

April 5, 1941

[Gridiron Club Dinner]

FDR Speech File

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SPEECH OF THE PRESIDENT

GRIDIRON DINNER

APRIL 5, 1941

MR. PRESIDENT, MEMBERS OF THE GRIDIRON CLUB AND GUESTS:

I am somewhat torn tonight, for I should like to
talk of a thing called "atmosphere", while I remember at
the same time that I am here as a guest ^{under info / notes our hosts are} ~~and not as a host~~ ^{just a} ~~little bit~~

In the early days of the first German occupation
of Belgium, Brand Whitlock, ~~as~~ our Ambassador, suggested
to the State Department that it was perhaps difficult for
Americans at home to ^{realize} ~~visualize~~ ^{see hear} [and see and even smell] the
atmosphere of a constantly expanding world at war.

I was here in Washington ⁱⁿ ~~I remember~~ those days.

Not many of us in the Government, not many perhaps of the
Gridiron Club ^{understand} ~~smelled~~ that atmosphere ^{in those earlier years of}
14 - 15 - 16

We found thrust upon ourselves a new economy -- sudden changes in material things; sudden expansions in spiritual outlooks.

Yes, we read of men killed in battle -- they were not our sons; we read of new forms of warfare on sea and land -- the torpedoes that sank other people's ships; the heavy artillery that destroyed other people's cities.

So we lived on -- from July 21, 1914 to April 5, 1917 -- nearly three years of a life of unreality.

Yes, we learned certain restraints, for I remember that in those days even the Gridiron Club Dinners showed certain restraints.

In normal times of peace, of playful cartooning of domestic political parties and candidates and Presidents and ex-Presidents, it was the tradition, even then, that the head of our Nation, at the close of those dinners, should rise and return blow for blow in a duel of wits,

which would excite the mirth of your guests, and, at the same time, sooth and flatter the Gridiron Club, which even then was a serious organization -- an organization which always regarded itself as a vehicle for laughter, but never ~~regarded itself~~ as a subject for laughter.

I remember that in July, 1918, I attended the famous Annual Dinner of Gray's Inn in that famous ^{later} ~~famous~~ ^{which I fear has now been} Elizabethan banquet hall, ~~now~~ unhappily bombed. Birkenhead presided, Churchill spoke, so did Milner and Balfour and Smuts and Laurier. Down the long tables came dishes of macaroni, or perhaps it was spaghetti, followed from hand to hand by the most amazing huge pepper grinders that I have ever seen. One half turn of the handle would make your macaroni black. The Lord Chief Justice of England, on my right, pleaded with me to cover my macaroni a half ^{inch thick} ~~an inch~~ in black pepper. He said: "My boy, this is the famous vintage pepper which we bring out and eat after it has remained in our cellars for one whole century" ^{It is 100 years old}

alright
I looked at him in horror and he said "Why, my boy, it is
a great tradition of Gray's Inn, but, perhaps I should not
urge you to throw your restraint to the winds, for new
days have come, and the winning of the war against those
who would destroy democracies is perhaps more important than
the tradition of vintage pepper".

we are still
Speaking of the atmosphere of today, ~~is it perhaps~~
~~fortunate~~ *fortunate* that these dinners ~~are~~ *continue to occur to us*
~~the vintage pepper~~
of Washington.

nevertheless
Speaking of atmosphere, ~~is it fair to suggest that~~
when the very existence ~~of~~ *of* our grandchildren trembles in
the balance -- when for a while we must postpone the
renewal of the happy days of the historic "give and take"
we know
of these dinners -- there are some things in life which
ought to be stressed in any gathering -- and other things
we are compelled to
which ~~might well be~~ put into camphor until the ways of
peace come back again.

None of this means, of course, that any of us ought to lay aside our sense of humor. I turned down a man the other day for appointment to a high Federal office ^{solely} because he has no sense of humor, either in bad times or in good.

I myself think I have a sense of humor, though some of you good people ~~called it "a sense of the ridiculous",~~
~~on some of you,~~ hardened by the misfortune of having to live in Washington under Administration after Administration, insist that I am ^{not really so funny when you have to} ~~even flippant when a serious column must~~
~~be submitted~~ ^{write} ~~of~~ ^{skirmish} ~~the~~ ^{humor.}

You and I have seen piping times of international peace when the lampooning of friendly foreign statesmen made very little difference to the affairs of the world -- times when partisan appeals could be made ridiculous by limericks -- when we could think in terms of winning elections in counties, or cities or states by viewing with local pride and damning with local alarm.

But in days like these a new atmosphere makes the hallowed caricature a little less humorous -- makes the subject of the legitimate peace-time ^{abdominal operation} ~~appendectomy~~ a little less intriguing on the front page ~~of chain papers~~ than it is when the patient may really ~~go~~ ^{be sent to} under the knife *of life or death.*

National unity, By way of example, was unquestionably a skit subject in 1932 or in 1936. But because of this thing, which I call "atmosphere", national unity ^{is} ~~no longer~~ *take on a tinge of incredulity in 1941.* ~~a side-splitting subject in 1941.~~

In a world of surprise, of sudden decision, of shock, of sacrifice, none of us can live with our emotions alone -- our minds and our bodies stretched to tension point -- not at least without an interlude of relaxation. The atmosphere of these Spring days of 1941 allow for that relaxation, ~~but if the time be out of joint, it does not mean that its moments of relaxation should be out of joint~~

~~too.~~ Let us look forward, not to memories as in tonight's song, ^{but the day} when the restraints & restrictions that bind us now are swept away & all of us can come back to freedom winners & the good old 2 party system *when the chains of 1913 are broken.*

And we are happy at least in the knowledge that the Gridiron Club affords us a reminder that free speech is still in its possession and ours.

Yes, still in the possession of the Gridiron Club and the National Press Club and the White House Correspondents Association and the American Newspaper Guild and the American Society of Newspaper Editors -- and all the other organizations in the field of Journalism -- and free speech is still in the possession of the President of the United States.

So far as I am concerned, it will always remain there in all those places, for that is where it belongs, in spite of the fact that at least as far back as 1934 sections of the press and sections of the Congress wept crocodile tears to prove that that free speech in America, and of America, would be a thing of the past in another twelve months.

It is important that it remain free, for the suppression of it is a mortal weapon that dictatorships direct against their own peoples and against our future. Against that mortal weapon, among many other evil things, Great Britain *and other brave nations* fight today. Toward the suppression of all those evils, the United States has pledged its support. *J*

~~Freedom of speech and of the press still has a living meaning -- a meaning defined to our citizens by the press itself. Government can give it a negative protection -- but its care, its preservation and its use are the responsibilities of the press itself. Some readers -- most readers -- believe that the press should preserve it from self-destruction now.~~

We must write the contemporary chronicle
Some day -- perhaps in the next century -- a

definitive historian will name this war. I hope he will call it "the war for the restoration and preservation of faith".

I say this because the war was conceived in the breaking of faith. There are some of little faith who would go back to mistakes of policy or errors of judgment that were based on the occurrences that followed on the ending of the first World War -- mistakes and errors which, nevertheless, were based on good intent.

There are those among us -- men of little faith -- who laugh at the League of Nations -- at the efforts to make peace among nations more secure; ~~there are some who laugh at those, who, in good faith, prevented the United States from joining that League;~~ there are some who laugh at those who in 1921, ^{under Secretary Hughes} sought in good faith for a reduction in the Naval armaments of the world; there are some who laugh at the sincerity of an American Secretary of State, ^{Mr. Kellogg} who initiated a Pact among many nations for the peaceful settlement of problems between nations; there are some who would not stand behind another Secretary of State who ^{Mr. Stimson} proposed not to overlook the flagrant violation of solemn treaties in 1931.

And since that date,¹⁹³¹ the sacredness of the pledged

word -- the sanctity of the spirit of good faith -- has gone from bad to worse. I repeat that this war springs from the broken treaty, the ignored word, the violated faith.

Yet, good faith, in spirit and in truth, has not perished. It has not perished in Great Britain; it has not perished in China; it has not perished in Greece; it has not perished in Yugoslavia. It has not perished in this Hemisphere. It has not died in the United States.

It has not ~~perished~~^{flourished} in the hearts of millions of people on the Continent of Europe or the Continent of Asia -- peoples whose voices for a while are still, whose bodies for a while are in bondage, but whose faith in good faith lives on deathless.

We eat, we drink, we are merry. But in our hearts we do not laugh at faith -- good faith. We keep our humor, but we know that unless we restore the good faith of this nation and of all the other nations upon earth, good faith

will take flight beyond recall, and the keeping of our
humor will stand us then in little stead.

So for the salvation of our ^{good} humor, let us bring
back the good faith of the world.

Samuel Johnson

*orig. reading copy, edited
at the Table*

HM

1st & Only Draft

SPEECH OF THE PRESIDENT
GRIDIRON DINNER
APRIL 5, 1941

MR. PRESIDENT, MEMBERS OF THE GRIDIRON CLUB AND GUESTS:

I am somewhat torn tonight, for I should like to talk of a thing called "atmosphere", while I remember at the same time that I am here as a guest and not as a host.

In the early days of the first German occupation of Belgium, Brand Whitlock, as our Ambassador, suggested to the State Department that it was perhaps difficult for Americans at home to visualize and see and even smell the atmosphere of a constantly expanding world at war.

Here in Washington I remember those days. Not many of us in the Government, not many perhaps of the Gridiron Club smelled that atmosphere.

We found thrust upon ourselves a new economy -- sudden changes in ~~the shape of our orders; sudden demands for expansion; sudden opportunities to better our lot~~ in material things; sudden expansions in spiritual outlooks.

Yes -- we read of ~~men~~^{men} killed in battle -- they were not our sons; we read of new forms of warfare on sea and land -- the torpedoes ~~did not sink our ships~~^{that sank other peoples'}; the heavy artillery ~~did not destroy our cities~~^{that destroyed other peoples'}.

So we lived on -- from July 31, 1914 to April 6, 1917 -- nearly three years of a life of unreality.

Yes, we learned certain restraints, for I remember that in those days even the Gridiron Club Dinners ~~observed~~^{observed} certain restraints.

In normal times of peace, of playful cartooning of domestic political parties and candidates and Presidents and ex-Presidents, it was the ~~continued expectation, almost~~ tradition, even then, that the head of our Nation, at the close of those dinners, should rise and return blow for blow in a duel of wits, which would excite the mirth of your guests, and at the same time soothe and flatter the Gridiron Club, which even then was a serious organization -- an organization which always regarded itself as a vehicle for laughter, but never regarded itself as a subject for laughter.

All through the first World War an element of England maintained its traditions, coupled perhaps with the restraints of the Twentieth Century. I remember that in July, 1918, I attended the famous Annual Dinner of Gray's Inn, (how unhappily bombed) ^{that} in famous Elizabethan Banquet Hall, Birkenhead presided, Churchill spoke, so did Milner and Balfour and Smuts and Laurier. Down the long tables came dishes of macaroni, or perhaps it was spaghetti, followed from hand to hand by the most amazing ^{large} pepper grinders that I have ever seen. One half turn of the handle would make your macaroni black. The Lord Chief Justice of England, on my right, pleaded with me to cover my macaroni a half an inch in black pepper. He said "My boy, this is the famous vintage pepper which we ^{bring out from} ~~never~~ eat ^{After} ~~since~~ it has remained in our cellars for one whole century." I looked at him in horror and he said "Why, my boy, it is a great tradition of Gray's Inn, -- ^{but} ~~it is~~ perhaps ~~for~~ I should not urge you to throw your restraint to the winds, for new days have come, and the winning of the war against those who would destroy democracies is perhaps more important than the tradition of vintage pepper".

Speaking of ^{the} atmosphere ^{as to day} ~~in the light of actual~~
~~times~~, is it perhaps ^{fair} ~~to~~ to suggest that ^{these}
Dinners are the ~~best still live on~~ vintage pepper ^{of Washington?}

Speaking of atmosphere, is it ^{fair} ~~also~~ to suggest
that when the very existence for our grandchildren trembles
in the balance -- when ^{for a while we must part with the leisure} ~~the return to the happy days when~~ ^{of}
the historic "give and take" of these dinners ~~was~~
~~was lost - when we are going through days~~
~~of real hazard to that extent~~ -- there are some things
in life which ought to be stressed in any gathering,
~~from the gathering of the family, to the gathering of~~
~~the Club, to the gathering of the Nation.~~ -- and other
things which might well be put into camphor until the ways
of peace come back again.

None of this means, of course, that any of us
~~ought to lay aside~~ our sense of humor.
I turned down a man the other day for appointment to a
high Federal office because he has no sense of humor,
either in bad times or in good.

I myself think I have a sense of humor, though some of you good people called it "a sense of the ridiculous", or some of you, hardened by the misfortune of having to live in Washington under Administration after Administration, insist that I am even flippant when a serious column must be scribbled.

You and I have seen piping times of international peace when the lampooning of friendly foreign statesmen made very little difference to the affairs of the world -- times when partisan appeals could be made ridiculous by limericks -- when we could think in terms of winning elections in counties, or cities or states by viewing with local pride and damning with local alarm.

But in days like these a new atmosphere makes the hallowed caricature a little less humorous -- makes the subject of the legitimate peace-time appendectomy a little less intriguing on the front page of chain papers than it is when the patient may really go under the knife.

National unity, by way of example, was unquestionably a skit subject in 1932 or in 1936. But because of

this thing, which I call "atmosphere", ~~I raise the whole~~

~~philosophic query as to whether national unity is~~ *no longer a* side-

splitting subject in 1941.

In a world of surprise, of sudden decision, of shock, of sacrifice, none of us can live with our emotions alone -- our minds and our bodies stretched to tension point -- not at least without an interlude of relaxation. The atmosphere of these Spring days of 1941 allow for that relaxation, but if the time be out of joint, it does not mean that ^{its moments of} ~~the~~ relaxation should be out of joint too.

And we are happy at least in the knowledge that the Gridiron Club affords us a reminder that free speech is still in its possession and ours.

Yes, still in the possession of the Gridiron Club and the National Press Club and the White House Correspondents Association and the American Newspaper Guild and the American Society of Newspaper Editors -- and all the other organizations in the field of Journalism -- and free speech is still in the possession of the President of the United States.

So far as I am concerned, it will always remain there in all those places, for that is where it belongs, in spite of the fact that at least as far back as 1934 sections of the press and sections of the Congress wept

crocodile tears to prove that that free speech in America, and of America, would be a thing of the past in another twelve months.

It is important that it remain free, for the suppression of it is a mortal weapon that dictatorships direct against their own peoples and against our future. Against that mortal weapon, among many other evil things, Great Britain fights today. Toward the suppression of all those evils, the United States has pledged its support.

Freedom of speech and of the press still has a living meaning -- a meaning defined to our citizens by the press itself. Government can give it a negative protection -- but its care, its preservation and its use are the responsibilities of the press itself. Some readers -- most readers -- believe that the press should preserve it from self-destruction now.

Some day -- perhaps in the next century -- a definitive historian will name this war. I hope he will call it "^{The} war for the restoration and preservation of faith".

I say this because the war was conceived in the breaking of faith. There are some of little faith ~~but~~ who would go back to mistakes of policy or errors of judgment that were based on the occurrences that followed on the ending of the first World War -- mistakes and errors which, nevertheless, were based on good intent.

There are those among us -- men of little faith -- who laughed at the League of Nations -- at the efforts to make peace among nations more secure; ^{there are some} who laugh ~~at the~~ _A ~~other side~~ at those, who, in good faith, prevented the ^{joining that League} United States from ~~having a hand at least in the scene~~ _A ~~to preserve peace among men;~~ ^{there are some} who laugh at those who in 1921 sought in good faith for ~~the ideal~~ of a reduction ^{there are some} in the Naval armaments of the world; who laugh at the sincerity of an American Secretary of State who initiated ^{A Pact} ~~treaties~~ among many nations for the peaceful settlement ^{there are some} of problems between nations; who would not stand behind another Secretary of State who proposed not to overlook the flagrant violation of solemn treaties in 1931.

And since that date, the sacredness of the pledged word -- the sanctity of the spirit of good faith -- has gone from bad to worse. I repeat that this war

springs from the broken treaty, the ignored word, the violated faith.

Yet, good faith, in spirit and in truth, has not perished. It has not perished in Great Britain; it has not perished in China; it has not perished in Greece; it has not perished in Yugoslavia. It has not perished in this Hemisphere. It has not died in the United States.

It has not perished in the hearts of millions of people on the Continent of Europe or the Continent of Asia -- peoples whose voices for a while are still, whose bodies for a while are in bondage, but whose faith in good faith lives on deathless.

We eat, we drink, we are merry. But in our hearts we do not laugh at faith -- good faith. We keep our humor, but we know that unless we restore the good faith of this nation and of all the other nations upon earth, good faith will take flight beyond recall, and the keeping of our humor will stand us then in little stead.

So for the salvation of our humor, let us bring back the good faith of the world.

*Copy of
original*

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Speaking of the atmosphere of today, is it perhaps fair to suggest that these dinners are the vintage pepper of Washington?

Speaking of atmosphere, is it fair to suggest that when the very existence for our grandchildren trembles in the balance -- when for a while we must postpone the renewal of the happy days of the historic give and take of these dinners -- there are some things in life which ought to be stressed in any gathering -- and other things which might well be put into campher until the ways of peace come back again.

None of this means, of course, that any of us ought to lay aside our sense of humor. I turned down a man the other day for appointment to a high Federal office because he has no sense of humor, either in bad times or in good.

I myself think I have a sense of humor, though some of you good people called it a sense of the ridiculous, or some of you, hardened by the misfortune of having to live in Washington under Administration after Administration, insist that I am even flippant when a serious column must be scribbled.

You and I have been piping times of international peace when the lampooning of friendly foreign statesmen made very little difference to the affairs of the world -- times when partisan appeals could be made ridiculous by limericks -- when we could think in terms of winning elections in counties, or cities or states by viewing with local pride and damning with local alarm.

But in days like these a new atmosphere makes the hallowed caricature a little less humorous -- makes the subject of the legitimate peace-time appendectomy a little less intriguing on the front page of chain papers than it is when the patient may really go under the knife.

National unity, by way of example, was unquestionably a skit subject in 1932 or in 1936. But because of this thing, which I call atmosphere, national unity^{is} no longer a side-splitting subject in 1941.

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I say this because the war was conceived in the breaking of faith. There are some of little faith who would go back to mistakes of policy or errors of judgment that were based on the occurrences that followed on the ending of the first World War -- mistakes and errors which, nevertheless, were based on good intent.

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