



# FOREIGN POLICY ASSOCIATION

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**FPA Town Hall  
John Sexton Speech  
Thursday, May 31, 2012, 6:30 p.m. – 9:30 p.m.  
The Pierre Hotel, 2 East 61<sup>st</sup> Street at Fifth Avenue, New York, NY**

*Featuring:*

**John Sexton**

MR. JOHN SEXTON: This is a very, very singular honor for me. It's an honor, frankly, because I'm the one of the five that is here not for himself but because you couldn't have NYU standing here. I look at Henry who shares with me a Jesuit education and who is self evidently a model global citizen; Walter coming from the nation that almost defines what it means to be a global citizen and more importantly the nation from which Albert Gallatin, NYU's founder came, born two hundred and fifty years ago last year.

Peter, who creates the heart and soul of the city that I believe, notwithstanding the other great cities in the world, is the center of the world. And then to be honored in the same set with a person I will say is not just a friend but an intimate friend, a person who is my hero, a person I love dearly, a person who I've known for now, over three decades, Joel Klein, who is a public servant who inspires everyone. And then to have Rita and Gus, both of whom I claim for NYU Law School because notwithstanding their other great affiliations they're both graduates of NYU Law School; but who more importantly encouraged a neophyte, a person who was born on the streets of Brooklyn and couldn't imagine getting any place that he couldn't drive. They encouraged him to think about a world, global, civil society. This is a great honor.

I want to offer just a few reflections that I think, in a way, tie together the evening, using, in part, NYU as an exemplar, but I think you'll see a perfect congruence with what you've heard before and with the extraordinary agenda of this important organization we celebrate tonight, FPA.

If I have a strength that I bring it's not the kind of creativity or intelligence or vision that Rita described. I think what I am is this; I'm a good noticer. I usually can notice things before other people do. Sometimes I notice what they're doing before they realize they're doing it. And then I'm a good storyteller. My son says, dad experiences the world as ten percent better than it is and he articulates his experience as fifteen percent better than that. It turns out this is a great quality in a Dean or a University President because you should be a little bit aspirational in your stories.

When I look out at the world today I look at it very much through the lens of a Jesuit education, through a PhD; and a PhD, importantly, in religion at a pivot point for my church, the Catholic church. When a great student of globalization, John the XXIII, was teaching the church that you were far better off if you looked at the world not through the single window you're given but through the many facets of a diamond. And that we could learn more about our own faith by studying other faiths. This is certainly something I've lived since my entire family, including my wife and my children, my grandchildren, are all Jewish. My Irish Catholic brother in law says not since Abraham of Lore has a gentile begat as many Jews as John.

But when I look out at the world the first thought that occurs to me is that it looks an awful lot in one way like Renaissance Italy. When the creative class, the talent class, the leaders of society circulated among Milan and Venice and Florence and Rome you change those nouns now to Shanghai and Abu Dhabi, and London and New York and you begin to see the same phenomenon going on; and for some people that means that there're a lot of people that they don't understand that are circulating around, and that's particularly true of American's. Only fifteen percent of our people have passports. Only thirty percent of our Representatives in Congress have passports.

And at the same time that that's happening I see another phenomena which is the kind of miniaturization of the world. Think about this; just about the time when this great fluidity is occurring the world is miniaturizing and gating strategies, as we've just discovered that you can't gate out economies; we in university's have known always you can't gate out ideas. Now, we're beginning to realize you can't gate out people. Gating strategies just don't work in this century that we've entered a decade ago, and the world is miniaturizing.

in a way New York is the first experiment in that miniaturization, if you think about it. It's the first city in the world that could say that every country in the world is represented in its public school system by kids that were born in that county. And if you go to the neighborhoods of New York, you go out into the boroughs, you can hear the music, the prayers, taste the food of every country in the world. It really is the first experiment. But how are we going to react to this fluidity and this miniaturization? Are we going to react to it with fear? Are we going to see a clash of civilizations? Are we going to kind of shut down and try to build gates that can't succeed? Or are we going to react to it as a great opportunity? The way John the XXIII told me to react. The way my mentor, who when I encountered him, my PhD

mentor, when I encountered him in 1963 was the world's leading expert on a medieval theologian of the Christian church, Saint Anselm. But by 1983, twenty years later, I was at the United Nations celebrating the publication of his sixty volume work on world spirituality, which had twenty-five faith traditions in it.

Now, that's the kind of migration human kind, I would submit, has to make. And universities have always been on the side of ecumenism. We've always been the great vehicles, as FPA is a great vehicle, of understanding, of the proposition that knowledge means something. So, you know, it, you don't have to be a visionary or innovative. If, in May of 2001, Rita Hauser calls you in, true story and says, you know, you've been Dean of this law school for twelve years, enough, get out of here. Okay? For the sake of this place just get out of here and go do what they've been asking you to do. Go take on the Presidency. Now, you have to understand at NYU Law School everybody sees the move from being Dean of the Law School to being President as, at best, a lateral move.

So it's May 2001, just before 9/11, and you look out at this city and you're in a university that was founded by Albert Gallatin. In his words, to be, quote, in and of the city, close quote. Unlike the universities of their time, the great university's of England, of the United States, that were out in the country; the northern boundary of New York City in 1831, when NYU was founded, was the north of Washington Square Park, those red row houses there were the summer homes of the wealthy from downtown. Columbia was way out in the county. The Ivy's were way out in the country. The Oxford, Cambridge, way out in the country. And Gallatin said, let's create a university that's in and of the city.

So, you look out of the window and you're the President now of a university that doesn't have a blade of grass, doesn't have a single gate, most of its buildings aren't next to NYU, you have no choice but to say, wait a minute, we're ecosystematic with this city; we're in and of this city. And if you're in and of New York you're attracting kids and professors and administrators that enjoy complexity and cacophony. They see that as a learning opportunity, not intimidated by it. They're ecumenist, they don't know they're ecumenous yet, but they're ecumenists.

So, it becomes natural, then, to get them out into the neighborhoods of New York, that's phase one. Get them out into the neighborhoods. Run buses every Saturday, every Sunday. Come, you want to get on a bus, you go out, there's an old timer in a restaurant who will tell you the story about the old country, you'll eat the food and hear some music. You're using the asset that's there. You don't have a big monetary endowment, you use your locational endowment. And then you find out that's catching on. So what's the next step?

Well, you start creating study away site on your campuses but you want them not to be places for academic tourism. You want it to be the high quality places. So you say to your faculty, we want you to teach, we want these to be NYU courses. We'll set up, we'll create campuses. And you're lucky because your French Department had started in France forty years earlier and your Spanish Department started in Madrid. So you persuade them to take students that are from other departments

and they you're given a fifty-five acre estate in the City of Florence; in the city, not outside. It's the only villa inside the city, one mile from the Duomo. And you satart building on this and kids start, they start and professors start and everyone is getting excited about this.

So, phase two, you create these study away sites. You create these study away sites, now sixteen of them as Rita said, on six continents with the two that will open up this fall; our first in Australia, in Sydney, and our first, other than New York, in the United States, in Washington DC. Why shouldn't you do study away in Washington DC if you're coming in from outside the United States? And that's what happened with phase three.

'Cause the only doorway in was New York, but then we opened up the doorway in Abu Dhabi and a doorway in Shanghai. So now, if you're a kid in the Bronx and you want to go to NYU, you have to decide, first, which doorway do you want to enter? Do you want to enter New York or Abu Dhabi or Shanghai? And when you enter a doorway it means that you're probably going to spend five of your eight undergraduate semesters or if you're a graduate student, most of your graduates, in that place.

If you're an undergraduate and you're in New York or Abu Dhabi or Shanghai you're being taught by NYU faculty and it's NYU courses and it's all seamless. And it moves and that guarantees its quality and you have all the services of the university. You have internships and all of that that goes with it. And you can get as far out of your comfort zone as you want so if you're in Paris, you can take the NYU Anglophone program or the NYU Francophone program where everything's in French, including your calculus course. Or you can study at the Sorbonne or you can study at Sciences Po or you can combine the four. You can live in our dorm or you can live with a family which we have a relationship that goes year after year or you can go out in the market and rent it. It depends on how far you want to get out. You can have an internship with an American company or at a French company or with a company from the Emirates.

And that's the theme of this. So now, you sit down to prepare for your next semester at NYU and no matter which doorway you're entered you have to decide what continent you want to study on. And it is not a branch campus system. It is not a hub and spoke system. It's a new form of university, we call it organic circulatory system. And it turns out, and this is where I'll close my description of NYU; it turns out this is an extraordinary magnet for talent.

So we just recruited an outstanding Chinese American mathematician, out recruited three of the brand name mathematics departments in the country that were offering that mathematician fifty percent more as a start up. But we were the only university that could say, if you come here, we'll promise you that one year out of four you can teach in Shanghai and your children can learn their patrimony and you can be near your parents.

It turns out that if you'd said to Leonardo, you can only paint in this town if you paint only in this town, you wouldn't have gotten his paintings. And it turns out that that's a pretty good human resources notion, and it turns out that when you think about it, universities always have been circulatory systems that operated beyond sovereignty. It's where Bologna began, and the great universities since have existed.

And the greatest proof of proposition which, learn about it, because this gets me back to FPA, you want to feel good about this agenda, this organization? Come visit us at one of the four weekends when we're doing admissions for NYU Abu Dhabi. NYU Abu Dhabi, now the most selective school in the world. This year fifteen thousand applications for a hundred and fifty spots in the class. We have four hundred and fifty students there. Four hundred and fifty student, eighty-nine countries represented. The median student speaks four languages. A third of them had perfect SAT scores. Eight of them turned down Harvard to come to us next September. Oxford, Cambridge, - - they're turning it down. Why? Because they get the vision of the world that's represented and the only student body in the world that doesn't have a center of gravity except the commitment to ecumenism at the only university that allows them to circulate.

So, it turns out that you just walk in to these kids and they're unbelievably inspiring. And that's the hope; that's the hope that this organization represents. It's what draws people and the talent of Noel here. It's what's drew us, those of you that are supporters of it and directors of it here tonight. And that's why its work is important, because we're at this moment where we're either going to accept the fact that the world is a jagged world and we're going to try to gate the ungatable away or we're going to see the great chance to step forward and bring humankind through a critical threshold to a new plateau. I applaud FPA. I applaud Noel. I'm deeply, deeply grateful for the honor you bestow, not upon me tonight but upon the university about which I get to tell stories. Thank you all very, very much.