# Great American Speeches

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EDITED, WITH INTRODUCTIONS, BY

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for cultivated luxury—standing now for a species of fatty degeneration simply vulgar. . . . The idea of fitness to purpose, harmony between form and use with regard to any of these things, is possessed by very few, and utilized by them as a protest chiefly—a protest against the machine! . . . Artists who feel toward modernity and the machine now as William Morris and Ruskin were justified in feeling then had best distinctly wait and work sociologically where great work may still be done by them. In the field of art activity they will do distinct harm. Already they have wrought much miserable mischief.

If the artist will only open his eyes he will see that the machine he dreads has made it possible to wipe out the mass of meaningless torture to which mankind, in the name of the artistic, has been more or less subjected since time began; for that matter, has made possible a cleanly strength, an ideality and a poetic fire that the art of the world has not yet seen; for the machine, the process now smooths away the necessity for petty structural deceits, soothes this wearisome struggle to make things seem what they are not and can never be; satisfies the simple term of the modern art equation as the ball of clay in the sculptor's hand yields to his desire—comforting forever this realistic, brain-sick masquerade we are wont to suppose art.

William Morris pleaded well for simplicity as the basis of all true art. Let us understand the significance to art of that word—*simplicity*—for it is vital to the art of the machine. . . . Simplicity in art, rightly understood, is a synthetic, positive quality, in which we may see evidence of mind, breadth of scheme, wealth of detail, and withal a sense of completeness found in a tree or a flower. A work may have the delicacies of a rare orchid or the stanch fortitude of the oak, and still be simple. A thing to be simple needs only to be true to itself in organic sense.

THEODORE ROOSEVELT

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# Dealing with the Big Corporations

MUSIC HALL, CINCINNATI, OHIO;
SEPTEMBER 20, 1902

*Active in politics as a Republican from 1880, Theodore Roosevelt (1858–1919) served in the Spanish-American War, leading the Rough Riders in a renowned charge up San Juan Hill in Cuba. He was elected governor of New York in 1898 and vice president in 1900. The following year Roosevelt succeeded President McKinley, who fell victim to an assassin. Reelected as president in 1904, Roosevelt won the 1906 Nobel Peace Prize for helping to end the Russo-Japanese War. In 1912, he again ran for president, as a candidate of the Progressive (Bull Moose) party, but he and the Republican candidate, William Howard Taft, lost to Woodrow Wilson. In an effort to control monopolies and preserve competition, Congress had passed the Sherman (Anti-trust) Act in 1890, and Roosevelt vigorously insisted on the enforcement of this law, often speaking publicly on the need to curtail the power of corporate trusts.*

The whole subject of the trusts is of vital concern to us, because it presents one, and perhaps the most conspicuous, of the many problems forced upon our attention by the tremendous industrial development which has taken place during the last century, a development which is occurring in all civilized countries, notably in our own. There have been many factors responsible for bringing about these changed conditions. Of these, steam and electricity are the chief. . . . Those are the facts. Because of them have resulted the specialization of industries, and the unexampled opportunities offered for the employment of huge amounts of capital, and therefore for the rise in the business world of those masterminds through whom alone it is

possible for such vast amounts of capital to be employed with profit. It matters very little whether we like these new conditions or whether we dislike them, whether we like the creation of these new opportunities or not. Many admirable qualities which were developed in the older, simpler, less progressive life have tended to atrophy under our rather feverish, high-pressure, complex life of today.

But our likes and dislikes have nothing to do with the matter. The new conditions are here. . . . It is foolish to pride ourselves upon our progress and prosperity, upon our commanding position in the international industrial world, and at the same time have nothing but denunciation for the men to whose commanding position we in part owe this very progress and prosperity, this commanding position. . . .

In dealing with the big corporations which we call trusts, we must resolutely purpose to proceed by evolution and not revolution. . . . The evils attendant upon overcapitalization alone are, in my judgment, sufficient to warrant a far closer supervision and control than now exists over the great corporations. Wherever a substantial monopoly can be shown to exist we should certainly try our utmost to devise an expedient by which it can be controlled. . . .

The first thing to remember is that if we are to accomplish any good at all it must be by resolutely keeping in mind the intention to do away with any evils in the conduct of big corporations, while steadfastly refusing to assent to indiscriminate assault upon all forms of corporate capital as such. The line of demarcation we draw must always be on conduct, not upon wealth; our objection to any given corporation must be not that it is big, but that it behaves badly. . . .

Nor can we afford to tolerate any proposal which will strike at the so-called trusts only by striking at the general well-being. We are now enjoying a period of great prosperity. The prosperity is generally diffused through all sections and through all classes. . . . If we are forced to the alternative of choosing either a system under which most of us prosper somewhat, though a



few of us prosper too much, or else a system under which no one prospers enough, of course we will choose the former. If the policy advocated is so revolutionary and destructive as to involve the whole community in the crash of common disaster, it is as certain as anything can be that when the disaster has occurred all efforts to regulate the trusts will cease, and that the one aim will be to restore prosperity. . . .

You must face the fact that only harm will come from a proposition to attack the so-called trusts in a vindictive spirit by measures conceived solely with a desire of hurting them, without regard as to whether or not discrimination should be made between the good and evil in them, and without even any regard as to whether a necessary sequence of the action would be the hurting of other interests. The adoption of such a policy would mean temporary damage to the trusts, because it would mean temporary damage to all of our business interests; but the effect would be only temporary, for exactly as the damage affected all alike, good and bad, so the reaction would affect all alike, good and bad. The necessary supervision and control, in which I firmly believe as the only method of eliminating the real evils of the trusts, must come through wisely and cautiously framed legislation, which shall aim in the first place to give definite control to some sovereign over the great corporations, and which shall be followed, when once this power has been conferred, by a system giving to the government the full knowledge which is the essential for satisfactory action. . . .

Without the adoption of a constitutional amendment, my belief is that a good deal can be done by law. It is difficult to say exactly how much, because experience has taught us that in dealing with these subjects, where the lines dividing the rights and duties of the states and of the nation are in doubt, it has sometimes been difficult for Congress to forecast the action of the courts upon its legislation. Such legislation (whether obtainable now or obtainable only after a constitutional amendment) should provide for a reasonable supervision, the most prominent feature of which at first should be publicity—that is, the

making public, both to the governmental authorities and to the people at large, the essential facts in which the public is concerned. . . .

I wish to repeat with all emphasis that desirable though it is that the nation should have the power I suggest, it is equally desirable that it should be used with wisdom and self-restraint. . . . We need to keep steadily in mind the fact that besides the tangible property in each corporation there lies behind the spirit which brings it success, and in the case of each very successful corporation this is usually the spirit of some one man or set of men. Under exactly similar conditions one corporation will make a stupendous success where another makes a stupendous failure, simply because one is well managed and the other is not.

While making it clear that we do not intend to allow wrongdoing by one of the captains of industry any more than by the humblest private in the industrial ranks, we must also in the interests of all of us avoid cramping a strength which, if beneficently used, will be for the good of all of us. The marvelous prosperity we have been enjoying for the past few years has been due primarily to the high average of honesty, thrift, and business capacity among our people as a whole; but some of it has also been due to the ability of the men who are the industrial leaders of the nation. In securing just and fair dealing by these men let us remember to do them justice in return, and this not only because it is our duty but because it is our interest—not only for their sakes but for ours. We are neither the friend of the rich man as such nor the friend of the poor man as such; we are the friend of the honest man, rich or poor; and we intend that all men, rich and poor alike, shall obey the law alike and receive its protection alike.

THEODORE ROOSEVELT

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# Preservation of the Forests

LELAND STANFORD JUNIOR UNIVERSITY,
PALO ALTO, CALIFORNIA; MAY 12, 1903

*Theodore Roosevelt communicated directly with the American people at every possible opportunity. In 1902 and 1903, for example, the president spoke publicly at least once a week—and sometimes twice a day—in cities and towns from Massachusetts to California. Roosevelt continually addressed subjects of concern to himself and the country—Cuba, the Philippines, the large corporations, good citizenship, forest preservation. His speeches were different in each location, and he always conveyed important philosophical ideas and explained government policies in a friendly, clear, and conversational manner. Roosevelt's speech at Leland Stanford Junior University in California reflects his position as a pioneer conservationist.*

I want today, here in California, to make a special appeal to all of you, and to California as a whole, for work along a certain line—the line of preserving your great natural advantages alike from the standpoint of use and from the standpoint of beauty. If the students of this institution have not by the mere fact of their surroundings learned to appreciate beauty, then the fault is in you and not in the surroundings. Here in California you have some of the great wonders of the world. You have a singularly beautiful landscape, singularly beautiful and singularly majestic scenery, and it should certainly be your aim to try to preserve for those who are to come after you that beauty, to try to keep unmarred that majesty.

Closely entwined with keeping unmarred the beauty of your scenery, your great natural attractions, is the question of making use of, not for the moment merely, but for future time, of

in my body I shall continue in that spirit. I shall continue to work for the great causes to which I have been dedicated throughout my years as a congressman, a senator, vice president, and president, the cause of peace—not just for America but among all nations—prosperity, justice, and opportunity for all of our people.

There is one cause above all to which I have been devoted and to which I shall always be devoted for as long as I live.

When I first took the oath of office as president five and a half years ago, I made this sacred commitment: to consecrate my office, my energies, and all the wisdom I can summon to the cause of peace among nations.

As a result of these efforts, I am confident that the world is a safer place today, not only for the people of America but for the people of all nations, and that all of our children have a better chance than before of living in peace rather than dying in war.

This, more than anything, is what I hoped to achieve when I sought the presidency. This, more than anything, is what I hope will be my legacy to you, to our country, as I leave the presidency.

To have served in this office is to have felt a very personal sense of kinship with each and every American. In leaving it, I do so with this prayer: May God's grace be with you in all the days ahead.

RONALD REAGAN

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# First Inaugural Address

CAPITOL, WASHINGTON, D.C.; JANUARY 20, 1981

*Ronald Reagan (1911– ), who had sought his party's nomination for president in 1976, ran as the Republican candidate in 1980, thwarting the reelection bid of Jimmy Carter. Reagan's deficits—his age and reputation as an extreme conservative—were not considered significant by an electorate weary of double-digit inflation and the nightmare of Americans held hostage in Iran for the past year. On the day Reagan was sworn in as president, the Iranian government released the hostages. With this dramatic and symbolic event as a backdrop, Reagan unveiled a path of revolutionary economic policies guided by the principle that "government is not the solution to our problem; government is the problem." President Reagan's success as "the great communicator" derived from his projection of genial optimism and strength of conviction, as well as from speeches filled with anecdotes, simple concepts, and patriotic effusion.*

To a few of us here today this is a solemn and most momentous occasion, and yet in the history of our nation it is a commonplace occurrence. The orderly transfer of authority as called for in the Constitution routinely takes place, as it has for almost two centuries, and few of us stop to think how unique we really are. In the eyes of many in the world, this every-four-year-ceremony we accept as normal is nothing less than a miracle. . . .

The business of our nation goes forward. These United States are confronted with an economic affliction of great proportions. We suffer from the longest and one of the worst sustained inflations in our national history. It distorts our economic decisions, penalizes thrift, and crushes the struggling