# Franklin D. Roosevelt - "The Great Communicator" The Master Speech Files, 1898, 1910-1945 

## Series 1: Franklin D. Roosevelt's Political Ascension

File No. 24

1913 September 30

Oswego, NY "Montcalm's Victory..."

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ON THE HUDSON
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HYOE PARK ON THE HUDSON
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ON THE HUDSON
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ON THE HUDSON
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HYDE PARK ON THE HUDSON

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Montcalm's Victory and Its Lesson.
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Writers of history, like readers of history, being human, receive different impressions and different opinions from the same statement of facts. And, likewise, I have little doubt that the many people who are taking part today in the commemoration of a great historical event will go away from here with many dissimilar views about that event, about the man Who was the hero of the capture, and about the meaning of the war which we call the "French and Indian."

We are inclined, I think, in learning about things that happened in the past, to fall into two very natural errors -errors common not only to students of history but to teachers of history. I refer first to the mental practice of dwelling on facts and on facts alone. I once knew a very learned gentleman who could give, off-hand, every important date in history, and the name of every important man connected with those dates. But when I asked him what effect the French and Indian War had upon the preparation of the Colonies for the Revolutionary War, he could only babble that the one occurred from fifteen to twenty years before the other, and that it must, therefore, have had considerable influence. In other words, he was forgetting causes, forgetting results, in his effort to remember concrete facts.

And the other historical fallacy is equally common. Te might call it the speculative fallacy. You are probably perfectly familiar with the man who says: "If Napoleon had been victorious at Waterloo, he would have been master of Europe - nay, of the whole world!" Or, "If Burgoyne had not surrendered at Saratoga, we should still be colonies of England."

This is interesting, this is amusing,


I have called attention to these two viewpoints because they illustrate the real necessity of looking into the cause and the result as well as the fact, which we must do if we are to gain any benefit in the present from the lessons which undoubtedly exist in history.

The familiar poem of Southey sums it up.
It was a summer evening; Old Kaspar's work was done.
And he, before his cottage door, Was sitting in the sun.
And by him sported on the green His little grandchild, Wilhelmine.

She saw her brother, Peterkin, Roll something large and round
Which he beside the rivulet, In playing there had found.
He came to ask what he had found That was so large and smooth and round.

Old Kaspar took it from the boy, Who stood expectant by.
And then the old man shook his head, And, with a natural sigh,
"Pis some poor fellow's skull," said he, "Who fell in the great victory."

Then, you remember, old Kaspar goes on to tell of the Battle of Blenheim, and at the end says:
"And everybody praised the Duke,
Who this great fight did win."
"But what good came of it at last?" Guoth little Peterkin.
"Why, that I cannot tell," said he, "But t'was a famous victory."

What good came of another famous victory - the victory of Montcalm at Oswego in 1756 , that we commemorate to-day? Are we celebrating a date merely or the fact of a battle? Or wimataces we go away after the exercises shaking our heads and murmuring, like 01d Kaspar, "Why, that I cannot tell, but t'vas a famous Fictory?" There are lessons, there is inspiration, to be gained to-day. Do not fear that I will attempt to recite the details of the facts - of the events which occurred. But I would patata sketch, very briefly, the place which the battle and the commander hold in their relation to the history of many peoples in two continents.

In about the year 1750 , two great forces, K做herta without material interference, had at last come into contact with each other. The advance of the British Colonies had been a natural growth - a normal pushing back of the wilderness from the seaboard by virtue of increasing population; an advance not military, not religious, not political, but an advance of healthy colonization.

On the other hand, the French position on the Continent was corparatively artificial. For a century, explorer and priest and voyageur had laid bare the secrets of the rivers and lakes and woods of the great Middl Nest and had established communication between the St.Lawrence and the vast Territory of Louisiana. But what had they lowtwoniadz them besides the knowledge of the trails and streams? A few trading posts perhaps, a few so-called converts among the Indians; that is all. But in doing this, the French had succeeded where the whiles while British had falled: they had not colonized, they had not developed the wilderness, for they had established a highly concentrated organization. What they lacked in numbers, they made up for in cooperative efficiency. A fen hundred Frenchmen were, as a matter of fact, the absolute rulers of all this vast country. They were the representatives of a tottering monarchy, of a discredited form of government, of finm
 years, by sheer vitality, by organized effort, by a united front, they staved off the inevitable. Montcalm was the embodiment of all that was best in French-America. He fell, the victim not of Wolfe's army, but of the inevitable conflict between the past and the future.

The weakness of the British Colonies was the usual weakness of Anglo-Saxon peoples, a lack of preparation for
armed conflid.
4. The colonies were going each their own road, thinking of commerce first, and caring for the development and control of the Continent only in-so-far as their safety from attack in the rear and the success of the fur trade affected their pockets. Parkman sums up the situation when he says:
"This war was the strife of a united and concentrated few against a divided and discordant many. It was the strife too of the past against the future; of the old against the new; of moral and intellectual torpor against moral and intellectual life; of barren absolutiam against a liberty, crude, incoherent, chaotic, yet full of prolific vitality." Why, then, did Montcalm capture Oswego? Why did French arms seem so long victorious? The fort at this place was, as we all know, the chief reliance of the colonies between Lake Champlain and Pittsburg, and it was the principal thorn in the flesh of the Frenchmen. Here on the lake, opposite Fort Frontenac, it stood, a constant menace to the great line of communication with the Mississippi. Here was a danger spot which threatened the St.Lavrence and the Ohio. The French knew all this, but the Colonies of England were blind to their advantage.

The Assembly of the Colony of New York was so busy sintthe Governor that it refused to give aid to the Western
in Pennsylvania, every Finglishman was driven east of the Alleghenies, and then Oswego fell. The success of the French seemed assured. A handful of men, comparatively, based on a wilderness, had driven the British aloties almost back to the seaboard.

At last, of course, the awakening came; the giant child began at last to realize his strength. The Colonies excelled New France in numbers, in wealth, in resources, a hundred fold. And formen they were victorious.

The historian Greene has called the French and Indian War the birth of the history of the United States. If this is so, we can learn a lesson from its history. We can learn that in irनeffstrength such as Montcalm had is of no avail. That unity and organization in a nation amount to nothing if the social structure is lacking. We may have armies and navies of the greatest, but in the end they will go down to defeat if the people at home on the farmor in the towns are totsemcatictipe


And we learn that the fight at Oawego availed Montcalm nothing in the end. It had, and will have, however, through all time, a lesson for the vanquished. At bottom, the British Colonies were sound. They lacked unity, they were given to


Whey were caught unprepared for war, but the inherent soundness of the foundation carried them to victory in the end. To-day 猚觔 ultimate victory would be more difficult. Today we fight with fourteen-inch guns at ranges of ten miles. The pistol in the top bureau drawer is no longer of the same avail as was the old musket over the chimney.

Conflict, like everything else in modern civilization, is so complicated that preparation is essential. That is why we have our
No one desires war today. We are all striving - army and navy alike - to prevent its occurrence. But no one can guarantee to the American people that there will be no more war. And until that day comes, the example of Montcalm tex and the lessons of the conflict between the French and the British Colonies cannot fail to inspire us to better things.


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