



DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

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REMARKS BY U.S. SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION JOHN A. VOLPE FOR THE COLUMBUS DAY DINNER, WALDORF-ASTORIA HOTEL, NEW YORK, NEW YORK, SATURDAY, OCTOBER 7, 1972, 9:00 p.m.

I am delighted to join you in celebrating the second anniversary of Columbus Day as a national holiday. I might note -- with pardonable pride, I hope -- that the people of Massachusetts have made Columbus Day an official holiday since 1910. (I was very young at the time -- and won't take credit for that!)

I will take credit however, for the fact that during the last of my three terms as Governor of Massachusetts we made it more than just an officially-recognized holiday. In 1967 we made it a legal holiday -- with banks and schools closed, and appropriate official tribute being paid to the discoverer of this great land!

I would like to recall for you some of the words that were used just 12 months ago to mark the first national recognition of Columbus Day. Listen:

"In this present age of epic journeys into space, we can appreciate more than ever the great achievements of Christopher Columbus. An intrepid explorer, a supreme navigator -- but above all a man of unshakeable faith and courage -- this Son of Italy sailed in the service of the Spanish crown on a mission that forever broadened mans' hopes and horizons."

Those are words from the first Columbus Day Proclamation -- words from President Richard Nixon. I join you in applauding the spirit, the sincerity, and the understanding reflected in that statement of national tribute.

But, in truth, that first voyage of Columbus in 1492 did much more than just broaden mans' hopes and horizons. The discovery of a new world opened a new era in civilization.

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Faith in God was revived and the human spirit was renewed. Gone was disillusion, cynical pessimism and despair. In its place there came into being a speculative hope for a new golden age of the future. Returning from that first voyage of discovery, Columbus brought Europe a new confidence, and enlarged infinitely the scope of human thought and speculation.

I wonder if we here today -- we Americans who make the new world our home -- are not now in the process of crossing that same threshold.

I happen to think we are. I think that we are witnessing a gradual turnabout -- a return to the values that brought our Nation to the position of greatness it enjoys in the world today. We are going through a period of change -- a period of adjustment -- and we should. For without change, we will surely find ourselves without progress. Indeed, without this recurring need for change, we would probably not have found ourselves honoring Christopher Columbus. It was his search for change, his vision and determination that altered the mood of Europe and the face of the world. But it was constructive change directed towards sound progress.

But "sound" progress does not come through the destruction of our institutions. It does not come through challenging our values in an effort to destroy them. It does not come through lawlessness, permissiveness and tolerance toward moral decay. Nor does it come through any laxity on our part in the age-old reverence we have learned for the supreme being that created us all.

Yes, there are ruts in the road that leads to that last great battle between the forces of good and evil. Large, substantial ruts. But their true purpose is to challenge our aspirations for greatness, reinforce our conviction and affirm our loyalty. And it is time to re-affirm our faith in the American people -- in ourselves -- and to once again underscore the strength of our Nation. It is time to raise our voices for liberty and freedom and justice. It is time to make old-fashioned patriotism fashionable again!

In reality, these are truly the symbols of our natural being.

President Nixon has said: "The story of America is not its wealth, its power, but its spirit and purpose; this is the land that enshrines liberty and opportunity, and that has held out the hand of welcome to millions in search of a better and fuller and above all freer life."

Yes, only a part of our strength rests in the tremendous natural resources with which our land is endowed.

America's greatest resource has always been her people -- people who came from all over the world -- "The poor, the downtrodden, the huddled masses yearning to breath free." Most of them were devoid of both money and formal

education, but they were rich in daring -- endowed with the unusual and the uncommon. As they poured in through the gates of Ellis Island here in New York it would have been hard to see them then as symbols of a new age of hope and glory and accomplishment. But this was their spirit and purpose and out of this strong, select stock evolved the people we know as Americans. In less than a century we had surpassed the rest of the world in almost every field of human endeavor, and free men, working together produced the richest civilization in human history.

Theirs was a faith capable of turning dreams into reality -- the same great faith that brought Columbus to the shores of the new world. It was the same faith that moved the pioneers to push towards the western horizon and expand a relatively small country into a vast nation. It was the same faith that put American astronauts on the moon. It is also the same faith we must now call upon to bolster our hope, replenish our strength, and re-affirm our purpose as we seek solid prosperity and happiness for all Americans and a generation of peace for all of the world.

After many years of tension, turmoil, conflict and dissent, it seems we are joining together to move away from the elements that have divided us. Perhaps today, to some small degree, we can all experience the same feelings Christopher Columbus has at sunrise on October 12, 1492 when he first sighted the surf breaking against the shores of San Salvador. We, too, are within sight of our landfall.

Just as Columbus made his way into the calm safety of Fernandaz Bay on that October 12th 480 years ago, we in America are returning to the concepts of decency and respect for each other. We are re-affirming our understanding of what is right and what is wrong. Now, as Americans, we must make those principles part of our daily lives. We must re-instill the ethics upon which our government was founded -- the ethics of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Note that I didn't say the "granting" of happiness or the "right" to happiness. I said the "pursuit" of happiness. And as we join the pursuit, we must do what we can to keep this resurgence alive.

Resurgence! We Americans of Italian ancestry -- as many of us here tonight are -- should be particularly good at it. Our forefathers created the renaissance they led Europe out of the dark ages. They gave us Leonardo Da Vinci (whose "Mona Lisa" is still smiling at our inability to fathom many of his principles of engineering). And most important of all, they gave us Christopher Columbus, whose gift to Europe -- and to us -- was a new world. Yes, ours is a tradition of resurgence -- it is our heritage!

In their search and in their faith Columbus of Genoa, Amerigo Vespucci of Tuscany and Giovanni Da Verrazano of Florence all looked to the West for their footsteps to this land of unparalleled opportunity. And we have held fast to our heritage by preserving for our children the full value of the great culture and traditions of our forebears.

Personally, I will always be indebted to the traditions I learned as a child. They have always been a source of deep inspiration to me in both my private and public life. If I am a better citizen today, it is because my parents taught me to love America, to believe in it, and most importantly, to do something for it. I sincerely hope I'm living up to their expectations of my country.

I think most Americans of Italian ancestry feel the same. It is an inbred sense of responsibility born of national pride. President Nixon was well aware of this when he said recently: "They are proud of their Italian background, but they are proud first to be Americans," and then he added: "What we have today wouldn't be here today if a lot of people hadn't come to America, hadn't worked hard and built America."

We are fortunate that our parents and grandparents did come to America and that they came with "a maximum of faith and a minimum of technique, a bare sufficiency of equipment and a superabundance of stout-heartedness." Today we are blessed with a maximum of technique and a super-abundance of equipment. Surely it is time we rekindled some of the faith and regenerated some of the stout-heartedness of those who have gone before.

The whole history of the Americas stem from the four voyages of Christopher Columbus and the eternal faith that sent him forth to the benefit of the ages. It is therefore, our duty to dedicate this Columbus Day -- the 480th anniversary of the discovery of America -- to reassuring the world that the faith of the admiral of the ocean seas will live to benefit the future, just as we here tonight have reaped its rewards. That is the heritage we must pass on. Thank you once again, for inviting me here tonight. It is a national holiday in which all Americans can take pride.

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