



INAUGURAL ADDRESS

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President

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Madam Rector, Governor Baliles, Secretary Fornash, Provost Perkins, Mayor Newman, Chairman Fore, Mr. Spates, Mr. Guthridge (sage friend through all the many years to WTR2, WTR3, and WTR4), President Willett, President Howard, President Reveley, First Ladies Reveley, May, Quint, my family, my friends ----

We gather together today in the heart of Virginia, in the fifth century of this Commonwealth, between customary rites of an election and Thanksgiving, celebrating an enduring liberty, even --- or perhaps especially --- in an era of gathering clouds, in the longest enduring democracy of the world, a liberty rooted in the ideals of education.

The heartfelt words of this afternoon make me hope even more deeply to be worthy of this trust; I can't help but think of those who can't be with us today, my dear friend Jane Maddux especially --- and likewise of those watching from another shore, as they say in proper liturgy. It is a sentimental and joyful scene that is unfolding.

And what is it like for a Virginian, in the native line of the generations, to be at the focus right now of such a moving and stately ceremony and moment? It is like a homecoming. I was christened in College Church, here in one of all of America's oldest two-college communities; my grandparents, who began their tenure at President Howard's institution exactly fifty years

ago, in the fraught year of 1963, are buried in graves adjoining to its Via Sacra; Longwood has been a part of my family's life continuously for more than a century, since the time of my great-grandmother in the class of 1910 through the generations since, including my dear grandmother in the class of 1940, and my cousin Patrick Eason of the class of 2017, a freshman this year. My grandmother's dear friend Evelyn McCorkle of the class of 1942 is with us today.

Given the momentum of family ties and patterns, you could have the impression that finding my way through the years to assuming the mantle of this role was graceful and easy. But too many of you who have seen my ungraceful moments are assembled today for that. What has propelled me and driven me on this path is the example, so many examples, of selfless hard work and dedication that I have enjoyed the privileged blessing to see and learn from first-hand, at home and in my career.

That same spirit of dedication is also in manifold evidence with our faculty here, the guardians truly from age to age of Longwood's soul. For instance, seven of our current faculty members, Dr. Jordan, Dr. Harbour, Assistant Dean Fowlkes, Prof. Baldrige, Prof. Edmonson, Prof. Lust, Prof. Webber, all with whom I am honored to serve, indeed all have served this institution since the 1970s across five decades; and the incomparable Dr. May, of course, continues great deeds even in ostensible retirement. More than two dozen new faculty members joined our ranks freshly this year, and some of you, blessed with the same fortitude and passion, if you have the same kind of remarkable long tenures, may serve into the year 2050 and beyond -- a link to the future, just as our senior-most faculty today are a link with former days and the formative past: with the administration of President Willett, inaugurated here almost exactly 45 years ago in November 1968, who stewarded the institution with consideration and panache through the social dynamics of the day, or with Dean Gordon Moss, whose courage in the face of

the valley of segregation inspired reverberating change, and taught students to look not just to how to have a career but to how to live a life, or with, in turn, in deeper time, my great-grandfather Thomas Eason, professor of biology here one hundred years ago, honorary member of the class of 1913, who walked the halls we know, dreaming at times naturally of the future of higher education in this Commonwealth and nation.

Even if a president rivals the historic and transformative tenure of Joseph Jarman, who led this institution for 44 years from 1902 to 1946, in the time here of my grandparents and great-grandparents, he or she is at most a steward, preceded and succeeded by animating ranks of faculty the best of whose tenures throughout our 175 year history run in multiples of decades as today.

From the beginning, with faculty at the heart, this institution has held and been held to timeless ideals, while also, in a sequence of metamorphoses, rising to the call of new beginnings. In the earliest days, 175 years ago, many graduates of America's great colleges from the Colonial Era rallied to found this great institution, our University. And it has moved through transformations since, at this Virginia crossroads --- Farmville, Hampden-Sydney, Prince Edward, Longwood --- where, it is certainly profound to note, the Civil War ended and Civil Rights began.

Established as a pioneer in women's education, our then private institution became affiliated with the Methodist Church in its early decades, then became a state institution in the 1880s, a baccalaureate institution a generation later in the first half of the twentieth century, coeducational a generation ago, then a university in name and scope with this new millennium, and today, as one of the hundred oldest colleges and universities in the country and one of the fifty oldest NCAA Division I schools, with 4,800 students from across Virginia, the nation, and

the world, with lifelong bonds with 33,000 alumni across the globe, Longwood stands within the forefront ranks of America's institutions of higher education, which truly are the envy of the world.

These 175 years in Virginia and America, against the backdrop of the millennia of world history, have seen momentous junctures of national and global crisis as well as momentous progress. Future centuries, I suspect, will see the decades ahead of us today as fulcrum years. The global community is knit together in arts and commerce, yet still divided in diplomacy and arms; we hold in our mortal hands still the power to abolish all forms of human poverty and all forms of human life; science has discovered new suns, orbited by new and lonely planets, with characteristics of our own earthly home but at astronomical distance in the imponderable vastness of space, and still our ethics and budgets here on earth struggle to calculate the appropriate distribution of medicines and technology that now, just in present living memory, for the first time in humanity's advance can indeed cure disease and save life --- what would have had the air of magic or divinity even at the beginning of the twentieth century. And as we move through these early decades of the twenty-first century, higher education itself, of course, is under duress, as budgets tighten and questions over purpose are voiced.

For generations, through the tides of history, Longwood's heritage has been as a teaching college --- an institution famed for teaching teachers. Today we are certainly that and more --- we remain one of the best in this country at preparing teachers for that honorable and ancient profession, while also preparing our students for myriad other honorable professions, many of those modeled by our faculty as well as by our splendid professional staff and administrators. Now, if our faculty are the guardians of Longwood's soul, our staff in full, professional and classified, are its dynamic force, so many with tenures also reaching decades in length. There is

never a moment, any hour or day at any time of any year, when some core or crescendo of our staff are not on sentinel watch in a hum of activity for the common good of our University. One moral imperative of this University community is to increase the compensation of our staff and faculty, stagnant through a stagnant decade nationally.

As an institution we have indeed grown in professional reach, building on teaching teachers. Our even deeper heritage, of course, is the liberal arts. At the founding in 1839, at a juncture before any professional career outside the home was meaningfully open to women, including teaching, our curriculum consisted of: music, literature, mathematics, Latin, and Greek. Cicero, writing in a time of peril and growing crisis 2,000 years ago, coined the phrase liberal arts to mean the course of study befitting citizens in a republic; “liberal” having the same root as the word “liberty.” Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, Theodore Roosevelt, and Martin Luther King, among so many, have echoed that call for America.

At the founding of this institution, as today, our foremost concern was preparing citizen leaders, which is to say people of broad mind heedful of tradition and eager for progress. We cannot forget how progressive the idea of women’s education itself was in the early decades of the nineteenth century. Of course, in the progress of our republic, two generations would pass before these citizens, our alumnae, suffragists inspired by the lessons of the liberal arts, themselves would hold the franchise, and more than a century would pass before that franchise was widely shared and Longwood itself was open to all of drive and ability.

My family’s history with this institution and with higher education laces through that time. The one advantage I myself perhaps have distinctive from my father and grandfather at their beginnings in this role is the innocence of youth. My own college days are still within the

nearer reaches of memory and experience. In that regard, I would like to speak to our students today directly, who truly will bring fulfillment to future years, who carry our long hopes.

You know that you ride a tide of history, with fulcrum years ahead, and already without the innocence of generations before, in a time with a weather-beaten sense more like fall than summer, though in a country still rich in a way no array of figures can measure. You are the age now of our patron hero Joan of Arc at the height of her deeds. Among your first vivid memories at national scale was 9/11. News throughout all the days you know has broadcast the tribulations of terror and war. And in 2008, in the crush of adolescence, you saw the economy crash. And the Great Recession today can seem unending.

You know indeed that we live in hard times, with a future of vast possibility. With powerful desire, you want to be citizen leaders. You want the guidance, the wisdom, of this ancient institution --- ordained, maintained --- as it's been passed from generation to generation, leavened with new knowledge, the liberal arts of citizen leaders.

You ask to learn history that will be a guide to the perennial inroads against liberty and to how America might find peace at home;

You ask to learn new languages and literature as a guide to our common humanity;

To learn the psychology that gives humanizing insight for equity and equality;

To learn the dynamic and rhythms of the art that gives peace and challenge to the soul;

The finance that unlocks our way from debt and accelerates enterprise;

The science that fuels our hope to explore the stars and to bring understanding, wonders, and solace throughout this world;

You ask to learn the methods of education itself that will lift the generations to come as citizens of this country and citizens of the world.

Longwood in three centuries is the alma mater of citizen leaders; citizen leaders --- you, here and now, joined with the generations running before you and those still yet to run ahead --- are the coursing heart of Longwood.

Residential liberal arts education is one of the great revolutionary forces in all of history. The third oldest public university in this Commonwealth, governed and overseen by boards of great and good citizen leaders, loved and sustained by faithful and devoted alumni and friends, guarded and propelled by faculty and staff, focused intently on you is at the cusp of such promise with unshakable purpose.

The liberal arts of citizen leaders are for the challenges of free society, perennially the same, perpetually new, as when two millennia ago Cicero in a republic forbearer to our own in an era of gathering clouds first exhorted the liberal arts.

Who is ready to meet the challenge?

At one century and three quarters, Godspeed and thank you.