

Remarks

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Riverside Park Conservancy Spring Gala

General Grant National Memorial

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I am particularly pleased to be introduced by John Adams, who has played such a key role in the preservation of historic sites, farmlands, and open spaces. Your generous comments are very meaningful to me.

When I think about Riverside Park and what it means to me, I recall my childhood playing here, the connection of this Park to the greater scenic Hudson Valley, the amazing opportunities this Park gives to the children of our city, and the pivotal role the Conservancy plays in preserving important historical monuments. On this 72nd Anniversary of D-Day, with General Grant at my back, I would like to commend the Conservancy for all that it does, but especially for the care it bestows upon our history. This year, the Conservancy, in partnership with the City, has launched an in-depth conservation study of the Soldiers' and Sailors' Monument, located at 89th Street in Riverside Park, honoring those who served the Union in the Civil War, I join with the Conservancy in hoping that one day soon, that monument to the Union soldiers will be restored to its full magnificence.

And so, tonight I am humbled to receive this recognition in the shadow of one monument, dedicated to the great Union General, Ulysses S. Grant. And I am inspired equally by that other memorial downtown, honoring the sacrifice of the Union Soldiers, an historic monument with a cornerstone laid by then-Governor Theodore Roosevelt in 1900.

But frankly, most of all I am grateful that no one has asked me if I had a good seat to see Teddy Roosevelt lay that cornerstone.

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In the aftermath of the Civil War, Mark Twain remarked upon this great mystery: how it could be that *physical* courage should be so common in the world, and yet *moral* courage so rare.

It is fit and proper that all communities remember those whose physical courage led them to sacrifice on the field of battle.

But today I would like us all to pause to honor as well that rarer virtue: moral courage.

The soldiers and sailors commemorated in this Park died because a founding document told them, “all men are created equal,” - and yet they knew that every day, somewhere in this nation, that principle was being violated by the master’s lash.

That violation they could not abide; and when their nation called them,

they took up arms.

That is what we mean by moral courage.

And so they won the war, and so the Union was preserved; and so the Constitution received its crown, the Civil War amendments, outlawing slavery, along with every badge and incident of slavery - and indeed prohibiting any provision that might deny any American the equal protection of the law.

It was, by any measure, a great victory. And yet today, I sometimes fear that, just as the great monument to the Union Soldiers has fallen into disrepair, so have the principles for which that monument stands.

I worry that today we still see some flying the confederate flag, claiming that they do so only to honor the dead – but, in too many instances, slandering the living as well.

I worry for those who come to our shores seeking those blessings of freedom promised by our Constitution, only to be denied the equal protection of law.

As a veteran, I worry about those men and women who return from war, and are thanked for their service, only to be forgotten.

And as a farmer, I worry about a nation that has inherited a great land, only to forget that we must be stewards of that land.

It is not just monuments that must be restored. The ideals that they represent must be restored as well.

As Lincoln said, in dedicating the cemetery at Gettysburg, “it is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they...so nobly advanced.”

Let this Park, this Conservancy, and these monuments inspire us. And as we restore our monuments, let them inspire others as well, to find within themselves the courage – the *moral* courage – to preserve the ideals upon which the true greatness of this nation shall always rest.

Thank you.