

December 17, 1938

[Gridiron Club Dinner]

FDR Speech File

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President Lincoln, members of the Gridiron Club, Gentlemen
and otherwise:

Many of ^{you} ~~the~~ who are here tonight have visualized
the mild-mannered old gentleman who now addresses you as the
fanged wolf to whom little red riding hood said "What big
teeth you have". They forget, I think, the other moral of
that childhood tale.-- that if little red riding hood had not
been an innocent little idiot she would not have gotten into
trouble with the wolf.-- for the wolf was not a wolf at all,
but only a kind police dog who was trying to protect his
master's house. And be it remembered that the house did not
belong either to little red riding hood or to the police dog.

This police dog did not go South to learn about
teeth from barracudas and sharks. But he obtained special
training for the Gridiron Club Dinner by observing the sharp
pointed sword which decorates the nose of the sail-fish.

I, therefore, feel completely at home tonight.

The skit which we have seen which was called "The Lost Horizon" might have been called "The Lost Tooth". Nothing arouses greater mirth on the part of the spectator than a toothache, provided it is not his toothache. The immense satisfaction with which columnists, cartoonists and editorial writers greeted a recent toothache -- not their's understand -- was not without interest and even instruction for the victim. It made me think of what a member of the staff once said when he heard that Charles Chapin, the famous City Editor of the ^{Evening} World, was ill -- "Nothing trivial, I hope".

Even the Gridiron Club, proud of its subtle wit, has changed from gentle humor to dental humor. It was a good skit -- but it was also a good toothache.

If some of your members have assumed the privilege in your interpretative writings of calling every Progressive

and every liberal Democrat a "communist", it is completely fair for me to announce to the world that the Gridiron Club of Washington, D.C. has gone for "nudism". You have exhibited the Secretary of State without his pants. You have shown the British Foreign Minister without his pants. I can only assure you that neither of them would be in their respective Cabinets if their legs looked like Gridiron Club legs.

I shall have to apologize officially to the two great democracies of Europe because you have depicted Britannia clad in a ~~helmet~~^{trident} and a shield and La Belle France protected by a fan. International affairs, Lord only knows, are bad enough -- and "ism" here and another "ism" there -- without you people having to drag "nudism" into the picture. The only palliative to the nudist movement in international relations is that it is perhaps less dangerous than being all dressed up and no place to go.

The Gridiron Club gets into dangerous ground again -- when it uses the simile of the apple which Adam gave to Eve -- the apple of discord. There is too much apple-eating going on in the world any way -- not fine luscious, ripe Dutchess County apples, but applesauce made from apples with worms in them, and from unripe apples guaranteed to produce stomach-aches. The world is getting more of this diet -- breakfast, lunch and supper -- than it ever had to swallow before. It would be ungracious of me to name the dieticians who serve it.

In some Nations and among small elements in our own Nation, the diet of applesauce and of unripe apples is producing alarming symptoms. But it is a fortunate thing, I think, that the good humor and the good sense of most countries and of the overwhelming majority of people in our own Republic have become accustomed to saying to the waiter, with a polite smile, "Thank you, I don't care for any today", and proceeding to fill

their mental and physical needs with food of their own choosing.

That was proven to be the case ^{upto the election of Nov, 1936} ~~a year and a month ago~~ And I

don't think that the health of the American family has declined much, if any, since that date.

And speaking of what ^{upto Nov 1936} ~~a year and a month ago~~ was known as the Republican Party, I was very glad yesterday to welcome Governor Landon to the White House. He is a delightful gentleman and is much to be envied. He told me he was ^(currying) his own horse out in Kansas and I told him that I would honestly like to swap places with him -- but that if he substituted for me in the White House he would have to take the toothache with it.

Honestly though, I am worried about the Republican Party. Except for the dinner last Spring, the Gridiron Club has been unable to produce a Republican politician speaker for three years. Once they went to the Socialist Party. Once

they turned to the Baltimore Sun -- a great metropolitan journal which belongs to its own party. Again they turned to the Baltimore Sun.

And tonight, my fellow speaker has been my old friend
Major and Mayor LaGuardia. *Birthday!* Surely you did not select him as
a Republican speaker. Like the overwhelming majority of Democrats in this Congress and in this Administration, he has been honored by being called a "communist" and a "red". Like the overwhelming majority of Democrats in this Congress and in this Administration, he has fought for the rights of the average citizen.

The Mayor has been charged with being a friend of the New Deal. If that charge had not been made he would not have been elected.

But, to return to the Republican Party. One of the few remaining Republican Governors officially asks that every present or former Republican leader be retired. Frankly, I should hate to see that happen. I believe in good will and I believe in good humor and the Republican leadership today is the greatest possible factor in maintaining good humor in the American people.

And I should hate to see Arthur Vandenberg retired. Four years ago, I put that second best cutaway suit -- the one I wear to funerals -- into mothballs for him. But I serve warning on him now that if he does not claim it on January 20, 1940, I am going to give it to the President of the Gridiron Club.

And since the Gridiron Club has apparently given up the regular practice of having Republican speakers -- for reasons into which we need inquire no further -- I am

hoping that you will go even more Democratic. I hope that at your next dinner and at intervals thereafter, I shall be invited as a guest who can sit here and have a corking good time without the menace of a speech hanging over me at the end of the evening. If the Gridiron Club will give me the pleasure of a night out, if it will accept me as a guest who does not have to speak (and I know those are two big "ifs") I shall make one other request -- that ^{As} ~~for~~ an old-fashioned hick Democrat from Dutchess County who is trying to make his dress suit last for another three years, I be permitted to come in a black tie and soft shirt instead of this traditional "soup and nuts."

I have had a wonderful evening -- I want to have other evenings even more wonderful.

(Continued)

It could not be done in any other Nation in the world, but it is wholly within the bounds of American propriety to take American public servants and American ideals for "a ride" within these sacred walls. ^{under the circumstances} That is as it should be.

Nevertheless, there are public ^{ideals} ~~expresses~~ outside these walls where satire and ridicule and fun end. We have progressed far since the days when the favorite toast was "My country, right or wrong". ^{fair} Criticism of government, criticism of party, criticism of individuals -- all are legitimate. That is as it should be.
But Ridicule of certain ideals at home and abroad is not legitimate.

Somebody asked me the other day if I had any real hates and I told them that I had three. First, against the writer or the speaker who sneers at the objective of a more abundant life for the citizens of our land. Second, against the man who sneers at all who ^{would not let} ~~are without~~ jobs and tells them

they could find work if they would only look for it. And

third, against the man who pokes fun ^{at or raises false hopes} at American efforts to encourage peace ^{and seek among the} ~~between~~ Nations. ^{of the world}

If privately and publicly, you exercise your constitutional right not to hitch your wagon to ^{great ideals} ~~error~~, don't out the traces of your neighbor who is trying to hitch his wagon to a star. ^{At the long last those}

who seek most highly gain most

The ^{greatest} ~~hopeful~~ of the
United States will see to that.