

WE HOLD THESE TRUTHS

By Roosevelt Fitzgerald

We do not get a chance too often to read the great documents upon which our country was established. One result of this is that we find ourselves performing rituals which are meaningless to us.

Just days ago we celebrated the 206th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. There were parades, picnics and fireworks. Most Americans enjoyed a long weekend. There was also the prediction of the number of

lives which would be lost on the nation's highways. A large percentage would be the result of driving while under the influence. Those unfortunates will not be around to celebrate the 207th birthday.

Local news, both print and television, took us on semi-tours of the Valley reporting some of the doings around and about. One television reporter asked several participants of the parades, picnics and parties pertinent,

pressing questions pertaining to their participation in those festivities. Most had no understanding of the significance of the date — The Fourth of July.

Initial draft along with all of the additions and deletions. The final product reads in part:

We hold these truths to be self-evident
That all men are created

What would they have? Is life so dear or peace so sweet as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery? Forbid it almighty God. I know not what course others may take but as for me, give me liberty or give me death."

would have any punch. I feared that it would be such a puny bill that it needn't be signed at all.

High drama preceded it. Will it or won't it pass muster? We had to wait until the very last page of the mystery to find out. Then, there it was. So much anxiety before. So much fear and uncertainty. But at last it came and although it had been served up with a mixture of bile and humiliation, I was nonetheless happy.

That scenario had been so important that it had demanded all of my attention. No periphery vision in evidence. Voting Rights was center stage and when it



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I was not surprised. Americans, as a group, seem to understand less about our democratic republic than almost any other group on the face of the Earth. We seem to merely routinely do things and their significances are a totally different matter.

Carl Becker, the historian, has written a marvelous book entitled simply *The Declaration of Independence*. It gives us not only the Declaration in its final draft form but also the

equal. That they are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights. That among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

Equality, rights, life, liberty and happiness. All of these are important in determining the quality of life of a people.

Whenever I read this portion of the Declaration of Independence, I marvel at its intensity and I shiver at the thought of what it must mean to Americans. Can't you just feel it? Doesn't it make you just want to jump up and shout?

Being a sort of history buff, I've taken a bit of time to take a look at the setting in which a dramatic piece of literature was born. It was truly a time to try men's souls. All around there were sufferings and deprivations. No one dreams of being oppressed and only those who are truly deviant desire such.

One of the Founding Fathers epitomized the dichotomy of the times. Patrick Henry. You've heard of him. Sure, I know that there is current debate as to the validity of some of the comments attributed to him. Whether they are accurate or not is beside the point. The fact that they are universally believed is what really matters. Listen to him and you decide its worth.

"Gentlemen may cry peace, peace but the war is actually begun. The next gale that sweeps from the North will bring to our ears the clash of resounding arms. What is it the gentlemen wish?

We don't hear that kind of talk anymore. Maybe it's a good thing. Patrick, you see, owned slaves. How dare he speak in such terms on the matter of "chains and slavery." By today's standards and in today's "lingo," such as he uttered has been translated to "do as I say, not as I do."

The Fourth of July. The nation's birthday. A time to rejoice. A time to



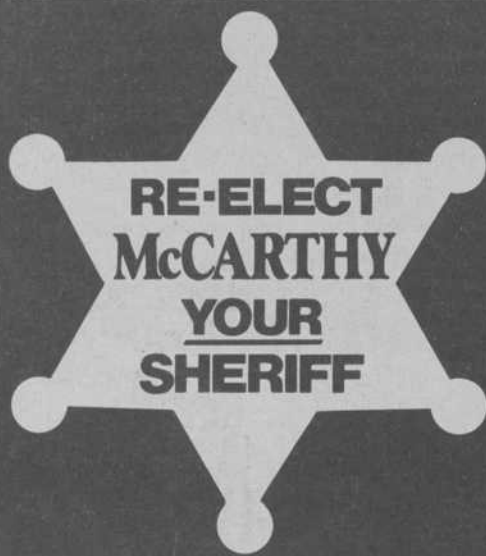
The shot heard round the world: Lexington, Mass.

stop and reflect on all the events in our country's history. A solemn time. 1982. Two hundred and six years since its beginning and where are we? We've come a long way but there is still "a ways to go." 1982. How many times have we heard it in speeches and in song: "The best of times and the worst of times."

That's what we have — the best of times and the worst of times. It was on a Tuesday, just last week, that a twenty-five-year extension of the Voting Rights Act was signed by the President. For quite some time I had been apprehensive about its extension. Well, I knew something would be signed, but I was not sure if it

survived the whirlwind, I was happy. It seemed so appropriate — on the eve of the Fourth of July it was extended. Equality, rights, life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Protection of the right to vote — the best of times.

I was just getting used to that reality. Actually, the reverberations of the hand clapping had not receded before a bombshell was dropped which neutralized all thoughts of joy. The day after the Voting Rights extension was signed, the death knell for ERA was sounded. How can I be happy about voting when 51 percent of the total population of the U.S. has been told, in effect, that they are not equal to the other 49



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MARY McLEOD BETHUNE (b. Mayesville, North Carolina; July 10, 1875; d. May 18, 1955). Called the First Lady of the Negro race, she was founder and president of Bethune-Cookman College, Daytona Beach, Florida; director of the Division of Negro Affairs, NYA; founder and president of the National Council for Negro Women.

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