

**NATIONAL STRENGTH  
AND INTERNATIONAL  
DUTY**

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National Strength and International Duty by Theodore Roosevelt

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**THEODORE ROOSEVELT**

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## NATIONAL STRENGTH AND INTERNATIONAL DUTY

Before dealing with the proper subject matter of the lecture, I wish to take up—and brush aside—the objection to truth-telling glibly urged by some extremely partisan papers, and by some very silly persons, who condemn all criticism of our shortcomings on the pretence that “criticism tends to weaken the Government and is therefore disloyal.” The well meaning persons who are misled by this shallow pretence would do well to ponder the fact that this is the position which, in reference to me, has been heatedly upheld by the Hearst papers, and by German-American papers like the *Staats Zeitung*, which in this war have served Germany by justify-



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ing her actions, by enthusiastically hailing all peace proposals which would leave her mistress of the international situation, and by assailing our Allies, especially England. The pro-Germans clamor for an indecisive peace, covertly back Germany or oppose our Allies, or seek to interfere with all proposals to make us genuinely efficient in the war, and by their utterances to rouse and increase discontent with the war; and then they curry favor with the foolish, at the same time that they continue to serve their real purposes, by denouncing those who seek to make us more effective in the war by honestly endeavoring to eliminate the things that make us ineffective. The fact that the pro-Germans, with ostentatious sham loyalty, denounce honest criticism of our faults ought to convince all honest persons who are also intelligent that such criticism at this time is vitally necessary. Such criti-

cism, to be of use, must be made in the living present, and not after the event, and only of the dead past. Let these persons read Washington's unsparing criticisms of, and to, the Continental Congress; let them read Lincoln's merciless criticisms of Pierce and Buchanan; and they will understand that honest and truthful and fearless criticism of grave shortcomings may be absolutely indispensable in order to secure triumph in a grave crisis.

Any man who preaches to others should rightly be required to show that he has himself, according to his power, acted upon the doctrines he preaches and that he has not lightly changed them or lightly adopted them. Moreover, any public man who criticizes shortcomings in the present should rightly be required to show that he has criticized similar shortcomings in the past, and that he has himself when in

power endeavored to do that which he now holds that others ought to do or to have done. For this reason I make the following quotations from my writings in the past.

In the life of Thomas Hart Benton, written thirty-one years ago, I put my position as follows:

“After all this ruffianism was really not a whit worse in its effect upon the national character than was the case with certain of the Universal Peace and Non-Resistance developments in the Northeastern States; in fact, it was more healthy. A class of professional non-combatants is as hurtful to the real healthy growth of a nation as is a class of fire-eaters; for a weakness or folly is nationally as bad as a vice or worse and in the long run a [professional pacifist] may be quite as undesirable a citizen as is a duelist. No man who is not willing to bear arms and to fight for his rights can give a good reason why he should be entitled to the privilege of living in a free community.”