

The Wah, Who? Whisper!

Special Issue: a John Sloan Dickey Retrospective

The Great Class of 1956 Newsletter

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[Year 34 in the reign of Hon. Ed.]

You men of the upper classes personify the vitality of the greeting which on behalf of all of us I give each year to each entering freshman -- "You are more than welcome, you are now one of us." Let me say a just a word more to the freshmen about this phase of your privilege. Few things in life turn out to be better than the fellowship within which they are experienced. The entering of any new fellowship is a large event in the human life. Today you not only begin college; you also, as members of the Class of 1956, enter the fellowship of Dartmouth men, and this fellowship of Class and College may well become for you, as it has for countless other Dartmouth men, one of the most prized possessions of the privilege now before you.

-- John Sloan Dickey, Convocation address, Webster Hall, September 24, 1952

[Thanks for providing the above go to Alert Reader George **RECORDS**
(George.Records@midfirst.com)]

John Sloan Dickey was president of Dartmouth when the freshmen of the **Great Class of 1956** entered the College. At matriculation, he shook the hand of everyone of us and looked us in the eye. This special issue of the WWH is dedicated to the man who guided us for four years.

• From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia: "John Sloan Dickey (4 November 1907 – 9 February 1991) was an American diplomat, scholar, and intellectual. Dickey served as President of Dartmouth College, Hanover, New Hampshire from 1945 to 1970, and helped revitalize the Ivy League institution.

"John Sloan Dickey's commitment to the liberal arts, or, as he termed them "the liberating arts," was perhaps best expressed in an innovative course on "Great Issues," designed to introduce seniors to the problems of national and international relations they would face as citizens."

On November 9, 1945, eight days after having taken office as Dartmouth's 12th president, John Sloan Dickey spoke:



"Some have said that Dartmouth is not a college – that it is a religion. I take it that what is meant by this is that men who have lived together on Hanover Plain believe in Dartmouth. And whatever else may be said, surely that is true and sure that must be good. . . . Some may (and often do) ask, Why do men feel that way about Dartmouth? Is there really any such thing as the Dartmouth spirit? . . . As any good country-man will tell you, you cannot live with a spirit but that spirit gets inside you. However else the Dartmouth spirit may manifest itself, it does give rise to a sense of family, to a sense of belonging to something together. Hovey (writer of Dartmouth's Alma Mater) has done a better job than anyone else in putting it into words. A time comes to almost every man who has lived on this campus, when he sings those words "as brother stands by brother" he suddenly realizes that he belongs to a larger family – and is better for it."

Time Magazine, December 5, 1955: "In 1947 [Dickey] started a compulsory "Great Issues" course for seniors which has been copied in some form on nearly 100 campuses. Students study the major problems of their time, e.g., the Atomic Revolution, modern man's political loyalties, bring to bear on them all that they have learned before. Essentially, says Dickey, this is "applied liberal arts, an effort to give our men a transition between the classroom and adulthood. A man spends four years with a book; after that he is inclined to rely on periodicals and newspapers for his information. There is entirely too little effort in undergraduate experience to relate the liberal arts to what a fellow lives with when out."

From Wikiquote.org: "'The world's troubles are your troubles...and there is nothing wrong with the world that better human beings cannot fix.'" - John Sloan Dickey, 12th President of Dartmouth College

The Dartmouth Review

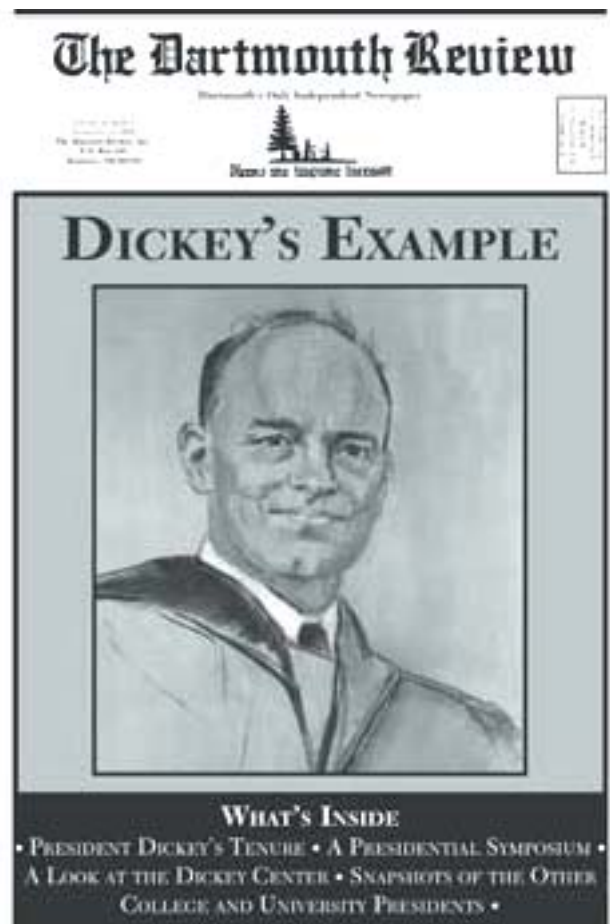
By Charles S. Dameron | Sunday, November 16, 2008

He was the only president of Dartmouth ever to assist in building the Winter Carnival sculpture. Regularly spotted with an unlit cigarette in his mouth after he gave up smoking, he was often asked if he needed a light. He always responded that he just liked playing with cigarettes. He was the man who described himself not as a "president," but just "the man on this job."

By all accounts, John Sloan Dickey was highly regarded by students, faculty and alumni both for his good humor and humility. But what set him apart was the true magnitude of his accomplishments as president of the College. "The man on this job" brought to Hanover a zeal for tailoring education to public service and international engagement. Under his stewardship, Dartmouth vaulted to its place as one of America's most renowned undergraduate institutions.

But, most significantly, Dickey identified and emphasized the mission of the academy as both an intellectual and moral one. The goal of a liberal arts (or, as he insisted, liberating arts) education was not merely to make the student smarter—the student was meant to become a better human being. Dickey was committed, above all else, to graduating men from Dartmouth who possessed not only the relevant technical skills, but who had also internalized the vital first principles of conscience that would inform every department and all curricula.

And that led into the second critical component of his presidency: he realized that Dartmouth's small size made it possible to create a common character and academic experience among its students.



His tenure as president was relentlessly devoted to creating such a community—and to that end, he accomplished a great deal, from developing the celebrated Great Issues course, to establishing the Tucker Foundation, to overseeing the construction of the Hopkins Center. But his largest goals and achievements weren't tangible: he aimed to make Dartmouth a tight-knit, intellectually fervent, and nationally prominent college with an unmistakable sense of purpose...

...Dickey's own undergraduate days at Dartmouth were marked by a definite sense of purpose, too.... He ended up graduating magna cum laude, Phi Beta Kappa, and a candidate for a Rhodes scholarship. All that time in the library not only gained him admission to Harvard Law School, but also facilitated a romance with a Baker librarian, Christina Gillespie, whom he married three years after he graduated from Dartmouth in 1929...

...The Dartmouth College biography of Dickey, by Charles Widmayer, recounts Dickey's 1952 Convocation speech. Its theme was "The Business of Being a Gentleman," which "has a deep and direct bearing on whether you ever become a liberally educated man," according to Dickey. Widmayer summarizes: "He was talking about manners, he added, not in any foppish way, but in the sense of self-discipline, concern for others, and sensitivity, all of which are part of 'the ancient tribute—a gentleman and a scholar.'" This was, as it were, the Dickey Doctrine, and his commitment to the gentleman-scholar ideal would course through the major actions of his presidency.

The Great Issues Course

The first of those actions, his advocacy of the Great Issues course for seniors, was launched in 1947, almost immediately after his inauguration as president. In pushing for the Great Issues program, Dickey was certainly inspired by the unity of purpose and learning he had experienced in his freshman year at Dartmouth, but also by what he saw as a lack of consciousness of world affairs among college students generally.

"Today our seniors leave college without public purpose, or as Dr. [William J. Tucker, ninth president of the College] used to call it, 'public-mindedness.' They lack that sense of intellectual unity which in part at least is aroused simply through the common study of live issues," said Dickey.

The course featured Monday evening lectures from distinguished visitors, who would stay for Tuesday morning discussions. Every Thursday, seniors would receive a preparation briefing from a member of the Dartmouth faculty in advance of the next week's visiting lecturer. The first year's themes, or focuses, were Modern Man's Political Loyalties, The Scientific Revolution and the Radical Fact of Atomic Energy, International Aspects of World Peace, American Aspects of World Peace, and What Values for Modern Man?



Daily reading of The New York Times or the New York Herald-Tribune was required, as was, in that first year, reading the Declaration of Independence, the Charter of the United Nations, and the Communist Manifesto. It was not a token course, and its compulsory nature and rigorous standards bothered many seniors who would have preferred to be freer of obligations in their last year. But it won Dartmouth plaudits from other academics, and put Dartmouth on the national stage in a new way. And, despite the grumbling from some quarters, surveys years later showed that a majority of students who had taken Great Issues ranked it as one of the most valuable parts of their Dartmouth experiences.

Dickey felt similarly: in the oral history of his life, he called Great Issues "the single most valuable initial experience that I had on the job because it required me to

work at formulating my views about the purpose of the institution [and] about the implementation of that purpose."

But it did three other things for him, which he believed were of great benefit to the Dartmouth community. Because he actually took the lead in instructing the Great Issues course, "it also brought me in touch with the total student body in a way that I could not have been in touch with through teaching a normal class. It brought me in touch with faculty."

Finally, because he was developing the roster of visiting lecturers, "it involved my keeping in touch with people at the top level of government, in the foundations, and throughout the American community. This was something that Dartmouth needed and will always, I suppose, need to a little larger degree than an institution located in Boston or New York or one of the great metropolitan centers."

"I suggest that the American liberal arts college," Dickey wrote, "can find a significant, even unique mission in the duality of its historic purpose: to see men made whole in both competence and conscience." Dickey goes on to note that any institution of learning, by its very nature, will naturally and fairly easily incline to graduating men of competence. That, to Dickey, was not the mark of a great institution: "To create the power of competence without creating a corresponding sense of moral direction to guide the use of that power is bad education." Dartmouth College, Dickey decided, would not be in the business of providing a bad education...

...He believed any college could accomplish the training of competence. Dartmouth would not be excellent because it had the largest endowment or the greatest number of internationally distinguished professors. Neither its buildings nor its place in the Ivy League would set it apart. All of those things were and are good, and Dickey secured them, but they did not amount to excellence.

What made him proud, what made him and his Dartmouth unique and excellent, was the idea that the liberal arts could serve a greater moral purpose, and could turn out men and women of character and conscience. Dickey saw, as few in his time or ours saw, that only such a mission could give coherence to education.

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CLASSMATE COMMENTS

Following are the responses to these questions posed in an All-Class Email: Was John Sloan Dickey a great president of Dartmouth? Did YOU learn anything from Great Issues?

Tom **RIKER** (tncriker@roadrunner.com) I hesitate to speculate about greatness at any level, but John Sloan Dickey was our college president, and that should count for something.

As for the Great Issues course, in addition to exposing me to "a common experience", and much with which I was unfamiliar, it also provided me with financial support to get through my last two years of the college.

Don Cameron gave me the opportunity to run

the Dartmouth News Service which provided the *New York Times* as the required text for the course, along with the *Herald Tribune* and the *Boston Herald* for the campus community. I'm sure Ted **BREMBLE** and Tom **PENCHOEN** remember the lovely chill of those mornings, bless them both.

The daily newspaper has become a part of my retirement life line, as has the "liberating education" that Dickey's stewardship provided, unknownst to me at the time.

By the way, the *Herald Tribune* was my favorite, and even after its U.S. demise, sustained me on travels across the ponds. Is the *Boston Herald* still around? - Tom

[Hon. Ed. note: yes, the BH is still going. Point

your browser to www.bostonherald.com.]

Russ **COOPER-MEAD** (russ@coopmead.com)
Great article - and an interesting place to find it.

I think the article proves he was a great president of D, maybe its greatest, at least in so-called modern times.

The odd thing about Great Issues is that I was one of a few seniors who didn't take it -- Senior Fellows were excused from all class requirements, and that included Great Issues. When I edited our reunion book, I got several GI journals/papers; and I realized what I'd missed. Many Classmates cited its importance in their real education.

I'd say, looking back, that it was the only course I wish I had taken -- I would gladly have dumped Sociology 1 (where Spiss [sp?] tried to copy my quizzes and got the same C+ I got), Physics 1 ("I don't think you're going to make it in this course, Mr. Mead" - Murch), and half the English department. - Russ

[Hon. Ed. Note: In Physics 1, I'm happy I never asked YOU to explain "32 feet per second per second".]

Larry **SEYMOUR** (neurodoc51@yahoo.com) No comments about John Sloan except to say that I thought he was the good president for his era and had an aura about him. He fit the college of that day, but would not fit today. - Larry

David W. **MILLER** (davemiller1@hughes.net) I don't know whether he was a great president or not, but I do know I learned a lot from Great Issues, and wondered why it was cancelled.

"The American male at the peak of his physical powers and appetites, driving 160 big white horses across the scenes of an increasingly open society, with weekend money in his pocket and with little prior exposure to trouble and tragedy, personifies 'an accident going to happen.'" - JSD

I learned about my own racism from the questions Thurgood Marshall raised, and I learned important stuff about media biases from the exercise we did taking a social or political issue and comparing the coverage of it in *Time*, *U.S. News*, *Newsweek*, and the *Times*, etc. The international speakers woke me up to global issues I tended not to pay any attention to. -- Dave

Walker **PETERSON** (wpetersonsr@yahoo.com)
Thanks, Flint, for sending this [Dartmouth Re-

view] article to us. I firmly believe that John Sloan Dickey was a great president. His moral leadership in particular was notable and strongly felt to the extent that I came to believe that that was what Dartmouth was all about: molding a conscience and an intense sense of right and wrong.



As for Great Issues, I found it to be in many ways the most valuable course I took at Dartmouth because it informed me on crucial aspects of some of the most important matters of the

day and brought me face-to-face with outstanding speakers. I was saddened and puzzled when I learned that GI had been discontinued. - Walker

Henry **KAPPEL** (hakappel@msn.com) I think it is difficult for an undergraduate to judge a President but looking at some of the actions of many of his successors he looks pretty GOOD! I have not agreed with many of my amalata's policy changes over the years (going co-ed: banning symbols: killing fraternities; stifling free speech etc) but dropping Great Issues with all its attendant problems was my personal greatest disappointment and I think Dickey's finest contribution !

Em **HOUCK** (emhouck@aol.com) I would certainly rate John Sloan Dickey as a great President of Dartmouth College. He not only had that almost undefinable quality called presence which is so often found in great leaders, he was also a man of vision and insight with a powerful ability to articulate both. His definition of "The Liberating Arts" is a document I have kept on

“The purposes of liberal learning are not the contrivance of some agile intellect... they are at once both the story and the generating spirit of man’s liberation from the meanness and meagerness of mere existence.” It truly is a “universe of our expanding awareness”. “The human story is overlaid with the dust of spent time...we can reduce but presumably never banish the infinite ignorance between ourselves and our Creator. But even if knowledge is finite and ignorance infinite the tension of man’s ongoing struggle to be liberated is what holds the finite and the infinite together.” (I can provide the whole thing, less than a page in length, if you want it.)

And remember his wonderful closing words at every Convocation: “You are the stuff of an institution. What you are it will be...and we’re with you all the way.” And at graduation: “The words now are 'so long' because in the Dartmouth fellowship there is no parting.”

As for Great Issues, it was a fantastic course, partly for the factual learning it provided us but even more, perhaps, for the way it forced us to analyze conflicting arguments, synthesize our own conclusions, and succinctly convey in writing our



understanding of both sides of those issues and why we came down on the side we did. It also brought the Class back together. After our fairly common experiences as freshmen we all went



our separate ways, some into medieval literature, philosophy or romance languages, others into physics, math or engineering, but we all came together Monday night and Tuesday morning for Great Issues. In the process we were reunited as a Class at the same time we were forced out of our separate ivory towers and into the issues of the real world we were about to rejoin.

I, and others, have tried to convince Jim Wright to bring Great Issues back,

with no success. However, in my position as Trustee of Hanover College in Indiana I was the Board’s representative on the faculty’s curriculum revision task force a few years ago. Among several exciting innovations which greatly increased the Hanover student’s ability to craft majors that crossed disciplines, increased the rigor of study, and several other valuable things, a senior capstone experience was added called, fancy that, Great Issues. Jane and I recently established an endowment at Hanover to help fund the expenses of that Great Issues course.
- Em

Bill **KING** (bill2king@aol.com) Not only do I believe that Dickey was the best President that Dartmouth has had, but I also subscribe to the sentiment, expressed in the same issue of the Review, that he should be used as the model for selection of the next President. I thought this was summed up superbly by the TDR Editor, Emily Esfahani-Smith, when she said:

“Dickey’s vision for the College was not messianic or grand by any stretch of the imagination. He did not seek to undo the history and traditions of the College; nor did he want the College to stagnate into a sleepy stasis, an intellectual stalemate. He simply understood three things—the nature of man, the nature of Dartmouth, and the nature of the world—and he brought them into a dynamic interplay here at the College. In doing so, he lifted Dartmouth, its spirit, and the

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spirit of those attending to an elevated ground, as each met his very high expectations. Whoever the next president of the College may be, he or she would be wise to lead by Dickey's beloved example." - Bill

Keith **LADD** (keithladd@protectionbureau.com) Great Issues was one of the most valuable courses and educational experiences of my college career. It helped me widen my scope of thinking and to correlate spiritual thinking with secular activities. - Keith

Paul **NELSON** (sightpacific@earthlink.net) I recall JSD before a fireplace, Pendleton shirt, corduroys, talking to us "lads." In one short "talk" about our futures he referred to us becoming "rugged individuals." In another breath he wanted us to be "well-rounded gentlemen." Sounded like Whitman compromised by Oxford anglophilia. How to be both?

It was a contradiction I didn't get over, because it wasn't very thoughtful, more condescending. I see the former as a workable potential for an artist, the latter as fodder for Wall Street.

Dickey was perfect for his time, when the school was more a superannuated prep school.

But I'm a crank anyway....aloha, Paul

Dennis **MINELY** (dsminely@comcast.net) Dickey was the greatest in his (and our) era and the best to this day..all successors pale by comparison. And in addition, he looked (Hollywood could not have improved his appearance and image as a college president) and acted the part with a great positive aura about him.

And I say: Bring back Great Issues!!! We learned a lot about the world outside Hanover and heard from great men as well as some of the great issues of the day. I asked one of our recent presidents why we stopped and why not bring it back. He said and I'm not quoting exactly: give us 2 million dollars and we'll be glad to resurrect the Great Issues course. - dm

Robert **KAIMAN** (rkaiman1@comcast.net) That John Sloan Dickey was a great Dartmouth President is--to put it simply--a gross understatement, and I'll leave it at that. Upon reflection, the Great Issues course he mandated for seniors was the single best course I ever took in my undergraduate, or graduate studies. The outstanding speakers that took the time to talk to us members of the Silent Generation, aka the **Dartmouth Class of '56**, and the requirement that we then had to analyze their words, and to submit reasoned conclusions at the end of the semester, brought in to play all that a liberal arts education is about.

*"There is no more vulnerable human combination than an undergraduate."
- JSD*

(By, to say the least, a very weird coincidence regarding your email question on "GI," I had just recently reminisced in a note to Sam **FRY**, my then-Butterfield Hall roommate, about the night Sam and I sat drinking at desks near our in-room bar--remember those days--as we typed up our Great Issues papers, and both got A's; several lessons were learned from GI, including the relatively minor, but non-trivial one on how to best write successful papers!) - Robert

Stew **WOOD** (stewwood@aol.com) I'm not sure I'm in much of a position to call any one of the Presidents the College has had "great," but my time at Dartmouth was certainly great. Great Issues was one of those change agents in my life, opening me to a wider landscape than I had experienced before. Reading the paper to discover the bias of its editors and writers was a new way of reading the free press. Engaging significant figures in business, government, the arts, communication -- all of that was new and a real gift.



My time at Dartmouth was one of claiming my values or perhaps better said, discovering my values. I can thank John Sloan Dickey for creating the atmosphere in which that was possible for me and I suspect many others. So, yes, he's great in my book; but I have only my story to tell and no way of determining how more or less important my four years were than anyone else's. I'm just glad I had those four years and the professors, administrators and fellow students who helped shape them.

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I can say as well, it's great to be back and know students who seem to be experiencing something of the same thing themselves. Thanks for asking.
-- Stew

Roberts W. **FRENCH** (rwfrench@newmexico.com) A. Was John Dickey a great president of Dartmouth? Yes, absolutely. I doubt that there are any like him now. He was an immense presence on campus, and not just because he stood 6'3". He was everywhere: he signed our matriculation documents, he signed our diplomas - and what a superlative signature! - he visited fraternities to speak and respond to questions, he worked on the center of campus statue for Winter Carnival, he participated in the Freshman Trip by appearing and speaking at the Moosilauke Ravine Lodge, he came to campus events (for example, by coming to the Outing Club's annual dinner), and so much more. I always found him extraordinarily patient with the immaturities of people like me.

Some personal recollections: when he was working at night on the center of campus statue in '56, the crew chief (not me, Allah be praised), shouted down to this person below, "Move it Meathead," or something like that. President Dickey about broke up laughing - and he moved it.

(2) I may be unique in having participated in the Freshman Trip four times: as participant, as a trip leader, as Ravine Lodge Crew member, and as D.O.C. president. So I had the pleasure of hearing President Dickey speak six times to the trippers. Always he was impressive, involved, and concerned. And he was THERE, available and ready to respond.

(3) In the fall of '56—after I had graduated, of course—I was in a rock-climbing accident (ironic: I had done the climb and was down on "safe" territory when the rappel rope I was retrieving dislodged some rocks which found their way to my head. I was in Dick's House for three months, my

first stay there. Almost immediately President Dickey came to visit me—as did Al Dickerson and Stearns Morse. There is much to be said for a small college, especially one with people who care and pay attention.

(B) Did I learn anything from Great Issues? Yes, I learned much. I loved the course. I loved its breadth and awareness. I loved the way it introduced me to new disciplines and enthusiasms (where else would I have heard Vincent Scully or Norman Thomas?). Keeping the journal was easy, since I've always kept a journal, and reading the Times daily was a breeze, since I've done that for almost sixty years. In short, the Great Issues course seemed to me appropriate to a liberal education: listen to various opinions from various disciplines, think about them, and be prepared to respond.



If anyone has a syllabus from our Great Issues course I would much like to have a copy. -- Bob

Toby **JULIAN** (ftj13@windstream.net) John Sloan Dickey was the last great President of Dartmouth College. The man knew and truly felt the traditions and value of the Dartmouth education, and realized that continued progress, and not radical change, was needed. He apparently did not have the need, like so many since

him have had, to make his mark by changing the Dartmouth education in some radical, dramatic and politically popular way.

John Dickey kept Dartmouth on its true course, and did not try to make the school something that it was not.

Of course some change is good, and is always needed to keep pace with changes in the modern world. But, not all change is good, and much that has taken place since John Sloan Dickey's time has been negative.

You asked, and that's one man's opinion! -- Toby

Fred **ABRAHAM**

(abraham@pshift.com) I do think Dickey was a great President. His philosophy of a liberating arts education was excellent, and the nature of our education was one that gave room for great personal development and self actualization. It introduced us to a broad spectrum of educational subjects while at the same time giving us great freedom in developing educational interests. I presume that the Great



Issues course was his inspiration. It certainly was the crowning point of our education, for it introduced us to some of the great minds of our time, gave introductions to their topics so we were well informed on them, and using the *New York Times* as a "text" showed us how our the intersection of our education and the real world in all its facets was an important activity with which to continue for the rest of our lives. While I feel too many of our Classmates got trapped in business with its attendant overvaluation of conservative ideals, I think the best teachers introduced us to a more sensitive consideration of the rights of others. I think many courses, especially those in philosophy gave us a great perspective on our place in the universe and in society. For those of us that followed scientific careers, from the first day in biology, that world became irresistible, and there was a gifted faculty to support it. - fred

"...your business here is learning, and that is up to you." - JSD

Several of the Dickey photos here were provided courtesy of Patricia B. Cope at the Rauner Library at Dartmouth

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•Women of '56 are invited to all Class functions as voters•

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"Gentlemen, if you have been worthy of it, your Dartmouth education has given you perhaps the most precious possession of a human being: a larger opportunity of choice. May you use it." --- JSD, Commencement 1945

How time fugits!

**Only 27 months remain
until our 55th Reunion
June 13-15, 2011!**