

December 21, 1936

[Stinson Club Dinner]

FDR Speech File

GRIDIRON CLUB
DECEMBER 21, 1936.

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Su Excelencia, Presidente Gableman, Senores y socios del Club Gridiron:

Durante mi reciente viaje de buena voluntad a Sud America, yo hice el gran descubrimiento que la poderosa influencia de su Club no ha llegado a hacerse sentir en el Hemisferio del Sur. Nuestros amigos en las republicas hermanas tienen la desventaja de leer solamente puras noticias. No tienen la costumbre Norte Americana de interpretar las noticias. Tal vez en el porvenir Ustedes podrian ofrecer sus servicios.

This comment, Gentlemen, deserves your serious consideration, especially on an occasion like this which brings us together just before Christmas with larger grace and a more pervading spirit of good will than - shall we say - at the Spring dinner when the Congress is in session.

I am delighted that a fellow guest tonight is Governor Landon of Kansas. I felt it an honor to have him as an opponent. This morning we had a delightful talk about all kinds of things -- international affairs, domestic problems and sport -- fishing and shooting and the big outdoors. And may I say to him that his sense of sportsmanship is not confined to fishing and hunting, and that I appreciate

his sportsmanship in the larger field.

As usual I have enjoyed every minute of our entertainment tonight. A number of us perhaps have found the various skits more factual than the writings of their journalistic authors during the recent campaign.

Between June and November I became an even more omnivorous reader of papers than in the past. I use the word "papers" because in common with a hundred million or more fellow Americans I have come to discriminate between the word "paper" and the word "newspaper."

In a great serial which ran for several months in the papers, one of the characters bore the name of Franklin D. Roosevelt. Whether this character was to be a hero or a villain I could not at first make out. But as that magnificent work of imagination developed, I decided that this character Roosevelt was a villain. He combined the worst features of Ivan the Terrible, Machiavelli, Judas Iscariot, Henry VIII, Charlotte Corday and Jesse James.

He was engaged in a plot to wreck the American Constitution, to poison the Supreme Court, to demolish capitalism, to destroy old age security, to get us into war, and to assassinate all the men in the United States who had red hair or as newspaper publishers claimed the rank of Colonel -- in short, to blot from the face of the earth the United States as we have known it.

I began to believe it myself. Didn't I read it in the columns of our great papers? These papers had been awarded prizes for their artistic make-up and sometimes even for their enterprise in ferreting out facts. Moreover, if the slightest doubt remained in the reader's mind, the most penetrating, permeating editorial intellect assured him that ~~he~~ was so.

Yes, I began to believe it myself. One morning, about the middle of October, I became curious about this man Roosevelt and I went to a beautiful, old mirror of the early Federal period and took a careful look at him in the glass. He smiled. I remembered that one of the most damning indictments that had been brought against him was that self-same smile. I smiled back. And after a careful examination I decided that all that this villain looked like to me was

a man who wanted to be re-elected President of the United States.

He was re-elected and the great 1936 campaign serial turned out to have a most surprising ending. On the morning of November fourth the editors decided that this villain was, after all, a reasonable person. He was deluged with editorial advice -- suave advice, friendly advice, advice based on the apparent assumption that this man was really a reincarnation of a cross between Little Eva and Simple Simon.

May I recommend this habit of standing in front of a mirror? It is a good habit. It restores perspective. It brings out all the blemishes one ought to know about.

It is a much better habit than some others that recently have been practised. Before the mirror you can talk to the man you see there but the same voice comes back. And that perhaps is better than trying the art of ventriloquism.

There was one other aspect of the campaign which was personally deflating to me -- the newspaper poll. When I first entered politics there were no polls -- we had only

the prognostication of the political Chairmen. Sometimes they were as right as Jim Farley and sometimes they were as wrong as John Hamilton. And by the way, here is a simple problem in mental arithmetic. If John Hamilton gets \$25,000 a year for carrying Maine and Vermont, what should Jim Farley's salary be?

Our campaigns in the past developed the practice of straw votes and recently what we call Digest Polls. I read the oscillations of voting percentages with bated breath. I do not know how Governor Landon felt but I wondered throughout those long weeks whether I was not some sort of stock traded in on the Stock Exchange -- off a quarter, up a half, down two. I passed through a bewildering series of highs, lows and net changes until I could hardly write my name without putting a plus or minus sign before it. And what did it prove in the end? It proved that with all of our journalistic genius for prognostication, a sure fire method of diagnosing, deciphering and anticipating American public opinion still remains to be discovered.

Yet as far as the American Press is concerned, no one could admire it more than I. Its freedom, its technical facilities, its network of communications, its speed, its alertness and the plentitude of its coverage are unequalled in the world.

Yet some people -- mostly people with indigestion or bad consciences -- speak of the danger of the regimentation of our Press. Let us analyze. Suppose the Government of the United States were a dictatorship. Suppose the Government required newspapers to purchase and print some of the canned editorial features dealing with national affairs that now fill our Press! The outcries of editors present here tonight would be heard round the world! Gentlemen, it needs no Government dictatorship to regiment the American Press. Any regimenting of the American Press which is present today or looms in the offing comes from the regimenting of it by the Press itself.

But the Gridiron Club is not regimented, and it brings to us all the saving graces of humor and perspective. It is good for me to be here. It is good, I think, for the Chief Justice to be here. It is good for Governor Landon to be here. It is good for Republicans and Democrats and

Socialists and Communists to sit at these tables and laugh at themselves and at each other. The Gridiron Club offers twice a year the largest of mirrors for us all to look at ourselves in. As we think of those sections of the world in which fear, hatred and bitter political rivalries have great peoples within their grasp, who of us cannot feel a spirit of humble gratitude to Providence that our national destinies are emerging from the strains of recent times with our American tradition of tolerance and perspective unimpaired?

Franklin D. Roosevelt

(Original reading copy)
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*Draft
Gableman*

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State Dept

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He was re-elected and the great 1936 campaign serial turned out to have a most surprising ending. On the morning of November fourth the editors decided that this villian was, after all, a reasonable person. He was deluged with editorial advice -- suave advice, friendly advice, advice based on the apparent assumption that this man was really a reincarnation of a cross between Little Eva and Simple Simon.

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Our campaigns ^{in the past developed the practice of} ~~produced into~~ straw votes and ~~from~~ ^{recently} ~~what we call~~ Digest ^{Polls}. I read the oscillations of voting percentages with bated breath. I do not know how Governor Landon felt but I wondered throughout those long weeks whether I was not some sort of stock traded in on the Stock Exchange -- off a quarter, up a half, down two. I passed through a bewildering series of highs, lows and net changes until I could hardly write my name without putting a plus or minus sign before it. And what did it prove in the end? It proved that with all of our journalistic genius for prognostication ^{and} ~~and~~ sure fire method of diagnosing ~~and~~ deciphering ^{and} anticipating American public opinion still remains to be discovered.

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On my recent mission of good will to South America
I made the great discovery that the overpowering influence
of your Club has not yet extended to the Southern Hemisphere.
Our friends in our Sister Republics are handicapped by being
limited to the reading of nothing but news. ^{actual} ~~They lack the~~
North American habit of ~~complete lack of~~ ^{ing} ~~interpretation of the~~ news. Perhaps in
the days to come you can ^{offer a different} ~~extend the field of your operations.~~

Grider's branch - Dec 21, 1936

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