students of the extraordinary events of their collegiate years, which for many, began in the late 1990s.

"By any measure, and by comparison to any segment of time across history, you have attended Columbia at a remarkable and possibly even momentous period. For nearly all of you, that period spans a time when the world is struggling to come to terms with threats and instabilities—economic, political, and social," said Bollinger. "Most of us come to Columbia because here, more than at any other educational institution in the world, you can experience national and global events; and indeed, so you have." Bollinger, Law ’71, went on to reflect how Columbia has evolved in its nearly 250 years of existence, from several changes in its Manhattan location to an explosion of departments and students. He cited the Class of 1803, which graduated just 18 seniors and 2 medical students, as an example of how far Columbia has come to take its place among the world’s great universities.

"Although a large institution like this one, with such a long history, has too many facets and dimensions to be captured by a single characterization, it is nevertheless a fair summation of Columbia's distinctive history to say that it has always produced an unusually large share of the leaders of its time. As an institution, it certainly has proven its capacity to adapt to the needs of the time," Bollinger noted the words of Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, who argued that they were protected by a Constitutional "theory" that continued Bollinger. "The extent to which we embrace strangers in our sense of who we are going to care about?" continued Bollinger. "The extent to which we embrace strangers in our sense of who we are going to care about—to care about in serious ways, not just as abstractions—determines the character of the society we call ours. Today more than ever before we are being asked to extend our sympathies well beyond what has been asked of us in the past.

On the subject of free speech, Bollinger noted the words of Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, who supported the rights of five Russian aliens who were arrested in New York City in 1918 for distributing leaflets praising the Russian Revolution and denouncing President Woodrow Wilson for U.S. military actions in World War I. Although Holmes disagreed with the arrested men, said Bollinger, he argued that they were protected by a Constitutional "theory" that says "the ultimate good desired is the power of the thought to get itself accepted in the competition of the market, and that truth is the only ground upon which [our] wishes can safely be carried out." Bollinger added, "This means that the First Amendment should protect speech until the point at which it so imminently threatens...interference with the lawful and pressing purposes...that an immediate check is required to save the country.

"My point is that now and in the future we will need, as much as ever and perhaps even more so, to bear in mind the underlying sources of the tensions we feel in difficult times, to bear in mind how those before us resolved them, and to bear in mind that some hard questions never will and never should disappear," said Bollinger. For a complete transcript of president Bollinger's speech, go to: http://www.columbia.edu/cu/ceremonies/commencement/notes/notes_inde x.htm.