
Franklin D. Roosevelt — “The Great Communicator”
The Master Speech Files, 1898, 1910-1945

Series 1: Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Political Ascension

File No. 131

1920 August 9

Hyde Park, NY - Acceptance of V.P. Nomination

ACCEPTANCE SPEECH
OF
FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT
1920

Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt

E.R. from T.R.

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Master Speech File No 131

[8-9-20]

S P E E C H O F A C C E P T A N C E

by the

HONORABLE FRANKLIN DELANO ROOSEVELT

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Franklin D. Roosevelt", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

On the occasion of the ceremonies at
Hyde Park, Dutchess County, New York,
notifying him of his nomination for
the Office of Vice President of the
United States by the Democratic Party.

1 9 2 0

Mr. Cummings and Ladies and Gentlemen of the Committee:

I accept the nomination for the office of Vice-President with humbleness, and with a deep wish to give to our beloved country the best that is in me. No one could receive a higher privilege or opportunity than to be thus associated with men and ideals which I am confident will soon receive the support of the majority of our citizens.

In fact, I could not conscientiously accept it if I had not come to know by the closest intimacy that he who is our selection for the Presidency, and who is my chief and yours, is a man possessed of ideals which are also mine. He will give to America that kind of leadership which will make us respect him and bring further greatness to our land. In ^{him} ~~James M. Cox~~ I recognize one who can lead this nation forward in an unhalting march of progress.

Such a man is James M. Cox.

Two great problems will confront the next administration; our relations with the world and the pressing need of organized progress at home. The latter includes a systematized and intensified development of our

resources and a progressive betterment of our citizenship. These matters will require the guiding hand of a President who can see his country above his party, and who, having a clear vision of things as they are, has also the independence, courage and skill to guide us along the road to things as they should be without swerving one footstep at the dictation of narrow partisans who whisper "party" or of selfish interests that murmur "profits".

In our world problems, we must either shut our eyes, sell our newly built merchant marine to more far-seeing foreign powers, crush utterly by embargo and harassing legislation our foreign trade, close our ports, build an impregnable wall of costly armaments and live, as the Orient used to live, a hermit nation, dreaming of the past; or, we must open our eyes and see that modern civilization has become so complex and the lives of civilized men so interwoven with the lives of other men in other countries as to make it impossible to be in this world and not of it. We must see that it is impossible to avoid, except by monastic seclusion, those honorable and intimate foreign relations

which the fearful-hearted shudderingly miscall by that Devil's catch word "international complications".

As for our home problem, we have been awakened by this war into a startled realization of the archaic short-comings of our governmental machinery and of the need for the kind of re-organization which only a clear thinking business man, experienced in the technicalities of governmental procedure, can carry out. Such a man we have. One who has so successfully reformed the business management of his own great State is obviously capable of doing greater things. This is not time to experiment with men who believe that their party can do no wrong and that what is good for the selfish interests of a political party is of necessity good for the nation as well. I as ⁴a citizen believe that this year we should choose as President a proved executive.— We need to do things; not to talk about them.

Much has been said of late about good Americanism. It is right that it should have been said, and it is right that every chance should be seized to repeat the basic

truths underlying our prosperity and our national existence itself.— But it would be an unusual and much to be wished for thing, if, in the coming presentation of the issues a new note of fairness and generosity could be struck. Littleness, meanness, falsehood, extreme partisanship - these are not in accord with the American spirit. I like to think that in this respect also we are moving forward.

Let us be definite. We have passed through a great war, ~~an~~ armed conflict which called forth every effort on the part of the whole population.— The war was won by Republicans as well as by Democrats. Men of all parties served in our armed forces.— Men and women of all parties served the government at home. They strived honestly as Americans, not as mere partisans. Republicans and Democrats alike worked in administrative positions, raised Liberty loans, administered food control, toiled in munition plants, built ships.— The war was brought to a successful conclusion by a glorious common effort - one which in the years to come will be a national pride. I feel very certain that our children will come to regard our participation as

memorable for the broad honor and honesty which marked it, for the absence of unfortunate scandal, and for the splendid unity of action which extended to every ¹position of the nation. It would, therefore, not only serve little purpose,— but would conform ill to our high standards if any person should in the heat of political rivalry seek to manufacture political advantage out of a nationally conducted struggle. We have seen things on too large a scale to listen in this day to trifles, or to believe in the adequacy of trifling men.

It is that same vision of the bigger outlook of national and individual life which will, I am sure, lead us to demand that the men who represent us in the affairs of our government shall be more than politicians or the errand boys of politicians - that they shall subordinate always the individual ambition and the party advantage to the national good. In the long run the true statesman and the honestly forward looking party will prevail.

Even as the Nation entered the war for an ideal,

so it has emerged from the war with the determination that the ideal shall not die. It is idle to pretend that the war declaration of April 6th, 1917, was a mere act of self-defense, - or that the object of our participation was solely to defeat the military power of the Central Nations of Europe. We knew then as a Nation, even as we know today, that success on ~~land~~^{land} and sea could be but half a victory. The other half is not won yet. To the cry of the French at Verdun; "They shall not pass"; the cheer of our own men in the Argonne; "We shall go through" - we must add this; "It shall not occur again". This is the positive declaration of our own wills; that the world shall be saved from a repetition of this crime.

To this end the democratic party offers a treaty of peace, which, to make it a real treaty for a real peace MUST include a League of Nations; because this peace treaty, if our best and bravest are not to have died in vain, must be no thinly disguised armistice devised by cynical statesmen to mask their preparations for a renewal of

greed-inspired conquests later on. "Peace" must mean peace that will last. A practical, workable, permanent, enforcible kind of a peace that will hold as tightly as the business contracts of the individual. We must indeed be, above all things, businesslike and practical in this peace treaty making business of ours. The League of Nations is a practical solution of a practical situation. It is no more perfect than our original Constitution, which has been amended 18 times and will soon, we hope, be amended the 19th, was perfect. It is not anti-national, it is anti-war. No super-nation, binding us ~~as~~ to the decisions of its tribunals, is suggested, but the method and machinery by which the opinion of civilization may become effective against those who seek war is at least within the reach of humanity. Through it we may with nearly every other duly constituted government in the whole world throw our moral force and our potential power into the scale of peace.

That such an object should be contrary to American policy is unthinkable; but if there be any citizen who has honest fears that it may be perverted from its plain intent so as

+ emphasize
the word
honest

to conflict with our established form of government, it will be simple to declare to him and to the other nations that the Constitution of the United States is in every way supreme. There must be no equivocation, no vagueness, no double dealing with the people on this issue. The League will not die. An idea does not die which meets the call of the hearts of our mothers.

So, too, with peace. War may be "declared"; peace cannot. It must be established by mutual consent, by a meeting of the minds of the parties in interest. From the practical point of view alone a peace by resolution of Congress is unworkable. From the point of view of the millions of splendid Americans who served in that whirlwind of war, and of those other millions at home who saw, in our part of the conflict, the splendid hope of days of peace for future generations, a peace by resolution of Congress is an insult and a denial of our national purpose.

Today we are offered a seat at the table of the family of nations to the end that smaller peoples may be truly safe to work out their own destiny, to the end that

the sword shall not follow on the heels of the merchant, to the end that the burden of increasing armies and navies shall be lifted from the shoulders of a world already staggering under the weight of taxation. We shall take that place. I say so because I have faith -- faith that this nation has no selfish destiny, faith that our people are looking into the years beyond for better things, and that they are not afraid to do their part.

The fundamental outlook on the associations between this Republic and the other Nations can never be very different in character from the principles which one applies to our own purely internal affairs. A man who opposes concrete reforms and improvements in international relations is of necessity a reactionary, or at least a conservative in viewing his home problems.

We can well rejoice in our great land, in our great citizenship brought hither out of many kindreds and tongues, but to fulfill our true destiny we must be glad also for the opportunity for greater service. So much calls to us for action, and the need is so pressing that the

slacker of peace is a greater menace than the slacker of war. Progress will come not through the talkers, but through the doers.

It is for this reason that I am especially happy in the pledges given in the platform of the Democratic party. That document is definite. It is a solemn pledge that, given the authority, our party will accomplish clear aims.

Among the most pressing of these national needs I place the bettering of our citizenship, the extension of teaching to over 5,000,000 of our population above the age of ten who are illiterate, the strengthening of our immigration laws to exclude the physically and morally unfit, the improvement of working conditions especially in the congested centers, the extension of communications to make rural life more attractive, the further protection of child life and of women in industry. All of these demand action. If we raise the standard of education, of physical fitness, of moral sense, the generations to come will have no difficulty in coping with the problems of material economics.

So also with regard to the further development of our natural resources we offer a constructive and definite objective. We begin to appreciate that as a nation we have been wasteful of our opportunities. We need, not merely thrift by saving, but thrift by the proper use of what we have at hand. Our efforts in the past have been scattered. It is now time to undertake a well considered, co-ordinated plan of development, so that each year will see progress along definite lines. The days of "pork-barrel" legislation are over. Every dollar of our expenditures for port facilities, for inland waterways, for flood control, for the reclamation of swamp and arid lands, for highways, for public buildings, shall be expended only by trained men in accordance with a continuing plan.

The golden rule of the true public servant is to give to his work the same or even higher interest and efficiency than he would give to his private affairs. There is no reason why the effectiveness of the National Government should not at least approximate that of well conducted private business. Today this is not the case. I may be pardoned if

I draw on my experience of over seven years in an administrative position to state unequivocally that the government machinery requires reorganization. The system, especially since the war, has become antiquated. No mere budget system, much as we need that, will correct the faults.

First of all the methods of the legislative branch of the National Government, especially in the upper House require drastic changes. It is safe to say that the procedure of the Congress has progressed less with the times than in any other business body of the country. Yet it is upon the Congress that every executive department must wait. Appeals to the ^{Republic} House and Senate in the last session fell on apparently deaf ears.

In the administrative branch also great changes must take place. The functions of the departments should be re-distributed along common-sense lines, and methods provided to standardize and prevent duplication of effort. Further, it is high time that Government employment be placed upon a proper level. Under the safeguard of civil service the

salaries must approximate those paid in private employ. Today we are faced with the fact that the majority of the most efficient Government employes leave the service when they are becoming most valuable. The less useful remain. Many millions of dollars could be saved to the tax-payers by reclassification of the service, by the payment of adequate compensation and by the rigid elimination of those who fail to measure up to a high standard. All of this also has been called to the attention of the present Congress without result, and Congress only can authorize the remedy.

It is a particular pleasure to know that if we are sustained by the people in the election, the country will have as its chief executive a man who has already amply established his reputation as a successful administrator. ~~by the reorganization of the business methods of a great state.~~ He is an engineer-statesman. The task before the National Government ^{will} ~~can also~~ be assisted by a sympathetic cooperation between the executive and the legislative branches, and in this work partisanship must not enter.

In the consideration of the needs of the country

and the conduct of its affairs I like to dwell particularly on that part of Lincoln's immortal phrase which speaks of "Government for the People". Service on the part of men and women in the Government is not enough; it must be unselfish service, it must be service with sufficient ^dbreath of view to include the needs and conditions of every kind of citizen, of every section of the land. Such a body of workers would make impossible a return to the conditions of twenty years ago when men in the halls of the Congress and in the executive branches almost openly represented special interests or considered the obtaining of appropriations for their own localities as of more weight than the welfare of the United States as a whole. Such a spirit of unselfishness would prevent also the formation of cliques or oligarchies in the Senate ~~for~~ ^{to} the retarding of public business.

Some people have been say^{ing} of late: "We are tired of progress, we want to go back to where ^{we} were before; to go about our own business; to restore 'normal' conditions ~~of~~ ^{of "normalcy"} ~~normalcy~~." They are wrong. This is not the wish of America. We can

never go back. The "good old days" are gone past forever; we have no regrets. For our eyes are trained ahead--forward to better new days. In this faith I am strengthened by the firm belief that women of this nation, now about to receive the National franchise, will throw their weight into the scale of progress and will be unbound by partisan prejudices and a too narrow outlook on national problems. We cannot anchor our ship of state in this world tempest, nor can we return to the placid harbor of long years ago. We must go forward or founder.

America's opportunity is at hand. We can lead the world by a great example, we can prove this nation a living, growing thing, with policies that are adequate to new conditions. In a thousand ways this is our hour of test. The Democratic program offers a larger life for our country, a richer destiny for our people. It is a plan of hope. In this, chiefly let it be our aim to build up, not to tear down. Our opposition is to the things which once existed, in order that they may never return. We oppose money in

politics, we oppose the private control of national finances, we oppose the treating of human beings as commodities, we oppose the saloon-bossed city, we oppose starvation wages, we oppose rule by groups or cliques. In the same way we oppose a mere period of coma in our national life.

A greater America is our objective. Definite and continuing study shall be made of our industrial, fiscal and social problems. Definite and continuing action shall result therefrom, and neither the study nor the action shall be left to emotional caprice or the opportunism of any groups of men. We need a cooperation of the ablest and the wisest heads in the land, irrespective of their politics. So we shall grow -- sanely, humanly, honorably, happily -- conscious at the end that we handed on to those that follow us the knowledge that we have not allowed to grow dim the light of the American spirit brought hither three hundred years ago by the Pilgrim Fathers.

The coming years are laden with significance, and much will depend on the immediate decision of America.

This is the time when men and women must determine for themselves wherein our future lies. I look to that future for progress; ^{- Progress} in the establishment of good will and mutual help among nations, in the ending of wars and the miseries that wars bring, in the extension of honorable commerce, in the international settlement which will make it unnecessary to send again two million of our men across the sea. - I look to our future for progress; in better citizenship, in less waste, in fairer remuneration for our labor, in more efficient governing, in higher standards of ^{life!} living.

To this future I dedicate myself, willing whatever may be the choice of the people to continue to help as best I am able. It is the faith which is in me that makes me very certain that America will choose the path of progress and set aside the doctrines of despair, the whispering of cowardice, the narrow road to yesterday. May the Guiding Spirit of our land keep our feet on the broad road that leads to a better tomorrow and give to us strength to carry on.

FROM PUBLICITY BUREAU DEMOCRATIC NATIONAL COMMITTEE

CONFIDENTIAL. To be held in confidence, and no portion, synopsis or intimation to be published or given out until its delivery has begun at Hyde Park, N.Y. To be released, at 1 P.M. Eastern time, Monday, August 9, 1920.

W.J. Cochran,
Director of Publicity.

Speech of
Hon. Franklin D. Roosevelt,
of New York,
Accepting Democratic
Nomination for the Vice-Presidency
At Hyde Park, N. Y., on Aug. 8th, 1920.

Mr. Cummings and Ladies and Gentlemen of the Committee:

I accept the nomination for the office of Vice-President with humbleness and with a deep wish to give to our beloved country the best that is in me. No one could receive a higher privilege or opportunity than to be thus associated with men and ideals which I am confident will soon receive the support of the majority of our citizens.

In fact, I could not conscientiously accept it if I had not come to know by the closest intimacy that he who is our selection for the Presidency, and who is my chief and yours, is a man possessed of ideals which are also mine. He will give to America that kind of leadership which will make us respect him and bring further greatness to our land. In James M. Cox I recognize one who can lead this nation forward in an unhalting march of progress.

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Much has been said of late about good Americanism. It is right that it should have been said, and it is right that every chance should be seized to repeat the basic truths underlying our prosperity and our national existence itself. But it would be an unusual and much to be wished for thing if in the coming presentation of the issues a new note of fairness and generosity could be struck. Littleness, meanness, falsehood, extreme partisanship - these are not in accord with the American spirit. I like to think that in this respect also we are moving forward.

Let us be definite. We have passed through a great war, and armed conflict which called forth every effort on the part of the whole population. The war was won by Republicans as well as by Democrats. Men of all parties served in our armed forces. Men and women of all parties served the government at home. They strived honestly as Americans, not as mere partisans. Republicans and Democrats alike worked in administrative positions, raised Liberty loans, administered food control, toiled in munition plants, built ships. The war was brought to a successful conclusion by a glorious common effort- one which in the years to come will be a national pride. I feel very certain that our children will come to regard our participation as memorable for the broad honor and honesty which marked it, for the absence of

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It is that same vision of the bigger outlook of national and individual life which will, I am sure, lead us to demand that the men who represent us in the affairs of our government shall be more than politicians or the errand boys of politicians - that they shall subordinate always the individual ambition and the party advantage to the national good. In the long run the true statesman and the honestly forward looking party will prevail.

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To this end the democratic party offers a treaty of peace, which, to make it a real treaty for a real peace MUST include a League of Nations; because ^{this} ~~the~~ peace treaty, if our best and bravest are not to have died in vain, must be no thinly disguised armistice devised by cynical statesmen to mask their preparations for a renewal of greed-inspired conquests later on. "Peace" must mean peace that will last. A practical, workable, permanent, enforceable kind of a peace that will hold as tightly as the business contracts of the individual. We must indeed be, above all things,

businesslike and practical in this peace treaty making a ⁴/₁₀ of the business of ours. The League of Nations is a practical solution of a practical situation. It is no more perfect than our original Constitution, which has been amended 18 times and will soon, we hope, be amended the 19th, was perfect. It is not anti-national, it is anti-war. No ^{super-}supernation, binding us to the decisions of its tribunals, is suggested, but the method and machinery by which the opinion of civilization may become effective against those who seek war is at last within the reach of humanity. Through it we ^{work} with nearly every other duly constituted government in the world to throw our moral force and our potential power into the scale of peace. That such an object should be contrary to American policy is unthinkable; but if there be any citizen who has honest doubts that it may be perverted from its plain intent so as to conflict with our established form of government, it will be simple to declare to him and to the other nations that the Constitution of the United States is in every way supreme. There must be no equivocation, no vagueness, no double dealing with the people on this issue. The League will not die. An idea does not die which meets the call of the hearts of our mothers.

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looking into the years beyond for better things, and that they are not afraid to do their part.

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So also with regard to the further development of our natural resources we offer a constructive and definite objective. We begin to appreciate that as a nation we have been wasteful of our opportunities. We need not merely thrift by saving, but thrift by the proper use of what we have at hand.

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In the consideration of the needs of the country and the conduct of its affairs I like to dwell particularly on that part of Lincoln's immortal phrase which speaks of "Government for the People." Service on the part of men and women in the Government is not enough; it must be unselfish service, it must be service with sufficient breadth of view to include the needs and conditions of every kind of citizen, of every section of the land. Such a body of workers would make impossible a return to the conditions of twenty years ago when men in the halls of the Congress and in the executive branches almost openly represented special interests or considered the obtaining of appropriations for their own localities as of more weight than the welfare of the United States as a whole. Such a spirit of unselfishness would prevent also the formation of cliques or oligarchies in the Senate for the retarding of public business.

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The coming years are laden with significance, and much will depend on the immediate decision of America. This is the time when men and women must determine for themselves wherein our future lies. I look to that future for progress: in the

establishment of good will and mutual help among nations, in the ending of wars and the miseries that wars bring, in the extension of honorable commerce, in the international settlement which will make it unnecessary to send again two millions of our men across the sea. I look to our future for progress; in better citizenship, in less waste, in fairer remuneration for our labor, in more efficient governing, in higher standards of living.

To this future I dedicate myself, willing whatever may be the choice of the people to continue to help as best I am able. It is the faith which is in me that makes me very certain that America will choose the path of progress and set aside the doctrines of despair, the whispering of cowardice, the narrow road to yesterday. May the Guiding Spirit of our land keep our feet on the broad road that leads to a better tomorrow and give to us strength to carry on.

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AMERICANISM

BY

FRANKLIN DELANO ROOSEVELT

Much has been said of late about good Americanism. It is right that it should have been said and it is right that every chance should be seized to repeat the basic truths underlying our prosperity and our national existence itself.

But it will be an unusual and much to be wished for thing if, in the coming presentation of the issue, a new note of fairness and generosity could be struck. Little-ness, meanness, extreme partisanship: these are not in accord with the American spirit. I like to think that in this respect we are moving forward.

Let me be concrete. We have passed through a great war, an armed conflict which called forth every resource, every effort on the part of the whole population. The war was won by Republicans as well as by Democrats. Men of all parties served in our Armed forces. Men and women of all parties served the Government at home. They strived honestly as Americans, not as mere partisans. Republicans and Democrats alike worked in administrative positions, raised Liberty Loans, administered food control, toiled in munitions plants, built ships. The war was brought to a successful conclusion by a glorious common effort, one which in the years to come will be a national pride.

I feel very certain that our children will come to regard our participation as memorable for the broad honor and honesty which marked it, for the absence of unfortunate scandal and for the splendid unity of action which extended to every portion of the nation. It would, therefore, not only serve little purpose, but would conform ill to our high standards if any persons should, in the heat of political rivalry, speak to manufacture political advantage out of a nationally conducted struggle.

We have seen things on too large a scale to listen at this day to trifles or believe in the adequacy of trifling men. It is that same vision of the bigger outlook of national and individual life which will, I am sure, lead us to demand that the men who represent us in the affairs of our Government shall be more than politicians, that they shall subordinate always the individual ambition and the party advantage to the national good.

In the long run the true statesmen and the honestly forward looking party will prevail. Even as a nation entered the war for an ideal, so it must emerge from the war with the determination that this ideal shall not die.

It is idle to pretend that the declaration of war of April 6, 1917, was a mere act of self defense or that the object of our participation was solely to defeat the military power of the central nations of Europe. We knew then, as a nation, even as we know today, that success on land and sea could be but half a victory. The other half is not won yet.

The cry of the French at Verdun, "They shall not pass!", and the cheer of our own men in the Argonne, "We shall go through!", -- these were essential glories. Yet, they are incomplete.

To them, we must write the blinding finish, "It shall not occur again!" For America demands that the crime of war shall cease.

A NOTE AND A GREETING

The text of the address on Americanism by Franklin D. Roosevelt is taken from a phonograph record made in 1920, when he was the Democratic candidate for Vice President. It was one of several twelve-inch records issued during the campaign, under the general title of "Nation's Forum", by the Columbia Phonograph Co., Bridgeport, Conn. Among others were speeches by James H. Cox, the Democratic Candidate for President, on THE WORLD WAR and PREVENTION OF WAR. This is believed to be the first recording of the voice of FDR.

The earnest words of the young aspirant, after World War I, apply with equal fervor to present conditions and the wish for universal peace. The antiphonal note of this speech was sounded in Franklin D. Roosevelt's last message to the American people, April 12, 1945, when he dedicated himself and all Americans "to the making of abiding peace."

JOHN VALENTINE

Glendale, California

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