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1989 MEMORIAL DAY SPEECH (SHORT VERSION)

MAY 29, 1989

TODAY IS A VERY SPECIAL DAY ... A SPECIAL OCCASION ... MEMORIAL DAY. IT IS ON THIS SPECIAL OCCASION THAT WE ALL BECOME ACUTELY AWARE THAT FREEDOM, JUST AS ANYTHING THAT IS PRECIOUS, CARRIES A LARGE PRICE TAG. BECAUSE MEMORIAL DAY IS THE DAY SET ASIDE TO HONOR AMERICA'S WAR DEAD. IT IS A DAY OF NATIONAL MOURNING.

BUT, MEMORIAL DAY IS MORE THAN A DAY OF NATIONAL MOURNING ... IT'S A DAY OF REMEMBRANCE ... IT IS THE DAY WHEN AMERICANS, FROM ALL WALKS OF LIFE, PAUSE TO HONOR THE MEMORY OF AMERICA'S GREATEST PATRIOTS.

WE HONOR THE MEN AND WOMEN WHO GAVE THEIR LIVES SO THAT WE, THE LIVING, COULD CONTINUE TO ENJOY THE LIBERTIES AND FREEDOMS THAT HAVE SO LONG BEEN A PART OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

IT IS IMPORTANT FOR THE UNITED STATES TO HAVE A DAY OF REMEMBRANCE. THIS NATION'S PAST, WITH ALL ITS HEROIC SACRIFICES, SHOULD NEVER BE FORGOTTEN. FOR IT IS IN OUR NOBLE PAST THAT WE FIND THE REASONS THAT CAUSED OUR FOUNDING FATHERS TO MAKE THAT FIRST PAYMENT ON THE CONTINUING ACCOUNT OF FREEDOM.

IT IS IMPORTANT THAT WE REMEMBER THE IDEALS THAT LED THOSE EARLY AMERICAN COLONIALISTS TO TAKE UP ARMS AGAINST THE MILITARY MIGHT OF THE BRITISH EMPIRE MORE THAN TWO HUNDRED YEARS AGO.

IT WAS THEIR EFFORTS AND THEIR SACRIFICES THAT ESTABLISHED THIS NATION ... THIS WAY OF LIFE THAT HAS ENDURED FOR TWO CENTURIES. ENDURED, BUT NOT WITHOUT CHALLENGE. BLOODY WARS HAVE BEEN FOUGHT TO PRESERVE THE IDEALS OF FREEDOM AND SELF GOVERNMENT THAT ARE THE FOUNDATIONS OF OUR BELOVED NATION.

YES, THE PAGES OF AMERICAN HISTORY ARE FULL OF ACCOUNTS OF FIGHTING MEN ENGAGING IN BATTLES AND GREAT WARS IN THE NAME OF FREEDOM, ALMOST EVERY GENERATION OF YOUNG AMERICANS HAS BEEN ASKED TO ANSWER THEIR NATION'S CALL TO ARMS. MANY ARE THE PAGES OF OUR NATIONAL HISTORY THAT HAVE BEEN WRITTEN IN BLOOD.

ALTHOUGH WE DO NOT HONOR WAR, WE DO  
RECALL WITH HONOR AND RESPECT THE  
BATTLES AND THE WARS THAT THE HEROES OF  
THIS NATION HAVE FOUGHT, IN ORDER TO  
PRESERVE OUR AMERICAN HERITAGE. AND WE  
GIVE SPECIAL HONOR TO THE MEMORY OF  
THOSE WHO, IN THE WORDS OF ABRAHAM  
LINCOLN, "GAVE THE LAST FULL MEASURE OF  
DEVOTION."

IT IS ON THIS DAY ... MEMORIAL DAY  
... THAT THE TREMENDOUS COST OF FREEDOM  
REALLY COMES HOME TO THE AMERICAN PUBLIC  
... AND IT COMES HOME HARD.

HOW HIGH IS THE PRICE OF FREEDOM?  
IF WE LOOK AROUND US, WE CAN SEE MANY  
CEMETERIES ... BOTH MILITARY AND  
CIVILIAN ... FILLED WITH AMERICA'S  
FREEDOM FIGHTERS.

HOW HIGH IS THE PRICE OF FREEDOM?  
IF WE THINK FOR A MOMENT, WE CAN PICTURE  
HALLOWED PLACES IN FOREIGN LANDS ...  
WHITE CROSSES ROW UPON ROW. A TERRIBLE  
PRICE TO PAY IF FREEDOM FAILS ... BUT A  
SMALL PRICE TO PAY IF THE WORLD CAN  
EVENTUALLY BE FREE.

IF WE REMEMBER THE WORDS OF THOMAS  
JEFFERSON ... "ETERNAL VIGILANCE IS THE  
PRICE OF LIBERTY" ... THEN WE CAN SEE  
THAT A ONCE-A-YEAR AWARENESS OF FREEDOM'S  
COST IS NOT ENOUGH. AMERICANS MUST  
STAND READY TO DEFEND FREEDOM AND  
LIBERTY, OR THEY MUST STAND READY TO  
LOSE THEM.

MEMORIAL DAY IS DEDICATED TO THOSE  
WHO DID STAND READY, TO THOSE WHO  
ANSWERED FREEDOM'S CALL, TO THOSE WHO  
GAVE THEIR LIVES SO THAT AMERICA MIGHT  
LIVE.

WE HONOR THESE MEN AND WOMEN ...  
HONOR THEM BECAUSE THEY UNSELFISHLY  
FOUGHT FOR THE IDEALS OF THIS COUNTRY,  
THEY DIDN'T FIGHT FOR PERSONAL PROFIT,  
NOR DID THEY FIGHT TO CONQUER AND  
ENSLAVE OTHER HUMAN BEINGS.

THEY FOUGHT AND THEY GAVE THEIR  
LIVES SO THAT ALL THE WORLD MIGHT  
UNDERSTAND ... AND ULTIMATELY ENJOY THE  
BENEFITS OF THE AMERICAN WAY OF LIFE ...  
FREEDOM, SAFETY AND EQUAL JUSTICE UNDER  
THE LAW.

THOSE WHOM WE HONOR TODAY DID NOT  
WORSHIP WAR, NOR DID THEY ENGAGE IN WAR  
SOLELY FOR THE SAKE OF WAR. THEY FOUGHT  
FOR A CAUSE. THEY KNEW THE DIFFERENCE  
BETWEEN RIGHT AND WRONG AND THEY KNEW  
THEIR CAUSE WAS JUST.

THERE IS NO BETTER WAY TO SHOW OUR GRATITUDE FOR THE SACRIFICES AND HARDSHIPS SUFFERED BY OUR WAR DEAD THAN BY GUARDING AND PRESERVING THE PRINCIPLES FOR WHICH THEY FOUGHT SO VALIANTLY.

THE DECORATION OF GRAVE SITES HAS LONG BEEN THE ACCEPTED CUSTOM FOR MEMORIAL DAY AND ON THIS SPECIAL DAY, PEOPLE WILL BE PLACING SMALL FLAGS AND FLOWERS OF ALL SIZES, TYPES AND ARRANGEMENTS ON THE GRAVES OF VETERANS THROUGHOUT THE NATION.

HOWEVER, IT IS BUT A TOKEN, A SMALL GESTURE USED TO SYMBOLIZE THE MONUMENTAL FEELING THAT WE HOLD FOR THESE MEN AND WOMEN, THESE BRAVE AMERICANS WHO STEPPED FORWARD WHEN THEIR NATION CALLED.

AMERICA'S WAR DEAD ARE BURIED IN HALLOWED GROUND. GROUND MADE HOLY BY THE BLOOD THAT WAS SHED BY THESE AMERICAN PATRIOTS, CITIZENS WHO KNEW IN LIFE AND PROVED BY THEIR DEATH, THE FACT THAT WITH CITIZENSHIP COMES OBLIGATIONS AS WELL AS PRIVILEGES.

MEMORIAL DAY IS TRULY A DAY OF REMEMBRANCE, BUT MEMORIAL DAY IS NOT A SALUTE TO THE PAST ALONE ... NO MATTER HOW GLORIOUS AND HOW RIGHTEOUS THAT PAST MAY BE.

WE DO LITTLE CREDIT TO THESE HONORED DEAD IF ALL WE DO IS PRAISE AND MOURN THEM. TO GIVE FULL CREDIT TO THE SACRIFICES THEY MADE, WE THE LIVING MUST REDEDICATE OURSELVES TO THE PRINCIPLES FOR WHICH THEY FOUGHT AND DIED.



AMERICAN FIGHTING MEN, GENERATION  
AFTER GENERATION, PURCHASED A LEGACY OF  
FREEDOM FOR ALL AMERICANS WITH THEIR  
UNSELFISH, THEIR TOTAL SACRIFICE.

IT BECOMES OUR PERMANENT OBLIGATION  
TO PRESERVE THAT LEGACY, THAT HERITAGE OF  
FREEDOM FOR GENERATIONS YET TO COME. IT  
IS OUR SACRED DUTY TO PASS IT ON,  
UNTARNISHED AND UNLIMITED TO THE MILLIONS  
OF AMERICANS YET UNBORN.

THIS NATION'S COMBAT VETERAN IS NO  
COMMON MAN. THOSE WHO HAVE GIVEN  
EVERYTHING FOR THEIR COUNTRY AND THEIR  
FELLOW AMERICANS ARE TRULY AMERICA'S  
NOBLEMEN.

EVERY MAN AND EVERY WOMAN WHO HAS  
HONORABLY SERVED THIS COUNTRY IN TIME OF  
WAR HOLDS A SPECIAL PLACE IN OUR HEARTS.  
THOSE WHO HAVE PASSED ON, WE COMMEMORATE  
ON THIS VERY SPECIAL DAY.

AS WE LEAVE HERE TODAY, LET US GO FORTH TO FACE THE FUTURE WITH HEAD HELD HIGH. AND LET EACH OF US MAKE A SOLEMN VOW TO REMEMBER FOREVER THOSE WHO HAVE KEPT US FREE. LET US PLEDGE TO DO OUR UTMOST TO KEEP THE FUTURE OF OUR COUNTRY, OURSELVES AND OUR DESCENDANTS BRIGHT WITH THE PURE LIGHT OF FREEDOM. AND LET US RENEW OUR FAITH IN THE TRUE SPIRIT OF AMERICA ... LET US BLESS THE MEMORY OF THOSE WHOM WE HONOR TODAY ... FOR THESE ARE GREAT AMERICANS.