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UNTIL 6:00 a.m., EDT, MAY 20, 1975

MAY 19, 1975

Office of the White House Press Secretary

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THE WHITE HOUSE

TEXT OF REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT  
TO BE DELIVERED TO THE  
FREEDOM DAY CELEBRATION  
CHARLOTTE, NORTH CAROLINA

I am delighted to be in Charlotte today to enjoy the spirit of this unique observance of our national Bicentennial.

I congratulate Mecklenburg County and all of North Carolina on the Bicentennial enthusiasm demonstrated here. And I will leave to the historians any debates about Mecklenburg County's Declaration of Independence.

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 such 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 unity in 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. Our destiny, in this year of our Bicentennial, is to emerge as an even greater Republic.

When the United States celebrated its first one hundred 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.

North Carolina is a showcase of a State that reveres the values of the past while leading the way toward a progressive future. The 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.

This State, and the rest of the South, knows at first hand the changes of which I speak. I am proud of the great breakthroughs in education and industry in the South, a region which today numbers more than 67 million people, nearly one-third of the American population. This is an area where family income has increased more in the past quarter-century than in any other part of the United States. Today, personal income is rising more rapidly here than in the rest of the country. Southerners -- including the Tar Heels -- must be doing something right!

In fact, more people are today moving into the South than away from it. This part of the Nation is today growing as fast as the West.

You have so many accomplishments to take pride in. In Southern education, expenditures per pupil have increased by more than two hundred twenty percent in the last quarter century -- far more than in the Nation as a whole. The number of high school graduates has increased at a much greater rate than the rest of the country. There are also significant increases in those attending institutions of higher learning.

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In industry, the South has today moved from a basic agricultural society to a modern industrial region which manufactures approximately one quarter of our Nation's total output. This is a great comeback from economic conditions of a century ago.

I cite these statistics because they verify the potentialities of the South and of all America. But it is not statistics that inspires us today. It is the spirit of the people. It is the patriotism and the dedication and the will-power of the thirteen original States which still live in the South and across America. It is the vision of the future rather than a mirror of the past which you hold. And I commend you for it.

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

They were proud to be Americans -- just as you here today are proud to identify yourselves with the traditions which made us great and the national character which will keep us that way.

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

America emerged from an agricultural and frontier society into an industrial age. Towns evolved into great cities of the 20th century. Rail transportation and the telegraph tied this vast continent together.

Today, it is our turn to renew our pride in America, and rededicate ourselves to the future. Our challenge -- like the centennial task one hundred years ago -- is to create a new agenda for America's third century. We must rise above the divisions that have scarred our national life in recent times. We must once again become one people -- strong and unified in our national purpose.

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

I know that the spirit of liberty -- so evident in North Carolina at the time of our Revolution -- will guide us. Those early stirrings of patriotism and dedication to our way of life are still very much with us. The South as a region and North Carolina as a State and Mecklenburg as a county will continue to provide inspiration to our Nation.

I join in working with all Southerners, and all other Americans, to build a better tomorrow. Together we can do it!

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