
Franklin D. Roosevelt — “The Great Communicator”
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At Convocation of the Regents of the University of the State of
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It is not in the business world alone, nor in the mechanical world, nor in the realms of transportation and communication that modern civilization has found itself faced with new problems or old problems now difficult of solution because of their very size. The same broad difficulties have entered into the field of education, and here, too, the problems are in part new and in part those of long standing.

It is, therefore, right that from time to time we should revert to the fundamentals, and it is appropriate at this Convocation of the University of the State of New York to refer to the policy of this State which has had its own fundamentals for generations.

The interest in education of that agency of the sovereignty of the people, known as the government of the State, is based on the undoubted right of the people as a whole to require certain standards of educated civilization among its future citizens. This right has, as we know, been contested from time to time by those who have thought that the word "Liberty" meant a right to the individual to bring children to maturity in any way decided upon by the individual.

Through a full century universal education has had to strive against a host of objectors, but in every battle the proponents of education have been victorious.

The result is that today the broad right of the people of the American commonwealths to set up and insist upon certain standards is practically unquestioned, though at the same time remnants of the Old Guard of objectors continue to snipe at our efforts to remove the last elements of a bygone age.

It is perhaps well that through these years the wise leaders of public education have not yielded to the temptation to reach out into fields which were not properly their own. In other words, those responsible for the supervision by the State have given free reign to the colleges and universities, to the schools of research and of higher professional learning. In this way we have developed throughout the United States the finest kind of competition striving for higher education. We have made possible the free use of experiments, some of which have rightly been discarded, others of which have been accepted as desirable.

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Apart from the magnificent strides in higher education made by the private institutions, the State governments as a whole have concerned themselves primarily with the needs of the average child, the needs of the fundamentals which are necessary to the higher learning.

I wish that some person might write a book or deliver a series of addresses to show with pen and with picture a side by side comparison of the city and country schools of fifty years ago with the city and country schools of today. At the same time I wish, too, that we might have descriptions and photographs of some of the schools in city or country which are still being conducted as in bygone days. It is true that we may have sympathy with those in our midst who talk glibly about the little red school house, the education which some of the great men of the past there acquired, but at the same time we can not yield to our sympathies. The day of the one-room school is definitely numbered, but it is an unfortunate fact that in many states they still exist in numbers far too great.

What is needed by the State, and by the State I mean the body of citizens who make up its sovereignty, is a greater knowledge of what has been and is being accomplished in other states. We of New York, for example, can learn much by a deeper study of the accomplishments of our neighbors in New England, of our neighbors in the West and in the South. In many respects the problems of the several states differ but they differ in detail rather than in principle. As I have from time to time traveled through the United States, I have been impressed with what we at home could learn by a greater knowledge of what is going on among our neighbors. In this State the government itself through the Board of Regents and the Department of Education has made great strides, especially during the past eight years, yet we have long distances still to cover.

It is my hope that the Regents of the University of the State of New York in continuation of their fine achievements of the past and their excellent plans for the days to come will do all in their power to extend into every home a simple understanding of the program. At the same time may they give to the citizens of New York an even broader understanding and outlook by telling us what is being accomplished in other parts of America.

It is from the people of the State that the Regents as well as the Governor receive their mandate and it must be our task not only to provide an education suitable to the need and thought of the day for the children of the State, but it is equally our task to give information to the parents of the State on the broader aspect of national achievement.

You will see that I am still perhaps old-fashioned enough to believe in competition, and that one of the readiest means of arousing the people of one state to modern educational needs is to point out what other states are doing and to ask our citizens to keep our State in the forefront of progress.

To you, the Chancellor and members of the Board of Regents and you, President Graves, I extend my felicitations on this anniversary and I pledge to you by hearty support of the splendid program in which you are engaged.