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**The Debate over Intercollegiate Athletics at Harvard:
Roosevelt versus Eliot**

It has been well documented that President Theodore Roosevelt and Harvard's President Charles W. Eliot had adversarial views regarding the conduct of intercollegiate athletics. Eliot who had rowed for Harvard's crew between 1855-1858, while serving as an instructor in mathematics and chemistry, viewed athletics as a means to contribute to social and moral development. His views toward athletics favored a traditional

British view in which amateurism and moderate competition were emphasized. Eliot had articulated that higher education was to serve for cultivating intellectual pursuits and not for cultivating physical performance. At Harvard, Eliot viewed physical pursuits as being ancillary to the mission of higher education. Roosevelt, who graduated from Harvard in 1880, however, was an advocate of physical development. He believed that the rise of urbanization and industrialization had contributed to a decline in physical vigor, especially among youth. He felt that rugged athletics would provide the training ground for physical development that was once characteristic in pastoral living. Competitive athletics would not only provide for physical training but would develop a spirit of maintaining allegiance to one's alma mater.

The purpose of this paper is to review the manner in which Roosevelt reacted to Eliot's decision on athletic conduct at Harvard. In June 1908, one year before Eliot's retirement, an incident occurred which caused the greatest difference of opinion between Roosevelt and Eliot. Several days before the Harvard-Yale rowing contest, two members of the Harvard crew, Sidney Fish and Charles Morgan, Jr., were suspended from competition. Fish and Morgan, who were about to leave for Connecticut to compete against Yale, were detected in the act of removing a restricted book from the library. They removed the text for the purpose of preparing for a final examination. Since this text was not permitted to be taken from the library, they had violated the rules, which resulted in their suspension from competition. The victory over Yale was in jeopardy and an extraordinary excitement took hold of alumni and students. Theodore Roosevelt, Jr. sent a telegram to his father asking him to interfere, as a concerned alumnus, in the suspension of the oarsmen. Hearing of this news, President Roosevelt and Assistant Secretary of State Robert Bacon, both loyal Harvard men, dispatched a telegram to Eliot expressing their astonishment at the severity of the punishment and requesting him to modify his position and permit the men to row. Roosevelt requested that Eliot find some other form of punishment for Fish and Morgan. Eliot maintained that since they broke a rule that was agreed upon between Harvard and Yale, the two rowers were required to be suspended. Roosevelt had clearly acted on behalf of the importance of winning the rowing contest regardless of rules violations by the athletes.
