

FDR AND WORLD WAR TWO

These selections are condensed from two famous speeches by President Franklin D. Roosevelt in the early 1940s.

December 1940: America as the Arsenal of Democracy

Never before since Jamestown and Plymouth Rock has our American civilization been in such danger as now.

The Nazi masters of Germany have made it clear that they intend not only to dominate all life and thought in their own country, but also to enslave the whole of Europe, and then use the resources of Europe to dominate the rest of the world.



Some of our people would like to believe that wars in Europe and in Asia are no concern to us. But if Great Britain goes down, the Axis powers will control the continents of Europe, Asia, Africa, Australia, and the high seas. It is no exaggeration to say that all of us in all the Americas would be living at the point of a gun. Frankly and definitely there is danger ahead – danger against which we must prepare.

The plain facts are that the Nazis have proclaimed, time and again, that all other races are their inferiors and therefore subject to their orders. And most important of all, the vast resources and wealth of this American hemisphere constitute the most tempting loot in all the round world.

The experience of the past two years has proven beyond doubt that no nation can appease [satisfy] the Nazis. We know now that a nation can have peace with the Nazis

only at the price of total surrender.

Some tell you that the Axis powers are going to win anyway, that the United States might just as well throw its influence into the scale of a dictated peace and get the best out of it that we can. They call it a “negotiated peace.” Nonsense.

Such a dictated peace would be no peace at all. It would only lead to the most gigantic armament race and the most devastating trade wars in all history. And in these contests the Americas would offer the only real resistance to the Axis powers. With all their vaunted [boasted] efficiency, with all their parade of pious purpose in this war, there are still in their background the concentration camp and the servants of God in chains.

The history of recent years proves that the shootings and the chains and the concentration camps are not just the transient [temporary] tools but the very altars of modern dictatorships. They may talk of a “new order” in the world, but what they have in mind is only a revival of the oldest and worst tyranny. In that there is no liberty, no religion, no hope.

The people of Europe who are defending themselves do not ask us to do their fighting. They ask us for the implements of war: the planes, the tanks, the guns, the freighters which will enable them to fight for their liberty and our security. We must get these weapons to them so that we and our children will be saved the agony and suffering of war which others have had to endure.

Group Discussion: *Why does FDR believe the U.S. cannot just ignore the war in Europe? What arguments does FDR use to win support for the idea of sending American military equipment to help Great Britain and the other Allies?*

America responded and Congress approved millions of dollars of aid for the Allies. But the December 7, 1941 attack by the Japanese on Pearl Harbor ended any hope that America could avoid joining the fight. A month after the attack, FDR made a report on the war situation.

January 1942: First War Address Before Congress

I am proud to say to you that the spirit of the American people was never higher than it is today. The response of the American people has been instantaneous, and it will be sustained until our security is assured.

Japan's scheme of conquest goes back half a century. It is not merely a policy of seeking living room, but a plan which included the subjugation [conquering] of all the peoples in the Far East and in the islands of the Pacific.

A similar policy of criminal conquest was adopted by Italy. The Fascists first revealed their imperial designs in 1935. Their goal was the domination of all North Africa, Egypt, part of France and the entire Mediterranean world.

But the dreams of empire of the Japanese and Fascist leaders were modest in comparison with the aspirations of Hitler and his Nazis. Their plans called for the ultimate domination of the whole earth. When Hitler organized his Berlin-Rome-Tokyo alliance, all these plans of conquest became a single plan.

Our own objectives [goals] are clear: the objective of smashing the militarism imposed by warlords upon their enslaved peoples; the objective of liberating the subjugated nations; the objective of establishing and securing freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom from want, and freedom from fear everywhere in the world.

We know that modern methods of warfare make it a task not only of shooting and fighting, but an even more urgent one of working and producing. The superiority of the Allies in munitions [weapons] and ships must be overwhelming. We must strain every existing armament producing facility to the utmost. We must convert every available plant and tool to war production.



We are fighting today for security and progress and for peace, not only for ourselves, but for all men; not only for one generation, but for all generations.

Our enemies are guided by a brutal cynicism, by unholy contempt for the human race. We are inspired by a faith which goes back through all the years to the first chapter of the Book of Genesis [in the Bible]: "God created man in His own image."

We on our side are striving to be true to that divine heritage. We are fighting, as our fathers have fought, to uphold the doctrine that all men are equal in the sight of God. Those on the other side are striving to destroy this deep belief and to create a world in their own image, a world of tyranny and cruelty and serfdom.

This is the conflict that day and night now pervades [completely fills] our lives.

Group Discussion: *What does FDR say the three Axis nations want? What does he say are the objectives of the Americans? What does he say it will take to win the war? How does FDR contrast the different values and beliefs of the Allies and the Axis nations?*