Franklin D. Roosevelt — “The Great Communicator”
The Master Speech Files, 1898, 1910-1945
Series 1: Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Political Ascension

File No. 231

1920 October 30

New York City, NY - Campaign Speech
Tonight the United States of America stands at the parting of the ways. We must go onward and upward toward the ideal nation, the leader of the world, from the dark valleys of national and personal greed, of injustice and the rule of brute force, or take the returning downward path back to the old ways again. As a tree, so must a great nation either grow or die. There is no alternative. We must continually stretch out our branches of commerce, of world relationship, further and further, higher and higher. We must continually stretch out our roots of justice, of equality, of right thinking and doing, deeper and deeper. The other course is to wither leaf by leaf, twig by twig, a dead and shriveled nation.

There can be no doubt of the real issue before the voters. All of the camouflage of intention, all of the smoke screen of cunningly devised words to obscure their real hope and purpose, all of the loud bombardment of false statements and noisy oratory, all of the poison gas of unspeakable sacrilege and scurrilous defamation carried on by the unscrupulous band of reactionaries who have seized control of a great party's machinery, cannot hide the real issue. We are met at the crisis, and because the issue is one of the future of the nation and the fact that we fight with ballots rather than bullets, does not abate one iota the desperate seriousness of the struggle. To despair of the result would be to despair of the conscience of the American people — to despair of their sense of justice and right — to despair of that clear seeing vision which has made us the leader of the free peoples of the world. I for one hold fast to my faith in my Countrymen.

The march of this country onward from a land of individual selfish States to a united nation has always been attended with constant struggle against the powers of evil. When we threw aside slavery as a thing abhorrent to a liberty loving people, the world watched with horror the physical strug-
gle between brothers. But since that time we have won battle by battle in the silent struggle against corruption in our political life, against the control of our national resources by conscienceless corporations, against the right of mere money to sit supreme in our halls of legislation, against the forces of anarchy and Bolshevism, against the enslaving of our industrial population—all these without an actual physical conflict, but with as truly great a moral effort as our physical effort in the Civil War. Because of these victories we found ourselves so great a nation as to have become the example and the hope of all the liberty-loving peoples of the world—the inspiration of the downtrodden and the dread of the despot. Whether we wish to or not, our progress toward a higher, better kind of living will lead the rest of the world in our footsteps, and our failure will drag all civilization backward with us.

We entered the great war for far more than a mere advantage, and the liberty-loving masses of the peoples of the Old World hailed our entry because it meant, after the war, a new and better era for the World in general. Never has the entry of a combatant on the battlefield been received with quite the same spirit as was ours. It was not the generals in their headquarters, nor the statesmen in their council rooms that felt the greatest exaltation at our appearance—it was the peoples of the different nations themselves who took, each and every one, fresh courage, fresh heart and fresh hope in the future, not for our military strength but of our declared moral purpose in crushing the greatest enemy of progress that the world had known. We fought not for profits but for peace. It was a war against war.

Take up the old files of your newspapers when our representatives arrived in Europe. Read of the wonderful receptions from the peoples in Italy, in France, in England. Read how the whole world
waited to accept our leadership toward a new kind of fellowship among nations where fair dealing should replace force and conference, conflict.

and then Read how the little knot of selfish Senators who all their lives had fought a losing fight against progress, who had opposed all legislation giving the people the things which were theirs, banded together and thwarted the desire in every patriotic American's heart, to assume the rule of moral leader of the World which had been acceded to us. Read in those files the history of that period. Read how the whole progress of the world was thwarted for the sake of partisan advantage and piqued pride. Read how this same band, disregarding the voice of the people of their own party at the primaries for a non-progressive and fearless leader at the polls, this year, in the confident belief that ties of party would enable them to lead a majority whither they pleased, selected carefully a candidate entirely pliable to their reactionary purposes and boldly challenged the Country to defeat their struggle for that evil thing called "Normalcy", at the polls.

Continue through your files. I do not care whether you subscribe to a Republican or a Democratic paper. See how certain they were in their first confident assurance that a nation weary of war and suffering from the tremendous cost of war would unintelligently vote for what they vaguely described as "a change". See how in the first flush of their easily won victory in the Convention they boldly resurrected the Infant Industry, the monopoly protecting tariff, the need of increasing production and reducing the cost of wages - all the old shibboleths of the "normal" era. See how the temper of the people early warned them to hastily revise their "canned" campaign speeches, and you will see out of
the real object of the controlling forces of what is left today of the great Republican Party. It would be a misuse of words to call these forces "leaders".

As to the future of our Country, as to whether we entered the League of Nations or not, as to whether the world and history would look upon us as a nation of shallow sentiment and no real purpose, they cared not a whit. Their only interest in world history or in the condition of civilization was the fear of its effect upon their personal political fortunes. They sought to talk about everything except the League and what it meant. The docile mouthpiece of their proclamations spoke one day for and the next day against, perfectly willing to throw the whole League principle over for the sake of the support of "irreconcilable" Senators and eager the next day to deceive the people in an effort to soothe murmurings of discontent and rebellion which followed that action. Read all this yourself. I am not making claims - I am merely analyzing what the records of the Press will show.

Then read from the beginning now, forgetting all minor issues, how disclaiming all special credit for the winning of the war, which we might easily have taken for our campaign slogan, we of the Democratic Party have sought to lay before the people the greatness of the real issue. We have made it clear that we seek to join in this wonderful surge of the world's people toward a new order, toward a civilization in which wars will be a matter of history. Our only fear has been that the people would not realize the real issues. Our confidence tonight is the feeling that throughout the entire country there is shown remarkable and wonderful evidence
that the voters understand what they are really going to vote for next Tuesday. A hundred years from now the world historians will write a chapter on the period in American history, and in the world’s history as well, from 1920 on. On your ballots depends the heading of that chapter. Shall it be - "America leads the World toward The New Era" - or - "America abandons her Faith"?

To return to the world conditions of July 1914 is unthinkable. America must never bear in the pages of history the responsibility for such a fate.

Yet this election will mark the decision. In the years to come grand-children studying their books will come to us and ask us how we decided on the great referendum of 1920. I for one want to be able to look them in the eye and give answer. I want to be able to say to the children of tomorrow - "I voted for the teachings of religion. I voted for peace on earth. I have never regretted my course".
As in the National Election, so in many State Elections it is the same dominant group of Republican reactionaries at the helm. In our own State the very nomination of the present Republican candidate for the Governorship is an example, and the renomination of the present senior Senator from New York clinches the argument. It is our good fortune that the electorate has read and understands the records of the nominees. The success as unselfish public servants of our splendid Governor Smith and Lieutenant Governor Walker is known in every town and in every home of the Empire State. The voters will say to them on November 2nd—"Well done good and faithful servants".
A. Smith

Man who wanted to

Husband of Pearl

Woman in France

Parting of Ways

Nation like a tree

Camouflage

Cannot conceal you more

This is a wrong

I wish that I had no

Hurt of constant truth

Sound of their own

Communion song

Dr. Emmerson for Barye

Name to guard

Take in a file of paper

Read loud to hand

Chicago back then

No concern for future

W.W. Norton and

Chapel Nat. 1920

American Kindergarten

1920
EXTRACTS FROM SPEECH OF HON. F. D. ROOSEVELT
NEW YORK CITY, OCT. 30, 1920

Tonight the United States of America stands at the parting of the ways. We must go onward and upward toward the ideal nation, the leader of the world, from the dark valleys of national and personal greed, of injustice and the rule of brute force, or take the returning downward path back to the old ways again. As a tree, so must a great nation grow or die. We must continuously stretch our our boughs of commerce further and further, higher and higher. We must continually stretch out our roots of justice, of equality, of right thinking and acting, deeper and deeper, or we must wither leaf by leaf, twig by twig, a dead twinering nation.

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issues. Our confidence tonight is the feeling that throughout the
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that the voters understand what they are really going to vote for next Tuesday. A hundred years from now the world historians will start their chapters on the period in American history and in the world's history as well, from 1920 on. On your ballots depends the heading of that chapter. Shall it be - "America decides to lead the World toward The New Era" - or - "The Beginning of the Fall of the American People". Will we move forward in the vanguard of the world's advance toward peace and prosperity or will we decline to join, and retreating into our own borders become more Prussian than the Prussians until the forces of a reformed world beat down the tremendous armaments we will be obliged to create, in the same way and for the same purpose as the Kaiser's hosts were defeated two years ago? Think carefully before you vote. I for one have no fear of your decision.
What man believe it, and lots of them, too. They have been in a state of panic ever since they heard of the railroad between New York and Buffalo. They say they will be ruined because of the competition. But I don't think there will be any trouble. The road will only benefit the people. It will open up new markets and bring down the cost of transportation. I believe the railroad will be a great success, and I am willing to do my part to promote it."

The next day, a group of business leaders met at the American Institute to discuss the proposed railroad. They agreed that it was a good idea and that it would benefit the whole community. They decided to form a company to build the road and elected John D. Rockefeller as the president. The company started construction immediately, and within a few years, the railroad was completed. It was a great success and opened up new markets for agriculture and industry. The people were happy and the economy was boosted.

The national government also benefited from the railroad. It provided a means of transportation for goods and people, and it helped to unify the country. It was a sign of progress and growth, and it was something that the people could be proud of. It was a symbol of the power and potential of the nation. The railroad was a symbol of the future, and it was something that would shape the course of history. It was a sign of the progress that was being made, and it was something that would benefit everyone. The railroad was a sign of the future, and it was something that would shape the course of history. It was a symbol of the power and potential of the nation. The railroad was a symbol of the future, and it was something that would benefit everyone.