

TO THE DEEPER RITUALS

Inaugural Address

by

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INTRODUCTION

Chairman Moore, Reverend Clergy, Governor Rockefeller, Members of the Board of Trustees, Honorable Members of the Legislature, Executive and Judicial Officers, Chancellor McGovern, and members of the Board of Regents, Presidents, Faculties, Students and Staff of the University, Distinguished Delegates and Guests, and all good friends:

In accepting the Chancellorship of the State University of New York, I do so with a deep sense of gratitude for your confidence, and a pledge to give myself unreservedly to the task. The State University of New York—with more than 300,000 students on seventy campuses from Suffolk on Long Island to Fredonia in the west—stands proudly as an institution: unparalleled in its growth, unique in its diversity, and increasingly looked to as a model of what the public university of the future must become. Our dramatic rise as one of America's preeminent institutions of higher learning is a tribute to many individuals—not the least important of whom are the citizens of New York State.

But two men in particular come to mind today. For the past twelve years, Governor Nelson A. Rockefeller has played a truly significant role in the growth of the State University of New York. His vision of what a great university can mean in the life of a people and his drive to see that vision realized have unfailingly sustained this monumental effort. Thomas Jefferson's self-chosen epitaph mentions three achievements: the Declaration of American Independence, the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom, and the founding of the University of Virginia. When the history of 20th Century higher education is chronicled, Governor Rockefeller's name will

be recorded very prominently indeed. And because of his vision and support, the lives of hundreds of thousands of students—for generations to come—will be enriched.

My thoughts turn also to Chancellor Emeritus Samuel B. Gould. When Chancellor Gould invited me to join him here in 1965, I gladly accepted because of my great respect for Sam Gould as a man and my admiration for his dream of what this institution might become. The intensity of my convictions regarding his leadership has deepened during the intervening years. And it is humbling, indeed, to find myself now taking on the challenges to which he so brilliantly responded.

I.

Today, the State University of New York confronts a world dramatically different from the one it first greeted in 1948. Nineteen forty-eight—that was the year Charles Evans Hughes died and Dwight D. Eisenhower became president of Columbia University. That year an annual review published by one of our leading encyclopedias described France's colonial war in Vietnam, praised a new miracle pesticide called DDT, and suggested that the quality of programming was beginning to improve on the nation's nineteen television stations.

In 1948, editors did not think it necessary even to mention such topics as ecology, integration, urban affairs, narcotics, birth control, computers, automation, or pollution. The changes of the past twenty-three years (the total life span of this University) are almost beyond belief. Consider, for example, the litany of place-names—so powerful and poignant to us—which would have merely puzzled that entering class of '48. Cape Kennedy, Montgomery, Dallas, Watts, Kent State, Jackson State, Woodstock, My Lai, and the Fort Benning trial. Our minds—and the minds of our youth—have been driven from exhilaration to despair, from cautious optimism to confusion and even shock. During these years we have gathered in the silence of our darkened homes, as though mesmerized by a kind of electronic ritual, to watch as our astronauts descended onto the moon and as our slain leaders were lowered into the earth. And what does all of this have to do with the university? Very much, I would say. For it is on the college campus that the future most dramatically meets the past. And here the fiercest aftershocks of change are felt. Campus turmoil of the recent past has ripped our institutional fabric, and we, in the university, enter the decade of the seventies much more sober and mature.

This is not to say, of course, that adversity has passed. Suddenly, a new, more penetrating crisis has emerged. Almost without warning, questions of fiscal resources, institutional flexibility, and even the very integrity of the University itself have tumbled in.

I do not for one moment misjudge the urgencies we face. They are very real. And yet, ultimately, the issue is not the gravity of the crisis but rather the quality of our response. The strength, the fiber of an institution, as in all of us, is not revealed in tranquil, easy times. Rather, character shines through when adversity looms large and hard choices must be made.

As John Gardner wrote in his book entitled *Excellence*. The problem is to achieve some measure of excellence—in this society. With all its beloved and exasperating clutter. With all its exciting and debilitating confusion of standards. With all the stubborn problems that won't be solved. With all the equally stubborn ones that must be.

This, then, is our challenge and I believe it can be met. After all, the State University of New York is not some disembodied, towering structure “out there” somewhere. It is, quite literally, assembled in this room. Our future will be shaped, not by mysterious, invisible forces beyond ourselves, but by the convictions *we* agree to share and the actions *we* decide to take.

II.

Therefore, I suggest that we look beyond the moment, and consider several goals to guide our future course. First, we must, in the days ahead, rekindle a spirit of confidence between the University and the community beyond. It is no secret that the turbulence of the recent past has left us with a yawning chasm between the campus and the town. The climate of acceptance, always fragile, seems to have given way to distrust, suspicion, and even fear.

If we are to regain our equilibrium as a people, this festering antagonism must begin to heal. This requires, among other things, a recognition of the University's delicate and critical social role. It means rejoicing in the University as an island of free and open inquiry, and it means seeing it as a place where the established order of things can be scrutinized and probed. In doing so, we shall reaffirm the vitality of democracy itself, for if we lose faith in our universities, we lose faith in our future and in ourselves.

But trust is a two-way street, and the University has its own obligations to fulfill. Specifically, we must go beyond our cloistered walls to meet with honest critics, not to quarrel, but to listen

and to learn, to demonstrate our determination to serve as good stewards of the public trust. Smugness, aloofness, and arrogance are inconsistent with our mission, and they are ultimately destroying the very institution we seek to serve. My point is simply this: The University cannot be chained to the narrow purposes of a single group; neither can it long survive alone.

The campus and the community are inevitably interlocked, and the time has come for us to stand together and rekindle confidence and hope. Woodrow Wilson used to speak of "Princeton in the Nation's Service." I like to think that something analogous to that spirit will underlie our own efforts in the future, as indeed it has in the past. I suggest a second goal, the need to keep the structure of our university fully functional. We are, they say, the world's largest university. But if our size serves only to suffocate, or if in the name of centralized control, we substitute bland uniformity for diversity, then we shall have salvaged only the shell of the institution while watching its spirit slip away. Every person in this university should be able to take pride in being part of a large and exciting undertaking. But each should enjoy, as well, a keen sense of his own freedom within "the system" and be able to *personally* help the University chart its future course.

With this goal in mind, I shall continue to encourage diversity among the colleges, protect local initiative, and promote the creative new ideas flowing from the campuses. But local initiative, as essential as this may be, will not suffice. Duplication and overlap would, I am convinced, lead to fragmentation and work against the best interest of us all. Now, more than ever before, University-wide priorities must be set, proposed new programs carefully examined, and hard choices made. At this critical time, we simply cannot afford the deceptive luxury of uncoordinated growth. Faced with an unprecedented crisis of resources, this is the time to plan together. This is the time for the University to stand as a cohesive whole—with its separate parts, to be sure—but in spirit, a great and unified educational network whose pooled resources are fully available to the citizens of the State.

And yet, the State University of New York—for all its size and diversity—is only one partner in New York's total enterprise of learning. Nothing could be more petty or shortsighted than for each College and University of this State to huddle within the protective shelter of its own enclave, seeking to survive in splendid isolation. The day has come to recognize that all of us—public and private institutions alike—are intimately joined in a single goal: that of meeting the educational aspirations of the young.

In this spirit, I suggest that we move quickly to draw together, as public and private colleges and universities throughout this great State, into a series of regional "Cooperative Councils on Higher Education." Such a move would build upon and strengthen the excellent consortia already beginning to emerge in such areas as: Rochester, the North Country, Buffalo, and Long Island.

These councils, assisted by a network of regional offices and staff, would, as I visualize them, be working organizations—not mere window dressing. The possibilities are endless and, to me, quite exciting: shared library facilities, faculty exchanges, joint research, regional conferences, and cultural events, to name a few. Rather than eroding the independence of the Colleges involved, such collaboration would strengthen the separate institutions and dramatize the unity of our cause.

This call for a flexible structure, both in the University and beyond, leads to another concern: the need to keep the educational process imaginative and open. As long ago as 1869, President Charles William Eliot of Harvard declared in his no-nonsense way: "The University must accommodate itself promptly to significant changes in the character of the people for whom it exists." Though said in 1869, it is just as true today. I do not for one moment, of course, propose that we dilute the University's great traditions: critical analysis, reasoned discourse, precision of thought, and free and open inquiry. These remain—as always—the essentials. And yet, earlier maturation, vastly upgraded high school programs, and dramatic breakthroughs in communication have combined to alter radically the context of our work and the students we receive.

In this regard, there are, I believe, good and sufficient reasons for us to rethink the *four-year* college program, the length of time required to complete the baccalaureate degree. Specifically, I suggest that one of State University's newly emerging arts and science colleges be established as a three-year institution—not to substitute one rigidity for another, but rather to adapt our schedules somewhat to the changing student.

Further, I propose the introduction (possible as early as September 1972) of an experimental and voluntary three-year A.B. program for perhaps ten percent or more of the freshmen students entering, throughout the University system. If these experiments prove successful in educational and human terms, I can foresee a day in the not too distant future when large numbers of our students will be earning their degrees in shorter and more flexible spans of time.

But greater flexibility in the length of college study alone is insufficient. The time has come to examine as well the conventional notion that “going to college” necessarily means four or three (or any number) years of actual *residence* on a campus—preferably one well supplied with moldering bricks and luxuriant ivy. Coming in increasing numbers to State University's doors are many kinds of people—young mothers, war veterans, mature students—people who fiercely desire to be better educated, who have the motivation and ability to move ahead, but who either cannot or do not wish to relocate to a college campus.

These are the circumstances that led to the launching of the Empire State College, a new kind of college on the American scene, one with a well-conceived program, high standards, its own faculty but without a campus. Students will study at home, in ghettos or foreign countries, in front of television sets or tape machines, or they may find themselves temporarily in campus seminars. A faculty will supervise and guide them. This is essential. The crucial point is that the *form* of Empire State College will be novel, while its *process* remains flexible and its quality high.

Clearly the length and the location of higher learning must be reexamined; yet these changes—important though they are—will be empty gestures unless at the same time we examine the *quality* of the educational encounter. Indeed, as we become less preoccupied with the mechanics—the form—of education, we will be freed to focus on the substance of our work: What do we mean by the educated man, what about such old-fashioned notions as “requirements?” What, in short, should be happening *to*, or, more precisely, *within* each student?

This brings me to a fourth issue: the need to keep concern for the individual as a central aim.

It is true, as Clark Kerr once observed, that the modern multiversity—with its computers, research institutes, government contracts, and sprawling parking lots—has become a vast enterprise indeed. And yet, the human learning activities at its heart remain curiously intimate and low-keyed: the girl studying alone in a library alcove, the boy challenging his professor's ideas after class, roommates arguing their way through a “bull session” late at night. The framework of this university may seem huge and monolithic. But within the institution thousands of intimate intellectual encounters are constantly taking place. Our responsibility, it seems to me, is to encourage such exchanges a thousandfold.

One of the charges most frequently directed against the modern university is that research is stressed while teaching is ignored. In a sense, the charge is misleading because of the cleavage it implies. The *best* teachers frequently are *precisely* those men and women deeply immersed in their research.

But it would be foolish to assert that there is no substance to the charge. Too often we have paid lip service to teaching, while reserving for research the more concrete rewards. The problem, of course, is not new. Charles Townsend Copeland, one of Harvard's truly gifted teachers, had to wait eighteen years for promotion from instructor to assistant professor, because he was considered to be "only" a teacher!

Just as we now—quite properly—give recognition to those outstanding in research by honoring them as Distinguished Professors, so the time has come to honor those who splendidly nourish students. As a step toward that goal, I propose that we create within the University still another academic rank: that of University Teacher. The designation of University Teacher, prudently and sparingly used throughout the University, will signify to the best of our master teachers, both by title and salary, that this University regards highly and rewards excellence in teaching. I fully recognize the pitfalls inherent in the measurement of teaching; I am also aware that a new rank is only a single, modest step.

But the difficulties are worth confronting, and a distinguished rank for teaching is, I believe, more than an empty gesture. In a University whose hallmark is excellence, superior research *and* superior teaching must flourish side by side. To be sure, we must cultivate new realms of knowledge. But we also must cultivate the *people* in our midst. "The worth of a State," wrote John Stuart Mill, "is the worth of the individuals composing it." And so it is with the University as well.

My final concern, while difficult to define precisely, is perhaps the most crucial of all. As I talk with teachers and students, I often have the uncomfortable feeling that the most vital issues of life—the nature of society, the roots of social injustice, indeed the very prospects for human survival are the ones with which the traditional structures of academia are least equipped to deal. Our students come to us at a time of high expectancy, hoping to explore their urgent questions about society and about themselves. And yet, all too often they encounter routines that only deaden and distract. Thoreau might have put the problem this way: we are prepared for the student who wants to understand the anatomy of the frog, but are we prepared for the student who wants to understand the anatomy of his own society, or of his own soul?

I hope so, for I believe society today desperately needs those individuals who look at the old and familiar in startling new ways, who pose the "obvious" questions people seldom ask, who seek—as William Faulkner phrased it in his Nobel Prize address of 1950—"to make out of the material of the human spirit something which was not there before." Such a thrusting beyond the familiar may be an irritant at times. But creativity on the campus will also illuminate the mind, stimulate the arts, and speak to the common yearnings we all share.

Carl Sandburg expressed it well in his simple moving poem, *The People, Yes*:

Once having marched
Over the margins of animal necessity,
Over the grim line of sheer subsistence
Then man came
To the deeper rituals of his bones,
To the time for thinking things over,
To the dance—the song—the story
Or the hours given to dreaming
Once having so marched.

Frankly, at this moment I do not know precisely how the University of the future will organize itself to confront "the deeper rituals" of our bones. And yet, I am confident we can and will respond. In a period when our priorities are being sharply probed, what a tragedy it would be if the most deeply felt issues, the most haunting questions, the most creative moments were to be pushed to the fringes of our institutional life—simply because they do not fit neatly into the academic routines to which we sometimes seem so excessively devoted. "With all thy getting," declare the Scriptures, "get understanding."

CONCLUSION

I am keenly aware of the limited impact which men and their institutions seem to make these days on the events of the times. But our abiding hope that with determination and effort we indeed *can* make a difference represents a life-giving beam of light. Furthermore, if any single social invention carries with it that potential for the fulfillment of our dreams, it is the University. And long after we have all disappeared from the scene, it will have been said of this

magnificent State and its people that by educationally caring for its sons and daughters, it also secured the future.

I wish to acknowledge the debt I owe to the members of the Board of Trustees for the trust they have placed in me, for their guidance and wise counsel, and for their unfailing encouragement and support. Because of my faith in the students and teachers and administrators of this institution, and because of my sense of what the University has meant in the long sweep of human history—and what it may yet become—I am eager to move ahead. For I can think of no greater mission than the building of a University.