



A RE-DECLARATION OF CREATIVE INDEPENDENCE

Kennedy Center Artistic Director and Vice President of Social Impact Marc Bamuthi Joseph dedicated the REACH with his Re-Declaration of Creative Independence, an original, communally performed choral poem. Below is the full text.

Marc Bamuthi Joseph Performance with
Alfre Woodard
Tatiana Chavez
David Brooks
Rachel Martin
Daniel Bernard Roumain

On the occasion of September 7, 2019...

A re-declaration of creative independence...a remix of Kennedy's first public words as president on the occasion of an inaugural moment...some self-evident truths and some personal views expressed with an intent to invite and connect...a shout out to Toni Morrison...an applearc noticeably not upset, and yet filled with some unusual fruit...filled with something brand new we can all taste...filled with seeds of something we all must grow...this morning we declare it...an assertion of the citizen as artist and the artist as leader...a bet you can't recite the bill of rights but you know all the words to stairway to heaven...you've hear the soundtrack so many times you could probably understudy for Lin-Manuel Miranda at this point...artists are our avatars...it's a self-evident truth, this is a re-declaration of it...joy is a human right...inspiration is an American ideal...in order to achieve the beautiful democracy we must have a democracy of beautiful things...dances and symphonic sound and New Orleans and Houston and Detroit and Bali and Budapest and Bangladesh and the Bronx...creativity knows no borders...*art knows no national boundaries. Genius can speak in any tongue and the entire world will hear it and listen...*this is America we preserve and remix it all...we declare that art is a basic truth, we ourselves are evidence...we are at our best when creativity is right within our reach.

Vice President Johnson, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Chief Justice, President Eisenhower, Vice President Nixon, President Truman, reverend clergy, fellow citizens:

We observe today not a victory of party, but a celebration of freedom—symbolizing an end, as well as a beginning—signifying renewal, as well as change. For I have sworn before you and Almighty God the same solemn oath our forebears prescribed nearly a century and three-quarters ago

The world is very different now. For man holds in his mortal hands the power to abolish all forms of human poverty and all forms of human life. And yet the same revolutionary beliefs for which our forebears fought are still at issue around the globe—the belief that the rights of man come not from the generosity of the state, but from the hand of God.



We dare not forget today that we are the heirs of that first revolution. Let the word go forth from this time and place, to friend and foe alike, that the torch has been passed to a new generation of Americans—born in this century, tempered by war, disciplined by a hard and bitter peace, proud of our ancient heritage, and unwilling to witness or permit the slow undoing of those human rights to which this nation has always been committed, and to which we are committed today at home and around the world.

Let every nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe, to assure the survival and the success of liberty.

This much we pledge—and more.

The name of the building is not “stay”. It’s not called “the sit”. Or the “kick back and watch”.
It is called the REACH.
And WE must do so.
Like our namesake.

Our namesake says:

I see little of more importance to the future of our country and our civilization than full recognition of the place of the artist.

He was a leader who embraced creativity.
Bearing his name is an honor
We are responsible to the aspiration of that name
To be restless for peace
To be eloquent while stargazing
Moving forward honoring our foundational colors
Red rice, cotton, and indigo
The economy of creative ecologies
Who am I American if not free to create
To manifest my destiny
What algorithm and yeast and response and responsibility...

The ability to respond simultaneously to the world as it is by MAKING a physical, time-based archetype of a different world as I imagine it, past passes through the artist

Tradition is just an old innovation waiting to become new again
Beethoven probably had more in common with Sid Vicious than the king of Austria, and frankly few of us remember who the king of Austria WAS in 18whatever, but you remember the music he commissioned, because great art matters

Shouldn’t have to be anything we repeat, but alas it is up to us, on this day, to RE-DECLARE it

To those old allies whose cultural and spiritual origins we share, we pledge the loyalty of faithful friends. United there is little we cannot do in a host of cooperative ventures. Divided there is little we can do -- for we dare not meet a powerful challenge at odds and split asunder.



To those new states whom we welcome to the ranks of the free, we pledge our word that one form of colonial control shall not have passed away merely to be replaced by a far more iron tyranny. We shall not always expect to find them supporting our view. But we shall always hope to find them strongly supporting their own freedom -- and to remember that, in the past, those who foolishly sought power by riding the back of the tiger ended up inside.

From sea to sea
From river to run
Slopes and sun
blue men dancing

Reach with an extended wingspan
sprawling like the width between Esperanza Spalding's soprano and her upright's vibrato
Reach upright like a straight backed woman balancing tomorrow upon her crown

Reach for the jewel of American promise
downward
into the bottomless echo of an ocean who swallowed dreamers against a current
the despondent Africans who died in bondage before setting foot on
the north American continent
acknowledge our many truths
make our wrongs right
float towards the ideals of creativity and independence

like the building
see how it rises and falls
like a serene white hawk
or the heart rate of a young boy in love

how the building curves
like a lunar satellite around Venus
curves like the river that bends around it
the building is in a cosmos of water and tree
cloud white peaceful green
sky so blue lit you feel you can reach it
it is fair like Thurgood Marshall
it speaks of justice for all
it begs of you your curiosity
peek in all the corners for unscripted magic
concurrently crackin in every corner
completely transparent like the ideals of American law...

making art is complex
constructing a building, is like, impossible
so we made three of them
the building reaches to the skylight



it expands its wings and welcomes you into its chest if you choose to come close
it descends to the river below
eye level to the water

MAKES you look at yourself in the context of creative process at eye level

The REACH isn't just what you can see

It's about who you choose to be in the midst of creative potency

Its about our collective creative potency

Its about art as vessel for huge ideas, great education, and social responsibility

*Let both sides seek to invoke the wonders of science instead of its terrors. Together let us explore the stars, conquer the deserts, eradicate disease, tap the ocean depths, and encourage the arts and commerce. Let both sides unite to heed, in all corners of the earth, the command of Isaiah -- to "undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free."*¹

And, if a beachhead of cooperation may push back the jungle of suspicion, let both sides join in creating a new endeavor -- not a new balance of power, but a new world of law -- where the strong are just, and the weak secure, and the peace preserved. All this will not be finished in the first one hundred days. Nor will it be finished in the first one thousand days; nor in the life of this Administration; nor even perhaps in our lifetime on this planet. But let us begin.

The poet says we choose to go to the moon...
as if dreaming were a choice

Far from being a harbor where culture comes to dock, the REACH seeks to be a space station where ideas are launched. In defiance of the gravity of this moment, what is the contemporary equivalent of Kennedy's moonshot? How can culture move us toward the impossible?

Marvel at the marble at the marley and the skylight

But if all you do is look, you really ain't doing it right, no shade, this is a building made for movement...it's matter is the matter of sweat, this thing is rock solid but it flows like fluid. It's name is a VERB yo, it's time for some action, the curtain is up and the potential for Sparkling chicanery is high, let's ACT up, the future will not happen to us, to fulfill the greatness of American promise, we make it, together, artfully...

In your hands, my fellow citizens, more than mine, will rest the final success or failure of our course. Since this country was founded, each generation of Americans has been summoned to give testimony to its national loyalty. The graves of young Americans who answered the call to service surround the globe.

Now the trumpet summons us again -- not as a call to bear arms, though arms we need -- not as a call to battle, though embattled we are -- but a call to bear the burden of a long twilight struggle, year in and year out, "rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation,"² a struggle against the common enemies of man: tyranny, poverty, disease, and war itself.

In the long history of the world, only a few generations have been granted the role of defending freedom in its hour of maximum danger. I do not shrink from this responsibility -- I welcome it. I do not believe that any of us would exchange places with any other people or any other generation. The energy, the faith, the



devotion which we bring to this endeavor will light our country and all who serve it. And the glow from that fire can truly light the world.