



## CONVOCATION 2001 ADDRESS

**President Nannerl O. Keohane**

**August 23, 2001**

Welcome aboard, new students; welcome back, returning students, faculty and deans. Welcome also to the parents and families listening to this ceremony in Page Auditorium. Duke has a well-founded reputation for being especially friendly for students' families, and we hope that you will feel very much a part of this university in the years ahead. If you are experiencing some separation anxiety about leaving behind your beloved son or daughter, we understand; many of us have been there. But I promise you that you *will* recognize them at Parents Weekend -- and even four years from now. ...

Over the summer I read a great talk by a woman named Carly Fiorina to the Stanford graduating class of 2001. She confessed that she had been terrified the day she entered the university 25 years earlier, and equally terrified the day she walked out. Both times she was scared of leaving the protective bubble that she had come to call home; both times she was afraid she might squander the great gift she had received--that the seeds of her education had fallen on sterile soil. But both times she let her fear motivate rather than inhibit her. She used her fears the way musicians or athletes use nervousness, to help concentrate, to do their best in this moment rather than fretting about the future. And now Carly Fiorina is the President and CEO of Hewlett-Packard.

At Duke, as at Stanford, one hears a lot about the extraordinary achievements of individual students or alumni. Their achievements linger in the air here; but that whiff can sometimes be daunting for an entering first-year student -- will I ever be like *that*?

It's important to know that the context for their success is our academic community's dedication to helping each other do our best. Nobody succeeds alone, especially at a great university. Ask any one of those celebrities or CEOs or world-shifters who attended Duke ten, twenty, 50 years ago, and they will tell you that teamwork, even more than individual genius, was the key to their success. There are times when we give more than we take from our communities, and times when we need nourishment from them in turn. A single seed may not look very daunting, yet someday, in a propitious climate, after years of gathering into itself the nutriment of soil and water and sunlight, it provides shade and fruit and beauty.

I think of seeds in connection with your beginning at Duke because of a figure on campus with whom you will soon become familiar. Duke has quite a few statues, as you may already have discovered. The most visible ones are of members of our founding family. Washington Duke, the patriarch, welcomed you from his comfortable armchair as you entered East Campus, your new home. Other prominent statues, here in front of the Chapel and in front of Baldwin Auditorium, are of his two sons, who followed his lead in supporting a regional institution called Trinity College and helped turn it into an ambitious university called Duke.

Also on the East Campus lawn, facing toward Main Street in front of the East Duke Building among all those great trees, is a life-sized bronze statue of a farmer scattering seed. "The Sower" was sculpted by an artist named Stephan Walther, and it has stood on that spot for 90 years, a gift

from James B. Duke, who signed the original indenture establishing this university.

By his dress and demeanor our Sower recalls Johnny Appleseed, a legendary figure striding through the fields and woods of the early frontiers of this country, planting apple trees that he would never see in blossom, moving always onwards, westward towards new lands.

Some of you may think also of the Sower in one of the parables told by Jesus. One of the main points of the parable was that sowers cannot control the fate of their seeds. That depends on many things -- the condition of the soil, whether it is fruitful or rocky or barren; the luck of the draw, whether birds come along and eat it up before it has a chance to germinate; the weather itself, the amount of sun and rain. Given all the daunting obstacles that sowers faced in the centuries before our highly structured agri-businesses, it's a wonder that any seeds survived. Sowing is an act of faith. Henry David Thoreau once commented that he had great faith in seeds. "Convince me that you have a seed there," he said, "and I am prepared to expect wonders."

Sowing seeds is a common theme in many religious traditions as well. The Vietnamese Zen teacher Thich Nhat Hanh [TICK NOT HAHN] gave a beautiful talk a few years ago on "watering our good seeds." He professed his belief that "we have seeds of understanding, of awakening, of compassion, within ourselves. We don't need these seeds to be transmitted from the teacher. We already have all of them. ... We have all kinds of seeds in us, positive and negative ... We have the seed of holiness in us, and we have the seed of unholiness in us. ... A good practitioner," he says, "tries to help the positive seeds to become manifest."

Past sowers could never know exactly how their plants would develop. In the early decades of this century, Washington Duke and his two sons could never have foreseen most things about Duke today. Some aspects of a modern campus would please them, some might shock them, and many would simply bewilder them; I leave it to your imagination to consider which things at Duke today would wind up in which category.

James B. Duke was quite clear about his mission in his founding indenture: his major motivating purpose in establishing a university was "to develop our resources, increase our wisdom, and promote human happiness." Not a bad recipe for your own personal educational agenda -- developing your resources of intellectual and personal skill, increasing your wisdom, and promoting happiness -- your own, as well as the happiness of those about you.

J. B. Duke had great faith in education, when conducted along what he called "sane and practical" lines, to accomplish these lofty goals; and wanted his new university to attain and maintain "a place of real leadership in the educational world." In order to ensure this leadership, he stipulated that great care and discrimination be exercised in admitting as students only those whose previous records show a character, determination and application evincing a wholesome and real ambition for life.

Well, we've done just that in admitting you to Duke.

You might think about those phrases occasionally as you try to figure out how best to benefit from your new university. I can assure you that "determination and application" will pay off, especially sometimes when you'd really rather just chuck everything and go out and party on a weeknight. And although your particular ambitions for life may not always strike older observers as "wholesome," we credit you with having a "real ambition for life," I hope that you will use it

with discrimination while you are here.

And that's where character comes in. It's an old-fashioned word, but a useful one. At Duke, we are quite comfortable in saying that one of the purposes of a good undergraduate education is to build character -- to make you a better person. This doesn't mean subscribing to any particular set of beliefs or any specific narrow moral code. It does, however, mean knowing why personal integrity is important to you. Why cheating hurts everybody and erodes the foundations of an academic institution. Why honor matters, and what it means. Why you should remember your personal dignity and wholeness, even when you are tempted to do certain things with, for instance, alcohol or sex that will lead you to behave in ways that will interfere with your health, your education and your self-respect. One of the many things I hope you will learn at Duke is why you should want to be the kind of person who sets your own standards high, who has a clear moral compass that you live by.

A university education does not happen only in the classroom, although most of the truly important parts of it will happen in the academic part of your life. A university education is not a neat, well-rounded four year period that begins today and winds up with a bow around your diploma. A university education sows the seeds of a lifetime of growth, safely rooted in fertile soil, ready to blossom and flourish as they are needed and as the seasons of your life will call them forth.

When you get back to East Campus, notice that the Sower does not face toward the campus. The Sower faces toward the city just beyond that low wall that separates Duke from the city of Durham. I like to believe that this siting was done on purpose -- to remind all of us that Duke is not an ivory tower, separate from our nearest neighbors. Those of you who have been in Project BUILD already know that there is much in Durham that is worth exploring, and that there are many people among our neighbors who can use your help. I hope you will help your classmates discover the great riches of Ninth Street and downtown Durham, the Durham Bulls, the Carolina Theatre, the wonderful restaurants of every kind, the Hayti Heritage Center and much much more.

I hope every one of you will find out how rewarding it can be to use some of your own time, energy and gifts to help people who are striving to keep their families together, to learn English as a new language, to cope with drugs, to build a home, to stay in school -- even just know where the next meal is coming from.

Through the Duke-Durham Neighborhood Partnership Initiative and the Community Service Center, you will find wonderful opportunities to make a real difference in the lives of other people. Moving outside that low wall around East Campus can do wonders to put your own life into appropriate perspective. If you take the time to plant the seeds of your creativity and caring, many others, including strangers you will never know, will live better lives.

Johnny Appleseed, the inspiration for the Sower, was actually a real person named John Chapman, who spent the first four decades of the 19th century wandering around Ohio, Indiana and Western Pennsylvania when that was frontier country, sowing apple seeds. He was a pioneer, in the true sense of the word, and I hope that pioneering spirit will sometimes inspire you at Duke as well. In fact, as a class you are already guaranteed the chance to be pioneers in several different ways.

Just before you get to the rose garden in the oval here in front of the Chapel, a huge new building is going up behind the trees, just off our main west campus quad. In fact, it's several buildings -- we call it the West-Edens Link, because it is designed to connect all the residence halls on west campus with a set of new residence halls and great social spaces. And it is scheduled to be ready for occupancy in August 2002.

That means that your class will be the first class to move together from East Campus onto West Campus and inaugurate a new way of living at Duke. You will be the pioneers who get to figure out how to use these new spaces, make them livable, make them your own. This year, you'll have a chance to participate in decisions about how that space will be used, and then you'll be the first ones to enjoy it and to set the patterns for many classes to come. That's real pioneering.

Another way in which your class will pioneer is in building new ties with our neighbor university only eleven miles away in Chapel Hill. Nobody expects the fierce athletic rivalries to dissipate; Carolina will still be our major rival in almost every sport. But it has always seemed a shame that only graduate students and faculty take advantage of the intellectual opportunities at our neighboring university, one of the finest public universities in the nation.

For the first time this year, a bus now goes back and forth regularly between west campus and Chapel Hill, every half hour all day and into the evening. This means that you can now easily do something that your predecessors rarely did: you can take classes or seminars at UNC to complement the academic offerings at Duke. This will no doubt matter more to you when you have chosen your major and can fully use those upperlevel courses, but in the meantime, I encourage you to take advantage of that bus to go over for lectures, use the libraries, attend plays or concerts, and enjoy Franklin Street. The bus is for everyone on both campuses, faculty, students and staff, and I encourage you to use it soon.

These buses are supporting an exciting new program called the Robertson Scholars, and we have as part of your class the first 15 Robertson Scholars, who, along with their counterparts in Chapel Hill, are expected to take full advantage of the rich offerings at two of the world's best universities. Their good fortune is also yours. So I hope you'll serve as pioneers in finding your way westward to double the array of opportunities available in your university education.

Finally, one of the most crucial places where your pioneering spirit matters is in carrying out one of the main goals of Duke University's new strategic plan: to find new "creative ways to promote values of diversity and make the climate more welcoming for all members of the community." We believe, on good evidence, that the best living and learning environment includes people of diverse backgrounds on many dimensions -- ethnic, religious, socio-economic, in terms of race and sexual orientation and culture and geography. But having all those diverse folks around doesn't do your education any good unless you take advantage of it -- learning from people whose experiences are quite different from your own, opening your mind to the possibilities of being human in very diverse ways.

We need to find new pathways through this uncertain realm we call diversity. It can be contentious, tense, and sometimes scary; but the rewards of having the courage and commitment to explore that territory can be great. And we very much need your help in doing so. That means being willing to take some risks, which is part of all pioneering; but we cannot make these valuable things happen *to* you; you must be part of making them happen yourself, and all of us will benefit.

Members of the Class of 2005, as you break new ground and sow new seeds at Duke, we hope you will find this climate conducive to your flourishing as a person. There are many people here who are eager to help you flourish. They include: other students, faculty members, advisors and administrators. I urge you to take advantage of their advice, their interest, their support.

The pioneering journey we call a university education will be challenging; it will occasionally be exhilarating and occasionally exhausting; but it will stretch your mind in ways that it has never been stretched before -- in ways that should ultimately be pleasurable and rewarding for the rest of your life. I look forward to sharing this journey with you, and I wish each and every one of you all the best along the way.