
Franklin D. Roosevelt — “The Great Communicator”

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[Philmont, NY]

FDR Speech File

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Papers of President Franklin D. Roosevelt
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Speech at Philmont, N. Y., May 30, 1912

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This is a Decoration Day Speech
delivered by the President in 1911
or 1912.

[Philmont, N.Y., May 30, 1912]
RLJ

It has been said that the past is helpful to the present only ~~only~~ as an inspiration for the future. I never see a gathering of this kind on a day set aside as a Memorial of Past without turning unconsciously to the days to come. It is a good thing for our nation to have solemn days like this to commemorate the greatest men and the greatest deeds of our past; it is a ~~good~~ ^{desired} thing for us who are young to see face to face you who have helped to make us what we are. It is the highest honor to me to speak ~~before~~ before you who have been spared to us today as living reminders of that great past, as living guides to a great future.

For as the years go by I like to think that Memorial Day will be an ever increasing factor for the good of our country. It will and it must take on for the generations yet unborn a quality of sacred consecration which

will strengthen our childrens arms to deal with the problem that are yet to come -

To you men of the Grand Army, to you men and women who have lived those days half a century ago, to you who went to the front and fought and endured, and to you who at home helped with almost equal wearage and suffering and spirit this day is first of all a Day of Reverence, a day ~~on~~ which you are of right entitled to ~~devote~~ ~~devote~~ devote to Memories, to the solemn Tribute to those who have gone before, and to struggles of the past in which you have worthily born your share.

This is your day, but I like to think and I know that you would like those of us who are young to think that it is our day too - and that is why I say that this day is going to become greater each year.

My dear A grand army man once said
 home: It is one of the ~~greatest~~ comforts
 of my declining years to feel that after
 I am gone & all my comrades are
 gone, Memorial Day will go on just as
 it always has, and with an even deeper
 significance -

It is this same thought that has taught
 us that we get a more perfect and
 truthful estimate of any event after a
 lapse of time - At the moment of any
 great happening the impartial vision
 is impossible.

In 1783, when the Treaty was signed
 by which Great Britain acknowledged
 the independence of her 13 colonies,
 our forefathers without doubt be-
 lieved that independence had been
 won and an independent nation been
 born for all time ^{and} without questioning.
 But it took long years of humiliation
 of our seamen on the high seas, long
 years of insults at the hands of

And of other nations to show us that a Second War for Independence must be fought - And so just as the Revolution gave the Thirteen colonies freedom from the Crown of England, so the War of 1812 was needed to make us definitely an independent nation.

Our grandfathers believed in 1815 that the final perfecting step had been successfully taken, but we know today that long years had to elapse - long years of internal dissensions - of the ~~war~~ ~~rowing~~ of wild oats - ~~disorder~~ and another war and the greatest of them all must ~~still~~ be fought, before the Land would become a perfect whole a perfect body in which the motion of every limb bore a definite relation to the motion of every other part.

My Mother's family came from

New England and there the War was looked upon fundamentally as a war to free the Slaves - In the South it was largely regarded as a War to end the sovereignty of the States, a War to give dangerous powers to a despotic Central government - But we today looking back, whether we come from the North or from the South can read more truly, and we know today that the War of Half a Century ago should be called The War for the Union.

That is the title by which it will go down into History - It should not be called a Civil War, it should not be called the Rebellion. It was greater than that, it was more fundamental and far reaching - it was truly a Trial by fire from which a series of sections emerged welded into

a perfect whole - It has taken Time to heal the wounds, Time to smooth off the rough edges left by the battle, but thank God the Union has been accomplished Today and you who fought are rejoicing to see the day.

These are the salient features we look back to - and as we study them we learn how the men of the Revolution and of the Second War for Independence, and the men of the War for the Union carried themselves when those crises came - We learn what patriotism meant, what privation and suffering meant, what good citizenship called for - We read that Two million men were under arms, that another Two million were at home directly furnishing those necessary views of war; that the women took

an almost equally important part; that scarcely a family in the land that did not lose a father or a brother -

And we come at last to realize in a measure the devotion, the self denial and the moral courage which were of necessity called forth if the Cause was to be won. We can realize at least in part what Washington passed through at Valley Forge and what Lincoln endured in the dark days of '61 and '62. And we can realize too in part what many a private endured in the snows of the March to Quebec and in the campaign of the Wilderness.

I have said that Memorial Day will grow in importance to the Nation, because of its lessons and memories. And I say this because those lessons

and memories are very necessary to our future.

Today we are in times of peace; but those lessons and memories are just as important now in times of peace as in times of war.

It has been perhaps the tendency of the American people to procrastinate in dealing with its problems.



FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT
SEN DISTRICT
CHAIRMAN
COMMITTEE ON FOREST, FISH AND GAME

*The Senate of
The State of New York
Albany*