

(Address delivered by the Rev. Theodore M. Hesburgh, C.S.C., President, University of Notre Dame, at the 200th Commencement of the University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, May 10, 1987)

IN THE HEART OF THE CITY

Happy 200th Birthday!

If I had to choose a text for my words today, I would take it from something your distinguished President wrote a year ago:

"The University today is, of course, an incomparably different institution, in scale and complexity, than it was in all its phases since its founding 200 years ago. Yet a continuity of spirit connects our past, our present, and our future."

I want to speak today about the University's past, present, and future, and the spirit, so difficult to capture in words, yet indispensable, as President Posvar has said, to any continuity, or unity, or challenge, or even understanding of the life of this University, past, present, and future.

The past is easily enough captured by a few dates. Pitt began in 1787 as the "Pittsburgh Academy," a tiny school in the forest around the three rivers. It was to become the oldest American university West of the Allegheny.

Pitt's development in the 19th and early 20th century paralleled the great industrial development that occurred around the City of Pittsburgh. (I was personally a beneficiary of that development, since my father was manager of the Pittsburgh Plate Class Company in Syracuse, New York).

Pitt became, in the early and mid-20th century, a university of great intellectual and scientific development. The history of this period centers around three personalities who have left and are still leaving their mark upon this place. As has been said, most institutions are the long shadow of those who have created them.

John Gabbert Bowman was Chancellor of Pitt for twenty-four years (1921-1945). Chancellor Bowman's great dream was what has become the central landmark of Pitt: The "Cathedral of Learning." As all cathedrals, it took time to build. It was begun, between Fifth Avenue and Forbes Street, in 1926. Then came the great depression which slowed it down, but it did rise slowly in the thirties. The Heinz Memorial Chapel, the Stephen G. Foster Memorial, and other specialized Pitt structures surround it, but Bowman's dream and reality still anchors the University today.

Edward Litchfield was Chancellor for eleven dangerously exciting years (1955-66). I knew Ed reasonably well and can testify that he was impressive, eloquent, business-like, charming, and dreamed great dreams for Pitt. New buildings and programs sprouted like mushrooms during his tenure. Forbes Field was purchased and levelled, as were other Oakland buildings. An immense development was planned for Panther Hollow. Huge sums were raised and spent in expansion which he named development. Chancellor Litchfield had his share of the usual higher education headaches; academic freedom, disloyalty accusations, problems

with benefactors. Some thought him grandiose and arrogant, and dubbed him "King Edward."

Generally though, he managed well academic problems, but as the annual deficit rose precipitously, financial problems at last overwhelmed him. He resigned in 1966 and died tragically with all his family two years later when his airplane crashed into Lake Michigan while attempting a landing at Meigs Field.

The third personage, President Wesley Posvar (and his lovely talented wife, Mildred) is still with us after being Chancellor since January, 1967, and President since 1984. Wes, as we all call him, has had a remarkable career: first in his class of 875 cadets at the U. S. Military Academy, Rhodes Scholar, five earned academic degrees, including a doctorate in Public Administration from Harvard, youngest full professor at the Air Academy -- or any of the military academies.

He, too, like his predecessors, has left and is leaving his mark on this venerable institution. He, better than anyone else, understands the history I have briefly recounted: the tiny beginning in the woods, the gradual growth, the heartbreaking setbacks, such as the fire that closed the school from 1849-1854, the move from downtown to Oakland in 1908 when the name was changed from "Western University of Pennsylvania" to the University of Pittsburgh, and, finally, its current development as one of the truly great teaching and research universities of

our land, with 25,000 students in all the great branches of learning, academic, scientific, and professional.

Six months after his appointment in 1967, Wesley Posvar sensed the spirit of the place when he said:

"There are not more than a handful of the nation's large universities that exist in the heart of the city .... We are glad we can say that this city provides our clientele ... our support ... our habitat ... and our urban research laboratory."

This last sentence gives the best indication of the spirit of this place and its future challenge.

First, the habitat of the University. While Pitt has become a national and world center of learning, it maintains a local character. It is a place and the people of Pittsburgh have a strong sense of place. They can distinguish the three rivers and they know where Oakland ends and Shadyside begins. The University of Pittsburgh people love this localism, this habitat. In the midst of more universal and worldwide interests and concerns, they love to inhabit this place and to talk about it, their habitat.

Pittsburgh is a city of almost innumerable neighborhoods and boroughs and towns. Most of the students and practically all of the faculty, administrators, and staff live in these various locales. All are attached by ties of pride and custom to their own turf, but they willingly accept others. And all of these places are close to the actuality of the Oakland campus.

Pittsburgh people live in Oakland, Shadyside, East Liberty, Point Breeze, Squirrel Hill, Bloomfield, and on and on to an indefinite number of places, near and not so near, where faculty and students live, places familiar and known to whole communities of people.

The people all know and use and grumble about the bus routes, the old street car lines, that bring them to Pitt: the 71 Negley and 73 Highland, the 75 Wilkinsburg that wanders along Ellsworth Avenue, the 76 Hamilton and Jane, like an old engaged couple, and, finally, the famous 77-54, the "Flying Fraction" which one sees everywhere and no one knows where it actually goes. It is from all of these places and many more, and along all these familiar routes, that the Pitt population rockets and totters to work each day. It is their very special urban habitat.

Then there is, in President Posvar's words, the clientele. The diversity of Pitt people is even more diverse in their national and ethnic roots, than the places in the habitat. Faculty and students and their families of origin share the widest possible variety: Italians, Poles, Austrians, Slavs, Irish, Danes and Welsh, Greeks and Turks, the more recent Asians and Hispanics, and the oldest wave, the blacks, all of these and more, together take part peacefully in the total University life.

Pitt honors ethnic and cultural differences in the nationality rooms of the Cathedral of Learning, to the number of 21 if not more by now: Swedish, German, Russian, Scottish, Jugo-Slav, Czech, Chinese, and Lithuanian, to mention a few.

Classes and seminars in the nationality rooms honor the national histories of the diverse Pitt population, the Pitt clientele. \*

This habitat, this clientele, this urban research laboratory of which the President spoke is reminiscent of the motto of our country which is also celebrating a 200th anniversary this year: e pluribus unum, out of many peoples, a single country, and here, a single university, a common endeavor. This spirit of which your President also speaks, "a continuity of spirit connects our past, our present, our future" may indeed give us the best indication of where the greatest future challenge of this University and this nation lies.

Lance Morrow wrote in the last March 30th edition of TIME Magazine a prescient essay on America called, "A Change in the Weather." Morrow writes, "Time to look for new ideas, time to move beyond the era of self-congratulations and beer commercial patriotism. America cannot afford stupidity. It costs too much in the world. Education, therefore, must have a priority, and not just more money; it needs discipline and imagination. America can no longer afford racism and a neglect of the underclass. They also cost too much. These are problems that must be solved, not only as a matter of social justice (which they are), but as a question of America's long term economic survival." For economic survival, read "Productivity and Competitiveness."

William Raspberry was saying much the same thing in a recent column in the Washington Post:

"In this increasingly technological society, college education will have to play the role previously played by the factories: providing access to the entry level jobs that helped lift recent generations of America's poor out of poverty.

"That being the case, we had better stop thinking of college access for the nation's minorities as a form of charity we can no longer afford, and start thinking of it as an investment we can't afford not to make."

This is what I think President Posvar was indicating as a special role for urban universities with their very special habitat, clientele, and <sup>the</sup> urban research laboratory that surrounds them. It is the future's greatest challenge, for the nation, as well as this University. Quickly, let us consider the facts as they relate to America's future competitiveness and productivity as a nation.

The first consideration must be demographic. People are America's greatest resource. America has been a great nation because of the quality and strength of its diverse people: the most heterogenous nation on earth.

Today we are seeing sweeping changes in our population: The Baby Boom generation -- 70 million people born between 1946 and 1964 -- is over and we now have a baby bust generation. American women are having children at a rate of 1.8 per lifetime, whereas 2.1 are required for normal replacement. Moreover,

because of a sharp decline in the white birth rate, by the turn of the century, one out of every three Americans will be non-white. From what we already know from the urban laboratory, this young minority population, mostly black and Hispanic, will be poorer and less well educated. The majority of students, <sup>Nationwide</sup> in the 25 largest city school districts today are non-white with a drop-out rate of close to 50%.

This is the profile of one-third of tomorrow's work force: Mostly born into poverty, raised by one parent, burdened from birth by prejudice, surrounded by hopelessness and failure. This is the permanent underclass and <sup>the</sup> fruit of racism of which Lance Morrow wrote. This is a large percentage of America's human capital that is right now underdeveloped and underutilized, at a time when our productive and competitive posture is threatened worldwide. We are actually in serious danger of becoming a second or third rate nation. Only better education can turn this tide.

What are the numbers? Blacks number 26.5 million and Hispanics 14.6 million in the 1980 census, together over 40 million, and through immigration and higher birth rates, growing much faster than whites. Among the 35 million Americans who today fall beneath the poverty line, they are disproportionately represented. They are the current ethnics who deserve our strongest attention and imagination and educational innovation. By the year 2020, they will represent 91 million Americans, 34.3% of our population, the Hispanics then <sup>becoming</sup> ~~being~~ slightly more numerous than blacks.



Numbers alone do not tell the story of this American challenge, but here are a few more numbers indicating seriously dangerous social conditions. More than half of all black children and a fourth of all Hispanic children live with only one parent in homes with few books and magazines. Three out of ten come home to an empty house. Every day, 3,000 teenagers become pregnant and nearly half are unmarried and living in poverty.

Children are today the poorest segment of society. 43.4% of the blacks and 39.9% of Hispanics compared to 15.9% of whites now living in poverty.

Twenty-seven million Americans, 21.7% (more than a fifth) of the population between 18 and 65 years of age, are functionally illiterate today. This includes 56% of Hispanic adults and 44% of black adults. And the total number of functional illiterates is growing by 2,250,000 persons each year. Adult illiteracy costs business around \$20 billion a year because of error, accidents, damage to equipment, and high employee turnover. All this is happening in the highest technological society the world has ever known and in its most affluent society -- at least for the moment.

Since education or the lack of it seems to be at the heart of this dilemma, again, let us look at the facts. Nationwide, 26% of the students fail to complete high school, but the figure is higher than 40% in urban settings and higher yet in ghetto areas. High school dropouts are automatically eliminated as college candidates. In 1983, slightly less than 60% of all

blacks and slightly more than 50% of Hispanics graduated from high school, compared to 75% of whites. Again, poverty, broken families, and poor inner city schools seem to be the causes.

What is worse, after some initial progress, the present number of blacks and Hispanics who go to college has declined sharply. The latest (1983) report shows that college enrollment by whites remained at about 32% from 1975 to 1980, and the rate for blacks dropped from 32% to 27.8% during this five year period. At the same time, college attendance for Hispanics dropped from 35.4% to 29.9%.

In 1981, only 8.2% of blacks and 7.7% of Hispanics, 25 years of age or older, has completed four years of college, compared to a 17.8% completion rate for whites.

As a rather direct result, the 1980 census reveals that 9.7% of elementary and secondary teachers are black and 2.9% Hispanic. The college faculty figures are worse, 4.8% black and 2.6% Hispanic.

Graduate school enrollments for blacks and Hispanics are declining as well. Which means even fewer in the pipeline for future teachers on all levels. To cut federal aid to education for the poor at this moment is not just inept, it is insane.

I think we need no more statistics to demonstrate further that we are indeed a nation at risk. If we ever needed further motivation to do something about the schooling on all levels of what has become a more or less permanent American underclass of minorities, I think the facts related above should move us, and quickly.

What urban universities like Pitt have done in the past to educate and elevate millions of ethnic minorities from poverty to affluence, it can do again, but it will require more ingenuity and imagination than ever before, because this time we are coping with prejudice as well as poverty, color as well as ethnicity. We also face deterioration of the family which is the most steady of all educational supports and the truest source of educational motivation.

Yet, I do believe it can be done, especially if we see this challenge as determinant in whether we are to be a first-rate or second-rate country. We cannot be first-rate if one-third of our shrinking work force is uneducated and functionally illiterate. Precious human capital squandered and wasted. Many of these minorities without adequate education will be not only unemployed, but unemployable, in our highly technical industries.

What is at issue here is education on all levels from pre-school family education to graduate and professional school education. Great urban universities like Pitt will have to lead the way, for they are where the problem is, in the great urban centers. They must reach down to the pre-school, elementary, and secondary schools to improve performance or they will see their own share of a shrinking baby bust population shrink further.

If time permitted, I would indicate further solutions, but suffice it to say that when President Posvar spoke of "a continuity of spirit".... connecting Pitt's past, present, and

future," I was inspired to think again of that wonderful American ideal, e pluribus unum, how our country and this University have forged a single nation and a single University from vastly diverse human components and how with imagination and dedication, we might just do it again. "The past is prelude" reads the inscription on our National Archives. I am sure it might just as well be the theme of this University's and America's future. And these futures are inevitably linked together, for dismal failure or shining success. This day, in this great University, I hope and pray for a future of shining success, a repetition of the past which is prelude.