

George Washington would have supported the New Deal, 1934

Introduction

During his first term, President Franklin D. Roosevelt sought to deflect opposition to the New Deal. Speaking at Gettysburg on Memorial Day, 1934, Roosevelt invoked the memory of George Washington by comparing his federal agenda with that of the first president, Roosevelt mentions Washington's national tours, his support for large development projects, and his opposition to sectionalism: "He knew that Nations grow as their commerce and manufactures and agriculture grow, and that all of these grow as the means of transportation are extended. He sought to knit the sections together by their common interest in these great enterprises; and he projected highways and canals as aids not to sectional, but to national development."

Questions for Discussion

Read the introduction and study the text of the letter. Then apply your knowledge of American history to answer the following questions. Remember to base your answers on the information in the document.

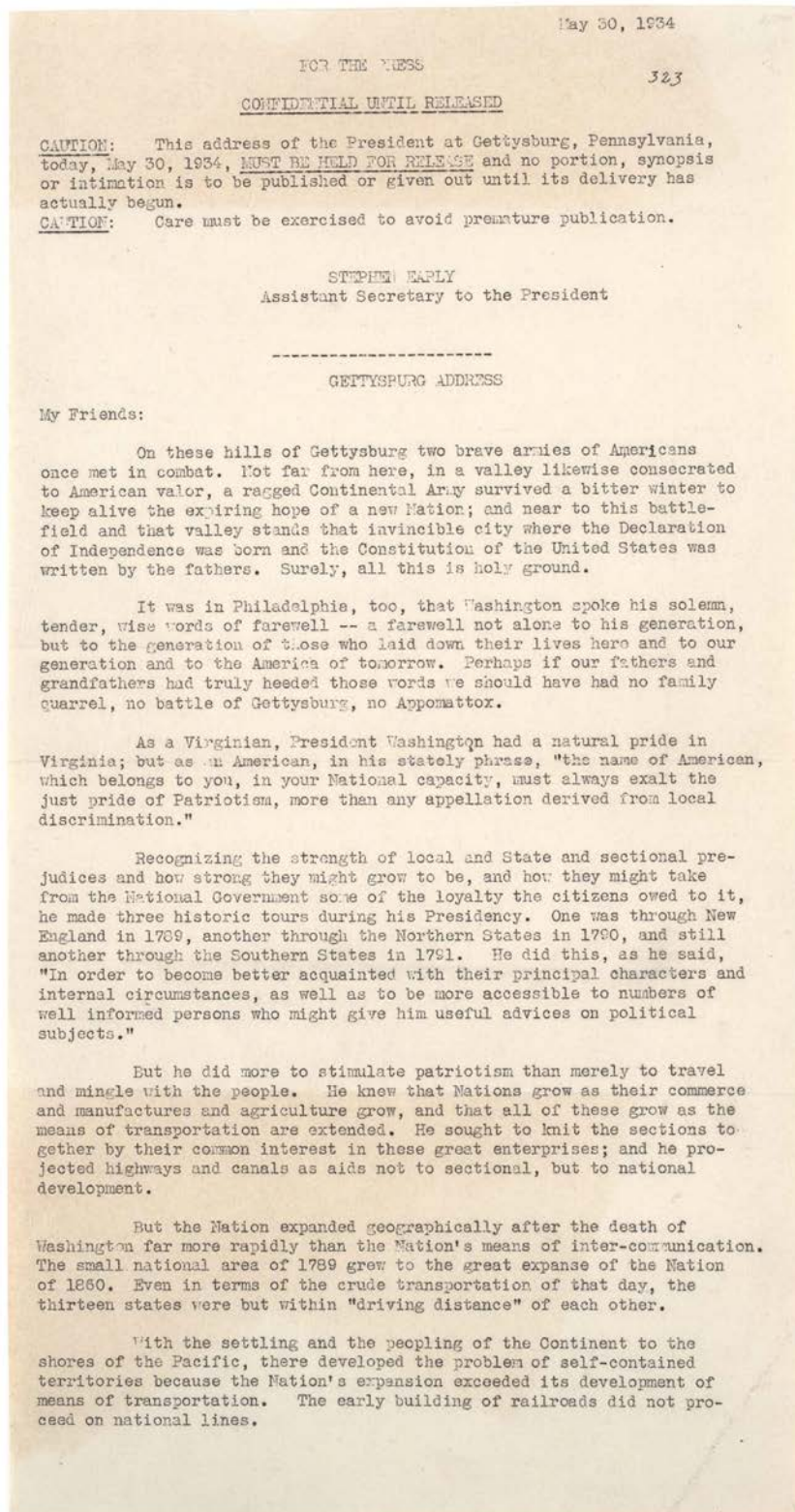
1. Why did President Franklin Roosevelt employ numerous references to President George Washington?
2. How did President Franklin Roosevelt encourage a "consolidated nation" in the text of this speech?
3. Explain why President Franklin Roosevelt was in favor of expanding highways and railroads throughout the nation.

** Advanced students or students wishing to earn extra credit may choose to answer the following:

Why did President Franklin Roosevelt refer to the lack of adequate communication and transportation as contributing factors to the Civil War?

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Images



Franklin Roosevelt, Press release of speech delivered on Memorial Day 1934 at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, p. 1 (Gilder Lehrman Collection, GLC03352)

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Contrary to belief, the South and the West were not laggard in developing this new form of transportation; but there, as in the East, most of the railroads were local and sectional. It was a chartless procedure; people were not thinking in terms of national transportation or national communication. In the days before the Brothers' War not a single line of railroad was projected from the South to the North; not even one from the South reached to the National Capital itself.

It was an inspired Prophet of the South who said: "My brethren, if we know one another, we will love one another." The tragedy of the Nation was that the people did not know one another because they had not the necessary means of visiting one another.

Two subsequent wars, both with foreign Nations, measurably allayed and softened the ancient passions. It has been left to us of this generation to see the healing made permanent.

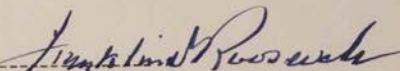
We are all brothers now in a new understanding. The grain farmers of the West do not set themselves up for preference if we seek at the same time to help the cotton farmers of the South; nor do the tobacco growers complain of discrimination if, at the same time, we help the cattle men of the plains and mountains.

In our planning to lift industry to normal prosperity, the farmer upholds our efforts. And as we give the farmer a long sought equality, the city worker understands and helps. All of us share in whatever good comes to the average man. We know that we all have a stake -- a partnership in the Government of our country.

Today, we have many means of knowing each other -- means that have sounded the doom of sectionalism. It is, I think, as I survey the picture from every angle, a simple fact that the chief hindrance to progress comes from three elements which, thank God, grow less in importance with the growth of a clearer understanding of our purposes on the part of the overwhelming majority. These groups are those who seek to stir up political animosity or to build political advantage by the distortion of facts; those who, by declining to follow the rules of the game, seek to gain an unfair advantage over those who live up to the rules; and those few who still, because they have never been willing to take an interest in their fellow Americans, dwell inside of their own narrow spheres and still represent the selfishness of sectionalism which has no place in our National life.

Washington and Jefferson and Jackson and Lincoln and Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson sought and worked for a consolidated Nation. You and I have it in our power to attain that great ideal. We can do this by following the peaceful methods prescribed under the broad and resilient provisions of the Constitution of the United States.

Here, in the presence of the spirits of those who fell on this ground, we give renewed assurance that the passions of war are mouldering in the tombs of Time and the purposes of peace are flowing in the hearts of a united people.



Franklin Roosevelt, Press release of speech delivered on Memorial Day 1934 at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, p. 2 (Gilder Lehrman Collection, GLC03352)