

## AMERICA FOR AMERICANS

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### Afternoon Speech of Theodore Roosevelt at St. Louis, May 31, 1916

**H**ERE in St. Louis I wish to speak briefly on the subject of Americanism. I stand for straight Americanism unconditioned and unqualified, and I stand against every form of hyphenated Americanism. I do not speak of the hyphen when it is employed as a mere matter of convenience, although personally I like to avoid its use even in such manner. I speak of and condemn its use whenever it represents an effort to form political parties along racial lines or to bring pressure to bear on parties and politicians, not for American purposes, but in the interest of some group of voters of a certain national origin, or of the country from which they or their fathers came.

Americanism is not a matter of creed, birthplace or national descent, but of the soul and of the spirit. If the American has the right stuff in him, I care not a snap of my fingers whether he is Jew or Gentile, Catholic or Protestant. I care not a snap of my fingers whether his ancestors came over in the Mayflower, or whether he was born, or his parents were born, in Germany, Ireland, France, England, Scandinavia, Russia or Italy or any other country. All I ask of the immigrant is that he shall be physically and intellectually fit, of sound character, and eager in good faith to become an American citizen. If the immigrant is of the right kind I am for him, and if the native American is of the wrong kind I am against him. But unless the immigrant becomes in good faith an American and nothing else, then he is out of place in this country, and the sooner he leaves it the better.

#### Let Us Be Americans, Nothing Else.

We in this country form a new nation, akin to, but different from, each of the nations of Europe. As Alexander Hamilton put it, "Let us be neither Greeks nor Trojans, but Americans." We are false to this country if we rank ourselves as "German-Americans" or "English-Americans," "Irish-Americans" or "French-Americans."

Our duty is to the United States. This duty should constrain us in the first place to treat the other nations primarily according to the way such treatment serves American interests; and in the second place so far as possible to treat other nations in such manner as serves the interests of mankind at large. Every nation acts sometimes well and sometimes ill. Therefore we should stand for or against any nation accordingly as its behavior tells for good or for evil in the particular crisis with which we have actually to deal. We should be friendly to all nations, and in any crisis we should judge each nation by its conduct in that crisis. We should condemn the misconduct of any nation, we should oppose its encroachments upon our rights with equal vigor, whether it be Germany, England, France, Russia or any other power, *according to what it actually does on the given occasion with which we have to deal.*

So much for our treatment of other nations. Now for our own citizens. We represent many different race strains. Our ancestors came from many different Old World nationalities. It will spell ruin to this nation if these nationalities remain separated from one another instead of being assimilated to the new and larger American life.

The children and children's children of all of us have to live here in this land together. Our children's children will intermarry, one with another, your children's children, friends, and mine. They will be the citizens of one country. Even if they wished, they could not remain citizens of foreign countries. The attempt to keep them with a half citizenship, with a divided loyalty, split between devotion to the land in which they were born and in which their children are to dwell, and the land from which their fathers came, will merely mean that they fail to remain citizens of the old-world land and yet do not get the benefit of being citizens of the new-world land. The effort to keep our citizenship divided against itself by the use of the hyphen and along the lines of national origin is certain to breed a spirit of bitterness and prejudice and dislike between great bodies of our citizens. If some citizens band together as German-Americans or Irish-Americans, then after a while others are certain to band together as English-Americans or Scandinavian-Americans and every such banding together, every attempt to make for political purposes a German-American alliance or an Irish-American alliance or an English-American alliance or a Scandinavian-American alliance, means down at bottom an effort against the interest of straight-out American citizenship, an effort to bring into our nation

the bitter old-world rivalries and jealousies and hatreds. What I have been striving for a year and three-quarters to do is to protest against the up-growth of this utterly un-American spirit, to protest against the upgrowth of a spirit which means, if successful, division and impotence in our national life, the breaking up of our unity as a nation, the severance of our citizenship along the bitter lines of old-world antipathy. We cannot afford to have our children and our children's children grow up excepting as Americans pure and simple, Americans and nothing else.

### **The Result of Divided Allegiance.**

If any of our people born here go back to the land from which their fathers came, they find themselves inevitably looked upon as foreigners. The American of English descent who goes to England finds himself looked upon and treated, as he ought to be, as an outsider, a Yankee. His ways of thought are different from the ways of thought of the people of the land. The American of German descent who goes to Germany is not looked upon as a German. He is looked upon and treated as a foreigner, as an American; and his ways of thought are different from the ways of thought of the people of the land. He has gone to a land where no divided allegiance would for one moment be permitted, where, very properly, whoever dwells in the land is held to a sole and undivided allegiance to the German flag; and the American of German descent who goes there either remains absolutely an outsider and an alien, an American, or else he has to become absolutely German. If either the American of English descent or the American of German descent or the American of any other descent tries to remain with a dual allegiance, with a divided citizenship, he merely ceases to become an American without thereby becoming a German or an Englishman or anything else. He becomes a man without a country who has forfeited the right to be stirred by the feeling of patriotic devotion to any land, or to have a special and peculiar kinship with any people. The American birthright is the birthright of all of us; and it is a shame and a disgrace for any man to barter it for so poor a mess of pottage as is implied in that kind of hyphenated citizenship which means that the individual tries to be a half-way citizen of two lands and forfeits the right to be a whole citizen of any land.

When our nation was formed in the stress of the Revolution, it was under the lead of men of many different race strains; English, Dutch, German, Irish, French. But they were all Americans and



nothing else. Their loyalty to this country was whole-hearted and undivided, and they sought to serve only the United States and not any of the countries from which their ancestors had come.

### **All Nothing But Americans.**

The same rule applies to-day. Throughout my life my closest personal and political friends have included men who were themselves born in, or whose ancestors were born in, Germany, Ireland or Scandinavia, just as they included men who were of old Colonial American stock. The man who, for the ten years when I was Governor, Vice-President and President, was closest to me, was a man whose father and mother were born in Germany—and his father served in the Civil War, by the way. He and I looked at all problems, national and international, from the standpoint, and only from the standpoint, of our common Americanism. The man who, when I was Police Commissioner in New York, was closest to me was born in Denmark. He is dead now. His name was Jacob Riis. He was one of the best Americans I have ever known. Again and again I have held up his career as a model for our American boys to follow. One of the best Americans I know, a man who has done better work for the navy than any one else during the last two years, is by birth a Swede. During my scientific work in Africa and South America, at the head of American scientific expeditions, the American members of my party included the man with whom I have been most closely associated in zoological work, and who was joint author with me of the zoological book of which I am most proud. His parents were born in Germany; his kinfolk fought in the Union Army. Another of my American companions, an Iowa man, was born of an Irish father who fought in the Civil War. Another's father was born in Bohemia, being a Czech, and also fought in the Civil War. Yet another, an Indiana boy, had a German father and a French mother. But we were all of us Americans, and nothing but Americans.

In my cabinet a descendant of one of Blucher's colonels sat side by side with a descendant of one of Napoleon's brothers. Another member of the cabinet had been born in Germany, and yet another member in Scotland. The parents of another member were born in Ireland. They were all of them Americans, and nothing else. If they had severally designated themselves, and had acted as, one a "German-American," another a "French-American," another an "Irish-American," another a "British-American," each condition-

ing his loyalty to the United States by a hyphen, not one of them would have remained an hour in my cabinet. The greatest work done by any American in recent years was the work done by General Goethals in the Panama Canal Zone. His parents were born in Holland. But he is no more a "Dutch-American" than I am. He is an American. Among the other Army men who have been closely associated with me, Major General Barry is of Irish parentage, whereas Major General Leonard Wood's forbears came over in the Mayflower three centuries ago. But General Barry is not an "Irish-American." Nor is General Wood an "English-American." They are Americans. When the battle fleet went around the world, two of the best men aboard it were Admirals Wainwright and Schroeder. Wainwright was of old Colonial English descent, and Schroeder's parents were born in Germany. But the one was not an "English-American" or the other a "German-American." They were Americans—and incidentally, both of them were as gallant and accomplished officers and as thorough seamen as ever commanded a squadron of warships under the American flag.

#### Must Not Divide Allegiance.

As another example I take an enlisted man. Throughout my term as President the doorkeeper in the Executive office, the man to whom the safety of the President and the intimate workings of the government were in a peculiar sense entrusted, was an ex-soldier of the regular army. He was by birth a German. At the outbreak of the Civil War his regiment was stationed in Texas. Some of the officers joined the Confederacy. Others were imprisoned. The enlisted men were left alone. A body of them, including my friend, marched north through the Indian country, without any officers, reached the Union lines, rejoined the army, and fought through the war. How would it be possible to find better Americans? My old friend's children and grandchildren live in this country beside my children and grandchildren. It is their country; and they all have an equal claim on it, and owe to it an equal duty. He and I fought for and under the same flag. That flag floats over our children's children. It is their flag and their only flag. It would be a wicked and a cruel thing to try to sunder them from one another and to make any of them divide their allegiance by a half-loyalty to any other flag.

It would be possible to man our entire administration from

President down with men of German blood, and of such uncompromising Americanism that every good American could follow them with whole-hearted loyalty. I would vote to seat in the President's chair any American of German, Irish, Scandinavian or other parentage, of whatever creed, as against any man whose ancestors came over in the Mayflower or settled on the banks of the James three centuries ago, if I thought the first man was better fitted for the position than the second man. I hold it an outrage and a violation of every principle of true Americanism to discriminate against such a man because of the land from which he or his parents came, or because of his creed. But I hold it no less an outrage for him to act in our domestic politics not as an American, but as an American with a qualification; as an American who has some un-American interest to serve, some foreign country to serve, because of his ancestry. The man who thus acts is the hyphenated American.

### **Not An Abstract Question.**

This is not a mere abstract question which I am discussing. At this very moment it is blazoned forth in the public press that branches of the "German-American Alliance," so-called, in different parts of the country, are attempting to coerce timid and unscrupulous politicians by threatening to vote against them, or by actually voting against them, when the German-American Alliance regards their action as unsatisfactory from the standpoint, not of the United States, but of Germany. These branches of the Alliance openly take the ground that they intend to shape American politics in the interests, not of the United States, but of Germany. The German-American Alliance of Pennsylvania, for instance, as reported in the public press, states that it intends to show "the leaders of the national conventions that they have to deal with a United German-American vote." Such a statement represents moral treason to the Republic. Branches of the German-American Alliance in other parts of the country have used practically the same language. The Alliance has put forth no program affecting America. The program on which it wishes American citizens to vote is one affecting Germany, and only Germany. I do not in the least object to it because it denounces me. It has denounced Mr. Wilson almost as often and almost as severely. One of its favorite forms of denunciation includes Mr. Wilson, Mr. Root and myself, as equally to be opposed in the interest of Germany.



### **Moral Treason.**

It is moral treason to the United States for any of its citizens to act and to seek to make their governmental representatives act, not with reference to the interests of the United States, but of some foreign power. The German-American Alliance is, in practice, an anti-American alliance. Any such political organization, whether German-American, Irish-American or English-American, is not a healthy element of the body politic. Any body of our citizens have a perfect right to oppose any man because of a difference of judgment concerning American problems provided the judgment is based purely on American needs and ideals; but it has no right to deal with American public servants, or American public men on the basis of the interests of some foreign power. The men who so act are disloyal to the United States, and I would say this just as quickly of men trying to serve England or France as I say it of men trying to serve Germany. I would condemn the American citizen who acted as "English-American" just as strongly as I condemn the American citizen who acts as a "German-American." If France had subjugated Belgium I would condemn her just as strongly as I have condemned Germany. If British warcraft had sunk German passenger vessels and taken the lives of hundreds of American men, women and children, as German submarines did in the case of the Lusitania, the Arabic and other vessels, I would have condemned any "English-American" who excused the act as unhesitatingly as I have condemned and now condemn the "German-Americans" who now defend or apologize for the actions of the German submarines. I would condemn as strongly the actions of any of our people who sought to make this country subservient to England as I now condemn those who seek to make it subservient to Germany. Such men are not merely un-American; they are anti-American to the core, and unfit to be citizens of this Republic.

I believe that the men thus acting not only do not represent, but scandalously misrepresent the great majority of real Americans of German origin. I believe that the great mass of Americans of German origin are now, as they have always been, among the most patriotic and loyal citizens in this country.

### **A Record of Honor and Glory.**

Here in this city I could repeat name after name of men of German birth who as American citizens have had distinguished

records of intense loyalty to the Union, and of eminent national service as soldiers and statesmen and above all as patriots. In the Civil War a much larger proportion of the citizens of immediate German origin, than of the citizens of old Colonial native stock, were loyal to the Union. This State of Missouri, like Maryland and Kentucky, owes the fact that it stayed in the Union primarily to the German element in its citizenship; and across the river in Illinois, the debt owed by lovers of the Union to the German element was almost as great. These men knew no divided, no half-hearted loyalty. Carl Schurz was a Major General in the Army, a United States Senator, and a member of the President's cabinet. He was no more fervently devoted to the cause of the Union and freedom in the Civil War, than to the fight against political corruption and against the spoils system in our political life when peace succeeded war. By a statue at Forest Park you of this city have commemorated the services of Major General Franz Sigel, who here entered the United States service. So did the after time Major General Osterhaus, whose son served under me as Admiral while I was President, and whose grandson, as gallant and efficient a young naval officer as there was in the service, served at one time as my aide. From St. Louis there marched into the Union Army no less than nine regiments, all of which had colonels born in Germany. This is a great record, and it is typical of the record made throughout the Union by the men of German birth or parentage. But it is not a matter of pride merely to Americans of German descent. Every American worth calling such thrills at the thought of it. It is a record of honor and glory for my children's children just as much as for yours. It is part of the common heritage of pride bequeathed to all who dwell in this great land of ours, to all whose single-hearted loyalty is given to its flag that floats over all of us.

In my own regiment in Cuba, among the many gallant men who served under me, were men of German birth or parentage. They served side by side with men of Irish birth or parentage, and with men of old native American stock; and they all served with equal gallantry and with equal devotion to the flag. Two of my captains were killed at the very outset. One was of old American stock, a man whose forbears from father to son had served in the United States Army for five generations. The other was the son of an Irish immigrant who had himself fought in Meagher's Brigade in the Civil War. Another of my captains was



born in Germany. Yet another, who fought under me against Spain, was of almost pure Spanish descent. My orderly was the grandson of a German "forty-eighter." One of my best sergeants was born in Norway. Another was born in Italy; and yet another was of Polish parentage. But each of these men was an American and nothing else. They all acted together as Americans. I would have driven from my regiment any man who tried to discriminate among them because of a difference in creed, or because of the different lands in which they or their forefathers were born. Their honor was my honor. We had one country. We bore proud allegiance to one flag.

### **America For Americans.**

The other day in Detroit, when I spoke for universal service based on universal training, a woman in the gallery called out to me, while she waved an American flag: "I have two sons. I offer them if the need comes." I answered her: "If every mother in our country would make the same offer, there would be no need for any mother to send her sons to war." Now, from the press of the following day I saw that her name was Mrs. Anna Neuer, wife of Mr. D. M. Neuer. Her husband, judging from the name, must of course be of German ancestry. Her father fought on the Union side in the Civil War. Her two sons are not German-Americans any more than they are English-Americans or any other type of hyphenated Americans. They are Americans. That is an American family. Mrs. Neuer represents the type of woman that we like to think of as typically American. All I am asking of our people is that they shall be Americans exactly in the sense that the Neuer family is American.

The salvation of our people lies in having a nationalized and unified America, ready for the tremendous tasks of both war and peace. I appeal to all our citizens no matter from what land their forefathers came to keep this ever in mind, and to shun with scorn and contempt the sinister intriguers and mischief makers who would seek to divide them along lines of creed, of birthplace, or of national origin. I ask them to remember that there is but one safe motto for all Americans, no matter whether they were born here or abroad, no matter from what land their ancestors came; and that is the simple and loyal motto, AMERICA FOR AMERICANS.

# THE PROGRESSIVE PARTY

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## ITS RECORD

FROM JANUARY TO JULY, 1916

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INCLUDING

STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES  
OF THEODORE ROOSEVELT

COMPILED BY THE  
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE PROGRESSIVE  
NATIONAL COMMITTEE