
Franklin D. Roosevelt — “The Great Communicator”

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Series 1: Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Political Ascension

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Brooklyn Academy of Music

THE ACADEMY OF MUSIC - BROOKLYN then Tier of
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Mrs. Good, Mrs. Smith, and my friends of
 Kings. (Applause.) I am very happy and proud. Your
 demonstration makes me feel quite choky. (Laughter.)
 I am happy and proud to be the guest of the splendid
 United Democracy of Brooklyn. (Applause.)

Here we are, four days before the great vic-
 tory (Applause.) I want to tell you for a minute about
 some of the things that have happened in the past two
 weeks and a half, something about the State of New York.
 I am not going to talk tonight about the problems of
 government in this State, because one who is more worthy
 and more able to discuss those problems is going to be
 with us later on this very evening. (Applause.)

While he has been travelling into every cor-
 ner of the United States, I have been trying to travel
 into every corner of our own State. (Applause.) And it
 has been a pretty heartening progress all the way
 through.

process. We have been out along the Southern Tier of counties of this State, out to Lake Erie, then up to Buffalo, and back by way of Lake Ontario, through the middle of the State, and everywhere that we have gone we have found not just interest; we have found the same kind of enthusiasm that we find here in the City of New York.

You know, I have had a certain amount of experience with campaigns up-State and I know from past years some of the things that may happen to unfortunate Democratic candidates in some of the places up-State. (Laughter.) Let me give you an example. Eight years ago, when I was running for the vice-presidency, somebody routed us into a charming city way up near the Canadian border, the City of Watertown, and we expected to have a meeting of sorts there, and when we got there, after diligent search, we found gathered in a small back room, the Democracy of Watertown, faithful unto the last. Well, they had the courage of their convictions. They greeted us and I made a speech to the Democracy of Watertown. There wasn't anybody that turned out outside of the Democracy of Watertown, and we

proceeded on our way, hoping. As you know, in that particular year, our hopes were not fulfilled.

This year, when we got up-State, they came to us and told us that we were to go to Watertown. I sort of shook my head. They said, "Now, we are going to give you a real meeting." I said, "How many will you have, 40?" Because, you know, I am a great believer, being a Roosevelt, in the increase of the population. It is a pretty healthy climate up there, and I knew none of them could have died off. So we took a chance, and as the automobile caravan approached Watertown, over one of the magnificent Al Smith highways of this State (Applause), we were not thinking about much except the delightful scenery, when suddenly the road in front of us was blocked, blocked with 30, 40, 50 cars. They came to us, a reception committee, five miles out of town; and as we went into town, we were joined by more cars, more reception committees, and a band paid for with their own money.

When we got into the fine public square of Watertown, our thirty Democrats had multiplied into three thousand yelling enthusiasts. Well, that night

the biggest theatre in town held eighteen hundred people, and there were about 2500 in it, and there were another twenty-five hundred on the outside, and still more who could not even listen to the loud speaker. That is the kind of a reception that we have met with in New York State; not just in Watertown alone, but in every city in New York.

Here is another interesting discovery we made: A new class of voter, who had been Democrats up-State, a few of them, and a vast number of Republicans, some of whom did not know that the Civil War is yet ended; but this year, in addition to the hosts of enthusiastic Democrats and the smaller number of rather dampened Republicans -- I am not just speaking of those who live near the Canadian border -- there is a new class of voter, hundreds and thousands of them in every county and in every town of the State of New York, people who come up to us in our cars, come up to us in the halls, proudly, and say -- men and women -- "I am an Al Smith Republican."

And then there is still another class of voter that we have discovered, lots of them, lurking in

all the secret places of the State. People after the receptions are over, after the band has stopped playing, will sneak up behind us and say, "I have got a Hoover button on, I have got a Hoover sign on my car, I have got a Hoover picture in my window, but Mr. Roosevelt, it is all right; I had to do that, the neighbors made me do that, but don't worry about it, I am going to vote for Al Smith." (Applause.)

That is why I am telling you tonight that as one who is pretty familiar with up-State New York, there is going to be an awful shock coming to the Republican leaders about six thirty P.M. next Tuesday night. (Applause.)

And now, in view of the fact that my old friend is going to talk about the State of New York, I am going to talk about the nation. (Applause.)

I am going to take occasion in the first place to make a few remarks about a meeting that I understand was held in Brooklyn last night. (Cries of "boo.")

No, gentlemen, he is a very distinguished gentleman who, outside of campaign time, has paid the most wonderful tributes that Alfred E. Smith has ever

had. (Applause.) But somehow, you know, campaign times sometimes warp even the better good taste and judgment of the greatest lawyers.

Last night this gentleman high in the councils of the Republican Party, made a speech in Brooklyn, and when I read Mr. Hughes' opening paragraph and remembered with what apparent reluctance he had finally come forward as a last hope in the last stages of the disaster of the Republican campaign, I thought that he had finally decided that party loyalty or no party loyalty, he could no longer support the Republican Party. For this is his opening sentence:

"Once more I am glad to believe that calumny does not pay. The mud-slingers bespatter themselves."

And with that sentence, my friends, I fully agree. (Applause.)

It has been left to Mr. Charles Evans Hughes to put into a simple sentence that great reason why millions of red-blooded Americans, formerly affiliated with the Republican Party will vote for Alfred E. Smith. (Applause.) Mr. Hughes' simple statement is an epitome of the descent, step by step, during the

the past four months, on the part of the leaders of the Republican organization into the lowest depths of unspeakable slander, calumny, and even obscenity, which has flown in an unceasing stream from mysterious sources throughout this campaign.

They have condoned every vile attempt to revive passions which have been dead in our nation since our ancestors burned witches in Salem. (Applause.) Let that be enough to say upon this matter of religion. I am convinced that the voters of the country are as sickened and disgusted at the tactics that have been employed as I am. When the first flood of Smith votes comes in next Tuesday night, I am confident that those same leaders who have conducted the Republican campaign will learn once and for all that the American people agree with Mr. Hughes that calumny does not pay. (Applause.)

Yes, we have witnessed on the one side personal abuse, and on the other side fair argument. We have seen on the one side evasion and generalities and excuses, and on the other courage, clear statement and presentation of a proud record. (Applause.) And

we have seen on the one side the presentation of a ~~man~~ carefully guarded, carefully edited figure, the ideal Mr. Hoover as his political party would have him appear before the American people. (Laughter.) But on the other side the people of this country have had the presentation of a man in his own person, a man who does not have to be presented in any colors but those of his own simple human self. (Applause.)

I speak as one who has known and admired Mr. Hoover for many years. I speak dispassionately. I speak as one who regards him as an excellent engineer, as an excellent deputy to carry out a specified task. Let us remember that Mr. Hoover, in all his fine record of public service, has in each instance had but one specific task to perform, and at one time. Let us remember, too, that in each of these tasks he has been the uncontrolled master of unlimited funds, that he has had full authority to issue orders in time of great public emergency, and that he was the arbiter without a master first in the relief work in Belgium, then in the similar work in Poland. And as Food Director during

than one hundred other agencies of the Federal Govern-

ment.

the war, he was the czar over the great stable products of the food supply of the world, and in the same way during the emergency of the Mississippi Flood, he was clothed with unlimited powers by the Red Cross and the Executive Department of the Federal Government. I state the simple fact that in all this excellent record, Mr. Hoover has never yet filled any position that can compare in any way to that of the Presidency of the United States. (Applause.)

A VOICE: Send him back to London; they want him. (Applause.)

MR. ROOSEVELT: He has never had a task like the Presidency which involves the necessity, the ability, to manage multifarious and simultaneous problems every day that passes. He has never had to co-ordinate dozens of functions of government, all of them dissimilar.

It is one thing, my friends, to coordinate bureaus all working for the same general purpose into one department of commerce; but it is a very different thing to handle ten separate departments, and more than one hundred other agencies of the Federal Government.

Finally, and this is a vital point, Mr. Hoover has never by any stretch of the imagination, proved that great essential in the Chief Executive of a Nation, that quality that has to be held by a man, the ability to get results by coordinating the Presidency with the Congress of the United States. (Applause.)

Let us not forget, if we go back in our history, that the greatest of all of our presidents have all possessed that rare ability of getting things done with the aid of Congress.

On the other side, there is nothing of guesswork. On the other side there is no mere hope that our candidate will measure up to the specifications of his office. The democracy of the State of New York has long had as its leader a man who is not a mere executive capable of performing some given task in a place of sole responsibility. We have had a man who, during every one of these eight years at the head of our State Government, the government of the largest and most populous state in all the Union, has given proof of the possession of that great essential to sound and progressive government, leadership, the leadership of Alfred E. Smith. (Applause.)

The task of the Nation during the past four months has been to learn as a whole, that day-by-day record of our beloved Governor. It is a task in which he and we have succeeded. The Nation today visualizes that record, and understands why on Tuesday next, it must and shall be extended to the Federal Government itself.

I am going to ask kind of simple questions that have to be asked to bring together that mass of material which we get in any campaign. Shall we take a man who may make good in the complex, many-sided office of President, who may make good; or shall we take the man who in an almost identical position has made good? (Applause.)

Shall we take a man who has kept silent and is still keeping silent when courageous members of his own party demanded public atonement and penance for the sins of a past administration, or shall we take a man whose unwillingness to accept the support of the unworthy, has had many striking tests in our own State?

Shall we take a man who has managed to make a number of speeches without saying anything, a man who

has left the public uncertain as to his real attitude on great questions of the day, or shall we take a man whose fearlessness, whose bravery, whose outstanding courage has been shown in public life one thousand times, a man who has made his position and his policy clear as the light of day? And finally, shall we take a man who has utterly failed to fire the public imagination, or shall we take a man whose personality is so vibrant, whose humanity is so outstanding, that he has drawn Massachusetts from her citadel of conservatism and Minnesota from its buttress of hereditary Republicanism into the great stream of sister states now following in his train?

And by the same token, apply the same argument, which is fair, and in which there is no mis- slinging or abuse; apply that to the State campaign. Do the people of this State want to go ahead with a fearless definite expression on the part of the leaders of democracy, or do they want to shift over and put themselves under the leadership of the same men who have been trying to block legislative and executive accomplishment in this State in the past ten years?

And I want to say one word. The government of this State is like a corporation. When you invest in a corporation or have to do with its management, you put into office of president and vice-president men of the same general line of policy; a treasurer who agrees with the president and vice-president, and a counsel who works with the other three. By the same token, when I go to Albany on January first next (applause), as the President of the Corporation of the State of New York, in which every man and woman owns one share of stock, and nobody two (applause), I want you to give me a vice-president, Herbert H. Lehman, who talks the same language that I do. I want you to give me a custodian of the public funds, Morris Tremain, a man who has kept them well (applause); and last and just as important, I want you to give me that splendid citizen, Albert Conway, as my lawyer. (Applause.)

Now, I have got a favor to ask (laughter.) It seems sort of silly to ask it here in Brooklyn where twenty-three out of your twenty-four Assemblymen are my friends and will work with me (Applause). But there are a lot of people who are listening in over the "Mike"

who don't live in boroughs or assembly districts that are unanimously Democratic. (Applause.)

I make this plea in every Republican assembly district in the State of New York; I want for my own personal comfort, not for my health, but for my comfort (applause), I want a Democratic Legislature with me. (Applause.) And if there is any slip "twixt the cup and the lip" I will tell you this: If I have to have a Republican Senate or a Republican Assembly, they can expect the same treatment from me as they have been getting from Al Smith. (Applause.)

So we are coming to the parting of the ways. I have been through this State, and I have been through a large part of this Nation. There is no doubt in my mind of the surge that is coming our way. The signs of it are unmistakable, and it is not only here in the great centers.

It is not even confined to the cities of the country. Go out into the smaller communities, and on the farms of the United States. People are realizing that this country wants to change the present administration in Washington, and substitute for it an adminis-

tration of honesty and progress. (Applause.)

And so, I come into the home stretch with all the confidence in the world. I am confident that the voters have sized up the national situation. I am certain that they are not satisfied with the expressed views of Herbert Hoover in this campaign, and I am satisfied that they are content with the beliefs and contentions of Alfred E. Smith, so squarely expressed.

Yes, I know the results. And a little bit later on this evening I hope that Senator Copeland will extend to you an invitation. (Applause.) But before he extends it, I want to give you a practice one first. You know, you have got to have practice before you start on a splendid march of triumph in Washington, D.C. (Applause); and so, friends, I hope that John McGooley will hire a hundred trains (applause); I hope he will hire a hundred special trains on January 1, 1929, and take them up to Albany, and that we will have a parade there. (Loud Applause.)

But as an old-fashioned farmer from Sullivan
 as justice of the peace. (Applause.)