
Franklin D. Roosevelt — “The Great Communicator”

The Master Speech Files, 1898, 1910-1945

Series 1: Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Political Ascension

File No. 96

1919 July 4

Syracuse, NY

July 4, 1919

[Syracuse, NY]

FDR Speech File

*F. D. Roosevelt
Spoken at Syracuse N. Y. July 4, 1919
Welcome to Returning Soldiers & Sailors.*

I have often been told by professional

speakers that the easiest of all tasks was the Fourth of July oration; that, indeed, it had been, through the course of years, developed into somewhat of an exact science, with a regular and orderly course of procedure. The recipe was simple: First one started out with the glorious constitution of the United States; five minutes was the customary allowance to prove that it was the greatest inspired document in the world, and it was even permissible to hint that the Saints themselves might have taken a pointer or two from Thomas Jefferson. Then one proceeded to tear the individual planets from the skies and plant them firmly and forever on the azure field of our National Emblem, after which it was customary to soar on the back of the American Eagle over the entire world and discover that nowhere was there a nation so great and powerful as ours. As a climax, ten minutes would be devoted to telling what we could do if we ever

had to fight. Such was what might be called the "standard" Fourth of July speech. I doubt if anyone ever took the text seriously or literally or if any orator really imagined it would be so taken. It was a pleasant exercise in exaggeration which deceived no one.

But on this Fourth of July, 1919, an astounding thing has happened. We have dreamed dreams and they have come true. What we thought was pleasant hyperbole has proved to be fact, and I, for one, find as a result that a Fourth of July speech under these circumstances is one of the most difficult things to make, instead of the easiest. I am somewhat in the situation of the colored gentleman who was asked,

"Rastus, what would you say if I gave you a dollar?" "Mr. Jones," replied Rastus, "I would say

"that you was the most beneficial, magnificentest, liberalest, elegantest, splendiferous man what the Lord ever made."

"Is that so, Rastus? Well, now, what would you say if I gave you One Hundred Dollars?" Rastus scratched his head for five minutes in profound silence and finally replied, "Mr. Jones, I just don't seem to recollect any words in the English language what fits that situation."

That is about the way I feel, for today, speaking seriously and without exaggeration, the principles of the equal rights of men, of justice toward the weak as well as the strong, of government by consent of the governed, as set forth in our constitution, are being recognized by all the great nations on earth as the most wonderful doctrine for the guidance of human conduct that has ever been devised. The world today is remaking its old laws and revising its old treaties with our constitution for its text

book. Since last Fourth of July the stars in our flag have shone with a brightness amid the darkness of foreign battlefields that no planet's ever equalled. Today it needs no imaginary trip upon eagle wings to prove that our country is recognized as a great and wonderful country with resources beyond the wildest guess work of the past; and all our proud and innocent boasting as to what we could do in war has ceased to be boasting and become a mere recital of deeds achieved.

We are having a double celebration today, for we are also welcoming those who are fortunate enough to have gone forth to meet the common enemy in stricken fields across the sea and who have now returned. How can anyone put into words the joy and pride we feel? For myself, I confess in addition a deep envy because Fate ruled that I should sit at Washington, doing my bit by

assisting in the direction of the movements of our fleets and the myriad and one things which must be done to make and keep the Navy efficient in time of war. Not but what my own work has had its thrills; not but what something of the joy of battle has fallen to our lot in Washington. To devise, as we did, a deadly barrier against the German submarine across the wide North Sea; to be told by experts of other nations and some experts of our own that it was impossible and then to watch it, through cipher cable, stretch out, nevertheless, day by day, catching the enemy's barbarous boats from time to time in its fatal tentacles, until by the time the armistice was declared, it stretched in lines that almost met from shore to shore. That was one of the Navy's tasks, about which little has been said but much thought. To take the giant guns of our new battleships, to mount them on railway trucks of new and unheard-of

strength, to master apparently insoluble problems of construction in one-third the time the most rash and optimistic expert allotted, to send them across, mount them again, to rush them to the front, and to see what terror and consternation their thousand pounds of T.N.T. created when dropped from over twenty miles away into the enemy's ranks. All this fell to our lot in partial compensation, as well as the thrill of thankful and joyful relief as each convoy laden with troops passed safely through the harbor's mouth, thanks to the unwearied vigilance of our tireless gray destroyers. But still, in spite of all this, for my part I would have preferred to have been in action at the front, to have stood side by side with you, now home; to have met the enemy in physical death grapple rather than coldly plotted his destruction from an office chair. Men from the front, I welcome and I envy you. Those in the

Navy's service know, I think, of the interest I have taken in you, of how hard I have tried to do my part toward making your part a success, and you of the Army will not forget that the Navy had an interest in General Pershing's forces also. There were, you may remember, some Navy people there. They called them, I have heard, "Devil Dogs," ignoring their official title of "Marines." They worked by your side in the common cause. So you see, as one of the heads of the official family, I can welcome both the Army and the Navy home.

How can I describe the feeling that we all have toward you? What welcome can I give in words that would be worth saying in comparison with the welcome you have already had from those that you love best at home, the silent welcome of heart speaking to heart? You know how they felt without a word being said. You know how you felt when you first

saw them again. I but ask you to believe that that same feeling, so utterly indescribable, so deep, so strong that one can no more speak about it or put it into language than one can talk idly and lightly about one's religion, is shared by all of us and is the feeling in every heart today. We watched your going, every one of us, with personal anxiety and fear. We read of your brave deeds with personal pride and exaltation; we greet your homecoming with personal joy and thankfulness, with which we all of us mingle, I think, that feeling closely akin to reverence which brave men have inspired in the hearts of mankind since the world began.

False persons

I have often been told by professional speakers that the easiest of all tasks was the Fourth of July oration, ^{that} and, indeed it had been, through the course of years, developed into somewhat of an exact science, with a regular and orderly course of procedure. The recipe was simple: first one started out with the glorious constitution of the United States; five minutes was the customary allowance to prove that it was the greatest ~~inspired~~ inspired document in the world, and it is ^{was even} ~~even~~ permissible to hint that ^{the Senate themselves} ~~the Senate themselves~~ might have taken a pointer or two from Thomas Jefferson. Then one proceeded to tear the individual planets from the skies and plant them firmly and forever on the azure field of our National Emblem, after which it ^{was} ~~is~~ customary to soar on the back of the American Eagle over the entire world and discover that nowhere was there a nation so great and powerful as ours. As a climax, ten minutes would be devoted to telling what we could do if we ever had to fight. Such

was what might be called the "standard" Fourth of July speech.

I doubt if anyone ever took the text seriously or literally or if any orator really imagined it would be so taken.

It was a pleasant exercise in exaggeration which deceived

no one. But on this Fourth of July ¹⁹¹⁹ an astounding thing

has happened. We have dreamed dreams and they have come

true. What we thought was pleasant hyperbole has proved

to be fact, and I, for one, find as a result that a Fourth

of July speech under these circumstances is one of the most

difficult things to make, instead of the easiest. I am

somewhat in the situation of the colored gentleman who was

asked,

"Rastus, what would you say if I gave you

a dollar?" "Mr. Jones," replied Rastus, "I would say that

you was the most beneficial, magnificentest, liberalest,

elegantest, splendiferous man what the Lord ever made."

"Is that so, Eastus? Well, now, what would you say if I gave you One Hundred Dollars?" Eastus scratched his head for five minutes in profound silence and finally replied, "Mr. Jones, I just don't seem to recollect any words in the English language ^{what} ~~that~~ fits that situation." ^{It} That is about the way I feel, for today, speaking seriously and without exaggeration, the principles of the equal rights of men, of justice toward the weak as well as the strong, of government by consent of the governed, as set forth in our constitution, ^{being} are recognized by all the great nations on earth as the most wonderful doctrine for the guidance of human conduct that has ever been devised. The world today is remaking its old laws and revising its old treaties with our constitution for its text book. Since last Fourth of July the stars in our flag have shone with a brightness amid the darkness of foreign battlefields that no planet's ever equalled. Today it needs no imaginary trip upon eagle wings to prove that

our country is recognized as a great and wonderful country with resources beyond the wildest guess work of the past; and all our proud and innocent boasting as to what we could do in war has ceased to be boasting and become a mere recital of deeds achieved. ~~(stop and drink ice water after this to allow the explosion to die down)~~

We are having a double celebration today, for we are also welcoming those who are fortunate enough to have gone forth to meet the common enemy in stricken fields across the sea and who have now returned. How can anyone put into words the joy and pride we feel? For myself, I confess in addition a deep envy ^{because} ~~that~~ fate ruled that I should sit at Washington, doing my bit by assisting in the direction of the movements of our fleets and the myriad and one things which must be done to make and keep the Navy efficient in time of war. Not but what my own work has had its thrills;

not but what something of the joy of battle has fallen to
our lot, in Washington, ^{to} devise, as we did, a deadly barrier
against the German submarine across the wide North Sea;
to be told by experts of other nations and ^{some} ~~many~~ experts of
our own that it was impossible and then to watch it, through
cipher cable, stretch out, nevertheless, day by day, catch-
ing the enemy's barbarous boats from time to time in its
fatal tentacles, until ^{by the time} the armistice was declared, ^{it stretched in} ~~meeting~~
lines that almost met from shore to shore. That was one
of the Navy's tasks, about which little has been said but much
thought. To take the giant guns of our new battleships, to
mount them on railway trucks of new and unheard-of strength,
to master apparently insoluble problems, ^{of construction} in one-third the time
the ~~reckless~~ ^{rash and} most optimistic expert allotted, to send them
across, mount them again, to rush them to the front, and to
see what terror and consternation their thousand pounds of

T.N.T. created ^{when} dropped from over twenty ~~five~~ miles away into the enemy's ranks. All this fell to our lot in partial compensation, ^{as well as the} ~~the~~ thrill of thankful and joyful relief as each convoy laden with troops passed safely through the harbor's mouth, thanks to the unwearrying vigilance of our tireless gray destroyers. But still, in spite of all this, for my part I would have preferred to have been in action at the front, to have stood side by side with you, now home; to ~~have~~ met the enemy in physical death grapple rather than coldly plotted his destruction from an office chair. ^{When} ~~From~~ the front, I welcome and I envy you. Those in the Navy's service know, I think, of the interest I have taken in you, of how hard I have tried to do my part toward making your part a success, and you of the Army ^{will} ~~must~~ not forget that the Navy had an interest in General Pershing's forces also. There were, you may remember,

some Navy people there. They called them, I have heard,

"Devil Dogs," ignoring their official title of "Marines."

They worked by your side in the
~~for prolonged applause from all but the regular~~
common cause.

~~they began with probably common sense and a little at~~

~~this point.~~ So you see, as one of the heads of the

official family, I can welcome both the Army and the Navy
home.

How can I describe the feeling that we all
have toward you? What welcome can I give in words that
would be worth saying in comparison with the welcome you
have already had from those that you love best at home, the
silent welcome of heart speaking to heart? You know, ~~how~~,
how they felt without a word being said. You know how you
felt when you first saw them again. I but ask you to be-
lieve that that same feeling, so utterly indescribable, so
deep, so strong that one can no more speak about it or put
it into language than one can talk idly and lightly about

one's religion, is shared by all of us and is the feeling
in every heart today. We watched your going, every one
of us, with personal anxiety and fear. We read of your brave
deeds with personal pride and exaltation; we greet your home-
coming with personal joy and thankfulness, with which we all
of us mingle, I think, that feeling closely akin to reverence
which brave men have inspired ^{in the hearts of mankind} since the world began.

~~(Be sure and stand still until the company is dismissed)~~

~~and until the picture man gets through.)~~

1

personal
Mr R

I have often been told by professional

speakers that the easiest of all tasks was the Fourth of July oration, ^{that} ~~and~~ indeed it had been, through the course of years, developed into somewhat of an exact science, with a regular and orderly course of procedure. The recipe was simple: first one started out with the glorious constitution of the United States; five minutes was the customary allowance to prove that it was the greatest uninspired document in the world, and it is ^{was even} ~~even~~ permissible to hint that St. Paul ^{himself} might have taken a pointer or two from Thomas Jefferson. Then one proceeded to tear the individual planets from the skies and plant them firmly and forever on the azure field of our National Emblem, after which it ^{was} ~~is~~ customary to soar on the back of the American Eagle over the entire world and discover that nowhere was there a nation so great and powerful as ours. As a climax, ten minutes would be devoted to telling what we could do if we ever had to fight. Such

was what might be called the standard Fourth of July speech.

I doubt if anyone ever took the text seriously or literally or if any orator really imagined it would be so taken.

It was a pleasant exercise in exaggeration which deceived no one. But on this Fourth of Jul, an astounding thing has happened. We have dreamed dreams and they have come true. What we thought was pleasant hyperbole has proved to be fact, and I, for one, find as a result that a Fourth of July speech under these circumstances is one of the most difficult things to make, instead of the easiest. I am somewhat in the situation of the colored gentleman who was asked,

"Rastus, what would you say if I gave you a dollar?" "Mr. Jones," replied Rastus, "I would say that you was the most beneficial, magnificentest, liberalest, elegantest, splendidiferous man what the Lord ever made."

"Is that so, Rastus? Well, now, what would you say if I gave you One Hundred Dollars?" Rastus scratched his head for five minutes in profound silence and finally replied, "Mr. Jones, I just don't seem to recollect any words in the English language that fits that situation." That is about the way I feel, for today, speaking seriously and without exaggeration, the principles of the equal rights of men, of justice toward the weak as well as the strong, of government by consent of the governed, as set forth in our constitution, are recognized by all the great nations on earth as the most wonderful doctrine for the guidance of human conduct that has ever been devised. The world today is remaking its old laws and revising its old treaties with our constitution for its text book. Since last Fourth of July the stars in our flag have shone with a brightness amid the darkness of foreign battlefields that no planet's ever equalled. Today it needs no imaginary trip upon eagle wings to prove that

our country is recognized as a great and wonderful country with resources beyond the wildest guess work of the past; and all our proud and innocent boasting as to what we could do in war has ceased to be boasting and become a mere recital of deeds achieved. (Stop and drink ice water after this to allow the applause to die down.)

We are having a double celebration today, for we are also welcoming those who are fortunate enough to have gone forth to meet the common enemy in stricken fields across the sea and who have now returned. How can anyone put into words the joy and pride we feel? For myself, I confess in addition a deep envy that fate ruled that I should sit at Washington, doing my bit by assisting in the direction of the movements of our fleets and the myriad and one things which must be done to make and keep the Navy efficient in time of war. Not but what my own work has had its thrills;

not but what something of the joy of battle has fallen to
our lot in Washington, to devise as we did a deadly barrier
against the German submarine across the wide North Sea;
to be told by experts of other nations and many experts of
our own that it was impossible and then to watch it, through
cipher cable, stretch out, nevertheless, day by day, catch-
ing the enemy's barbarous boats from time to time in its
fatal tentacles, until ^{by the time} the armistice was declared, ^{it had sunk in} ~~waiting~~
lines that almost met from shore to shore. That was one
of the Navy's tasks, about which little has been said but much
thought. To take the giant guns of our new battleships, to
mount them on railway trucks of new and unheard-of strength,
to master apparently insoluble problems ^{of construction} in one-third the time
the readiest and most optimistic expert allotted, to send them
across, mount them again, to rush them to the front, and to
see what terror and consternation their thousand pounds of

T.N.T. created ^{when} dropped from over twenty-five miles away into the enemy's ranks. All this fell to our lot in partial compensation, ^{as well as} ~~and then~~ the thrill of thankful and joyful relief as each convoy laden with troops passed safely through the harbor's mouth, thanks to the unwearrying vigilance of our tireless gray destroyers. But still, in spite of all this, for my part I would have preferred to have been in action at the front, to have stood side by side with you, now home; to have met the enemy in physical death grapple rather than coldly plotted his destruction from an office chair. Boys from the front, I welcome and I envy you. Those in the Navy's service know, I think, of the interest I have taken in you, of how hard I have tried to do my part toward making your part a success, and you of the Army must not forget that the Navy had an interest in General Pershing's forces also. There were, you may remember,

some Navy people there. They called them, I have heard, "Devil Dogs," ignoring their official title of Marines. (Pause for prolonged applause from all but the regular Army boys who will probably commence throwing bricks at this point.) So you see, as one of the heads of their official family, I can welcome both the Army and the Navy home.

How can I describe the feeling that we all have toward you? What welcome can I give in words that would be worth saying in comparison with the welcome you have already had from those that you love best at home, the silent welcome of heart speaking to heart? You know, boys, how they felt without a word being said. You know how you felt when you first saw them again. I but ask you to believe that that same feeling, so utterly indescribable, so deep, so strong that one can no more speak about it or put it into language than one can talk idly and lightly about

one's religion, is shared by all of us and is the feeling in every heart today. We watched your going, every one of us, with personal anxiety and fear. We read of your brave deeds with personal pride and exaltation; we greet your homecoming with personal joy and thankfulness, with which we all of us mingle, I think, that feeling closely akin to reverence which brave men have inspired since the world began.

(Be sure and stand still until the bouquet is presented and until the picture man gets through.)