

Wendy
Prudt Peterson
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INDIVIDUAL AND COMMUNITY

by

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President

5 notes

Deborah

**The Carnegie Foundation
for the Advancement of Teaching**

Coming Home

Special Convocation/Conferral of Honorary Degree of Laws

Franklin Pierce College

Rindge, New Hampshire

Wednesday, September 29, 1993

1 Resident Peterson

Dean week ①

2 members of the Faculty

3 Students

4 administrative Colleagues

I am deeply honored ~~to~~
by the recognition you have
extended to me today.

Franklin Pierce College

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is one of the most distinctive higher
institutions
in the nation

1) with administrators
of great stature

2) A superb faculty

3) a creative climate
for learning

4) Had a general education program
that is a model for
the nation

Bellevue
Victorian
University

No
institutions

Out of
the
box

→ No national
key school of

1

I admire in democracy

you

Individual & County separate

That provides for all
Police strength a
Core of common laws

2

And I also admire
the way Franklin Pierce College
has ~~combined~~ integrated

The liberal &
The useful Arts

You have
- in this capacity

A dedication

to Christ

to the intellectual quest

Just simply is a
standard of excellence

For the return

SEARCH FOR COMMUNITY

^{of known}
This ~~evening~~, at the beginning of another academic year,

- I should like to talk briefly about ~~the tension between~~
- ~~individualism and community that is growing~~
- ~~here in America~~
- ~~as well as in higher education~~

The ~~theme~~ of ~~liberal~~ heavy

AT THIS CALL

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The questions I'd like to
pose is THIS

Is it possible
in the minority are already

To achieve some sense
of cultural cohesion

Can we - with all of
our individualism

→ And experiments

Also promote
community concerns

Ad 2d like a Begun
By telling you a story

I.

In 1972, I was sitting at my desk in Albany, New York.

It was a dreary Monday morning in Albany—

- **which is a bit of a redundancy, I know.**

And to avoid the pressures of the day

- **I turned instinctively to the stack of third-class mail that I kept perched precariously on the corner of my desk**
- **to create the illusion of being very, very busy—it's an old administrative trick.**

On top of the heap was the student newspaper from Stanford University.

- And the headline announced that the faculty at Stanford had reintroduced a required course in "Western Civilization," after having abolished all requirements just three years before.

- Bear in mind, this was 1972.

The students, I discovered,

- **were mightily offended by the faculty's brash act.**

And in a front page editorial, declared that

- **"A Required Course at Stanford is an Illiberal Act."**

And ~~then~~ ^{THE} the editors concluded their attack ~~on the faculty~~
~~report~~ with this blockbuster question:

- **"How dare they"—the students ask—"impose uniform
standards on nonuniform people?"**

While reflecting on the meaning of this verbal confrontation,

- **my mind "flashed back"**
- **to the days of Cambodia and Kent State,**

to the times—not long before—when, with regularity, I was

- **locked in**
- **and locked out of my office.**

And shouted down by students,

- **who failed to recognize the honor and the adulation I deserved.**

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I also recalled that these irreverent college students,

- most of whom I liked very much,

would reassure me that

- I should ~~not~~ ^{not} take the assaults personally.

The problem—they said—

- I was over 30
- and ~~was~~ ^{that I was} running a corrupt system.

And they were right—of course—on at least one count and perhaps two.

But what I found most revealing and most disturbing,

- **during these endless confrontations,**
- **was that the students kept insisting that**
- **there was "nothing" that we had in common.**

There we were, sitting in my office,

- **getting hungry,**
- **wanting sleep,**
- **shouting,**
- **laughing,**
- **talking to one another,**
- **angry about the war.**

And yet, according to the students,

- **there was absolutely nothing that we shared together.**

And that's what troubled me the most,

I was troubled that some of America's most gifted students

- **after 14 or more years of formal learning**

still had not learned the simple truth that

- **while we're "nonuniform," as the Stanford students put it,**
- **we still do have many things in common.**

They had not discovered the fundamental fact that

- **while we are all "autonomous" human beings**
- **with our own aptitudes and interests**
- **we are—at the same time—**
- **deeply dependent on each other.**

KEY POINT

And this brings me to the central theme of my remarks today.

I'm convinced that ~~educating students in a multicultural world~~

Education

- surely means affirming the sacredness of every individual.
- It means celebrating the uniqueness of every culture.
- It means—as the Stanford students put it—
 - acknowledging the "nonuniformity" that separates us from each other.

→ Of course here non-uniform

Look to your left

Look to your right

and say a prayer for us

But there's another side to the equation.

In our deeply divided world, education also ~~must begin helping~~ students to understand that

means (dis)unity

- **while we're all alone,**
- **^{one} we're also all together.**

The goal must be

- **not only to celebrate individualism,**
- **but to reaffirm "community," as well.**

HUMAN COMMONALITIES

But where do we begin?

Several years ago, in a book called

- *A Quest for Common Learning,*

I suggested that we organize the core curriculum in the nation's colleges and schools,

- not on the basis of "disciplines" or departments,
- but on the basis of what I called
- *The Human Commonalities,*

- those universal ^{human} experiences that are found in
 - all cultures
 - and among all peoples on the planet.

And I concluded that there are, in fact,

- ~~eight~~ ⁴ commonalities that bind us all together.

↳ Q: I have to ask you what ~~what~~ share with Edgore in our room
- where would you begin?

I. THE LIFE CYCLE

First, at the most basic level,

- we all share the universal human experiences of birth and growth and death.

(Have you noticed that the best way to get along in another culture is to take a baby)

The life cycle binds us all together.

And yet the sad truth is

- that most of us go through life without reflecting on the mystery of our own existence,
- not understanding conception,
- not considering the sacredness of our own bodies,
- not learning about how to sustain wellness,
- or pondering the imperative of death.

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My wife is a certified nurse midwife and delivers babies

- **including seven grandchildren of our own.**

And Kay tells of delivering the babies of teenage girls.

These are children having children

- **who for nine months have fed their unborn infant coke and potato chips.**

And then we wonder why children come to school

- **not well prepared to learn.**

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I'm suggesting that

- **we all share the mystery of birth and growth and death.**

And quality education means

- **helping students understand these most basic human experiences**
- **and discover how they differ**
- **from one culture to another.**

II. LANGUAGE

This leads me to commonality number 2.

In addition to the life cycle

- all people on the planet use symbols
- to express feelings and ideas.

The simple truth is that our sophisticated use of language

- **sets human beings apart from all other forms of life.**

And it's through words

- **that we are all connected to each other.**

Consider the miracle of this very moment.

- **I stand here vibrating my vocal cords.**
- **Molecules are bombarded in your direction.**
- **They hit your tympanic membrane;**
- **signals go scurrying up your eighth cranial nerve, and**
- **there's a response deep in your cerebrum that approximates, I trust, the images in mine. But do you realize the audacity of this act?**
- **Encouraged your looking in my direction.**

I've been a teacher far too long to confuse

- **visual contact with**
- **cerebral interest.** *in fact*

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I'm suggesting that our exquisite use of symbols makes us truly human.

ⁱⁿ *Education*
• And ~~I'd like to see a core curriculum~~ in which students ~~study~~ *should study*

• not just parts of speech

• but also how language profoundly shapes our lives.

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Writing recently in the *New York Times*, Malcolm Bradbury said:

- It is an old truth that
 - if we do not have mastery over language,
 - language itself will master us.

tag
We live in a world where

- **cliques have become substitutes for reason**
- **and where prejudice is frozen into hurtful slogans**
 - **even on a college campus.**


In response to this challenge,

- I propose that all students complete a course in expository writing—and oral discourse.
- I also propose that all seniors be asked to write an essay on a consequential topic
 - to test their capacity to think critically
 - and integrate ideas.

- **But I suggest as well that all students be asked to complete**

- **a course on The Ethics of Communication—a seminar where the use and abuse of language would be considered,**

- **where political debates would be carefully critiqued,**

- **and where the integrity of one's own discourse would be thoughtfully confronted.**

I'm suggesting that educating students in a multicultural world

- **means teaching that language is a shared trust**
- **and that truth is the obligation we assume**
- **when we are empowered in the use of words.**

III. THE ARTS

This brings me to human commonality #3.

I'm convinced that

- **beyond the life cycle,**
- **beyond the use of symbols,**

all people on the planet respond to the aesthetic

- **since art is a universal language, too.**

- **Dance is a universal language.**

- **Architecture is a universal language.**

- **Music is a universal language.**

- **Painting and sculpture**

- **are languages that can be understood all around the world.**

Consider how Salvador Dali's painting

- **"The Persistence of Memory"**

can profoundly touch any person haunted by the relentless passage of time.

Consider how the gospel song "Amazing Grace" can stir a common bond among people

- **whether they are from Appalachia or Manhattan.**

And consider also how "We Shall Overcome,"

- **sung in slow and solemn cadence,**
- **can stir powerful feelings**
- **regardless of race or economic status.**

I'm suggesting

- **that for the most intimate,**
- **most profound,**
- **most moving experiences,**
- **we turn to music and dance and the visual arts to express feeling that words cannot convey.**

And this is true for all people on the planet.

IV. HISTORY

This brings me to human commonality #4.

Even though we are all "nonuniform," the simple truth is that

- **all people on the planet—regardless of their culture—have the miraculous capacity**
- **to recall the past**
- **and anticipate the future.**

We are, in fact, the only species on the planet

- **that can put itself in time and space.**

T.S. Eliot wrote

- **"time present and time past" are both perhaps found in**
- **time future,**
- **and time future contained in time past.**

And yet, how often we squander

- **this truly awesome capacity to look in both directions.**

Would it be too sentimental to suggest that

- **during class discussion we might become autobiographical at times**
- **and share with others more candidly**
- **the uniqueness of our past.**

Let me ask you:

- **how much do you really know about your fellow students?**

Is there even one whose heritage you truly understand?

The problem is that **most of us live only in the present,**

- **we don't recall our heritage,**
- **or spend time reflecting on our roots.**

To put it simply, ~~in the days ahead,~~

- **students should study Western civilization to understand our past.**

- **And they should study non-Western cultures to understand our future.**

And I'm also convinced that ethnic and women's studies

- **will enrich the curriculum rather than dilute it.**

V. GROUPS AND INSTITUTIONS

This brings me to the fifth commonality we all share.

In addition to

- the life cycle,
- and the use of symbols,
- and our response to the aesthetic,
- and our shared sense of time,

all people on the planet are also are members in groups and institutions

- that consequently shape their lives.

Our son, Craig, lives in a Mayan village in the jungles of Belize

- with his Mayan wife and 3 Mayan children.

And when we visit Craig each year, I'm impressed that Mayans and Americans

- who may be separated by
 - a thousand miles
 - and a thousand years,

still carry on their work in very similar ways.

→ in ways that
are very much the same

The Mayans, just like all of us, have family units. They have

- **in their culture**
- **elected leaders,**
- **village councils,**
- **and law enforcement people.**
- **They have jails,**
- **and schools,**
- **and they have places where they worship.**

In some ways it's very different

- **but then again, it's also very much the same.**

~~In our search for commonalities let~~

Let's ~~help students~~ understand that we all hold membership in groups and institutions.

But in educating in a multicultural world,

- ~~let's examine how the patterns of social life differs~~ ^{because human life differs} from one culture to another.

~~Consider, for example, the exciting possibility of~~

- ^{social cycle} having students compare group behaviors in
 - Santa Cruz, California
 - with Santa Cruz, Belize.

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David, my 3-year-old grandson in Belize,

- **understands his "connectedness to nature" very well as he**
- **chases birds.**
- **bathes in the river**
- **and watches corn being picked and pounded into tortillas.**

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VI. NATURAL WORLD

This brings me to commonality #6.

It's true that we are all different.

But it's also true that we are all connected to the

- **ecology of planet Earth**
- **(in which we are all "embedded as working parts,"**
- **as Lewis Thomas put it.**

But my grand children in Baton Rouge and in Penick

~~But children in our culture~~—who "grow up" with

- **appliances**
- **and asphalt**
- **and precooked foods—**

find it much more difficult

- **to discover their connections to the natural world.**

When I was United States Commissioner of Education, Joan Cooney,

- the brilliant creator of "Sesame Street,"

came to see me one day.

- She said they wanted to start a new program at Children's Television Workshop
- on science and technology for junior high school kids.
- It subsequently was funded and called "3-2-1 Contact."

In doing background work for that project, they surveyed some junior high school kids in New York City, and asked such questions as:

- "Where does water come from?" A disturbing percentage said "the faucet."
- And they asked, "Where does light come from?" They said "the switch."
- And they asked, "Where does garbage go?" "Down the chute."

~~They~~
 Their connections went about what
 a fan AS
 the ~~VSD~~ TV
 the Refrigerator
 the light switch
 in the wall

I'm suggesting that—with all our differences—every single one of us

- is inextricably connected to the natural world

and that our very survival on this planet

- increasingly will depend on our ability to

- respond sensitively

- to the "earth home" we share together.

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VIII. SEARCH FOR MEANING

Finally, I'm convinced that all people on the planet,

• regardless of their unique heritage or tradition,

• are searching for a larger purpose.

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Reinhold Niebuhr put it most precisely when he said,

- **"Man cannot behold unless he be committed,**
- **he cannot find himself,**
- **unless he finds a purpose beyond himself."**

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Again, the search for meaning varies greatly from one culture to another.

But it's my own conviction that

- at this moment,
- and in this culture.

Life is made most authentic as we engage in service.

Martin Luther King, Jr. said

- **everyone can be great**
- **because everyone can serve.**

And I'm convinced that the young people of this country are

- **ready to be inspired by a larger vision.**

And in the Carnegie report

- **High School and**
- **College**

we propose that service programs become an "integral" part of school and collegiate education.

↳ to help schools see a connection between

what they learn & how they live

Franklin Pierce
Daniel's choice

As Vachel Lindsay ~~once~~ wrote: *in me all*

- It is the world's one crime
 - Its babes grow dull.

- Not that they sow,
 - but that they seldom reap.

- Not that they serve,
 - but have no gods to serve.

- Not that they die,
 - but that they die like sheep.

The tragedy of ~~life~~ is not death.

The tragedy is to die

- **with commitments undefined,**
- **convictions undeclared,**
- **service unfulfilled.**

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IX. JUSTICE

of them

This evening I've suggested that

- while we're all different
- we are at the same time—very much alike.

We are all born and live and die.

We all send messages to each other.

We all respond to music and dance and the visual arts.

We all recall the past and anticipate the future.

We all are members of groups and institutions.

We all are an inseparable part of nature.

~~We all engage in producing and consuming.~~

We all seek to give meaning to our lives.

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And with all the talk about separations and divisions

- this is the glue—the social cohesion—that holds it all together!

• And it's here

- in the Human Commonalities

- that the spirit of community can be found.

JUSTICE

But here, at the very end, I'd like to underscore an absolutely crucial point.

- **An authentic spirit of community**
- **simply cannot be achieved without human justice.**

And frankly, I'm enormously troubled by the growing gap in America today

- between the privileged and the poor.

I'm troubled that in this,

- the most affluent nation in the world,

- one out of every 4 children under the age of 6

- is officially classified as poor.

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I'm troubled that

- **hundreds of thousands of little babies in this country**
- **do not have good nutrition**
- ~~**because the federal WIC program is underfunded.**~~

And I consider it a national disgrace that the Head Start program,

- **which prepares disadvantaged 3 and 4-year-olds for school,**
- **serves less than half the eligible children**
- **because of lack of money.**

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Why is it that we can fund

- **space ~~stations~~ SHUTTLES**
- **and bail out the S&Ls,**

and never seem to have enough money for our children?

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Langston Hughes, in his timeless verse, brought the challenge into focus when he wrote:

- **What happens to a dream deferred?**
- **Does it "dry up"**
- **like a raisin in the sun,**
- **or "fester" like a sore—**
- **or "crust" over?**

What happens to a dream deferred?

- **Maybe it just sags like a heavy load,**
- **or does it explode?**

CONCLUSION

Here, then, is my conclusion.

- Let's celebrate diversity.

the nigma 2 Every Individual

- Let's reaffirm community.

2 a system or connections

But let's also acknowledge

- that terrible injustices still persist,
- and pledge to build a better world,
- for all of us—but most
- especially for our children,

I do not expect miracles overnight.

And yet it is my deepest wish that

- **David, my 3-year-old grandson in Belize.**
- **and Julie, his 3-year-old cousin in New Jersey.**
 - **who speak different languages**
 - **and have different colored skins,**
- **still will grow up knowing deep down inside**
- **that they are truly members of the same human family.**

And to me this is what community is all about.

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Again, thank you very much for honoring me today.