

Our Country, Right or Wrong



July 2003 addition

This quote was added to this site in July 2002. The context for it; plus information about Carl Schurz, was provided by Jim Clark after visiting this page on Hill Connections. The addition below is included with gratitude.

Schurz' speech is surprisingly relevant today:

“The American people...should be specially careful not to permit themselves to be influenced in their decision by high-sounding phrases of indefinite meaning, by vague generalities, or by seductive catchwords appealing to unreasoning pride and reckless ambition. More than ever true patriotism now demands the exercise of the soberest possible discernment.

I am far from denying that this republic, as one of the great powers of the world has its responsibilities. But what is it responsible for? Is it to be held, or to hold itself, responsible for the correction of all wrongs done by strong nations to weak ones, or by powerful oppressors

to helpless populations? Is it, in other words, responsible for the general dispensation of righteousness throughout the world? Neither do I deny that this republic has a ‘mission’; and I am willing to accept, what we are frequently told, that this mission consists in ‘furthering the progress of civilization.’ But does this mean that wherever obstacles to the progress of civilization appear, this republic should at once step in to remove those obstacles by means of force, if friendly persuasion do not avail? Every sober-minded person will admit that under so tremendous a task any earthly power, however great, would soon break down.”

(From Senator Carl Schurz' January 17, 1872 speech to the U.S. Senate)

Carl Schurz (1829-1906) was a journalist, statesman and soldier who became a leader of German-Americans in the nineteenth century. He was involved in the German revolutionary movement and immigrated to the United States in 1852. Schurz became active in Republican politics and supported Lincoln and the antislavery movement. Lincoln appointed him U.S. minister to Spain (1861-62). Schurz returned to serve in the Civil War as a brigadier general of volunteers, and then major general of the XI Corps. He was elected to the U.S. Senate from Missouri (1869-71; 1871-75). President Rutherford Hayes appointed him to be Secretary of the Interior (1877-81). Schurz also had an active career as a journalist in the German-language press and was a contributor to “Harper’s Weekly” (1892-98) and an editor of the New York Evening Post (1881-84).