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AND DIVERSITY

Diversity and Learning at Harvard: A Historical View

*Address to the Massachusetts Historical Society
Harvard Club of Boston, November 6, 1996*

I WOULD LIKE to share with you some of the background of my present thinking on the subject of diversity in higher education. When I embarked on the research approximately two years ago, I found that there was little identifiable documentation of the history and certainly no historical study of the subject.

My goal was to try to define the case that might be made for college and university admissions programs that took the concept of diversity seriously: programs that made conscious efforts to reach out to identify and enroll selected students from under-represented minority groups – including groups that are usually classified as “racial” or ethnic in nature, such as African Americans, Native Americans, and Hispanic Americans.

I was pragmatic in my quest. You will recall that the Supreme Court had ruled – in the well-known *Bakke* case¹ of 1978 – that there was likely to be only one possible rationale concerning this subject that might be acceptable to the Court. The opinions of the

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Court were unusually divided in the *Bakke* case. It was left to Justice Powell to expound the view that conscious efforts to achieve diversity – including racial and ethnic diversity – in university admissions were acceptable, but only when the goal was part of an articulated effort, with a carefully designed process, to enhance the educational benefits – the nature and quality of education itself – in a college or university.

In addition, Justice Powell stated that race and ethnicity could be taken into explicit account in the definition of diversity only if a college's or university's admissions policy and practice could withstand the difficult legal test of "strict scrutiny" by the courts.

Without leading you too far into the intricacies of the *Bakke* case, I hope I have said just enough to suggest which intellectual and historical questions might have intrigued me, and why.

My own thinking, I should add, coincided very much with Justice Powell's: that is, if a university were to make special efforts in outreach and admissions, then those efforts would have to be strongly linked to the university's central purpose: to the central activity of education and learning, and the development of leaders capable of making effective contributions to our society – a democratic, heterogeneous society of considerable complexity.

Since most people in the United States currently associate the concept of diversity with the idea of affirmative action and with the civil rights legislation of the 1960s, I was also interested to see whether there was good evidence for a tradition of diversity that was distinct from affirmative action and that unequivocally predated the civil rights movement.

If one could show that educators, and major thinkers in other fields, had discussed the educational value of diversity long before the politics of the 1960s, it seemed to me that we would have a better chance of shifting the present debate from the charged political and legal arena where it is now lodged back to the educational arena where such matters properly belong.

When I began, however, I had no concrete evidence at hand,

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so I simply started out with a hope and a hypothesis. I began with the *Oxford English Dictionary*, looking up the word “diversity” to trace its different meanings over time. There were no dramatic discoveries, but there was one suggestive quotation from John Stuart Mill’s *On Liberty*, published in 1859. I also happened to remember – because I had recently read through the annual reports of Harvard’s presidents – that Presidents Hill and Felton had both, in the 1850s, discussed the need for Harvard to become a national, even international, university, and I began to wonder what had prompted them to propose that particular kind of expansion or “outreach” at just that time.

In other words, there were some early indicators pointing me toward the mid-nineteenth century, especially the 1850s, and I quickly added to my list of reference books *The Education of Henry Adams*, since Adams graduated from Harvard in 1858.

What was the net result of these initial probes?

First, it quickly became clear that, for President Felton at least, the prospect of a civil war was a precipitating event that led him to think explicitly about ways in which education could be helpful in avoiding regional and national friction, or actual conflict. Felton wanted to promote better understanding across the kinds of geographic, cultural, and social barriers that then existed in parts of the United States. He wrote, in 1860, that he wanted Harvard to have:

students from every State and Territory in the Union – without a single exception or secession, [because gathering students together] from different and distant States must tend powerfully to remove prejudices, by bringing [undergraduates] into friendly relations through the humanizing effect of liberal studies pursued in common, in the impressionable season of youth. Such influences are especially needed in the present disastrous condition of public affairs.²

That, in effect, was the early theory of the case: educate young, impressionable students from different parts of the country in

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one institution, and they will get to know one another, learn to understand one another, and overcome their prejudices through such contact. When they leave college, they will take their new forms of understanding with them back to their local communities. As they mature and become leaders, they will in time create a kind of national network, capable of bridging the great gaps that were so clearly emerging in mid-century American society. In short, student “diversity” – the gathering of different sorts of young people coming from different places, with different prejudices and points of view – could be a potentially powerful force in education and in the public life of the nation. That was the major reason Felton wanted to move Harvard from being a mainly regional institution to being a truly national one.

Was the idea plausible? Was there any evidence to suggest that education might really be enhanced if different sorts of students were in fact brought together in this way? When I looked at the chapter on “Harvard” in *The Education of Henry Adams*, I found Adams acknowledging that he, like most undergraduates in the Class of 1858, was from a well-established New England family. But, as he also wrote, “chance insisted on enlarging [Adams’] education by tossing a trio of Virginians” into the mix – a trio that included “Roony” Lee, the son of Robert E. Lee. Adams and Lee became good friends, although Adams recognized “how thin an edge of friendship separated” him and the Virginians “from mortal enmity” on the brink of the Civil War.

This experience in diversity proved to be important. For the very first time in his life, Adams wrote, he was brought “in contact with new types [of people] and [was] taught . . . their values. He saw the New England type measure itself with another, and he was part of the process.” Even though it was already too late for the students in the Harvard Class of 1858 – the Civil War would soon be upon them – Adams remembered throughout his life that this “lesson in education was vital to these young men,” and it clearly left a lasting impression on him.

We can see, in the 1850s, the beginnings of a theory of the

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educational benefits of diversity – in contrast to the view that students would generally be expected to come from the same geographical region, and more or less the same economic and social backgrounds, and very likely the same religious background. Even though neither President Felton nor Henry Adams actually used the word “diversity,” the idea was clearly in the air, and at least two other important writers of the period did in fact use the term – and use it regularly.

John Stuart Mill, for instance, stressed the need for “diversity of opinion” in deliberative institutions and societies that were at least partly democratic in nature. He stressed the value of bringing “human beings in contact with persons who are dissimilar from themselves, and with modes of thought and action unlike those with which they are familiar.”

Moreover, diversity in points of view – or modes of action – was not something that one should simply read or hear about; “real contact” with others was essential, because (as Mill said) it is important to hear “arguments” from

persons who actually believe them, who defend them in earnest and do their very utmost for them. [One] must know [the arguments] in their most plausible and persuasive form [and] feel the whole force of the difficulty [that one's own arguments must encounter].³

In short, reading about points of view – or about other types of people, or actions and customs different from your own – is one important way of learning. But books do not talk back to you directly, and do not respond to your arguments with the power and conviction of someone who can speak persuasively about what he or she believes and why. Contact, personal encounters, human associations and conversations and dialogue and debate make a difference to the substance and texture of what one learns and how one learns it.

For Mill, as for Felton (and Adams), a critical aspect of education depends on being in the actual presence of people who are

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“dissimilar” from oneself in significant ways. In colleges and universities, the way to gain the particular educational values that come from various forms of dissimilarity is to have an admissions process that takes diversity explicitly into account as one of its important goals and that brings different kinds of students together in a residential community committed to learning in all its forms – outside the classroom, as well as inside.

Diversity can of course be defined in many ways, and few people tried to be more concrete in their definition than Charles William Eliot, who became president of Harvard just after the Civil War, in 1869.

Much has been written about how Eliot transformed Harvard from a small college into a genuine university, how he ushered in the elective system, and so forth. But relatively little has been written about his ideas concerning student diversity and its importance to the process of education.

His views were complex, and I cannot do justice to them in this brief talk. But Eliot saw diversity – along regional, social, economic, religious, and racial or ethnic lines – as a defining feature of American democracy. And he brought an expanded conception of diversity to Harvard. He envisioned a university that would gather together students from a wide variety of “nations, states, schools, families, sects, [political] parties, and conditions of life.” Harvard, he wrote, should welcome children of the “rich and poor” and of the “educated and uneducated,” students “from North and South” and “from East and West,” students belonging to “every religious communion, from the Roman Catholic to the Jew and the Japanese Buddhist.” Bringing them together, he wrote, would allow them to experience “the wholesome influence that comes from observation and contact with” people different from themselves.

Eliot’s conception of “race” was different from our own – especially in its emphasis on characteristics that we might today associate more with ethnicity, national origin, and immigrant status. But he specifically identified the “great diversity in the popu-

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lation of the United States as regards racial origin” as a crucial and positive element in American democratic society. He wanted to keep the races – whether Celtic, Teutonic, Mediterranean, Slavic, African, or otherwise – separate from one another, and he had his own Anglo-Saxon preferences. But he was able to entertain and embrace a vision that was considerably larger (and more inclusive) than his purely personal tastes, and he set about – quite consciously – opening Harvard’s doors to at least some of the children of new immigrants, to members of religious minorities, and also (although in very small numbers) to African Americans.

Before Eliot’s presidency, for instance, there were – as far as we know – zero black graduates of Harvard College. During his presidency, there were eight. They did not come accidentally or unnoticed: they were deliberately recruited, and they had an impact well beyond their numbers. Also, at the beginning of Eliot’s presidency, there were just seven Roman Catholics, and three Jews enrolled in the College – out of a total of 563 students. By the end of Eliot’s tenure, 9 percent of the student body was Roman Catholic, and 7 percent was Jewish, for a combined total of 16 percent, compared to *less than 2 percent* when Eliot started.

Interestingly, it was one of the African American students, W. E. B. Du Bois, Harvard College Class of 1890, who would later affirm the significance of Eliot’s broad vision. Harvard, Du Bois wrote, “was no longer simply a place where rich and learned New England gave the accolade to the social élite. It had broken its shell and reached out to the West and to the South, to yellow students and to black. . . . [Eliot and others] sought to make Harvard an expression of the United States.”

It would be possible to cite testimony from other students if we had time – students such as John Reed, who was an undergraduate in the last years of Eliot’s presidency. Reed wrote an interesting set of reflections on his Harvard experience, and he specifically mentioned the fact that he had once abandoned a close Jewish friend, when it became clear that the friend was becoming a social liability.

There was a later reconciliation, but the anecdote demon-

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strates that the lessons and the benefits of diversity are not always easy to discern, and that they are sometimes painful – even if the pain is subsequently transmuted into something valuable.

As things turned out, Reed came to appreciate and even revel in Harvard's diversity, and he saw the University as a place which brought together "characters, of every race and mind, poets, philosophers, [and] cranks of every twist," offering them all "anything [they] wanted" from the world's vast storehouse of learning.

Eliot himself was certainly no sentimentalist. He knew that diversity can cause friction and turbulence, and can sometimes make the experience of being a student more difficult – and, at times, even alienating. But he insisted on the importance of a more open, diverse, and even disputatious university, where a "collision of views" would promote "thought on great themes," teach "candor" and "moral courage," and cultivate "forbearance and mutual respect." He saw that an inclusive vision of higher education not only would benefit individual students, but was also essential in a heterogeneous society whose citizens simply had to learn to live together if the nation's democratic institutions were to function effectively, and if its ideals were to be fulfilled. He insisted, in other words, on the link between diversity in education and the requirements for citizenship and leadership in a diverse nation such as ours.

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If we step back for a moment, we can take stock of the concept – and practice – of diversity at Harvard during the half century that passed between the late 1850s and the end of President Eliot's tenure in 1909.

First, we can see that the definition of diversity steadily expanded throughout this period. The early emphasis was primarily on diversity of ideas or points of view. But the most perceptive thinkers soon realized that those curious things that we call "ideas" are not disembodied phenomena or abstractions. They are

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complicated bundles of perceptions, intuitions, arguments, opinions, dispositions, convictions, feelings, attitudes, and rhetorical gestures that cohere – and also shift, mutate, and sometimes fail to cohere – in live human beings who constantly express, modify, reconsider, and reformulate what it is they think and feel, or what they *think* it is that they think and feel.

Moreover, these live human beings, in turn, are also not abstract phenomena, floating in a vacuum: they come from some specific place or places and have been affected by the customs, attitudes, and beliefs of their families, and the culture of their points of origin. Each has a local habitation and a name that is partly regional, religious, racial or ethnic, economic, and social in nature.

That is why the effort to define diversity in college admissions almost always involves at least two major factors: first, a complex assessment of every individual as a unique human being; and, second, a thoughtful consideration of all those more general differentiating characteristics that can have a strong bearing on who we are and what we are – characteristics such as those enumerated by President Eliot when he said that Harvard should have students from different nations, states, schools, religious groups, political parties, and conditions of life.

There is no guarantee, of course, that a farm boy from Wisconsin will bring something substantially different to a university, compared with a student from a large high school in the Bronx, or one from a *lycée* in Paris. But it is a perfectly reasonable assumption, as a first approximation, and the assumption can then be tested in detail when admissions officers look carefully at individual applicants and their applications.

Similarly, there's no necessary reason that an African American student from West Virginia should have ideas or perspectives or experiences or aesthetic tastes that are different from those of an Asian American student from Los Angeles, or a white student from Maine. But I think it would be odd if three such students did not turn out to be significantly different from one another

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in any number of interesting and stimulating ways, capable of expanding one another's horizons – and those of their fellow students.

In other words, it is not at all surprising, looking over the historical record, that educators like Felton and Eliot often talked in terms of broad categories – such as geography, or economic background, religion, or race – when they wanted to identify important indicators of diversity. The categories are in fact extremely effective points of reference, and they have served many colleges and universities very well for at least a century. The critical issue, of course, is that we should not be trapped by these categories, or use them mechanically as a substitute or shortcut for a thoughtful rounded assessment of each individual candidate.

If we care seriously about diversity, therefore, we will want to make sensible use of the relevant categories at our disposal, recognizing their limitations as well as their utility. I want to stress this point, because several recent proposals and judicial rulings – in California and Texas, for instance – have essentially banned the use of some well-established factors (specifically, race, ethnicity, and even gender) in college admissions, while allowing others to remain standing (such as socioeconomic background or regional place of origin). I, myself, believe that it is very difficult to identify a logically consistent set of reasons to justify these particular distinctions; and I also believe that, from an operational point of view, any excellent admissions process would find it essentially impossible to comply with prohibitions of the kind I just described. But these are policy considerations which – however important – deserve a much fuller discussion, on another day.

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If we look briefly at developments during the major span of our own century, it is clear that the concept of diversity shifted meaning a number of times when applied to college and university admissions. There was no single, simple line of development, but rather a series of changes and reversals.

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The most important moment to focus upon – and it was a historical moment of the greatest significance – came in the years following World War II. Several things happened simultaneously: there was a massive expansion of the entire system of American higher education; there was substantially increased access to college on the part of different kinds of people, beginning notably with the GI Bill and moving through to the admission of more minority students, more foreign students, and, of course, the admission of women to previously all-male colleges. In addition, there was the rapid development of standardized testing – through the College Board and the Educational Testing Service – as a way of evaluating and sorting, on a national comparative basis, the huge number of students who were beginning to apply to college. And, finally, there was a major investment (by many, but not all, colleges) in the entire process of outreach and assessment in admissions, because admissions officers were now faced (for really the first time in history) with the complicated task of selecting a very limited number of students from a large and expanding pool of candidates.

Given this situation, it became essential to develop much more explicit admissions criteria and guidelines, because it was no longer possible to enroll most of the people who wanted to matriculate. Not surprisingly, any set of admissions criteria could be, and came to be, openly challenged through discussion, debate, and even litigation.

The challenges have come in many forms, but the most visible – and divisive – have been legal cases in which white students have litigated against particular universities because the universities were said to have admitted African American (or other minority) students who had lower “grade point averages” and lower standardized test scores than the plaintiffs. The *Bakke* case in California, and the recent *Hopwood* case⁴ in Texas, are the two most conspicuous of these, but there have been others as well.

In very broad terms, we can see these legal conflicts as bringing to a head the clash between a particular “meritocratic” idea

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of educational quality – defined largely in terms of statistically measurable academic achievement – and an equally strong idea of education associated with the concept of diversity, including all the different forms of knowledge, the variety of human qualities and talents, and the multitude of perspectives on experience that are obviously not very measurable in statistical terms, but are no less real for that.

Let us suppose, for a moment, that Harvard were to subscribe, in a consistent way, to a statistical “meritocratic” view. What would happen, for example, if we were to take only those students with the very highest test scores and grade point averages, going mathematically from top to bottom, until an entire entering class was filled? The results would almost certainly be very curious. It is not at all clear, for example, how many of the students, chosen in this way, would be very talented in the arts, since certain creative abilities do not correlate at all strongly with SAT scores – or even with high grades in many subjects. It is not clear how many students with a capacity for leadership we would have in such a class – or individuals strongly committed to public service; or how many students who have exceptional and unusual abilities to understand other people, or to penetrate complex human and societal situations; or students who are good at ice hockey, or who are descended from our alumni.

Equally important, it is not clear that we would have assembled a group of students who were sufficiently dissimilar to learn very much from one another: about the varieties of human nature, about how people from different places, different social and economic backgrounds, different ethnic and racial backgrounds, different countries and religions and cultures experience the world, articulate their values, and, indeed, live their lives.

In this respect, it is important to remember that when we *do* admit a class of first-year students to Harvard College, we do not do so “atomistically,” looking at each candidate in isolation from all the others. Instead, we try to “compose” a class that, in all its variety, has considerable power to “teach itself,” so to speak.

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Of course, we want a very high level of academic achievement, measured in more or less traditional ways. But, we also want students to be able to achieve, at college, all those other dimensions of intellectual and human capacity – dimensions that are most likely to emerge in the actual dynamic process of education – through innumerable encounters, associations, and discussions among students as well as with faculty, day in and day out. Educational quality, as we know, has every bit as much to do with realizing potentialities still to be developed – in an environment designed to help such development – as it has to do with measuring prior achievement.

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Perhaps I am wrong. But, I believe that very few of us – if any – would be very satisfied with a college admissions process that was mathematically driven by test scores and similar statistics; yet, it is just such scores and statistics that are being used as the chief evidence in the legal cases I have mentioned.

These statistical scores and grades are certainly useful, and certainly important to take into account in any sensible admissions process. But, when we try to describe why they are not wholly sufficient, I think we find ourselves mentioning criteria and qualities and characteristics that are mainly associated with the concept of diversity.

That, I believe, is why John Stuart Mill, President Felton, President Eliot, and students such as those I have cited, were driven to the conclusion more than a century ago that the concept of diversity or “dissimilarity,” of significant differences among people, was central to any serious theory of education and learning. All of these individuals obviously valued academic excellence. But none of them thought that a narrow view of excellence was robust enough to capture anything like the full range of capabilities that we would want to include and help students to develop in a definition of education. Felton and Eliot and others sensed that their nation, and the world, were multifarious; that the needs and re-

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quirements of heterogeneous democratic societies were becoming complex beyond any imagining; and that one of the only effective ways to begin to understand and absorb some substantial part of that multifariousness and complexity was to encounter it directly, and come to know it through actual association, through having direct contact with a considerable variety of people, through diversity.

That recognition is every bit as important now – perhaps more important – as it was a century and a half ago. In closing, let me confess that I find it ironic – and inauspicious – that on a day when we can look back on President Eliot’s clear-sighted determination to reach out consciously to enroll students of different immigrant groups and races, the State of California has just passed a resolution prohibiting any consideration of ethnicity, race, or gender in college admissions.

1 *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke*, 438 U.S. 265 (1978).

2 Cornelius C. Felton, *Report of the President to the Board of Overseers, 1859–60*, 6.

3 John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty* (1859; reprint, London: Penguin Books, 1985), 99.

4 *Hopwood v. State of Texas*, 78 F.3d 932 (5th Cir. 1996).

Free Expression in a Diverse Society

Commencement Day Address, June 4, 1992

GATHERED in this Yard, with its great trees and simple buildings, we might well believe that we have the power to create and sustain the deepest possible human harmonies. For our universities do have this power – especially through their commencement rituals, and through the shared experiences of tens of thousands of students, faculty, staff, alumni, and friends.

But if we feel a special sense of unity at times like this, we also realize how rare such moments are, and how few people are fortunate enough to experience them with any frequency. Much of the world is in considerable disarray, and as we look about, it is obvious that we have more than enough problems and issues to occupy us. I would like to talk about one which – for want of a better term – I will simply call the problem of living together.

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How, on this increasingly populous and heterogeneous planet of ours, where geographical boundaries are now so permeable, where we are no longer insulated from what is happening in countries far across the world, where ideas as well as people move from

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place to place more swiftly than they can be absorbed; how, with so much flux, and so many random acts which no amount of preparation can ever fully anticipate; how shall we find the human capacity and the resources necessary to live peacefully and fruitfully together?

We rub elbows every day with people whose religious and political beliefs differ from our own, people of different nationalities and cultures, people from different racial or ethnic groups who may speak languages we do not know, people who have their own cuisines, their own music, their own modes of dress. And if we do not literally encounter such a range of people every day, we read about them, we hear about them, we watch them on television.

Given this diversity and the increasingly close quarters in which we live, we might conclude that matters could be far worse than they are. But most of the time, I believe, we are inclined to think just the opposite: we ought to be doing much better.

I am frequently asked, for example, why it is that ethnic, racial, and other relations among students seem to be so tense on many campuses throughout the country. Why do students of different races or religions or cultures sometimes choose to eat, or even live, separately from one another? If our students – so capable, so carefully selected, so clearly intended for leadership in the future – cannot live together more harmoniously, taking every opportunity to intermingle and learn from one another when conditions are so favorable, what can we possibly expect from the rest of the world, most of whose people live in conditions that are barely tolerable? The assumption behind these questions is usually clear: that the situation on our campuses has become worse in recent years – or, at the very least, has not improved.

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There are no simple answers to these questions, nor do we have time here for a long analysis. But I would like to start by framing a hypothesis for your consideration. I ask you to entertain the

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idea that the situation on our campuses today is at least as good as – and in some respects better than – that which existed at many times in our past. What we see today needs far more subtle interpretation than I can provide in a few minutes. But the divergent and sometimes conflicting student voices on campus are often signs of vital and even necessary controversy, of healthy self-assertion, of difficult but essential human growth, and of jarring but important moments of sudden discovery and self-discovery. They can also bear witness to sobering events that are painful, disturbing, and even repugnant. But it is precisely this complex intermixture of experiences that usually characterizes periods of profound change in life; and I believe that we are indeed in a period of such change.

Let me elaborate. I think there are at least four important characteristics which make the present moment different from – and potentially more healthy or positive than – earlier periods.

First, the diversity we now have is greater than at any previous time, and that means there is a wider range of voices ready to speak out. If we think for a moment of the collegiate world of the 1950s (when I was a student), the differences between then and now are striking.

In many of our institutions, there were scarcely any black students, or Asian Americans, Hispanics, or Native Americans. Women were still excluded from most of the major private universities. Jews were still largely restricted by quota, and Roman Catholics were few in number. Political outliers – whether very conservative or very liberal – were either quiescent or nonexistent. Assertive religious orthodoxy was virtually unknown. Gay and lesbian students were scarcely acknowledged as a reality. Students from foreign countries were present in only very modest numbers. And how many physically impaired students did we enroll, and how much institutional attention did we focus upon their particular needs?

To be sure, campuses were generally more tranquil through-

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out the period from 1945 until the mid-1960s. But that tranquility was purchased at the cost of not including vast segments of our society. We are immensely more inclusive now. We should not be surprised that we are also – sometimes, at least – rather less tranquil.

My second point is this: our new inclusiveness is neither timid nor tepid. Many students as well as faculty have not been shy about speaking out. And whatever complications this may have added to our lives, the polyphonic results are fundamentally better than something more plainly monotonic. In addition, the freedom we enjoy is manifestly preferable to any artificial consensus that might be created through subtle or more overt forms of censorship. We know that such censorship was not uncommon at many universities through the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, and that the resulting human and intellectual price was very high.

A Harvard audience in particular should remember that barely a century ago, Charles Eliot Norton – a formidable figure from our university's past – was nearly denied tenure here because he was thought to be an agnostic – which in fact he was. And Cardinal Newman's little novel, *Loss and Gain*, quietly records the poignant tale of an Oxford student who was suspended from his university for questioning some of the Thirty-Nine Articles while also expressing an interest in the tenets of Roman Catholicism.

Current critics of the university scene, who see threats of oppression from either the “politically correct” or the “politically incorrect,” are rightly concerned about any form of intellectual or other coercion. Such coercion has no place in a university, and we know how damaging its effects can be. Even when there is vigorous debate, there is a worry that some voices will dominate and that others will feel too reticent to speak. There is also the hazard that certain groups will press for decisions that would be unwise or simply wrong. These dangers are real, and critics have not been slow to point them out. Our own goal is clear: we must remain fully committed to creating and maintaining a climate on cam-

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pus that is genuinely civil and tolerant, while also open to a wide range of views.

Maintaining the actuality of such openness is not always easy, because civility and “tone” cannot be legislated. Nor is there any way to insure that everyone will feel equally at ease in the large forum of a major university: much depends not only on the climate we create but also on differences in individual temperament and disposition – on personal impressions, inclinations, and will. It is all the more important, therefore, that those who are in positions of responsibility evaluate arguments and decide issues on the merits, seeking to do what is best, rather than what may seem most “responsive” at any given moment.

Although some recent critics of universities have correctly identified important issues such as those I have just mentioned, they have, in my view, also tended to overlook much of the full – and crucial – historical record on this topic, and have tended to imply that there were times in the past when a maximum of true freedom of expression and diversity were combined with a maximum of civility and tranquility. I doubt seriously that a careful reading of the record will sustain that view. At the very least, we need – on this subject, above all – far more scholarly and meticulous attention to all the relevant evidence, and a much more informed discussion than we have had to date. Few current subjects offer an easier target for those who are interested in it for ideological or political or polemical reasons. Surely it is time to turn to our most scrupulous observers of institutions and our very best historians of education for clarification and deeper understanding.

Let me expand a little on this second point. What we now have on our campuses, as already suggested, is a plenitude of voices and views that are sometimes – but far from generally – discordant. While I have stressed many of the positive aspects of this situation, I certainly do not underestimate the depth and difficulty of the issues it raises. For example, individuals and groups have sometimes been deliberately provocative and offensive in their state-

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ments about other members of the university. Others have used obstructive – if nonviolent – means in an effort to press their points of view. These forms of action are fundamentally different from one another, and each must be evaluated on its own terms.

But we do need to recognize that each has the potential to divide communities quite sharply; and some actions, if they constitute the direct harassment of individuals, obviously infringe upon basic rights. Over time, patterns of behavior that are divisive or clearly disruptive can take a heavy toll, especially in the setting of a residential university. Precisely because universities are intrinsically open and conducive to free expression and debate – and because their decision-making processes are highly consultative as well as subject to constant review and criticism – we all have a special responsibility to use these processes in such a way as to increase understanding and to resolve differences whenever possible. At the very least, we must respect and accept conscientious disagreement by exercising a large measure of mutual patience and forbearance.

While acknowledging the difficulties and possible hazards of our present situation, I do want to return to my fundamental point: we have an exceptional degree of openness and free expression on our campuses, and I doubt whether we have ever had so many articulate voices exploring a broader range of perspectives with so much confidence. To some observers, this variety may seem more like cacophony than polyphony; and we do have our intensely cacophonous moments. But when I listen to the student discussions that take place on campus every day, I hear – far more often than not – something that is remarkably humane, searching, spirited, and “conversational” in nature. And if that is indeed the case, do we not have reason to take some real pride in this fact?

Third, in spite of the complexity that a wide range of voices and views can create, we have been – and must continue to be – unyielding in our determination to uphold the right of free speech for all students, faculty, and invited speakers. There is a powerful university-wide consensus behind this principle on our

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campus, and that is a great credit to faculty and students alike. There have been hundreds and hundreds of speakers at Harvard this year, expressing an immensely wide range of opinions on countless topics. Not one single speaker has been blocked, not one has been shouted down. There can be no swerving from this steady course.

Fourth, we would be mistaken – as I have already suggested – either to exaggerate the amount of tension or conflict that exists on campus, or to underestimate the full extent of intermingling and real learning that take place among students and faculty. People do succeed in reaching across gaps; deep friendships are formed; moments of exhilaration – as well as discouragement – are shared. Day in and day out, the University works as a lively, interesting, and convivial place where students and scholars live together and learn from one another.

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I have asked you to entertain the hypothesis that matters on our campus may well be better today, not worse, in certain important respects. I have cited four main reasons: a far greater inclusiveness than ever before; a much greater willingness on the part of many students and faculty to express their views openly; a strong commitment to the protection of free speech; and a vital community of students and scholars who learn from one another with great vigor, seriousness, and enjoyment. I would now like to offer a few additional observations to keep in mind as we continue to evaluate our present situation.

The first involves some sweeping and therefore certainly debatable generalizations about how human beings tend to behave. I am neither a pessimist nor a deep skeptic. But I do believe that our species – viewed from a broad historical perspective – has generally been tribal and sectarian; quite passionately attached to political, religious, or other convictions, sometimes with violent results; deeply intolerant of groups or castes or races that have been categorized as impure or inferior or apostate; and highly

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nationalistic in our modern era – even pathologically so throughout much of our twentieth century.

If this analysis is at all correct, then any society or institution which deliberately tries to seek out and embrace diversity is acting against the grain of strong human instincts and much human behavior. Such attempts have scarcely ever been made. America, for all its imperfections and contradictions, remains the one bold, idealistic, though yet unfulfilled, living experiment that has consciously set itself the task of including people of widely divergent backgrounds from every part of the world.

And our university – as well as others – has recently taken upon itself an even more challenging role: to maintain the values of diversity and free expression, while also attempting to create a humane community in which people respect one another's differences, and seek to understand and know one another well. Defining this complicated task – this task of living together – is relatively easy. But finding the means to achieve it is far more difficult. Indeed, it is a task that has never, to my knowledge, been tried before on anything like the scale that we are attempting.

Why, then, should any of us ever have thought, even for a moment, that the job would be easy? When the populations of the world have quarreled and fought for millennia in order to protect their religious, ethnic, national, linguistic, and other characteristics or symbols of group identity, why should we expect thousands of younger people – even when working with faculty and staff – to create easily or swiftly the kind of community that virtually all humanity has tended to resist? Indeed, to see the continuing strength of the world's resistance, we need only read about what is taking place in the streets of what was once Yugoslavia, or in regions of the former Soviet Union, or Northern Ireland, or the Middle East, or parts of Africa, or elsewhere.

I do not find it surprising, therefore, that we should find tensions between Jewish students and black students on our campuses, or between white students and Asian Americans, or between

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different groups within the Hispanic community. Nor do I find it strange that students from the same ethnic or other groups should often seek one another's company at meals, or in their dormitory accommodations.

I would be deeply happy if there were even more intermingling than there is, and I believe strongly that our institutional structures – and the spirit that we seek to create on campus – should foster such intermingling. But if we look closely at our larger American society (and if we are candid with ourselves), we cannot fail to notice that vast segments of our population live, socialize, and even work with people who have racial, religious, or cultural characteristics very similar to their own.

These patterns and boundary lines are created partly – though not entirely – by choice, and they are generally guarded with vigilance. We know the statistics and anecdotal evidence, for example, that demonstrate the powerful obstacles encountered by many minority families when they try to move into “majority” neighborhoods. We also know about the conflicts that arise when the reverse occurs, or when borderlines between different minority groups fall into dispute.

If we are alert to these and similar characteristics or social structures that define – and always have defined – so much of our national life, we should be able to understand more clearly the rhythms and patterns of our students' lives. Indeed, we may well discover that our students manage their affairs rather better than the rest of us. So, while I look forward to a time when there will be less tension and misunderstanding on campus, I would be surprised if that happened very rapidly or painlessly. Our undertaking, by its very nature, brings into close association many different people with different views and perspectives, and this fact alone guarantees that there will be debate, disagreement, argument, and difficulty.

In this respect, it is helpful to reread some of our most thoughtful statesmen on this general subject. Neither Abraham

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Lincoln nor Martin Luther King turned away from the kind of challenge we are discussing, but neither promised any simple solutions. And for a frank, unvarnished view of the conception of humankind that underlies some of the thinking behind our Constitution, we can learn a great deal from rereading James Madison's contributions to *The Federalist Papers*.

Madison had very little confidence that the full exercise of freedom in a democratic or republican society would lead to easy agreements or tranquility. Instead, he viewed the human species as highly factional – addicted to forming tightly knit groups that in turn struggle with other groups. This was of course one of the reasons that he favored a complex system of checks and balances in our government, with its careful separation and distribution of powers: he hoped that, through such a structure, the power of particular groups would be blocked or contained by the contending force of other groups. “The latent causes of faction,” Madison wrote, “are . . . sown in the nature of man.”

A zeal for different opinions concerning religion, concerning government, and many other points. . . ; an attachment to different leaders ambitiously contending for pre-eminence and power; or to persons of other descriptions whose fortunes have been interesting to the human passions, [all these] have, in turn, divided mankind into parties, inflamed them with mutual animosity, and rendered them much more disposed to vex and oppress each other than to co-operate for their common good.¹

We certainly do not have to agree with Madison, at least not entirely. And our government, as well as the spirit of our political and civic life, owes an obviously profound debt to that more optimistic Jeffersonian stream of thought which is part of our national identity. But the tendency to associate with people who have characteristics and values similar to one's own is as typical of America as is our persistent effort to dissolve such distinctions in order to promote intermingling through the vehicle of a

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national “melting pot.” A good deal of “melting” does take place. But we also continue to have our Polish American and Asian American societies; our Columbus Day, Easter Sunday, and St. Patrick’s Day parades; and our Latino, Italian American, African American, and Hasidic neighborhoods.

The reality of America’s unity or its diversity is far from simple: most efforts to find a single metaphor or succinct phrase to describe our aspirations or our actual national experience capture part of the truth but are inevitably less than adequate. We are a melting pot – but also a nation of free, equal, and unique individuals; a mosaic of different cultures and groups; an assemblage of fifty separate states; a union or single nation “indivisible”; a “rainbow coalition”; an expanding New Frontier or Great Society; a ground where Madison’s contentious factions struggle; a land of opportunity for individuals with the desire and will to succeed; a lonely crowd; and an aggregation of separate racial or ethnic communities who live in clannish ways.

Our national search for self-definition is obviously one of the continuing, unresolved dilemmas of America. At what levels of experience do we in fact intermingle and “melt”? Do we try – in substantial measure – to preserve, cherish, and celebrate our different cultural or ethnic customs and traditions? Or do we prefer – with little fanfare – to live our quite separate lives? Or do we manage, in some complex manner, to act in several of these ways, adjusting ourselves to different roles at different times?

The troublesome and threatening factions that Madison feared are – when viewed from a more positive perspective – the familiar and unifying political parties that we join, the religious congregations we belong to, the “single issue” organizations we form, and the extended families and identifiable neighborhoods that we sustain. But whether we assign a more negative or more positive value to our human inclination to create such associations, the gravitational pull of that tendency is clearly very strong. Madison’s incisive analysis should remind us, at the very least, that our

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nation and its complex institutions will almost always contain assertive subgroups or subcultures or “factions.” Even if these groupings are often benign, we can scarcely expect that matters will ordinarily proceed smoothly, with little friction or stress.

Before concluding, let me underscore one additional point: our current enterprise in diversity is quite recent in origin. In the nation as a whole, much *legal* discrimination against African Americans ended only in the last three to four decades, and the removal of many *de facto* restrictions on some groups is still far from complete. Most major private universities have been coeducational for only the last twenty-five years, and their inclusion – in any significant numbers – of individuals from a wide variety of political, ethnic, racial, religious, and other groups or persuasions is even more recent.

From the long perspective of human history, we have had scarcely more than a fleeting second of time to undertake a transformation that is unprecedented and that is occurring in a world where many nations and communities are moving in precisely the opposite direction – that is, toward societies which are ever more tightly and narrowly defined in terms of their group characteristics. If Harvard enrolls a student from Saudi Arabia, and if he or she rooms near a student from Israel, should we expect that the two newcomers will immediately understand and trust one another, simply because they have crossed the Atlantic and landed in Weld Hall? Or if an African American student rooms in his first year with a white student, should we assume that each of them will forget all they may have heard or read about one another’s race – or about the Civil War and so many other events in our history? They *might* do so, but we should certainly not count on the fact. Examples could be multiplied, including those that involve the attitudes of some men toward women, or some women toward men.

Our experiment is a new one – hardly two or three decades old – and it is taking place in a nation that is itself deeply troubled by unresolved issues concerning race, equity, and educational

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opportunity. We will need more time to accomplish what we would all like to achieve. Some people will be understandably impatient for more rapid change; others will point out correctly how much has already taken place. My own view is frankly evolutionary. We are unlikely to reach solutions – or, more precisely, resolutions – easily or immediately. Indeed, it is not obvious – in an untried experiment of this kind – what our realistic expectations can be. But we know there are no alternatives that are either more humane, or more in accord with the realities of our world. Our experiment in diversity must be pressed forward with energy and conviction, in a manner that preserves the fundamental strength and fabric of this great but also very human university. We are and must remain a living organism, something essentially different from a mere organization.

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Let me now conclude by suggesting some of the principles and ideas for action that may be able to guide us as we look to the future.

First, we will need help and strong support in order to maintain an unwavering commitment to the goals we have set ourselves: to sustain the highest possible quality in education and research at Harvard, and to promote – simultaneously – the greatest degree of openness and of inclusiveness within our institution. I have concentrated in this talk on issues of diversity, but I have not done so because of any lack of full commitment to academic and related forms of excellence. Diversity is in itself not an absolute value, and it cannot be dissociated from other values that are fundamental to a university: free inquiry, intensive research and scholarship, integrity of mind and thought, devoted teaching and passionate learning. At bottom, the goals of diversity and quality are deeply interrelated and need to be addressed together.

I have insisted that we must press forward with our experiment in diversity, essentially because I believe that our students must in the future live and function as effective leaders in an increasingly

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heterogeneous and internationalized world. Diversity is important, therefore, not as an abstract ideal, but as an essential educational goal related to the nature and texture of our actual lives. It enables us to create within the university an environment in which students can encounter – under propitious conditions – some of the most important issues and forms of knowledge critical to their own and to their world's future.

Next, if we are to preserve our commitment both to the highest quality, and to the greatest degree of openness, we must stand utterly firm on the issue of freedom of speech. We will not tolerate the direct harassment of individuals; but free expression in all the many forms that are honored in our society must be protected, and will be protected in this university.

Next, while reaffirming our determination to protect the right of free expression, we must also bear in mind the primary – but not exclusive – purposes of such freedom in a university setting. Our chief concern, after all, is the process of learning and the discovery of important truths. If we care about such learning, then we will want to understand not only abstract ideas, but also the people who articulate different ideas and perspectives. Consequently, the ways in which we talk with one another – the tone of voice we use, the extent to which we listen as well as speak – will often be as important as what we actually say. If we cannot be courteous, civil, respectful, and sympathetic in our behavior – as well as incisive, assertive, and sometimes contentious – then we will surely have failed to realize one of the most important purposes of an education in the liberal arts. If we cannot be fundamentally humane in the use of our intellect and knowledge – and in our relations with other people – then the full, unfettered exercise of all our precious freedoms will yield something immeasurably less rich and enlightening than it should.

Last of all, we will need a more determined commitment from administrators, faculty, and staff – as well as students – to invest time in getting to know one another better, in humanizing our daily lives, and in structuring more carefully the ways that we work

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together. We will have to learn to anticipate the complicated problems that can come from living together in a diverse university, to manage and respond to difficult issues more effectively, and to understand their implications more fully. We will need more conscious planning and coordination, informed by frank discussion.

Meanwhile, the simple but challenging task of thinking more considerably about our day-to-day human relationships is crucial. In E. M. Forster's novel *Howards End*, two phrases recur as leitmotifs throughout the book. The novel tells of very different kinds of people – from widely divergent backgrounds and social classes – who come into great conflict and then manage to reknit their lives because of the considerable pain they have endured together. The motto that characterizes the episodes of conflict in the novel is the repeated phrase “telegrams and anger”: “anger” because the protagonists are given to furious outbursts when they shout but rarely listen; “telegrams” because they tend to vent their fury by firing off intemperate messages into the void.

The novel's other motto has to do with finding ways to bridge the chasms and gaps in our relationships with others. Doing so is far from easy, because the gaps can be enormous. Over and over again, people in the book are asked to take fuller account of the harsh problems that others are facing, to imagine themselves in one another's predicament in order to experience things from a completely different point of view.

For this to happen, however, much more is needed than mere intellect or reason. A special kind of human imagination and a sympathetic disposition toward others are essential. Some courage is also necessary, because imaginative leaps of this kind always involve yielding – if only provisionally – some part of our own ideas and feelings in order to see things as others do.

Forster continually urges his characters to reach out and make that imaginative leap: “Only connect,” he tells them. The process will never be entirely smooth or complete. Hard lessons will have to be learned time and again. Disturbing incidents will recur,

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because our tendency to treat others insensitively is at least as strong as our desire to treat them with understanding and affection. But real learning can nonetheless deepen; free inquiry and free expression can flourish; and the fruits of diversity can be harvested, if those of us in our universities – and in our larger society – can make the essential imaginative leaps that alone will enable us to “connect.”

¹ James Madison, *The Federalist Papers*, No. 10 (1787).

Sustaining an Inclusive Vision

President's Statement to the University Community

April 4, 1996

AS YOU MAY KNOW, a federal appeals court recently issued a major decision concerning diversity and university admissions. In *Hopwood v. Texas*,¹ the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit ruled that the University of Texas may not use race as a factor in its law school admissions, despite the university's assertion of a compelling interest in fostering student diversity. Although the *Hopwood* decision does not apply directly to Harvard (or other institutions outside the Fifth Circuit's jurisdiction, which includes Texas, Mississippi, and Louisiana), I have received a number of questions about its implications, and I want to offer a brief comment.

I believe that student diversity contributes powerfully and directly to the quality of education in colleges and universities. For more than a century, Harvard has placed a very high value on the creation of a residential community that brings together people with a wide range of backgrounds and experiences. The breadth of views and voices in our university challenges each of us to think harder, to see the different sides of any issue, to confront

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our own assumptions and preconceptions, and to develop the kind of understanding that can come only when we are willing to test our ideas and arguments in the company of people with very different perspectives. It also gives us the chance to come to know, understand, and respect a remarkable variety of men and women whom we might not otherwise have the opportunity to learn from or even to meet.

The educational importance of student diversity has informed our admissions process for many decades, as I suggested in my recent report to the Board of Overseers.² In choosing from among a pool of well-qualified applicants far larger than the number of available places, we take great care not to view people simply as the sum of their grades and test scores, however helpful those measures may be. We view applicants as individual human beings with a complex set of talents, qualities, interests, backgrounds, and experiences – all of which bear on their record of achievement and their future promise, as well as their capacity to contribute to the educational experience of their class as a whole.

Race and ethnicity are among the many factors that our admissions officers and faculty members may take into account as part of the selection process. Harvard's policies in this regard antedated the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the United States Supreme Court's 1978 decision in the *Bakke* case. The federal appeals court in *Hopwood*, taking a position contrary to that of Justice Powell's pivotal opinion in *Bakke*, has now expressed the view that the consideration of race as a factor in the admissions process "is no more rational on its own terms" than considering "the physical size or blood type of applicants." I respectfully and strongly disagree. To my mind, race has historically been, and still remains, a significant factor that influences the process of growing up and living in the United States – one that helps to shape the outlooks, experiences, and opportunities of millions of people.

I do not believe we can solve the persistent dilemma of race or ethnicity in American life simply by stating that we live – or

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ought to live – in a society where these characteristics have ceased to be significant. Our hope for progress lies in gradually narrowing the real gaps that continue to exist among many people of different races. That can be done only by creating fruitful ways of bringing people together – ideally, by educating them together.

To say that factors such as race and ethnicity may be taken into account in the admissions process does not mean that they should be elevated above all others. It does not imply efforts to achieve specific numerical targets through quotas. It means that a person's race or ethnicity may be considered as a potential “plus” factor among the many considerations that go toward assessing each individual as a whole person: as someone whose “merit” cannot be measured purely in terms of numbers, as someone who has the potential to bring something distinctive and important to Harvard and to society.

Over many decades, this approach has made Harvard stronger both as an academic institution and as a human community. Progress has come slowly yet steadily – not without interruption, not without friction and strain, but with impressive results. Now is a time to reaffirm our commitment to building upon that progress, and to sustaining an inclusive vision of higher education that I believe has been essential to our university and to the nation.

1 *Hopwood v. State of Texas*, 78 F.3d 932 (5th Cir. 1996).

2 Neil L. Rudenstine, *Report of the President to the Board of Overseers, 1993–95*.

Persevering

*Martin Luther King, Jr., Day Celebration
Smithsonian Institution, January 18, 1993*

DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING wrote his last book, *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?*, in 1967 – the year before he was assassinated. Every page shows Dr. King’s humane vision: his sense of identification with people of every kind; his belief in the worth of every individual; his commitment to unify, not divide us; his ability to face the most difficult problems in a clear-sighted way, maintaining his determination while recognizing that any particular project might end in defeat or even disaster.

Many of the ideas that Dr. King expressed in the last year of his life speak to us even more forcefully now than before. I want to draw on a few of these ideas, as I discuss some of the difficulties faced by our country’s educational system.

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By 1967, Dr. King had come to believe that achieving social justice – overcoming racism, ensuring equality of opportunity in all spheres – would depend a great deal on addressing the problems of America’s cities.

Early in *Where Do We Go from Here?*, Dr. King mentioned the

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massive investment needed to address those problems. “The real cost lies ahead,” he wrote – and he cited predictions that, without such an investment, the nation would face “further deterioration of the cities, increased antagonism between races and continued disorders in the streets.”

A quarter century later, those words describe the state of many American cities all too well. And many of our urban schools, despite the efforts of teachers and other dedicated people, are in a discouraging state of disarray – in some cases, near collapse. Overcrowding is epidemic. Buildings are literally crumbling. In the City of New York alone, a recent report estimated that \$24 billion is needed to repair the city’s 1,053 school buildings – and to build enough space for the 300,000 *additional* students who will enter the system before the year 2000.

This situation is calamitous for everyone. But it takes a disproportionately harsh toll on the urban poor, including millions of minority students and their families. Another recent report, concerning a different urban school system, concluded that public education is failing completely under the double burden of poverty and racial isolation.

Consider the profile of a typical inner-city fifth-grade class described in a second report. Of twenty-three students, *five* were born to teenaged mothers; *eight* live in housing officially classified as inadequate; *nine* of the twenty-three have parents who are out of work; *fifteen* live with single parents; *fifteen* live below the poverty line.

The problems suggested by this profile – the joblessness, the housing, the family situations – affect and in many respects overshadow the problems of substandard school buildings, or the level of financial investment in the educational process itself.

In such an environment, schools can succeed only if they somehow overcome formidable odds. Dr. King saw all of this developing twenty-five years ago, and the urban situation he described has generally become worse, not better.

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Of course, not all the problems facing our system of education are caused by inner-city poverty or racial attitudes. Many are the result of broader cultural and other patterns in our society, and they have had an effect on virtually all young people, regardless of their background.

We know, for instance, that vast numbers of our students never learn to read or write or calculate beyond the fourth- or fifth-grade level, and even many high school graduates never advance beyond the eighth-grade level.

We also know that our students, nationwide, continue to do poorly on well-designed tests given to students from many different countries – especially in mathematics and science. We know that SAT verbal scores have fallen since 1967, and that science proficiency has declined among our seventeen-year-olds.

We know that fewer than half of the students who enroll in full-time four-year college programs directly out of high school manage to complete the requirements for a bachelor's degree within six years. And, according to a recent survey, only about one in three freshmen spends six hours or more per week on homework – a figure that puts studying roughly on a par with watching TV, and well behind such activities as exercise or sports, working at paid jobs, and socializing with friends.

By all sorts of measures, we are performing far below standard. Large numbers of our young people are now, in effect, educationally handicapped.

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This analysis leads me to another of Dr. King's basic convictions: many of our nation's most pressing problems affect all of us, and they ought to unite us in common cause. If we want to improve the conditions for education in our country – and certainly if we want to improve relations among people of different races and cultures – we can do so only if we work together collaboratively, recognizing our differences while remembering our very deep common bonds.

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In *Where Do We Go from Here?*, Dr. King describes the long civil rights march across Mississippi in 1966 – the march on which James Meredith was shot. After the shooting, some leaders argued that whites should be discouraged from participating further in the march. Some felt that whites had begun to exercise disproportionate influence over the civil rights movement and that blacks needed to regroup among themselves, so they could retain control over their own most important affairs.

Dr. King yielded to no one in his determination to create a stronger sense of group identity and maintain leadership among blacks. But when it came to dealing with the largest issues facing America, he believed that neither blacks nor whites – nor any other group – could hope to succeed alone. Real progress would require something more complicated than separatism, on the one hand, or a simple melting away of important individual or group differences, on the other.

Summing up the debate on the Mississippi march, he wrote:

[T]he answer ... was not to give up, not to conclude that blacks must work [only] with blacks in order for Negroes to gain a sense of their own meaning. The answer was only to be found in persistent trying, perpetual experimentation, persevering togetherness.

Like life, racial understanding is not something that we find but something that we must create. ... [T]he ability of Negroes and whites to work together, to understand each other, will not be found ready made; it must be created by the fact of contact.¹

These words offer no easy remedies. Dr. King describes the dilemma, and he relies finally on his own strong faith, declaring that the only answer to racial or ethnic conflict will be found in “persistent trying, perpetual experimentation, persevering togetherness.” Progress, as he says, will have to be “created” with great effort from the hard “fact of contact.”

His choice of words – persistent... perpetual... persevering... trying... experimentation... creation... contact... – suggests that there will be no obvious end to this process, and that we must

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press forward even if there are moments when we seem to be losing ground. Indeed, as we look around the world today, “the fact of contact” among people of different races and cultures appears to be generating at least as much conflict as understanding. For every act of liberation we have witnessed in the last few years, every stride toward freedom, every increase in the measure of human dignity, we can find a contrasting example of violent – even barbarous – religious, ethnic, nationalist, or racial strife. Many people in our world – perhaps a great majority – appear to have no special interest in learning to live with others who are different from themselves; often, it seems, they would rather be rid of them.

In America, and not least in our schools and colleges, many of the signs are also deeply troubling. We hear and read about more acts of racial harassment and more instances of hateful speech. According to one study, attitudes on racial issues have recently tended to “harden” – to become less tolerant, not more – as many students pass through college. A large proportion of students now regard race relations on their campuses as “generally bad.” And we know that on some campuses there have been severe racial crises in the last few years – serious enough to bring entire institutions to a standstill.

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Surveying the landscape of 1967, Martin Luther King might well have lost heart or drifted into cynicism. Instead, he reaffirmed his principles and framed proposals for change. As we think about our problems today, especially in the field of education, we should ask how to answer Dr. King’s question for ourselves: Where do we go from here? Are there steps we can take to address the problems that confront us? What realistic alternatives are open?

First, although no single, all-encompassing solution is likely to emerge – at least not soon – we must still keep in mind that the problems of the schools cannot be separated from those of our families, our communities, our cities, and our towns, or from the

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state of our national economy. This is no less true in 1993 than in 1967: without the kind of major investment in our cities and in our more general human environment that Dr. King called for in his last book, we will inevitably face staggering problems as we try to improve the schools themselves.

An added difficulty, of course, is that our nation's available resources at this moment are so much scarcer now than twenty-five years ago. We also have less confidence in our ability to produce long-term structural changes, changes that will actually create healthy economic conditions, better opportunities for employment, and decent housing and neighborhoods where people have some genuine sense of ownership and pride. Yet until some significant renewal of this kind takes place, many of our public schools and whole districts will continue to function under immense pressure, pressure that intensifies as we ask the schools to provide more of the services, and to solve more of the problems, that are fundamentally the responsibility of whole communities and the larger society.

In the meantime, what other actions can we take? Let me suggest two.

First, the last decade has shown that the country as a whole has a strong and continuing interest in the predicament of our public schools. There has been more experimentation, more investment of private funds, and more volunteer time committed to the problems of the schools than anyone might have dared to imagine fifteen or twenty years ago.

But while we have to continue to experiment and be receptive to new ideas, the time clearly has come to take stock, and to pay much more attention to those programs and approaches that have begun to yield good results. For example, if the effort to rebuild the school system of an entire state shows evidence of success – as in Kentucky, or South Carolina – then we must study such situations in detail, to see which elements are critical and are making a difference.

In other words, this is the moment to identify and capture not

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every latest new idea, but the best ideas that are being tested and carefully evaluated. We need to adopt a more systematic and long-term approach, investing in programs that are working, trying to understand the ways in which lasting results can be achieved, and building as much as possible on what we have already begun to learn. And we need to support good programs over a period of many years, so that they have time to develop and reach maturity.

Second, at the level of the individual school or district, we have to help teachers, principals, and superintendents perform an almost impossible balancing act.

To begin with, there is the day-to-day work with students who often do not want to be in school at all. Many teachers rise to the challenge. But the work is draining and exhausting, with relatively few visible triumphs and only modest material rewards. Nothing less than excellent leadership from principals and superintendents can help to motivate and strengthen the work of teachers and students, creating schools that are communities rather than simply facilities.

Then there is the even harder – and perhaps the most important – challenge. Our greatest educational problem is not that our schoolchildren fail to master basic skills, skills that are often the product of memorization and routine. Whatever shortcomings we may have on that score, they are far overshadowed by the fact that we are not managing to teach our students how to analyze new situations and problems, how to use facts as evidence in order to produce logical and persuasive arguments, how to take different points of view into account rather than simply expressing personal opinions without ever examining them.

All the tests show that the point at which our students fail is just that point where they must write – not simply a sentence or two, but a coherent paragraph or essay – or where they have to think through a “word problem” in mathematics. These are the moments when active learning and the real use of the mind begin. Yet it is just at these moments that so many of our students falter.

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We need to find more effective ways of teaching – using much more interesting and stimulating curricular materials, using real books, but also drawing on the help that interactive technology can offer. Our communities and schools need to convey the message that academic achievement is absolutely vital: it certainly is not the only priority, but it must be the highest priority of any school. We have to begin with the premise that even our youngest children are already very skillful as well as talented, and they have managed to master extremely complicated processes – such as speaking and understanding a language – even before they arrive at school.

If we do that – if we take our children and their abilities very seriously from the earliest stage – there will be a far greater chance that they, in turn, will begin to take themselves seriously and to strive for real achievement. Unless they know that we have confidence in them and are willing to devote time and attention to them, it will be very hard for them to have the kind of confidence in themselves that is absolutely critical.

This will not happen easily. Students and their teachers face situations every day that are discouraging enough to demolish months of patient work and progress. But I see no other way, except to move ahead with the assumptions and attitudes that I have just tried to describe. In this effort, colleges and universities can help, by building cooperative programs with schools and communities. Corporations and foundations – as well as others – must continue the work they are already doing. Everyone will have to be prepared for setbacks, and for a very long voyage. But unless we stay the course and aim high – and find ways to help our students to aim equally high – there will be no real progress.

¹ Martin Luther King, Jr., *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), 28.

University Debate and Freedom of Speech

*An Open Statement to the Harvard Community
November 14, 1991*

DURING the past few days, there have been reports of controversial incidents related to the issue of sexual orientation. I would like to state as clearly as possible my own views on the broad range of concerns raised by these incidents:

First, actions that are intimidating and are directed at specific individuals are repugnant and intolerable. The recent incident (as reported in the *Crimson*) involving the defacement of the door of a student's room with a homophobic epithet – or similar vandalism or attacks directed at any member of the University – are not only a violation of University regulations; they are cowardly and contemptible.

Second, actions that are clearly in the realm of freedom of expression and speech, that offer opinions or statements in a more general way, must be protected, even if they are offensive to some members of the community. If we find certain statements offensive, then we can respond in ways that are appropriate to a

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university. Some people may simply choose to ignore such views. Others may wish to debate them, offer counter-opinions, or reply with parody, wit, or ridicule. To attempt to censor such speech, however, would be totally inappropriate.

Finally, debate on controversial issues is inevitable and essential. I would hope, however, that all members of the community will continue to bear in mind the fundamental purposes of the University: that we are here to evaluate ideas and ask new questions, but that our basic goal should be to do so in a way that actually advances the cause of learning, of new knowledge, and of understanding.

It is not difficult to caricature, parody, or in a general way disparage the views of others. Indeed, sometimes – as brilliant satirists have shown us – this can be very healthy, even necessary, and can sharpen our vision of what is true. There is no question of our remaining open to a variety of forms of expression and debate. At the same time, we are also likely to serve one another best if we remember that – as members of a single university community – civil discourse, thoughtful arguments based on informed views, genuine scholarship, and careful as well as imaginative expression are at the very heart of our work as students, teachers, scholars, and staff members.

It will not always be obvious how to reconcile the twin goals of guarding genuinely free expression while also attempting to build a community free of intimidation and harassment, based on a respect for individuals as well as a desire to learn from others. We will always have the problem of resolving difficult cases that are ambiguous or unclear.

There is no simple solution to these dilemmas or to the tensions inherent in them. But a university by its nature should be prepared to address such complexity, to live with it, and to deal with it in ways that are constructive and humane. That will happen only if individuals and groups who disagree with one another are willing to discuss their differences candidly in the hope of achiev-

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ing deeper mutual understanding and a shared sense of being members of a university that has powerful common values and goals.

*Access and Affordability:
A Commitment to Need-Based
Financial Aid*

*Excerpts from Testimony to the National Commission on the
Cost of Higher Education, November 7, 1997*

ALLOW ME TO TRY to address, directly, the question that led to the convening of this Commission: how do we ensure that college education remains accessible and affordable to students from across the economic spectrum?

I want to talk about Harvard's approach, not because it represents some sort of platonic ideal, or a model that is workable for all institutions of higher education – but because it is one model, and one that illustrates a systematic effort to address a serious problem.

Let me begin with the number that all too often serves as not just the beginning, but the end, of discussions about college access. What might be called our comprehensive fee – the total of tuition, room, board, and other charges – is now around \$30,000 a year. It is not quite the highest in the nation, but it is still very

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steep. Yet, based on our estimates, it is still only about two-thirds of what it actually costs to provide our students with an undergraduate education in a residential setting. The remaining third is underwritten largely by endowment and annual gifts. In this sense, all of our undergraduates – even those who pay the full comprehensive fee – receive a significant subsidy or implicit scholarship.

As a private college and university committed to a very broad set of programs in education and research, Harvard has for many decades had high fees which, if viewed in isolation, would place a Harvard education well beyond the reach of the great majority of students and families in the United States. But there is, of course, more to the story. Back in 1854, Harvard's President Walker summarized the problem and the solution very succinctly: "There is no objection," he said, "which weighs so heavily against an education in Cambridge as the expense; and the only practicable way of reducing it would seem to be by the institution of scholarships."

As this suggests, Harvard's approach to college access has long been rooted in a simple insight: given that it is inherently expensive to provide an excellent residential college education, and given that a great many families are not able to afford the full price, financial aid based on need is the most direct, effective, cost-effective, and economically practicable way to reduce the net cost of college for many students – while also maintaining a steady flow of tuition revenue from those students whose families can afford to pay the total sum.

The modern version of this philosophy has been with us for several decades now. We have made it a cardinal principle that students should be considered for admission without regard to their financial need. We want our doors to be open to the most able and promising students – rich, poor, or in between.

That's only half the principle. The other half – the one that converts ideal into reality – is that students who are admitted, and who choose to come to Harvard, are provided with a package of financial aid that is sufficient to enable them to attend.

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We advertise the nature of this program widely, and we recruit students vigorously. As a result, we are able to attract a wide range of applicants from literally all income groups, and from an enormous variety of backgrounds. The number of applicants to our first-year class has grown, over the past five or six years, from 12,000 to more than 16,500 – essentially ten applicants for every place in the class – and over three-quarters of the students who are offered admission choose to enroll.

Our commitment to need-based aid is expensive. Two-thirds of our undergraduates receive some form of financial aid, and they will together receive some \$80 million in aid this year – in the form of scholarships, loans, and work-study jobs. More than half of that aid – \$42 million – takes the form of scholarships; and nearly nine out of every ten of those scholarship dollars come from our institutional funds.

Almost half of all our undergraduates qualify for scholarship grants, averaging \$14,000. Added to that are a loan and a job that cover another \$6,500. That combined total – around \$20,500 – is roughly two-thirds of our full comprehensive fee. In other words, for about half of our students, the average amount remaining to be paid, on a current basis, for a year at Harvard College is roughly \$9,500.

I want to emphasize that the figures I've given are averages: some students receive over \$20,500; others receive less, depending on their own level of need. And the aid reaches students from a very broad band of family incomes. Our scholarship students include, for example, some 375 students whose family incomes are less than \$20,000 a year, as well as some 250 whose family incomes are greater than \$120,000 a year; the others fall between.

Over time, as our comprehensive fee has steadily increased, we have tried to make sure that the families of our scholarship students not be asked to bear an increasing share of the students' budgets. In 1980–81, for instance, the typical parental contribution for students on scholarship was 26 percent of the total student budget. Seventeen years later, the figure is still 26 percent.

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Meanwhile, the portion of the total student budget covered by scholarship funds has grown, on average, from 43 percent to 49 percent.

We have also tried, by investing heavily in need-based scholarships, to avoid leaving our students with huge debts when they graduate. In our most recent graduating class, almost half our seniors managed to leave Harvard without any outstanding student loan debt at all. And only 8 percent of all our seniors graduated with debt burdens of more than \$20,000.

In fact, as the real value of federal scholarship grants has eroded in recent years, and as the balance of federal aid has shifted strongly in the direction of loans, colleges and universities have reached deeper into their own funds to provide scholarship aid. At Harvard, while tuitions have continued to rise faster than inflation, our own undergraduate scholarship budget has risen at a significantly faster rate than tuitions: more than twice as fast, when measured in constant 1997 dollars over the last decade.

Having said all this, I do not at all underestimate the severe problems and real anxieties faced by many students and families struggling to pay for college. And I do not propose that strong need-based aid is the be-all and end-all of an effective approach. We need to keep up the effort to moderate the growth of tuition and fees, as we have been doing. At Harvard, we have lowered the rate of tuition growth each of the last five years. The increase from last year to this – 4.1 percent – was the lowest in percentage terms since 1969. Our intention is to continue this trend, although it will require even more intensive efforts to raise endowment and other sources of revenue, to budget systematically, to control our expense growth, and to make sensible cuts and economies that do not compromise the fundamental quality of our academic programs. It will also require some help from the national economy.

All in all, however, we need to be realistic in our expectations. Whatever the exact percentage increase in next year's tuition and fees, the full price of attending Harvard will still be

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high – higher than a great many students and families can reach on their own. We will be left to do what I believe it is absolutely essential for us to do: reaffirm and redouble our commitment to a program of need-blind admissions and strong need-based student aid.

Some Essential Institutional Values

Divinity School Convocation Address

September 23, 1992

IN THIS 175th anniversary year of the Divinity School, there is a wonderful coincidence between the commemorative events and the present state of the school we are celebrating. One of Great Britain's more notable but also dyspeptic public figures was once asked what he thought of the established Church, and he said in reply something that might, alas, also apply to a good many schools of divinity: "The great point about the Church," he stated, is that "if you leave *it* alone, it will leave *you* alone." But in Harvard's case, happily, we have a divinity school that, in the most collegial way possible, does not leave us alone. It has clear purpose. It has its own voice. It has a presence — as well as the will to make that presence an active part of the University as a whole. As we celebrate this 175th anniversary, we can above all celebrate this very moment in the life of the School.

While I have been asked to offer an address, I am obviously not equipped by training or by natural genius to speak with the tongues of either theologians or members of the ministry. We must all settle, therefore, for something modest. Recognizing my

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ignorance, I have nonetheless decided to throw caution to the wind, and *not* speak to you on a subject (such as higher education, or even the present state of literature and the arts) about which I might possibly know as much as my audience.

I want to focus on a few questions or dilemmas that are very much on my mind, and that I believe the members of the Divinity School are in a better position to elucidate than I. Defining the questions is difficult, and can often lead to misunderstanding, but I shall attempt to share some of my thoughts.

Well before the political conventions of this summer, I had begun to wonder about the meaning of the term “values,” partly in response to the questions of a close friend who has for the past two years been studying the issue of values in relationship to universities: Which values are most important to a university? Which values are *essential* to such institutions? If we believe in certain institutional values, how do we go about the process of defining, articulating, teaching, and adhering to them?

As I have groped for clarity and definition in this area, I have felt the need to know how (if at all) we should distinguish among the three terms “values,” “morals,” and “ethics.” It seems to me that many people have begun to use them almost interchangeably, and that gives me pause.

“Morals” and “ethics” are obviously very close to one another, but there are important contexts where one term is clearly more appropriate than the other: for example, we speak intelligently about “professional ethics” or “practical ethics,” but it is not at all clear that we could so intelligibly talk about “professional morals” or “practical morals.”

But whatever differences there may be between the two terms “morals” and “ethics,” it is nonetheless clear that both of them are deeply rooted in conceptions of conduct, action, and choice: human behavior that is measured against established standards or codes in a way that leads toward the making of judgments. A given action may be morally or ethically “right” or “wrong” – or

not altogether one or the other. But however complicated our judgments or our standards, we will find it very difficult to make any sense of the words “morals” and “ethics” without ultimately turning to considerations of conduct and the judgments that we bring to bear upon conduct.

Values are obviously something rather different. They are intertwined with ideas of estimating and judging, but their relationship to conduct, action, and choice is much more oblique. One of the interesting points about the term “values” is that it is not easy to discover when it began to be used to convey anything like its present set of meanings. I found the *Oxford English Dictionary* only moderately useful on this subject. For most of its history, the word seems to have been used in the singular more than the plural, and its meaning has been closely associated with the tangible or convertible. The value of something was estimable in fairly precise ways: it could be weighed, or measured, or bargained about. “Value” and “values” were not floating out there as amorphous, cloud-like, and elusive quiddities – full of significance, but marvelously ambiguous; clear to the initiated, but often puzzling to those who are more naïve or perhaps simply humble.

My purpose is not to suggest that values, as we now use the word, are not extremely important. I only want to stress that the term itself (including its history), and the qualities or activities or objects that we refer to when we use the term, are in very serious need of renewed discussion, clarification, and more careful analysis than they are now receiving. As I try to participate in this process, I will share with you some untested intuitions and impressions, in the expectation that they will soon be corrected and wither in the face of superior analyses.

First, it seems plausible to me that the meaning of the word “values” has broadened, becoming more inclusive, as a result of at least two important developments that are characteristic of contemporary society. The first is the gradual but steady recognition that the concept of value or worth – of the actions, objects, or

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ways of living which are judged to be admirable or valuable because they have an internal consistency, coherence, and integrity of their own – has become more complex as our consciousness of the world's variety and its pluralist nature has increased.

In effect, we are all anthropologists now. We know far more about the species of humankind in all its innumerable cultural manifestations, and we have come more and more to understand and appreciate the achievements (in art, in cosmology, in religion and other spheres) of people who are very different from one another. It is not surprising, under these conditions, that we should see a greater multiplicity of “values” – varieties of worth – in our universe, and that the word itself is increasingly useful because it allows us to acknowledge (and to some degree manage) this multiplicity. In addition, to the extent that there has been any recent shift away from the term “morals” to “values” (or even to “ethics”), that change may well reflect the increasing difficulty or discomfort which many people encounter when they attempt to make judgments in this sphere. There was a time when people talked quite frequently – if only somewhat loosely – about “the work ethic.” Many are now much more likely to talk about the “value” of work – or, perhaps more revealingly, the value of leisure, or even leisure values. We talk very naturally about aesthetic values, community values, and cultural values: the list could be lengthened considerably. We also talk, without apparent strain, about *moral* values, and that in itself implies that we make a natural distinction between morals and values. In short, using the word “values” is one way that we can legitimately, but also ambiguously, indicate respect for aspects of human life and conduct without having to rely on categories that relate to choice and judgment – to the language of morals.

My second general impression about “values” relates closely to the first. Even before this summer's [1992] Democratic and Republican conventions, it was becoming clear that the term was entering more and more into the realm of political – as well as

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more general public – discourse. As this occurred, the word was not surprisingly being used to signal differences as well as commonalities, to highlight distinctions and preferences rather than multiplicity and inclusiveness. This is perhaps a predictable antiphonal development to the movement I described earlier. As our concepts of worth and value expand, becoming more complex and inclusive, we should not be startled to find a simultaneous effort within our society (and within ourselves) to discover and isolate that special set of values which are most definitively “ours.” We seek, in some sense, our own identifying and distinguishing special qualities. This process can produce greater stridency, a tendency on the part of many individuals and groups to seek firmer and perhaps narrower definitions of identity – or, as we might say in religious terms, more fundamental or “fundamentalist” conceptions of belief and behavior. Under such circumstances, different sets of values can quickly begin to collide quite visibly – whether the issue is abortion, or the nature of the family, or questions related to the environment, or the treatment of people from ethnic, racial, or religious communities that are different from one’s own.

Political discourse can reflect such developments and collisions in many ways. The approach of the moment does seem to be one that tries to find language – the language of values – which is sufficiently general and ambiguous to have a quite wide appeal, but sufficiently decodable to reassure particular groups and individuals. Those in the political arena who have recently tried to move from this strategy to one that uses the language of morals and moral judgments more openly – on questions such as “non-traditional” families, sexual orientation, or abortion – have found themselves more isolated (even repudiated) than they appear to have expected.

My last general observation on the topic of values can be stated more briefly. It is no secret that, over the course of the last two to three decades, we have suffered a widespread loss of pub-

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lic confidence in many of the central institutions of our society: government, businesses, many religious institutions, the media, and educational institutions, to name only a few. It is not my intention to try to explain this shift, but rather to focus on one of its by-products: the fact that, increasingly, our society has a less and less distinct view of the legitimate distinctions we can and should make about the appropriate role and mission of different kinds of institutions. Of course we maintain, at some level, a reasonable sense of how governments differ from corporations, or corporations from churches, or churches from universities. But there has been more blurring of the lines: less clarity about real differences, and some tendency to press many institutions to play a broader and more inclusive public, if not political, role.

In my view, aspects of this development have been very healthy. That major institutions should not be so specialized and so self-enclosed that they are isolated from the general affairs of life is something that most of us would affirm with conviction. But I suspect that the hazards in the direction of more self-enclosure are, at this moment, relatively minimal, as compared to the ambiguities and potential problems that can result from the opposite tendency.

There was a time, for instance, when the purposes of a college or university could be stated fairly succinctly – in terms of academic and personal education, as well as research and the creation of new knowledge. Major universities have, in addition, always been connected to the larger society in more direct ways: by preparing people for the professions, by doing applied as well as basic research to help solve pressing problems, and by providing advice and technical assistance on a wide range of matters.

But the number and range of interactions between the university and the wider world have increased enormously over the years, and so has the expectation that the university should be more directly involved in a growing number of external activities and relationships. What we might call the explicit public role of

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the university is part of our agenda in a new way. This is partly because we ourselves are more conscious of this aspect of our mission, and partly because society itself sees us more and more through this lens: viewing us, perhaps increasingly, in ways that it views other institutions (whether we think in terms of government regulation, or “consumer” attitudes, or the desire for certain “products”).

This brings us full circle to my initial question of values in the context of the university and its purposes. At least some of the current tendency to blur distinctions among institutions might be mitigated if those of us in the university attempted to articulate our primary “functions” more precisely – the activities we simply must engage in, and the activities in which we have a special capacity to excel. In addition, we must try to be clearer about the essential conditions – the shared understandings, as well as guarantees and protections concerning matters such as free inquiry and free expression – that are necessary if we are to carry out our purposes. In the process, we will inevitably be defining our central values, and discovering those points of tension where our own core values may have the potential to conflict with one another.

The effort is not to “solve” these issues, but to clarify them, so that we can think and act more intelligibly, more in concert, with a clearer sense of what we are and what we aspire to be. This is critical, not only for ourselves, but for our continuing conversation with other institutions, groups, and individuals in our society – indeed, throughout the world. I know of no school that is better situated than yours to help us think through these difficult matters, and I look forward to further conversations in the months and years ahead.