

Publisher's Note

This new edition of *Speeches of the American Presidents* contains more than 220 major speeches by the 45 presidents of the United States, from George Washington, elected in 1788, to Donald Trump, elected in 2016. Twenty-two new speeches have been added, covering the presidencies of George W. Bush, Barack Obama, and Donald Trump, plus new content added to some of the chapters of earlier presidents as well.

Speechmaking is one of the classic devices for communication between the chief executive and the people he represents, one of the methods by which he announces policy, acquires the loyalty of special interest groups, tries to subvert the will of Congress when it suits his purposes, and unifies the nation in time of crisis. *Speeches of the American Presidents* is intended to give readers, especially students, a useful way to study the presidency—its development as an institution and the individual presidents' management of events in their administrations—through the words of the presidents themselves. Although many of the presidents delivered important speeches in their pre- and post-White House years, we have, with a few exceptions, included only speeches made during each president's term in office. Most are reprinted in full from the public record; some very long speeches have been excerpted. Because of the relative scarceness of extant speeches for the earlier presidents, we have included some of their annual messages (now called State of the Union Messages) in the present volume, despite the fact that during the years between Jefferson and Wilson these messages were read to Congress by a clerk rather than by the president himself.

The speeches in this collection were chosen with two main purposes in mind. First, to demonstrate the growth of speechmaking as a political tool throughout the history of the presidency. During the twentieth century, for instance, presidents came to rely on a variety of new media to deliver messages to an increasingly large and diverse audience, ranging from print media at the beginning of the period to television and broadcast media at its end. In the twenty-first century, the development of the Internet and social media changed speechwriting and delivery even further.

Second, these speeches have been chosen to show the ways in which each president revealed his character and the ideals he espoused. A special effort has been made to include speeches from administrations that comment on issues that are important in contemporary America, including intervention in foreign affairs, minority rights, taxation, defense spending, and the eternal argument over the benefits and dangers of a strong federal government. Discussions of questions such as the role of slavery in the early republic hold important lessons for modern readers.

The chapters in this volume are arranged chronologically by president. The speeches are then arranged chronologically within each chapter. Texts for the speeches in this edition were taken from official online sources maintained by the White House (www.whitehouse.gov) and the National Archives and Records Administration (www.nara.gov). This volume closes with a detailed subject index.

Introduction

On the face of it, the duties of the Chief Executive, as conceived by the Founders and described in the Constitution, require certain kinds of expertise—but public speaking is not one of them. The president is in charge of making sure that the decisions of Congress are implemented; of appointing ambassadors, Supreme Court justices, and certain other federal officers, as well as commissioning all federal office holders; of making treaties; of assessing the expert opinion of his cabinet officers; of granting pardons; and of acting as commander in chief of the armed forces. He has to submit occasional reports to Congress concerning the state of the Union and he has to recommend to Congress “such Measures as he shall judge necessary and expedient”; these reports and recommendations are assumed to be in written form. All of these duties could be carried out by a wise administrator who has at heart the best interests of the nation as a whole—which is exactly what the delegates to the Constitutional Convention had in mind. They did not foresee a time when the wise administrator would also have to function as the head of a political party (still unknown in their day), a cheerleader for a political agenda, a symbol of the federal government, a symbol of the entire country, a professor educating the ignorant citizenry about urgent matters, a preacher delivering inspiration and motivation (or warning and remonstrance) in time of crisis, a crusader molding public opinion into a weapon for attacking Congress. Indeed, the prospect of a president standing before the people to exhort and rally them would have struck them as a lapse into the demagoguery they were assiduously trying to avoid.

How strange it appears to us citizens of the 21st century, conditioned from childhood to expect to see presidents solemnly addressing us through our TV screens, when we realize that the great presidents of the early republic, the prescient heroes of our democracy, provided no role modeling whatsoever for their successors in office when it came to communicating with the public. The only oratorical communication from the president to the people was the inaugural address, which was heard directly by a few thousand listeners at best, and which tended to follow certain platitude-ridden conventions. The true presidential audience consisted of the nation’s legislators, not its electorate, and the presidents kept their congressional appearances to a minimum. The custom established by George Washington of visiting Congress to deliver his mandated annual message in person was honored by Adams and squelched by Jefferson, to lasting effect—no other president came to the Capitol to address Congress until Woodrow Wilson surprised everyone by doing so in 1913. Even Washington’s famous Farewell Address of 1796 was never heard by the congressmen and senators for whom it was intended; it was printed in a newspaper instead.

Jefferson’s repudiation of Washington’s custom nicely illustrates one reason why the expectations of the Constitution’s framers were so quickly confounded, for Jefferson’s election in 1800 marked the first time that one political party (the Democratic-Republicans) took the presidency away from another (the Federalists). Although the electors’ choice of Washington as president was unanimous in the first two presidential elections, by the third one, in 1796, the two opposing parties were already well in place. In the ensuing decades, the extension of voting rights to greater numbers of adult white males (rather than propertied men only), together with the adoption in most states of the popular vote as a method of choosing presidential electors, inevitably altered the relationship between presidential candidates and the ordinary people who were now empowered to choose them. The result was that American politics lost all hope of becoming what the Founders had intended—a tranquil forum for dispassionate, rational debate—and became instead a battleground for contending factions, each one doing its utmost to grab the attention of the voters.

By the mid-19th century, the ability to entertain large crowds with impressive displays of rhetoric was a recommending qualification for most politicians at the local and state levels. Still, some lingering sense of the dignity of the office of president delayed the entry of presidents and presidential candidates into the tournaments of oration. Whig candidate William Henry Harrison made the first presidential campaign speech on the steps of the National Hotel in Columbus, Ohio, on June 6, 1840, but his efforts were far outclassed by the immense torchlight processions and rallies launched on his behalf in hundreds of locations by Whig operatives. Significantly, none of the great Congressional speechifiers of the golden age of American oratory (1836–1860)—Daniel

Webster, Henry Clay, John C. Calhoun, Thomas Hart Benton, or Stephen A. Douglas—became president, though most tried at least once. The orotund stylings of senatorial and congressional rhetoric were apparently not sufficient to elect a president, nor were they suitable for the communications that the presidents of the era were obliged to undertake. Those politicians who did come to occupy the White House, whether competent or incompetent in other respects, were, with few exceptions, indifferent speakers.

It is with Abraham Lincoln that we find the beginning of true presidential rhetoric, and at a level that has never been bettered until, it might be argued, Barack Obama. He arrived at the White House as a veteran courtroom lawyer, stump speaker, debater, and raconteur, his mind well-seasoned with Shakespeare and the Bible, but no biographer can fully explain the inner development that enabled him to infuse the English language with so much dramatic moral and emotional power. In the Gettysburg Address he succeeded in doing something that would not even have crossed the minds of previous presidents—drawing to the attention of his listeners, and by extension the entire nation, their obligation to confront the ideal of equality embedded in the Declaration of Independence and to collectively set themselves to make it a reality. With Lincoln begins the tradition of the president as an ethical leader modeled after Moses, providing direction to the people during times of physical and spiritual crisis and confronting moral lapses with an appeal to conscience. Alas, many more presidents have aspired to this role than were qualified to fill it. Most attempts to imitate Lincoln, far from evoking his sought-after aura of statesmanship, have appeared as sorry attempts to exploit his legacy.

The current emphasis on speechmaking as an essential part of presidential campaigning and of White House leadership is largely the result of the steady advances, over the course of the 20th century, in the technology of mass communications, coupled with the transformation of the presidential term into a kind of endless beauty contest in which the president has, daily, another chance to win or lose. The now-universal campaigning technique of crisscrossing the nation on speechmaking tours began in the late 19th century with James Baird Weaver and William Jennings Bryan, who bequeathed their method to future contenders, though they lost five races between them. The national conventions of the major political parties, formerly conducted as massive shouting bouts between mobs of delegates, underwent a change of character as first radio (in 1924) and then television (in 1940) opened them up to the rest of the country; by the end of the century, the conventions had devolved into tightly controlled theatrical productions featuring addresses in which even the laughter and applause were prearranged.

Presidents who like to give speeches and relish being in the spotlight have their model in Theodore Roosevelt, who famously took the stage in the 1912 campaign even though he had an assassin's bullet in his chest. Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson, though very different otherwise, both followed Lincoln in treating the presidency as the nation's source of moral leadership; when they stood at the podium, it was to exhort, to challenge, to teach, even—in Wilson's case—to the point of extreme and nearly fatal self-sacrifice.

Although many people think of Franklin Roosevelt as the first president whose voice became widely familiar through radio talks, he was preceded by the supposedly taciturn Calvin Coolidge, who gave a radio address on the occasion of George Washington's birthday in 1924 and thereafter spoke to the public every few weeks. FDR, of course, was the first president to be heard all over the globe, the first to make a broadcast in a foreign language (in November 1942, to the people of France), and the first to use radio to establish a sense of closeness with his domestic audience; to him also belongs the credit for being the first presidential nominee to deliver an acceptance speech at a convention (in 1932). During Roosevelt's second term he appeared on television, speaking at the opening session of the New York World's Fair, and thus became the first president to have to concern himself with the quality of his television image. His successor, Harry Truman, was the first to deliver a televised speech from the White House, on October 5, 1947.

Over the ensuing half century, the various White House administrations have set themselves the task of making good use of the opportunities offered by televised presidential speechmaking. These include keeping the president and his agenda favorably in the public eye, demonstrating his command of the issues and his physical health and vigor, persuading voters to pressure Congress to enact the president's programs, rallying support in times of trouble, and defining for the American people what their goals are and who their enemies are. Unfortunately for presidents, however, these opportunities come at a high price, since speeches broadcast over television are

presented by journalists with agendas of their own. Media hostility has helped bring at least one presidency to the point of collapse and helped prevent several others from achieving second terms. Thus, a president given to frequent speechmaking, as most of the recent ones have been, ends up cycling endlessly between offensive and defensive modes, between building an image of competence through a forceful articulation of policy and countering the subsequent, and potentially devastating, onrush of criticism that it engenders.

Just before the century turned, presidential speechmaking took a step in yet another direction— towards the idea of the president as a kind of super therapist whose job is to listen to the stories of hardship related by ordinary people, publicly acknowledge their pain, take it on as his own, and then craft legislative remedies to be proposed to Congress. Something of this idea was present under Franklin Roosevelt; it was further developed under Jimmy Carter; but it reached full-blown form under Bill Clinton. Clinton's apparent devotion to respecting the needs of others was partly manifested in his mania for delivering speeches to small groups, which he did by the hundreds every year; it also showed up in his attempts to manage the so-called Middle East peace process through a display of what he hoped would be seen as evenhanded attention to the claims on both sides (see "The Oslo Accords," reprinted in this volume). But Clinton's offer to share himself with the electorate proved to have its limits, and many people who were drawn in by his expert rhetorical performances found this out the hard way.

The election of George W. Bush in 2000 perhaps demonstrates that voters have discovered better ways to evaluate their candidates than by mere skill at giving speeches. The campaign leading to the first presidential election of the 21st century was something akin to a contest between two gladiators who have no choice but to enter the arena with rusty swords and chipped armor. Speechmaking became a basic requirement for all candidates for the White House, and it figures prominently in the impressions that voters take with them into the polling booths, most often by way of news clips and political commercials; but in the 2000 presidential race, neither of the two leading candidates was gifted with natural eloquence. The Democratic contender, though plainly intelligent, was wooden and unexciting on the podium. The Republican contender, though hearty and enthusiastic, regularly tripped over his tongue when making remarks. Had one or the other of them been a more competent, more persuasive speaker, the nation might not have ended up with a perfectly divided, and therefore embittered, electorate.

The 2008 presidential election was historic in several ways – Barack Obama not only became the first African American president of the United States, but, with eloquence and literary power, has been described as "orator-in-chief." According to Douglas Brinkley, presidential historian and professor at Rice University, "Barack Obama is one of the great orators in American history. He thinks in constitutional law terms that give him the spine for his speeches, his compass. Obama consistently wanted to feel he was the author."

As the twenty-first century progresses, President Donald Trump has changed the nation's narrative not only politically but poetically. We now have a president who is neither eloquent nor direct, and the Internet and social media continue to change speechwriting and delivery in ways we have never thought possible.

Seventh Annual Message to Congress

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

December 8, 1795

THIS RANKS as Washington's most hopeful address to Congress, reflecting what his biographers J. A. Carroll and M. W. Ashworth called "his own exuberant ambitions for the future of the American republic" expressed in "a well-contrived and confident appeal for national unity in an hour of growing political disparities." Washington had good reason to be pleased: war with England had been avoided, relations with Spain had been normalized, and the end of his own term in office was in view.

I trust I do not deceive myself when I indulge the persuasion that I have never met you at any period when more than at the present the situation of our public affairs has afforded just cause for mutual congratulation, and for inviting you to join with me in profound gratitude to the Author of all Good for the numerous and extraordinary blessings we enjoy.

The termination of the long, expensive, and distressing war in which we have been engaged with certain Indians northwest of the Ohio is placed in the option of the United States by a treaty which the commander of our army has concluded provisionally with the hostile tribes in that region.

In the adjustment of the terms the satisfaction of the Indians was deemed an object worthy no less of the policy than of the liberality of the United States as the necessary basis of durable tranquillity. The object, it is believed, has been fully attained. The articles agreed upon will immediately be laid before the Senate for their consideration.

The Creek and Cherokee Indians, who alone of the southern tribes had annoyed our frontiers, have lately confirmed their preexisting treaties with us, and were giving evidence of a sincere disposition to carry them into effect by the surrender of the prisoners and property they had taken. But we have to lament that the fair prospect in this quarter has been once more clouded by wanton murders, which some citizens of Georgia are represented to have recently perpetrated on hunting parties of the Creeks, which have again subjected that frontier to disquietude and danger, which will be productive of further expense, and may occasion more effusion of blood. Measures are pursuing to prevent or mitigate the usual consequences of such outrages, and with the hope

of their succeeding at least to avert general hostility.

A letter from the emperor of Morocco announces to me his recognition of our treaty made with his father, the late emperor, and consequently the continuance of peace with that power. With peculiar satisfaction I add that information has been received from an agent deputed on our part to Algiers importing that the terms of the treaty with the Dey and Regency of that country had been adjusted in such a manner as to authorize the expectation of a speedy peace and the restoration of our unfortunate fellow citizens from a grievous captivity.

The latest advices from our envoy at the Court of Madrid give, moreover, the pleasing information that he had received assurances of a speedy and satisfactory conclusion of his negotiation. While the event depending upon unadjusted particulars can not be regarded as ascertained, it is agreeable to cherish the expectation of an issue which, securing amicably very essential interests of the United States, will at the same time lay the foundation of lasting harmony with a power whose friendship we have uniformly and sincerely desired to cultivate.

Though not before officially disclosed to the House of Representatives, you, gentlemen, are all apprised that a treaty of amity, commerce, and navigation has been negotiated with Great Britain, and that the Senate have advised and consented to its ratification upon a condition which excepts part of one article. Agreeably thereto, and to the best judgment I was able to form of the public interest after full and mature deliberation, I have added my sanction. The result on the part of His Britannic Majesty is unknown. When received, the

subject will without delay be placed before Congress.

This interesting summary of our affairs with regard to the foreign powers between whom and the United States controversies have subsisted, and with regard also to those of our Indian neighbors with whom we have been in a state of enmity or misunderstanding, opens a wide field for consoling and gratifying reflections. If by prudence and moderation on every side the extinguishment of all the causes of external discord which have heretofore menaced our tranquillity, on terms compatible with our national rights and honor, shall be the happy result, how firm and how precious a foundation will have been laid for accelerating, maturing, and establishing the prosperity of our country.

Contemplating the internal situation as well as the external relations of the United States, we discover equal cause for contentment and satisfaction. While many of the nations of Europe, with their American dependencies, have been involved in a contest unusually bloody, exhausting, and calamitous, in which the evils of foreign war have been aggravated by domestic convulsion and insurrection; in which many of the arts most useful to society have been exposed to discouragement and decay; in which scarcity of subsistence has imberbered other sufferings; while even the anticipations of a return of the blessings of peace and repose are alloyed by the sense of heavy and accumulating burthens, which press upon all the departments of industry and threaten to clog the future springs of government, our favored country, happy in a striking contrast, has enjoyed general tranquillity—a tranquillity the more satisfactory because maintained at the expense of no duty. Faithful to ourselves, we have violated no obligation to others. Our agriculture, commerce, and manufactures prosper beyond former example, the molestations of our trade (to prevent a continuance of which, however, very pointed remonstrances have been made) being overbalanced by the aggregate benefits which it derives from a neutral position. Our population advances with a celerity which, exceeding the most sanguine calculations, proportionally augments our strength and resources, and guarantees our future security. Every part of the Union displays indications of rapid and various improvement; and with burthens so light as

scarcely to be perceived, with resources fully adequate to our present exigencies, with governments founded on the genuine principles of rational liberty, and with mild and wholesome laws, is it too much to say that our country exhibits a spectacle of national happiness never surpassed, if ever before equaled?

Placed in a situation every way so auspicious, motives of commanding force impel us, with sincere acknowledgment to Heaven and pure love to our country, to unite our efforts to preserve, prolong, and improve our immense advantages. To cooperate with you in this desirable work is a fervent and favorite wish of my heart.

It is a valuable ingredient in the general estimate of our welfare that the part of our country which was lately the scene of disorder and insurrection now enjoys the blessings of quiet and order. The misled have abandoned their errors, and pay the respect of our Constitution and laws which is due from good citizens to the public authorities of the society. These circumstances have induced me to pardon generally the offenders here referred to, and to extend forgiveness to those who had been adjudged to capital punishment. For though I shall always think it a sacred duty to exercise with firmness and energy the constitutional powers with which I am vested, yet it appears to me no less consistent with the public good than it is with my personal feelings to mingle in the operations of government every degree of moderation and tenderness which the national justice, dignity, and safety may permit.

Gentlemen:

Among the objects which will claim your attention in the course of the session, a review of our military establishment is not the least important. It is called for by the events which have changed, and may be expected still further to change, the relative situation of our frontiers. In this review you will doubtless allow due weight to the considerations that the questions between us and certain foreign powers are not yet finally adjusted, that the war in Europe is not yet terminated, and that our western posts, when recovered, will demand provision for garrisoning and securing them. A statement of our present military force will be laid before you by the Department of War.

With the review of our army establishment is naturally connected that of the militia. It will merit inquiry what imperfections in the existing plan further experience may have unfolded. The subject is of so much moment in my estimation as to excite a constant solicitude that the consideration of it may be renewed until the greatest attainable perfection shall be accomplished. Time is wearing away some advantages for forwarding the object, while none better deserves the persevering attention of the public councils.

While we indulge the satisfaction which the actual condition of our western borders so well authorizes, it is necessary that we should not lose sight of an important truth which continually receives new confirmations, namely, that the provisions heretofore made with a view to the protection of the Indians from the violences of the lawless part of our frontier inhabitants are insufficient. It is demonstrated that these violences can now be perpetrated with impunity, and it can need no argument to prove that unless the murdering of Indians can be restrained by bringing the murderers to condign punishment, all the exertions of the government to prevent

destructive retaliations by the Indians will prove fruitless and all our present agreeable prospects illusory. The frequent destruction of innocent women and children, who are chiefly the victims of retaliation, must continue to shock humanity, and an enormous expense to drain the Treasury of the Union.

To enforce upon the Indians the observance of justice it is indispensable that there shall be competent means of rendering justice to them. If these means can be devised by the wisdom of Congress, and especially if there can be added an adequate provision for supplying the necessities of the Indians on reasonable terms (a measure the mention of which I the more readily repeat, as in all the conferences with them they urge it with solicitude), I should not hesitate to entertain a strong hope of rendering our tranquillity permanent. I add with pleasure that the probability even of their civilization is not diminished by the experiments which have been thus far made under the auspices of government. The accomplishment of this work, if practicable, will reflect undecaying luster on our national character and administer the most grateful consolations that virtuous minds can know. . . .