**N. O. KEOHANE WELCOMING REMARKS TO SYMPOSIUM TITLED "WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES DIFFERENCE MAKE"**

Saturday, March 1, 1997

It is a pleasure to join you this morning, and to welcome members of the Board of Trustees in the midst of this historic meeting. This symposium has a timely and important task: to explore the meaning and value of difference -- social difference, cultural difference, and intellectual difference.

This is the first of what we hope will be recurrent opportunities to engage issues of difference as part of our intellectual lives at Duke. We are deeply appreciative to Professor Bob Thompson and his colleagues in the Faculty Associates Program. The significant engagement of faculty with students around these issues is critically important, and we are grateful for their leadership.

The Uses of Diversity

This symposium flows from two hard truths: first, that we, in higher education generally and at Duke University specifically, have not made our full, best case for diversity, explaining why diversity matters to us educationally. And secondly, we have fallen short of making the full, best use of difference as a crucial part of education, as a contribution to the enrichment of every single individual on campus, here at Duke.

As the current backlash against affirmative action and minority recruitment in several parts of our country makes crystal clear, we have taken too much for granted. As a result, we have not yet made a compelling argument, both to skeptical folks on campus and to many in the world outside, for the importance -- to learning -- of multiple perspectives, different ideas and values on a university campus.

Colleges and universities are among the most diverse institutions in our society, in which people of many different cultures and backgrounds come together for four years of intense and concentrated experience. The campus is one of the few places in America -- indeed, in the world -- today where people have easy opportunities to learn from one another both the ethical practices of different cultures, and the imperative importance of living more humanely together and caring for one another.

The difficulty, of course, is that rich opportunities for education from diversity remain unexploited. Too many people spend their years on diverse campuses ensconced in homogeneous subcultures, with only the most

superficial contacts with peers who are unlike themselves. Furthermore, the fact of difference in the classroom and elsewhere on campus can become an obstacle to the use of it, if faculty and staff members are overly timid about exploring it, or take it as an excuse to avoid unpleasant topics.

At the same time that Duke and other institutions of higher education have become more diverse, the willingness to tackle issues raised by diversity appears to have eroded among faculty, students and staff members. We are often reluctant to pose questions about difference for fear of offending a member of another subculture. The pride in cultural identity engendered by a critical mass of students from any particular subculture can itself become an obstacle to cross-cultural understanding. Such difficulties are not unique to our campuses; they are endemic in the world outside our borders. But I would argue that colleges and universities have a particular obligation, and a unique opportunity, to try to transcend such barriers.

This does not mandate homogeneity, or forced integration of every member of every group at every point in their lives. There must be spaces and times where minority students, students of color, can support one another and develop a better understanding of, and pride in, the heritage of African-American or other cultures. However, just as the unexamined assumptions brought by white students from suburbia to the university must be unsettled, it is important to unsettle the assumption that self-segregation for the sake of mutual reinforcement and support is the only way to go.

We should endeavor to construct a community on campus in which all participants experience others in a more than superficial fashion. Constructing such a community involves deliberately fostering learning experiences that lead to a greater understanding of difference -- through the curriculum, the provision of extracurricular programs and symposia, the design of structures and patterns of residential life, support for student groups that aim for this result, as well as admissions and faculty recruitment practices. An education worthy of the name involves overturning established expectations and opening doors to different worlds. Such an approach also is most likely to produce graduates who are well-prepared to lead in a multifaceted society, empowered by a truer understanding of the potential opportunities of such a society.

Nor are we talking only about the education of our students, or the attitudes and priorities of our faculty. Our community includes employees of many different backgrounds, doing many different kinds of jobs that are essential to our success as an institution. All our employees should feel included, involved, a true part of Duke, rather than peripheral, unwelcome, "different" in a sense that makes folks feel not part of what's going on here. All of them have rich contributions to make to the mosaic, the adventure, that is Duke University.

As one planner of this event, a graduate student, put it: "Duke has the illusion of inclusion." That may sound harsh, but we need to hear it: it would be unwise to get too comfortable with the fact of our growing diversity as a university, if we do not at the same time face hard truths about what needs to be done to become a more fully inclusive community.

James A. Joseph, now Ambassador to South Africa, recently published a book called Remaking America: How

the Benevolent Traditions of Many Cultures are Transforming our National Life. The book is an impressive compendium of the varieties of voluntary activity which are part of the traditions of several different peoples -- African Americans, Asian Americans, Latinos and Native Americans. Each has distinctive lessons to teach about ethical behavior and time-tested practices of mutual support.

This is a good example of the uses of diversity in education. As human beings, we are universally in need of the support and comfort of others in times of adversity. There are many different ways of providing that support, and in learning about those ways, we come to understand more about the way other people live. We also have the opportunity to adapt "our own" culture by acquiring new ways of meeting fundamental needs, developed by other cultures.

Our differences should become points of healthful tension rather than hostile suspicion or simplistic celebration. In classical dialectical fashion, the thesis of "one's own" societal culture should be set against the antithesis of the beliefs and practices of other people. The resulting synthesis for which we should aim is not an undifferentiated mass, but a refined, informed and tempered dedication to "one's own" principles -- refined by a clearer understanding of the sources and implications of those principles, informed by an awareness of alternatives, and tempered by some degree of humility in the face of the large number of ways human beings have of moving through the world.

Stories from Students

In dealing with such large abstractions, it sometimes helps to hear directly the voices that make up our differences, as we are doing in this symposium today. A colleague, a teacher in the Writing Course, has shared with me -- with permission of the authors -- some essays written by her first-year students on the topic of diversity. Their stories are telling, each in its own way:

* One student spent some time in Madagascar as a child. He remembers being chased by Malagasy youngsters who were shouting, "Fazaha! Fazaha! Fazaha!, which means "White pig."

This year, at Duke, he once used stereotypically "black" language --rap -- in a way that a new friend, an African-American, quietly told him was offensive. He writes:

"This weighed especially heavy on my conscience because of my background and experiences. I had experienced deep-seated racism and knew the rifts it forms. I had also seen these wounds healed through discovering the beauty and enthusiasm of people who were very different from me. I considered myself to be especially tolerant and sensitive. Yet I found myself acting as if I had never felt the pain of being in the minority. My experience at Duke has either sharpened my awareness or given me an entirely fresh perspective. I believe I have become more discerning of my classmates' backgrounds and beliefs and how my actions may

offend them. For once, the idealistic rhetoric of Duke administrators rings true. I have had my assumptions challenged and acquired new perspectives. Not bad for thirty grand a year."

* Another story: A Jewish student who went to a predominantly Jewish day school, then to a more diverse public high school. Now, at Duke, she is finding herself questioning what traditions are important to her even as she creates her own Jewish world on campus:

"I was forced to decide for myself how my Friday nights would be spent and how I would celebrate Jewish holidays. I am still in the evaluating process, picking up and discarding as I go along. I had my first real long-term relationship with a boy who was not Jewish or even white during my senior year of high school and over the summer, yet when we went out to eat I refused the combination of milk and meat in my meals ... I have come to accept my inconsistencies with my religion as steps in the evaluation process. How will I know what's right for me if I am only exposed to one way? Only told what to do without question?

* Finally, a Korean-American who lived for a time in Korea and whose aunt is Japanese. He asks:

"Who am I? Who am I?" I keep asking myself this question and receive no answers. I try each day to muddle my way into acceptance by different races but I've become tired. I have put up such an act for so long that I'm unsure of who I really am. College is said to be the place to learn more about yourself. I really do hope this is true. I would like to quickly learn about myself so that I might help my younger brothers and cousin when the go off to college. Maybe I'll learn that they need to find their own ways. Maybe I'll try to direct them to the right path and they'll succeed where I've failed or yet to reach. I see all these uncertainties. Maybe I'll find someone who has already gone through this ..."

Conclusion

In closing, I want to share a passage from a talk I gave at Wellesley College when the community there assembled for a similar day of focused common deliberation on issues of diversity and difference. My theme that day was "recognition" -- a theme picked out by Elizabeth Minnich, among many others, in an elegant and thought-provoking address yesterday afternoon.

We seek to recognize each other in all our variety, our diversity, our splendid individuality. Real recognition means noticing things about each other that are usually taken for granted, or missed entirely. It means discovering that each of us, by reason of our different cultural heritages and personalities, has the power to educate, to teach something worth knowing about the different ways of being human.

Recognition also entails granting power and status and license to speak, as when the chair of a meeting "recognizes" someone who wishes to speak out. Recognition implies empowering and respect; it is different from just looking. It means really seeing what others are, attempting to see them more nearly as they see themselves. It means pushing past stereotypes and expectations, knowing afresh.

We should also try to recognize things about ourselves that we may not want to know. Each of us must recognize -- in the sense of being willing to admit -- that we carry about with us a storehouse of stale stereotypes about other people, which stand in the way of a great many educating, liberating, and rewarding experiences. Stereotypes are attempted shortcuts that turn out to be dead ends -- ways of trying to categorize the world more efficiently that turn out to block out much of what we should be trying to experience. We should look especially closely at those boxes and labels in our mental furniture that group people by characteristics like race, religion, sexual preference, economic class, physical disability.

Taking stock of our stereotypes, recognizing important things about ourselves and about each other -- these are among the most important goals of our being together today.

While our work is not done, Duke has come some considerable distance in recognizing the educational value of difference. We can all go much further together in understanding how "difference" may be more productive, made more fully a part of how we learn.

This symposium today is a significant step along that path, and I am honored to be part of it.

Thank you.