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America and World War I

Calvin Coolidge



OVERVIEW

Calvin Coolidge rose to fame as the governor of Massachusetts, and later served as president of the United States. In 1919, in the aftermath of the war, Governor Coolidge spoke the following words about the Americans who fought for their country in World War I.

GUIDED READING As you read, consider the following questions:

- Whom was Coolidge honoring in this speech?
 - According to Coolidge, what is the importance of public welfare?
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Works which endure come from the soul of the people. The mighty in their pride walk alone to destruction. The humble walk hand in hand with providence to immortality. Their works survive.

When the people of the colonies were defending their liberties against the might of kings, they chose their banner from the design set in the firmament through all eternity. The flags of great empires of that day have gone, but the stars and stripes remain. It pictures a vision of a people whose eyes are turned to the rising dawn. It represents of the hope of a father for his posterity. It was never flaunted for the glory of royalty, but to be born under it is to be the child of a king, and to establish a home under it is to be the founder of a royal house. Alone of all flags, it expresses the sovereignty of the people which endures when all else passes away. Speaking with their voice, it has the sanctity of revelations. He who lives under it and disloyal to it is a traitor to the human race everywhere. What could be saved if the flag of the American nation were to perish?

America has many glories. The last one that she would wish to surrender is the glory of the men who have served her in war. While such devotion lives, the nation is secure. Whatever dangers may threaten from within or without, she can view them calmly. Turning to her veterans, she can say: "These are our defenders. They are invincible. In them is our safety."

After more than five years of the bitterest war in human experience, the last great stronghold of force surrendering to the demands of America and her allies agreed to cast aside the sword and live under the law. America decided that the path of the Mayflower should not be closed. She decided to sail the seas. She decided to sail not under an Edict of Potsdam, cramped in narrow lands, seeking safety in unarmed merchant men painted in fantastic hues as the badge of an infinite servitude; but she decided to sail under the ancient Declaration of Independence, choosing her own course, maintaining security

by the guns of her ships of the LINE, flying at the mast the stars and stripes forever, the emblem of a militant liberty.

With peace has come prosperity. Burdens have been great, but the strength to bear them has been greater. The condition of those who toil is higher, better, more secure than in all the ages past. Out of the darkness of a great conflict has appeared the vision of a nearer, clearer than ever before, the life on earth and less under the deadening restraint of course more and more under the vitalizing influence of reason. Moral power has been triumphing over physical power. Education will tend to bring reason and experience of the past into the solution of the problems of the future. We must look to service and not selfishness, for service is the foundation of our progress. The greatest lesson that we have to learn is to seek ever the public welfare, to build up, to maintain our American heritage.

Source: Library of Congress, American Memory. "American Leaders Speak: Recordings from World War I and the 1920 Election, 1918-1920" [Document posted on the World Wide Web]. Retrieved May 5, 1999 from the World Wide Web: <http://memory.loc.gov/>