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Change and Continuity

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From: Gavin

To: Pat  
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## Change and Continuity

RN speaking:

There are those who say that things must remain as they have been, that no changes should be made in American society. These people are satisfied with things as they are.

There are those who are satisfied with very little, if anything, in American society. They want a revolution. They want complete change.

I say to you that both of these positions are wrong. The question is not whether we will have change or continuity, but, instead, how can we have both change and continuity.

G.K. Chesterton once said that the only way to keep something as it is is to change it. He gave an example of a fence; if a man builds a fence, the only way he can retain that fence through the years is to change the fence: repair parts which have become worn out, replace parts from time to time, give it a fresh coat of paint when it is needed. The man changes the fence only in order to preserve it. If he simply lets the fence remain as it is, the fence will eventually fall, a victim to time and the effects of nature.

But the man does not tear the fence down. He repairs it, and, in repairing it, makes it stronger.

And this is what we must discuss this year: not if we are going to change but how, for we can preserve America only if we change her.

Some ask us not to change anything. But if we listen to them America will not prosper and will eventually fall.

Some ask us--no, perhaps it's closer to the truth to state that they tell us --that we must tear America down. The day-by-day work of repairing what is wrong with America is too difficult for minds intent on nothing but destruction.

But I say we need both change and continuity. When we speak of America, we don't simply speak of all the Americans who are alive today: we speak of every American, from the soldier who sat huddled by the fire in that winter at Valley Forge, reduced to nothing but his courage and his rifle, to the young men who now defend the same principles in a different kind of hell, far from winter, far from home. We speak of every immigrant who stood on the deck of a steamer and saw for the first time the great land of hope.

*Lincoln*  
*Dream* *22*

The decisions we make in this time and place will affect not only those of us who are alive now, but those who have gone before us, and those who will come after. As we stand here we do not stand alone; we stand with the millions of Americans who have helped to make this country what it is.

It has been said that men see things more than the Ancients and more distant only because we stand on the shoulders of the giants who have gone before us.

And so what we decide here will reflect on those who have suffered, those who have died in order to build this country. What we choose will be a commentary on what they have given us. We will choose not only for ourselves, but for them, the immigrant, the soldier, the slave, the American giants on whose broad shoulders we stand. Their suffering, their heroism, their pain and their hope: these are the things we must consider in our time.

And we choose for the future. Someday other men will face a time of choice in America and the land they have, the ideals they wish to preserve will depend on all of us here, today.

Thus, we choose as Americans of the last third of the 20th. century, but we choose for America, an America which extends in time back to the founders and forward to the hopes and dreams of us all.

What we have been given we must preserve; what we have discovered to be no longer useful, we must change, but we must change only in accordance with the laws and customs which are our greatest gift from the Americans of the past.

We do not stand alone.

We have not come all this way for nothing.

We must preserve what we were given for our children, and, with work and prayer and sacrifice and time, perhaps we can give to the future America not only what we were given to protect, but also the wisdom we have gained in our struggle in our time.