVERNED; AND IN THE NEXT PLACE OBLIGE IT
TO CONTROL ITSELF.”

THE CONSTRAINTS OF WHICH MADISON WROTE, SOME
UPON GOVERNMENT AND OTHERS ON INDIVIDUALS, ASSURE

OUR FUNDAMENTAL LIBERTIES. SUCH CONSTRAINTS WERE AS
HARD TO DEVISE IN A SWELTERING PHILADELPHIA MEETING
HALL IN 1787 AS THEY ARE TO PRESERVE IN OUR OWN TIME.
BICKERING AND CONFUSION PROLONGED THE WORK OF THE
CONVENTION. SOME OVERLY ZEALOUS DELEGATES WOULD
HAVE ABANDONED ITS WORK RATHER THAN COMPROMISE THE
POLITICAL POWERS OF THEIR OWN STATES. OUR COUNTRY
EXISTS TODAY ONLY BECAUSE, IN 1787—IN THE END—THE
STRUGGLE FOR POWER AND POSITION GAVE WAY TO A MORE
URGENT NEED FOR AGREEMENT AND UNITY. AN AGING
BENJAMIN FRANKLIN PLEADED WITH EACH OF HIS
COLLEAGUES IN PHILADELPHIA TO JOIN “WITH ME, ON THIS
OCCASION [TO] DOUBT A LITTLE OF [YOUR] OWN

INFALLIBILITY—AND...PUT [YOUR] NAME TO THIS
INSTRUMENT.”

FRANKLIN KNEW THAT THE CONSTITUTION DID NOT
HERALD THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A PERFECT SOCIETY BUT
RATHER THE PURSUIT OF A “MORE PERFECT UNION.” THUS, IT
WAS FITTING FOR THE FOUNDERS THEN AND FOR US TODAY TO
SPEAK NOT ONLY OF THE DEPTH OF OUR NATIONAL PRIDE BUT,
WHEN RELEVANT, OF OUR DOUBTS. OF COURSE, “MY COUNTRY
RIGHT OR WRONG,” BUT—IN CARL SCHURZ’S SENSIBLE,
QUALIFYING PHRASE—WHEN SHE IS RIGHT, SUPPORT HER;
WHEN SHE IS WRONG, CORRECT HER.

AS I PREPARED THESE REMARKS, I THOUGHT NOT ONLY
OF PHILADELPHIA IN 1787 BUT OF WASHINGTON, D.C. 176 YEARS
LATER AND OF A SINGLE INDIVIDUAL, A PERSON WHO STOOD

BEFORE 250,000 OF US AT THE LINCOLN MEMORIAL IN 1963 AND,
IN A SCANT FIFTEEN MINUTES, STRENGTHENED FOR ALL TIME
THE SHARED CIVIC FAITH OF ALL AMERICANS IN ANOTHER OF
OUR FOUNDING DOCUMENTS, THE DECLARATION OF
INDEPENDENCE:

I HAVE A DREAM [THE LATE REVEREND MARTIN LUTHER KING
DECLAIMED THAT DAY] THAT ONE DAY THIS NATION WILL
RISE UP AND LIVE OUT THE TRUE MEANING OF ITS CREED:

THAT WE HOLD THESE TRUTHS TO BE SELF-EVIDENT; THAT ALL

MEN ARE CREATED EQUAL....THIS WILL BE THE DAY WHEN ALL

OF GOD'S CHILDREN WILL BE ABLE TO SING WITH NEW

MEANING, "MY COUNTRY 'TIS OF THEE, SWEET LAND OF

LIBERTY, OF THEE I SING. LAND WHERE MY FATHERS DIED,

LAND OF THE PILGRIMS' PRIDE, FROM EVERY MOUNTAIN SIDE,
LET FREEDOM RING"....

A PERSONAL QUESTION: IN WHAT OTHER COUNTRY
COULD THE SON OF RUSSIAN-JEWISH IMMIGRANTS SPEAK TO
ALL OF YOU THIS MORNING AS ARCHIVIST OF HIS NATION? AS
THE LATE JURIST AND TEACHER FELIX FRANKFURTER WROTE,
"ONE WHO BELONGS TO [ARGUABLY] THE MOST PERSECUTED
MINORITY IN HISTORY IS NOT LIKELY TO BE INSENSIBLE TO
THE FREEDOMS GUARANTEED BY OUR CONSTITUTION." LET
US NOT FORGET THAT OUR FREEDOMS ARE AS OLD OR, IN
SOME INSTANCES, EVEN OLDER THAN THE NEW COUNTRY
WHICH SHELTERED ITS IMMIGRANTS.

FOR EXAMPLE, WAS THE FIRST PRESIDENT, GEORGE
WASHINGTON, COMPELLED TO WRITE NEWPORT'S HEBREW

CONGREGATION IN 1790, ASSURING THE JEWISH COMMUNITY
THAT ITS RIGHT TO RELIGIOUS FREEDOM WAS GUARANTEED
BY A UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT (QUOTING WASHINGTON)
“WHICH GIVES TO BIGOTRY NO SANCTION, TO PERSECUTION
NO ASSISTANCE...”? OF COURSE NOT, BUT IT WAS RIGHT AND
JUST, AS JUST AS THE NEED TO SUPPORT IN THESE TURBULENT
AND DIFFICULT DAYS THE CIVIL RIGHTS OF ALL AMERICANS,
INCLUDING THOSE OF OUR ISLAMIC AND ARABIC FELLOW
AMERICANS. THE 9TH ARCHIVIST OF THE UNITED STATES, I
WOULD REMIND YOU, IS ALSO THE FIRST SEMITIC ARCHIVIST,
AND I DO NOT TAKE THAT RESPONSIBILITY LIGHTLY.

WHERE, THEN, DOES IT END? WHERE DOES THE “GREAT
EXPERIMENT” IN SELF-GOVERNMENT WE BEGAN IN

PHILADELPHIA IN 1776 AND CARRIED FORWARD AT THE
CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION IN 1787 FINALLY COME TO
REST? NOT IN OUR TIME, CERTAINLY, WHEN GENUINE
DEMOCRACIES HAVE NEVER BEEN MORE NUMEROUS OR
EXPANDING IN NUMBER MORE RAPIDLY.

NOR NEED WE IN THE UNITED STATES BE OVERLY
CONCERNED ABOUT THE FUTURE RELEVANCE OF THE U.S.
CONSTITUTION IF, IN ADDITION TO KEEPING OUR POWDER DRY,
WE CONTINUE THE UNABASHED PURSUIT OF AMERICA'S
UNTAPPED PROMISE.

WHAT DOES REMAIN OF CONCERN TODAY, FELLOW
AMERICANS, AS IT HAS BEEN SINCE THE BITTER DEBATES IN
PHILADELPHIA IN 1787, IS THE NEED TO STRIKE A PROPER
BALANCE BETWEEN CONFLICTING 'RIGHTS.' AT THAT TIME, IT

WAS THE RIGHTS OF SMALL VERSUS LARGE STATES, OF NORTH
VERSUS SOUTH, OF DEALING WITH SLAVERY OR AVOIDING THE
ISSUE IN THE DOCUMENT, OF INSERTING OR DELAYING
INCLUSION OF A BILL OF RIGHTS. IN OUR OWN TIME, AT ISSUE
ARE THE CIVIL RIGHTS OF INDIVIDUALS IN A TIME OF WAR
VERSUS LEGITIMATE NATIONAL SECURITY CONCERNS, THE
EXTENT OF CONGRESSIONAL AND EXECUTIVE AUTHORITY
VERSUS JUDICIAL CONSTRAINTS, TO CLASSIFY OR TO
DECLASSIFY GOVERNMENT RECORDS, AND 'BLUE STATE'
VERSUS 'RED STATE' INTERPRETATIONS OF OUR FOUNDING
DOCUMENT. JAMES MADISON, WHERE ARE YOU WHEN WE
NEED YOU?

IT IS WELL WORTH REMINDING OURSELVES ON
OCCASIONS SUCH AS THIS THAT WE SHARE OUR FREEDOMS IN

THIS COUNTRY WITH ALL AMERICANS, WHATEVER THEIR
VIEWS ON THE HOT AND DIVISIVE TOPICS OF THE DAY.

WE MEET THIS MORNING ON A HALLOWED
BATTLEGROUND OF THIS CURRENT STRUGGLE AND WE SALUTE
THOSE WHO LOST THEIR LIVES ON SEPTEMBER 11, 2001 WHILE
DEFENDING OUR FREEDOMS ON THIS VERY SPOT AND IN
LOWER MANHATTAN, AND—PERHAPS BRAVEST OF ALL—
WHILE SAVING OUR WASHINGTON LANDMARKS FROM
DESTRUCTION AT THE SACRIFICE OF THEIR OWN LIVES IN A
PENNSYLVANIA FIELD.

WHAT KIND OF PEOPLE ARE WE, AS WE ENTER THE
SEVENTH POST-9/11 YEAR? SIMPLY PUT, WE ARE A BRAVE,
RESILIENT, SUPPORTIVE, AND ALERT BAND OF BROTHERS AND
SISTERS—300 MILLION-PLUS STRONG—WHO NEED NO FURTHER

REMINDERS THAT OUR WORLD IS A VERY DANGEROUS PLACE,
BUT IN THE YEARS TO COME, HOPEFULLY MORE DANGEROUS
STILL FOR OUR ADVERSARIES.

YET, THE SEPTEMBER 11TH ATTACKS DO SEEM TO HAVE
ADDED A NEW, UNEXPECTED DIMENSION TO AMERICAN (AND
GLOBAL) LIFE. THE COUNTRY HAS ENTERED A NEW AND
PROBABLY LENGTHY PERIOD OF HEIGHTENED SECURITY AND
GREATER NATIONAL VIGILANCE—WHICH WILL, IN TURN, POSE
THREATS TO CIVIL LIBERTIES, AS WARTIME SITUATIONS
ALWAYS DO. OF COURSE, WE CANNOT PREDICT A FUTURE
DEVOID OF DEEP ANGUISH AND TRAGEDY, WHETHER DUE TO
FRESH TERRORIST ONSLAUGHTS OR TO OUR OWN
INADEQUACIES. “HISTORY,” ARTHUR M. SCHLESINGER, JR. HAS
WRITTEN, “IS NOT A REDEEMER PROMISING TO SOLVE ALL

PROBLEMS IN TIME.” TODAY, AMERICANS HAVE ENTERED A
NEW TESTING TIME, ONE THAT BEARS CLOSE RESEMBLANCE
TO OTHER CRUCIAL MOMENTS IN OUR PAST. HOW WE
CONFRONT THESE TESTS IN THE YEARS AHEAD REMAINS TO BE
SEEN AND WILL DETERMINE WHETHER THE PRESENT
GENERATION OF AMERICANS—OURS—CAN RISE TO CONFRONT
THE CURRENT CHALLENGE WITH SUFFICIENT COURAGE AND
EFFECTIVENESS.

WHILE WE MEET IN THIS SOLEMN ASSEMBLY, OUR
LEADERS IN THE CONGRESS AND THE ADMINISTRATION
STRUGGLE IN PROFOUND DEBATE OVER THE MEANING AND
OPTIONS OF WAR AND PEACE IN OUR TIME. PLEASE DO NOT
FOR A SINGLE MOMENT BELIEVE THAT THE PROCESS OF

DEBATING THESE DECISIONS ON ANY SIDE OF ANY ISSUE GOES ON EASILY OR WITHOUT ANGUISH: THAT IS NOT THE CASE.

MOST AMERICANS, FOR EXAMPLE, BELIEVE THAT WORLD WAR TWO—“THE WAR” TO THEM—WAS A NECESSARY CONFLICT AND SERVED WITHOUT PROTEST WHEN CALLED TO DUTY. KOREA WAS A MORE COMPLEX “POLICE ACTION” WITH U.N. INVOLVEMENT, BUT IT RACED TO A BROKERED CONCLUSION IN THE EISENHOWER PRESIDENCY.

VIETNAM WAS STILL ANOTHER MATTER, POLARIZING THE COUNTRY FOR ALMOST A DECADE. NOW IRAQ HAS TAKEN CENTER STAGE WITH ITS OWN UNIQUE TEMPLATE. IT DIFFERS FROM WORLD WAR TWO (AMONG OTHER FACTORS) IN THE ABSENCE OF UNQUESTIONING SUPPORT; YET IT DIFFERS EVEN MORE PROFOUNDLY FROM VIETNAM IN THAT THE AMERICAN

PUBLIC NOW, BUT NOT THEN, REMAINS HIGHLY SUPPORTIVE
TODAY OF THE MILITARY—OF OUR TROOPS AND THE ARMED
FORCES IN GENERAL, EVEN MOST OF THOSE WHO FAVOR RAPID
TERMINATION OF THE WAR ITSELF.

IN THAT SUPPORT, FOR THOSE WHO DEPEND ON US, ON
THIS CONSTITUTION DAY AND CITIZENSHIP DAY, WE ARE
UNITED; AND AS I WRESTLED WITH IDEAS APPROPRIATE FOR
THIS OCCASION, I WAS REMINDED OF A NOW-FORGOTTEN
SPEAKER WHOSE LONG ORATION PRECEDED ABRAHAM
LINCOLN’S SHORT, ELOQUENT SPEECH AT GETTYSBURG:
EDWARD EVERETT HALE, ARGUABLY THE GREATEST SPEAKER
OF HIS AGE. HALE’S SHORT STORY, “THE MAN WITHOUT A
COUNTRY,” WAS A CIVIL WAR MORALITY TALE FOR THAT
DIVIDED TIME.

THE STORY IS A SIMPLE ONE, NOT MUCH READ THESE DAYS, BUT ONCE A STAPLE ON OCCASIONS SUCH AS THIS.

PHILIP NOLAN, A YOUNG AMERICAN MILITARY OFFICER, JOINS THE CONSPIRATORIAL PLANS OF AARON BURR TO BREAK UP THE AMERICAN UNION. NOLAN IS ARRESTED, TRIED FOR TREASON AND ADMITS HIS TREASON TO A COURTMARTIAL, ANGRILY SHOUTING, “DAMN THE UNITED STATES. I WISH I MAY NEVER HEAR OF THE UNITED STATES AGAIN.” THAT BECOMES THE COURT’S SENTENCE, AND NOLAN BEGINS A HALF-CENTURY SHUTTling FROM ONE NAVAL VESSEL TO ANOTHER, WITH THE CREWS INTRUCTED NEVER TO MENTION THE U.S. NOR SHOW AN AMERICAN FLAG, NOR DISCUSS THE UNITED STATES IN THE PRISONER’S COMPANY.

IN THE DECADES WHICH FOLLOW, A CHASTENED PHILIP
NOLAN COMES TO LOVE HIS COUNTRY, THE UNITED STATES,
AND TO CRAVE ABOVE ALL ELSE NEWS FROM HOME.
PREDICTABLY, THERE IS A DEATH BED RECONCILIATION.

WHY DOES THIS MID-19TH CENTURY POTBOILER OF A
NARRATIVE, 150 YEARS-PLUS AFTER IT WAS WRITTEN, STILL
BRING TEARS TO MANY, INCLUDING YOUR SPEAKER? COULD IT
BE FOR THE SIMPLE REASON THAT LOVE OF COUNTRY
REMAINS A DOMINANT YET SELDOM EXERCISED EMOTION
CEMENTING OUR NATIONAL UNITY ACROSS ANY AND ALL
DIVISIONS OF BELIEF AND BACKGROUND? COULD THAT BE IT?
COULD THERE LURK BENEATH OUR VENEER OF SECULAR
SOPHISTICATION AND MEDIA SUBMERSION A SPECIAL DNA
THAT SPREADS THE SEEDS OF PATRIOTISM AND LOVE OF

COUNTRY UNWITTINGLY AND EVEN, IF NECESSARY,

UNWILLINGLY?

OF COURSE, THAT ABSORPTION OF PATRIOTIC LOVE OF COUNTRY COULD BE THE SPECIAL PRESERVE OF ARCHIVISTS, HISTORIANS, AND SOLDIERS—BUT I DOUBT THAT. THERE IS MUCH EVIDENCE THAT THERE EXISTS JUST BENEATH THE SURFACE, WHERE THE BITTERNESS OF DISPUTES INVOLVING IRAQ POLICY REACHES NEW HEIGHTS DAILY—CONSENSUS OF A DEEPER DEGREE OF A COMMITMENT ON THE PART OF THE AMERICAN PEOPLE AND THEIR LEADERS (FROM ALL SEGMENTS ON THE POLITICAL SPECTRUM) TO THE HISTORIC PURPOSES OF THE AMERICAN REPUBLIC.

I AM REMINDED, IN CLOSING THESE REMARKS, OF ANOTHER PERSON AND ANOTHER TIME AND PLACE—OF

PRESIDENT FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT SPEAKING ON JUNE 30,
1941 AT THE DEDICATION OF THE FDR PRESIDENTIAL LIBRARY
IN HYDE PARK, NEW YORK, THE FIRST MODERN SUCH LIBRARY.
ITS PURPOSE, FDR SAID THAT DAY, WAS:

“TO BRING TOGETHER THE RECORDS OF THE PAST AND
HOUSE THEM IN BUILDINGS WHERE THEY WILL BE PRESERVED
FOR THE USE OF MEN AND WOMEN LIVING IN THE FUTURE, [TO
DO SO] A NATION MUST BELIEVE IN THREE THINGS:

IT MUST BELIEVE IN THE PAST.

IT MUST BELIEVE IN THE PRESENT.

BUT MOST OF ALL IT MUST BELIEVE IN THE CAPACITY OF
ITS PEOPLE SO TO LEARN FROM THE PAST THAT THEY CAN
GAIN IN JUDGEMENT FOR THE CREATION OF THE FUTURE.”

NOW AS IN PAST YEARS, AND ON DAYS SUCH AS
CONSTITUTION DAY AND CITIZENSHIP DAY, THERE IS NO
PLACE MORE FITTING THAN THIS TO RALLY THOSE WHO HAVE
DEFENDED AMERICAN FREEDOMS AT WHATEVER COSTS FROM
THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION TO 9/11 AND BEYOND. MAY WE
ALL CONTINUE TO PURSUE THE PROMISE OF OUR FOUNDING
CONSTITUTION, GRATEFUL FOR THE MANNER IN WHICH IT
STRENGTHENS OUR ABILITY TO CONFRONT TODAY'S
PROBLEMS AND PERILS AS IT HAS FOR MORE THAN TWO
CENTURIES.

THANK YOU.