

Coolidge Cup Declamation Qualifier

Official Speech Excerpt Packet for 2024

1924-2024 Centennial Edition

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The Genius of America

October 16, 1924

[...] It is not very long, as history views matters, since all of us were alien to this soil.

[...] It is a truism, of course, but it is none the less a fact which we must never forget, that this continent and this American community have been blessed with an unparalleled capacity for assimilating peoples of varying races and nations. The continuing migration which in three centuries has established here this nation of more than a hundred million, has been the greatest that history records as taking place in any such brief period.

[...] Starting anew in a land of almost unlimited natural opportunity, the early settlers found that the success of their nation-building experiments must depend upon their working harmoniously together, sinking non-essential differences, cooperating frankly and sincerely in the general interest, and, above all else, forgetting the ancient antagonisms. It has been our good fortune that we have been able to shake off the old traditions, to strike hands with our neighbor in the common effort to preserve our new-found liberties. And along with this, through our system of universal education, we have been able to guard against the revival of old, or the creation of new regional or group hostilities.

[...] It must be the hope of every American citizen to maintain here as a permanent establishment, and as a perpetual inheritance for Americans of the future, the full measure of benefits and advantages which our people have been privileged to enjoy. It is our earnest wish to cooperate and to help in every possible way in restoring the unfortunate countries of the Old World. We want to help them to rid themselves of the bad traditions, the ancient animosities, the long established hostilities. We want our America to continue to be an example and a demonstration that peace, harmony, cooperation and a truly national patriotic sentiment may be established and perpetuated on an American scale. We believe our first great service to the Old World will be in proving this. And in proving it, we shall be doing the things that will best equip us, spiritually and materially, to give the most effective help toward relieving the suffering nations of the Old World.

[...] But in cherishing all that is best in the land of your origin, and in desiring the highest welfare of the people of the old home, the question arises as to how that result can best be secured. I know that there is no better American spirit than that which is exhibited by many of those who have recently come to our shores. It is my belief that those who live here and really want to help some other country, can best accomplish that result by making themselves truly and wholly American. I mean by that, giving their first allegiance to this country and always directing their actions in a course which will be first of all for the best interests of this country. They cannot help other nations by bringing old world race prejudices and race hatreds into action here. In fact, they can best help other countries by scrupulously avoiding any such motives. It can be taken for granted that we all wish to help Europe. We cannot secure that result by proposing or taking any action that would injure America. Nor can we secure it by proposing or taking any action that would seriously injure some European country. The spirit of America is to help everybody and injure nobody. We can be in a position to help only by unifying the American nation, building it

up, making it strong, keeping it independent, using its inclination to help and its disinclination to injure. Those who cast in their lot with this country can be true to the land of their origin only by first being true to America. When the public sees and realizes that racial groups here are first of all devoted to the interests of this country, there will be little difficulty in securing here the present needed help and assistance for the countries of the old world.

[...] Let us maintain all the high ideals which have been characteristic of our different races at home. Let us keep our desire to help other lands as a great and broad principle, not to help in one place and do harm in another, but to render assistance everywhere. Let us remember also that the best method of promoting this action is by giving undivided allegiance to America, maintaining its institutions, supporting its Government, and, by leaving it internally harmonious, making it eternally powerful in promoting a reign of justice and mercy throughout the earth.

For context and for reference, [the full speech is available here](#).

Note also that this excerpt retains original spellings, which in some cases differ from modern spellings.

Message to the House of Representatives Returning Without Approval a Bill Providing for Adjusted Compensation for War Veterans

May 15, 1924

To the House of Representatives:

Herewith is returned, without approval, H.R. 7959, a bill “to provide adjusted compensation for veterans of the World War, and for other purposes.”

[...] We have no money to bestow upon a class of people that is not taken from the whole people. Our first concern must be the nation as a whole. This outweighs in its importance the consideration of a class, and the latter must yield to the former. The one compelling desire and demand of the people to-day, irrespective of party or class, is for tax relief. The people have labored during the last six years under a heavy tax burden. This was necessary to meet the extraordinary costs of the war. This heavy assessment has been met willingly and without complaint. We have now reached a financial condition which permits us to lighten this tax burden. If this bill becomes law, we wipe out at once almost all the progress five hard years have accomplished in reducing the national debt. If we now confer upon a class a gratuity such as is contemplated by this bill, we diminish to the extent of the expenditures involved the benefits of reduced taxes which will flow not only to this class but to the entire people. [...]

The prosperity of the nation, which is the prosperity of the people, rests primarily on reducing the existing tax burden. No other action would so encourage Business. No other legislative enactment would do so much to relieve Agriculture. The drastic executive campaign for economy in Government expenditures has but one purpose—that its benefits may accrue to the whole people in the form of reduction in taxes. I can not recede from this purpose. I am for the interests of the whole people. The expenditures proposed in this bill are against the interests of the whole people. I do not believe they are for the benefit of the veterans.

[...] Considering this bill from the standpoint of its intrinsic merit, I see no justification for its enactment into law. We owe no bonus to able-bodied veterans of the World War. The first duty of every citizen is to the nation. The veterans of the World War performed this first duty. To confer upon them a cash consideration or its equivalent for performing this first duty is unjustified. It is not justified when considered in the interests of the whole people; it is not justified when considered alone on its own merits. The gratitude of the nation to these veterans can not be expressed in dollars and cents. No way exists by which we can either equalize the burdens or give adequate financial reward to those who served the nation in both civil and military capacities in time of war. The respect and honor of their country will rightfully be theirs forever more. But patriotism can neither be bought nor sold. It is not hire and salary. It is not material, but spiritual. It is one of the finest and highest of human virtues. To attempt to pay money for it is to offer it an unworthy indignity which cheapens, debases, and destroys it. Those who would really honor patriotism should strive to match it with an equal courage, with an equal fidelity to the welfare of their country, and an equal faith in the cause of righteousness.

[...]

America entered the World War with a higher purpose than to secure material gain. Not greed but duty was the impelling motive. Our veterans as a whole responded to that motive. They are not asking as a whole, they do not want as a whole, any money recompense. Those who do seek a money recompense for the most part, of course, prefer an immediate cash payment. We must either abandon our theory of patriotism or abandon this bill. Patriotism which is bought and paid for is not patriotism. Our country has maintained the principle that our Government is established for something higher and finer than to permit those who are charged with the responsibility of office, or any class whose favor they might seek, to get what they can out of it. Service to our country in time of war means sacrifice. It is for that reason alone that we honor and revere it. To attempt to make a money payment out of the earnings of the people to those who are physically well and financially able is to abandon one of our most cherished American ideals. The property of the people belongs to the people. To take it from them by taxation can not be justified except by urgent public necessity. Unless this principle be recognized our country is no longer secure, our people no longer free. This bill would condemn those who are weak to turn over a part of their earnings to those who are strong. Our country can not afford it. The veterans as a whole do not want it. All our American principles are opposed to it. There is no moral justification for it.

For context and for reference, [the full speech is available here](#).

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Education: the Cornerstone of Self-Government

July 4, 1924

[...] America is turning from the mere thought of the material advantage to a greater appreciation of the cultural advantage of learning. It is coming to be valued more and more for its own sake. People desire not only the intelligence to comprehend economic and social problems, but they are finding increased leisure is little more than time wasted in indulgence, unless an opportunity for self-development and self-expression has been provided in youth by the cultivation of a taste for literature, history, and the fine arts.

[...] Teaching is one of the noblest of professions. It requires an adequate preparation and training, patience, devotion, and a deep sense of responsibility. Those who mold the human mind have wrought not for time, but for eternity. The obligation which we all owe to those devoted men and women who have given of their lives to the education of the youth of our country that they might have freedom through coming into a knowledge of the truth is one which can never be discharged. They are entitled not only to adequate rewards for their service, but to the veneration and honor of a grateful people.

[...] The encouragement and support of education is peculiarly the function of the several States. While the political units of the district, the township, and the county should not fail to make whatever contribution they are able, nevertheless since the wealth and resources of the different communities vary, while the needs of the youth for education in the rich city and in the poor country are exactly the same, and the obligations of society toward them are exactly the same, it is proper that the State treasury should be called on to supply the needed deficiency. The State must contribute, set the standard, and provide supervision if society is to discharge its full duty not only to the youth of the country, but even to itself.

The cause of education has long had the thoughtful solicitude of the National Government. While it is realized that it is a State affair, rather than a national affair, nevertheless it has provided by law a Bureau of Education. It has not been thought wise to undertake to collect money from the various States into the National Treasury and distribute it again among the various States for the direct support of education. It has seemed a better policy to leave their taxable resources to the States, and permit them to make their own assessments for the support of their own schools in their own way. But for a long time the cause of education has been regarded as so important and so preeminently an American cause, that the National Government has sought to encourage it, scientifically to investigate its needs, and furnish information and advice for its constant advancement. Pending before the Congress is the report of a committee which proposes to establish a Department of Education and Relief, to be presided over by a Cabinet officer. Bearing in mind that this does not mean any interference with the local control, but is rather an attempt to recognize and dignify the importance of educational effort, such proposal has my hearty indorsement and support.

It is thus that our educational system has been and is ministering to our national life. Our country is in process of development. Its physical elements are incomplete. Its institutions have been declared, but they are very far from being adopted and applied. We have not yet arrived at

perfection. A scientific investigation of child life has been begun, but yet remains to be finished. There is a vast amount of ignorance and misunderstanding, of envy, hatred, and jealousy, with their attendant train of vice and crime. We are not yet free, but we are struggling to become free economically, socially, politically, spiritually. We have limited our amount of immigration in order that the people who live here, whether of native or foreign origin, might continue to enjoy the economic advantages of our country, and that there might not be any lowering of the standards of our existence, that America might remain American. We have submitted an amendment to the national Constitution designed to protect the child life of the Nation from the unwarranted imposition of toil, that it might have greater opportunity for enlightenment. All of these movements are in the direction of increased national freedom, and an advance toward the realization of the vision of Washington and Lincoln.

A new importance is attaching to the cause of education. A new realization of its urgent necessity is taking hold of the Nation. A new comprehension that the problem is only beginning to be solved is upon the people. A new determination to meet the requirements of the situation is everywhere apparent. The economic and moral waste of ignorance will little longer be tolerated. This awakening is one of the most significant developments of the times. It indicates that our national spirit is reasserting itself. It is a most reassuring evidence that the country is recovering from the natural exhaustion of the war, and that it is rising to a new life and starting on a new course. It is intent, as never before, upon listening to the word of the teacher, whether it comes from the platform, the schoolhouse, or the pulpit. The power of evil is being broken. The power of the truth is reasserting itself. The Declaration of Independence is continuing to justify itself.

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