

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT

AFTER RECEIVING AMERICA'S DEMOCRATIC LEGACY AWARD
AT THE B'NAI B'RITH DINNER, IN HONOR OF THE 40TH ANNIVERSARY OF
THE ANTI-DEFAMATION LEAGUE MAYFLOWER HOTEL, WASHINGTON
D.C.

NOVEMBER 23, 1953
7:54 P.M. E.S. T.

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Why are we so proud? We are proud, first of all, because from the beginning of this Nation, a man can walk upright, no matter who he is, or who she is. He can walk upright and meet his friend—or his enemy; and he does not feel that because that enemy may be in a position of great power that he can be suddenly thrown in jail to rot there without charges and with no recourse to justice. We have the habeas corpus act, and we respect it.

I was raised in a little town of which most of you have never heard. But in the West it is a famous place. It is called Abilene, Kansas. We had as our marshal for a long time a man named Wild Bill Hickock [sic]. If you don't know anything about him, read your Westerns more. Now that town had a code and I was raised as a boy to prize that code.

It was: meet anyone face to face with whom you disagree. You could not sneak up on him from behind or do any damage to him, without suffering the penalty of an outraged citizenry. If you met him face to face and took the same risks he did, you could get away with almost anything, as long as the bullet was in the front.

And today, although none of you has the great fortune, I think, of being from Abilene, Kansas, you live after all by that same code, by your ideals and in the respect you give to certain qualities. In this country, if someone dislikes you, or accuses you, he must come up in front. He cannot hide behind the shadow. He cannot assassinate you or your character from behind, without suffering the penalties an outraged citizenry will impose.

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I would not want to sit down this evening without urging one thing: if we are going to continue to be proud that we are Americans, there must be no weakening of the code by which we have lived; by the right to go to the church or the synagogue, or even the mosque, of your own choosing; by your right to speak your mind and be protected in it.

Ladies and gentlemen, the things that make us proud to be Americans are of the soul and of the spirit. They are not the jewels we wear, or the furs we have, the houses we live in, the standard of living even that we have. All these things are wonderful to the esthetic and to the physical senses.

But let us never forget that the deep things that are American are the soul and the spirit. The Statue of Liberty is not tired, and not because it is made of bronze. It is because no matter what happens, here the individual is dignified because he is created in the image of his God. Let us not forget it.

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But if I could leave with you one thought, you not only will repeat it every day of your life, but you will say, "I will do my part to make it always true, for my children, and my grandchildren."

Thank You.