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Address before the New York Southern Society: The 1955 Model South

Strom Thurmond

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ADDRESS BY SENATOR STROM THURMOND (D-S.C.) BEFORE THE SOUTHERN SOCIETY AT THE PLAZA HOTEL, NEW YORK, NEW YORK, JANUARY 14, 7:30 P.M.

THE 1955 MODEL SOUTH

Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen:

You have honored me tonight beyond my ability to express the true depths of appreciation which I feel. To have my fellow Southerners invite me to appear before them on this auspicious occasion has given me a deep sense of humility. I realize that many distinguished Southerners have preceded me as guest speakers before this society. I pledge to you that I shall try to be deserving of such attention.

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All of us here have in common that bond—which neither the ravages of time nor the reach of great distances can ever erase: A Genuine love of our homeland—the South.

Some of you are mere sojourners in New York. A sojourner would be one who has remained here for only a few years. Others among you are "temporary residents". Those would be the ones who have remained away from Dixie for perhaps 20 or 25 years. But whether sojourner or temporary resident, none of you has ever forgotten or forsaken the ideals which belong to the South.

Someone has said that the South is only "a state of mind." That may be correct, but if it is, I am proud to confess with you that I am of that particular state of mind.
Such a state denotes the qualities of being sincere and loyal and courageous. It signifies a willingness to face hardships and determination to overcome them. It means a state of mind in which honored customs and revered traditions have not been cast aside to meet the demands of rushing years which are soon gone. No, the South is not that kind of a state of mind.

The people of Dixie fit pretty well into the classification of the poet who advised:

"Be not the first by whom the new is tried
"Nor yet the last to lay the old aside."

That is a philosophy of forward-looking moderatism. Some call it conservatism. Some condemn it as reactionary, but I believe it to be a sound approach to most of the problems which
we have faced in the past and which we must face in the future.

No people and no section have a monopoly on wisdom. By the process of evolution, which we call education, the people of every nation and the people of every section of this nation learn from others. Just as in the past we have learned much from other sections of the country, we are now teaching those same sections some of our ways.

All of us recall the time in 1937 when the South was labelled by the late President Franklin D. Roosevelt as the "Nation's No. 1 Economic Problem". Were he alive today, Mr. Roosevelt would have to reverse that statement. He would be forced to look not south from Washington, but north, to find the
nation's No. 1 economic problem.

Since 1937, the South has not only learned much, it has done much. Long since, it seized the initiative from the New England states in industrial development. Only last year, you heard the anguished cries of New Englanders asking the Government to channel production contracts to the textile plants of that section. Their plea was that help was needed to offset the labor surplus of New England and to provide jobs for the unemployed. They did not add that bad employee-employer relations and outmoded plants were the causes of their troubles.

Meanwhile, the textile plants of the South were humming at a steady rate. Industrialists, at least, have learned that
the South is not just a state of mind. They have learned that the Southern States have more to offer of real value than do other sections. Our people are realists. They know if they give a good day's work in return for a good day's pay, that both employers and employees will benefit.

Manufacturers have learned that it is more economical to build their plants in areas where people like to work, where raw materials are plentiful and where markets are expanding almost at revolutionary speed. They like the mild climate and the adequate sources of power which have been developed in the South.

Our people, in turn, like the location of new
industries in the South. Many plants have been constructed in the rural areas close to the homes of farm people. These people can maintain their farms while working a full shift in the plants. The people like to live in their own homes, to breathe the fresh air of the country, and to drive back and forth to work in their own automobiles.

Incidentally, our people laughingly say that a Yankee is worth more than a bale of cotton and twice as easy to pick.

From the vast resources of Texas and Louisiana, pipe lines are being criss-crossed through the Southland to supply needed fuel to the entire area. Some of these lines have been extended completely out of the South to feed industries and homes in other states.
In spite of the tremendous demands of a mechanized age upon them, the highways of the Southern states compare favorably with those of the nation. They bring in the tourists and visitors and funnel out the finished products of many industries.

Our freight rates finally were adjusted so our shippers can compete on even terms with other sections. The removal of that discrimination destroyed an artificial advantage which states outside the South long enjoyed at the expense of the South.

The fruits of Southern orchards have earned the enthusiastic approval of people all over the country who have
sampled them and called for more.

But more important, the people themselves are enjoying the results of their work. Since 1945, the increase in the average income of our people is higher than the national average. I am confident that it will continue to rise. And we must also take into account the fact that the cost of living is not as great in the South generally as in other sections. Therefore, the people are able to enjoy their income to a larger degree than workers in other sections.

But all the progress being recorded in the South is not material.

Cultural advancement is steady, too. While many states are crying for federal assistance to build schools to meet the
growing need for classroom space, most Southern states have gone ahead with their own construction programs.

I ask you to forgive me if I point with modest pride to South Carolina.

During my term as Governor, the best teacher's salary schedule in the history of the State was established. Also while I was Governor, a permanent nine-month State supported school term was established. Many other advances were made.

As an example for every State of the nation, Governor James F. Byrnes has led an educational revolution during the past four years. He persuaded the Legislature to approve a three per cent sales tax, ear-marked for the use of public schools. The
revenue from that tax has enabled the State to raise the salaries of teachers 43 per cent, to pay for all school bus transportation, and to project a 200 million dollar school construction program.

Already 134 million dollars has been spent or allocated to provide equal facilities for the children of all districts, rural or city, and for white and Negro schools. Better transportation and better schools have brought about an all-time high in attendance.

Most of our colleges have construction and expansion programs under way to meet the growing need for higher educational facilities as secondary schools produce more graduates.

What South Carolina has done for her schools, is evidence
of her ability to meet the responsibilities reserved to the states under the Constitution.

I am sure we need have no fears as to the quality of leadership being produced in the South, because education is keeping pace with progress in every other field of endeavor.

Southerners have always been leaders. That is attested to by your presence here tonight. Each of you knows many leaders developed in the South, who have left the South to assume important roles in virtually every field and every state.

Often leadership has been by young men in the South. The oldest of the four South Carolinians to sign the Declaration of Independence was Arthur Middleton who was 34. The youngest
was Edward Rutledge who was 26. Thomas Heyward was 29 and Thomas Lynch, Jr., a month under 27.

During the Revolutionary War, many of the States of the South were conquered and reconquered. But the people would not quit the fight. Their courage in the face of mounting hardships finally overcame the superior forces of the enemy and independence was secured for the establishment of a new nation.

Heroism is a quality which has not been lacking in Southerners. During World War I, only 78 Medals of Honor were awarded by Congress, but of these/Tennessee and South Carolina soldiers/ distinguished themselves by earning six for each state.

The events of World War II and the Korean War/are too recent to be necessary to recall to your memory.
A noble Georgian once made a historic address in this city before the New England Club. In part he said:

"The new South is enamoured of her new work. Her soul is stirred with the breath of a new life. The light of a grander day is falling fair on her face. She is thrilling with the consciousness of growing power and prosperity...."

Those words were spoken by Henry W. Grady of Atlanta on Dec. 21, 1886. Even then, at the end of the most tragic era in the history of the South, he envisioned a New South like that which has matured in our day. His words are still appropriate.

The breath of a new life has truly stirred the soul of the
So she faces the future; not waiting for a fairy godmother, she creates her own magic out of reality instead of make-believe.

Southerners have become political realists, too.

Through the years we pursued a progressive, moderate course in politics as well as in other fields. While we stood on the reasonableness of a political middle ground, some leaders in both major parties saw the vote-getting power of crafty appeals to special groups. They played section against section and prejudice against prejudice. They adopted a program of what they called "liberalism" to attract many unsuspecting people.

Those crafty planners were capable of seeing the immediate results in the garnering of votes for their parties. They
either were not wise enough to understand/or did not care about/the ultimate conflicts which they were creating/and the damage being done their parties.

The effect of these political tactics has been to cause political moderates to hold closely to the middle ground for self protection. As we have followed this course, the condemnation of "sectionalism" has been heaped upon us.

But we believe that no course can be best for any one section of this great nation if it is not good for the entire country. Our concern has not been sectional; it has been national.

With each succeeding national election year, the major
parties have drawn closer together in the expression of policies stated in their platforms.

As the platforms and policies of the major parties have come more and more to resemble each other, the people have come to realize they must listen to what the candidates say and observe what they do, to determine what is best and who is best for the nation. Only by such examination can we decide for whom to cast our votes.

As to loyalty through the years, no other section of the country can approach the South's record of loyalty to party.

The South has given many great political leaders and statesmen to the nation. In the present 84th Congress Southerners dominate the major committee chairmanships. Our majority
leader, the distinguished Senator from Texas, enjoys the respect of all his colleagues on both sides of the aisle.

But because the South has continued to take a moderate approach to the questions of the years, our opponents have accused us of disloyalty to party, of provincialism, and of being reactionary.

There are those who seem to think that loyalty means blindness to issues. I believe it means the seeking of what is best for the nation and trying to follow such a course.

Our political enemies have attempted to place a label of ill repute on any expression or evidence of independence. But they have failed. The people of the country respect
independent thinking, as long as they believe it is sincerely in the interests of our country.

The views of the Southern states were for long considered unworthy of attention, because politicians thought they knew exactly what to expect from the South. They have been surprised and wakened from their political slumber by our several recent expressions of self determination.

Parties and machines have learned they cannot disregard the wishes of the people they are supposed to represent. They are slowly learning they are creatures of the people instead of their masters.

I am a South Carolina Democrat, elected by the Democrats of South Carolina. I shall conduct myself as I believe they...
wish me to represent them in the Senate. My vote was cast with the Democrats to organize the Senate. My committee assignments were made by the Senate Democratic leaders, because they know I represent the Democrats of South Carolina.

I have previously stated that I shall vote the dictates of my conscience in all matters coming before the Senate. That is the way I believe the Democrats of my State want me to vote. It is the course which was followed by my distinguished predecessors.

Already you have read speculation, and heard talk, of issues and candidates in the national conventions of 1956. Regardless of the issues and regardless of the candidates, I am convinced that the views we hold will receive more attention in 1956 than ever before, if we maintain a moral independence in our
consideration of political questions.

The political leaders of the two great parties are realists too. They recognize the power of the electorate. They know that the aroused electorate of the South cannot be considered a "sure thing" for any party. The parties must seek the favor of the people on the basis of what the parties and the candidates actually have to offer our country—not on flimsy promises.

My fellow Southerners, tonight we can well be proud of the 1955 model South. Our conversion from a predominantly agricultural section into one of industry has been a success. Our educational development is keeping pace with other endeavors. Our political growth has reached maturity.

Truly, the South is coming into its rightful heritage.