

March 18, 1937

[Dedication of Warm Springs (GA) School]

FDR Speech File

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FEBRUARY 12, 1937

INFORMAL EXTEMPORANEOUS REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT ON THE OCCASION
OF THE DEDICATION OF THE ELLENOR ROOSEVELT SCHOOLHOUSE,
WARM SPRINGS, GEORGIA, March 18, 1937, 3:00 o'clock P.M.

I am glad that I have been introduced as your neighbor because I have been your neighbor now for a great many years. I am also glad that Mr. Smith went back to that day in Albany, in 1929, when we talked about the school needs in Warm Springs. The Julius Rosenwald Fund helped there materially in providing us with the plans for the other school which was built in 1929, and with the completion of this school this community is now pretty well fitted out with its physical needs as to school buildings.

It was way back in 1924 that I began to learn economics at Warm Springs. I went to school at Warm Springs, and here is how it happened: One day, sitting on the porch of the little cottage in which I lived, a very young man came up to the porch and said, "May I speak with you, Mr. Roosevelt?" and I said, "Yes." He came up to the porch and he asked if I would come over to such and such a town -- not very far away from here -- come over next week and deliver the diplomas at the Commencement of the school. I said, "Yes," and then I said, "Are you the president of the graduating class?" He said, "No, I am principal of the school." I said, "How old are you?" He said, "Nineteen years." I said, "Have you been to college?" He answered, "I had my freshman year at the University of Georgia." I said, "Do you figure on going through and getting a degree?" He said, "Yes, sir, I will be teaching school every other year and going to college every other year on the proceeds." I said, "How much are they paying you?"

And the principal of the school said, "They are very generous;

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This is a transcript made by the White House stenographer from his shorthand notes taken at the time the speech was made. Underlining indicates words extemporaneously added to the previously prepared reading copy text. Words in parentheses are words that were omitted when the speech was delivered, though they appear in the previously prepared reading copy text.

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they are paying me three hundred dollars a year." Well, that started me thinking. Three hundred dollars a year for the principal of the school! That meant that the three ladies who were teaching under him were getting less than three hundred dollars a year. I said to myself, "Why pay that scale?"

At that particular time one of the banks in Warm Springs closed its doors. At the same time one of the stores in Warm Springs folded up. I began figuring out that the community did not have any purchasing power. There were a good many reasons for that. One reason was five cent cotton. You know what five cent cotton, six cent cotton, seven cent cotton meant to the South, and yet here was a very large part of the Nation that was completely at the mercy of people outside of the South, of the speculators, dependent on world conditions and on national conditions over which they had absolutely no control. The South was starving on five and six and seven cent cotton and they could not build schools and they could not pay teachers and the younger generation was growing up without an adequate education. You and I know that that simple fact is very, very true.

So I began expanding my economic philosophy. I started in the next year, as some of you will remember, and let a contract to build the golf course. The contractor, who was an honest and efficient contractor, got his labor, partly white and partly colored, around Warm Springs and he paid them seventy cents a day and eighty cents a day -- when the weather was good. Figure out the purchasing power of the families of these workers in the course of a year. Could they buy anything at the local store? Could the local store sell enough to keep the wheels of the factories in the North running?

In other words, by that process of reasoning, we saw that the prices paid to labor down here in Warm Springs, the prices that we people got for our cotton -- all of them tied in with the factories of the industrial cities of the North and East. And so a number of years ago -- and I was not the only one, for a lot of people were thinking along the same lines -- we began trying to think of the picture as a national picture. We began to realize that here in this wonderful Southland there was a great opportunity, an economic opportunity, an educational opportunity, if we could only do something to stabilize what people got for their work and their cotton at a higher level -- a level which would be more nearly the level of other parts of the country.

And here we are in 1937. We can remember back thirteen or fourteen years ago and compare the condition of Warm Springs and Meriwether County, and indeed the whole of the South, this year with the conditions in 1924, 1925, 1926, 1927 and 1928, even before the depression. Today we are infinitely better off and we all know it. That is because we are today thinking in national terms.

Now, so far as education goes, we have a long, long way to go. Somebody at lunch told me a story of an old negro who had said: "He got a lot of book knowledge but he ain't got no mother knowledge." Now, there is a lot in that. It is not book knowledge alone that counts. Even you children in the back room can take this from me: It is not book knowledge alone that will get you through life. You have got to have mother knowledge, too. Yes, we have a long way to go, but we are taking the proper steps as shown by the fact that this building and the other schoolhouse, the new schoolhouse in Manchester, and in

other parts of this country have been built to meet our physical needs. At the same time we must raise our economic standards a good deal higher than they are today. I would like to see the pay of the teachers in the whole State of Georgia approximate more nearly the pay of the teachers in the State of New York in the country districts where I live. I would like to see the plan of Governor Rivers go through. He told me the other day that he wanted to spend twice as much on education this coming year as was spent last year. That is a great ambition and I hope he succeeds. He wants to guarantee a seven-months school year to every child in the State of Georgia, and I hope that he can accomplish that, too. But it is going to mean that everybody must put his shoulder to the wheel to put it through.

Mr. Peabody -- I wish he could be here today -- said to me the other day, "We have made great strides and today in this State there is a greater understanding among all groups of citizens in every county for the need of raising the economic standards and thereby raising the educational standards of the State." He has contributed very greatly to what has been done, and we are all very grateful and proud of the work that George Foster Peabody has done, not only in this State but in a great many other states of the Union, including up-State New York. I am sorry that he cannot be here today, and I am also sorry that my better half cannot be here today. She asked me to tell you that she is tremendously grateful and very happy in having this fine building named in her honor, and I hope that next time we will, both of us, be able to get down here so that she may come here and see this school and see the children in it and see the tablet with her name over there on the front wall.

I have known the parents and the grandparents of a good many of the boys and girls who are actually at school in this building at the present time, so that I have a personal feeling for you boys and girls. I know that this school is going to help you to be good citizens.

Dedication of Warm Springs School
3/18/37

Speaking extemporaneously, the President said in part:

"And the principal of the school said, 'They are very generous; they are paying me three hundred dollars a year.' Well, that started me thinking. Three hundred dollars a year for the principal of the school! That meant that the three ladies who were teaching under him were getting less than three hundred dollars a year. I said to myself, 'Why pay that scale?'

"At that particular time one of the banks in Warm Springs closed its doors. At the same time one of the stores in Warm Springs folded up. I began figuring out that the community did not have any purchasing power. There were a good many reasons for that. One reason was five cent cotton. You know what five cent cotton, six cent cotton, seven cent cotton meant to the South, and yet here was a very large part of the Nation that was completely at the mercy of people outside of the South, of the speculators, dependent on world conditions and on national conditions over which they had absolutely no control. The South was starving on five and six and seven cent cotton and they could not build schools and they could not pay teachers and the younger generation was growing up without an adequate education. You and I know that that simple fact is very, very true.

"So I began expanding my economic philosophy. I started in the next year, as some of you will remember, and let a contract to build the golf course. The contractor, who was an honest and efficient contractor, got his labor, partly white and partly colored, around Warm Springs and he paid them seventy cents a day and eighty cents a day -- when the weather was good. Figure out the purchasing power of the families of these workers in the course of a year. Could they buy anything at the local store? Could the local store sell enough to keep the wheels of the factories in the North running?

"In other words, by that process of reasoning, we saw that the prices paid to labor down here in Warm Springs, the prices that we people got for our cotton -- all of them tied in with the factories of the industrial cities of the North and East. And so a number of years ago -- and I was not the only one, for a lot of people were thinking along the same lines -- we began trying to think of the picture as a national picture. We began to realize that here in this wonderful Southland there was a great opportunity, an economic opportunity, an educational opportunity, if we could only do something to stabilize what people got for their work and their cotton at a higher level -- a level which would be more nearly the level of other parts of the country.

STATEMENTS FILE

Dedication of Warm Springs School
3/18/37

Speaking extemporaneously, the President said in part:

"And the principal of the school said, 'They are very generous; they are paying me \$300 a year.' Well, that started me thinking. \$300 a year for the principal of the school! That meant that the three ladies who were teaching under him were getting less than three hundred dollars a year. I said to myself, 'Why pay that scale?' And so I began to learn economics.

"At that particular time one of the banks in Warm Springs closed its doors. At the same time one of the stores in Warm Springs folded up. I began figuring out that the community did not have any purchasing power. There were a good many reasons for that. One reason was five cent cotton. You know what five cent cotton, six cent cotton, seven cent cotton meant to the South, and yet here was a very large part of the Nation that was completely at the mercy of people outside of the South, of the speculators, dependent on world conditions and on national conditions over which they had absolutely no control. The South was starving on five and six and seven cent cotton and they could not build schools and they could not pay teachers and the younger generation was growing up without an adequate education. You and I know that that simple fact is very, very true.

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"And here we are in 1937. We can remember back thirteen or fourteen years ago and compare the condition of Warm Springs and Meriwether County, and indeed the whole of the South, this year with the conditions in 1924, 1925, 1926, 1927 and 1928, even before the depression. Today we are infinitely better off and we all know it. That is because we are today thinking in national terms."

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