

WHAT SO ★ PROUDLY ★ WE HAIL

The American Soul in Story, Speech, and Song

Address to the Nation, July 4, 1942

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In the dark days of World War II, with the outcome very much in doubt, Independence Day was observed not by fireworks—as nighttime blackouts were observed in all cities and towns—but by extra dedication to the war effort. In this radio address to the nation on July 4, 1942, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt (1882–1945) set the tone.

How does Roosevelt understand the meaning of World War II? How does he understand the traditional meaning of the Fourth of July, and what new significance does it have in the present crisis? How successfully—and by what means—can the message of Independence Day be spread to “all peoples and races and groups and nations, everywhere in the world”? Should it be?

For 166 years this Fourth Day of July has been a symbol to the people of our country of the democratic freedom which our citizens claim as their precious birthright. On this grim anniversary its meaning has spread over the entire globe—focusing the attention of the world upon the modern freedoms for which all the United Nations are now engaged in deadly war.

On the desert sands of Africa, along the thousands of miles of battle lines in Russia, in New Zealand and Australia, and the islands of the Pacific, in war-torn China and all over the seven seas, free men are fighting desperately—and dying—to preserve the liberties and the decencies of modern civilization. And in the overrun and occupied nations of the world, this day is filled with added significance, coming at a time when freedom and religion have been attacked and trampled upon by tyrannies unequalled in human history.

Never since it first was created in Philadelphia, has this anniversary come in times so dangerous to everything for which it stands. We celebrate it this year, not in the fireworks of make-believe but in the death-dealing reality of tanks and planes and guns and ships. We celebrate it also by running without interruption the assembly lines which turn out these weapons to be shipped to all the embattled points of the globe. Not to waste one

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hour, not to stop one shot, not to hold back one blow—that is the way to mark our great national holiday in this year of 1942.

To the weary, hungry, unequipped Army of the American Revolution, the Fourth of July was a tonic of hope and inspiration. So is it now. The tough, grim men who fight for freedom in this dark hour take heart in its message—the assurance of the right to liberty under God—for all peoples and races and groups and nations, everywhere in the world.

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