

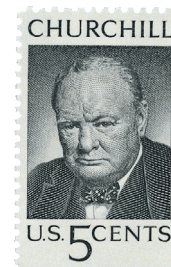
This Day in History... March 5, 1946

Churchill's Iron Curtain Speech

On March 5, 1946, Winston Churchill gave one of his most famous speeches, in which he used the phrase, "iron curtain" to describe the communist boundary in Europe.

As much of the world celebrated the fall of the Nazi regime in 1945, Churchill grew concerned about the Soviet Union's growing influence and resolved that we must "impose upon Russia the will of the United States and the British Empire." That July, the Conservatives suffered a major defeat in the general election, ending Churchill's term as prime minister.

Churchill then served as the leader of the opposition, a role that still made him a major influence in world affairs. He visited the United States in 1946 and was invited to deliver a speech at Westminster College in Fulton, Missouri, on March 5.



This stamp was issued in Fulton, Missouri, the site of this speech.



From the Great Americans Series

Joined on stage by President Harry Truman, Churchill began his "Sinews of Peace" speech by thanking and praising the United States. He then promoted his belief that the US and Britain develop an even closer relationship to help police the postwar world. Churchill then issued a warning against the Soviet Union's expansion and compared it to Adolph Hitler's rise before World War II. He went on to warn that with the Soviets there was "nothing which they admire so much as strength, and there is nothing for which they have less respect than for military weakness."

Also during this speech Churchill is believed to have coined the phrase "iron curtain" when he said, "From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic an "Iron Curtain" has descended across the continent. Behind that line lie all the capitals of the ancient states of Central and Eastern Europe. Warsaw, Berlin, Prague, Vienna, Budapest, Belgrade, Bucharest, and Sofia; all these famous cities and the populations around them lie in what I must call the Soviet sphere, and all are subject, in one form or another, not only to Soviet influence but to a very high and in some cases increasing measure of control from Moscow."

Truman and the other people present applauded Churchill's speech and soon the phrase "iron curtain" became widespread. However, some US leaders opposed his idea of a closer relationship, as they believed Britain's power was declining and didn't want to have to support them. Additionally, Joseph Stalin called the speech "war mongering" and Churchill's points about the "English-speaking world" as imperialist racism. Though the Russians had been Britain's and America's allies against Hitler just a year prior, they were now preparing for the Cold War. In fact, some Russian historians point to this speech as the start of the war.

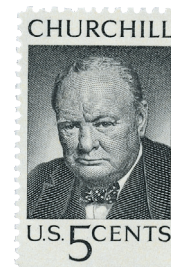
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