

April 15, 1939

[Elmhurst Club Dinner]

FDR Speech File

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PRESIDENT CLAPPER, MEMBERS OF THE AMERICAN SOCIETY
OF INVENTORS, AND FELLOW GUESTS:

It is a great privilege for us laymen to be here tonight with this Society, which, through the daily perpetration of inventions, is carrying on a noble American tradition.

By your constant contributions you are bringing into every American home that impetus to thought, to controversy, often to tears, and sometimes even to bloodshed, which makes America such a charming, exciting and psychopathic Donnybrook Fair.

I can remember half a century ago, before that stimulating virus "imagination" had infected the inventive genius of the Press, news was dull - terribly dull - for it was only news, just straight news - and the country was dying of ennui. News was all the same, no matter which paper you picked up or which column you read. Except during

national elections, there was no controversy about the newspapers because the reading public did their own interpreting of the news. They themselves - the reading public - did their own coloring of the news when they passed it on by word of mouth to the neighbor who had not seen the morning paper.

What dull days those were! Nobody knew who wrote the news, there were no by-lines, no personalities, no commentators, no interpreters, no columnists. Few people knew or cared who owned the newspapers, and when they did know it was because the individual paper was the personal vehicle of an individual like William Cullen Bryant or Horace Greeley, who had made their marks chiefly in other fields; or it was a James Gordon Bennett, who sent Stanleys to Africa to discover Livingstons, or conducted his newspaper from the deck of a yacht in the Mediterranean.

Inventors in those days were puny souls who invented

cotton gins and sewing machines and reapers and electric lights - all of them rare luxuries which took affluence and riches to use. How you, the members of this Society, have improved on that, for your inventions go morning, noon and night into the homes of over one hundred million people, rich and poor alike.

When I was a small boy I learned in Sunday School that it was useless to hide your head under the covers at night; there was One way off there in the sky somewhere, who knew what you were thinking. In Washington I have learned all over again that it is no use trying to keep your thoughts to yourself. Omniscient gentlemen of the Press sit behind their Remingtons or Underwoods in their well-stocked offices, putting down on paper everything you think and everything you are going to think and everything that you ought to think, but don't.

I often wonder who is that "person close to the White House" who sees all, knows all, and tells all. Myself, I have often suspected it was Pete the Peanut Man, who couldn't be closer to the White House unless he moved his wagon inside the grounds. But that is only a suspicion. No newspaperman has even so much as hinted that it is from Pete that he gets the inside information with which he startles you - and me. Your true newspaperman protects his news source. Pete - if it is Pete - is safe. He can continue whispering his secrets till his last peanut is sold.

But you inventors are not the only people who have improved on things. How well do I know that when I compare the Washington to which I returned in 1933 with that Washington I knew so well in the first Administration of Grover Cleveland. And perhaps on that I could preach a little sermon - give a little advice to my young friend, Bob Taft. In all friendship I call his attention to the fact that the Washington of 1939 is by no means the Washington of 1909.

But that older Washington, that pre-war Washington, that happier Washington, that simpler Washington, was not without its charm. President Taft was, I believe, the first President to use an automobile. The members of the Cabinet considered themselves fortunate to have a brougham and pair placed at their disposal, with an old Negro coach-man, in a well-vaselined top hat, to drive them in their unhurried progress from one occasion to another. Secretaries of State were able to rusticate in salubrious Northern climates during the feverish Washington Summer, and if an infrequent cablegram arrived from one of our missions abroad, there was a great to-do in the Department to open the safe and find the code-book.

James Bryce used to walk in the cool of the evening on upper Connecticut Avenue, near du Pont Circle. Friends used to fall in with him and discuss "The American Commonwealth" or ask him if he thought the English were treating the Irish right. People picnicked on Massachusetts Avenue, where an imposing row of Embassies now stands. A stage-coach-line --

the renowned Herdic -- transported passengers from U and Sixteenth streets downtown. An overland trip to Mount Vernon was an all-day job, with the wheels often up^{to} the hub-caps in Mud. On the South side of Pennsylvania Avenue, where great Government buildings spread their chromium elegance from square to square, stood public markets. Negro women with their push-carts and their barrows offered a well-plucked fowl, a jar of home-made pickles or the all-curative herbs -- sassafras for Spring tonic, catnip tea for teething babies, white oak and red oak bark for chills.

That was a Washington that we shall never see again.
You will never see it, Bob, nor shall I. It is gone.

I remember, I remember
The fir-trees dark and high;
I used to think their slender tops
Were close against the sky

It was a childish ignorance,
But now 'tis little joy
To know I'm farther off from Heaven
Than when I was a boy.

Farther off from Heaven? Yes, from the Heaven of
a world without tension, without fear, without hatred, without

the fierce clash of impetuous ambitions and of conflicting economic forces that make the struggle for survival a struggle as bitter for the individual as for peoples, for races, religions and nations. If in that far-off Washington ours was the happiness and comfort of what I might call an adagio world, we now know that such happiness was a delusion. Ours was the bliss of ignorance. Today all of us are paying the price for that vanished and deceptive quietude.

No, the Washington of 1939 is not the Washington of 1909, and still less the Washington of the first Administration of Grover Cleveland. And now that Bob Taft has come back to us after these many long years, I fear it will take him well past 1940 before he becomes eligible for membership in the new order of things.

Just as the Democracy of 1886 could not be the model for the Democracy of 1933, so the Republicanism of 1909 cannot be the model of the Republicanism of 1940. Yet I am going away from here tonight fairly bursting with the importance of

knowing who the next Republican candidate for President will

I thought when I came here that I'd have the secret.
be. ~~But I am not going to tell. Unless there be some one among~~

~~us tonight so base as to betray what we have learned here~~

the American Soc. of Scientists and I both have
made the great discovery
upon my fellow scientists keep it dark
beneath the roses. ~~It~~ ^{It} may be a full year and a quarter before
the excited public is given the name of Doctor Townsend.

This announcement will not be made until the Republican

managers have polled all the successful Republican candidates

of the 1938 off-year election and have got the unanimous reply -

"It was Doc Townsend who pulled us through." What has happened

once can happen again. Republics are ^{sometimes} ungrateful, but Republicans ^{never!}

~~are not~~. The Republican promise of sweeping economies in

Government will disappear in 1940 under the sun of Doctor

Townsend's smile.

But 1940 lies in the still impenetrable future, and
meanwhile the world is moving fast. The United States is
conscious of its strength and patient in the assurance that
this strength gives us. But mere patience is not enough. With
patience must go knowledge, information, a facing of the facts.

The facts and conditions of the years of 1914 to 1918 are not to be slavishly copied any more than the facts and conditions of 1909 or 1886.

It is just as stupid, just as mendacious for orators to assume that we would send another Army to France in the 1917 style as it would be to make orations against sending an Army into Canada in the 1812 style.

American leadership is striving, according to such wisdom as is vouchsafed to it, to guide the destinies of our people through the mazes of this troubled world -- the world of 1939. All currents of opinion have a right to be heard, and are being heard. But out of discussion will arise, let us hope, a unified national sentiment, for here, if ever, partisanship should cease.

The government-controlled, censored press beyond the Atlantic and the Pacific rings with the denunciations that certain gentlemen in the Congress and outside the Congress have seen fit to hurl at our national leadership.

It has been well said that the grave responsibility imposed in the conduct of foreign relations sobers those who bear it. It is a pity that those who are not immediately concerned with that responsibility some times show a lack of sobriety. I wish that this sobering sense could come to that minority of Americans who today have made themselves the heroes of a censored foreign press. I need name no names. But it will not take inventive genius on the part of this Society or of its guests to fill in the names. I refer to those Americans in and out of official life who enjoy an amazing popularity with certain governments overseas.

If, at some far off future time, the United States of America is reduced to the category of a second-rate Nation, if we are told how to run our international affairs, if we are told with whom we may or may not trade, then you will find statues to these gentlemen to whom I refer in the public squares of Berlin and of Rome.

Personally, I would rather see statues in American cities to all leaders of other nations who have striven successfully for the maintenance of world peace and the continued existence of democratic government.

Gentlemen, let us have peace. Let us have peace at home; then shall we be in a position to put forward the unified strength of our hearts, our minds, our most fervent and humble hopes for the maintenance of peace abroad.

Franklin D. Roosevelt

Orig. reading copy at Lib. Club

From Lowell Mellett 1
Gridiron

I've told you before what a pleasure it is for me to attend these dinners and participate in the punishment so impartially administered. I think I can say for all the victims tonight that we appreciate the fact that, in laying the lash upon us, it hurts them--the members of the Gridiron Club--more than it does us, that they do it more in sorrow than in anger, that they do it for our own good. And it does do us good

For one I am resolved to take to heart the lessons the gentlemen of journalism have to teach us humble practitioners of politics. I am resolved to accept the code of their craft and live up to it.

Of the good journalist it is said that he never betrays a confidence. If he writes, quote, "Those in position to know" unquote; or, quote, "It is learned from an unimpeachable source," unquote; or, quote, "persons close to the White House" unquote, you can be sure that he is prepared to face a firing squad or even a Senate committee, rather than disclose the identity of the person quote "in position to know" unquote, or lay open to impeachment his quote "unimpeachable source" unquote. And most certainly you never will pry from his locked lips the name of the quote "person close to the White House" unquote. Myself, I often have suspected it was Pete the Peanut Man, who couldn't be closer to the White House unless he moved his wagon inside the grounds. But that is only my suspicion. No newspaper man has even so much as hinted that it is from Pete that he gets the inside information, with which he startles you and me. Your true newspaperman protects his

news source. Pete--if it is Pete--is safe. He can continue whispering his secrets till his last peanut is sold.

And I am going to be like that. I am going away from here tonight fairly bursting with the importance of knowing who the next Republican candidate for President is to be. But I am not going to tell. If it should leak out, as a consequence of the Gridiron members putting the same trust in us that we are accustomed to put in them, you have my quote "unimpeachable" word that it will not be me that betrays their trust.

This is no little thing that I promise. It is important for me to know whom we are going to beat in 1940. It is important for our party to have the name of the opposition candidate before the nation as early as possible, in order that we may start shooting at it. Yet, unless there be some one among us tonight so base as to betray what we have learned here beneath the rose, it may be a full year and a quarter before the name of Doctor Townsend is given to the excited public.

For it wont happen quite as you've seen it happen here. It will come out of a smoke-filled room, sometime between midnight and morning, of a late day in the national convention. It will not be until all the elements of the situation have been weighed. It will not be until the managers have polled all the successful party candidates of the 1938 off-year election and have got the unanimous reply--"It was Doc Townsend that pulled us through." Then the decision will be made that only Doc Townsend can pull them through again. That the decision will be made, I can well believe.

I am not one of those who accept the saying, "The Old Guard lies, but never surrenders." I am certain that it does surrender. I am certain that it will surrender its program of economy in 1940 in return for the Townsend vote. Republics may not be grateful, but Republicans are. They are grateful in these days for any little thing and, to the sincere and earnest advocate of Fifty every Friday, they have reason to be grateful for more than a little. Ham and Eggs? A Chicken in Every Pot? That is only the beginning, folks; only the beginning. By 1949 it will be , "A Gridiron dinner in every gullet."

Frankly, I am encouraged. I like the idea of old age security as well as any man. As I feel my arteries hardening and my old eyes growing dim, I like to contemplate a life of ease, long years of serene retrospection, in a rocking chair, perhaps, on the south porch of the modest little cottage on Pennsylvania Avenue that has sheltered me so long from the storms of life. True, it is a simple place and it is expensive to keep up. We've spent something like a hundred thousand on the roof (?) in the past six years. But for one who does not care for doodads, it is enough. I have been contented there. And to me it will always be home. You can understand, I am sure, how I feel.

And as I sit there on my porch in my little gray home in the Northwest I will have my memories. I will recall the great men I have known, the opportunities I have had to be near and to talk with great men. Dimming the memory of all others, I am sure, will be that of my experience tonight. Tonight I have sat at the right hand--I won't say of God, but of one of the gods. Here I stand where I could

if I dared, reach right ^{out} and touch an authentic columnist. Here I stand, bathed in the aura, the unmistakable effulgence of omniscience. I am speechless with reverent awe.

Other newspapermen think; I am sure they do. Columnists know. They are divine---simply divine! No bothering about quote "those in position to know" for them. No business of button-holing quote "persons close to the White House." No quote "unimpeachable sources." They themselves are the unimpeachable source.

When I was a very small boy I learned in Sunday School that it was useless to hide your head under the covers at night; there was One way off there in the sky somewhere who knew what you were thinking. In Washington I have learned all over again that it is no use trying to keep your thoughts to yourself. There is not merely one but a number of these modern divinities, sitting behind typewriters in their well-stocked offices, ^(clubs) putting down on paper everything you think and everything you are going to think.

Tonight I have had this great experience of standing---even of sitting---in the very presence of one of them.

So, members of the Gridiron Club, you have made me very happy tonight; very happy and very proud. I have enjoyed your party more than I can tell you.

I'll be back in the fall---if we dont have a war.

Note: The poem on P. 4 is the work of Thomas Hood, 1799-1845.

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~~But~~ This announcement will not be made until the Republican managers have polled all the successful Republican candidates of the 1938 off-year election and have got the unanimous reply - "It was Doc Townsend who pulled us through." What has happened once can happen again. Republics are ungrateful, but Republicans are not. The Republican promise of sweeping economies in Government will disappear in 1940 under the sun of Doctor Townsend's smile.

But 1940 lies in the still impenetrable future, and meanwhile the world is moving fast. The United States is conscious of its strength and patient in the assurance that this strength gives us. But mere patience is not enough. With patience must go knowledge, information, a facing of the facts. Who could have predicted that the murder of an Austrian Archduke in an obscure Balkan province on a June morning in 1914 would, in the end, send millions of Americans overseas to fight on the fields of France? But this happened, and the tomb of an Unknown American soldier who fell there has become a national shrine.

Is it not wiser, this time, for us to realize that peace is not divisible, that there are methods short of war

that will enable us to assist in the maintenance of peace in the face of recurrent shock and an almost rhythmic aggression? I do not hold to the belief that the United States is not of this world, in this world and part of this world. None of us wants war, either for ourselves or for others. Another war would put Western civilization to a fearful hazard, but the the hazard of international deterioration and of a haunting fear that draws the savor from all the relationships of life is no less fearful.

American leadership is striving, according to such wisdom as is vouchsafed to it, to guide the destinies of our people through the mazes of this troubled world. ^{in the world of 1929} All currents of opinion have a right to be heard, and are being heard. ^{But} Out of discussion ~~and debate~~ will arise, let us hope, a unified national sentiment, for here, if ever, partisanship should cease. ⁷⁷ The government-controlled, censored press on the further fringes of the Atlantic and the Pacific rings with the denunciations that certain gentlemen in the Congress ^{the Congress} and outside have seen fit to hurl at our national leadership. ~~My old friend, Henry L. Stimson, has recently said that the grave responsibilities imposed in the conduct of foreign relations sober those who bear them. Would also that this sobering sense would come to some Americans who have made themselves the heroes of a censored foreign press! I wish them joy of their overseas popularity.~~

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GRIDIRON DINNER

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