6-28-1959

Address of Senator Strom Thurmond (D-SC) at dedication of Confederate Museum at Front Royal, Virginia, 1959 June 28

Strom Thurmond

Follow this and additional works at: https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/strom

Materials in this collection may be protected by copyright law (Title 17, U.S. code). Use of these materials beyond the exceptions provided for in the Fair Use and Educational Use clauses of the U.S. Copyright Law may violate federal law.

For additional rights information, please contact Kirstin O'Keefe (kokeefe [at] clemson [dot] edu)

For additional information about the collections, please contact the Special Collections and Archives by phone at 864.656.3031 or via email at cuscl [at] clemson [dot] edu

Recommended Citation
Thurmond, Strom, 'Address of Senator Strom Thurmond (D-SC) at dedication of Confederate Museum at Front Royal, Virginia, 1959 June 28' (1959). Strom Thurmond Collection, Mss100. 1884.
https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/strom/1884

For additional information about the collection, please contact the Special Collections and Archives by phone at 864.656.3031 or via email at cuscl [at] clemson [dot] edu

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Manuscript Collections at TigerPrints. It has been accepted for inclusion in Strom Thurmond Collection, Mss100 by an authorized administrator of TigerPrints. For more information, please contact kokeefe@clemson.edu.
ADDRESSES OF SENATOR STROM THURMOND (D-SC) AT DEDICATION OF CONFERATE MUSEUM AT FRONT ROYAL, VIRGINIA, JUNE 28, 1959

You have bestowed a great honor on me by inviting me to participate in these ceremonies. There are several reasons I feel so honored.

The occasion was first mentioned to me by Senator Harry Byrd. Any invitation from Senator Byrd is an honor. Your senior Senator is an inspiration to all who believe in constitutional government; and in the field of fiscal policies, he is indeed an institution. The people of the entire nation owe a debt of gratitude to Virginia for his services, as indeed they do for those of your able junior Senator Willis Robertson and your Congressman, Burr Harrison. I value most highly the friendship of these outstanding public servants.

The spirit of the people of Front Royal, past and present, makes it an honor for me to be associated with them. From its meager beginning as fifty acres and a dream in 1788, Front Royal has become a historic symbol of victorious courage to the people of the South; and, in fact, to all Americans who still cherish the principles of constitutional government. This town suffered the discomfort of occupation by Federal troops for almost the entirety of the late War for Southern Independence. It is, however, for the victory of Confederate arms on May 23, 1862, which led to the capture of Winchester by Stonewall Jackson in his valley campaign, that the town until recently was best remembered.

It is indeed fitting, in view of recent events, that one of the most singly courageous acts of the war took place during the engagement at Front Royal. It was here that the eighteen-year-old "Cleopatra of the Confederacy", Belle Boyd, residing in the occupied town, braved the fire of both sides, and dashed through the Union lines and into the Confederate ranks to deliver information on the enemy's strength to General Jackson. It was an act of extreme courage and conviction, equal in every respect to the occasion.
Just three years less than a century later, Front Royal was again embattled, and its citizens again rose to the occasion. The courage and determination shown here in 1959 was not inspired by flags, uniforms or the sound of battle; rather, it was courage and determination, born of deep conviction for a just cause. Just as the exemplary act of young Belle Boyd in 1862 contributed to the success of Jackson's valley campaign, and to the Southern cause, your actions in 1959 have contributed to the same principles and traditions.

Not only did you preserve the right of self-control of the education of your children, but your actions also contributed immeasurably to the morale of your fellow Southerners, not only in Virginia, but far beyond the borders of this Commonwealth, throughout the entire South. Your example removed any doubt as to whether Virginians still retained the spirit and love of principle demonstrated so inspiringly in the 1860's. The courageous and solid unity of action by the people of Warren County exemplify what is surely the real spirit, the true spirit, of the overwhelming majority of Virginians. That spirit will ultimately prevail in this Commonwealth and the entire South.

Truly, my fellow citizens, by your calm determination, your courage, and your sacrifice, you have made Front Royal the very symbol of the South's determination to preserve and maintain States Rights.

States Rights. Just what do we mean, anyway, by this term "States Rights"? Is it just a meaningless name that we Southerners love to prattle about? Is it simply an outworn political tradition? No! States Rights is an enduring and valid principle, an ancient and a universal principle--it is the fundamental human right of local self-government.

Local self-government, States Rights, home rule, self-determination--call it what you will--they are one and the same. Applied to almost any other land except the South, the United States has always recognized and supported the principle of local self-government.
In fact, the United States was founded on, and grew out of, the right of local self-government, of Home Rule—that was what the Revolutionary War achieved for the former colonies. Yet, when the South asserted this identical right, in the 1860's, the right was denied by the United States. That the Southern States had every right to secede from the Union cannot be doubted. As sovereign States, they had voluntarily acceded to the constitutional compact; and as sovereign States, they had the right to withdraw from it.

Today, here at Front Royal, in dedicating this Confederate Memorial Museum, named for the Warren Rifles, we honor the memory of those courageous and immortal men in gray who fought for the Southern cause. No words that I could speak would be adequate to express the love, the appreciation, and the gratitude, which we, the Southerners of today, feel for those men, who sacrificed their lives and their all for their beloved homeland.

I would like to say this much, however; I think we make a great mistake when we speak of the cause for which they fought as the "Lost Cause." It is far from being a lost cause—a fight for principle is never lost.

True, the South suffered military defeat in the war, and failed in its bid for national independence, despite the heroic, almost superhuman, efforts of these men in gray. Yet the fight they waged, by its very heroism, by their own glory and their sheer nobility, made the South's sense of separate identity, its unity, its solidarity, stronger than ever.

Moreover, the cause which they upheld is still a living cause today, albeit in modified form. Local self-government in the sense of complete national independence may be no longer an issue; but local self-government in the form of States Rights definitely is an issue; and those who battle for States Rights today are waging a fight for governmental principles which are founded on the bedrock of the Constitution.

This issue of States Rights versus Federal usurpation of power is the most important domestic problem facing this country today. Actually, the encroachment of the Federal Government on the rights of the several States has been going
on for a long period of time; but over the past two decades, and especially since 1954, when the Supreme Court embarked on its new sociological tangent, Federal usurpation has increased to an almost unbelievable extent.

I shall not even attempt here to enumerate the specific usurpations of the Federal Government. To do so would require a great deal of time indeed, and, in any event, I think that most of us have become generally familiar--I might say painfully familiar--with what has been happening in this respect over the past few years. Suffice it to say, all three branches of the Federal Government have been guilty of usurpation of power. This is important to remember, because some people have gained the impression that the Supreme Court alone is responsible for the entire situation. That is not the case. Although it is the Court which has led the attack since 1954, all three branches must share the blame--the Court, the Congress, and the Executive.

We are indeed, my fellow-citizens, at a late hour to defend our liberties. Already, as I have tried to emphasize and re-emphasize, the essential foundations have been perilously weakened. Although there is much more awareness of the danger now than ever before, still the people--outside of those of us here in the South,--have not yet been sufficiently aroused from their apathy to take effective political action to halt the trend toward Federal totalitarianism.

This trend must be stopped, and stopped now. If we do not take effective and immediate action to stop it, we will, much sooner than we think, arrive at the condition which a Virginia editor so graphically pictured, in these words (and I quote):

"The United States will cease to be a union of individual States, and will become instead a consolidated nation. Virtually all government will center in Washington. The responsibilities of State and local administrations will dwindle to the merest sweeping of streets, the clipping of public parks. Immense, unapproachable, unreachable, the monolithic structure of Federal Government will dominate men's lives and control their destinies." End quote.

Already we are far advanced toward this condition of subjugation to an all-powerful central government. Yet still there
are many people, especially in the Northern States, who seem unconcerned when we warn them of the consequences of Federal usurpation of the rights of the States. It must be that many people in the North do not have a clear grasp of the meaning of States Rights. As a result of the propaganda efforts of the liberal, anti-South press in the metropolitan centers of the North, perhaps the Northern people have really come to think of the terms "States Rights" and "local self-government" as being nothing more than expressions of Southern race exploiters. If, then, they cannot appreciate the principle for which we fight, when it is called by those terms--States Rights or local self-government--surely they will know what we mean if we use, instead, the phrase "government by consent of the governed." This is a phrase that embraces, and is the embodiment of the philosophy of States Rights; it is a phrase familiar to both North and South, a phrase deeply rooted in early American history. It is also, or at least it was in the past, a cherished American principle.

My friends, if we want to see just how far we have already gone down the road to serfdom, to totalitarianism, we need only to consider how much of the government here in Virginia is "by consent of the governed."

Virginians took the lead in 1776 to secure the benefits of this principle of "government by consent of the governed." They felt strongly enough about this principle to pledge in its behalf their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor. Yet, today, in 1959, Virginians do not enjoy "government by consent of the governed", in the most vital and the most purely domestic concerns of the people of Virginia.

The people of Virginia are quite capable of running the educational system of Virginia, as well as the other domestic affairs of this Commonwealth. The people of Virginia elect a Governor and other State officials. The people of Virginia, on a local basis, elect a State Senate and a House of Delegates. Time and time again the people of Virginia, as is the case with the people of the other Southern States, have made it abundantly clear just exactly how they feel about the relations
of the races / with respect to public education. They have made plain their desire to maintain racial separateness. Their Governors have spoken. Their legislatures have spoken. The people themselves have spoken.

The voice of the people, of their governors, and of their legislatures / go unheeded. The control--not the authority, mind you, but the control--of the public educational system in Virginia / has been assumed--yes, usurped--by Federal judges, officials who are neither elected nor appointed by Virginians. Neither are they answerable to the people of Virginia. Yet these men, answerable only to what has been aptly called / the "Supreme School Board", in Washington, are the de-facto directors / of the ultimate decisions with respect to Virginia's public education system. It was their direction and order / that the white and colored races should be mixed / in Virginia public schools, against the will of the majority of both races / in Virginia.

This is hardly / "government by consent of the governed." It is, in fact, government in direct opposition / to the will of the governed.

Have the people of Virginia, or of any other Southern State, or of any State, surrendered the right to govern their own schools? The very thought of such an idea / is absurd!

It is true that through the means of the Constitution, Virginia, along with South Carolina and the other States, delegated--and we should ever bear in mind that the word used in the Constitution is delegated, not surrendered, and this is an important distinction--delegated certain powers to the new Federal Government. But these powers which were delegated to the Federal Government / were very carefully spelled out. Nowhere among this list of enumerated powers can be found any mention of education. In fact, the word "education" is not even to be found anywhere in the Constitution. This is one of the fields of jurisdiction / which the States definitely retained and reserved unto themselves.

There is no validity in the assertion / that the Supreme Court derived jurisdiction to interfere in the public education
systems of the States, from what has been loosely called the Fourteenth Amendment. In the first place, it is obvious that it was not the intention, of either the people or the Congress, that the so-called Fourteenth Amendment should prevent separation of the races in the schools. The same Congress which submitted the so-called Fourteenth Amendment to the States, set up segregated schools in the District of Columbia. No amount of rationalization by the nine usurpers can change that intention, which was recognized and respected by courts for almost a century.

More important, however, and more fundamental, this so-called amendment is not now, and never has been, legally a part of the Constitution. Not only were the mandatory provisions for the proposing and ratification of amendments not complied with, but the entire Fourteenth Amendment operation, from its conception to its purported adoption, was carried out under conditions of military occupation, duress and fraud, following the military aggression against the South. It is indeed ironic that this so-called Fourteenth Amendment should purport to guarantee, among other things, "due process of law"—because, if in the history of the United States there has ever been one development that was characterized, from start to finish, by a total absence of "due process of law," that development is the creation and the purported adoption of the Fourteenth Amendment.

To say, as some have tried to say, that, nevertheless, we have "acquiesced" in the Fourteenth Amendment, is an absurdity. No one, whether he be a Governor, a lawyer, a judge, or a plain citizen,—not even a sovereign State itself—can "accept" as part of the Constitution, something that is not in fact a part of the Constitution. The desire or willingness to "acquiesce" or "accept" has nothing to do with it—it either is or is not a part of the Constitution, depending upon whether certain requirements were or were not fulfilled. No proposed amendment can become legally a part of the Constitution unless it is brought into being in strict conformity with the procedures laid down in the amending clause—and that does not mean by
militar aggression, fraud and duress.

Thus we find the Supreme Court's 1954 desegregation decision to be not only a false interpretation, based on sociological theory instead of law, but a false interpretation of something that never has been legally a part of the Constitution in the first place.

Contrary to repeated assertions, the desegregation decisions are not "the law of the land." Far from it, the decisions are built on a foundation of fraud, deceit and military aggression. I tell you, this decision is no more the law of the land than the Nazi decrees in occupied France were the law of that land, or than Communist decrees backed by the guns of the Russian army are the law of the land in Hungary today.

As practical men, we must of course acknowledge the existence of the means for forcing compliance with the court orders and decrees. We are well aware that there have been times, such as occurred in Arkansas, when even the most consecrated must yield to physical might. We are equally well aware that force may be applied on other occasions in the future, and that there shall be no alternative to yielding. Let us be ever conscious, however, that any such yielding is to force, and not to authority of law. We shall never surrender our beliefs and convictions. We shall never accept the theory, as the anti-South arguments would have it, that the Constitution is what a particular court says that it is. The Constitution can be altered only through the method of amendment prescribed in the Constitution. Never shall we, nor should we, acknowledge that the court can emasculate the Constitution by judicial fiat.

The struggle in which we are engaged, and in which you have acquitted yourselves so nobly, is not a struggle merely for the separation of the races in the schools. This is but one application of the principle for which we fight. Essentially, our struggle is for the triumph of a government of laws as opposed to a government of men. We must ever bear this in
mind, lest we become so enmeshed in a particular battle/that we lose sight of the total war.

We should also bear in mind always/that the South is not fighting for itself alone. The South's cause/is the nation's cause. It was on the principle of States Rights/that the federal system of the United States Government was founded. States Rights is a principle of vital concern, not only to the Southern States, but to all States; for States Rights, or local self-government, is the indispensable element of our checks-and-balances system, the very cornerstone of liberty.

"Liberty," said Lord Acton, "is not a means to a higher political end. It is itself/the highest political end." It is the ultimate issue at stake/in the present constitutional struggle. Regardless of the efforts to becloud the picture/by injection of extraneous issues, the fact remains/that it is human liberty/which is at stake.

It may well be that our people in the South/will suffer additional setbacks and reversals/in their efforts to preserve their rights, as for instance when they are confronted with stark and naked force. Let us not be discouraged/on such occasions, should they/occur.

The South has suffered from the application of force at the hands of the enemy before, notably in the 1860's. Indeed, the South was overwhelmed with force, and held in subjugation through force. Actions of the South were thereby suppressed, but the spirit flowing from love of liberty/never wavered. Even at the lowest ebb of reconstruction days, the determination for the South to rise again/burned in the heart of all true Southerners.

Today/the South has risen again. Our perseverance for the cause of liberty, our very spirit of independence, is reaping the rewards of economic progress. I suspect sometimes that the degree of passion exhibited towards the South/on the race issue/may, in itself, be a reliable barometer of the South's economic progress. At the time of the War for Southern Independence, and subsequently, during Reconstruction, slavery was played up emotionally as the cause of the War, although in
fact, the basic causes of the war were of an economic nature, stemming from a political sabotage of Southern liberty. Similarly, now that the competition of our economic resurgence is being felt in other parts of the country, the tempo of the attack, almost dormant during our reconstruction-inspired depression of years duration, has risen to almost fever pitch.

The people of Warren County have set the example of courage and ingenuity for the people of the South to follow. The people of the South will follow your example. The pattern of action may vary from place to place, since different circumstances necessitate flexibility. The means employed to resist the attack may vary, and probably will. Some will undoubtedly adopt a course approaching open defiance of the court, through the doctrine of interposition; others will adopt a course involving legal circumvention; still others will follow your example in changing from public to private schools. Each occasion must be met by what appears to the local people, or to the people of the particular State, as the means of resistance which is most appropriate. The important thing is for all Southerners to remain firm and unyielding to the encroachment on their rights. So long as we remain united in our consecration to principle, firm in our determination to resist the attack on our liberty, and courageous in implementing our chosen courses of resistance, we need have no fear of defeat.

It is, therefore, my hope, that the Confederate museum which you have struggled to build, and have used so appropriately, will stand not merely as a material monument to those who sacrificed for the cause of Southern independence. It is my fervent prayer that it shall stand also as a reminder that the spirit of the 1860's is still alive in the South; and that all who see it, or hear of it, shall be conscious that the fight we wage is for individual liberty, the most precious possession of man. I am confident that the reaction of the overwhelming majority of Southerners will be that tyranny shall not prevail in this land. Liberty, freedom and constitutional government must, and shall, be victorious.