

## *Indigenously American but Simultaneously Global*

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*Excerpt from Remarks to Alumni Gatherings  
Düsseldorf, Paris, and London, June 27 – July 1, 1997*

WE ARE – and will remain – a fundamentally American institution, but we have also rapidly become an international university. Or, to put it another way, we are a place where people of many different nationalities and geographic regions, religious and political convictions, cultural, racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds gather, meet, congregate, study, and come to know one another – learning from each other, and teaching each other, year after year.

In fact, beyond our more than 18,000 degree students, Harvard also has approximately 60,000 more students each year, of all ages, who attend short-term mid-career and advanced executive education courses or who enroll in the extension school or summer school. A large proportion of these students come from abroad to attend special programs in business, law, government, public health, and other fields. Most of these programs are heavily oversubscribed, mainly because there are so few universities

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in the world that offer high-quality advanced education and training of this kind. These initiatives represent a critical part of Harvard's future, and will – I am certain – continue to grow.

Meanwhile, the reverse current – Harvard students and faculty spending time overseas – is also substantial. And these various flows and movements ultimately have, of course, a deep effect on the nature of classroom discussions, on the formulation of new research projects, and on the kind of learning that takes place in hundreds of conversations daily, outside the confines of the classrooms and the formal curriculum.

In short, this enlarged range of different human and intellectual contacts and perspectives increases the richness of interchange at every level and at every turn. The questions that are asked, the problems posed, and the answers volunteered alter, expand, and vary in response to the nature of the enhanced international and diverse educational community that is Harvard.

All of this represents a major stride forward from half a century ago, when the United States was just beginning to realize that it could not withdraw, again, from world affairs; when the Marshall Plan had barely been conceived; and when Harvard – indeed, most universities – had only a very modest investment in international studies. Yet in spite of all that has been achieved since that time, much more remains to be done, because the world is, I believe, at another major turning point: we face an international situation that is dramatically different from, but no less challenging than, that which existed just after World War II (and for decades afterward).

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We are experiencing one of the most far-reaching transformations in modern history. Today's world is more open to positive developments, more free, more fluid and robust, more interconnected, and more collaborative – at least potentially – across national and regional boundaries.

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There is, of course, another side to the ledger. Openness and freedom can lead to fierce ethnic, religious, and nationalist conflict; to highly unstable political regimes and economic conditions; and to the unleashing of powerful centrifugal forces that intensify distrust and divisiveness.

The question, then, is whether we can capitalize on the present moment in order to build stronger international relationships at every level, beginning with individuals and institutions. Can we also create more effective regional and international organizations, to help maintain the positive momentum that has been generated since the end of the Cold War?

I believe that we can, but it will certainly not be easy. It will, in addition to the other things, require a significantly larger supply of educated human talent: people who understand the dynamics and the added complexities of this new world we have entered, with all its fluidity and unpredictability as well as promise.

In 1943, Winston Churchill made a secret visit to Harvard, while World War II was still raging. He received an honorary degree, and in his address he declared that “the empires of the future will be empires of the mind.” That future has now arrived. It is clear that finely tuned human intelligence and skill, grounded in humane values, represent the world’s most valuable – as well as its most scarce – resource. This resource is vital to every aspect of international affairs today. Fortunately, we have the power to increase its supply, as long as our universities (and our governments) are willing to make a substantial renewed investment in international and regional studies. The goal is to educate leaders, in all walks of life, who are informed about the world at large, responsive to its dilemmas, and imaginative as well as realistic in their search for solutions, and in their capacity to take action.

The need for such an investment cannot be taken for granted. Many nations (including the United States) have been largely self-absorbed for a good number of years. Funds to support research abroad, student exchange programs, technical assistance and aid

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projects, or advanced mid-career and executive education programs for participants from different countries – such funds, whether from government or other sources, have declined, in real terms, for more than two decades. And this decline is continuing, just when the opportunity for genuine international progress is so clearly open to us.

Reversing so strong a trend will be very difficult. But if we want to make a beginning, we should ask ourselves about some of the concrete steps that universities might consider. Let me give you a brief outline of Harvard's own plans, as just one example.

First, as more countries than ever before play an active role on the international stage, we must at the very least increase our store of fundamental knowledge about them. There may have been a time when it seemed safe to operate with comparatively little understanding of Chechnya, Zaire, Kazakhstan, Colombia, Chiapas, Rwanda, Yemen, Burundi, or even Afghanistan. But the plain fact now is that virtually any region of the world, however distant, can instantaneously become a flash point for serious concern. Or, conversely, it can become a constructive partner in the effort to sustain a durable peace.

Our relative ignorance is not, alas, limited to the most remote or inconspicuous corners of the world. We also know far too little about many major nations and cultures, including parts of the Middle East, China, much of Latin America, Africa, and sizable portions of the former Soviet Union.

Therefore, one challenge for us is to take maximum advantage of the new climate of openness which now exists and which has no real precedent in the modern era. To do so, we need the resources to enable students, scholars, and others to consult the large number of archives, documents, and other research materials that are now accessible in hundreds of cities and regions that have long been effectively closed. Equally important, scholars and students can talk at length with (and interview) ordinary people and officials in these regions, and can travel quite freely to see, at first hand, the texture and crosscurrents of life in these societies.

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The objective is a simple and fundamental one: to achieve as deep an understanding as we can of other cultures, for the sake of knowledge itself, but also to make more of the world comprehensible, less impenetrable, and therefore less threatening.

Next, we need to enlarge our student and faculty exchange programs. Little progress has been made in recent years, not for lack of interest, but for lack of funds. In Harvard's current fundraising campaign, we are seeking to increase our endowment to support more students and visiting faculty from abroad. In this connection, our European exchange programs are critical to us, precisely because the nature of the dilemmas we face in common has changed. One of the most effective ways to move forward is by educating more of our young people together. It is one thing to study other countries and cultures; it is quite another thing – and a very powerful one – for people from different nations to study together and to learn reciprocally.

Finally, Harvard has begun to focus even more of its energy on the search for better ways to address some of society's most complex and pressing problems. This can be done only by encouraging people from different specialized fields, professions, and countries to collaborate. We have embarked on a program to increase the endowments of our regional and international research centers, emphasizing their University-wide capacity – that is, their ability to bring together individuals from all our professional schools, and all of Arts and Sciences, to work on projects of unusual importance.

Few if any of the most difficult real-world problems that confront us can be addressed from a single perspective. To understand (and try to solve) a serious environmental health problem in a particular region, for example, we need scientists, political figures, public health officials, and people who understand the economics of the situation and the legal regulations that may apply. If the project is an international one, there must also be individuals who understand the local languages and culture.

Otherwise, factors that are rooted in social behavior, as much

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as in the external environment, can be easily overlooked, or remedies may be recommended that run counter to important indigenous beliefs and customs.

More and more, Harvard is working to make the most of its total intellectual and other resources, from across the entire University, cooperating with universities and other institutions abroad. We are seeking to learn more about alternative paths to successful economic development, about the roots of ethnic conflict, the serious issues created when immigrant and refugee populations cross national boundaries, the upheaval in many health care systems, and the difficulty of creating democratic institutions in countries where such institutions have never really existed before.

These and any number of other dilemmas require the kind of collaborative (and often international) approaches that I have been describing. Such efforts (indeed our entire international agenda) are among the highest of Harvard's priorities for the future. We will be investing the better part of \$200 million in the next few years to create a significant new international studies complex as well as to secure new endowment funds to support increased international research, more student exchanges, and new curricular developments.

If we now step back for a moment, we can see that Harvard is in the midst of evolving toward a new form of university that builds in fundamental ways on its history and heritage, but that will also, over time, incorporate the most significant aspects of the technological and international changes I have been discussing.

The Harvard of a half century from now will represent an intricate web of connections between our permanent, physical, tangible university and the electronic "virtual" university that is now emerging. It will also represent a vastly expanded web of national and international connections. It will be indigenously American and local, but simultaneously global.

The challenge before us, therefore, is very significant and will

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demand major investments of time, thought, and energy. We must succeed, because I am persuaded that the leading universities of the next century will be those that have carried out this transformation most effectively.

Let me stress the underlying concerns that are the real motive for everything we are trying to achieve. Terms such as “information technology” and “international studies” are at best clumsy and abstract.

In the end, we must focus on the fundamental simplicity of our purposes: to educate our students, and ourselves, to help prepare individuals to live satisfying and generous lives in the complex world they are now inheriting. We want them to be able to address intelligently and decently the difficult, interesting, sometimes hazardous, often rewarding situations that are part of our personal, national, and increasingly international existence.

It would be astonishingly naïve to think that everything can be solved simply by bringing together more of our students and colleagues from different countries in the enterprise of education. It would be equally naïve to think that improved information systems, or a greatly expanded number of international friendships and institutional relationships will carry the day. But conversely it would be folly to believe that strong and lasting relationships, and the values they embody, are negligible or irrelevant. Whatever differences may at times divide us, we know that there are deep and strong foundations of trust and affection, founded upon generations of shared experiences that keep us together in spirit and cannot be shaken.