
Franklin D. Roosevelt — “The Great Communicator”
The Master Speech Files, 1898, 1910-1945

Series 1: Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Political Ascension

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1898 January 19

School debate on Hawaii Annexation (Groton)

January 19, 1898

Speech on Hawaii

FDR Speech File

00011

I suppose Warren and I are to meet you at Fairhaven, at least we both wish to, and feel we ought.

Warren is much distressed, and the more so, because he fears the great shock will make Aunt Kassie very ill.

I shall telegraph you early tomorrow, asking when I am to go to Fair Haven

I only wish I could have been near you in our great trouble.

Ever your own loving son

FRANKLIN.



"Mr. Peabody has told us that our country cannot be safe without Hawaii. I shall try to disprove this . . ."

The following is the text of the address which F.D.R. delivered on Jan. 19, 1898, upholding the negative in the debate: "Resolved, that Hawaii be promptly annexed." This was a rough pencil copy of his speech, with marginal eye-catchers, which served him for notes.

Mr. President, Lady and Gentlemen.

Of all the great powers of the world the United States and Russia are the only ones which have no colonies to defend. All our territory is on this continent and all of it except Alaska is continuous.

Therefore the United States and Russia are the only two countries no part of whose territory can be cut off by a naval enemy. At present we have no really vulnerable point. Now, the annexation of Hawaii by us would affect the feelings of the European powers in two ways: first it would anger them because Hawaii is a common stopping point, secondly it would embolden them because we should for the first time in our history have a vulnerable point.

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Mr. President, Lady and Gentlemen.

Of all the great powers of the world the United States and Russia are the only ones which have no colonies to defend. All our territory is on this continent and all of it except Alaska is continuous.

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Mr. Peabody has told us that our country cannot be safe without Hawaii. I shall try to disprove this. Now if we own the islands it means that we must protect them, and to do that we should

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have not only to fortify the Islands
themselves but also maintain a naval
base & spend at least 100,000,000 every
year on our navy, besides a large navy
in the Islands, yet we receive neither
the nearest part of the U.S. and so
are too far away to be of any service
to our Western coast in time of war
For the same reason they would not
help to defend the Hawaiian canal
as Japan is nearer Nicaragua than
Hawaii. It would be quicker to send
troops from the former place.
The chief argument of Mr. Robinson
that we need a cooling station for
our ships. Now it is not generally
known that Pearl Harbor is one of the
best harbors in the world. It is
well sheltered by the islands and
the water is so clear that a ship
may stay there for weeks without
needing a cooling station.



If we must have another cooling
station in mid-Pacific why not put
it one of the Atlantic Islands in the
North.
But before we bother about foreign
cooling stations and fortifications we
should first look to the defense of our
own coast. New York Harbor, and
San Francisco are still at the mercy of
enemy and why should we spend the mil-
lions needed to fortify them when we have
positions already in the middle of the
Pacific. Captain Mahan himself says
it is necessary to think of an invasion
rather than of a declaration of war.
Under our policy it is not an emergency
war for destruction. There is no doubt
that it is in the interest of the
advantage of the United States.



not take the islands some ships
and let a little of the position
be taken by the United States. The
only uncertainty of Japan, Hawaii, and
the United States is that the United States
is not in a position to defend itself
if it is in the interest of the
United States.

trade with the Islands, for England
 already for the trade.
 would not use the goods as a base of
 operation against us in case of war,
 for the King a veritable subject, at
 least would a lot in England
 within sight of our own shores.
 also had determined any wisdom of
 against the Island, and it would be
 interest or political expediency for us,
 for King and the Hawaiian would be at
 touch as Robinson Crusoe. Besides all
 New Hawaii is taking fire, the
 Christiana sailing west. The country
 outside of the U.S. would have Hawaiian
 and some French Senator has argued that -
 if after introduction for any reason we
 should wish to abrogate the Island we
 could easily turn them over to
 England or Germany. How did Lincoln
 get us out of the war? and
 given us the right of the country.

Abraham Lincoln

Poland

would never consent to have the
 Island and likely handed down from
 a country, we which has not once
 waved. Therefore if we once agree
 to keep the isolated Islands we subject
 we have to do.
 there is no more reason for the U.S.
 to annex Hawaii than to annex
 Nicaragua and it is ridiculous to say
 we should hand over that country to a
 foreign power - it that we will be
 consistent to the principle of annex. We
 do not want to own any of these
 tropical countries in the way of these
 Islands. By the Island of Hawaii we
 become are only subject to keep Hawaii
 forever from
 to govern them or even discuss them of
 we give up in foreign defense the
 must not let the ally and not only
 our future enemies experience, and they
 our past enemies of Japan and many
 long political difficulties upon the
 more serious at any moment.

Lincoln



★
made 7/10

nationality of a free people? Why
 meddle with this land thousands of
 miles away whose inhabitants are so
 different from us in every way? Why
 weaken our strategical position and
 why spend millions in a foolish cause?
~~I appeal to your common sense~~
~~common sense that common sense~~
~~which has never yet made a mistake~~
~~and which let us pass never will.~~

Mr. P. says our trade will double in ten
 years, but not why this should be so
 as he has not proved it

This rough copy of his speech, with marginal eye-
 catchers, served F.D.R. for notes. The debaters
 were not allowed to read their speeches verbatim.

100 million

Another
 argument

Before
 bothering

Mr. Peabody has told us that our country cannot be safe without Hawaii. I shall try to disprove this: now if we own the islands it means that we must protect them, and to do that we should have not only to fortify the Islands themselves but also maintain a much larger navy. Now to do this we should have to spend at least \$100,000,000., every year on our navy besides a large sum on erecting forts and maintaining soldiers on the Islands. Let us remember that the islands are over 2,000 miles from the nearest point of the U.S. and so are too far away to be of any service to our Western coast in time of war. For the same reason they would not help to defend the Nicaraguan canal should we ever built it, and also, as California is nearer Nicaragua than Hawaii it would be quicker to send warships from the former place.

Another argument of Mr Peabody's that we need a coaling-station for our ships. Now it is not generally known that Pearl Harbor, a port in one of the islands belongs to the United States. All that is needed is a little inexpensive dredging and we shall have a coaling-station without annexation.

If we must have another coaling-station in mid-Pacific why not fit up one of the Aleutian Islands in the North.

But before we bother about foreign coaling-stations and fortifications we should look to the defense of our own coasts. New York, Boston, and S. Francisco are still at the mercy of an enemy and why should we spend the millions needed to fortify these cities on those worthless Islands in the middle of the Pacific. Captain Mahan himself says it is nonsense to think of annexation unless we decide to spend an enormous sum for fortifications. Now is it worth while to do this? In what way will it advantage us?

Mr. P.
says

Mr. Peabody says that if we do not take the islands, some other power will, but let us look at the question. England might have had Hawaii years & years ago if she had wanted it. She has also disclaimed any intention of taking Hawaii, but supposing [she] does take it. In what way would it harm us? We should have free trade with the Islands, for England stands for free trade. England would not use the group as a base of supplies against us in case of war, for she has a veritable Gibraltar at Esquimaux a port in British Columbia within sight of our own shores.

Japan
interfering

Now about Japan's interfering. She also has disclaimed any intention of seizing the Islands, and it would be indeed a foolish enterprise for her, for any armies in Hawaii would be as lonely as Robinson Crusoe. Besides all this Hawaii is entirely out of the Japan-America sailing-route. No country outside of the U.S. wants to have Hawaii and . . .

Abandon
Isles

Some foolish Senator has argued that if after annexation for any reason we should wish to abandon the Islands, we could easily turn them over to Japan, England or Germany. Now the United States has never been in the habit of giving up territory once acquired, and I am sure the people of this country would never consent to have the Stars and Stripes hauled down from a country over which they had once waved. Therefore if we once annex Hawaii we shall always be obliged to keep the wretched Islands *whether we wish to or no*.

Nicaragua

There is no more reason for the U.S. to annex Hawaii than to annex Nicaragua and it is ridiculous to say we could hand over that country to a foreign power for that would be contrary to the Monroe Doctrine. We do not want to own any of these tropical countries or to go there ourselves. By the Mon-

Monroe
Doctrine

roe Doctrine we are only supposed to keep foreign powers from these countries but not to govern them or own them. Now if we once go in for foreign colonies we must stick to that policy and not only are foreign colonies expensive, but they are dangerous children and may bring political difficulties upon the mother country at any moment.

Trade
Treaty

What we want is a favorable trade treaty with the Islands, and this we have already, for everything of commercial value is provided for in it.

McKinley
only
support

The Bill for annexation before the Senate now comes straight from the White House. It is significant to note that if the treaty were not pressed by McKinley himself there is no doubt that it would be beaten, for not one of the older Republican Senators are in favor of it. All the goods Democrats in both the House and Senate are against the treaty, while the only support comes from the White House and McKinley is only trying to make his administration popular with the masses.

Why can we not leave Hawaii alone, or else establish a sound Republic in which all Hawaiians shall be represented not a government such as they have at present, under the influence of Americans. As I have shown no power would take Hawaii now as a gift, but supposing some Power should in the remote future should wish to have it. Then the expression of the feelings of the United States would be enough to stop it, just as the feeling of America led Louis Napoleon to withdraw his troops from Mexico, a number of years ago.

Colonies

Several nations of modern times ruled upon the monarchic plan, have seized territory for commercial reasons and because of sympathy with the people residents, but we have no such plea for seizing

Hawaii as W [Wendell Blagden] shows. Why should we soil our hands with colonies? See how Italy's colonial system has utterly failed, then ask yourself what good France's colonies do her.

As Mr — has so ably shown the inhabitants are not ignorant folk. Why then does the Government shrink from submitting the treaty to a general vote of the inhabitants. The answer is obvious: they would vote against it to a man. Why then annex them without their consent? Why take away the nationality of a free people? Why meddle with this land thousands of miles away whose inhabitants are so different from us in every way? Why weaken our strategical position and why spend millions in a foolish cause?

I appeal to your American common-sense, that common-sense which has never yet made a mistake and which let us pray never will. [In the manuscript this sentence was crossed out and the following conclusion substituted:]

Mr. P. says our trade will double in ten years, I do not see why this should be so as he has not proved it.

Captain Alfred Thayer Mahan, cited as an authority in this speech, had retired from the Navy in 1896. Earlier, in 1890, lectures he gave at the War College in Newport had been collected and published as *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History, 1660-1773*, a book at this time just beginning to receive prominent attention. After his retirement Mahan wrote numerous magazine articles, furthering his international reputation, and influencing such men as Theodore Roosevelt and Henry Cabot Lodge, who were then engaged in an active effort to enlarge and improve the Navy. Shortly after the time of this debate, when the Spanish-American War broke out, Mahan was recalled from retirement to serve on the board of strategy directing naval operations. He died in 1914; with the outbreak of the Second World War, and especially after the

Japanese attack on that "not generally known" United States port, Pearl Harbor, his name and work again became front-page news. An article in the *New York Tribune*, datelined Washington, January 11, 1898, commented on the majority committee opinion which Senator Cushman Kellogg Davis of Minnesota, chairman of the Committee on Foreign Relations, presented before the Senate. He was quoted in part: "We should take the islands while we have the opportunity, and if we do not want them it will be a very easy matter to get rid of them on our own terms." The *Tribune* then went on to state that the Senator "showed that they [the islands] would be a very important territorial acquisition to either Japan, England or Russia, and expressed the opinion that either of those powers would take the islands off our hands at any time we might make known our desire to be rid of them." The report concluded: "It would be easy enough to turn them over to some other country . . . but who, the Senator asked, will say that it will be so easy for us to take them at some future time, in case we voluntarily deprive ourselves of the present opportunity?" Since Davis' speech would have appeared in all the newspapers the morning of F.D.R.'s debate, undoubtedly he was the "foolish Senator" mentioned.



"I am hoping to get the pink-eye
so I can come home . . ."

[GROTON]
JAN. 21, 1898,
FRIDAY.

My dearest Mama,

After leaving you this morning Warren and I settled ourselves in the train. As we had both forgotten to wind our watches last night we asked the conductor for the right time. He told us 8.30 so we set our watches. On arrival at Boston we