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**Franklin D. Roosevelt — “The Great Communicator”**  
**The Master Speech Files, 1898, 1910-1945**

**Series 1: Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Political Ascension**

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**1931 June 22**

**Van Hornesville, NY -  
School Commencement Speech**

At Van Hornesville School Commencement, Van Hornesville,  
June 22, 1931

*Owen D. Young*

People sometimes ask me if I do not think that we are living in a most interesting generation of world history; and I tell them yes, but with the qualification that the coming generation will be even more interesting.

I do not suppose that in any fifty-year period greater changes have come over the lives of the average man and woman than in the past half century. Our whole method and manner of living has been revolutionized since the days of our grandparents. We know, of course, of the great changes which have taken place through great scientific discoveries. Fast passenger and freight service on railroads and in the air has become commonplace; electricity has entered our industries and our homes, and the radio and talking pictures have changed the whole scheme of recreation and amusement; the horse and buggy has disappeared and our circle of neighbors has increased from a radius of five miles to a radius of fifty miles.

I often wonder though if in thinking of this constant enlargement of the physical scope of human life we are giving thought also to the tremendous effect which these changes have wrought in the problems that go with the associations of human beings with other human beings. For instance, it is a simple step for a family to install a radio set, and perhaps soon a television set; and it is simple for a family to discard the old wagon and substitute an automobile. It is simple too for a community to set out a new airport or to bring in a new, modern equipped factory.

What the generation to which I belong has overlooked in the rush of installing all these new devices and all these changed methods of doing business, is that every one of these new devices and methods result in a dislocation of the century's old accepted balance which people were accustomed to.

Let me illustrate: A hundred years ago this part of the State of New York and indeed almost every part of the State of New York was essentially agricultural in its mode of life and the economic structure was based on a very large number of practically independent communities largely self-sustaining in the sense that each community raised all of its own food and sufficient agricultural surplus to send into the comparatively few cities to barter for the few manufactured goods which were required on the farm.

Today the position is reversed, for the great majority of our people live in cities and are engaged in industries, and during the thirty years of this century the art of manufacture has advanced so rapidly that millions in the cities now find that they are a surplus which if put to work would turn out manufactured articles of commerce in quantities too great to be consumed, at least for the present, by themselves and the minority of people who still live by agriculture.

No one wants or would be willing to go back to the old conditions. No one would ask you young people to revert to the conditions that obtained in the homes of the great majority of American families a hundred years ago. The splendid achievements of recent years which have brought us higher standards of living, greater physical comforts, vastly better education, and a more abundant prosperity, must be maintained and even increased. Nevertheless, the machine is today out of balance and the principal effort of the next few years will be to restore that balance.

The rules and remedies of the past probably do not form an answer to the restoration of the machine. Probably new and untried remedies must at least be experimented with. Every one of the new factors in our lives is the result of experimentation and it is therefore only logical and not radical to insist that through experimentation also we must solve the social and economic difficulties of the present.

You in Van Hornesville can well be proud of owning,—for I know that you feel that you own him—a young American,—for he will always be young—who as much as any other American now living has contributed to the progress of modern life. Mr. Young is and for many years has been a very neces-

sary factor in almost every forward step of the nation, and I need not remind you that his modest leadership has greatly influenced the course and progress of many other nations besides our own.

Today, however, I like to think of him more as Owen Young, not of world conferences, not of great industries, not of unselfish efforts for social betterment, but as your Owen Young of Van Hornesville. He is your unassuming, simple neighbor and friend who in spite of a world acquaintance still has his heart right here in this community. I have that feeling too, for no place in the world could ever mean so much to me as my own home town on the Hudson River.

We of the older generation must lean heavily on the boys and girls who are about to take their part in the world, on their interest and help in solving the many problems which confront America and indeed worldwide civilization in these modern days. So I say to you, keep your hearts for all your lives in your own town, but do your level best to work with your neighbors of your town, of your county, of your state and of your country, in finding the answer to the difficult yet fascinating problems of those coming years.