

APPENDIX 4.—SPEECH BY VICE ADM. H. G. RICKOVER, U.S. NAVY,
ENTITLED "LIBERTY, SCIENCE AND LAW"

[Copyright 1966, H. G. Rickover]

LIBERTY, SCIENCE, AND LAW, BY VICE ADM. H. G. RICKOVER, U.S. NAVY, AT THE
ATHENS MEETING OF THE ROYAL NATIONAL FOUNDATION ATHENS, GREECE, JUNE
2, 1966

This speech reflects the views of the author and does not necessarily reflect the views of the Secretary of the Navy or the Department of the Navy.

I deeply appreciate your invitation to address this meeting. It is an honor and a moving experience—especially for an American—to speak here where the ancient *Ecclesia* had its seat, where men first practiced the difficult art of self-government, succeeding brilliantly for a time but failing in the end. My country, as you know, picked up the torch of liberty they had lighted and established the first *representative* democracy in modern times, even as Athens had established the first *direct* democracy in all history.

Twenty-four centuries separate these two great innovative acts in time, over 5,000 miles in space. One took place in a small city-state possessing few material resources, the other in a huge country of great natural wealth. Yet there is a close inner link between them. They had the same objective. The principles they adopted to achieve their purpose were similar. Both sought to create—and did create—the political framework for a society of free men.

Even as Solon, Cleisthenes and Pericles before them, the framers of the American Constitution of 1789 were political thinkers, as well as experienced practical politicians. They drew upon Greek political theory and practice with which they were thoroughly familiar, adopting what had proved successful, ingeniously improving where the earlier structure had shown weakness. They were men of the enlightenment, when classical rationalism sparked a new Age of Reason throughout the Western World; when philosophers were inspired to mount an attack on every custom and institution that shackles the mind of man and arbitrarily restrains his actions—from superstition to class privilege, from tyranny by an established church to tyranny by a secular autocrat. The political institutions of all the nations of the free world today—beginning with my own—had their inception in the turmoil of that last phase of the Renaissance.

Western civilization is set apart from civilizations elsewhere, both past and present, by its dynamism, its extraordinary creativity, its intense preoccupation with things of the mind. All this started with the Renaissance. Not until modern Western man rediscovered and retrieved his classical heritage did he begin to outstrip the rest of the world.

To borrow a Churchillian phrase, it can be said of Athens, of Greece in general, that never before or since did so few human beings leave so deep and lasting an imprint on so many others, differing in race and faith, distant in time and space from this cradle of Western civilization. Their mark is on all our science, our art, architecture, literature, theater, and on our political thinking and practice as well. Here in this city, on this hill where I am privileged to stand, the Athenians proved that free men could govern themselves; that it was possible to live in a civilized society without having to relinquish personal freedom.

This was an epochal achievement. In all his long life on earth, man has had but brief moments of freedom. His own nature is the cause of the paradoxical situation that *civilization and liberty are interdependent, yet at the same time antithetical*. One cannot be had without the other, yet reconciling them remains to this day what it has always been—the most difficult political, social and economic problem.

Civilization and liberty are *interdependent* because basic to freedom is exercise of mind and spirit, of the faculties that set us apart from other living things and make us fully human. For this there must be a modicum of leisure which