

This New Chapter of History

Excerpts from Gen. Colin Powell's address on the afternoon of Commencement day.

Harvard and the military share a long tradition, so I really do not stand here alone. I am joined by the living memory of George Washington's Continental Army, which was housed in Massachusetts Hall during our fight for independence. I am joined by the spirit of the 136 Harvard men who fought and died in the Civil War and whose sacrifices are remembered in Memorial Hall. I am joined by the spirit of Harvard's veterans of two world wars, who quietly have their say through Memorial Church, right here behind me. Harvard graduates also served in Korea and Vietnam and in all of the nation's wars.

Some 47 years ago, in 1946, Harvard conferred honorary degrees on leading generals and admirals of World War II—Eisenhower, Nimitz, Arnold. Their spirits are here too.

What a Commencement that must have been! A world war ended! America victorious over fascism! Harvard Yard in 1946 was filled with twenty-year-old combat veterans who had won the war and were eager to build the peace. The armed forces and the people were as one in their moment of victory. The armed forces *were* the people, as they always have been in America.

But the party soon ended. We awoke with a hangover called communism; and it soon became clear that America could not simply tip its hat to a grateful world and go home. The exhausted world was building its hopes on this vigorous, powerful, can-do nation of free men and women called America.

In the years that followed, we led a grand alliance through the Cold War—that long, awful twilight struggle with surrogate conflicts in such faraway places as Korea and Vietnam.

Most of my adult life was spent fighting the Cold War. It has also been my great thrill and privilege to see it all come to an end. Now here we are, in 1993, again as in 1946—a war behind us.... But this time we are a little older; we must be a little wiser. We must be less willing than we were 47 years ago to believe that history has ended. And this new chapter of history that has just opened is making Kafkaesque demands on our view of the world, on our sense of what is real and predictable and what isn't.

The world map no longer has nice, neat lines separating friends from foes. It is pocked, instead, with the sores of a dozen tragic places—with a host of once and future Iraqs, Somalias, Bosnias, and North Koreas. In this turbulent new era where power is more diffused, where we are grappling with the sudden reemergence of nineteenth-century conflicts, we are once again seen as the great, vigorous, can-do nation on which the world is pinning its hopes. The world is depending on the power of our democracy, on the power of 250 million Americans to do what's right. We have the responsibility to respond. As Winston Churchill said from this platform fifty years ago, "The price of greatness is responsibility." And we will be judged in the future classrooms of Harvard by

whether we rise to that responsibility. We will be judged *kindly* if we throw ourselves with all our creative vigor *first* into the industry of America—into creating for ourselves the prosperity that brightens lives and underwrites the progress of our culture. The restoration of our own economy must be the foundation stone of our role in the world. We will be judged kindly if we renew the values of our communities—values of service, of family, of compassion, of wisdom. We can't aspire to greatness unless we begin with a foundation of values. And we will be judged kindly if we respond to this new world with a new strategy, a new vision of our national security.

We have designed a new strategy based on a world not of Cold War but of the hot, violent sparks of ancient regional passions. One key to our post-Cold War defense strategy is to maintain our overseas military presence, to reduce it but not

abandon it. We must not reduce our forces to such a level that we can only deal with *one* major crisis. We must never be at the mercy of an opportunist who is tempted by our preoccupation in one conflict to hold us hostage somewhere else. Responding to...crises means maintaining a quality, combat-ready force that can go anywhere in the world quickly and fight when it gets there. It means forces that can act unilaterally but, more likely in the future, can also act as part of a great international coalition such as the U.N. It means a force that can participate more fully in peacekeeping and humanitarian operations. Nothing gives your warriors greater satisfaction than to use their skills not to destroy life but to relieve human suffering.



Powell: Will we rise to our responsibility?

Believe me, we *are* paying a peace dividend. But we've got to be very careful. We're downsizing, not demobilizing. We must not, we cannot, undermine the quality, morale, and capability of [our] volunteer force.

And if we decide to use our military forces, we must translate those political goals into clear military objectives. We must never forget the ends we are seeking in our preoccupation with examining the means we might use.

Certainly the military has problems. We don't always meet the high standards we set for ourselves. We will continue to encounter challenges to our traditions and policies, and we will take them on and solve them. We took on racism. We took on drugs. We took on scandals such as Tailhook. And we found answers that made us stronger and even more relevant to the society around us. We will do the same with the controversial issue of homosexuals in the military.

I believe we are near a solution, [and] I can assure you the decision will be faithfully executed to the best of our ability.

Most of our GIs will never walk Harvard Yard. Few have parents who have attended a Commencement such as this. Yet they stand with me here today not as strangers but as your fellow Americans dedicated to the same *veritas* represented on Harvard's crest.

From the rich intellectual loam of this place will grow tomorrow's leaders.... Be proud when you leave here. You deserve to be very, very proud. You have earned your place in the good fight—the fight for truth, the fight for the spirit of *veritas*. It is *to* that spirit that I commend you as you make your way through life. And it is *in* that spirit that I wish you and this magnificent institution a thriving and fulfilling future.