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**Franklin D. Roosevelt — “The Great Communicator”**  
**The Master Speech Files, 1898, 1910-1945**

**Series 1: Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Political Ascension**

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**File No. 315**

**1929 March 14**

**Message to Harvard Class of 1929**

March 14, 1929.

TO THE MEMBERS OF THE CLASS OF 1929:

(Harvard)

This is not just a message from the OLDEST LIVING GRADUATE to point out to the graduating class a set of rules for your life work and to wish you prosperity and happiness as graduates of Harvard University. It is, rather, to express to you the thought that you of 1929 are not essentially different in any way from us of 1904.

I have no doubt that most of you regard us, who are celebrating our twenty-fifth anniversary, as people who have passed the meridian of life and, if we are lucky, a happy old age to look forward to, for that is the way, I am certain, that I felt in June, 1904, about the class of 1879.

"Believe it or not" I want to asser to you Seniors that it is a strange but undoubted fact that the overwhelming majority of us twenty-five year ancients feel very little older than we did in the year 1904, and I am even willing to state that some of us feel a deal younger.

Certainly, whatever may be the cause, many people are growing old with grace, and with a fine spirit of youth, in this day and generation. Perhaps the finest example is that of that splendid son of Harvard, Mr. Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes of the United States Supreme Court. I wish that every undergraduate might know him and visualize his splendid spirit of youth.

You are entering a period which, in all probability, will be the most interesting in all history. Life is changing more rapidly, year by year, and I am inclined to believe that these changes will be even greater during the coming generation than they have been since I was in college. You will have a definite part in the making of these changes, and I am confident that in you Harvard will be well represented <sup>as</sup> as she has been during the nearly three hundred years of her history.

May I add a personal plea to the Class of 1929. We have long suffered throughout the nation from the disinclination of educated men to take part in public affairs. This has resulted in part from a tendency to sneer at a certain type of so-called politician, and in part from a lack of definite human interest in questions of government. Too often the

tendency is to let government, both local and state and national, take its own course just so long as it does not interfere with the business, convenience, or pleasure of the individual. I do not mean for a moment that taking an interest in public service is a life task or a profession. It is rather an avocation which should be entered into by every man as a part, great or small, of his daily life.

There is a feeling today, on the part of many of our citizens, that much the easiest way out of our political questions will be to find some amiable, able, economically sound Mussolini to act as a complete dictator and administrator for all governmental functions. But it is worth while to give passing thought to the earlier days of our history during which our ancestors set up the first successful republican form of representative government. Its creation and subsequent development, on wise lines, was due to the personal, active interest taken by a large proportion of the population.

Harvard is building up today, as it has during most of its past, a fine spirit of independent thought, and a willingness to break away from mob psychology. May you carry on that independence! You

may turn out to be wrong but no one will blame you if your individuality is honest and your purpose high. As you scatter through the world remember, too, that as a component part of the great body of Harvard graduates you cannot get lost. The thoughts and the hopes of your own comrades and friends and, indeed, of all other Harvard men, will follow you.

[March 14, 1929]

## TWENTY FIVE YEARS

I have wondered what ~~the~~ <sup>the</sup> emotion ~~which~~ is uppermost in the minds of those of us who return to Harvard after graduation a quarter of a century ago.

Physically the changes are great: ~~we have~~ <sup>are living</sup> ~~we~~ <sup>we</sup> with our wives and children, in a series of great dormitories dedicated to the use of our Freshman sons; we look across the River to the ~~series of~~ beautiful buildings of the Business School; we see new structures in and around the Yard.

Personally we rejoice that so many of the faces of the Harvard of 1900 are still here. Because the years have borne so lightly on their shoulders, because we ourselves renew our youth in these anniversaries, we find the realization difficult that the ~~participation~~ <sup>presence</sup> of President Eliot, of William James, of Charles Eliot Norton, of Dean Shaler, of Major Higginson is with us no longer.

But apart from the gradual appearance of new faces in the ranks, apart from <sup>the removal of the architecture of the earliest days</sup> ~~the removal of the architecture of the earliest days~~, apart from that fine generosity of sons and friends of Harvard which makes possible the physical growth, many of us graduates take pride in a deeper, more abiding progress.

A university, I take it, in order to fulfill its highest purpose to the nation and the world, should seek two great aims: First, the provision of education in the best sense of the word, and, equally important, leadership in liberal thought. The University is a composite whole judged by its faculties, its students

its graduate body - judged by the contribution it makes to, and the influence it exerts upon, the life of humanity.

That is where my thoughts ~~lie~~<sup>lie</sup> on a day when Harvard has given me an honor more enduring, more personally and deeply appreciated than any which could come to me at other hands in all the rest of my life.

The liberal thought of which I speak comes properly from the oldest institution of learning in our land. Some young, new giant of the West, exceeding us perhaps in numbers, can pride itself on the modernism of its outlook; it is a rightful attribute of youth; but there is a difference when that young spirit is backed by the traditions of nearly three centuries. We need not fear the future when the great advances of the present day are led by the older institutions, when, laying aside <sup>the</sup> rivalry of a quarter of a century ago which aimed at mere size, they are ~~now~~ vying with each other in turning out a better, and not merely a greater product.

Three generations ago Harvard assumed the leadership of the American colleges by striking out boldly in the direction of the university idea, and with the purpose of giving greater responsibility to the individual. We were pioneers in the field; we called it, perhaps, the great experiment, but during the course of the years we proved the rightness of our vision.

Today Harvard leads again, not in an experiment but in the logical development of modern education. We have become in a true sense a university, teaching adequately and progressively almost every element that enters into the broad field of the human knowledge of the twentieth century. <sup>But</sup> ~~There is~~ danger has been recognized, in the field of civic life and in the field of scholastic life, that the trend may ~~become~~ <sup>too</sup> far to the production of a ~~new generation~~ <sup>words</sup> cast in a common mold. <sup>too university</sup>

Under the leadership of President Lowell, of the men within and without the university associated with him, Harvard sees the danger and bravely steps out to meet it. We believe, and rightly, that in the final analysis progress will come <sup>in the</sup> educational, in the industrial, in the scientific and in the political world through the stimulation and strengthening of the will and the power of the individual to act as an individual.

<sup>evolution</sup> We have passed through an era necessary in our ~~progress~~ when the teaching has been directed to cooperative and mass effort. The <sup>lesson</sup> ~~purpose~~, the teaching of this past quarter century has been learned.

Today we face the next great step. Happy in its background, and because of its maturity wholly ~~secure~~ <sup>secure</sup>, Harvard can well afford to place a renewed emphasis on the individual within her gates. I am very certain that we, the graduate body of Harvard, <sup>have never wished on</sup> ~~did not wish~~ <sup>expected</sup> ~~and did not expect~~ that the mere methods of Harvard



shall remain unchanged. My father's day was his day;  
my day was my own; my son's day is his and just as  
surely the Harvard ~~xxx~~ of his son will differ greatly  
from this year of Grace of 1929.

That our university belongs to the nation is  
today a fact; that its relative influence throughout  
the nation is <sup>as high</sup> ~~as high~~ as at anytime during its history  
is, I believe, equally ~~established~~.

~~merely shall we~~ <sup>keep busy as a part of the procession,</sup>  
~~keep pace with the growth of national~~  
ideals, of world knowledge; we have  
a higher responsibility, <sup>one which far</sup> ~~more~~ <sup>more</sup> vitally  
~~interesting and important~~ since the  
imagination ~~the~~ exploration and  
the colonization of the new fields  
and new methods ~~which will be~~  
those of tomorrow.

Harvard has in her soul the  
spirit of <sup>high</sup> adventure. We are seekers,  
never satisfied with that which we have  
found. ~~It~~  
It is in that spirit which we

who have ~~been~~ been out in the world  
for many years came back. We return  
to renew the inspiration which here we  
obtained, but in a larger sense we  
return to pledge ourselves anew to  
the support of the Harvard of liberal  
thought, the Harvard of new things,  
the Harvard of courageous <sup>vision</sup> ~~effort~~.  
~~The Harvard of the past~~  
~~is the Harvard of the future~~  
In the steady, clear and brave  
pursuit of that vision, open, President  
Leland can be very certain that you  
have the loyalty and encouragement of  
the graduate body.

The Harvard of the days to come