Franklin D. Roosevelt — “The Great Communicator”
The Master Speech Files, 1898, 1910-1945

Series 2: “You have nothing to fear but fear itself:” FDR and the New Deal

File No. 1070

1937 September 17

Sharpsburg, MD - Address at Antietam Battlefield
The passage of time has a substantial effect on the history of all great crises, especially on those which have occurred in comparatively recent years. History, in the strict interpretation, covers the events of yesterday and of the past week. Actually in the minds of almost everyone, we do not class as history those things which have come to pass within our own memory or within such a short time before we were born that the preceding events entered greatly into the atmosphere of our childhood.

Young people in their early 30's today have little or no personal recollection of the World War of twenty years ago; it entered into their childhood memories. But they think of the War with Spain as history.

In my own case, though I came into the world seventeen years after the close of the war between the States, the events of that war and of the difficult years that resulted from it make it difficult for me to classify that war as history.

And today, seventy-five years after the critical battle of Antietam, there are still many among us who can remember it. It is, therefore, an American battle which thousands of Americans, middle aged and old, can still visualize as bearing some relationship to their own lives.

We know that Antietam was one of the decisive engagements of the Civil War because it was the first effort of the Confederacy to invade the North--tactically, a drawn battle, but actually a factor of vital importance to the final result because it spelled the failure of the attempt.
Whether we be old or young, it serves us little to discuss again the rights and the wrongs of the long four year's war between the states. We can wish that the war had never been. We can and we do revere the memory of the brave men who fought on both sides—we can and we do honor those who fell on this and other fields. But we know today that it was best, for the generation of Americans who fought the war and for the generations of Americans who have come after them, that the conflict did not end in a division of our land into two nations. I like to think that it was the will of God that we remain one people.

Today, old and young alike, are saddened by the knowledge of the bitter years that followed the war—years bitter to the South because of economic destruction and the denial to the population of the normal rights of free Americans—years bitter to the North because victory engendered among many high places of authority the baser passions of revenge and tyranny.

We must not deny that the effects of the so-called era of reconstruction made themselves felt in many evil ways for half a century. They encouraged sectionalism, they led to misunderstanding and they greatly retarded the unity of the Nation.

It is too soon to define the history of a generation; but I venture the belief that it was not until the World War of twenty years ago that we acted once more as a nation of unity, another great crisis. I believe also, that the past four years mark the first occasion, certainly since the War between the States and perhaps during the whole 150 years of our government,
that we are not only acting but thinking in national terms.

Deeply we appreciate that distress or difficulty of any one part of the Union adversely affects every other part. We stand ready to lend a helping hand to those Americans who need it most.

In the presence of the spirits of those who fell on this field—Union soldiers and Confederate soldiers—we can believe that they rejoice with us in the unity of understanding which is so increasingly ours today. I hope and believe that they encourage us in all we do to foster that unity of America in the spirit of tolerance, of willingness to help our neighbor and of faith in the great destiny of the United States.
The passage of time has a strange effect on all great crises, especially on those which have occurred in comparatively recent years. History, in the strict interpretation, covers the events of yesterday and of the past week. Actually in the minds of almost everyone, we do not class as history those things which have come to pass within our own memory or that of our parents.

Young people in their early twenties today have little or no personal recollection of the recent World War; but it entered into their childhood memories. On the other hand they think of the War with Spain as history.

In my own case, though I came into the world seventeen years after the close of the war between the States, the results of that war and of the difficult years that followed it do not make me think of it as history.

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We know that Antietam was one of the decisive engagements of the Civil War because it marked the first effort of the Confederacy to invade the North—tactically a drawn battle, but actually a factor of vital importance to the final result because it spelled the failure of the attempt.

Whether we be old or young, it serves us little to discuss again the rights and the wrongs of the long four year's war between the States. We can but wish that the war had never been. We can and we do revere the memory of the brave men who fought on both sides—we can and we do honor those who fell on this and other fields.

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We must not deny that the effects of the so-called "era of reconstruction" made themselves felt in many evil ways for half a century. They encouraged sectionalism, they led to misunderstanding and they greatly retarded the unity of the Nation.

It is too soon to define the history of the present generation; but I venture the belief that it was not until the World War of twenty years ago that we acted once more as a Nation of restored unity. I believe also, that the past four years mark the first occasion, certainly since the War between the States, and perhaps during the whole 150 years of our government, that we are not only acting but also thinking in
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ADDRESS OF THE PRESIDENT
Antietam Battlefield, Sharpsburg, Maryland
Friday, September 17, 1937, 12:00 M.

MEN AND WOMEN OF THE NORTH AND THE SOUTH:

The passage of time has a strange effect on all great crises, especially on those which have occurred in comparatively recent (years) times. History, in the strict interpretation, covers the events of yesterday and of the past week. But, actually in the minds of almost everyone, we do not class as history those things which have come to pass within our own memory or that of our parents.

Young people, as I well know in my own family, who are in their early twenties, (today) have little or no personal recollection of the recent World War of only two decades ago, but that war entered into their childhood memories. On the other hand, they think of the War with Spain, which most of us remember, as ancient history.

In my own case, though I came into the world some seventeen years after the close of the war between the states, the results of that war and of the difficult years that followed it do not make me think of it as history.

And today, seventy-five years after the critical battle of Antietam, there are still (many) among us many who can remember it. It is, therefore, an American battle which thousands of Americans, middle-aged and old, can still visualize as bearing some relationship to their own lives.

We know that Antietam was one of the decisive engagements of the Civil War because it marked the first effort of the Confed-
This is a transcript made by the White House stenographer from his shorthand notes taken at the time the speech was made. Underlining indicates words extemporaneously added to the previously prepared reading copy text. Words in parentheses are words that were omitted when the speech was delivered, though they appear in the previously prepared reading copy text.
eracy to invade the North -- tactically a drawn battle, but actually a factor of vital importance to the final result because it spelled the failure of the attempt.

Whether we be (old or) young or old, it serves us little good purpose to discuss again the rights and the wrongs of the long four years war between the states. We can but wish that the war had never been. We can and we do revere the memory of the brave men who fought on both sides -- we can and we do honor those who fell on this and other fields.

But we know today that it was best, for the generation of Americans who fought the war and for the generations of Americans who have come after them, that the (conflict) war between the states did not end in a division of our land into two nations. I like to think that it was the will of God that we remain one people.

Today, old and young alike are saddened by the knowledge of the bitter years that followed the war -- years bitter to the South because of economic destruction and the denial to its population of the normal rights of free Americans -- years bitter to the North because victory engendered in the North among many the baser passions of revenge and tyranny.

We must not deny that the effects of the so-called "era of reconstruction" made themselves felt in many evil ways for half a century. They encouraged sectionalism, they led to misunderstanding and they greatly retarded the unity of the (Nation) people of the United States.

It is too soon to define the history of the present generation; but I venture the belief that it was not until the World War
of twenty years ago that we acted once more as a nation of restored unity. And I believe also that the past four years mark the occasion, the first occasion, certainly since the war between the states, and perhaps during the whole 150 years of our Government, that we are not only acting but also thinking in national terms.

Deeply we appreciate that the distress or difficulty of any one part of the Union adversely affects each and every other part. We stand ready in all parts of the land to lend a helping hand to those Americans who need it most.

In the presence of the spirits of those who fell on this field -- Union soldiers and Confederate soldiers -- we can believe that they rejoice with us in the unity of understanding which is so increasingly ours today. They urge us on in all we do to foster that spirit of unity, foster it in the spirit of tolerance, of willingness to help our neighbor, and of faith in the destiny of the United States of America.
The following remarks of the President to be delivered at the Antietam Battlefield, Sharpsburg, Maryland, on Friday, September 17th, MUST BE HELD IN CONFIDENCE UNTIL RELEASED.

Release upon delivery, expected about 12 o'clock noon, Eastern Standard Time.

Please safeguard against premature release.

Franklin D. Roosevelt
Secretary to the President

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M. H. McIntyre
Secretary to the President

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