

p. 5 Words can ease the soul just as knowledge sustains the mind. During trying times, a leader can summon them to inspire faith and quell fear by pointing to intention. It is fitting then to begin by drawing on words spoken by each man upon taking office, which serve to frame the crisis he confronted while portending the attributes that would most define him as president.

p. 132 Since the stock market's precipitous crash on October 29, 1929, the country's gross national product had tumbled by half, with world grain prices at a three-hundred-year low. More than ten thousand banks had folded since the Depression began, with thousands of businesses, unable to secure loans and credit, closing their doors in their wake. Twelve million people, a quarter of the workforce, were unemployed according to government statistics, though the actual number could have been twice that high. In Toledo, Ohio, unemployment stood at 80 percent. Other industrial cities suffered similar levels of joblessness. The farm states throughout the Great Plains were just as devastated, the soil dried up and useless from sustained drought, causing a migration of inhabitants westward for the idle promise of something better. Homelessness, despair, and misery suffused the nation, with few invulnerable to a turn of fate as conditions worsened. In the summer of 1932, when the economist John Maynard Keynes was asked if anything in history compared

to the Great Depression, he answered, "Yes, it was called the Dark Ages, and it lasted for four hundred years." As Roosevelt would later put it in a Fireside Chat, "the country was dying by inches."

p. 153 If the court-packing fiasco humbled Roosevelt, it didn't last long. In an effort to rid Congress of ten conservative Southern Democrats who had stood in the way of progress on the New Deal, Roosevelt meddled in the Democratic midterm primaries in 1938, openly supporting the more liberal opponents who were challenging them. Once again, his plan backfired. Only one of the ten members failed to win the party's primary; the other nine returned to Congress in 1939, none too pleased with the man in the Oval Office and less inclined than ever to support his agenda. They, along with other Southern Democrats, would form an alliance with Northern Republicans, further impeding Roosevelt's legislative aims. If Roosevelt's failed purge wasn't trouble enough, the midterms would yield the Republicans seventy-five seats in the House and seven in the Senate, marking the first time since 1930 the Democrats had lost ground to the GOP.

p. 204 In September of 1962, all hell broke loose at the University of Mississippi in Oxford, where James Meredith, a lone black man with a court order ensuring his admission, attempted to enroll. Once again, Kennedy's response was to send in the National Guard in

an attempt to maintain order, if not to promote systemic change. But by the time he gave the order, the clash with white segregationists had claimed two lives and left many more – including 160 federal marshals – injured. Martin Luther King Jr. spoke for many when he claimed that he was convinced that Kennedy “has the understanding and the political skills [to address civil rights] but so far I’m afraid the moral passion is missing.” By all indications, it was.

p. 246 *The dogmas of the quiet past are inadequate to the stormy present. The occasion is piled high with difficulty and we must rise with the occasion. As our case is new, so we must think anew and act anew. We must disenthrall ourselves, and then we shall save our country.*