

"Readjustment" Speech by Warren G. Harding, 1920

My countrymen, there isn't anything the matter with the world's civilization except that humanity is viewing it through a vision impaired in a cataclysmal war.

Poise has been disturbed, and nerves have been racked, and fever has rendered men irrational.

Sometimes there have been draughts upon the dangerous cup of barbarity.

Men have wandered far from safe paths, but the human procession still marches in the right direction.

Here in the United States we feel the reflex, rather than the hurting wound itself but we still think straight; and we mean to act straight; we mean to hold firmly to all that was ours when war involved us and seek the higher attainments which are the only compensations that so supreme a tragedy may give mankind.

America's present need is not heroics, but healing; not nostrums, but normalcy; not revolution, but restoration; not agitation, but adjustment; not surgery, but serenity; not the dramatic, but the dispassionate; not experiment, but equipoise; not submergence in internationality but sustainment in triumphant nationality.

It's one thing to battle successfully against the world's domination by a military autocracy because the infinite God never intended such a program; but it's quite another thing to revise human nature and suspend the fundamental laws of life and all of life's requirements.

The world calls for peace. American demands peace, formal as well as actual, and means to have it so we may set our own house in order.

We challenge the proposal that an armed autocrat should dominate the world, and we choose for ourselves the claim that the representative democracy which made us what we are.

This republic has its ample task if we put an end to false economics which lure humanity to utter chaos.

Ours will be the commanding example of world leadership today.

If we can prove a representative popular government under which the citizenship speaks what it may do for the government and country rather than what the country may do for individuals, we shall do more to make democracy safe for the world than all armed conflict ever recorded.

The world needs to be reminded that all human ills are not curable by legislation, and that quantity of statutory enactments and excess of government offer no substitute for quality of citizenship.

The problems of maintained civilization are not to be solved by a transfer of responsibility from citizenship to government and no eminent page in history was ever drafted to the standards of mediocrity.

Nor, no government worthy of the name which is directed by influence on the one hand or moved by intimidation on the other.

My best judgement of America's need is to steady down, to get squarely on our feet, to make sure of the right path.

Let's get out of the fevered delirium of war with the hallucination that all the money in the world is to be made in the madness of war and the wildness of its aftermath.

Let us stop to consider that tranquility at home is more precious than peace abroad and that both our good fortune and our eminence are dependent on the normal Readjustment forward stride of all the American people.

We want to go on, secure and unafraid, holding fast to the American inheritance, and confident of the supreme American fulfillment.