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Standing with the Statue of Liberty

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Beth, thank you for your leadership of the Public Events Committee this year.

Thank you Kathrine Handford for providing an organ prelude that sets the stage for this and all our Convocations. Thank you Phillip Swan, Steven Sieck and members of the entering class for beginning our year with such beauty. I look forward to many future performances. And thank you, Linda Morgan-Clement, for providing closing words for today's Convocation. I also want to thank the many members of the Lawrence community who helped me with research for my talk today.

I am grateful to David McGlynn and the Public Events Committee of last year for assembling a provocative and engaging Convocation series for us to enjoy. I hope you will join me in attending them. I want to specifically mention our convocation with Matika Wilbur on April 11. Matika will be with us to discuss "Changing the Way We See Native America." Her talk will be part of a larger effort to renew our connections with Native American communities both in Wisconsin and around the country.

Welcome to the academic year. I want to specifically welcome 425 first year, transfer and visiting students, eight new tenure-line faculty and many other new faculty and staff. I know you will join me in extending a warm Lawrence welcome to all new members of our community.

Preparing for Matriculation Convocation provides a moment to look back at the previous year, to see what we as a community need to discuss. For the first time in the six years that I have had the privilege of addressing you, an overwhelming number of issues rose to the surface. Extreme weather and resulting emergencies such as forest fires, drought, and hurricanes filled the news cycle. We learned more deeply about the effects of electronic interconnectedness and the open door social media provided to foreign influence in many democracies. The Me Too movement woke the nation to the corrosive impact of a toxic blend of power, gender, and sexual assault. Especially concerning for those of us in the academy: we were reminded that this trend continues on college campuses as well as in the larger society. Many voices have mounted a direct attack on the value of facts and evidence based research, concepts that live at the heart of the education we offer. And communities around the world continue to struggle to connect across differences of race, religion, political views, ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic class.

The education provided by Lawrence and other institutions of higher learning has never been more needed. I look forward to discussing and debating these themes and many others both inside our classrooms and on campus this year.

But in the end, for me, the most searing image of last year were the pictures of young terrified children in deep pain as they were taken from their parents at the border. These pictures represented over 2,300 children separated due to a new "zero tolerance" policy instituted on the southwest border — a policy that ushered in the next stage of our country's changing attitudes toward immigration. These images as well as images of refugees risking their lives in forced marches and sea travel in decrepit boats, rafts, and dinghies filled our consciousness this past year; they have brought to a boil in the United States and around the world the issues of immigration, refugee resettlement, and the growing number of displaced persons.

The numbers alone are shocking. According to a 2017 report by the UN Refugee Agency, at least 68.5 million people are now forcibly displaced from their homes due to political strife, environmental degradation, and other calamities. This is larger than the population of the United Kingdom. Over half of these displaced persons are younger than 18.

The trend line is also concerning. The number of displaced persons has grown by 60% in ten years. In 2017, 16.2 million people were displaced from their homes: three times the population of the state of Wisconsin. From the public conversation, one may assume that most of these displaced persons have now moved to Europe and North America. Actually, the vast majority – more than four out of every five – of these displaced persons reside in countries adjacent to their homelands. Turkey hosts the largest number. Pakistan, Uganda, Lebanon and Iran round out the top five host countries. Growing destinations include Bangladesh which received over half a million refugees from Myanmar in a six-month period, and Colombia, which has become the destination of close to half a million refugees from Venezuela.

After visiting a Syrian refugee camp in Jordan, Khaled Hosseini, author of *The Kite Runner*,” said: “These are important numbers. But it is a hard thing to picture millions of faces all at once. Numbers have a way of making them merge, turning them into a blur of human tragedy, a calamity so sprawling, that it undermines our ability to truly see it.” Recent authors such as Leila Abdelrazaq, Alaksandar Hemon, Dave Eggers and Hosseini himself have tried in their writings to humanize – to allow us to feel as we imagine the moving and desperate plight of displaced persons.

Given that there are fewer than six million Native Americans, Native Hawaiians and Native Alaskans in a country of 325 million, America is a country populated almost entirely from elsewhere. Many of us remember our own family’s immigration narrative. Some of our stories include the choice to emigrate, others tell of displacement from homelands by expulsion, force, or enslavement. The popularity of companies such as Ancestry.com and 23andme underscores our growing interest in these stories.

My husband David’s and my family origins illustrate some of the different choices that led people to become citizens of this country. My grandparents on one side of my family and great grandparents on the other side fled economic and religious persecution in Eastern Europe at the turn of the twentieth century. They came here as uneducated refugees, unaccompanied minors with no skills or resources. To survive, they built small family businesses like the Irish and Italian immigrants who surrounded them in the New York metropolitan area. They also practiced what some now call “chain migration”: frantically trying to bring family members to the United States before what turned out to be certain murder by Nazi Germany.

My in-laws immigrated to the United States in the 1950s from Colombia, South America. Because they were highly educated, a doctor and a nurse, our government actively recruited them to this country. When my father-in-law went to the US Consulate in Medellin the official asked him what visa he wanted. When he responded he didn’t know, the official suggested a green card would be the best option because it gave him the most flexibility. He finished a postdoctoral fellowship at Duke and began to practice pathology at the University of Chicago.

My family successfully fled persecution and likely death. David's family experienced both economic opportunity and prejudice for the first time here in the United States as a Spanish speaking family marooned in a wider, white, English speaking society.

I am sure family narratives in this room range even more widely than David's and mine. Some of us lived on this land and were forced to migrate to reservations. Others affirmatively decided to emigrate for a better life, or were kidnapped into slavery, or fled persecution, economic hardship and imminent death.

Can we take our personal narratives and develop a policy perspective from them? Last year I suggested three possible core values for us as a community: 1) To teach emotional intelligence and practice empathy; 2) To reinforce our commitment to academic freedom and freedom of speech with limits; and 3) To pursue equity in all that we do. I want to thank the many of you who contacted me afterward to discuss and debate this list. If we agree that practicing empathy and pursuing equity are core values for our community – then perhaps we can learn to see parallels to our own families' narratives with the experience of people fleeing economic hardship and political persecution around the globe today.

The impulse to support the stranger in our land is reinforced for many of us by our religious beliefs. For example, Leviticus in the Hebrew Bible states, "When a foreigner resides among you in your land, do not mistreat them. The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt." Galatians from the New Testament states, "... the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." From the Buddhist perspective, The Way of the Bodhisattva states, "Since I and other beings both, in fleeing suffering, are equal and alike, what difference is there to distinguish us, that I should save myself and not the others?"

But our history suggests that we, as a nation, have struggled from the beginning to learn from our personal past and from these teachings. And here in the United States, the past fifteen years of political conflict over immigration policy simply recapitulate that long struggle. This is particularly true for people who want to join us and who represent religions, races, or ethnicities different from the majority of citizens already here. Many scholars point to Roger Williams and the establishment of the colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations in 1636 as the beginning of our debate about this country's constraints on immigration and citizenship. Williams, an early immigrant to the Massachusetts Bay Colony from England, believed in religious freedom and the separation of Church and State. This philosophical stance did not sit well with the Puritan leadership of Massachusetts. In response he founded a new colony, despite the objection of the Puritan leadership, that welcomed people of all regions including Baptists, Jews, and Quakers. He established a close connection with the Narragansett tribe and he pursued anti-slavery policies. Thus, began one of the first debates of who can truly be an American citizen.

In *A Nation by Design*, Aristide Zolberg chronicles the long internal struggle to define American immigration policy. He writes that this country's policy, from the drafting of the Declaration of Independence into the twentieth century, has been influenced by the amount of land available for development; by national economic conditions, including the demand for labor; and by racial, ethnic, and religious considerations. State and federal legislators alternately enacted and relaxed

restrictive policies through the early 1920s. This period of general welcome allowed millions of new citizens to immigrate to the United States – including many who made their home here, in Wisconsin.

What seemed particularly salient to me as I thought about what is happening today is the period from the end of the First World War into the late 1920s when the United States government decided to significantly curtail immigration. In that period, we directly restricted non-Anglo Saxon peoples. Right after the war, books like *The Passing of the Great Race* by Madison Grant, chairman of the New York Zoological Society and a trustee of the American Museum of Natural History, and *The Rising Tide of Color against White World-Supremacy* by Lothrop Stoddard, encouraged a belief in white racial supremacy. The Ku Klux Klan, which targeted African Americans, foreigners, Catholics, and Jews, also saw a resurgence of membership and activity during this period.

Some people spoke against this trend. For example, the New York Times proclaimed in an editorial, “This new historic idea (of racial determinism) runs counter to our spiritual convictions as to the brotherhood of all human beings and the identical preciousness of all human souls.” But the insistence on white racial supremacy remained powerful in the country and in the political process.

What followed was a series of laws that imposed drastic restrictions on immigration to the United States – including the requirement of a literacy test, the direct barring of immigrants from Asia and Mexico, and quotas for individual European countries based on the number of US citizens who had already come from that country. These laws specifically curtailed immigration of Italians, Mexicans, Jews, Japanese and Chinese. As James Davis, Secretary of Labor, asserted in 1923 in the idiom of his time, “We want the beaver type of man. We want to keep out the rat-type.”

Concerns about security, national demographics, and economic health led presidential administrations and congressional majorities from both parties to sustain these policies through the early 1960s. Even the severe persecution of Jews and other communities by Nazi Germany and the uprooting of millions of people in the wake of the Second World War did not lead to major changes in policies.

As Breckinridge Long, a senior member of the State Department in the Roosevelt administration, confided to his diary after a conversation with another colleague, “He says they are lawless, scheming, defiant – and in many ways unassimilable. He said the general type of intending immigrant was just the same as the criminal Jews who crowd our police court dockets in New York and with whom he is acquainted . . . I think he is right – not as regards the Russian and Polish Jew alone but the lower level of all that Slave population of Eastern Europe and Western Asia.” Exceptions were approved by Congress for refugees after the war, but the quota system remained in place. These laws were reaffirmed in 1952 by act of Congress over the veto of President Truman who called the legislation, “a slur on the patriotism, the capacity, and the decency of a large part of our citizenry.”

In 1965, legislation passed and signed into law at the Statue of Liberty by President Johnson eliminated the quotas, prioritized family re-unification, and opened up immigration from Asia,

Mexico, and Africa. This new policy lived up to the words of the poem inscribed on the base of the Statue of Liberty by Emma Lazarus: “Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, the wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me.” This significant change in national policy also set up the present debates on immigration and the future of our country.

Many of the arguments deployed during these legislative battles continue to be alive today. For example, we hear that immigrants commit more crimes than US citizens, a similar argument to ones made in the 1920s. But in an article in USA Today three weeks ago Alan Gomez reviewed data from a number of different sources that uniformly point to a lower crime and incarceration rate for immigrants than for US citizens.

Moreover, multiple studies find that immigration, and even specifically refugee resettlement, increase economic activity. Immigrants actually have a positive impact on wages in the country. On average they have more advanced degrees than US citizens. They start new businesses and file patents at higher rates than US-born citizens. Taxes paid by immigrants and their children, here both legally and illegally, exceed the cost of services they use.

So why is the United States headed back to policies first put forward in the 1920s? In *Social Identity Theory and Public Opinion towards Immigration*, published earlier this year, Maurice Mangum and Ray Block Jr. suggest there are two reasons for citizens of this country to oppose immigration in all forms. “Americans generally oppose immigration if they believe immigrants will not adhere to American norms, prompting cultural change . . . and if they believe they are competing with immigrants for their economic wellbeing.”

Thus, Laura Ingraham’s statement last month on Fox News that, “in some parts of the country, it does seem like the America we know and love doesn’t exist anymore. Massive demographic changes have been foisted on the American people. They’re changes none of us ever voted for, and most of us don’t like. From Virginia to California we see stark examples of how radically, in some ways, the country has changed. Much of this is related to both illegal and in some cases legal immigration.” Such pronouncements – informed by opinion, not data – directly fan the flames of resentment felt by many.

There have been other – very different – examples around the world in response to the refugee crisis. Angela Merkel, chancellor of Germany, clearly took a different path with her decision to welcome one million refugees in 2015. Many tie this decision to her research, which included a book by Jurgen Osterhammel entitled “*The Transformation of the World*.” This book argues that the most successful 19th century economies championed open markets and liberal immigration laws. Among other benefits, these policies spurred technological advances. Her decision was also personal. As she said at an EU summit in characteristically very few words, “I once lived behind a fence. That is something I do not wish to do again.”

Merkel’s comments were echoed four weeks ago in the late Senator John McCain’s final letter to the American people. He said, “We weaken our greatness when we confuse our patriotism with tribal rivalries that have sown resentment and hatred and violence in all the corners of the globe. We weaken it when we hide behind walls, rather than tear them down, when we doubt the power of our ideals, rather than trust them to be the great force for change that they have always been.”

Knowing our past struggles and seeing our current situation, how can we, as individuals and as a community, Stand with the Statue of Liberty? The University has taken steps in this direction. We joined 39 other institutions in signing friend of the court briefs for two lawsuits against the current Administration's decision to overturn the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, or DACA. These cases have been successful at the Federal Appeals Court level which has so far prevented the discontinuation of this policy. We have also worked with our students, faculty, and staff to ensure that everything has been done to protect our community and to qualify citizenship and immigration status. We have reached out to recent immigrants in the Fox Valley to offer employment.

But we must do more as individuals and as a community to ensure – at this critical juncture for the United States and other nations around the globe – that we do not return to the policies of the 1920s; that we do not restrict immigration to this country out of imagined political, economic, and racial fears. Even locally, immigrant communities, which have been hosted and nurtured by our neighbors in the Fox Cities, need our support and friendship. There are thousands of immigrants and refugees in our midst here and close to 70 million people around the globe counting on our leadership.

This work connects to our own institutional values, but also to this nation's highest ambitions for itself – as the Statue of Liberty's inscription and symbol reminds us: we are a nation of natives and immigrants. We must stand for these values today, and always.

Again, I look forward to hearing your reactions, disagreements, and responses to my words today. Good luck in this new academic year. It is a pleasure to have you all back here in Appleton.