

## MIT 150 | Churchill at MIT: The Mid-Century Convocation (1949)

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[MUSIC PLAYING]

**TOOHY:** I was the president of the senior class that year. And I had been asked to be the representative of the student body at the inauguration of the new president of MIT, Dr. James Ryan Killian. At the same time, we had a mid-century convocation. Everybody was delighted that Winston Churchill was the one selected.

**KILLIAN:** The decision was made to invite Churchill as the lion of the convocation, as he came to be called. He accepted, provided his expenses could be paid.

[LAUGHTER]

There were several thousand people at south station waiting for his train to come in.

**TOOHY:** And there were a number of us who were chosen to be student guides for Mrs. Winston Churchill, Mrs. Randolph Churchill and some of the other ladies of the party. Mrs. Churchill was delightful. She was an American, and she was just a very friendly, lovely woman.

**KILLIAN:** I arrived up at the suite. I said, Mr. Churchill, I read your speech. I think it's superb. "Do you really?" he said. Mrs. Churchill said later that he hadn't been fit to live with for several weeks.

**TOOHY:** Everybody was excited waiting for him, wondering where he was.

**KILLIAN:** I finally got him moving and accompanied him to the Boston Garden, where he was to speak.

**TOOHY:** Boston Garden was the main arena in Boston, and indeed in New England at that time. The capacity was 13,000, and it was filled to capacity that night.

**BARUCH:** I present the Right Honorable Winston Churchill.

[APPLAUSE]

**TOOHY:** I was one of the seven people that was sitting up on the stage. All of us had our eyes focused on Winston Churchill, and I was over his left shoulder, so to speak, watching him deliver the speech.

**CHURCHILL:** I am honored by your wish that I should take part in the discussions of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. I have no technical and no university education and have just had to pick up a few things as I went along.

[LAUGHTER]

No technical knowledge can outweigh knowledge of the humanities, in the gaining of which philosophy and history walk hand in hand. Human beings and human society are not structures that are built or machines that are forged. They are plants that grow and must be tended as such.

**TOOHY:** And as he finished one sheet of paper, he would just let it fall to the floor. And so towards the end of the speech, there was sort of a pile of yellow paper at the left side of the rostrum.

**CHURCHILL:** I cannot speak to you here tonight without expressing the thanks of Britain and of Europe for the splendid part America is playing in the world. Life is a test, and this world a place of trial. However much the conditions change, the supreme question is how we live, and grow, and bloom, and die.

**TOOHY:** He was a man who had vision. As we see all that's happened over the last 50 years, Winston Churchill had vision.

**CHURCHILL:** Let us then move forward together in this charge of our mission and our duty, fearing God and nothing else.

**TOOHY:** His speech was very well-received-- standing ovations. It was electrifying. I was really surprised to see that it was front page headlines. We were poised for a big leap, and we've seen that big leap during these last 50 years.

**KILLIAN:** He said I would be disappointed in leaving these shores if I did not hear the Marine band.

[MUSIC - "THE MARINES' HYMN]

Churchill sang the words. Tears came to his eyes. That was the kind of fellow he was, and the way he held himself.

**TOOHY:** It was a magnificent opportunity, and one that I could not have foreseen when I entered MIT, or indeed when I began my senior year.

[APPLAUSE]