

January 21, 1936

[Cigarette - College]

FDR Speech - File

INFORMAL EXTEMPORANEOUS REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT
TO A GROUP OF STUDENTS FROM COLGATE COLLEGE

WHITE HOUSE EXECUTIVE OFFICES
January 21, 1936, 5.00 P.M.

It may be interesting to you to know that when I came here in the Spring of 1933, the White House Offices were about the way they had been since T. R.'s day, when he took them out of the White House.

When I came in here, my predecessor had been getting about 400 letters a day. But I found to my horror that I was getting about 4,000 letters a day which meant that the staff had to be jumped from 35 people to about 150. We were out of luck and did not have any place to put them. So, this past year, 1935, we tore down the old offices and put in new ones. Down below it extends out under the grass plot which you see behind this office and upstairs there is an additional floor. So that now we are equipped to carry out the work we must do.

But the whole building carries out the old idea and so does this room. Yet it is very convenient and there is plenty of room for everyone.

Somebody called attention to that big table out in the lobby. It was given to us by General Aguinaldo. I have been told that it was cut from one big tree.

Have you seen everything up on the Hill?

Franklin D. Roosevelt Library

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.

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... this part year, 1935, we took down the old office and put in new ones. When below it extended out under the ground that stated you see behind this office and speaker there is an additional floor. So that now we are equipped to carry out the work we must do.

But the whole building carries out the old idea and so does this room. For it is very comfortable and there is plenty of room for everyone.

Somebody called attention to that big table out in the lobby. It was given to us by General Aguirre. I have been told that it was set from one big tree.

Have you seen everything up on the Hill?

(Mr. McIntyre told the President that the students were taking their course in Government in Washington and that they had been up to the Hill.)

That is fine. There isn't a more practical thing you could possibly do.

I have been working on some plan for the future, trying to improve the Civil Service as a whole. We have never had a Civil Service to compare with the British Civil Service because over there it is a career in which there is great competition. In the British Civil Service there is pretty keen competition, especially in the first fifteen or twenty years. If you survive you can really get to a place as, for instance, permanent Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, where the reward is worthwhile.

When I came down here in 1913, in the Navy Department, I was perfectly horrified because the top Civil Service man in the Navy Department who had been there for forty years and had actually gotten to the top was getting \$4,000 a year and there was only one other man getting \$3,400 a year and the Chief Clerks of the Bureaus next to mine were getting only \$3,400 a year. There was no incentive. In those days, as Assistant Secretary of the Navy, I made out a report to Congress and pointed out that there was not very much incentive for anybody with ambition to stay in Civil Service,

that the best people after two years got out and went into private employ.

What we are working on now is some kind of a plan, even though it may be hard to get it through Congress, which will take men and women upon their graduation from college, put them through a drastic system of elimination and pay them pretty low wages the first year. That first year you might say they would be on probation and then, after that, we would eliminate fifty per cent of them. That would be pretty drastic but you would get personal contact with the individual. The trouble with Civil Service is that it is just a written examination together with some letters of recommendation. You cannot prove everything by an examination because personality does not enter into it and anybody can get a letter of recommendation.

So this method I am explaining to you will give us an opportunity to go into the personality of the individual and eliminate perhaps half of them in the first year and then, in the second year, we could eliminate half of the remaining members and then let those twenty-five per cent take an examination and then they will go into the first grade of Civil Service.

That will make for the improvement of Civil Service and then, in addition, there should be ample reward for

the people who go to the top. Of course we are not ready to shoot but I wanted to tell you about it.

It is good to see you all.