

justice turn a blind eye to mobs with nooses slung over trees. We saw bullets and bombs terrorize generations.

And yet, through all this, the call to freedom survived. “We hold these truths to be self-evident.” And eventually, a new generation rose up to march and to organize and to stand up and to sit in with the moral force of nonviolence and the sweet sound of those same freedom songs that slaves had sung so long ago, crying out not for special treatment, but for equal rights; calling out for basic justice promised to them almost a century before.

Like their abolitionist predecessors, they were plain, humble, ordinary people, armed with little but faith: faith in the Almighty, faith in each other, and faith in America. Hope, in the face so often of all evidence to the contrary, that something better lay around the bend.

Because of them—maids and porters and students and farmers and priests and housewives—because of them, a civil rights law was passed and a voting rights law was signed. And doors of opportunity swung open, not just for the Black porter, but also for the White chambermaid and the immigrant dishwasher, so that their daughters and their sons might finally imagine a life for themselves beyond washing somebody else’s laundry or shining somebody else’s shoes. Freedom for you and for me. Freedom for all of us.

And that’s what we celebrate today: the long arc of progress. Progress that is never assured, never guaranteed, but always possible, always there to be earned, no matter how stuck we might seem sometimes. No matter how divided or despairing we may appear. No matter what ugliness may bubble up. Progress, so long as we’re willing to push for it, so long as we’re willing to reach for each other.

We would do a disservice to those warriors of justice—Tubman and Douglass and Lincoln and King—were we to deny that the scars of our Nation’s original sin are still with us today. We condemn ourselves to shackles once more if we fail to answer those who wonder if they’re truly equals in their communities or in their justice systems or in a job interview. We betray the efforts of the past if we fail to push back against bigotry in all its forms.

But we betray our most noble past as well if we were to deny the possibility of movement, the possibility of progress; if we were to let cynicism consume us and fear overwhelm us. If we lost hope. For however slow, however incomplete, however harshly, loudly, rudely challenged at each point along our journey, in America, we can create the change that we seek. All it requires is that our generation be willing to do what those who came before us have done: to rise above the cynicism and rise above the fear, to hold fast to our values, to see ourselves in each other, to cherish dignity and opportunity not just for our own children, but for somebody else’s child. To remember that our freedom is bound up with the freedom of others, regardless of what they look like or where they come from or what their last name is or what faith they practice. To be honorable alike in what we give and what we preserve. To “nobly save, or meanly lose, the last best hope of earth.” To nobly save, or meanly lose, the last best hope of earth. That is our choice. Today we affirm hope.

Thank you. God bless you. May God bless the United States of America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:02 p.m. in Emancipation Hall at the U.S. Capitol. In his remarks, he referred to Speaker of the House of Representatives Paul D. Ryan.

Remarks Prior to a Meeting With President Reuven Rivlin of Israel December 9, 2015

President Obama. Well, it is a wonderful pleasure to greet and welcome President Rivlin on his first trip to the Oval Office as the President of Israel. This gives us an opportuni-

ty to reaffirm the unbreakable bonds between our two countries and our two peoples. And we are especially pleased that President Rivlin and Mrs. Rivlin is going to—are going to be able to

join us a little bit later this afternoon at the first of our two Hanukkah parties here at the White House. So we feel very blessed by that.

As I've reiterated many times before and as I indicated when Prime Minister Netanyahu was here, we consider our commitment to Israel's security to be one of the most important principles of American foreign policy. It's one that is shared by Democrats and Republicans alike. Under my administration, I'm very proud of the unprecedented military and intelligence cooperation that we have and the consistent support that we've provided to Israel's defenses. And this will give us a chance to discuss the future of that relationship, and I'll discuss with President Rivlin the work that we're doing to develop another memorandum of understanding that can lay the foundation for—

President Rivlin. Yes.

President Obama. —additional long-term assistance for Israel's defenses.

We'll also have a chance to talk about what is a very volatile neighborhood and the challenges that we all face from terrorism, the challenges that we all face from instability in the Middle East. And I'll be very interested in hearing President Rivlin's views on those issues.

And we'll have an opportunity to discuss the challenges that Israel faces internally and the ways in which we can be helpful in tamping down tensions between Israelis and Palestinians. I've been very clear in condemning the violence that is recurring inside of Israel, the need for leaders like President Abbas to unequivocally condemn the violence that's been taking place, the need to end incitement, but also the need for Israelis and Palestinians to find mechanisms in which to dialogue and arrive at peace. And although, obviously, this is a time at which the prospects of serious peace may seem distant, it's important that we continue to try. And I know that President Rivlin has made it one of his hallmarks to improve dialogue between Israelis and Palestinians and Arab Israeli citizens and the larger majority. And so we very much appreciate the work that he has done there.

God bless you, Mr. President. God bless the

So, Mr. President, I look forward to our conversation. I want to welcome you here today. And you are, as I said before the press came in, among friends. We're glad that you're able to celebrate Hanukkah with us here today.

President Rivlin. Thank you so very much.

President Obama. Thank you.

President Rivlin. Thank you.

President Obama. Thank you.

President Rivlin. Well, the obvious should be said from time to time and even being written: Israel has no greatest friend than the United States of America. That has to be very clear, and I say that loud and clear.

Well, Mr. President, we are facing the future. And we would like, at the same time, to really thank you from the bottom of our heart, the people of Israel, about what you have done in the last 6 years for the finance, for the diplomatic, and for the military help that you are giving us. You are making us able to stand against threats of today and of tomorrow.

I would like also to say that we are very grateful to you about the—your declaration about the need to fight extremism, whatever and wherever it is. And we are really going hand in hand with the—those ideas and these ideas. We have no war—we have no war with Islam. We have war against those who are using ideas in order to create extremism and threats towards the whole innocent people in the world.

Well, in—later on, we are going to light the Hanukkah candles, and the menorah, the Israeli menorah, the Jewish menorah has eight candles, four on each side. And in the middle, you have a—what we call the Shamash. The Shamash is not civil servant, it is the leader. The leader who, with him, we are lighting all the candles. And we know, Mr. President, that you have lit the candle for the last 7 years to show the way and the right way to your people and to the entire world. And we are very sure that the eighth candle that you will light in the next year will be the same: to show the whole world how to go in the light and to be able to fight everything that we should not accept and we should not get along with. state of America.

President Obama. Thank you so much. Thank you very much.

President Rivlin. It's a pleasure.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:27 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Nechama Shulman Rivlin, wife of President Rivlin; and President Mahmoud Abbas of the Palestinian Authority.

Remarks With President Reuven Rivlin of Israel at a Hanukkah Reception December 9, 2015

President Obama. Hello, everybody! Well, welcome to the White House, and Happy Hanukkah! Before we begin, let's give a big round of applause to our musical guests, the Maccabees. This is not the first time they have performed here, but they are more popular than ever. Their latest viral video is called "Latke Recipe." [Laughter] So, if the food is better than usual this year, you will know why. [Laughter]

Ordinarily, I like to tell people at the afternoon Hanukkah party that this is the special one. [Laughter] And then, I tell the people in the evening they're the special ones. [Laughter] But this afternoon really is special, because we are joined by Israel's President, President Rivlin, and Mrs. Rivlin.

President Rivlin. Thank you. Thank you.

President Obama. So earlier today we had an excellent meeting where we reaffirmed the unbreakable bond between the United States and Israel. President Rivlin is a strong voice for equal treatment of all citizens of Israel and greater understanding between Israelis and Palestinians. And I was deeply moved by his expressions and—of commitment to equality and justice.

We're also honored that after Rabbi Susan Talve from St. Louis's Central Reform Congregation leads us in the blessing, President Rivlin and Mrs. Rivlin will join us in lighting the Hanukkah candles.

We do have some other special guests who are here today. I want to welcome all the Members of Congress who are here. Also, last Hanukkah, some of you may remember we celebrated Alan Gross's return home from Cuba. We are proud to have Alan here today at the White House. So that's worthy of celebration.

All of us come together, along with Jews around the world, to celebrate a band of Macca-

bees who inspire us even today. They were outnumbered, they were outarmed, and yet they proved that freedom can prevail over tyranny, hope can triumph over despair, light can prevail over darkness. That sounds like a description of the new "Star Wars" movie. [Laughter] But this one happened a little earlier.

The light from 1 day's worth of oil has lasted not just for 8 days, but for more than 2,000 years. The Maccabees' sense of faith and courage and righteousness continue to animate the Jewish community even now. It's no accident that when we're called out to speak on behalf of refugees or against religious persecution, American Jews remember what it was like to be a stranger and are leading the way. And even as we draw from the best of our traditions, we're never afraid to build on what came before and to forge a better future for our children and our grandchildren.

And that's certainly the story of the menorah that we light this afternoon. Ze'ev Raban was born in Poland, studied in Munich, Paris, and Brussels, before emigrating to what would become the State of Israel. As a member of the Bezalel School, he helped create a new Hebrew style of art. And his work is uniquely Jewish, but its beauty is universal, just like so many of the values that we celebrate on this holiday.

So, as we light one of Ze'ev Raban's beautiful menorahs, may we, too, be inspired to create something beautiful and lasting in this world. May the warmth of family and friends around the world bring us comfort and bring us joy. And may miracles past and present continue to inspire us as we build a better world together.

And with that, I would like to invite President Rivlin to say a few words, and then we will get the blessing from our Rabbi.