

Harry S. Truman (1884-1972)

Independence Day Address Delivered at the Home of Thomas Jefferson

given on July 4, 1947

Governor Tuck, Mr. Houston, distinguished guests, fellow countrymen:

I certainly appreciate that warm welcome extended to me by the Governor of Virginia most highly, and I appreciate the courtesies which have been extended to me since I have been here. Virginia is always courteous to her guests.

It is fitting that we should come to Monticello to celebrate the anniversary of our independence. Here lived Thomas
5 Jefferson, author of the Declaration of Independence. Here Thomas Jefferson died on July 4, 1826, 50 years from the day the Declaration was adopted by the Continental Congress and proclaimed to the world.

The Declaration of Independence was an expression of democratic philosophy that sustained American patriots during the Revolution and has ever since inspired men to fight to the death for their "unalienable Rights."

The standard phrase used by writers of Jefferson's day to describe man's essential rights was "life, liberty and
10 property." But to Jefferson, human rights were more important than property rights, and the phrase, as he wrote it in the Declaration of Independence, became "Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."

The laws and the traditions of the colonies in 1776 were designed to support a monarchical system rather than a democratic society. To Thomas Jefferson the American Revolution was far more than a struggle for independence. It was a struggle for democracy.

15 Within a few weeks after independence had been proclaimed at Philadelphia, Jefferson resigned his seat in the Continental Congress and returned to his place in the Virginia Legislature. There he began his monumental work of laying the foundation of an independent democracy.

Within a few years the Virginia Legislature, under Jefferson's leadership, instituted full religious freedom, abolished the laws which had permitted great estates to pass undivided from generation to generation, prohibited the importation
20 of slaves, revised the civil and criminal code of laws, and established a general system of public education. These acts, according to Jefferson, eradicated every fiber of the ancient and future aristocracy. These acts formed the basis for a truly democratic government.

Jefferson knew it was necessary to provide in law the requisites for the survival of an independent democracy. He knew that it was not enough merely to set forth a Declaration of Independence.

25 Two years ago the United States and 50 other nations joined in signing a great Declaration of Interdependence known as the Charter of the United Nations. We did so because we had learned, at staggering cost, that the nations of the world cannot live in peace and prosperity if, at the same time, they try to live in isolation. We have learned that nations are interdependent, and that recognition of our dependence upon one another is essential to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness of all mankind.

30 It is now the duty of all nations to converge their policies toward common goals of peace. Of course, we cannot expect all nations, with different histories, institutions, and economic conditions, to agree at once upon common ideals and policies. But it is not too much to expect that all nations should create, each within its own borders, the requisites for the growth of worldwide harmony.

The first requisite of peace among nations is common adherence to the principle that governments derive their just
35 powers from the consent of the governed. There must be genuine effort to translate that principle into reality.

The respective constitutions of virtually all the members of the United Nations subscribe to the proposition that governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed. In many countries, however, progress toward that goal is extremely slow. In other countries, progress in that direction is nonexistent. And in still others, the course of government is in the opposite direction.

40 It is necessary, if we are to have peace, that the peoples of the earth know each other, that they trade with each other and trust each other, and that they move toward common ideals. And yet, when governments do not derive their powers from the consent of the governed, these requirements are usually denied, and the peoples are kept in isolation.

The stronger the voice of a people in the formulation of national policies, the less the danger of aggression. When all governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed, there will be enduring peace.

- 45 A second requisite of peace among nations is common respect for basic human rights. Jefferson knew the relationship between respect for these rights and peaceful democracy. We see today with equal clarity the relationship between respect for human rights and the maintenance of world peace. So long as the basic rights of men are denied in any substantial portion of the earth, men everywhere must live in fear of their own rights and their own security.

We have learned much in the last 15 years from Germany, Italy, and Japan about the intimate relationship of
50 dictatorship, aggression, and the loss of human rights. The problem of protecting human rights has been recognized in the Charter of the United Nations, and a Commission is studying the subject at this time.

No country has yet reached the absolute in protecting human rights. In all countries, certainly including our own, there is much to be accomplished. The maintenance of peace will depend to an important degree upon the progress that is made within nations and by the United Nations in protecting human rights.

- 55 The third requisite of peace is the free and full exchange of knowledge, ideas, and information among the peoples of the earth, and maximum freedom in international travel and communication.

Jefferson well understood this principle. On one occasion he said, "If a nation expects to be ignorant and free in a state of peace, it expects what never was and never will be." Today, we can paraphrase these words in international terms as follows: "If the nations of the world expect to live in ignorance and suspicion of each other in a state of peace, they
60 expect what never was and never will be."

Many members of the United Nations have jointly created and now support the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization for the purpose of promoting the free exchange of ideas and information among the peoples of the earth. In the preamble to the Constitution of this Organization the member nations have declared that "the wide diffusion of culture and the education of humanity for justice and liberty and peace... constitute a sacred duty which
65 all the nations must fulfill."

The United States has taken a leading role in furthering this ideal. We believe that it is essential to a peaceful and prosperous world. We believe that common knowledge and understanding among men can be greatly expanded in the years to come. We have the mechanical facilities--the radio, television, airplanes--for the creation of a worldwide culture. We have only to set them to work for international good.

- 70 Unfortunately, a number of countries maintain barriers against the flow of information and ideas into, or out of, their territories. Many of them restrict international travel. Some of them, behind barriers of their own creation, present to their citizens carefully selected or distorted versions of the facts about other countries. They teach and broadcast distrust and scorn of their neighbors.

These activities of organized mistrust lead the people away from peace and unity. They are a far cry from contributing
75 to the full and free exchange of knowledge and ideas which we need if we are to have a peaceful world.

The first step to end ignorance and suspicion would be to stop propaganda attacks upon other nations. The second step would be to let down the barriers to information, ideas, and travel. The final step would be to cooperate with other nations who are so earnestly endeavoring to increase friendly understanding among men.

Here at the home of Thomas Jefferson, who dedicated his life to liberty, education, and intellectual freedom, I appeal
80 to all nations and to all peoples to break down the artificial barriers which separate them. I appeal for tolerance and restraint in the mutual relations of nations and peoples. And I appeal for a free flow of knowledge and ideas that alone can lead to a harmonious world.

The fourth requisite of peace is that nations shall devise their economic and financial policies to support a world economy rather than separate nationalistic economies.

- 85 It is important to recognize that the United States has heavy responsibilities here. The United States is the greatest industrial nation of the world, the leading exporter of agricultural products, and the greatest creditor nation. Europe and Asia, on the other hand, have been devastated by war, and with insufficient funds and materials are struggling desperately with mountainous problems of reconstruction. In this situation the economic and financial policies maintained by the United States are of crucial importance.

90 We have contributed nearly \$20 billion since the war to world relief, reconstruction, and stabilization. We have taken the lead in the establishment of the World Bank and the World Stabilization Fund. We have cooperated fully in the work of the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations. We have authorized aid to Greece and Turkey. We have made generous loans through our Export-Import Bank. And we have suggested to European nations that further requests for American aid should be on the basis of a sound plan for European reconstruction.

95 Our representatives are in Geneva negotiating a series of tariff-reducing trade agreements. They are seeking agreement with other nations on the charter of an International Trade Organization designed to bring fairness and a spirit of cooperation into the trade relations of nations.

I believe that the United States is living up to its responsibilities for creating the economic conditions of the peace. We must realize that these responsibilities are continuous. Even the emergency aspects of the job are not yet behind us.

100 It is not enough, however, for one nation to live up to its responsibilities for aiding reconstruction and for cooperating in the production and exchange of goods. The cooperation of all nations is necessary if the job is to be done. To the extent that any nation falls behind, to that extent will urgent needs for food, clothing, and shelter remain unfilled.

Yet, certain nations today are withholding their support of reconstruction plans on the ground that this would mean interference by some nations in the internal affairs of others. This is as fallacious as the refusal of a man to enter a
105 profitable business partnership on the ground that it would involve interference in his private affairs.

Surely after two world wars, nations should have learned the folly of a nationalism so extreme as to block cooperative economic planning among nations for peaceful reconstruction.

The life of Thomas Jefferson demonstrates, to a remarkable degree, the strength and power of truth.

He believed, with deep conviction, that in this young Nation the survival of freedom depended upon the survival of
110 truth. So it is with the world.

As the spirit of freedom and the spirit of truth spread throughout the world, so shall there be understanding and justice among men.

This is the foundation for peace--a peace which is not merely the absence of war, but a deep, lasting peace built upon mutual respect and tolerance.

115 Our goal must be--not peace in our time--but peace for all time.

(1903 words)

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