

October 28, 1940

[Hunter College-]

FDR Speech File

1326

FORMAL REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT

Hunter College, New York

October 28, 1940

(The text of these remarks was not released to the press.)

I am very glad that this is the final dedication of Hunter College. But it is not my final appearance because, on this visit, I am afraid that I shall not get a chance to see all I want to of the College. I have only seen one side of it; I have only seen a part of the entire student body and faculty, so I am coming back again to see the rest of you. (Applause)

You know, our Mayor is probably the most appealing person I know of. (Laughter) He comes down to Washington and tells me a very, very sad story -- oh, a terribly sad story, with the tears running down out of his eyes and running down his cheek, and the first thing I know he has wangled another fifty million dollars out of me.

I want to tell you a story about teachers' colleges in the State of New York. I do not think I have ever told it before, but the story in itself presents a problem, not only the problem for teachers, for people who have made up their minds what their life work is going to be, but also a problem for the younger people in this country, the boys and girls, who may, perhaps, at a fairly early age, be thinking of going into a profession, the honorable and ancient profession of teaching.

This was back in 1929, the first year that Governor Lehman and I were in Albany. In the closing days of the session of the Legislature, there were passed two bills, two acts of the Legislature, sub-

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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 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.

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON
MAY 1, 1932

(The text of these remarks was prepared for the President by the White House staff.)

I am very glad that you are all here today. It is a great pleasure to see you.

You know, our history is probably the most amazing period in the world. I have only seen one side of it; I have only seen a part of the world's history and I am certain that you will see the rest of it. (omitted)

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I want to tell you a story about teachers' colleges in the State of New York. I do not think I have ever told it before, but the story in itself presents a problem, not only the problem for teachers, for people who have made up their minds what their life work is going to be, but also a problem for the younger people in this country, the boys and girls, the way, perhaps, as a family unit, be thinking of going into a profession, the knowledge and excellent profession of teaching.

This was back in 1922, the first year that Governor Lehman and I were in Albany. In the closing days of the session of the Legislature, there were passed two bills, two acts of the Legislature, and

mitted to me after the Legislature had adjourned. I had several weeks in which to decide whether I would sign them or disapprove them -- veto them, as we call it. And, incidentally, both the present Governor and his predecessor held all distance records, and still hold them, of vetoing unnecessary bills. And I think, also, that I can go just one step further: You know, Grover Cleveland in the old days was known as the great veto president. I beat him.

Now, here was the case of the reason for checking on the bills: here were two bills that were special bills. They were special legislation, therefore we looked at them with a good deal of care. One bill was to build a high school, build a normal school, down in this part of the State. The other was a bill to build a new normal school in the western part of our State. Well, I am all for normal schools, teachers' colleges, et cetera and so on, turning out teachers, but I asked the Commissioner of Education in Albany a simple question.

Mind you, this was the spring of 1929, when there was that tremendous surge that we thought was a surge of prosperity, when everybody, every factory, was running and we thought of it as the golden era of American prosperity. It was a few months before that awful bubble burst.

And the Commissioner of Education came in to see me and I said, "Doctor, before I sign those bills to build two new teachers' colleges, I want to ask you a question. You have on the rolls of the Department of Education and they have in the City of New York lists of qualified, certified teachers in our State, who are looking for teaching jobs?" He said, "Yes." I said, "Will you tell me how many names there are on those lists?" Remember, this was the height of

prosperity. "How many names there are of teachers who are unable to find teaching jobs?" He said, "I will find out. I never thought of it."

He went back and he reported to me that there were 7,000 men and women, qualified teachers, certified, who were, at the height of prosperity, looking for jobs.

I only cite that example, that story, because I think one of the important things for all of us, for teachers themselves, for governors, legislators, even the President, to try to tell the younger generation, the boys and girls in high school, what the chance is in this profession, what the chance is in the next profession, what the chance is in the third profession, so that at least we can give to the younger generation information of where the best chances in life lie during that particular period.

I think that there is room in the field of education. I say that because in so many parts of the country we still have the problem of providing better qualified teachers in all kinds of schools. And, in many parts of the country, we need a great many more teachers in the public schools. We need a great many more qualified people to bring the younger generation to maturity, to the grown-up period, with a better chance of living in this very complex civilization of ours.

And so I do not know whether Governor Lehman has started any more normal schools or not since I went away, but if he did, it was because they were needed.

I know very well, having lived off and on within a couple of blocks of here, I know Hunter College very well. And I know that Hunter College is needed. There is no question about its usefulness

in this community.

As I have said, I am going to come back and look it over because for an old, old man of fifty-eight, all this modern lighting and a great many things have changed in the last forty years, but I am still young enough to take an interest in the changes.

I advocats changes. (Applause)

Once upon a time, some years ago, I was terribly razzed with cartoons appearing in the papers, because I used the phrase -- I said I did not want to go back to "horse and buggy days." I still do not believe that this Nation or this State or this City wants to go back to horse and buggy days. I think there is only one real thing that we want to maintain, that was still alive, very much alive in the horse and buggy days, and that was patriotism, love of our nation, that began many, many generations ago, and that is still with us, as we know, in this great city. I believe that there are some things that are old that are worth preserving, and those are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, our form of government, peace and America. (Prolonged applause)
