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IN THEIR OWN WORDS:

*Franklin D.
Roosevelt*



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Earl W. Wilkins, Atlanta Daily World, September 18
Q. “Your ‘forgotten man’ has become a famous symbol, Governor Roosevelt. Is the Negro included in the plan you have to aid the plight of that mass of people?”

Roosevelt: “Absolutely and impartially,” he stated with vigor. His voice carried plainly to the circle of white people surrounding us.

National Youth Administration, 1938. Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library & Museum. Photograph: 48223864(94). <http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu>



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President's Statement on the Seventieth Anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation, September 22

“I hereby congratulate the Negroes of the United States upon the seventieth anniversary of their emancipation. Their progress during these seventy years has been remarkable. They have contributed greatly to the economic development of the Nation and I am sure that as prosperity returns they will share proportionately in the greater security, increased comfort, and happiness resulting therefrom. ”[i]

Address to the Annual Conference of Federal Council of Churches of Christ over a nationwide hookup, December 5

“This new generation, for example, is not content with preaching against that vile form of collective murder, lynch law, which has broken out in our midst anew. We know that it is murder, and a deliberate and definite disobedience of the commandment, ‘Though shalt not kill. ’ We do not excuse those in high places or in low who condone lynch law. ”[ii]

[i] Roosevelt, “Statement on the Seventieth Anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation, September 22, 1933.” Wooley and Peters, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/wis/?pid=14516>.

[ii] The reference was to the lynching of two white men in San Jose, California, that drew the approval of Gov. James Rolph, and the resulting verbal reprimand by Roosevelt. NAACP, Annual Report, 1933, 22.



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Annual Message to the Congress, January 3

“... crimes of organized banditry, cold-blooded shooting, lynching and kidnapping have threatened our security. These violations of ethics and these violations of law call on the strong arm of Government for their immediate suppression; they call also on the country for an aroused public opinion.”[i]

Press Conference, No. 125, May 25 – Q. “What is your attitude on the Costigan-Wagner bill”

THE PRESIDENT: “It is a terribly difficult subject. I have been talking about the theory of it with Costigan and Bob (Wagner) and various other people for quite a long while. I don’t think I had better give you an attitude because I frankly haven’t got sufficient clarity in my own mind as to the constitutionality of it. I think there is a question. I am absolutely for the objective but am not clear in my own mind as to whether that is absolutely the right way to attain the objective. However, I told them to go ahead and try to get a vote on it. It would be a useful thing to try to get a vote on it in the Senate.”[ii]

[i] Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt, 1/3/34, 12-13.

[ii] Complete Presidential Press Conferences, vols. 3, 5/25/34, 374.



NAACP pickets at the Crime Conference, Wash., DC, picketing against the practice of lynching. Washington D.C., 1934. Photograph. <https://www.loc.gov/item/95521097/>.

Press Conference, No. 154, October 31

Q. "In view of the recent developments and the interest being shown, are you going to recommend that the Costigan-Wagner Bill be passed?"

THE PRESIDENT: "You will have to give me about 24 hours because I will have to check up and see what I did last year. I have forgotten."

Q. "You endorsed it. You spoke several times, gave out interviews here after the Rolph thing in California."



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Press Conference, April 24

Q. Care to Comment on the anti-lynching bill?

THE PRESIDENT: “No.”[i]

Letter on Negro Progress, December 26

“My Dear Mr. Allen:[ii][

“Few events in our history are of greater significance than the freeing of the slaves. As we go back to the date when the Emancipation Proclamation was issued by the great Lincoln and come through the years, decade by decade, we are profoundly impressed by the steady progress which the Negro race has made since January 1, 1863.

“It is truly remarkable, the things which the Negro people have accomplished within living memory—their progress in agriculture and industry, their achievements in the field of education, their contributions to the arts and sciences and, in general, to good citizenship.

“It is my hope and belief that the Negro, inspired by the achievements of the race to date, will go forward to even greater things in the years to come. All of us should keep in mind the words of the immortal Lincoln: “In giving freedom to the slave we assure freedom to the free—honorable alike in what we give and what we preserve.”[iii]

[i] Complete Presidential Press Conferences, vol. 5, 4/24/35, 244.

[ii] Cleveland G. Allen (1887-1953) was a New York City journalist. Cleveland G. Allen Papers, 1915-1953, Manuscripts, Archives, and Rare Books Division, New York Public Library, New York City.

[iii] Roosevelt, Letter on Negro Progress, December 26, 1935. ” Wooley and Peters, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/wis/?pid=15007>.



1 9 3 6

President's Greeting on the seventy-fourth Anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation, September 16

“My dear Bishop Wright:[i]

“I appreciate the opportunity of extending greetings to all those who are planning to participate in the celebration of the Seventy-fourth Anniversary of the issuance of the Preliminary Proclamation of Emancipation by President Lincoln.

“It is an occasion for recalling the great progress which Negroes have made as citizens of our Republic. It also is an occasion for remembering that in the truest sense freedom cannot be bestowed. It must be achieved; and that there must be constant vigilance if it is to be maintained. The record which our Negro citizens have made in their own personal and racial development and their contribution to the material advancement of our country and to the promotion of its ideals are well known.

“I heartily congratulate them on their record, and hope that in the future, as in the past, they will continue to show intelligence, industry, and fortitude in striving for the best our Democracy offers.” [ii]

[i] Rev. Richard Robert Wright, Jr. (1878-1967), was a Bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. *Who Was Who in America, 1961-1968, 1071-1072.*

[ii] Roosevelt, “Greeting on the Seventy-fourth Anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation, September 16, 1936.” Wooley and Peters, *The American Presidency Project*. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/wis/?pid=15128>.

**Address at the Dedication of the New Chemistry Building,
Howard University, Washington, D. C. October 26**

“... I have a special interest in Howard University, because the government of the United States has long had a special relationship to this institution. . . .

“The American Negro’s response to this opportunity in the field of higher learning has been prompt and eager as in other fields. . . .

“And so the federal government has provided three new structures to it at this time, and there are more to come. These structures, as part of our building program, represent the happy conjunction of two important federal government programs to meet the difficulties of the depression. They are a part of our nationwide projects to reduce unemployment by building useful public works. They are also a part of our nationwide program to ensure the normal maintenance and necessary expansion of education facilities for you even in a time of depression.

“Our purpose was not only to provide work in all sections for all parts of the population, but to enable them all to share in the benefits to be obtained from these works so long as bricks and mortar shall endure. As far as it was humanly possible, the government has followed the policy that among American citizens there should be no forgotten men and no forgotten races. It is a wise and truly American policy. We shall continue faithfully to observe it.

“Howard University has shared as of right in our public works program. These government-financed improvements in the facilities of this great center of Negro education should enable it to continue to provide for its students cultural opportunities comparable to those offered by other first-class institutions of higher learning in the country.

“At its last commencement Howard sent forth 245 graduates to join nearly 10,000 alumni in all parts of the world. Here is a record of which the Negro race may well be proud. It is a record of which America is proud. It is further fulfillment of our dream of providing better and better educational facilities for all our people. ”



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Franklin D. Roosevelt in Denver, Colorado., October 12, 1936. Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library & Museum. Photograph: 48-22:3708(11).
<http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu>

President' Greeting to the NAACP, June 25

“Dear Mr. White:[i]

“I am happy to extend to the Twenty-ninth Annual Conference of the National Conference of the National Association of Colored People cordial greetings and best wishes for the success of its efforts in advancing the interests of the Negro Race and bringing about that cooperation and understanding between the races so essential to the maintenance of a vital democracy.

“I have watched with interest the constructive efforts of your organization, not only in behalf of the Negro people in our nation, but also in behalf of the democratic ideals and principles so clear to our entire nation. For it is evident that no democracy can long survive which does not accept as fundamental to its very existence the recognition of the rights of its minorities. ”[ii]

[i] Walter F. White (1884-1955), then Executive Secretary, NAACP.

[ii] Roosevelt, “Greeting to the NAACP, June 25, 1938.” Wooley and Peters, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/wis/?pid=15663>.



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1939

President's Greeting to the NAACP, June 13

"Dear Mr. White:

"The opportunities of a democratic people to participate in national progress are legion. Their responsibilities for sharing in the achievement of that progress are equally great. We delight in recognizing the contributions which members of the Negro race have made to American life and the part which they have had in the progress of the nation.

"My sincerest wish for all of you is that your opportunities may be increasingly shared and your responsibilities continuously accepted in helping the Negro race to hold fast to the advancements already made and in moving forward to higher planes of accomplishment. As an integral group in our American democracy we look to you to uphold its ideals, to help to carry its burdens and to partake of its blessings.

"In extending cordial greetings to the Thirtieth Annual Conference of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, may I express the hope that the Negro race will find steadily expanding fields in which to serve with industry, loyalty and distinction. "



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1940

Letter to Elder Solomon Lightfoot Michaux[i] on the Anniversary Celebration of the Thirteenth Amendment, October 6

“My Dear Elder Michaux:

“I regret exceedingly that circumstances prevented my acceptance of your cordial invitation to speak in connection with the celebration you are arranging to commemorate the seventy-fifth anniversary of the ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment.

“It is most fitting that this celebration is to be held under the auspices of the National Memorial to the Progress of the Colored Race,[ii] which petitioned for the stamp to be issued in honor of the ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment. How marvelous has been the advancement of your race. “Up From Slavery,” to quote the title of a book which won universal admiration when the great Booker T. Washington[iii] gave it to the world nearly forty years ago.

“I need hardly assure you that I had great satisfaction in authorizing the Thirteenth Amendment commemorative stamp. It is a symbol of all that has been achieved by Negroes in the past three-quarters of a century—achievements that have enriched and enlarged and ennobled our American life.

“It is an irony of our day that three-quarters of a century after the adoption of the Amendment forever outlawing slavery under the American Flag, liberty should be under violent attack. And yet over large areas of the earth the liberties which to us mean happiness and the right to live peaceful and contented lives are challenged by brute force—a force which would return the human family to that state of slavery from which emancipation came through the Thirteenth Amendment.

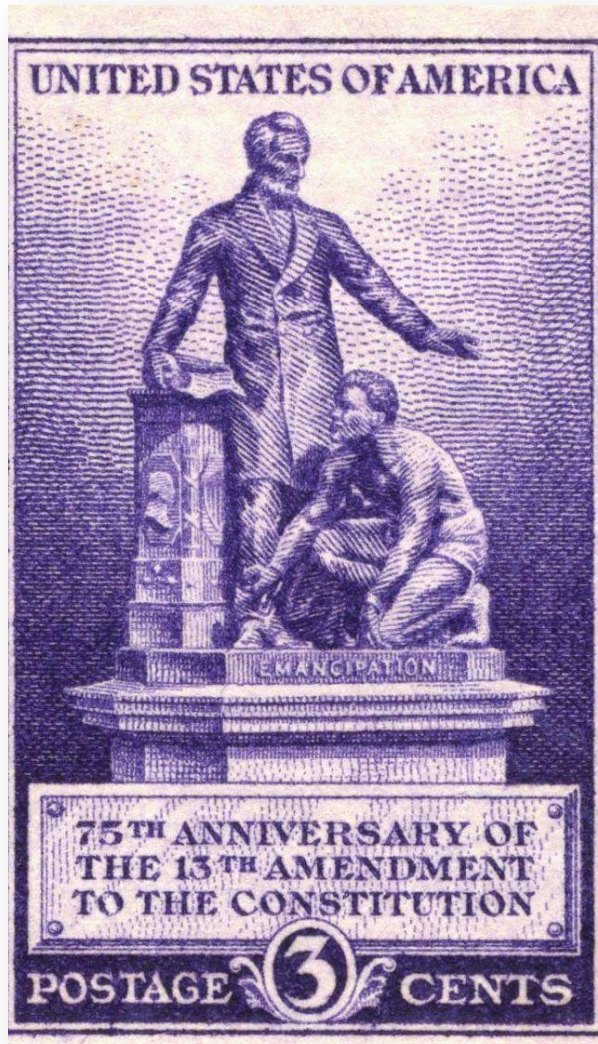
“As we celebrate the blessings of liberty which our Negro citizens share under the beneficent provision let us all, as Americans unite in a solemn determination to defend and maintain and transmit to those who shall follow us on the rich heritage of freedom which is ours today.”[iv]

[i] Elder Solomon Lightfoot Michaux (pronounced “Mee-show”) (1884-1968), known as the “Happy Am I Preacher,” was an evangelist who established the Church of God movement in Washington, D. C. , where his radio broadcasts supported President Roosevelt and the New Deal. He was also known for his mass baptisms, first in the Potomac River, and later in huge tanks of water (allegedly from the River Jordan) in the infield of the old Griffith Stadium. In 1942, he constructed the first federally subsidized housing for African Americans, a 595-unit housing development called Mayfair Mansions on the site of the old Benning Race Track in North East Washington. See Janette Hoston Harris, “Elder Solomon Lightfoot Michaux,” in Rayford W. Logan and Michael R. Winston, eds.: *Dictionary of American Negro Biography* (New York, 1982), 431.

[ii] The National Memorial to the Progress of the Colored Race in America was another of Elder Michaux’s projects, consisting of two large tracts of land in Jamestown, Virginia. Harris, “Elder Solomon Lightfoot Michaux,” 431.

[iii] Booker Taliaferro Washington (1856-1915), president of Tuskegee Institute in Macon County, Alabama, was, for a time at the beginning of the Twentieth Century, the most influential black man in the United States. His book *Up From Slavery* (first published 1910) was one of three published autobiographies.

[iv] Text of Roosevelt’s personal letter to Elder Lightfoot Solomon Michaux, leader of the Radio Church of God and president of the National Memorial to the Progress of the Colored Race in America, in “President Praises Negroes at Fair,” *New York Times*, 10/21/40, 20; see also Roosevelt, “Greeting on the Anniversary Celebration of the Thirteenth Amendment, October 6, 1940.” Wooley and Peters, *The American Presidency Project*. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/wis/?pid=15873>.



3-cent Stamp of the 13th Amendment. Bureau of Engraving and Printing, Smithsonian National Postal Museum, October 20, 1940. <https://commons.wikimedia.org>

On the Issuing of a 13th Amendment Stamp, New York Times, October 21

“It is an irony of our day that three-quarters of a century after the adoption of the amendment forever outlawing slavery under the American flag, liberty should be under violent attack. And yet over large areas of the earth the liberties which to us mean happiness and the right to live peacefully and contented lives are challenged by brute force – a force which would return the human family to that state of slavery from which emancipation came through the thirteenth amendment. As we celebrate the blessings of liberty, which our Negro citizens share under the beneficent provision, let us all, as Americans, unite in a solemn determination to defend and maintain and transmit to those who shall follow us the rich heritage of freedom which is ours today.”

“President Praises Negroes at Fair,” New York Times, 10/21/40, 20; also quoted in, Kachun, “A beacon to oppressed peoples everywhere’: Major Richard R. Wright Sr., National Freedom Day, and the Rhetoric of Freedom in the 1940s,” Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography 128 (July 2004): 289.