
Franklin D. Roosevelt — “The Great Communicator”

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1931 February 7

**Biltmore Hotel, New York City, NY -
Automobile Club Luncheon**

SPEECH OF THE GOVERNOR
AUTOMOBILE CLUB LUNCHEON
SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 7, 1931
(FOR RELEASE WHEN DELIVERED)

Each year that goes by sees more progress in the handling of problems which have come to modern civilization with the advent of the automobile.

For instance, in this State the hit or miss method of building highways has been replaced by a clear, definite policy which every citizen can understand. Today, by gentleman's agreement, the Legislature appropriates for highway purposes each year the exact sum received from the automobilists themselves. This year it is expected that the gasoline tax and the license tax will bring \$57,000,000 into the State Treasury and that amount will be spent on highways. Thus the users of the highways pay for their up-keep and rebuilding and the building of new roads. It is a businesslike policy which has the general approval of the great majority of citizens.

In the field of automobile accidents, however, we have not made the same progress. We are all familiar with the fact that nearly as many lives were lost in automobile accidents in the United States in the year 1930 as were lost

32,000 $\sqrt{37,000}$.

by American soldiers in action during the World War. But we sometimes overlook the equally important fact that nearly 1,000,000 Americans each year are more or less seriously injured by moter vehicles.

I fear that many of us are becoming very callous concerning a situation which should affect everyone of us vitally. The injuring or killing of hundreds of people every day soon loses front page value in the newspapers and that means that it loses front page value in our own minds. Automobile accidents have, I fear, become too much a routine part of American life.

The Automobile Clubs and many other organizations and individuals are working day in and day out to an arousing of the country to a condition which in these enlightened times seems almost barbarous.

For instance, there is a campaign for what is called "Safety Responsibility Legislation" - in other words laws which make financial responsibility, for instance, a prerequisite to the owning or driving of automobiles. The State of New York was the pioneer in adopting this legislation and since then it has been followed by eleven other states and two Provinces of Canada. That is a step in the right direction.

In addition we are all working successfully to the reduction of the death toll among school children. There are 175,000 schoolboy patrolmen enrolled in this work in 10,000 schools, and daily protection is afforded to 5,000,000 school children on their way to and from the classroom. It is good to know that statistics prove that this fine work is bearing practical results in the form of fewer accidents of this character.

Finally, the campaign of the Automobile Clubs against the hit and run driver is being pushed throughout the country. This particular luncheon is emphasizing the extension of that campaign. I do not suppose that there is any type of human being more to be despised, more cowardly, ~~than the hit and run driver.~~ That particular type of criminal, and that is the only word to apply, deserves neither sympathy from prosecutors or juries nor consideration for possible pardon on the part of any Chief Executive of any state.

Education, in the last analysis, must be the answer - an education founded on public opinion, and every person within range of my voice has a very definite obligation to the community to create a public opinion which will place the hit and run driver among the ranks of the worst of all criminals. ~~The hit and run driver should~~
~~be treated as a criminal and not as a person who has made a mistake.~~

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4-6-61

this may be a draft
for speech Feb. 7,
1931

RLS

[1931]

The toll of human lives taken by motor vehicles in this country has become a major national problem of staggering proportions. Deaths from automobile accidents have become such a common occurrence that they have almost ceased to be considered important news in our newspapers.

But we begin to appreciate the appalling seriousness of this problem when we realize that the number of persons killed in motor vehicle accidents in the United States last year was almost equal ^{to} the number of American soldiers killed in action during the entire World War. If this seems incredible, here are the figures:

It is estimated that about 32,000 lives were taken by automobiles in the United States during 1930. ~~approximately the same~~

~~approximately~~ there were 37,568 American soldiers killed in action during the World War. Of course, this figure does not include the total

number of casualties, including deaths from wounds and sickness, ~~but neither~~ *do the automobile death figures include all the other casualties.*

The problem assumes even more serious proportions when we consider that for every fatality resulting from an automobile accident, there are 35 non-fatal ^{injuries} ~~injured~~. This means that there were nearly one million persons injured more or less seriously by motor vehicles

in the United States last year, ~~but neither do the automobile casualty figures include non-fatal injuries.~~

Most of us have become very callous concerning the situation which should affect every one of us very vitally. We are all inclined to be callous until something happens either to us personally or to someone we love which brings the matter close home to our very lives. This is illustrated by an incident ~~that~~ recently ~~was~~ called to my attention, that was experienced by an Associated Press telegraph operator.

This particular operator had been working for several years in the New York office of the Associated Press and, of course, in this capacity he had been called upon to take down or send thousands of news dispatches concerning accidents of all kinds. It had become such a routine matter to him that he scarcely ever paid any attention to the names of the persons concerned and in ten minutes he had forgotten what

he had copied. But one day he was receiving a message over the wire from his home town. He paid no particular attention to the dispatch relating a serious automobile accident until the names of the victims began to be clicked off on the telegraph machine. Suddenly he realized he was copying the names of his own brother, his sister, and other members of his immediate family. Before he could finish copying the dispatch he turned pale and could not go on. He had to be relieved from his post.

It seems to me that something must be done to bring home to us the seriousness of this situation, Although I earnestly hope that the experience of the telegraph operator will not be necessary to make us realize that every victim of an automobile accident is somebody's mother, or father, or son, or daughter, or brother, or sister.

We are all becoming familiar with the expression "hit-and-run driver", but I am afraid to most of us this is simply another catch phrase invented by agile-minded newspaper writers. We have not yet come to realize to the fullest extent what a reprehensible act this phrase connotes.

At Luncheon of the Automobile Club, Biltmore Hotel,
New York City, February 7, 1931

Prevention of Automobile Accidents

P. 703

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I fear that many of us are becoming very callous concerning a situation which should affect everyone of us vitally. The injuring or killing of hundreds of people every day soon loses front page value in the newspapers and that means that it loses front page value in our own minds. Automobile accidents, have I fear, become too much a routine part of American life.

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