

*William McKinley delivered this speech\* to a contingent of Civil War veterans who visited him at his Canton home as part of McKinley's "front-porch" campaign during the 1896 presidential race. Please note: We transcribed the text that follows as closely as possible from a reporter's typed transcript. The "cheers and applause" notations, which were written in pencil, are approximate*

My Comrades and Fellow-citizens:

I respond to your call with special gratification. Nothing gives me greater pleasure than to meet at my home my comrades in the Civil War. The ties of fraternity and friendship grow stronger and dearer as the years recede, and the old guard one, by one, is called home. Your presence revives many patriotic memories; it recalls many stirring and glorious events. How vividly they rise before us, and what an inspiration for the right they always are! To have been a faithful soldier of the Union is no less a source of joy in your advancing years and infirmities, than a precious legacy for family and friends. It blesses he who gives and enriches he who receives. It is a record of patriotism and service in the severest trials of our history. *[Applause]* We all know something of what that war meant and what it cost; what sacrifice it exacted and for what a holy cause the sacrifice was freely given. Treasure illimitable, suffering indescribable and death beyond previous record or comparison. By far the larger number of our old comrades of the Grand Army are sleeping in "their silent tents" beyond the River; but though death has decimated our ranks it is a consoling reflection that more than a million of our comrades still survive. It is a gratifying thought that those who served their country best in war have always been among our best and truest citizens in peace. It is in the living present, however, and its duties and responsibilities that every old soldier is now as always most deeply interested. *[Applause]* Each new engagement of the war brought its own new trials and perils to face and bravely overcome. The devotion to discipline and duty which distinguished them then has kept the old soldiers true and steady ever since. *[Applause]* They have not faltered and will not falter now. There has been no time since they laid down their arms when we had greater need for patriotic men than now, and the response to the crisis of the hour will come from all sections of our common country. *[Great applause]*

We have reached a point in our history when all men who love their country must unite to defeat by their ballots the forces which now assault the country's honor. The war has been over thirty-two years and as a result we have a reunited country, a Union stronger and freer, a civilization higher and nobler, a freedom brighter and more enduring, and a flag dearer and more sacred than ever before – and all of them safe from any enemy because the men who a third of a century ago fought in deadly conflict, unite in their masterful might to oppose any enemy who would assail either freedom or Union or flag. *[Cheers]* The struggle which is upon us involving National good faith and honor will enlist their united and earnest services until those who are arrayed against the public faith shall be routed and dispersed. The bitterness of the war belongs to the past. Its glories are the common heritage of us all. What was won in that great conflict belongs just as sacredly to those who lost as to those who triumphed.

You meet to-day not as soldiers but as citizens interested now in maintaining the credit of the country you served so well and in restoring prosperity and better times to our goodly heritage. The future is the sacred trust of us all, South as well as North. Honesty like patriotism can neither be bound by state nor sectional lines. *[Great applause]* Financial dishonor is the threatened danger now, and good men will obliterate old lines of party in a united effort to uphold American honor. This you have always done, and you must strive to keep the Union worthy of the brave men who sacrificed and died for it.

I will be glad, my comrades, to meet you all personally. *[Loud cheering and applause]*

***\* Used by permission of The McKinley Museum, Canton, Ohio.***