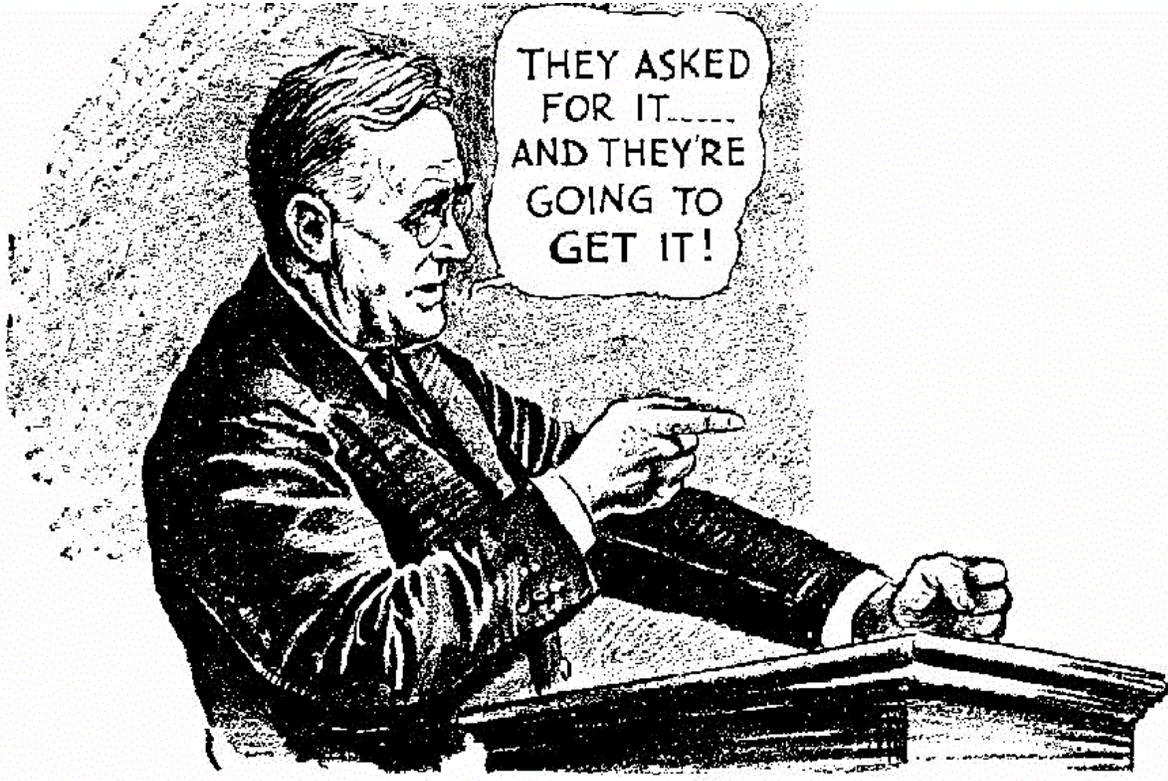


# FDR SPEAKS



SPEECHES, LETTERS & REFLECTIONS OF FDR

Written & Adapted by  
Steve Taft

### **A note from the dramaturg:**

The intention is to keep the presentation relatively simple. However, the incorporation of the projection and sound cues throughout the presentation are optional, yet important and dependent upon the architectural layout of the theatre, the technology available to the producing organization, and of course, the available crew. The running time of this two-act play is approximately 1 hour 30 minutes excluding the intermission time. This presentation has been created to accommodate two actors. However, it will become obvious that additional actors could easily be incorporated. Feel free to do so as appropriate.

As dramaturg, I have attempted to provide a presentation that highlights FDR's more famous speeches and/or acts of legislation. Due to length and dramatic continuity, the speeches and letters are edited. The letters attempt to provide insight into the thoughts of FDR: the man, his sense of ideals, and his larger than life gallery of friends. Various biographies and resources were utilized as dramaturg.

As with many great figures in history, FDR had his faults. Although I do not explore in detail his relationships with various females, his companions are briefly mentioned to once again, reveal a part of the man.

Ideally, this docudrama will inspire members of its audience (particularly those in high school or college), to learn more about the fascinating life of FDR, his acts of legislation, and the history of the world during his time as the 32nd President of the United States. However, it must not be forgotten that for theatre to educate, it must also engage, in order to capture the imagination and attention of its most valued member, the audience.

*Steve. Taft*

Dramaturg

# FDR SPEAKS

## Speeches, Letters, and Reflections of

## Franklin D. Roosevelt

*The set is relatively simple, yet tasteful. A full-size podium CS. Antique microphone(s) are placed on the front of the podium from various news agencies of the period such as CBS, etc. A desk (decorated with various props) sits DR over an elegant area rug. There is no chair behind the desk. A tasteful chair does sit SL of the rug slightly US of the desk. A chair and small round table are placed DL for the Narrator.*

*FDR will use an antique wheel-chair to move from the platform to the DR desk. FDR may also use canes of a unique nature if he wishes. The Narrator should take the opportunity to stand, walk, move, etc. as often as possible as FDR's movement may be somewhat limited. However, FDR should take the opportunity to provide movement when possible and motivated.*

*In the darkness, the narrator and FDR enter SR. FDR sits in his wheelchair US of DR desk. The Narrator stands just left of FDR. Edited, overlapped voice-over of the FDR with Copeland's "Fanfare for the Common Man" underneath. Faint top light on FDR. He wears a suit, glasses and smokes a cigarette.)*

### RECORDED VOICE-OVER

This is preeminently the time to speak the truth, the whole truth, frankly and boldly . . . let me assert my firm belief that the only thing we have to fear is fear itself-nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror . . . I see one-third of a nation ill-housed, ill-clad, ill-nourished . . . These Republican leaders have not been content with attacks -- on me, or my wife, or on my sons. No, not content with that, they now include my little dog, Fala . . . Yesterday, December 7, 1941--a date which will live in infamy . . . a date which will live in infamy . . . a date which will live in infamy. . . a date which will live in infamy.

*As the narrator provides background on the President, projections may be used to provide a pictorial history. Lights up on Narrator.*

NARRATOR

Being the President of the United States is the cruelest job in the world. However, such men are born to handle such cruelty . . . and greatness. Franklin D. Roosevelt's mother once remarked that: "with his gaiety, his excellent digestion, and his ability to sleep like a child, Franklin was able to serve us through thirteen of the most difficult years in American history." Our 32nd President was born at Hyde Park, New York. His father was older than the traditional father and the rich country squire. Young Franklin lived a somewhat privileged life. He was taught by tutors and governesses. He loved to sail. He was nearsighted and wore eyeglasses from age 18 (which some say, caused him to give the impression he was looking down on others). (*Crossing DLC*) He was strikingly handsome; lean, and athletic as a young man . . .

FDR

I like her . . . (*FDR rises and crosses CS*)

NARRATOR

. . . he had blue eyes, underscored by darker and darker circles as he grew older.

FDR

. . . but not as much as I thought.

NARRATOR

Only a bad case of the measles kept him from running away and enlisting in the Spanish-American War. When he recovered he went to Harvard University where he was generously described as a "faithful scholar." In actuality, he was content with a C or a low B and rarely scored higher.

FDR

My professors simply did not excite me intellectually.

NARRATOR

He took no mathematics, no chemistry, no physics, no psychology and no philosophy.

FDR

That's not quite true. I enrolled in philosophy.

NARRATOR

And . . .

FDR

I dropped it after three weeks . . . I was intensely active in extracurricular affairs and I am sure learned far more from them that were useful to me in later life than I did from my classroom studies. I tried out for football my freshman year . . .

NARRATOR

. . . and was cut from the squad.

FDR

I tried out for the rowing crew . . .

NARRATOR

. . . and was cut. (*Crosses CS*) He did become the librarian for the Fly Club and served on the library committee of the Harvard Union. Most important to Franklin was the *Crimson*, Harvard's student newspaper, a morning daily. He became managing editor in his third year and president of the *Crimson* his fourth year.

FDR

The yearbook reported I had a cameo face, broad shoulders, a musical voice and a Hah-vahd accent. I graduated in 1904 and went on to the Columbia Law School, from which I never graduated, but passed the bar exam in 1907.

NARRATOR

While in law school he married his distant cousin, Anna Eleanor Roosevelt, daughter of President Theodore Roosevelt's brother, Elliot. Franklin's charm, persuasiveness, and genuine interest in people brought him to politics.

FDR

I served two terms as a State Senator and campaigned so loyally for Woodrow Wilson that my efforts were repaid by appointment to Assistant Secretary of the Navy. I served in this important post through World War I.

NARRATOR

But, life was suspended for Franklin, when in 1921, at almost forty years of age, he was stricken with polio.

FDR

In my younger days, I was something of a lady's man. I dressed with style, loved to dance and dated more than was usual in those days. (*FDR and Narrator perform a short dance.*) But, I got married, fathered six beautiful children, had the affair, and then . . . I contracted polio. Perhaps, someone was trying to tell me something. Well, I quit dancing. (*FDR crosses SR to the desk and sits in his wheelchair.*)

NARRATOR

He refused to bow to the prospect of long, infirm years and with the encouragement of his wife and friends and three hard years of rehabilitation, he managed to stand up and get around on crutches and eventually support himself with beautiful and unique canes provided by friends and dignitaries all over the world.

FDR

I spent quite a bit of my time in Warm Springs, Georgia. Mr. George Foster Peabody, a banker and friend told me of the Pine Mountain spring water that flowed into a natural pool, 1,800 gallons every minute, heated in the depths of the rock to a constant temperature of 88 degree's. An old

broken-down resort lay on the property and I was determined to do something with it. Eleanor was not always fond of the area, but I'd keep in touch with my letters.

NARRATOR

Letter to Eleanor Roosevelt, October, 1924, Warm Springs, Georgia:

FDR

Dearest E,

It is just a week since you left, but the time has passed almost without our realizing it, as the life is just the same day after day and there is no variety to give landmarks. The mornings are as you know wholly taken up with the pool and four of the afternoons we have sat out on the lawn or as Roy calls it the "yard. . . ." The legs are really improving a great deal.

NARRATOR

They are not.

FDR

They are.

NARRATOR

You will be paralyzed for life.

FDR

With an attitude like that - yes.

NARRATOR

You must accept the facts.

FDR

Is this letter addressed to you?

NARRATOR

No.

FDR

Dearest E - Sorry for the interruption. The legs are really improving a great deal. There is now no question, that this Warm Springs pool does my legs more good than anything else. Much love, take care of yourself.

Your devoted.

FDR

When I first arrived in Warm Springs word spread and before I knew it, one day, 10 cripples arrived in this desolate ruin of a former resort. Well, something had to be done to help these folks, so, we did and I became known as "Dr. Roosevelt." With Missy's help we would draw rough

anatomical charts on cardboard. We set up an informal clinic with help from my friend, Dr. Johnson as visiting physician. You would howl with glee if you could see the clinic in operation at the side of the pool, and the patients doing various exercises in the water under my leadership, male and females of all ages and weights.

I taught one man how to swim and the rest how to exercise by playing around in the water. One workout method, of my own invention, I labeled "the elevating exercise:" from a sitting float position, you forced both feet to the bottom of the pool, then attempted to stand, buoyed by the warm mineral-laden water. I remember there were two large ladies. One of them had trouble getting both feet down. Well, I would take one large knee and I would force this large knee down, then I would say. 'Have you got it?' "Yes" she panted. "Hold it, hold it" I'd instruct her, grabbing for the other knee. However, before I could get it down below the surface, the first knee would be popping up again. This used to go on for half an hour at a time, but before I left in the spring, I could get both those knees down at the same time. A lot of good has transpired over the years at the hospital which now stands near the pool. I am very proud of that.

Of course, before I could have my pool in Warm Springs, Eleanor had to have her pool in Hyde Park. I gave Eleanor a piece of land about a mile and half east of the house, known as Val-Kill, meaning "Valley Stream" in Dutch. I notified my contractor to accommodate her wishes: (*on the phone*) My misses and some of her female political friends want to build a shack on a stream in the backwoods and want, instead of a beautiful marble bath, to have the stream dug out so as to form an old-fashioned swimmin' hole. Apparently, the girls think that this will get them more closely back to nature, and I foresee that I shall have to put a substantial board fence around the swimmin' hole to keep interested neighbors from seeing how close they can get back to nature when they take the morning plunge. I know your Misses would love it, too--aren't these wives of our funny things?

#### NARRATOR

Franklin's relationship with Eleanor was respectful but not passionate. Eleanor had not even kissed Franklin until they were married. Sara Roosevelt, (Franklin's mother), counseled Eleanor to "do her duty." The evidence suggests she did quite well producing six children between 1906 and 1916: Anna, James, the first Franklin Jr., (who died six months after his birth), Elliot, the second Franklin Jr. and finally, John. But, in 1918, after 13 years of marriage, Eleanor discovered that Franklin was having an affair with Lucy Mercer, Eleanor's personal secretary. Eleanor, a proud woman, volunteered to be divorced. However, Franklin's mother threatened to exclude him from financial support *and* her will, and his political advisors pointed out the devastating possibilities of divorce.

#### FDR

In time, Eleanor became my eyes and legs as she traveled the country and the world. She did a magnificent job. But, work had become almost as addictive as alcohol for Eleanor. Even when she thought she was relaxing, she was working. Small talk horrified her. Even at New Year's when everyone else relaxed with drinks, she would work until 10 minutes of twelve, come in for a round of toasts, and then disappear to her room to work until two or three a.m. Always at the back of her mind were the letters she had to write, the things she had to do. She could be a crashing bore. She was very judgmental even when she tried not to be. She couldn't

take my off-color jokes I loved to tell and she was always correcting me when it came to telling stories.

VOICE-OVER of ELEANOR

That isn't true dear.

FDR

If only she would have eased up. She couldn't understand that I needed relaxation more than anything else in the world. Perhaps that is why I turned to Missy, Marguerite Le Hand. (my personal aide and secretary). We had an exuberant, laughing relationship, full of jokes, silliness and gossip. It's said she was more like a wife to me than Eleanor. I admit my need for female companionship. Lucy Mercer (a beautiful woman and a good listener), Princess Martha, (another beautiful woman and a damn fine sailor) and Missy. You know, nothing is more pleasing to the eye than a good-looking lady, nothing more refreshing to the spirit than the company of one, nothing more flattering to the ego than the affection of one. I suspect if the media of yesteryear was like yours today, my career may have been kaput!

NARRATOR

The newspapers were happy to turn a blind eye to his disability, and over the years they were also willing to turn their attention away from something else -- his love life. An unfaithful president would never survive without the connivance of a compliant press corps, and connive they did -- never mentioning the long-running affair with his wife's social secretary, which clearly went to the heart of his moral character. . .

FDR

Now wait just a minute! I believe the judgment of history will be that my tangled love life never interfered with my sense of duty to this great nation.

NARRATOR

Can we get back to the business at hand?

FDR

At any rate, over the years, Eleanor and I kept in touch.

NARRATOR

Letter to Eleanor Roosevelt regarding their 28th anniversary.

FDR *(to narrator as secretary)*

*(Letter to Eleanor Roosevelt, The White House-March 17, 1933)*

Dearest Babs:

After a fruitless week of thinking and lying awake to find whether you need or want undies, dresses, hats, shoes, sheets, towels, rouge, soup plates, candy, flowers, lamps, laxation pills,

whisky, beer, etchings, or caviar. I GIVE IT UP!! And yet I know you lack some necessity of life-so go to it with my love and many happy returns of the day!

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If this excerpt has been of interest to you and should you or your organization be interested in producing *FDR Speaks*, feel free to contact me at: [steve.taft@uni.edu](mailto:steve.taft@uni.edu)