
Franklin D. Roosevelt — “The Great Communicator”
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Address at Commemorative Patriotic Exercises in Honor of the
200th Birthday of George Washington, Chancellors Hall, Albany,
February 22, 1932

If I should die worthy of a passing thought in later years, it would be enough if people said "He helped to free his fellow men."¹⁶

Through all the ages neighbors have fought against the tyranny of neighbors—they have fought against enslavement by conquest, by emperors, by kings; they have fought despotism imposed in the name of religions and of parliaments and of laws.

Three centuries ago on the shores of America, a new civilization was founded by men and women seeking relief from the tyrannies of Europe and the opportunity of carving out their own lives. When, a century later, Washington was born on the banks of the Potomac, the descendants of the pioneers were discovering that the problems, the wars and the politics of an old world had followed them across 3,000 miles of ocean.

The span of the life of Washington marks the era which established representative government in the hearts of mankind as the means of ending tyranny. He, more than one of his fellows, became the chief instrument in the attainment of this great desire which stirred multitudes in all nations.

To him came the call to lead in battle those who had taken up the arms of freedom. To him came the plea to hold together in council the exhausted states when victory had come. Upon him fell the task as the chosen First Magistrate to set up the Republic of the Union of States.

Because so great a part of the scene of his service to his countrymen lay in the colony and State of New York we, in this anniversary year of his birth, have right and reason to remember with gratitude that George Washington gave to us a leadership of success, which at the same time was a leadership of unselfishness.

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To no one of the great posts of responsibility which he held over many years did he aspire—to each and every one he was summoned by his fellows; but he is well remembered, when he accepted the rank or office there were none who could say he did not lead. His was a leadership of infinite patience, of the quiet assembling of discordant elements, of faith in the midst of dark days and inconsiderate abuse; but that leadership would not have laid the foundations of the United States if it had not had the quality of stern courage to demand as a right from others that same singleness of purpose and sacrifice for good of country which was his.

It is only once in many centuries that this old world of ours discovers a man who combines in himself this quality of courageous and sagacious leadership with a character of simple and unaffected unselfishness. When we record his triumphs let us at the same time hold the picture of Washington, his duty done, turning his steps with longing and love to his beloved Mt. Vernon. When we think of him as Commander-in-Chief of the War of the Revolution, or as the first President of our Republic, let us remember him too as a great and simple gentleman—a gentleman unafraid.
