

Franklin D. Roosevelt

Gettysburg, PA, 30 May 1934.

[Press release of speech delivered on Memorial Day at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania]

Typed letter signed, 2 pages.

GETTYSBURG ADDRESS

My Friends:

On these hills of Gettysburg two brave armies of Americans once met in combat. Not far from here, in a valley likewise consecrated to American valor, a ragged Continental Army survived a bitter winter to keep alive the expiring hope of a new Nation; and near to this battlefield and that valley stands that invincible city where the Declaration of Independence was born and the Constitution of the United States was written by the fathers. Surely, all this is holy ground.

It was in Philadelphia, too, that Washington spoke his solemn, tender, wise words of farewell -- a farewell not alone to his generation, but to the generation of those who laid down their lives here and to our generation and to the America of tomorrow. Perhaps if our fathers and grandfathers had truly heeded those words we should have had no family quarrel, no battle of Gettysburg, no Appomattox.

As a Virginian, President Washington had a natural pride in Virginia; but as an American, in his stately phrase, "the name of American, which belongs to you, in your National capacity, must always exalt the just pride of Patriotism, more than any appellation derived from local discrimination."

Recognizing the strength of local and State and sectional prejudices and how strong they might grow to be, and how they might take from the National Government some of the loyalty the citizens owed to it, he made three historic tours during his Presidency. One was through New England in 1789, another through the Northern States in 1790, and still another through the Southern States in 1791. He did this, as he said, "In order to become better acquainted with their principal characters and internal circumstances, as well as to be more accessible to numbers of well informed persons who might give him useful advices on political subjects."

But he did more to stimulate patriotism than merely to travel and mingle with the people. 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.

But the Nation expanded geographically after the death of Washington far more rapidly than the Nation's means of inter-communication. The small national area of 1789 grew to the great expanse of the Nation of 1860. Even in terms of the crude transportation of that day, the thirteen states were but within "driving distance" of each other.

With the settling and the peopling of the Continent to the shores of the Pacific, there developed the problem of self-contained territories because the Nation's expansion exceeded its development of means of transportation. The early building of railroads did not proceed on national lines.

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.

