

Winston S. Churchill: Address at Harrow School: Never Give In

2:20 min

Winston Churchill was speaking to students at his alma mater in October, 1941 – after one of the darker periods of World War Two. His words are still relevant in our time, with the War on Terror.

...When I was here ten months ago last time, we Britons were quite alone, desperately alone, and we had been so for five or six months. ... We had the unmeasured menace of the enemy and their air attack still beating upon us, and you yourselves had had experience of this attack; and I expect you are beginning to feel impatient that there has been this long lull with nothing particular turning up!

But we must learn to be equally good at what is short and sharp and what is long and tough. It is generally said that the British are often better at the last. They do not expect to move from crisis to crisis; they do not always expect that each day will bring up some noble chance of war; but when they very slowly make up their minds that the thing has to be done and the job put through and finished, then, even if it takes months - if it takes years - they do it...

You cannot tell from appearances how things will go. Sometimes imagination makes things out far worse than they are; yet without imagination not much can be done. Those people who are imaginative see many more dangers than perhaps exist; certainly many more than will happen; but then they must also pray to be given that extra courage to carry this far-reaching imagination... But for everyone, surely, what we have gone through in this period ... of ten months this is the lesson: never give in, never give in, never, never, never-in nothing, great or small, large or petty - never give in except to convictions of honor and good sense. Never yield to force; never yield to the apparently overwhelming might of the enemy. We stood all alone a year ago, and to many countries it seemed that our account was closed, we were finished. All this tradition of ours, our songs, our School history, this part of the history of this country, were gone and finished and liquidated.

Very different is the mood today.... There was no flinching and no thought of giving in then; and by what seemed almost a miracle to those outside these Islands, though we ourselves never doubted it, we now find ourselves in a position where I say that we can be sure that we have only to persevere to conquer....

Do not let us speak of darker days: let us speak rather of sterner days. These are not dark days; these are great days - the greatest days our country has ever lived; and we must all thank God that we have been allowed, each of us according to our stations, to play a part in making these days memorable in the history of our race.

Note – In addition to having an American mother, Mr. Churchill was made an American citizen by act of Congress in 1963 – so he is legally an American speaker.