

# Franklin D. Roosevelt's advice to high school students, 1922

## Introduction

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In 1922, Sharpless Dobson Green, a teacher at Senior High School in Trenton, New Jersey, wrote to influential people around the world to get their advice for his students. In his request, he explained his project:

There are about 400 young men and young women training for business under my supervision in the Senior High School of this city; will you send me, over your signature, a little message that will be an inspiration to them in their work now and aid them in being better citizens in the business world?<sup>1</sup>

He sent one of his requests to Franklin Delano Roosevelt a decade before Roosevelt was elected president of the United States. Born in 1882, Roosevelt entered Columbia Law School in 1905 but left in 1907 when he passed the bar and was able to practice law. He was elected to the New York Senate in 1910 and served as assistant secretary of the Navy from March 1913 through August 1920. He unsuccessfully ran as the Democratic nominee for vice president under James Cox in 1920.

In 1921, Roosevelt was struck by a polio-like disease. He had temporarily retired from public life to focus on rehabilitation when he responded to Green's request on October 3, 1922.

Roosevelt's letter focuses on civic responsibility and voting, and encourages students to actively participate in their communities. "The best citizen, and incidentally, the happiest citizen, is not the one who has made the most money, but is the one who has taken his share of the duties of citizenship."

He further advises the students that "the man or woman who has an understanding of the point of view of those in other spheres of activity and other walks of life will have the broad understanding that means the greatest kind of success."

Three years later, Green published 324 of the letters he had received in *Letters from Famous People*.

## Excerpt

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One hears much, especially in the career of business, that is uncomplimentary to those who run our public affairs. The man who kicks most is usually the one who & doesn't even bother to vote on Election day. It is absolutely true that our government will be only as good as we want it to be! If every business man and

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<sup>1</sup> Green, Sharpless D. , *Letters from Famous People* (New York: The Gregg Publishing Company, 1925).

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every business woman will take a personal interest in public affairs in the next generation, and will try to view public matters from the broadest standpoint of the whole nation, our government in nation, state and community will vastly improve.

Blind partisanship, or voting always one way because one's family always did, or because it is the fashion, is almost as dangerous as not voting at all. Don't forget that even the methods of government will progress and new things will come in just as they did in business. Don't be standpatters in your outlook on life any more than you can afford to be standpatters in your business affairs. A real Progressive in business, should be a real Progressive in public and community life.

The coming generation has in its hands the making of the new America. We cannot stand still – we will either go forward or slip back as a nation. That decision will rest upon the young men and women who are now in high school.

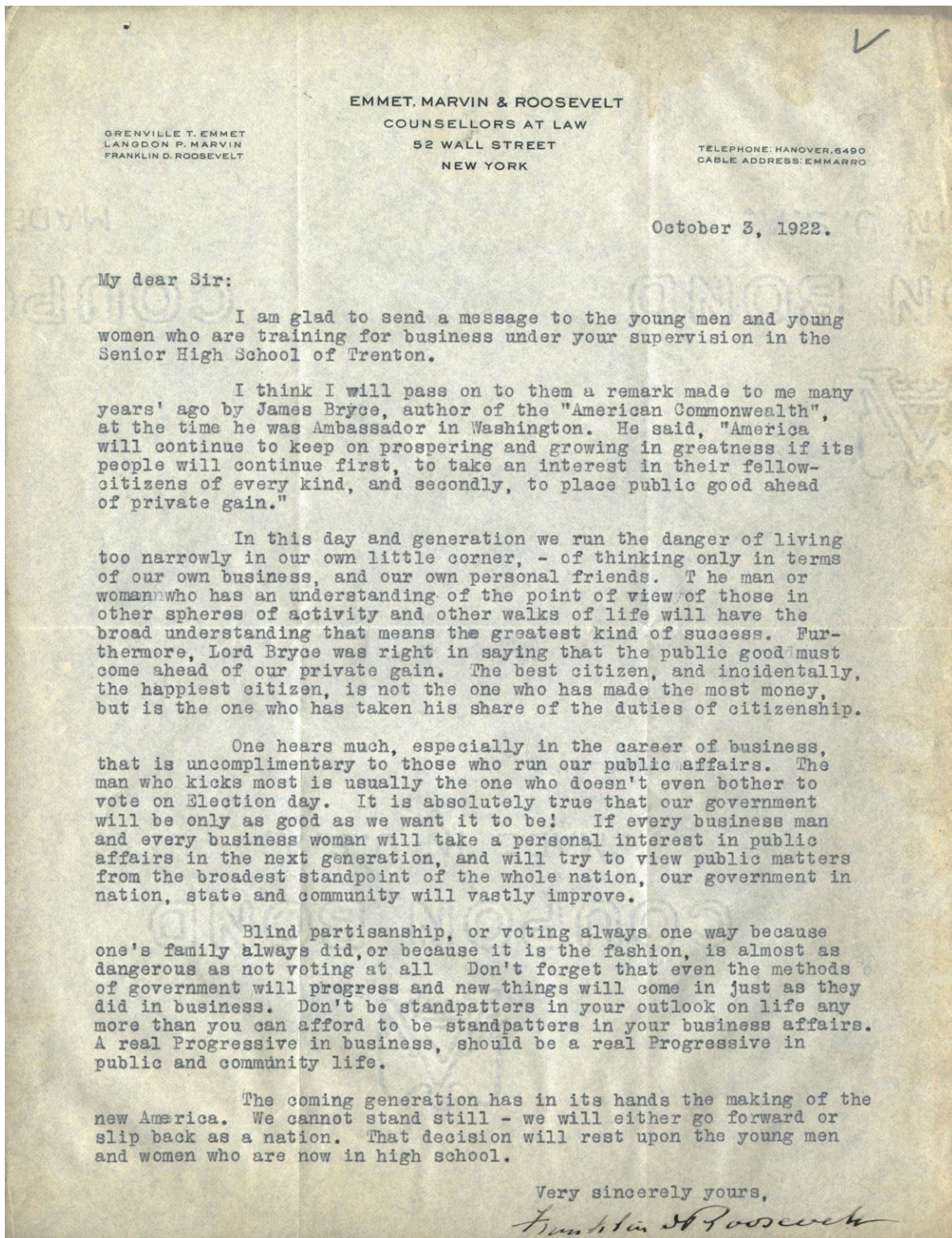
### Questions for Discussion

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1. (a) Explain and evaluate the following statement of Franklin Roosevelt's: "The best citizen, and . . . the happiest citizen, is not the one who has made the most money, but is the one who has taken his share of the duties of citizenship."  
(b) To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement? Explain your point of view.
2. According to Franklin Roosevelt, how can government improve and become "as good as we want it to be."
3. How does Franklin Roosevelt view "standpatters" in business and public affairs?
4. According to Franklin Roosevelt, how can young people contribute to "the making of a new America"?
5. Based on Franklin Roosevelt's letter, explain the connection and relationship of responsible participation in business and public affairs as essential for the United States to continue to develop and progress as a nation."
6. After reading Franklin Roosevelt's letter, to what extent do you think that high school students would be motivated to become active and responsible citizens in the business and civic matters of their communities and the nation? Explain your point of view.

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### Image



Franklin D. Roosevelt to Sharpless D. Green, October 3, 1922.  
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