

CONWAY FOURTH OF JULY CELEBRATION
Simon Park, July 4, 2012
Their Fate and Ours, Entrusted to the Supreme Judge
Phillip Fletcher

We are presented with opportunities in our lives in which we must decide for ourselves whether the cost to act will be worth the benefits that will be secured. Very rarely do we awake with the sun shining upon our faces, determined to seek opportunities that will have great cost. These opportunities march toward us in the most unsuspecting of times. They come upon us like giants moving with thunderous pace, awakening us from our slumber of comfort and provoking us to act. It is in these moments of giant opportunities, the character, conviction and courage of men and women is truly revealed. It is as Martin Luther King Jr. said, “the ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy.”

We know why we gather here today. In small cities like Conway, to large cities like Little Rock and New York City, Americans of all stripes are gathering around picnic tables, barbeques and fireworks to celebrate the actions of men and women who in the moments of challenge and controversy, put forward their lives, fortunes and sacred honor. The moments, or as the Declaration of Independence calls “the long train of abuses and usurpations” that instigated both the creation and signing of the Declaration of Independence, were the moments that awoke fifty-six men from their slumber. These men representing thirteen colonies awoke from their slumber to stand in controversy. They rolled out of their beds of comfort and convenience; and with resolve, courage and faith in the Sovereign God, displayed their measure as men to a ruler who had “a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over these States.”¹

Ladies and Gentleman, we gather here today not as Republicans, Democrats, Greens, Libertarians or independents. We gather as Americans. We do not gather here today to point out the failures of some signers. We are all imperfect people. We gather here today to celebrate the birth of our nation which occurred by the Sovereign and Providential God. But we also gather today to celebrate the courage of men and women who put themselves forward, to be branded as traitors to the crown, securing not just for themselves but for YOU and ME...the blessings of “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.”

These men put themselves forward as a sort of fragrant incense. Men such as *Josiah Bartlett, John Hancock, William Ellery, Thomas Nelson Jr. and Thomas Jefferson* stood firm in the fires of empire and their sacrifice continues to be an effervescent aroma that continues to stimulate the nostrils of Americans and nations around the world. The fragrance of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness was lit in the bowl of an idea that men and women could flourish, free of a government that sought to reduce the natural

¹ *The Declaration of Independence, 1776.*

freedoms of its citizens. Therefore, that fragrance continues to ascend today. It ascends in the nostrils of men and women who desire to take a creative idea and transform that idea into a business. It is the fragrance that moves from Ireland to South America; Uganda to England; from Japan to South America. It is the fragrance that tells “my people, the poor, [the] downtrodden millions, to go out from the old world; tell[ing] them to go out from wrong, oppression and blood.”²

The character of their sacrifice and the measure of who they were has been passed down in stories that are part of our American tradition. We want to be remembered as finishing well and while the endings of some of these men are clouded in the smoke of the past, we have stories that provide us a glimpse of the degree of challenge and controversy they faced for freedom and liberty. “Twenty-four were lawyers and jurists. Eleven were merchants, nine were farmers and large plantation owners; men of means, well educated. But they signed the Declaration of Independence knowing full well that the penalty would be death if they were captured. Twelve had their homes ransacked and burned. Two lost their sons serving in the Revolutionary Army; another had two sons captured. Nine of the 56 fought and died from wounds or hardships of the Revolutionary War.”³

These men were resolute in their conviction to appeal “to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions, do, in the Name, and by Authority of the good People of these Colonies, solemnly publish and declare, that these united Colonies are, and of Right out to be free...”⁴ Ladies and gentleman, these men and women supposed the cost of their lives, fortunes and sacred honor were worth the investment of a free nation in which now, today, two-hundred and thirty six years later we all now stand.

Their fate is inextricably tied to our fate. These men had differences. They came from varied backgrounds, families and education. Yet an opportunity had dawned upon them. They discerned the warm rays of independence, self-governing and new opportunities. And now centuries later, we as Americans stand on the threshold of being awakened once again out of our slumber. The footsteps of freedom and liberty are beginning to shake the landscape of our nation. The aromas of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness is drawing us back to that singular document to remind us that we must once again stand up and be measured in times of challenge and controversy.

And so our fate is inextricably tied to the fate of the signers of the Declaration of Independence. They entrusted their actions and ultimately this nation to a supreme authority. They appealed to him who was far about legislatures, governors and kings. Just as they appealed to the Supreme Judge of the world, we too must appeal to this Supreme Judge who has been appointed and of this we have all received assurance because he has been raised from the dead.

² Patrick Henry, *Our Heritage of Freedom*, 1776.

³ Author unknown, *The Fate of the Signers of the Declaration of Independence*, http://www.constitution.org/bio/fate_of_signers.htm.

⁴ *The Declaration of Independence*, 1776.

Therefore we should not be too alarmed. While we do not face the threat of loss in regards to property and our personal lives as these men did, we should not become too alarmed by the threats to our freedom and liberty. They appealed to a Supreme Judge who would judge rightly. They trusted that their thoughts, penned words and deeds would be weighed and found sufficient for the times.

Therefore let us do the same. I want, as you want, to leave a legacy in which my children and your children can continue to enjoy the fragrance of life, liberty and happiness in freedom. Let us be aware that we are on the threshold of being awakened to new challenges and freedom provides us the environment to speak freely, address grievances and create change. Let us be courageous and resolute to stand up in the midst of oncoming challenges and controversies to discover who we are as a free people and be a fragrance that benefits generations to come.

And when we stand up; when we stand up as these signers did, we will realize that our desires for continued freedom are in line with theirs. These signers understood their actions in the midst of challenge and controversies were not just for themselves but future generations. These fifty-six signers had the awareness to appeal to the Supreme Judge to say to the world, WE ARE FREE!

Therefore let us do the same. Let us do the same. That today and for the sake of future generations; “in the name of the One who made you, the Savior who redeemed you, in the name of the millions whose very breath is now hushed as, in intense expectation, they look up to you for the...words “YOU ARE FREE!””⁵

⁵ Patrick Henry, *Our Heritage of Freedom*, Boston Journal, 1776.