
Franklin D. Roosevelt — “The Great Communicator”

The Master Speech Files, 1898, 1910-1945

Series 1: Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Political Ascension

File No. 121

1920 May 1

Washington, D.C.

Speech of F.D.R. before Associated Harvard
Clubs, May 1, 1920, at the Willard Hotel, Washing-
ton, D.C.

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VOYAGES OF DISCOVERY

This is the year of the MAYFLOWER. It will be celebrated in Provincetown and in Plymouth and in Massachusetts, in the other States of our Union and in England and Holland as well. It will give added zest to the genealogists and to thousands of real and would-be "descendants." Countless people will be glad that the Pilgrims came to our shores and will recount the deeds and daring of the pioneers.

But will we not, perhaps, be over-emphasizing the celebration ~~and splendid acts already done and a part of history~~ *itself and the merely historical aspect* while we, at the same time, pass over with scanty heed the spirit and the purpose which lay behind the pioneers of our nation? For four hundred years our continent has been blest with Pilgrims, men and women in each generation who have been willing and ready to seek new fields, and this has been true almost equally of ~~all~~ ^{every} parts of the country. Motives, purposes, have varied; sometimes it has been the spirit of the seekers for religious liberty; sometimes of those who have sought political freedom; sometimes the spirit of commercial gain; ~~not much less have~~ ^{Edmund Spenser} the

spirit of pure adventure. But whatever the immediate object these pioneers as individuals have sought to gain, back of it all has lain the desire for change. It may even have been called a spirit of dissatisfaction and unrest, if you like, which has been latent in the human race from the first man. It was because the Pilgrims and the Puritans and the Cavaliers were not satisfied with what they had at home that led them to the New World. It was because the people of the seaboard were not satisfied with conditions at home that they entered upon the great winning of the West. But, in a ~~better~~ *truer* sense, it should not be called dissatisfaction, but, rather, the human wish for better things, for greater opportunities, for larger room to grow, for the easier attainment of ideals.

~~result of the adventure.~~

Into the very beginnings of the country came Harvard itself, born as a part of the vision of greatness which the pioneers had always before their eyes,--Harvard, the first college of the Anglo-Saxon New World. During the years and the centuries which ensued, the spirit of the pioneers spread over the land, extending, at last, to the setting sun of the Pacific; and during all those generations it was that same spirit of seeking -- seeking for new and better things which made us the United States of today. It was not only in the physical absorption of the continent -- in the discovery and settling of the great West, in the building of homesteads and roads and railways and factories throughout the land that the spirit displayed itself: it was just as greatly in the fields of progressive thought that the germ matured. The pact signed in the cabin of the good ship MAYFLOWER bore fruit in the evolution of our whole system of free religion and representative government; in the war for independence and in the Constitution of the United States.

Has Harvard played its part during all these years?

Is Harvard today in step with the continuing march onward? As I read the history of education in the United States in these four centuries that have gone by since Plymouth was founded, I cannot help feeling that the colleges of the country, and among them Harvard, and indeed, the whole system of keeping the people of the nation up to high mental qualifications, fell behind other developments during a long period of years; for until about two generations ago there was, after all, very little difference between the Harvard, say, of 1850, and the Harvard of 1750, or even of the Harvard of 1650. We have but to look over the old catalogues to see that the numbers in attendance in our universities and colleges had varied but little, and that the subjects of instruction had altered but little during all these years. But, in the meantime, the political and economic and social, ^{and scientific} thought had gone forward by leaps and bounds, and I suppose it is a fair statement to make that the Harvard of today has changed more greatly in the past seventy years than the Harvard of 1850 changed from that of 1636. That is, in part, an

answer to whether we are keeping pace, and yet it is an answer only in part, for it brings up the other side. Even if the Harvard of today has kept pace, are we looking forward to further changes, further progress, or are we content to sit back, satisfied with our work?

During the past year or two we have had visits from an unusually large number of distinguished foreigners, worthy representatives of the nations associated with us in the great war. They have traveled extensively in our country, and among those with whom I have talked, one impression of our nation seems to stand out. That is the thought of the relationship of the people of the United States to the physical vastness of the nation. These men seem to have been greatly impressed with the fact that we are all one people in basic thought and principle and that, not merely in language but in fundamental principle, the shades of difference between the East and the West, the North and the South, are almost negligible. Almost instinctively they compare our situation with the complexities of races and ideals on the European continent, and, perhaps with that comparison in mind, shake their heads in wondering whether this homogeneous condition can endure. They are inclined, I think, to seize upon incidents and local conditions to which we pay but little heed; to prophesy the growth of dissensions and differences between the geographical section of the future United States. They point to the obvious economic differences between

the manufacturing districts of the North and the agricultural districts of the South; to the self-satisfaction and pride of certain sections as against any other sections of the country; to the building up in some States of great populations extracted in large part from particular centers of the Old World, such as the Scandinavian ascendancy in the Northwest. They use as an illustration ^{the conditions which have called forth} our own present campaign for Americanization.

And yet only one of these men with whom I have talked has laid his finger on what, to me, is the greatest danger which we face. He said to me, "You Americans are safe for all time if you will but know your own country; if you will but travel and keep on traveling, so that you may have an understanding of yourselves; for if people understand they will never come to blows." I was reminded when he said this of an incident to which I was a witness in the White House in about 1905. Some important piece of legislation involving the development of our national resources had been defeated in Congress, largely because of sectional narrowness and antagonism. President Roosevelt, who had done what he could to save the bill, was thoroughly upset by its defeat, and bringing his fist

down on the desk exclaimed, as he had perhaps exclaimed in other cases before, "I only wish that I could be President and Congress too for just five minutes, for I would put through legislation making it a necessary qualification for every candidate for the House of Representatives and the United States Senate that he should certify that he had visited every State of the Union and had taken at least one trip outside the confines of the United States."

History, of course, shows that sectionalism, or at least a lack of the national point of view and the mental grasp of what these forty-eight States really are, has been a deterrent factor in our well-being from the earliest days of the Republic. Quite aside from the episode of slavery and of the Civil War, we know that far too many public questions have been ultimately decided from the local viewpoint. We know, too, that even today vast sums are voted, vast undertakings commenced, by the genial method best described as "political trading." It is not, perhaps, as open or as flagrant as it was a generation ago, but we know that it still exists.

And so it is clear that every effort that can be made by us as individuals or by us collectively to foster this spirit of national understanding will be a distinct step in the elimination of the danger which so many foreigners see before us.

I like to think that today Harvard has come into its own as a true national university. We know that its development into a true university has moved on with mighty strides during our generation. In the great branches of learning now taught within Harvard's gates, and in the very geographical distribution of the thousands in the academic and professional schools, Harvard has been made national. We, in the Associated Harvard Clubs throughout the land, have done our share to attain this end. We have had, I think, a little at least of the spirit of the pioneers, but again we come to the question, "Shall we stop here?"

In two ways at least our efforts must be put forth with even greater vigor. The first of these calls for an effort on the graduates of Harvard throughout the country to make known the true Harvard in the communities in which they live. Perhaps some of us are over-anxious to emphasize the Harvard College as distinguished from the even greater University. I am certain that many of us, whose association has been that of the undergraduate with the College, know too little and care too little about the other great schools whose growth in the past generation has far transcended even that of the undergraduate body, and it is a fault of many of us, also, that we have had to some degree a lurking suggestion in the back of our heads that the men in the Law School, in the School of Business Administration, in the Medical School, in the Scientific School and in the many other distinctive branches of study are not really Harvard men. The time arrives even now when the graduates of the College are outnumbered by the graduates of the professional and other schools, and the tendency is towards a further increase in the ranks of the latter. This, then, is a plea for a greater recognition of these brethren as Harvard men.

Through them the nation can with greater facility be made to understand all that Harvard represents -- that its interest extends to every part of the country, to every activity, to every new thought. I was interested the other day by reading in the Bulletin of a little example of the catholicity of Harvard. An old gentleman from the West, I think, a man not a graduate of Harvard, died and left in his will a substantial bequest to us to be used in research work especially on the subject of eugenics. It does not take long for us to adopt things that are new. I suppose within a few months President Lowell will announce that a new course has been established to investigate the latest advices from the Ouija board. I am not afraid of Harvard radicalism. I am not afraid even of occasional professors who make occasional radical statements before Civic Forums. Luckily, we still have the ability to use the antidote of laughter.

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