

# **Address on the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Battle of Kings Mountain**

**President Herbert Hoover**

2:30 pm  
October 07, 1930

My fellow countrymen:

This is a place of inspiring memories. Here less than a thousand men, inspired by the urge of freedom, defeated a superior force intrenched in this strategic position. This small band of patriots turned back a dangerous invasion well designed to separate and dismember the united Colonies. It was a little army and a little battle, but it was of mighty portent. History has done scant justice to its significance, which rightly should place it beside Lexington and Bunker Hill, Trenton and Yorktown, as one of the crucial engagements in our long struggle for independence.

The Battle of Kings Mountain stands out in our national memory not only because of the valor of the men of the Carolinas, Georgia, Tennessee, Kentucky, and Virginia, who trod here 150 years ago, and because of the brilliant leadership of Colonel [William] Campbell, but also because the devotion of those men revived the courage of the despondent Colonies and set a nation upon the road of final triumph in American independence.

No American can review the vast pageant of human progress so mightily contributed to by these men without renewed faith in humanity, new courage, and strengthened resolution.

My friends, I have lived among many peoples and have observed many governments. Each has its own institutions and its own ideals, its own spirit. Many of them I have learned to respect and to admire. It is from these contrasts and these experiences that I wish to speak today—to speak upon the institutions, the ideals, upon the spirit of America.

In the time since the Battle of Kings Mountain was fought our country has marched from those struggling Colonies on the Atlantic seaboard to the full sweep of the Pacific. It has grown from fewer than 3 million people to more than 120 million. But far more inspiring than its growth of numbers has been the unfolding of a great experiment in human society. Within this land there have been build up new and powerful institutions designed of new ideas and new ideals in a new vision of human relations. Through them we have attained a wider diffusion of liberty and of happiness and of material things than humanity has ever known before. Our people live in a stronger security from enemies abroad and in greater comfort at home than has ever before been the fortune of a nation. We are filled with justifiable pride in the valor, the inventions, the contributions to art and literature, the moral influence of our people. We glow with satisfaction at the multitude of activities in the Nation, the State, the local community, which spread benefits and blessings amongst us. We may be proud of our vast economic development over these 150 years, which has secured to the common man greater returns for his effort and greater opportunity for his future than exist in any other place on the Earth.

In the large sense we have maintained open the channels of opportunity, constantly refreshing the leadership of the Nation by men of lowly beginnings. We have no class or caste or aristocracy whose privilege limits the hopes and opportunities of our people. Science and education have been spread until they are the universal tools of the common man. They have brought to him the touch of a thousand finer things of life. They have enlarged the horizon of our vision into the inspiring works of God.

This unparalleled rise of the American man and woman was not alone the result of riches in lands or forests or mines; it sprang from ideas and ideals, which liberated the mind and stimulated the exertion of a people. There were other parts of the world even more easily accessible to new invasion by man, whose natural resources were as great as those of the United States, yet their history over these 150 years presents no achievement parallel to the mighty march of the United States. But the deadening poverty of other lands was in the absence of the stirring ideas and ideals which have lightened the path of the whole American people. A score of nations have borrowed our philosophy from us, and they have tempered the course of history in yet a score of others. All have prospered under them.

These ideas and these ideals were in the hearts and inspired the souls of the men who fought the Battle of Kings Mountain. They had spurred the migration of their fathers from the persecutions and restricted opportunities of Europe, had been sustained by their religious faith, had been developed in their conflict with the wilderness, and had become the spirit of the American people, demanding for man a larger mastership of his own destiny. Our forefathers formulated them through the Declaration and the Constitution into a new and practical political and social system unique in the world. Devoted generations have secured them to us.

It is never amiss for us to review these principles, that we uphold our faith in them, that we search our fidelity to them, that by stretch of our vision over the vast pageant of our accomplishment we should gain courage to meet the difficulties of the day.

Our political system was a revolt from dictatorship, whether by individuals or classes. It was rounded upon the conception that freedom was inalienable, and that liberty and freedom should rest upon law, and that law should spring from the expressed wisdom of the representatives of the majority of the people themselves. This self-government was not in itself a new human ideal, but the Constitution which provided its framework, with the checks and balances which gave it stability, was of marvelous genius. Yet of vastly more importance than even the machinery of government was the inspired charter of the rights of men which it guaranteed. Under them we hold that all men are created equal, that they are equal before the law, and that they should be safeguarded in liberty and, as we express it latterly, in equality of opportunity to every individual that he may achieve for himself and for the community the best to which his character, his ability, and his ambition entitle him.

No student of American history can fail to realize that these principles and ideals grew largely out of the religious origins and spiritual aspirations of our people. From them spring at once the demand for free and universal education, that the door of opportunity and the ladder to leadership should be free for every new generation, to every boy and girl. It is these human rights and the success of government which has maintained them that have stimulated the initiative and effort

in each individual, the sum of which has been the gigantic achievement of the Nation. They are the precious heritage of America, far more important, far more valuable, than all the riches in land and mines and factories that we possess. Never had these principles and ideals been assembled elsewhere and combined into government. This is the American system.

We have lived and breathed it. We have seldom tried even to name it. Perhaps we might well abandon efforts to define it--for things of the spirit can be little defined. Some have called it liberalism, but that term has become corrupted by political use. Some have called it individualism, but it is not an individualism which permits men to override the equal opportunity of others. By its enemies it has been called capitalism, and yet under its ideals capital is but an instrument, not a master. Some have called it democracy, yet democracy exists elsewhere under social ideals which do not embrace equality of opportunity.

Ours is a system unique with America--an expression of the spirit and environment of our people--it is just American.

Parallel with us, other philosophies of society and government have continued or developed and new ones have come into the world, born of the spirit of other peoples and other environments. It is a function of freedom that we should search their claims with open mind, but it is a function of common sense that we should reject them the moment they fail in the test. From experiences in many lands I have sometimes compared some of these systems to a race. In the American system, through free and universal education, we train the runners, we strive to give to them an equal start, our Government is the umpire of its fairness. The winner is he who shows the most conscientious training, the greatest ability, the strongest character. Socialism or its violent brother, Bolshevism, would compel all the runners to end the race equally; it would hold the swiftest to the speed of the most backward. Anarchy would provide neither training nor umpire. Despotism or class government picks those who run and also those who win.

Whatever the merits or demerits of these other systems may be, they all mean the destruction of the driving force of equal opportunity, and they mean the destruction of our Constitution, for our political framework would serve none of them and many of its fundamental provisions are the negation of them. They mean the abandonment of the Nation's spiritual heritage.

It is significant that some of these systems deny religion and seek to expel it. I cannot conceive of a wholesome social order or a sound economic system that does not have its roots in religious faith. No blind materialism can for long engage the loyalties of mankind. Economic aspiration, though it strongly marks the American system, is not an end in itself, but is only one of many instruments to accomplish the profound purposes of the American people, which are largely religious in origin. This country is supremely dedicated, not to the pursuit of material riches, but to pursuit of a richer life for the individual.

It would be foolish for me to stand here and say that our political and social system works perfectly. It does not. The human race is not perfect yet. There are disheartening occurrences every hour of the day. There are always malevolent or selfish forces at work which, unchecked, would destroy the very basis of our American life. These forces of destruction vary from

generation to generation; and if we would hand on our great inheritance to our children, we must successfully contend with them.

While we cannot permit any foreign person or agency to undermine our institutions, yet we must look to our own conduct that we do not, by our own failure to uphold and safeguard the true spirit of America, weaken our own institutions and destroy the very forces which upbuild our national greatness. It is in our own house that our real dangers lie, and it is there that we have need to summon our highest wisdom and our highest sense of public service.

We must keep corruptive influences from the Nation and its ideals as we would keep them from our homes. Crime and disobedience of law are the very incarnation of destruction to a system whose basis is law. Both pacifism and militarism court danger from abroad, the one by promoting weakness, the other by promoting arrogance. Failure of many of our citizens to express their opinions at the ballot box is at once their abandonment of the whole basis of self-government. Manipulation of the ballot is a denial of government by the people. Corruption or even failure of moral perceptions in public office defiles the whole spirit of America. Mere destructive criticism destroys leadership and substitutes weaklings.

Any practice of business which would dominate the country by its own selfish interests is a destruction of equality of opportunity. Government in business, except in emergency, is also a destruction of equal opportunity and the incarnation of tyranny through bureaucracy. Tendencies of communities and States to shirk their own responsibilities or to unload them upon the Federal Government, or of the Federal Government to encroach upon the responsibilities of the States, are destructive of our whole pattern of self-government. But these evils cannot shatter our ideals or subvert our institutions if we hold the faith. The knowledge of danger is a large part of its conquest.

It is the first duty of those of us who believe in the American system to maintain a knowledge of and a pride in it, not particularly because we need fear those foreign systems, but because we have need to sustain ours in purity and in strength.

The test of our system of government and of our social principles and ideals as compared to others may in part be interpreted by the practical results of the 150 years of growth that have brought to us the richness of life which spreads through this great Nation. I can give you some measurement both of our standards and of our social progress. In proportion to our population, we have one-fourth more of our children in grade schools than the most advanced other country in Europe, and for every thousand of our young people we have six and one-half times as many in colleges and universities. And I may add that today we have more of our youth in institutions of higher learning than all the rest of the 1,500 million people of the world put together.

Compared with even the most advanced other country in Europe, we shall find an incomparably greater diffusion of material well-being. We have twice the number of homes owned among every thousand people that they have; we consume four times as much electricity and we have seven times as many automobiles; for each thousand people we have more than four times as many telephones and radio sets; our use of food and clothing is far greater; we have proportionately only one-twentieth as many people in the poorhouse or upon public charity.

There is a profound proof, moreover, that the doors of opportunity have indeed been kept open. The posts of leadership in our country, both in government and in other activities, are held by men who have risen to command. A canvass of the leading administrative officials of our Federal Government, of our industries, and of our professions, shows that 90 percent of them started life with no financial inheritance. Despite the misrepresentations of demagoguery, there are today more chances for young men to rise, and for young women too, than there were 30 years ago.

We shall not have full equality of opportunity until we have attained that ultimate goal of every right-thinking citizen--the abolition of poverty of mind and home. Happily for us we have gone further than others on this road and we make new gains every decade.

But these tangible things which we can reduce to statistics and comparisons are but a part of America. The great intangibles of the spirit of a people are immeasurable--our sense of freedom, of liberty, of security, our confidence of future progress, our traditions of past glory and sacrifice, the example of our heroes, the spiritual enrichment of our people these are the true glories of America.

The world about us is tormented with the spiritual and economic struggles that attend changing ideals and systems. Old faiths are being shaken. But we must follow our own destiny. Our institutions are a growth. They come out of our history as a people. Our ideals are a binding spiritual heritage. We cannot abandon them without chaos. We can follow them with confidence.

Our problems are the problems of growth. They are not the problems of decay. They are less difficult than those which confronted generations before us. The forces of righteousness and wisdom work as powerfully in our generation as in theirs. The flame of freedom burns as brightly in every American heart. There need be no fear for the future of a Republic that seeks inspiration from the spirit of the men who fought at the Battle of Kings Mountain.

*Note: The President spoke at 2:30 p.m. to an estimated crowd of 30,000 assembled at the battlefield site in Kings Mountain, S.C. The National Broadcasting Company and Columbia Broadcasting System radio networks carried the address.*

Herbert Hoover, Address on the 150th Anniversary of the Battle of Kings Mountain. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project  
<https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/211901>