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# The Sprit of Reform and Introductory Comments

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### **“The Spirit of Reform” and Introductory Comments**

**“The Spirit of Reform” is a speech written by Dr. Robert Kendall impersonating Carl Schurz in 1884. Schurz emigrated to the U.S. from Germany in 1852, served as a Civil War general, advised Abraham Lincoln and five other U.S. presidents, and served as U.S. Secretary of the Interior, Ambassador to Spain, and as a U.S. Senator. He was a well-known journalist.**

**Impersonation speaking was developed by Dr. Robert Kendall who taught in the Communication Studies Department at St. Cloud State University in Minnesota between 1971 and 1992. Dr. Kendall described impersonation speaking in this way: “Each student chooses an historical character, does independent research on that person, writes a speech, locating it in a particular year of that person’s adult life, making it interesting and relevant to a [contemporary] audience, assumes that character through costume, attitude, worldview, and mannerisms, and delivers the speech to an open-invitation public.”**

It is my pleasure to introduce Mr. Carl Schurz, born in Germany in 1829, an immigrant to this country in 1852, an advisor to Abraham Lincoln and five other presidents, Ambassador to Spain, Civil War general, Secretary of the Interior, United States Senator, and renowned journalist. He is speaking in the year 1884. Ladies and gentlemen: Mr. Carl Schurz, speaking on "The Spirit of Reform."

Before I introduce Carl Schurz as a speaker, I should give you some background on this method of presentation. What you will see and hear this afternoon is a combination of public speaking and theatre: someone costumed as a historical character and speaking to an audience as that character — what has variously been called "Impersonation Speaking" and "First Person Monologues."

Dr. Kendall has been involved in the making of this kind of presentation for ~~over~~ <sup>nearly 30</sup> years — first portraying a number of Jesus' disciples, and ~~more~~ <sup>more</sup> recently as Carl Schurz and ~~other~~ <sup>other historical</sup> ~~characters~~ <sup>personages</sup>. In 1982, he <sup>first</sup> developed and taught a course at St. Cloud State University called "Impersonation Speaking," thought to be the first of its kind in the country, <sup>teaching it for ten years until his retirement</sup> with such characters <sup>were</sup> coming to life as Thomas Jefferson, Catherine the Great of Russia, James Garfield, Calamity Jane, Amelia Earhart, Hans Christian Andersen, Frederick Douglass, and Henry Thoreau. Among other benefits of this approach to public speaking is "it's an effective way to study history as it comes alive before your eyes."

Now I should like to introduce Mr. Carl Schurz, born in Germany in 1829, an immigrant to this country in 1852, an advisor to Lincoln and five other presidents, Ambassador to Spain, Civil War general, Secretary of the Interior, United States Senator, and journalist extraordinaire. He is speaking in the year 1884. Ladies and gentlemen: Mr. Carl Schurz, speaking on "The Spirit of Reform."

## INTRODUCTION FOR THE 2:30--2:55 (Kendall) PRESENTATION

Last spring a new course was offered on this campus, in all probability not offered on any other campus in the nation, called "Impersonation Speaking" --offered through the Speech Communication department. (For your information, it will be offered next, this coming winter quarter.)

Each student (professor, too, in this case) chooses an historical character, does independent research on that person, writes a speech, locating it in a particular year of that person's adult life, making it interesting and relevant to a 1984 audience, assumes that character through costume, attitude, worldview, and mannerisms, and delivers the speech to an open-invitation public.

This afternoon you will meet and hear two short speeches developed during last spring's class: Carl Schurz, advisor to Abraham Lincoln and seven other presidents, civil war general, Secretary of the Interior, United States Senator, influential journalist, and spokesman for the German-American immigrants---speaking in 1884; and Mary Jane Hickok, better known as Calamity Jane, a tough frontierswoman, about whom legends have been made---speaking in 1882.

# THE SPIRIT OF REFORM

by Carl Schurz

*that great American  
Naval hero,*

Sixty-eight years ago, on April 30, 1816, to be exact, Stephen Decatur, proposed a toast at Norfolk, Virginia, with these words: "Our country! In her intercourse with foreign nations may she always be in the right; but our country, right or wrong."

*That's* forty years ago, in 1844, again in April, John ~~Franklin~~  
*the octagonal Senator from Kentucky,* Crittenden, spoke these words in support of war with Mexico, "I hope to find my country in the right; however, I will stand by her, right or wrong."

Only ten years ago, in 1874, in February this time, ~~then~~ Senator Matthew Carpenter of Wisconsin, in his argument supporting these United States in selling firearms to France, accused me in the Senate chamber, *on the very floor of the U.S. Senate,* as I had spoken against this international travesty, *accused me* of being false to the sentiment, "My country, right or wrong, but my country."

*I want to tell you this afternoon:* Senator Carpenter was correct. I have laid my life on the line for two nations, the nation of my birth and the nation of my choice, and I have never *I repeat, never* believed in "my country, right or wrong." As I replied to Senator Carpenter ten years ago, so I affirm before you today: "My country, right or wrong; if right, to be kept right; if wrong, to be set right!"

When I came to this country in 1852, at the tender age of 23, I saw in this people a spirit not known in any other nation on earth. Though at that time I did not fully understand the complexity of that spirit, I did recognize a kinship with it. That spirit is one and the same with the spirit that drove Professor Kinkel and me, in 1848, to

rise up in arms against the King of Prussia and to demand a constitutional republic! That same spirit was in every battle we fought, encouraging us against overwhelming odds, and though our cause was lost in Germany, that spirit was alive in the United States! And when I landed in New York as a newly married young German immigrant, I knew that same spirit was here, and that I would ~~soon be able to~~ <sup>have the opportunity to continue</sup> ~~to espouse~~ <sup>what I began in Germany, encouraging the development of that spirit.</sup>

What is that spirit, you ask? It is the spirit that drives us to affirm the worth and the dignity of every human being. It is the spirit that drives us to demand fair and honest government---a government responsive to the people it governs. It is the spirit that not only puts right above wrong, but puts right above party loyalty and even above patriotism---indeed, it is the only true spirit of patriotism. That spirit I discovered as a student of Gottfried Kinkel at the University of Bonn---that spirit which saw me through our ill-fated revolution in Germany---that spirit which accompanied me into exile in Zurich, in Paris, in London---that spirit which led me back to Germany as a fugitive to help Professor Kinkel escape from prison and to safety in England---that same spirit greeted me as I landed in New York. <sup>What is that spirit?</sup> It is the spirit of continual reform <sup>let me say that again...</sup>---as we human beings struggle to make this nation and this world a better place in which to live. May that spirit never be lost!

During this last month, I have been speaking throughout the middle west on behalf of Grover Cleveland for president. This is a new experience for me, as it marks the first time I am supporting a Democrat for the highest office in the land. However, I have little choice, because the spirit of reform demands the defeat of James G. Blaine, <sup>the Republican candidate,</sup> Never, in the history of this nation, has the office of

president been more vulnerable to the threat of moral decay. I will continue to travel the rails from the Atlantic Ocean to the far flung Indian Territories, to as many of these 38 states as my resources will take me, giving speeches both in English and in German, campaigning for honesty in government, which Blaine cannot provide with his blemished public record which those infamous Mulligan Letters so vividly describe. Grover Cleveland, <sup>the governor of New York,</sup> on the other hand, though a Democrat, is a proven leader whose ideas of honest, intelligent, and efficient administration are remarkably clear and correct---Grover Cleveland is likely to become the representative of courageous conscience in the administration of public affairs. He is the man we need as president of these United States!

I know, some of you have heard that vicious rumor, which probably finds its origin in the mind of James G. Blaine, that Gov. Cleveland as a very young man became indiscreetly involved with a dipsomaniac widow by whom he is said to have had an illegitimate child. When we Mugwumps first heard this, a mood of despondancy quickly overcame us, as this scandalous revelation would obviously destroy Cleveland's candidacy, put Blaine in the White House, and damage the cause of American reform---if it were true. A gentleman from Chicago, in our company that evening, whose name I have temporarily forgotten, brought us out of our depression with these words, which I convey to you and recommend for your serious consideration: "From what I hear I gather than Mr. Cleveland has shown high character and great capacity in public office but that in private life his conduct has been open to question; while, on the other hand, Mr. Blaine in public life has been weak and dishonest while he seems to have been an admirable husband and father. The



conclusion that I draw from these facts is that we should elect Mr. Cleveland to the public office which he is so admirably qualified to fill and remand Mr. Blaine to he private life which he is so eminantly qualified to adorn." That makes good sense to me---and I believe it will to the American electorate as well.

I believe that Gov. Cleveland, when he becomes president, will continue the spirit of reform begun in this country with the Republican Party of Abraham Lincoln, brought to maturity during the administration of the esteemed Rutherford B. Hayes, guided wisely by President Chester A. Arthur, and which is temporarily absent from that same Republican Party today with James G. Blaine as its standard bearer. Gov. Cleveland, soon to be President Cleveland, will carry as his banner our banner---the colors of the spirit of reform.

I am proud to have been part of this American Reform Movement, and to have had my German-American brethren right beside me. From my first associations with Abraham Lincoln, as a young delegate from Wisconsin to the Republican National Convention in 1860, and our common goal of ridding this country of that despicable evil, human slavery; from my responsibilities to this nation as a reluctant Ambassador to Spain; from my participation as a general in those crucial battles of the civil war; from my attempts at reconciliation after that war ended; from my term of service in the United States Senate elected by the people of Missouri, and my battles with Ulysses S. Grant and his corrupt and expansionist policies; from my years as Secretary of the Interior in President Hayes' cabinet, and the problems with more left-over corruption <sup>from the Grant administration, particularly the</sup> in the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the <sup>trials & tribulations over the</sup> establishment of Civil Service standards; from my time as editor of the New York Evening Post ; and even to this day as an

*throughout all these experiences,*

independent writer---I have expounded the virtues of reform with every bit of energy I could muster.

Oh, it has not been without its pain. It has not been without struggle. Reformers create enemies. And many of those enemies are in high places. Senator Conkling of New York was a formidable opponent. For years he opposed what I believed to be one of the most important issues on the American political scene: reform of the spoils system---political contributions begetting political office regardless of merit. What I started promoting as a young advisor to Abraham Lincoln as early as 1864, a civil service merit system, finally came into being <sup>just last year</sup> with the Pendleton Act on January 16, 1883---nineteen long years <sup>after I introduced the idea!</sup> ~~before~~ Many debates and bloodied careers later!

In 1877, only a few months after General Custer's defeat at Little Big Horn, I, as Secretary of the Interior, was thrust headlong into a conflict which put every debating power I had to the test, and even tested the very spirit of reform. A joint congressional committee was named to examine in detail the probable consequences of transferring the Indians to the sole authority of the War Department, the theory being that, since they could never be civilized, they ought to be confined under military supervision until, through the beneficent operation of Nature, they <sup>would</sup> become extinct! We in the Interior Department won that battle, but it took months of radical action, removing prestigious men from places of power and appointing honest ones to take their places---by no means a popular decision---but a necessary one. I gained lifelong enemies through that action.

Even before that, in 1869, as a young Senator from Missouri

and an unrepentant liberal reformer, I quickly learned the consequences of standing firm for the right against great odds. President Grant, a Republican at that, had endorsed the annexation of Santo Domingo---to make it a United States territory. I opposed it on a number of grounds, but primarily because it was an expression of expansionism, of militant imperialism to which I shall forever and unalteringly be opposed. General Grant ordered an American rear admiral to take belligerent measures against Hayti, a foreign and friendly power in order to sustain Baez, the Dominican revolutionist! And for what purpose?--to create more United States territory! Because of my opposition to this crassest of imperialist maneuvers, President Grant proceeded to read me out of his Republican Party, the party of Abraham Lincoln, the party I helped found. And even now, in 1884, I am hearing faint rumblings of more expansionism: Cuba, <sup>yes, Cuba,</sup> is in the sights of the militant imperialists, and even such far flung governments as the Hawaiian Islands and the Philipines! Where will it end? It must end with the oceans! Interference in the tropics and the governments of neighboring nations is an act we cannot afford if we are to maintain moral influence and moral leadership as an enlightened civilization.

The Spirit of Reform must live on in this country! My country, right or wrong; if right to be kept right; if wrong, to be set right!