

June 20, 1934

[Yale University Speech]

FDR Speech File

ADDRESS OF THE PRESIDENT
Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut
Wednesday, June 20, 1934

President Angell and fellow Elis:

I don't believe that any higher academic honor can possibly come to any Harvard graduate than to be made an alumnus of Yale.

I am especially happy because this cements more closely a bond which I have had for many long years with a great number of Yale graduates who have worked with me on many kinds of tasks and in many places. Today in Washington I count very heavily on the splendid assistance that is given to me by Yale graduates in every department of the Government. We have not yet come to the point of placing universities under the code system. There have been suggestions to that effect, as, for instance, not long ago when some of my friends of Harvard suggested that something should be done to correct the unfair trade practice when a certain sacred Ibis disappeared from the Harvard Lampoon office, and again a suggestion was made when a certain pet bulldog disappeared from New Haven.

It was suggested this morning by the Public Orator that Congress will do almost anything I want. But the

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This is a transcript made by the White House stenographer from his shorthand notes taken at the time the speech was made. Underlining indicates words extemporaneously added to the previously prepared reading copy text. Words in parentheses are words that were omitted when the speech was delivered, though they appear in the previously prepared reading copy text.

I don't believe that any higher academic honor can possibly come to any Harvard graduate than to be made an alumnus of Yale.

I am especially happy because this ceremony marks clearly a bond which I have had for many long years with a great number of Yale graduates who have worked with me on many kinds of tasks and in many places. Today in Washington I count very heavily on the splendid realization that is given to me by Yale graduates in every department of the Government. We have not yet come to the point of placing universities under the code system. There have been suggestions to that effect, as, for instance, not long ago when some of my friends of Harvard suggested that something should be done to correct the unfair trade practices when a certain sector has disappeared from the Harvard Langdon office, and again a suggestion was made when a certain pet building disappeared from New Haven.

It was suggested this morning by the Public Works Administration that Congress will do almost anything I want. But the

dear, good Congress almost prevented me from being with you today. Last night, when I got aboard the train, I felt just like a schoolboy out of school, yet here I am, back in academic surroundings. However, I did want to tell you of my appreciation of being able to work through these years with Yale men, and I want to tell you also very simply of my thought that while there has been a certain amount of ribald laughter about the use of brains in the national government, it seems to be a pretty good practice -- a practice which will continue -- this practice of calling on trained people for tasks that require trained people. Today, more than ever before in our public life, it is true that we are calling on the teaching profession, on the graduates of scientific schools and other schools, and I think it is also true that in the conduct of government there has been no period in our history where what we call in the wrong sense politics and in the wrong sense politicians enter less than they do today in the conduct of government. I find, for the sake of example, that in my own mind and, I am quite sure, in the minds of most of the leaders of the Federal Government, qualification from the standpoint of ability rather than from politics enters into most of the choices that are made. There are, of course, repercussions to that. Sometimes appointments are

made and people are called in to serve their country, and weeks go by before anybody discovers which party they happen to belong to. I couldn't tell you today the party affiliations of probably the majority of people holding responsible positions in Washington, and it is a mighty good thing that I cannot.

I go back a great many years in calling on Yale men for help. One of the most pleasant surprises this morning was the statement by the Dean of the School of Forestry that this year's graduates were not present because they were already at work, and I looked down at Gifford Pinchot and smiled and he knew what I meant. Twenty years ago, or, more than that, twenty-two years ago, when I was a youngster in the State Legislature, for some perfectly unknown reason I was made the Chairman of a Committee -- I think it was because nobody else wanted the Chairmanship -- on Forests, Fish and Game. It was a subject about which I knew very little. I discovered immediately that one of the problems before us was the denudation of the Adirondacks. Timber had been cut there without rhyme or reason or thought and many of the upper slopes were being washed away until only the bare rock appeared. I began to take an interest and I sent a letter to the Chief Forester of the United States, asking him to come

to Albany to advise me and the Legislature, and Gifford Pinchot came up there and delivered a professorial lecture. He was one of the first of the brain trusters.

And the thing that sold it to the layman's mind -- to the mind of the average member of the Assembly or the Senate -- was not so much what he said as what he showed -- photographs of North China, a region once covered with magnificent forests, a region which today is a desert. We passed our legislation and that was the first step towards practical government supervised forestry so far as I know in the eastern part of the country. It started me on the conservation road. From that time on, in company with a great many other graduates of Yale, we have gone ahead by the slow process of education until today the whole country, I believe, is thoroughly familiar with the purpose of the great national plan for the better use of land and water throughout our continental limits.

I cite this merely as an example of what may grow from the enthusiasm of men. There are hundreds of other things we are doing today that are new, and the government of this country is seeking to progress in all of the affairs of governing the country in the same way that the great universities of this country have succeeded because they would

never stand still. Harvard and Yale have pointed the way in education for a great many generations, and today Harvard and Yale stand out in the world of education as being willing to experiment -- thank God.

Just so long as that spirit remains in our education, and, as President Conant suggested, we have still quite a way to go to catch up with the 17th Century, and just so long as that spirit is abroad in education, we need not worry about the future of the Nation.

I want to say one word about the national point of view. Ever since I graduated from college I have been more and more interested in the proposal, today in part a fact, that these great eastern universities should make themselves national in so far as it lies within their power, and the body of graduates of Yale and the body of graduates of Harvard every year are increasing the useful influence of the two universities in all of the sections of this country. The danger for all of us graduates, especially, I believe, of the larger eastern universities, lies in a narrowness of point of view -- the living within the confines of one's own community, of living within one's own profession and of typifying too greatly the man who is described by the West as the man who never went west of the Hudson River. To get to

know our country is going to help us, not only individually but our own government. We hear much in the more erudite press of the East about members of the legislative branch of the National Government who are usually set down as "local politicians". And yet in that body we must remember the simple fact that they do represent every state and every congressional district throughout the length and breadth of the land and that the cross-section of American public opinion is better displayed in the Halls of Congress than it is in any aggregation of educated citizens having purely the local point of view. After all, we are -- whether we like it or not -- living in a democracy. I like it. We are going to continue to live in a democracy.

The fact that the influence of Harvard and Yale is becoming more cosmopolitan and more nation-wide as each year goes by is one of the finest things to which we can point and the effort that we lend to that end one of the finest things we can do for our alma mater.

So, my friends, because Harvard and Yale have gone through these centuries hand in hand, I am very happy to belong to both of them.

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AT YALE UNIVERSITY, NEW
HAVEN, CONNECTICUT, JUNE
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I want to say one word about the national point of view. Ever since I graduated from college I have been more and more interested in the proposal, today in part a fact, that these great eastern universities should make themselves national insofar as it lies within their power, and the body of graduates of Yale and the body of graduates of Harvard every year are increasing the useful influence of the two universities in all of the sections of this country. The danger for all of us graduates, especially, I believe of the larger eastern universities, lies in a narrowness of point of view -- the living within the confines of one's own community, of living within one's own profession and of typifying too greatly the man who is described by the West as the man who never went west of the Hudson River. To get to know our country is going to help us, not only individually but our own government. We hear much in the more erudite press of the East about members of the legislative branch of the National Government who are usually set down as "local politicians." And yet in that body we must remember the simple fact that they do represent every state and every congressional district throughout the length and breadth of the land and that the cross-section of American public opinion is better displayed in the Halls of Congress than it is in any aggregation of educated citizens having purely the local point of view. After all, we are -- whether we like it or not -- living in a democracy. I like it. We are going to continue to live in a democracy.

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