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Three years ago, in Cincinnati, Ohio, heavy equipment operators put on their hard hats, climbed aboard their machines, and set to work destroying all but the central rotunda of that City's railroad station.

Before long, the passenger concourses, the marble, the columns, and the stonework lay in rubble. Some of the huge mosaics, composed of hundreds of thousands of tiny tiles, depicting the peoples and history of America, were saved for use elsewhere. But another <sup>piece</sup> ~~piece~~ of monumental architecture was ruined. Gone, for all practical purposes, was another piece of the nation's history.

Things like that have happened in one city after another. In my home state of North Carolina, the simple stations have either been boarded up or torn down, where once families greeted grandma, or saw a son off to war, or a daughter off to college. Most of them were not great architectural pieces, although it is still a shame for people to see a part of a town gone forever.

The bigger losses are the great stations; where the skills of the best architects and builders were lavished to make a great statement about a great nation. They created a building which said, 'Behold restless America, on the move, seeking experience and fortune. Let this be a monument to her energy and her vaulted spirit.'

What is a great public building, after all. There are those who would see such a building only as a functional object. But that is giving in to the demand of false economy. The people's money must be well spent. But that does not mean it must be spent on the cheapest, the least beautiful, and the least lasting. Nor does it mean buildings must be destroyed as soon as their original usefulness has left them. New uses can be found, as this National Visitors Center proves.

When we built a new Legislative Building in North Carolina, people accused us of putting up the Taj Mahal. But we looked at the old Capitol building, and realized there was a message there from the founders of our state. That grand old Capitol was built in the knowledge that beautiful public buildings are one way in which we show our respect for our democracy. We were right to listen to that

message. The people of North Carolina flock to see their new

**center**  
~~center~~ of government.

So I think we can be glad, here today, that something which inspired

America's inspired hopefulness has been preserved here in Washington.

This city should express the very best of what is in us as a people.

If Union Station had vanished, that would have been an expression

of the worst in us -- the willingness to cast aside the old without

considering its deeper value.

Everything we do sends a message to the future, speaking of

what we were. Those who planned this great building should be proud

we have found a way to pass their message on.

The old Union Station, preserved as a refuge and inspiration to

the visitor, sends forth the right message about ourselves. That

message is, "Behold America growing up, learning to hold on to what

is of value, finding new uses for old resources." That is a message

for which our descendents will admire us, I think, for being wise.