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THE WHITE HOUSE

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT
AT THE
FREEDOM DAY CELEBRATION

FREEDOM PARK

1:02 P.M. EDT

Congressman Jim Martin, Governor Holshouser, Senator Helms, Senator Morgan, Mrs. Hair, Mayor Belk, Chairman Whitney, Reverend Billy Graham, ladies and gentlemen:

It is a tremendous privilege and a very high honor to have the opportunity of being in this great county and this wonderful State, and I thank you from the bottom of my heart for this warm welcome.

I must admit I was a little apprehensive about coming to the hornet's nest (Laughter) -- after I heard what happened to President Wilson on May 20, 1916 -- 59 years ago. Reportedly, it was a very similar outdoor ceremony. Members of the band in their heavy ceremonial garb were dropping like flies from the heat.

Cornell Thomas Leroy Kirkpatrick, the Mayor of Charlotte, stepped up to the rostrum to introduce President Wilson. He got carried away a bit with the festivities and spoke for 50 minutes. (Laughter) Needless to say, the President barely had time for hello and good-bye before he ran to the train ready to pull out from the station.

I sincerely thank Jim Martin for departing from that precedent today. (Laughter) But I am sure you do, too.

As I said, I am most delighted to be in Charlotte today to enjoy the wonderful spirit of this unique observance of our national Bicentennial. And I am very humble knowing that many Presidents of the United States have come to Charlotte and to Mecklenburg County.

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I congratulate the county and all of North Carolina on the Bicentennial enthusiasm expressed here today. It is a magnificent turnout with the right spirit and the right aim and objective, and I thank you on behalf of all of your fellow Americans in the 49 other States.

As I look out at this tremendous crowd, I see this gathering as a symbol of the pride of Americans in their community, in their State and in their Nation. In recent years, America has undergone change after change, some still taking place with rapid and almost bewildering speed.

But amidst all this change, our most cherished values have remained as steadfast as when instituted by the fathers of our country.

I refer to America's capacity for unanimity and diversity, for courage in the face of challenge, for decency in the midst of dissension, for optimism in spite of reverses, and for creativity in adapting to the rapidly changing world in which we live today.

Our destiny in this year of our Bicentennial is to emerge as an even greater Republic in the days and months and years ahead, and we will.

When the United States celebrated its first 100 years, in 1876, the South was still recovering from the tragic war between the States. This was America's most terrible ordeal. Yet, America and the South have risen again.

It has been my good fortune in my lifetime to spend a great deal of time in North Carolina. During World War II, in law school, many visits here, one of my sons attended one of your great educational institutions-- Wake Forest--and this wonderful personal experience of meeting so many and getting to know so many North Carolinians proves to me that North Carolina is a showcase of a State that reveres the values of the past while leading the way toward a progressive future.

Tar Heel tenacity is the American tenacity. The Tar Heel pride is the American pride. And the Tar Heel moderation typifies America's new realism, and I congratulate you in each and every case.

This State, and the rest of the South, knows firsthand the changes of which I speak, and I am proud of the great breakthroughs in education and industry in the South, a region today which numbers some 67 million people, nearly one-third of our total population.

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This is an area where family income has increased more in the last quarter century than in any other part of the United States.

Today, personal income is rising more rapidly right here than in the rest of our great country.

Southerners, including Tar Heels, must be doing something right -- you know it, and I know it, and we are all proud of it.

According to all the statistics, more people are moving today into the South than away from it. This wonderful part of our Nation is today growing more rapidly than almost any other part of the United States of America, and for good and sufficient reason.

You have so many accomplishments to take pride in. In Southern education, expenditures per pupil have increased by more than 220 percent in the last 25 years -- far more than the Nation as a whole.

The number of high school graduates has increased at a much greater rate than in the rest of the country. There are significant increases in those attending your wonderful institutions of higher learning.

In industry, the South has today moved from a basic agricultural society to a modern industrial region which manufactures approximately one-quarter of our total Nation's output.

This is a great comeback from the economic conditions of a century ago.

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I cite these statistics because they verify the potentialities of the South -- yes, and of all America. But it is not the statistics that inspires us today, it is the spirit of the American people.

It is the patriotism, the dedication, the willpower of the 13 original States which still lives in the South and across America today. It is the vision of the future rather than a mirror of the past which you hold so deep within yourselves. And I commend you individually and collectively for the vision, the dedication, the patriotism and the willpower.

At the time of the American Revolution, some said that America could not defy the odds that confronted them, and us today. There were some who would roll over and prostrate themselves in self-pity and hopelessness, but there were many, many more who said, "We are Americans, we can do it."

They did it, and we can do it.

They were proud to be Americans, just as we are today proud to identify ourselves with traditions which made us great and the national character which will keep us that way.

Our Centennial in 1876 was a renewal and rededication by Americans to our highest aspirations. Americans -- Southerners, Westerners, Easterners, Northerners -- all looked to the future.

America has emerged from an agricultural and frontier society into an industrial age. Towns evolved into great cities. Rail transportation and telegraph and telephone tied this vast continent together.

Today, it is our turn to renew our pride in America and rededicate ourselves to the future.

Our challenge -- yours and mine and 213 million other Americans -- like the Centennial task of 100 years ago, is to create a new agenda at home and strong policies abroad for America's third century.

We must rise above those divisions that have scarred our national life in recent times. We must once again become one people -- strong and unified in our national purpose.

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The new strength and new dynamism of the South, coupled with the cherished traditions, can help America achieve this essential unity. I look to you for leadership in forging a new destiny for America from the heritage which we commemorate today.

I know that the spirit of liberty -- so evident in North Carolina at the time of our Revolution -- will guide us in the days ahead. Those early stirrings of patriotism and dedication to our way of life are very much with us every hour and every day.

The South, as a region, and North Carolina, as a State, and Mecklenburg, as a county, will continue in the future as they have in the past to provide inspiration to our great Nation.

I join in working with all of you as wonderful citizens of this great region of our country and working with all Americans in all fifty States to build a better America together, and we can do it.

Thank you very, very much.

END (AT 1:15 P.M. EDT)