

Bryn Mawr College
Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania

For Release 12 Noon
October 17, 1970

A HIGH HILL

INAUGURAL ADDRESS BY HARRIS L. WOFFORD JR.
AT CEREMONIES ON THE BRYN MAWR CAMPUS
SATURDAY MORNING, OCTOBER 17, 1970

Judge Spaeth, Father Hesburgh, brother and sister presidents, faculty students, alumnae, directors and trustees of Bryn Mawr, colleagues and friends:

"Who are the born brothers in truth?"--that is a question by

Archibald MacLeish, who then wrote:

"No word said can make you brothers!
Brotherhood here in the strange world is the rich and
Rarest giving of life and the most valued:
Not to be had for a word or a week's wishing." *

No words of mine can justify the trust you have given me. With consent withering all around us in this strange late twentieth-century world, your trust seems to me the rich and rarest gift and the most valued. I accept it gratefully and seriously. In return you have mine, a promise of years of work and lives lived together to fulfill the hopes of this day.

For I do trust this community -- this institution forged and tempered in the double fire of Quaker concern and devoted scholarship; this original encampment of women's liberation; this College that is as old and fiercely independent as M. Carey Thomas feuding with one of the first faculty members of 1885, Woodrow Wilson, and as young and fortunately buoyant as our new dean Mary Patterson McPherson and a dozen of our faculty riding the rapids of the Colorado River -- as old and wise as the third President Marion Edwards Park during the

* Archibald MacLeish, "Speech to Those Who Say Comrade."

(more)

great depression saying at the 1933 opening convocation, "As the world careens, rights itself or sinks, so Bryn Mawr careens, rights itself or sinks," and as young and hopeful as one of this year's freshmen on whose application form was this ambition: "I would like to become a Renaissance Woman."

This corporate body whose contradictions are very human but whose term, according to its charter, "is perpetual", whose name means High Hill, this College has my trust -- and I hope yours. In a world of too much levelling, it will be our common trust to keep this hill high.

The period of silence was a good beginning today. I hope you will understand if there are long silences from me on many matters while I listen and learn about a formidable list of new subjects: women, the stock market, graduate schools, and those fascinating entities that exist when two or three professors came together in the name of a common discipline, departments. And true to the definition of a university as a number of departments held together by a central heating plant, as some of you know too well, our central heating plant is breaking down.

But we cannot rest or rust in our tradition. We must begin a process of longer range planning that will include faculty, students, alumnae, directors and trustees -- all parts of the College on this hill and our College in dispersion. We must ask ourselves and think through together what we want Bryn Mawr to become in the 1970's, and since the future of Bryn Mawr is deeply involved in whether the world is careening, righting itself or sinking, we must also think of the world of the 1970's.

When I asked our President Emeritus Katharine E. McBride for a translation of the Chinese scroll on the living room wall of Pen y Groes, she said the characters meant: "A small house in music and breezes is all the world."

(more)

As the world goes we are a small house, but in the music made by our students and faculty and in the breezes of change blowing here as elsewhere--sometimes they seem like hurricanes--there is all the world. And all the world is in a crisis of authority and a crisis of the intellect - of law and reason. There will be no way out unless people dare to trust their intellects in action, unless on a scale never known before reason is used with courage to right a careening world.

This will not happen everywhere all at once but in a land where the guardians of the Republic are all the people, universal liberal education is our first and last hope for successful self-government. It seems to me that a college like Bryn Mawr, with its strong traditions, high standards and outstanding faculty, students and alumnae, though a relatively small body of some 11,000, men and women altogether, is in a good position to discover and point the way. I believe we are strong enough not to be blown over by the winds of change and we should be responsible in the vigorous sense of the word - that is, to respond. For I believe that we should turn President Park's formula upside down: as small communities of men and women, especially our communities of learning, careen, right themselves or sink, so will go America.

In American law, the common good or general reason hopefully emerges out of actual cases or controversies; very real principles are discovered and tested in very real situations; and always it is a Constitution you are expounding.

At Bryn Mawr it is a College we are expounding. For most of a century, in one controversy after another, under public fire or general apathy, in political, social or economic crisis, faculty and students have discovered and tested some very real principles of academic freedom. Out of trial and error I think we have learned that the reason for the freedom of the academy is not the unexamined liberty of students or teachers doing whatever they want to do; it is rather

(more)

the public need for the Academy, by teaching and research, on campus and in the community, to discover and test the ideas We the People need for our self-government.

Some romantics talk lightly of revolution but the real revolutionary ideas shaking the world -- take Marx, Freud and Einstein -- were the products of men who did the most difficult thing in this world: studied and thought, read and wrote, year upon year in the British Museum or the libraries and universities of Europe and America. It is time for the intellect of Americans to be taxed and tested. Our society may indeed sink in self-indulgence if the new generation of students does not begin to stretch itself to the outer limits of its intellectual capacity.

In a time when irrationality is widely celebrated, let me here confess to a continuing belief in this thing called reason. It is not so much faith in the little reason within, but faith in the larger reason that is found in such greater things as the Constitution of the United States which was designed so that reason could rule and Bryn Mawr College which was chartered to enable the rulers to be reasonable. In this view of America as a learning society there is a vital and profound relationship between a College and the Constitution. So you see why I believe our charter is indeed perpetual, why we should have the courage of our contradictions, and why, especially now when reason is on trial, we should pursue with all our power the liberal education that is the precondition for and the final meaning of any human liberation.

It is time now for me to practice what I preach, by seeing how these principles are tested in three issues immediately at hand.

First, our undergraduate Student Curriculum Committee, after a year-long study, has just presented an important series of proposals for reform; and this initiative coincides with the fact that this is the year set by the faculty of

(more)

arts and sciences for its major curricular review. This calls for us to ask the hardest and most important questions in a college, about the content and quality of the learning and teaching. In this complex age, with the explosion of knowledge, is it possible for that freshman to become a Renaissance Woman? Do modern science, technology, communications and politics indeed make possible - or impossible - a new birth of reason and law for America and the world?

If we careen, right ourselves or sink along with the world, then shouldn't the world become our great common subject -- the world in all its dimensions, including our own backyard with the major questions that cut across all academic disciplines. American higher education stands indicted for neglecting questions of life and death like war, race, poverty, urban breakdown, over-population and pollution. We must find the way and the will to bring these from the outskirts of the Academy where they appear mainly in extracurricular teach-ins or agitation, into the center of our study and research. Bryn Mawr's original and continuing emphasis on graduate studies, which account for nearly half our students, will be an important asset; indeed the experience of our new Graduate School of Social Work and Social Research in placing over 100 full-time masters students in community action assignments and with its unusual Ph.D. program should be most instructive.

In this educational search, we must not settle for chipping away at old inflexibilities or for any compromise with academic integrity in the name of relevance. Let us not take the advice of Pat Moynihan's priest who enjoined his flock to follow the straight and narrow path between right and wrong. Let us instead recall the advice of the poet who opened this College 85 years ago with a warning against "a want of thoroughness, and a disposition to value study chiefly as a means of making a livelihood." The object of education, James Russell Lowell told the convocation in Taylor Hall, is "not to help a

(more)

man as a bread-winner but rather to be the life-long sweetener of all the bread he ever earns." He added that he missed hearing in a new college like Bryn Mawr "the murmur of immortal feet" that inspired him at Oxford, but he thought we did at least "know the difference between literature and printed matter." I hope our curriculum for the future has more, not less literature; and listens more and more to the murmur of immortal feet. For the anarchy of everyone doing his thing is a far cry from the good curriculum which should be the common thing of a college. It is not a lowering of intellectual standards that we need, but a raising of them. The man or woman of a new Renaissance will need to be more intellectual in the full sense and better educated in all the liberal arts than most people have ever been.

Second, there is the matter of cooperation with other colleges and universities, and its companion question, coeducation. An angel might fear to tread in this area, but there is before us now the report of Haverford College's Commission on Women Students and our own study committee's report on coeducation. These reports raise some of the same issues and lead me to urge that our concentration be upon further cooperation in education not coeducation. Just as we want our curriculum to reach out to the world without lowering standards, we must seek to develop stronger and wider relationships with other educational institutions without blurring our individual identity. Again we want to be open to the world, not isolated and turned in upon ourselves. Already we have unusual reciprocal arrangements with Haverford and Swarthmore at the undergraduate level and the University of Pennsylvania for graduate work which give students the best of several worlds. We greatly value these arrangements, and particularly the unique and promising relationship with Haverford. With this nearest neighbor and closest partner, several hundred students are

(more)

enjoying the opportunity for cross-registration of classes and there is a dormitory exchange of 80 students each way.

Hoping to see us continue and extend these and other forms of academic cooperation, I have a proposal that springs out of our primary concern for curriculum. As we consider how the Academy can make the world's problems subjects of the best academic treatment, one of the issues before this afternoon's symposium, I suggest that our colleges of Quaker origin commit themselves to developing substantial new ways to work together, pooling resources to deal with these problems. What the world may need most right now is the active contemplation and search for inner light of a good Quaker meeting writ large. Is it beyond our capacity to provide that?

As to coeducation, which the Haverford Commission on Women Students is proposing on a much larger undergraduate scale -- already about a third of our graduate students are men -- I can only give first impressions. I suppose we should be complimented that they appear to want many more women students. In our community I have not found quite so pressing a need for more men. I hope the hundreds of men already studying here will take that, too, as a compliment. But I see no reason, especially in this new era of women's rights, to abandon our special concern for women's education or to accept some unproven magic formula for the best sexual ratio. I see no reason why a predominantly women's college will not be as good in the future as it has been in the past. So I hope that the discussions of Haverford's proposals now beginning between faculty-student committees of both colleges will be an educational and not a sexual search.

The third matter involves the very existence of independent higher education in America. Last year we were confronted with a state law which sought to impress colleges and universities into service as agents of the state -- indeed as informers against students -- in the enforcement of new state-imposed sanctions

(more)

for a variety of non-academic offenses. Upon the recommendation of the students who were faced with loss of their scholarships and of the whole student body and faculty, the Bryn Mawr Board refused and still refuses to sign such an agreement. We did so and do so because the autonomy of a free college and the integrity of the student-teacher relationship are at stake. Through the magnificent response of alumnae, faculty, students and friends of the College - the same combination that has brought Bryn Mawr so far - we are going to make up the lost scholarships. We are now working with Haverford and a number of other colleges and universities in seeking federal court action to enjoin the operation of that statute. The legislature's concern about disruption is reasonable; but we believe its remedy, is unconscionable and unconstitutional.

I cannot predict the outcome, but I think the stand we took and the price we are paying is part of what it means to keep our hill high; we are also doing a duty to the whole body of higher learning in America. For beyond this immediate case, we can predict that this is only one skirmish in a long struggle to determine what control the state will have over the affairs of our colleges and universities. To do our duty by this country, we need to resist all forces that would flatten us, whether they come from Harrisburg and Washington, or from within the college community even when they represent urgent popular passions and the latest political, social, educational and life styles.

To do this -- to survive and play our part in resolving the crisis of reason and law in our national life we will need all the support from alumnae and friends that has been given so generously over many years, and more. For the first crisis facing almost every private college today is financial. The family of Bryn Mawr is already large, as this gathering shows, but it must become larger. In this sense too we must reach out to the world, to enlist the collaboration of new people and new institutions, including particularly the corporations of our private sector. In seeking this support as in improving
(more)

our curriculum and increasing our cooperation with other colleges and universities, we must be more inventive if we are going to do our duty.

With this agenda, I do not know why I should thank Judge Spaeth and the Trustees for this assignment, but I can think of no better place to be. Long ago, twenty-five years ago, at the end of World War II, I heard a former president of Amherst, Alexander Meikeljohn, suggest the connection I have made today between education and the idea of a republic. By a long route it is what has led me here. It is best expressed, for me, in the toast that Scott Buchanan, then the dean of St. John's College used to make each Christmas. With the community assembled he would drink a toast to the three republics of which the college was a part; To the American Republic, to the still unconstituted Republic of Man, and to the universal Republic of Learning.

Before this community that represents Bryn Mawr, and in the light of our history, our present cases and controversies, and our future, that is my toast.

#

Bryn Mawr College
October 17, 1970