

*Remarks of James T. Laney, president emeritus of Emory University and former U.S. Ambassador to South Korea, at the inauguration of Rebecca Chopp as the 15th president of Colgate University on September 29, 2002.*

For a few moments this afternoon, I would like to speak about what in my view it will take to prepare a new generation for life and leadership in the years ahead. These needs, these requirements for our role in the world, look quite different today than they did just a few years ago, and there are corresponding implications for higher education. For example, picture the world in the '90s. The cold war was over, and our power was unrivaled and ascendant. The economy was stoked by the dot-com boom and all of its ramifications. Democracy seemed on the march around the world, and free trade was the mantra that would usher in a world of well-being eventually, presumably, for all.

Higher education was both participant and abettor of that. Our libraries, our labs, our classrooms were the envy of the world, spawning much of the creativity and innovation that underlay this new prosperity. And for individuals, the credentials and preparations that higher education would bring were essential for success, success measured not only by achievement, but, increasingly, by money. Society became entranced by the creation of wealth, and polls a few years ago indicated that the majority of students had as their ambition to become rich.

Education was the key, something to be acquired and employed to that end. And in such a climate, it was to be expected that education would be viewed as the means to one's

personal interests, not the occasion to challenge those interests, or those ambitions or to expand or enlarge them. Indeed, there was often an impatience with such attempts in some colleges. And many made valiant efforts against the tide. Colgate, I know, among them, but the tide was almost irresistible.

The pursuit of personal individual interests meant and became a gospel of greed that chose to define venality, finally, as virtue. Our heroes were corporate CEO's whose reputations were based on stock prices and not on fundamentals. But to tell the truth we were all, myself included, mesmerized by the market, personally and institutionally. There was talk of a new order, a new world. America bestrode the world like a benign colossus, at least from our standpoint. Our wealth, our power, our might was unparalleled. Inevitably, education was caught up in that very appealing, seductive world. And bright and clever graduates — not just of colleges like Colgate — but in law and business and other disciplines, all went on to do very well indeed. How different things seem today.

Our nation, still invincible, is no longer invulnerable. Illusions of easy, quick wealth have burst along with the stock market. Our heroes now are seen to have had clay feet and tainted hands. On 9/11 we had a moment of supreme moral clarity, when our heroes were at the lowest rung of the common people. Three hundred forty-three firefighters just doing their duty, not making big money, not making a name for themselves, chose . . . chose to go up in the World Trade Center towers, never to come back. Greed is no longer

good, we hope. We face the prospect of a protracted shadow war on terrorism and a likely real war in Iraq. The world is no longer benign, and it is not our oyster.

We are faced, not just with the demands for personal success, but with challenges that go beyond the pursuit of individual interests. Once again, we are directed toward the larger common good, to the just use of power, and our debates right now are on that very issue. We are directed to a life lived in ways that do not simply pander to private desires and tastes, but to a nobler, grander, more costly destiny, where virtue is not scorned, where courage and honesty and fairness and even self-sacrifice have regained luster. Now, to be sure, our inventiveness and creativity are still here in abundance, but now maybe they will be linked to something bigger than oneself. Gone are the illusions, the self-preoccupation, the frenzy and — one might say — the arrogance.

Now education has the opportunity — one might say the responsibility— to acknowledge this new reality and seize it. This is the ethos, as ethicists are fond of saying. It can enlarge itself, its view of itself, beyond the instrumental, the useful, the means to power and to wealth to address the larger purposes of life and hold them before our students. Not only our best thinking but our deepest commitment is required for this.

From what I've read and what I've seen and what I know about your new president, Colgate is uniquely positioned to take a lead in this endeavor. It stands in the great tradition of American higher education exemplified, it seems to me, by the sentence in the charter of Yale in 1702, "to fit youth for public employment in church and civil

state.” The emphasis on public here is not just on government. The idea is to point oneself beyond the private and individual, the purpose of education being to better serve society and the larger good.

Of course this doesn't annul self-interest. Self-interest is there. This is not a naive idea, rather it's an appropriate expansion of self-interest to include a just and peaceful world, something worth living for and dying for. The implications of this for education are that we are going to be involved a world far beyond what we considered a few years ago. The implications for higher education — what it entails — are enormous. But first we have to understand what engaging the world means as a nation, how our power is to be employed, and how we as citizens are to understand our role. Surely, one of the major purposes of education is to train a citizenry that it is able to take part in a public debate and not retire into private pursuits, and to do so with a sense of wisdom and thoughtfulness.

Of course, talking about power, our security is foremost, and power as might is required to achieve that. But the uniqueness of America from the very beginning was its reliance on the moral approval of the world, not just its power or its independence or its authority. It relied on a decent respect for the opinions of mankind - it's written into the Declaration of Independence by Thomas Jefferson. This is the bold venture of self-government in the United States, that authority derives from the consent of the governed, and this from free people. Authority is not independent, like divine prerogative or inherited privilege. This still has revolutionary implications for the world and how we act in the world. The

founders believed that they were doing something daring and new and universally valid, not just protecting freedom for ourselves and our own privileges but for all humankind. They finally understood that it meant for all humankind. Maybe we will finally realize that it is to include all the peoples of the world.

Our founders felt that their example had to fit their claim. I know it's not fashionable to talk about moral example, but this nation must give it. Our power is not self-justified. We learned from George Washington the restraint in the use of privilege. What other general in the history of the world had ever shared the privation of his troops as he did that winter at Valley Forge? He shared the privation of his troops, and they would have marched into the jaws of hell because of that. Now that's leadership. What other person in history had ever relinquished power, first as a heroic commander, then as president? Stepping down from power? It had never been done! Now that's the use and understanding of power — restraint. Washington knew force, but he also knew self-discipline.

Power has to have a moral basis, for the nation as for the individual. At our best we have recognized this throughout the years. Following World War II we rebuilt Europe at enormous cost. If we price that out in today's dollars it would be something on the order of half a trillion dollars. We rebuilt Japan at comparable cost — although we don't talk about it — under MacArthur. Enemies became friends and allies.

At the height of the Cold War, when our very existence was at stake, John Kennedy — certainly no naïf — proclaimed the Peace Corps, sending young people out of college all

over the world to countries that would receive them, to serve not in some particular cocoon of privilege, but to live among the people, tabernacling with them, learning the language and eating the food, making friends and doing what they could. The Kremlin understood this as the most subversive thing there was because it touched the hearts and minds of the people. I was in Korea at the time, and I remember the college students were electrified by the idea of a Peace Corps. The United States was finally doing something that was noble. They themselves, in as far as they could, went out in little groups of medical students to teach in poor, impoverished villages. It unleashed energies that nobody had understood before. It also produced for us a good group of diplomats for Asia and Africa who knew the languages. This is the power of example in the use of power. This has huge implications of how we act in the world, and first of all, it means of course a knowledge of the world by immersion, not by tourism. What this says about our study abroad programs I'll leave to others, but I think it does mean that we really need to get with the people, and let the people get with us.

What this requires is the study of power, not just of military might but also of soft power. We must study the role of non-governmental organizations. Voluntary organizations of this country are one of the greatest — I hate to say it — industries. Their influence reaches all over this country and around the world.

If we are going to defeat terrorism, we have to de-legitimize it. This means that those who aid and abet it and glorify it have to realize that it is wrong, it doesn't work, that there is something better. How do you de-legitimize terrorism in the eyes of the

terrorists? I had a conversation with Vice President Dick Cheney not too long ago, and he was remarking sadly, “How does an F-16 deal with a 15-year-old boy with dynamite strapped around his waist?” Terrorism has got to be de-legitimized.

Higher education has to understand the enlargement of interest in the liberal imagination. I think about the marvelous things that happen in classrooms, that happened even way back when I was in school. There is a vicarious participation of life through literature and philosophy, even economics. But this is done beyond method and meta-critical approach. Those are necessary to understand and dissect and to criticize. What I am referring to is the *substance* of these literatures, the things that captured the imagination and hearts of people when they were written, and still do. There needs to be on campuses an ethos that invites faculty to speak less self-consciously of things like hopes and dreams and anxieties, not as posturing but inviting participation. It’s been my experience that the very best students — the very best students — want to get to know faculty on that level. They want to know what we know, but they also want to know what we love. I remember Helen Vendler making a marvelous comment; she was president of the Modern Language Association. I think it took a good deal of courage for her to say this to that group. A more jaded group I don’t think exists. She said, “We will teach them what we love; that they may love it, too.”

Finally, teaching is about love, love of knowledge but also love of goodness. Our life is made up of virtue as well as knowledge, and an education that does not touch the heart is, finally, not a complete education. This means that higher education has the opportunity to

talk about a new kind of leadership, not just success, not just a bank account, but what really matters. God, we need that kind of leadership in the years ahead. This is a good place; this is a crucible for that kind of leadership to come out.

What we want to do, in Lincoln's immortal words, is find out how we can be touched by the "better angels of our nature," fully recognizing that there are a lot of other kinds of angels out there, too. We want graduates who will want to live beyond themselves in that world where they can make a mark. And while they are here on campus, we want them to be reminded and recalled of all those glorious things resonant with our past and consonant with our hopes and future and appropriate for the world that they will lead and you and I will face.