



11-20-2013

Scalia: A Real Gettysburg Address

John M. Rudy
Gettysburg College

Follow this and additional works at: <https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/interpretcw>

 Part of the [Cultural History Commons](#), [Social History Commons](#), and the [United States History Commons](#)

Share feedback about the accessibility of this item.

Rudy, John M. "Scalia: A Real Gettysburg Address." Interpreting the Civil War: Connecting the Civil War to the American Public (November 20, 2013).

This open access blog post is brought to you by The Cupola: Scholarship at Gettysburg College. It has been accepted for inclusion by an authorized administrator of The Cupola. For more information, please contact cupola@gettysburg.edu.

Scalia: A Real Gettysburg Address

Abstract

USCIS Director Alejandro Mayorkas, as he introduced the most potent speaker in Tuesday morning's ceremonies at Gettysburg, called it a, "special day," both in the lives of the handful of men and women raising their hands to take the oath of allegiance and become American citizens, but also, "in the life of our country."
[excerpt]

Keywords

Gettysburg, Gettysburg Address, Lincoln, National Cemetery, Rudy, Scalia

Disciplines

Cultural History | History | Social History | United States History

Comments

Interpreting the Civil War: Connecting the Civil War to the American Public is written by alum and adjunct professor, John Rudy. Each post is his own opinions, musings, discussions, and questions about the Civil War era, public history, historical interpretation, and the future of history. In his own words, it is "a blog talking about how we talk about a war where over 600,000 died, 4 million were freed and a nation forever changed. Meditating on interpretation, both theory and practice, at no charge to you."

Creative Commons License

Creative

Commons

This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial 4.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/)

License



Interpreting the Civil War

Connecting the Civil War to the American Public

www.civilwarconnect.com



Scalia: A Real Gettysburg Address

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 20, 2013

USCIS Director Alejandro Mayorkas, as he introduced the most potent speaker in Tuesday morning's ceremonies at Gettysburg, called it a, "special day," both in the lives of the handful of men and women raising their hands to take the oath of allegiance and become American citizens, but also, "in the life of our country."

Gettysburg, this place I call home, is momentous. Sometimes we lose that fact when we drive through the streets to get a quart of milk or head to the office. What happened here 150 years ago was truly a special moment in America's life. And no one underlined that fact better than Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia.

I don't agree personally with the Justice's politics. It's tough to imagine Scalia, a strict Constitutional constructionist, adequately commemorating a speech which declared that the Declaration of Independence, America's founding in thought, trumped the Constitution's founding in law. But that's exactly what he did.

His words were brief. But unlike much of what was belabored, prepared and read aloud Tuesday morning, Scalia's words were spontaneous and heartfelt. We live in an era of prepared and formal, vetted and predetermined. The heartfelt and spontaneous shines when it happens.

Scalia's remarks were powerful precisely because they didn't try to address Lincoln. They only glancingly addressed the cemetery and the dead.

But what Scalia *did* do was talk about being an American, about the promise of the very word. And Lincoln's Gettysburg Address is about nothing but the promise of being American, the necessity of preserving that promise and, most crucially, extending it to larger groups of Americans, new and old.

I'm not sure the Justice even realized what he was doing was perfect. Instead of spending his moments at the podium before administering the oath praising Lincoln, instead of revamping or rephrasing 272 words, instead of at great lengths dissecting a piece of pure American art, Scalia said something new for today, for us.

And the most crucial strength?

Scalia said, "I," and, "my." He spoke from his heart, he spoke personally. And in doing so, he captured the meaning of the day, of the anniversary, of being American.

You can watch [a video of this morning's ceremony here](#) (skip ahead to 1 hour, 17 minutes). Or read a transcript below:

"Before I administer the oath, I want to say a few words of welcome to the new citizens. What makes us Americans, what unites us, is quite different from that which unites other countries.

There's a word, 'unAmerican.' We used to have a House unAmerican Activities Committee. There's no equivalent word in foreign languages. It would mean nothing in French political discourse to refer to something as unFrench, or in German political discourse to refer to something as unGerman. It is only Americans, we Americans, who identify ourselves not by our blood or by our color, or by our race or by where we were born, but rather by our fidelity to certain political principles.

That's very strange. It's unique in human history, I believe.

We are, as you heard from the Director [of the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services] a nation of immigrants, who have come here mostly for two reasons. First, for freedom. From the pilgrims in the 17th century to the Cubans and the North Koreans in the 20th and 21st centuries.

And that freedom, of course, is not free, as the dead who rest buried here can demonstrate. The last line of our 'Star Spangled Banner' is, 'the land of the free and the home of the brave.' The two go together. Freedom is for the brave.

The second reason they came, these immigrants, was for opportunity. My father, who was the most patriotic man I ever knew, used to say that in the old country, if your father was a shoemaker, you would be a shoemaker. And in America, you could be whatever you were willing to work hard enough to be and had the talent to be.

And his son ended up on the Supreme Court.

My Grandmother expected me to be President; I didn't quite make that. (Audience Laughter) But it was possible. It is possible in America.

So welcome, my soon-to-be fellow citizens, to the nation of Americans. May America bring you all that you expect from it. And may you give it all that it expects from you.



The morning sun silhouettes the Address monument.