

**"LEST WE
FORGET"**

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"Lest We Forget" by David Starr Jordan

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DAVID STARR JORDAN

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"LEST WE FORGET"

AN ADDRESS DELIVERED BEFORE THE GRADUATING CLASS OF 1898
LELAND STANFORD JR. UNIVERSITY
ON
MAY 25, 1898

BY DAVID STARR JORDAN
President of the University

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PREFATORY NOTE.

The present address was delivered before the graduating class of Leland Stanford, Jr. University in connection with the granting of degrees, on May 25, 1898. It is published in the present form through the kindly interest of Mr. John J. Valentine, of San Francisco. It is here reprinted as delivered with a few slight verbal changes only, although the movement of events has shifted the perspective of some matters under discussion.

I may add one further word. It is a fundamental tenet of democracy that "government must derive its just powers from the consent of the governed." For the time being, government may have another justification, namely, that it is good government, and being good—just, economical and dignified—it may acquire in time the consent of the governed. The good government of careless and lawless races is the foundation and the justification of British imperialism. Imperialism is a difficult art, acquired by long practice, and through the experience of many failures. The secret of England's success lies in the lesson of respect for law, a lesson America in her reaction of national independence has half forgotten. To teach respect for law is Great Britain's civic mission. To teach respect for the individual man has been the mission of America.

It is a common saying in these days that on whatever shores the Stars and Stripes has been raised, it will never be hauled down. This saying would be more worthy of respect if coupled with another, namely that wherever the American flag may fly it will bring good government, respect for man, and respect for law. To reach this, we must turn over a new leaf. Our record thus far in colonial matters has been one of waste and neglect. Spain lost her colonies because she treated them much as we have treated our own colony of Alaska. "Compulsory Imperialism," we are told, the extension of civilization under the lead of happy chance and "Manifest Destiny," is the next stage in the development of the United States. Probably this is true, but, if so, we must not forget that dominion has its duties as well as its glories, and of these the duties are most numerous as well as most insistent. We must take lessons in respect for law from the only nation (save thrifty Holland) whose foreign possessions have been other than a source of weakness and corruption. The loss of her colonies may mark the civil and moral awakening of Spain. Let us trust that the same event may not bring moral and political decay to the nation which, most unwillingly, inherits Spain's bankrupt assets.

DAVID STARR JORDAN.

Palo Alto, Santa Clara County, Cal.,
August 10, 1898.

“LEST WE FORGET.”

MEMBERS OF THE GRADUATING CLASS OF 1898:

As educated men and women, in your hands lies the future of the State. It is for you and such as you to work out the problems of democracy. This is my justification in speaking to you of the present crisis. For a great world crisis is on us, and this year of 1898 may mark one of the three great epochs in our history.

Twice before in our national life have we stood in the presence of a great crisis. Twice before have we come to the parting of the ways, and twice has our choice been controlled by wise counsel.

The first crisis followed the War of the Revolution. Its question was this: What relation shall the emancipated colonies bear to one another? The answer was the American Constitution, the federation of self-governing and united states.

The second crisis came through the growth of slavery. The union of the states “could not endure, half slave, half free.” The emancipation proclamation of Abraham Lincoln marked our decision that the Union should endure; and that all that made for division should be swept away.

The third great crisis is on us now. The war with Spain is only a part of it. The question is not: Can we capture Manila, Havana, Porto Rico or the Canaries? It is not what we can take or what we can hold. The American navy and the American army can accomplish all we ask of them with time and patience.

Battles are fought to-day through engineering and technical skill, not through physical dash. The great cannon speaks the language of science, and individual courage is helpless before it. The standing of our naval officers in matters of engineering is beyond question. There are a hundred nameless lieutenants in our warships who, if opportunity offered, could write their names beside those of Grenville and Nelson and Farragut and Dewey. The glory of Manila is not dim beside that of Mobile or Trafalgar. The cool strength and soberness of Yankee courage, added to the power of naval engineering, could meet any foe on earth on equal terms, and here the terms are not equal. Personal fearlessness our adversaries possess, and that is all they have. That we have, too, in like measure. Everything else is ours. We train our guns against the empty shell of a mediæval monarchy, broken, distracted, corrupt.

The war with Spain marks in itself no crisis. The end is seen from the beginning. It was known to Spain as clearly as to us. But her government had no recourse. They had come to the end of diplomacy, and could only die fighting. "To die game" is an old habit of the Spaniard. "Whatever else the war may do," says the Spanish diplomat, with pathetic honesty, "it can only bring ruin to Spain."

It is too late for us now to ask how we got into the war. Was it inevitable? Was it wise? Was it righteous? We need not ask these questions, because the answers will not help us. We may have our doubts as to one or all of these, but all doubts we must keep to ourselves. We are in the midst of battle, and must fight to the end. The "rough-riders" are in the saddle. "What though the soldier knew some one had blundered?" The swifter, fiercer, more glorious our attacks, the sooner and more lasting the peace. There is no possible justification for the war unless we are strong enough and swift enough to bring it to a speedy end. If America is to be the

Knight-errant of the Nations she must be pure of heart and swift of foot, every inch a knight.

The crisis comes when the war is over. What then? Our question is not what we shall do with Cuba, Porto Rico and the Philippines. It is what these prizes will do to us. Can we let go of them in honor or in safety? If not, what if we hold them? What will be the reflex effect of great victories, suddenly realized strength, the patronizing applause, the ill-concealed envy of great nations, the conquest of strange territories, the raising of our flag beyond the seas? All this is new to us. It is un-American; it is contrary to our traditions; it is delicious; it is intoxicating.

For this is the fact before us. We have come to our manhood among the nations of the earth. What shall we do about it? The war once finished, shall we go back to our farms and factories, to our squabbles over tariffs and coinage, our petty trading in peanuts and post-offices? Or shall our country turn away from these things and stand forth once for all a great naval power, our vessels in every sea, our influence felt over all the earth? Shall we be the plain United States again, or shall we be another England, fearless even of our own great mother, second to her only in age and prestige?

The minor results of war are matters of little moment in comparison. Let us look at a few of them as we pass. Most of them are not results at all. The glow of battle simply shows old facts in new relation.

The war has stirred the fires of patriotism, we say. Certainly, but they were already there, else they could not be stirred. I doubt if there is more love of country with us to-day than there was a year ago. Real love of country is not easily moved. Its guarantee is its permanence. Love of adventure, love of fight, these are soon kindled. It is these to which the battle spirit appeals. Love of adventure we may not despise. It is the precious heritage of new races; it is the basis of personal courage; but it is not patriotism; it is push. Love of