

A call to arms: roosevelts war message



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YOUR FULL YOUR A Call to Arms: Roosevelt's War Message In his famous speech to the United States' Congress on December 8, 1941, President Franklin D. Roosevelt gave a call to arms that remains a significant example of leadership under extreme duress. Unknowingly, perhaps, Roosevelt's inspiration would have ramifications beyond his era, even to the present day.

The document itself is the text of the speech that the President gave after the Japanese bombing of the American military base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii.

1 Its accuracy is easily verified by congressional record and historical scholarship, as well as radio recordings of the speech.

In terms of the historical context, this speech was delivered to an anxious legislature as a declaration of war the day after the bombing. America was shocked to be the recipient of such treatment, with many of its citizens-and the national press-erroneously ascribing to the notions that Japan was inherently inferior, America was naturally superior, and the country could rely upon a certain "security from Axis attack." 2 The loss of innocence was pervasive in the psyche of the people. It was in the midst of this national shock and that Roosevelt delivered his impassioned address to a frightened nation which needed assurance, but also a reason to rise up and seek revenge.

The American President's outrage is detailed within the text of the speech itself. He posits a situation wherein the United States considered itself to be at peace with Japan and was currently in conversation with that government regarding the maintenance of peace in the Pacific region. He then moves on to state that the nation will always remember the act perpetrated against it, and proceeds to outline the scope of the armed response that will lead the

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country to victory. Roosevelt certainly succeeded in motivating the slumbering Americans to action. Indeed, as one author states, "[t]he words 'Pearl Harbor' quickly became one of the most emotive icons in American culture..." 3

The significance of this speech would be hard to understate. In relatively few words, Roosevelt galvanized the American people into a steadfast resolve that would turn an isolationistic, somewhat backwards country into a world super power. In the words of another author, "[t]hen a sleeping giant began to struggle to its feet. The miracle was about to begin." 4

A presidential speech broadcast to an entire nation as he declares war upon another country embodies the very essence of historical consequence. In light of the subsequent developments in America, from the expansion of the military-industrial complex to the economic boom that would ensue for decades following the war, it could be argued that this was a defining moment in the history of not only the United States, but the world in the 21st Century. The industrial might of America was sparked and, once burning, the flame shone bright and even flickers still. While it would be overly simplistic to credit Franklin Roosevelt with the re-emergence of a nation on the international stage, one would be hard-pressed to find a more salient moment in history.

Works Cited

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