

Harry S. Truman (1884-1972)

## Commencement Address at Princeton University

*given on June 17, 1947*

President Dodds, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen:

The President of Princeton University spoke of crises a while ago. He should try sitting in my chair for about an hour and a half!

It is with a great deal of pleasure, and much pride, that I am now able to count myself as a member of the Princeton family. Princeton University has conferred an honor upon me for which I am deeply grateful. I consider it a special privilege to have received the degree of Doctor of Laws at the Final Convocation of the Bicentennial Year in the presence of this distinguished company.

On an earlier occasion of equal significance in the history of this University, the President of the United States, Grover Cleveland, spoke in 1896 at the Princeton Sesquicentennial Ceremonies. President Cleveland seized that opportunity to charge our colleges and universities with the task of supplying a "constant stream of thoughtful, educated men" to the body politic--men who were eager to perform public service for the benefit of the Nation. He chided our institutions of higher learning for their lack of interest in public affairs, and held them responsible for the disdain with which many of the best educated men of the day viewed politics and public affairs.

Happily for us, that attitude on the part of our universities vanished long ago. I am certain that no observer of the American scene in recent years has detected any reluctance on the part of our educators to enter the political arena when their services have been needed. And our schools have made much progress in supplying the "constant stream of thoughtful, educated men" for public service called for by President Cleveland half a century ago.

That task is more important today than at any previous time in our national history.

In our free society, knowledge and learning are endowed with a public purpose--a noble purpose, close to the heart of democracy. That purpose is to help men and women develop their talents for the benefit of their fellow citizens. Our advance in the natural sciences has led to almost miraculous achievements, but we have less reason to be proud of our progress in developing the capacity among men for cooperative living. In the present critical stage of world history, we need, more than ever before, to enlist all our native integrity and industry in the conduct of our common affairs.

The role of the United States is changing more rapidly than in any previous period of our history. We have had to assume worldwide responsibilities and commitments. Our people have placed their trust in the Government as the guardian of our democratic ideals and the instrument through which we work for enduring peace.

The success of the Government's efforts in achieving these ends will depend upon the quality of citizenship of our people. It will also depend upon the extent to which our leaders in business, labor, the professions, agriculture, and every other field, appreciate the role of their Government and the greatness of its tasks.

Our schools must train future leaders in all fields to understand and concern themselves with the expanded role of the Government, and--equally important--to see the need for effective administration of the Government's business in the public interest.

I call your attention particularly to the problem of effective administration within the Government, where matters of unprecedented magnitude and complexity confront the public servant. If our national policies are to succeed, they must be administered by officials with broad experience, mature outlook, and sound judgment. There is, however, a critical shortage of such men--men who possess the capacity to deal with great affairs of state.

The Government has recruited from our academic institutions many members of its professional staffs--geologists, physicists, lawyers, economists, and others with specialized training. These men are essential to the conduct of the Government and to the welfare of the Nation. But we have been much less effective in obtaining persons with broad understanding and an aptitude for management. We need men who can turn a group of specialists into a working team and who can combine imagination and practicability with a sound public program.

All large organizations, public and private, depend on the teamwork of specialists. ordination is achieved by administrators trained to assemble the fruits of specialized knowledge and to build on that foundation a sound final

decision. Men trained for this kind of administrative and political leadership are rare indeed.

45 In the task of finding and training men and women who will add strength to the public service, universities have a particular responsibility. They should develop in their students the capacity for seeing and meeting social problems as a whole and for relating special knowledge to broad issues. They should study the needs of Government, and encourage men and women with exceptional interests and aptitudes along the necessary lines to enter the Government service.

50 The Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs of this university was established with this purpose in mind. It seeks to prepare students for public careers. It is significant that the school bears the name of a statesman whose concept of civic duty contributed so much to the Nation and to the world.

Of course, the Government cannot and does not expect to rely entirely upon our educational institutions for its administrators. It must bring into service from business and labor, and the professions, the best qualified persons to fill  
55 the posts at all levels.

The Government must take several steps to make its career service more attractive to the kind of men and women it needs.

Salary limitations prevent the Government, in many instances, from securing the kind of executives required to manage its vital activities. Capable administrators are too frequently drawn away from the Government to private  
60 positions with salaries many times what they could earn in the Government service. This situation can be remedied only by laws to bring salaries more nearly in line with the heavy responsibilities that executives carry at the higher levels in the public service.

The complexities of the tasks now facing our top officials force them to spend most of their time in studying matters of policy. These officials should be supported by a career group of administrators skilled in the various aspects of  
65 management. If capable men and women can look forward to holding such posts as a reward for able service, they will be more eager to accept Government employment.

Because of the difficult tasks of Government today, we should plan a program for the systematic training of civilian employees once they have entered the public service. It is not generally possible at the present time for the Federal Government to send its employees to universities for special short-term training programs. Nor is it permissible under  
70 existing law to spend Federal funds for Government schools to develop the knowledge and techniques required by officials in their work.

This is a problem that can be solved only by the joint efforts of the Government and the universities. Training programs can be formulated, both on the job and on the campus. The Government must make provision for its employees to participate. The universities will need to provide courses well adapted to increasing the effectiveness of  
75 the employee in his job. Such a plan is certain to pay substantial dividends.

I have been speaking about the important contribution which educational institutions can make to the service of the Nation through preparing men and women to administer our far-flung public enterprises.

Another contribution which I regard as important at this time is support for a program of universal training. I consider such a program vital to the national welfare. Since universal training necessarily affects young men of college age, I  
80 believe that our educational institutions should be particularly aware of the need for such a program and what it can accomplish.

The recent war left in its wake a tremendous task of repair and reconstruction, of building a new and orderly world out of the economic and social chaos of the old. It is a task too great for us, or for any other nation, to undertake alone. Even though we are contributing generously and wholeheartedly, no single nation has the means to set the world  
85 aright. It is a job for all nations to do together. Unfortunately, however, generosity of impulse and abundant good will are not enough to insure the political stability essential to social and economic reconstruction. Peace-loving nations can make only slow progress toward the attainment of a stable world--in which all peoples are free to work out their own destinies in their own way--unless their moral leadership is supported by strength.

Weakness on our part would stir fear among the small or weakened nations that we were giving up our world  
90 leadership. It would seem to them that we lacked the will to fulfill our pledge to aid free and independent nations to maintain their freedoms, or our commitments to aid in restoring war-torn economies. In such an atmosphere of

uncertainty, these nations might not be able to resist the encroachments of totalitarian pressures.

We must not let friendly nations go by default.

95 A few days ago, I sent to the Congress a report outlining a program designed to provide this country with the military strength required to support our foreign policy until such time as the growing authority of the United Nations will make such strength unnecessary<sup>1</sup>. That report was prepared by an advisory commission of distinguished citizens. One of them was President Dodds. The Commission reported its belief that the United States should have small professional armed forces. These should be supported by a reserve of trained citizens, derived from a carefully  
100 planned program of universal training for young men. Without such training, in the opinion of the commission, we cannot maintain effective reserves. Hence the commission regards universal training as an essential element in a balanced program for security.

Universal training represents the most democratic, the most economical, and the most effective method of maintaining the military strength we need. It is the only way that such strength can be achieved without imposing a ruinous burden  
105 on our economy through the maintenance of a large standing armed force.

The justification for universal training is its military necessity. However, it is a matter of deep concern to me that the training program shall be carried out in a manner that will contribute materially to the health and character of our young men. I am certain that the kind of training recommended in the report of the advisory commission will not only make our youth better equipped to serve their country, but better mentally, morally, and physically. The experience of  
110 living together and fulfilling a common responsibility should strengthen the spirit of democracy. It will be an experience in democratic living, out of which should come in increased measure the unity so beneficial to the welfare of the Nation.

We must remember, above all, that these men would not be training in order to win a war, but in order to prevent one.

I am confident that our educational institutions understand the need for universal training and recognize it as a vital  
115 responsibility of citizenship in our day.

The obligations of our educational institutions which I have been discussing are great, but in the world today there is a still greater obligation. It is the obligation of service to all nations in the cause of lasting peace.

There can be no greater service to mankind, and no nobler mission, than devotion to world peace.

The course has been charted.

120 The Constitution of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization states the basic truths by which we must be guided. That Constitution reads: "Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed."

The construction of the defenses of peace in the minds of men is the supreme task which our educational institutions must set for themselves.

125 This convocation is a symbol of what our educational institutions can do in the cause of peace. It marks the end of a great series of conferences, attended by scholars from all over the world, who assembled here for free discussion of the most challenging problems facing men today.

The special significance of these meetings is that they restored bonds in many fields of learning between our own and other lands--bonds which had been impaired by the war. The resumption of meetings of scholars, businessmen,  
130 religious leaders and Government officials is evidence of our conviction that the peace must "be founded, if it is not to fail, upon the intellectual solidarity of mankind."

Free and inquiring minds, with unlimited access to the sources of knowledge, can be the architects of a peaceful and prosperous world.

As we gain increasing understanding of man, comparable to our increasing understanding of matter, we shall develop,  
135 with God's grace, the ability of nations to work together and live together in lasting peace.

(2180 Wörter)

*Quelle:* <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=12671&st=&st1=>

<sup>1</sup>See Letter to the President of the Senate and to the Speaker of the House Transmitting Report of the Advisory Commission on Universal Training (June 4, 1947).