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You and I and Us and Them

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YOU AND I AND US AND THEM

LAWRENCE UNIVERSITY MATRICULATION CONVOCATION

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One of the more popular and prevalent concepts that we associate with institutions of higher education is the term "community." It is certainly a familiar term at Lawrence. It is term I invoke frequently--whether as "intellectual community" or "academic community"--a term that may be found in our institutional mission and purposes statement, a term that finds expression in our governance system through the Lawrence University Community Council, indeed a term that is featured in our viewbook, in which Lawrence is described as "a community of scholars," "a small, friendly college community," "a community built on trust," where "the community spirit is one of active participation and enrichment."

At best, community is a positive and dynamic way of affirming our commonality as participants in the life of the college. At worst, it may be reduced to a kind of warm fuzzy way of talking about our togetherness. But whatever the case, the term and concept of "community" is a kind of coin of the realm used to describe the institution. But what is it? On the one hand and most frequently, we think of community in terms of the people who occupy a shared space at a given time, engaged in common pursuits,

holding common values. You and I and Us and Them are the community. So far so good, I suppose. It all sounds rather benign, unthreatening, even uplifting and comforting. You and I and Us and Them: we're all in this community together. But who are You and who am I? And who is Us and who is Them? Is community the aggregate of singular individuals? Or is community a composite of plural groups? Or is it both? And does it matter?

The extent to which these questions about community affect or vex the college reflects in some measure the extent to which they affect or vex the country. Clearly, we have reached a point in our national life, a point that is highlighted and dramatized in our institutions of higher education, where such questions have taken on heightened significance and have provoked widespread debate. As Time Magazine put it in its July 8 cover story, the questions go something like this: "Do Americans still have faith in the vision of their country as a cradle of individual rights and liberties, or must they relinquish the teaching of some of these freedoms to further the goals of ethnic and social groups to which they belong? Is America's social contract--a vision of self-determination that continues to reverberate around the world--fatally tainted by its origins in Western European thought? What kind of people do Americans now think they are, and what will they tell their children about that?" Broadly stated, the debate, therefore, is about whether we are a nation--or, in our case, a community--of individuals or of groups, or, put another way, it is a debate about the ways in which we understand ourselves, how we construct our self-understandings, individually and

collectively. The way in which that debate is resolved in any given situation has great implications for the nature of a community and of how we relate to it.

We are a long way from resolving that debate, in large part because the whole notion of community is confounded today by the more recently popular and prevalent notion of diversity. In some general sense, we may see community and diversity as at odds with one another: community implies or invites homogeneity whereas diversity implies and celebrates heterogeneity. As all of you know, diversity--and a number of issues that fall out or follow from diversity--is now the hot topic in American education. Diversity means "difference, unlikeness"; but, as Elizabeth Minnich rightly points out in the most recent issue of Liberal Education, diversity on American college campuses "now means something like 'difference experienced as discrepancy, as cacophony, as disruption' or 'difference noticed and experienced as problematical.'" It is most especially problematical to the extent that we seek to bring together community and diversity, to diversify the community.

The aim to diversify a community not only poses a challenge but reveals part of the problem we face. For any intention to diversify--to introduce difference and unlikeness, if you will--necessarily must begin with the premise that there is some pre-existing arrangement of persons that is perceived to be not presently diverse, or diverse enough. That view, in its simplest form, is one that is dominating discussions about American higher education in the 1990s. Motivated in part by an idealism that seeks to

extend the promise of educational opportunity to all people, prompted in part by the demographic realities that reveal the increasing numbers of so-called minority students who will be eligible for post-secondary education in the coming decade, stimulated in part by the fact that we need to find ways to live together in what will be an increasingly racially and ethnically pluralistic society, colleges are striving to find ways to pay greater heed to these circumstances, to find better ways to be hospitable places for all, and to realize a shared civility for the benefit of each and every person. While these initiatives are directed at everyone, they are particularly attentive to the experiences of those who have historically been underrepresented on our nation's campuses.

At Lawrence, we proclaim as one of our purposes "to seek diversity within the university community as a means to enrich teaching and learning and to promote tolerance and understanding." Beyond that purpose, of course, the search for diversity also relates to other facets of the college, to the composition of the faculty and staff and to the contours of the curriculum. My purpose this morning, however, is to focus on how the diversity issue affects the nature of our community and the way in which we conduct the basic purposes of the institution.

It is worth noting that attention to elements of the diversity issue is not only being undertaken by individual institutions. Consortia such as the Associated Colleges of the Midwest and the Great Lakes Colleges Association have programs designed to

advance aspects of this agenda. Practically every national educational association has initiated projects aimed at addressing diversity. Major foundations like Ford and Lilly have devised grant programs on the topic. In what has become something of a cause celebre, one of the major accrediting agencies has introduced a diversity standard in its reviews of colleges and universities--and been roundly criticized for the effort by the Secretary of Education, who has suspended the Department of Education's recognition of the agency pending a review of the legitimacy of the standard.

The diversity debate rages, then, but it is not a debate confined to the halls of ivy. As Professor Troy Duster of Berkeley framed it in this week's Chronicle of Higher Education, we are dealing with "a complicated question that, stated most simply, is: 'What does it mean to be an American?'" The debate may be most prominent and publicized on college campuses, but it is in fact a debate that has to be understood in terms of long-standing American values and precepts. E Pluribus Unum--the national motto--and the ideal it proclaims regarding our national political arrangements and our national identity must be seen as providing an important context for the current concern. That context is one that is peculiarly American, and absent an appreciation for the national ideology we will not fully appreciate the significance of the debate we're now experiencing. That context has many sources, of which I will here only sketch a few.

In his Letters from an American Farmer, published in London in 1782, Hector

St. John de Crevecoeur posed a question that has preoccupied--sometimes haunted--Americans ever since: "What then," he asked, " is the American, this new man?" We hear that question today, in Crevecoeur's words, and already there's trouble brewing: the American about whom the question is asked is masculine. But once Crevecoeur begins to deliver his answer, the pot may begin to boil over. "He is either," Crevecoeur wrote, "an European, or the descendent of an European, hence that strange mixture of blood, which you will find in no other country." Alas, it turns out that the American Crevecoeur has in mind is not only male, but a white European male to boot.

Now the question posed--what is the American?--and the answer given (about which more in a moment) are interesting and taken together with other early attempts to grapple with the issue of who we are as a people the question and the answer give us an optic on our shared identity and provide us with a sense of what Gunnar Myrdal styled the American Creed. But in some quarters these days, Crevecoeur and those other commentators are blasted--and then dismissed--precisely because of the aforementioned limitations of his and their language and outlook. And the blasters and dismissers are not without their reasons, which on the surface seem not only plausible but proper: women play a relatively minor role in Crevecoeur's analysis--they enter the picture only as wives and mothers--and blacks and Native Americans--to say nothing of Asians and Hispanics--are wholly left out of the equation. The absence of the latter may be explained by their absence from the scene in the late eighteenth century, an explanation, however, that will hardly suit when it comes to blacks and Native

Americans. Are they too not Americans and are they too not to be accounted for in any coming to terms with the issue of national identity?

Now the fact that we would answer that last question affirmatively does not necessarily require us to write off Crevecoeur. He was, obviously and inevitably, a creature of his time; were Crevecoeur to have written with our sensibilities and outlooks, his categories of analysis would undoubtedly have been far different. But once recognizing the historical condition--that he was of his time, not ours--it seems to me that we can profitably learn something about ourselves from Crevecoeur and others without shelving our critical faculties and accepting their worldview wholesale. And I hope that you will indulge me in that endeavor for these moments together this morning.

Let's return to Letters from an American Farmer. Here's how Crevecoeur continues his answer to his question: "He is an American, who leaving behind him all his ancient prejudices and manners, receives new ones from the new mode of life he has embraced, the new government he obeys, and the new rank he holds....Here individuals of all nations are melted into a new race of men, whose labours and posterity will one day cause great changes in the world....The American is a new man, who acts upon new principles; he must therefore entertain new ideas, and form new opinions." Obviously and, indeed, not surprisingly, Crevecoeur's emphasis throughout this essay was to distinguish the American from the European, in fact, his purpose was to show the ways

in which Europeans became Americans. He was writing to a European audience and writing from a place in the new nation populated almost exclusively by peoples from Europe.

Further, he understood the American to have been forged from "individuals of all nations" who had been "melted"--a concept that would have great power in American self-understanding over the course of three centuries--into a "new race," a term he used not in the conventional meaning of race as the U.S. Census Bureau defines it, but as ideology and nationality, influenced in large part by environment. The new race is not simply a consequence of intermarriage--though Crevecoeur mentions that phenomenon and refers to the Americans as "this promiscuous breed"--but results from a "new mode of life," a "new government," and a "new rank." It is a product as well of "new principles," "new ideas," and "new opinions." Americans, then, are those who have abandoned "ancient prejudices and manners" and who have flourished in a new setting of freedom and opportunity. Indeed, Crevecoeur goes on to argue not that the American is some homogenized creature but that there is an extraordinarily rich diversity of Americans, each formed and conditioned in part by the circumstances in which he lives and the place he inhabits. Out of or within that diversity, however, emerged or was formed the American, this new man.

In making that claim, Crevecoeur was not alone. Writing in his journal, Ralph Waldo Emerson asserted that in America, this "asylum of all nations, the energy of

Irish, Germans, Swedes, Poles, & Cossacks, & all the European tribes--of the Africans, & of the Polynesians, will construct a new race...as vigorous as the new Europe which came out of the smelting pot of the Dark Ages." Those who participated in the founding of the American republic believed that the new nation was to consist of a new people. However limited and hence flawed their notions of inclusiveness may have been, that idea is an important and enduring legacy that we have inherited from them. This sense of newness, of life begun afresh, was pervasive and potent. "We have it in our power," Thomas Paine proclaimed, "to begin the world all over again."

In one sense, it is all pretty heady stuff. And it was pretty hard-headed too. George Washington worried that new arrivals would band together and therefore retain the "Language, habits and principles (good or bad) which they bring with them." He thus urged that they intermix with extant American communities and become "assimilated to our customs, measures and laws: in a word, soon become <u>one people</u>." John Quincy Adams's advice to a German baron made the same point. Emigrants, he warned, "<u>must cast off the European skin, never to resume it</u>. They must look forward to their posterity rather than backward to their ancestors."

Well, of course, it never happened that way, though the ideology of abandoning the old, adopting the new, and hence producing one people persisted for centuries, indeed persists to the present day. For most of our history, in fact, persons chose to emigrate to the United States and were prepared, in varying degrees of intensity, to

assimilate. Israel Zangwill's play The Melting Pot gave expression to that idea in 1908, concluding with a peroration to "the great Melting Pot" roaring and bubbling, stirring and seething, a cauldron in which "Celt and Latin, Slav and Teuton, Greek and Syrian,--black and yellow--...Jew and Gentile" shall "all unite to build the Republic of Man and the Kingdom of God." A more severe version of that idea was voiced with particular force by two American presidents. Teddy Roosevelt assaulted what he styled hyphenated Americans and Woodrow Wilson followed suit: "You cannot become thorough Americans," he told an audience of recently naturalized citizens, "if you think of yourselves in groups. America does not consist of groups. A man who thinks of himself as belonging to a particular national group in America has not yet become an American."

The American ideal, then, was not only a grand and uplifting promise, but had its darker side as well, given voice and prominence throughout our history by those whose test for true Americanness was exclusionary. Abraham Lincoln objected to the version of this darker side found in the Know-Nothing Party in the 1850s. "Our progress in degeneracy appears to me to be pretty rapid," he wrote a friend. "As a nation, we began by declaring that 'all men are created equal.' We now practically read it 'all men are created equal, except negroes.' When the Know-Nothings get control, it will read 'all men are created equal, except negroes, and foreigners, and catholics."

Lincoln's invocation of the Declaration of Independence is instructive, for it leads us toward another essential element of the idea of American identity. The prologue to the Declaration, affirming the principle of equality and citing the inalienable rights of individuals to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; the establishment of democratic values in the Constitution; the protections of individual rights detailed in the Bill of Rights--these ideas shaped what Washington meant when he referred to American customs, measures, and laws, those principles and practices the allegiance to which bonded individuals together as one people. Reflecting on this matter in his famous work An American Dilemma, the Swedish scholar Gunnar Myrdal wrote that "Americans of all national origins, classes, regions, creeds, and colors, have something in common: a social ethos, a political creed." Compared to every other country in the West, Myrdal went on, the United States "has the most explicitly expressed system of general ideals in reference to human interrelations." And while he acknowledged the degrees to which those ideals were not "very satisfactorily effectuated in actual social life," he was impressed nonetheless by their power and pervasiveness, by the ways in which their existence meant, in his words, that "America is continuously struggling for its soul."

The struggle for the nation's soul has been going on since its founding. From our beginnings as a nation, the ideal of the essential dignity and worth of the individual has been realized at best unevenly. No reading of the American experience can fail to acknowledge, even to lament, the myriad ways in which the ideals of a common American identity, of one people, have been frustrated. The millions in slavery--whom

the Constitution recognized for purposes of political representation as three-fifths persons--were not accorded standing and stature in terms of the national creed until the Fourteenth Amendment, passed in 1866; women were not accorded the vote until the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920. Even these achievements were flawed, and it has taken Supreme Court decisions--such as Brown v. Board of Education--and Congressional law-making--such as the Voting Rights Act and the Civil Rights Act--to realize the promise of the American Creed for black Americans. That many women today advocate an Equal Rights Amendment to the Constitution is but another sign of the fact that, for some, the struggle for the nation's soul continues.

As these political illustrations make clear, despite the ideology of the melting pot, of the ideal of one people, our nation has excluded persons in certain groups from the full privileges of citizenship. And, looking beyond the laws of the land, we can find many other examples of ways in which many Americans have been denied full and equal participation in the informal and voluntary associations of American life, persons for whom the American Dream has often been a promise deferred. But, until very recently, it was at the same time a promise remembered. It has perhaps never been remembered and invoked more eloquently and movingly than by Martin Luther King, Jr., in his speech at the March on Washington in 1963: "I say to you today, my friends," King said, "that in spite of the difficulties and frustrations of the moment I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream. I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: 'We hold these

truths to be self-evident; that all men are created equal.'" Indeed, one of the remarkable achievements of our nation is that its founding principles of equality, freedom, democracy, and the intrinsic worth of the individual have served three important functions: as guides to our political arrangements and social relations, as condemnations of our failures to live up to these ideals--as women's rights advocates and abolitionists made clear in the decades before the Civil War--and as a means and spur to self-correction of those failures throughout our history--as King's speech and the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s so dramatically exemplified.

Meg Greenfield, in an editorial in Newsweek this past July, reflected on this element of our national experience in ways I find poignant and helpful in understanding our long-standing values and our present dilemma:

"I have long thought it a stroke of genius," she writes, "for us to honor acquired ancestors in this country, to claim descent from people to whom our only connection is spiritual and philosophical and to insist, whether or not there were any from our particular tribe present in the drawing room at the time, that the high-minded terms of the will they drew up for the country be fulfilled. We also of course regularly amend that document to make its abiding principles applicable to the transformed world in which we live.

"Americans, unlike others, are not just pursuing the feuds and imperatives of ancient bloodline descent, the source of so much mindless, self-destructive conflict around the world today. We adopted our forebears. Even those among us who have had the worst

of the American experience make a voluntary claim on these people, demand that the founders' posterity be held to the best of their ideals, never mind what has happened up till now. It is this common acquired past and the common purpose that is meant to flow from it that is threatened by some of the excessive separatism and social fragmentation that are being witnessed now."

Ms. Greenfield frames the matter crisply and correctly, I think, even as she goes on to acknowledge that much greater attention to the history and culture of different American groups ought to be incorporated into our shared knowledge of our past and while at the same time she stresses the need to maintain an "all-important, binding, shared American identity...political, philosophical and cultural."

Greenfield's moderate and moderating position is one to which I want to return. But for now, I only point out that the problem that she is addressing is one of growing import. Today, well into our third century as a nation, we find ourselves struggling both again and anew with these venerable issues of national ideals and national identity. We struggle again to the extent that the promise of American life is still denied to many of our fellow citizens. We struggle anew in the sense that we now recognize with far greater clarity and force and intelligence than had been the case heretofore, the ways in which the American achievement has been enriched by the distinctive contributions of those to whom we had paid too little heed for too long and the ways in which the American experience, viewed from other perspectives, is found to be far more complex and troubling. The shorthand for these recognitions is the term

"multiculturalism," an idea which harkens back--though now with the advantages of new evidence and new scholarship--to earlier visions of the American mosaic, of America as salad bowl, of the idea and ideal of cultural pluralism.

We have surely gained much by these new discoveries and emphases. Our understanding of our common history is demonstrably extended and enriched by the recognition of and attention paid to the experiences and perspectives of those whose roots were not in Europe, or whose coming to America did not conform to the traditional immigrant pattern, or who have not "melted" as Crevecoeur, Emerson, and Zangwill posited as the norm. Familiar events and ideas are made fresh and take on new import when viewed from these other vantage points, when reflected upon by other voices. Is our sense of our past diminished or enlarged by recognizing that for Native American peoples, Columbus's arrival in 1492 was not a discovery but a confrontation; that the Sioux and the Blackfeet did not experience or view mid-nineteenth century Manifest Destiny and westward expansion as did Anglo-European American proponents and settlers? Do we do another and perhaps better justice to a full understanding of the American experience by spending time confronting the lives and legacies of Frederick Douglass, Harriet Tubman, and W.E.B. DuBois and a bit less time on Myles Standish, Priscilla Mullens, and John Alden? The answers strike me as noncontroversial and obvious: of course we are enlarged and achieve better understanding.

The problem, of course, is that many advocates of multiculturalism and diversity

take the argument several steps further. Some would argue--as did the National Council of Churches--that Columbus set loose "an invasion and colonization with legalized occupation, genocide, economic exploitation and a deep level of institutional racism and moral decadence." Another critic--quoted in The Economist this past July--hyperbolically charged that "Columbus makes Hitler look like a juvenile delinquent." In a particularly ahistorical assertion, a professor on the New York State task force that proposed a new multicultural curriculum for the public schools argued that the term holocaust ought not apply only to the Jewish experience under the Nazis, but that Native Americans and African Americans have claim on the term as well. As these examples illustrate, at times the aim of some advocates of multiculturalism seems less the acknowledgement, study, or even celebration of diversity than it is an assault on the worth of the American experience, seen in these lights as oppressive. Given these condemnations of traditional American values and self-understandings, it is no wonder that the struggle over diversity and community now takes a sharper turn.

Which is why the diversity/community and culture/multicultural debate is so central and difficult. It is made particularly difficult by the fact that a number of persons engaged in the debate have posed the issue in either/or terms, have set forth positions and arguments that admit of no ambiguity, no middle ground. There is precious little humility in this debate and far too much bold assertion of unassailable rectitude for this or that position. We do well to recognize and to work through the inherent difficulties and confusions we face here, rather than seek simple solutions to

complex problems. Troy Duster, whom I quoted a moment ago, makes a similar observation. "It may well be," he writes, "that we have too narrowly conceived the options as either/or. It may be that as a nation we have cast the problem incompletely and thus incorrectly by posing the matter as either one of assimilation to a single, dominant culture where differences merge and melt away--or one of hardened, isolated, and self-segregated groups, retreating into ethnic and racial enclaves, defeating the very purpose of trying to achieve diversity." Perhaps, I would add, we need to appreciate the fluidity of our identities, the multiplicity of our associations, and the complexities each of us embodies.

Martha Crunkleton advises something of this approach when she notes that we suffer from the confusion of equating difference with opposition. "If men and women are equal," she writes, "but women differ from men, then women and men are opposed--opposite kinds or types (for example, the 'opposite sex'). This kind of thinking about difference influences our thinking about race, gender, class, sexual preference, geography, religion--about almost any category we use to describe how one group differs from another. If the 'other' is oppositional, it becomes easy to identify the 'other' in a monolithic way. And then it is easy to overlook the diversity within the groups we have chosen to see as 'other.' It becomes easy to talk glibly about the 'male point of view,' or the 'black perspective,' as if these were unitary realities....Enforcing that kind of sameness within a group defined initially by its difference overlooks the distinctiveness of all persons in that group. This way of thinking makes it difficult for us to

understand each other in our complexity." Crunkleton is right; understanding each other is difficult indeed.

In mulling over these matters, I find myself drawn to the case of my daughter. Karin is eighteen years old, a college freshman, and an exceedingly interesting individual. She was, to the best of my knowledge, the first person in Appleton to discover and celebrate Sinead O'Connor, is dotty about Les Miserables and Phantom of the Opera, is fascinated by medieval history and culture and thinks she would love to work at The Cloisters, is a fairly accomplished artist, and can mimic a New York accent so that even Professor Dintenfass might think she came from Brooklyn. In her first month at college, she has joined the Ultimate Frisbee team, a medieval music ensemble as well as a juggling group, and is taking up the guitar. She is also, as far as I can tell, enrolled in several courses. In short, she possesses a range of individual interests and attributes, and in that respect is no different from each and every person in this Chapel.

Karin is also Korean. Margot and I adopted her when she was 21 months old. On her college applications, she properly listed herself as Asian. And at college she has also affiliated with the Asian Student group and, according to our last conversation with her, is contemplating the possibility of learning Korean. When she was twelve years old, she attended a week-long Korean Heritage Camp in Oregon, her only sustained engagement with others who shared that identity. Every person at that camp--directors, counselors, campers--was Korean. And when we asked her what was the most exciting

part of that experience, she reported that it was crossing the camp grounds without everyone turning around to look at her a second time, something that tended to occur more often than not on the streets of Appleton and the in the corridors of East High School.

Now Karin's case is by no means typical, but it is in some ways instructive: she is an American--in many ways a typical American teenager--and she is Korean. She is an individual, with individual talents and tastes and temperaments, and she is also a member of a group, an affiliation that might, in time and in ways neither she nor I can now possibly foresee, shape the way she understands herself as an individual. Her Korean roots have a bearing on her sense of self in ways far different from the fact that I trace my roots to Alsace-Lorraine and Denmark. Karin is drawn to other Asian students--in ways that I am not drawn to Danes--and will surely learn from them about their experiences of ethnicity and of how they understand and relate to their roots. But no one should understand Karin in a monolithic way; she is not an example of some unitary reality of Koreanness or Asianness; she may become influenced by but she will never be bounded by her ethnicity. She deserves to be accorded her complexity, her distinctiveness, her individuality--and each and every one of us deserves the same. If she chooses to express or seek those qualities through association with other Asian students, she does not thereby lose or forfeit her complexity, her distinctiveness, her individuality, indeed she may enhance them. And in this she is no different from any person, on her college campus or this one, who is a member of a particular ethnic or

racial group.

This rather personal illustration leads me to the following conclusion, one that follows from and echoes the position of Ernest Boyer in his recent report entitled Campus Life. Boyer argues that a college should be what he styles "a just community, a place where the sacredness of each person is honored and where diversity is aggressively pursued." I share with Boyer the ambition and intention that we can have it both ways--in fact, that we ought to have it both ways. He sees these objectives as compatible, not contradictory; he acknowledges that students ought to join together to pursue shared interests and mutual support, but argues too that students should reach out to one another, not only within their groups but also as individuals. One can certainly generalize these points and indeed I would argue that they apply to all groups on campus, the social as well as the purposeful, but most particularly to those that affirm, celebrate, or explore ethnic or gender identities. We ought not label such groups too glibly and put them at a distance--to see their members as "Them"--but to find in the lives and values of those persons the sources of enlivened and expanded community. We should remember too that persons who in one sense or setting might be viewed as "Them" to our "Us"--and who, of course, will return the favor--are in other senses and settings one of "Us."

But, in the last analysis, the college community--if it is to be a community--ought not be constructed or construed in terms of groups, any more than the college

curriculum should be so constructed or construed. To the extent that the curriculum recognizes or will recognize the expressions and experiences of those groups--by individuals or in the aggregate--our intellectual lives will be enriched and our appreciations for the many facets and features of diversity will be enhanced. But to the radical multiculturalists who argue a brand of intellectual and cultural relativism and who see the Western liberal tradition or the so-called American Creed as no different from or better than any other tradition or political and social arrangement, we must beg to differ. We must, it seems to me, continue to see as the special genius of our country and our educational traditions the primacy of the individual and of the individual's worth and dignity, whatever group affiliation that individual might hold. Robert Maynard Hutchins argued that "a liberal education...frees a [person] from the prison-house of...class, race, time, place, background, family, and even his [or her] nation." Today, many would argue the opposite: that race and background are not prisons from which we need to be liberated, but the defining characteristics of our personhood that ought to be the substance and subject of our education. That is a view we ought to resist. It is one thing to argue for greater attentiveness to diversity, greater acknowledgement of multicultural perspectives; it is quite another to argue that group identity reigns sovereign and that members of groups need to be educated about, indeed can only learn effectively when studying about, their group's identity, history, and traditions. Were that to be the case, we would forever be consigned to the prisons of the self.

For us, the notion that liberal education is a liberating education is inextricably tied to the values we hold as Americans, values that have in recent months and years gained tremendous potency in many parts of the world. For there is an essential connection between liberal learning and democratic values, a connection that Lawrence President Henry Merritt Wriston identified 55 years ago. The liberal arts college, he wrote, "can be an exponent of freedom only while political institutions are also free. Only as long as a democracy will accept the hazards inherent in its own nature will the liberal college survive. If ever the doctrines of discipline and authority, if ever the faith in collective planning and action, if ever the totalitarian theory of the state [if ever, we might add today, the privileging of group identity as fundamental and primary] triumph over the ideal of an adventurous individual life, the environment will overwhelm the institution." "The only conceivable objective in dealing with students," he went on, "is one which is individual to each." "To the regeneration of the individual student the liberal college is directed."

Lawrence should remain so directed. Clearly, many of us identify ourselves not just as individuals, but as members of groups. You and I are not just You and I; we come together as Us when we share certain identities and attitudes and we view those who have other identities and attitudes as Them. Some of these identities and attitudes are what I would style voluntary or volitional; we choose many associations on the basis of attributes that we select, rather than ones that are essentially ours. Other differentiations are more fundamental and enduring, such as one's sex or race or ethnic

background or religious tradition. In these cases, You and I and Us and Them are categories that take on greater import and meaning. And yet.... And yet there remains the singularity of each person, in all of his or her complexity, distinctiveness, and individuality. And yet too there remains that peculiar and persistent American principle of one people; and there remains that collegiate ideal of community. The realization of that principle and that ideal has always been difficult, never more so than at present, with all of the frenzy and fractiousness about multiculturalism and diversity abroad in the land. But the striving for that realization has probably never been more important to our common weal, both at Lawrence and beyond. I urge that we undertake that striving in a spirit of openness and joy, knowing that the process, however fraught with hazards, will truly help us approach a better version of our better selves, individually and collectively, and make our community both just and honorable for all.