
Franklin D. Roosevelt — “The Great Communicator”

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FDR Speech File

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may be

This ~~is probably~~ the longhand draft of ^a ~~the~~ speech
FDR delivered (~~presumably~~) to the graduates of the
U.S. Naval War College, Newport, R.I., Dec. 22, 1915.

[He spoke informally. No reporters were present.]

RLJ

- The Purpose of the Navy -
"Let me Forget"

You, who have successfully completed the course of the Naval War College, are to be congratulated on admission to the distinguished company of the scientists of warfare, and on the opportunity also which you now have of going out into the service and into the world of your fellow Americans with authority to tell the truth. It is time that the people of this country, whose servants you and I are, should be told that truth in simple language, by you and by me, or else we fail in our very manifest duty.

For while you have been studying here for the highest degree in your profession, the civilian citizens have also been going to school, taking a kind of kindergarten course in a subject not seriously studied since the days of their grandfathers. In fact the safety of the nation has seemed so long

secure, that people have gone along for
 years living in a fog of inaccurate and
 boastful tradition, and it has been
 only since they ^{saw, to their amazement, the} greater part of the civilized
 world hurrying into war that they have
 sought answers to a hundred questions
 presenting themselves in vital form to
 their ~~entrained~~ ^{entrained} minds. They have ^{had} things
 happen which they had brushed aside as
 impossible; they have seen the passions
 of the dark ages set loose in supposedly
 civilized communities; they have witnessed not
 mere armies or mere navies, but whole
 nations, men, women and children, mobilized
 for the sole purpose of winning the national
 competition called war. It has followed
 very naturally that most of them have
 asked the great question "How does it
 all affect us". A very few of our
 citizens, well meaning perhaps, who
 without much mental effort satisfy their

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souls by reiterating that the millennium
has come, answer that the United States
has nothing to fear, or that ~~force~~ ^{non resistance}
is more moral than armed ^{defense}. But the very
great majority of Americans, I am glad to
think, are still believers in the conception
of the word "nationality" that calls for
the protection of the nation itself.
And this ^{majority} are those who have been
going to kindergarten. It is to them
and to ourselves that we owe the
truth about the needs of the nation.
Today, more than ever before in our
times, we can secure the concentrated
attention of the people: they are at
school, and I take it there ~~has~~ has
been no prohibition, and will be none,
against you as citizens or as officers
from exercising your right and duty to
instruct in the fundamental truths
that apply to the subject of
national safety.

If a vote, pro or con were Taken in the United States tomorrow on whether we should have "adequate national defense" the cons would be scarcely worth counting.

As an abstract term it may be reasonably accepted national policy. But it is quite conceivable that people may differ over the definition of the word "adequate" - That, ^{however} is not what I want to consider today, for while you and I may agree entirely on what the naval branch of the service needs ^{in material and personnel}, to make it adequate, and while we ought to do everything in our power to attain this end, yet we will fail in the end unless we build our reasoning on sounder logic by ^{first} defining in clear terms that essential word "defense".

In the hurry and confusion of trying to learn a new subject over

night, the people of the United States have
 thought of national defense almost wholly
 in terms of ^{an} invasion of their own homes
 and fields. Books and articles, hurriedly
 compiled have drawn pictures of foreign
 fleets knocking down ships and
 foreign armies burning our homes and
 carrying off our wealth. Some of these
 visions have been highly colored, but
 most of them ~~have~~, in view of the ~~tem-~~
~~perament~~ ^{readiness} of the nation against
 war as compared with other people of the
 earth, have in them an element at
 least of possibility. Invasion is so
 far as the army and its needs are con-
 cerned a perfectly proper matter to
 consider when we are defining "Defense".
 Our history, and the whole theory and
 policy of our government from earliest
 times have accepted as the criterion
 of army strength the force necessary to
 repel outside attack from outside on

our own soil of the continental United States. We have had no "entangling alliances", we have aimed at no foreign conquests, and with the exception of certain army garrisons in detached territories which depend on the navy for their ultimate safety, it can be fairly stated that "defense" in the purely army sense may be limited to the prevention of armed invasion of our home soil.

But there is a real danger in too wide an application of this definition - Let me be specific: there is a real danger in too many pictures of coast cities in ashes or foreign troops marching up Broadway, there is real danger in too many headlines in the newspapers spring and autumn to the effect that the "Red Fleet" in the War Game has defeated the "Blue Fleet" and effected a landing

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in the Chesapeake or the Delaware. Too
much of this sort of thing - and I
will say a word about war games later -
has led a great many people in this
country to apply to the Navy the same
definition of "Defense" as ^{they do to} the Army.
Hundreds of people with whom I
have talked ask me what the Navy
can do to prevent invasion, and what
harbors our battleships would protect
in the event of war.

1. Man who has never thought before -
2. Man who has so specialized that he is inclined to subordinate all to his specialty -

[1916?]

Speech of Franklin D. Roosevelt at U.S. Naval War College, Newport, R.I.

Dec. 22, 1915.

"At eleven o'clock he awarded diplomas and spoke to officers who gathered behind closed doors. His speech was not written and he spoke with freedom upon the general subject of the relations of the War College to practical naval operations.

Many things were said which naturally were only for service ears particularly in times like these when countries are spying on each other to learn their secrets of preparedness and technical matter."

from: Newport (R.I.) Daily News, Dec. 22, 1915.

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