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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1919 July 4

Syracuse, NY
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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
eexercise 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 cir-
cumstances 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 beneficil, 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 de-
vice, 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 op-
timistic 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 unwearying 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.
I have often been told by professional speakers that the easiest of all tasks was the Fourth of July oration, 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 document in the world, and it is permissible to hint that 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 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
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"Rastus, what would you say if I gave you a dollar?" "Mr. Jones," replied Rastus, "I would say that you were the most beneficial, magnificientest, 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 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 textbook. 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 of 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 every expert 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 the armistice was declared, 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 in one-third the time
the newest 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 dropped from over twenty miles away into the enemy's ranks. All this fell to our lot in par-
tial compensation, as well as the thrill of thankful and joy-
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through the harbor's mouth, thanks to the unwearying 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,
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rather than coldly plotted his destruction from an office
chair. 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,
somes Navy people there. They called them, I have heard, "Devil Dogs," ignoring their official title of Marines. They walked by your side in the prolonged applause from all but the regular 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
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of us mingle, I think, that feeling closely akin to reverence
which brave men have inspired since the world began.

(Be sure and stand until the benediction is pronounced)
and until the picture man goes through.)
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our country is recognised 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.)

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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.

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[Be sure and stand still until the bouquet is presented and until the picture man gets through.]