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K E Y N O T E A D D R E S S

13th Annual Pennsylvania Black Conference on Higher Education

February 25, 1983

Hershey Hotel  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

In accepting your gracious invitation to address this assemblage, it had been suggested that my topic speak to: "Lifelong Learning via the External Degree and Its Impact on Minorities." After six episodes of the "Winds of War" and in light of recent and continuing events in higher education, these remarks might more accurately be described as thoughts on "Opening a Second Front." There is a battle raging within higher education. It is being fought over the continuing issue of whom the academy ought to serve, and how access to higher education by those of sufficient intellectual substance to benefit from the experience might be achieved.

Passage of the National Defense Education Act in the 50's, followed by the civil rights and financial assistance legislation of the 60's, theoretically eliminated the barriers of race, sex, and economic background as obstacles to higher education for minorities in America. However, as all of you are aware, the expectations of equity in educational opportunity are painfully unfulfilled.

The nature of you as an audience suggests that it is unnecessary for me to recount the many and complex issues that have been debated and contested during the past three decades. Indeed, I am pleased that this occasion has provided me with the opportunity to renew some old friendships with colleagues who have

been trench-mates in past battles over these same issues. I have been sometimes amused in a depressing sort of way during my travels around the country, at the impassioned rhetoric of revelation on the part of some of my less veteran colleagues as they stumbled upon the battle-lines of, for them, a newly discovered skirmish in such a long-fought contest. My depression at these encounters is a function of my frustration that so much activity has produced so little in real equity or change.

Witness the recent actions of the National Collegiate Athletic Association wherein this body adopted exclusionary eligibility requirements based on the arbitrary, unidimensional, misuse of standardized tests. Make no mistake, I support the notion that student athletes are first students; nor do I condone the exploitation of these young men and women for purposes that contradict the basic values of the academy. I do, however, object to educators who ought to know better, adopting a policy so significant in its implications yet so poorly supported by any significant data that would suggest the kind of unitary relationship between a test score and the ability to achieve in higher education that this practice implies.

I was pleased and delighted to learn of the enlightened position taken by President Anrig of the Educational Testing Service in opposition to the NCAA's action. I have had sufficient contact with the NCAA to know that the impact of this rule on excluding minorities from intercollegiate athletics was well known.

I hasten to add that real progress has in fact been made. However, as your conference theme suggests, there is a clear difference between progress and equity, just as there is a difference between a group receiving the same treatment, and receiving equal treatment. Opportunities in higher education have increased dramatically for minorities during the last twenty years.

However, this growth has been exceeded by the movement of the general population. The net effect has been that the gap between participation in higher education by Blacks when compared to the general population has grown larger, not shrunk.

In a recent report by the U.S. Civil Rights Commission on the status of minorities in our society, Black Americans are worse off economically and educationally than they were a decade ago. The irony of this condition is compounded by the philosophical rationale used to justify practices responsible for widening this gap. Since the end of the Civil War, the principal source of Black leadership in this country has and continues to be the Black college. Yet, under the banner of integration as a tool for achieving social justice, these institutions have been attacked where they should have been strengthened.

Institutions that ought to be rewarded for so long carrying the burden of providing quality education for the disenfranchised, are now struggling for their very survival. The State of Oklahoma seriously considered legislation that would convert Langston University into a prison. Kentucky State University was threatened with transformation into a community college. Wright State University in Ohio has become a prominent and excellent university. Built from the ground up recently, it is within a stone's throw from Central State University, which could have been developed into what Wright State has become. Jackson State University in Mississippi and Alabama State University in Montgomery, have both been confronted with direct competition for programs, funds, and students by the creation of new centers of the major state universities, within the shadow of long-standing academis competently led and staffed by competent faculties. And, in a famous case dear to my heart, Tennessee State University in Nashville became the first historically Black institution at any level -- elementary, secondary, or postsecondary -- to undergo a court-ordered desegregation merger and retain its institutional identity.

Just as a principle of social justice was twisted in its application so as to damage those it was intended to protect, so has our recent preoccupation with protecting the "quality" of contemporary higher education been used to in the words of William Ryan: "Blame the victim" in excluding those for whom real educational quality has been so dearly sought. Make no mistake about it, I support and am committed to the concept of quality in higher education. The aspiration for excellence is a fundamental principle and correctly-held value in higher education. Indeed, the very word "higher" implies qualitative distinctions between the intellectual work at our colleges and universities and "further" education done elsewhere.

What is often lost, however, is that quality assumes validity and that prestige and elitism can be promulgated in the absence of either validity or quality.

One might think from my remarks to this point that we ought to be discouraged in the work we do. Quite the contrary, I am buoyed and excited about the issues with which we grapple. Indeed, I encourage you to take heart in the contest and savor the victories large and small, for, though infrequent, assuredly they will come. I would further suggest that other forces are being marshalled, and I am tremendously excited by their potential.

While the access issues surrounding student potential have been argued and fought, something very important has been taking place in the broader society. First, the population has been getting older, and second, the locus and focus of activity in postsecondary education has been shifting to organizations less concerned with the exclusionary culture of traditional academia.

Several years ago in an address to the American Association for Higher Education, Pat Cross of Harvard observed that colleges and universities are

now a minority enterprise within postsecondary education. The majority of learners and monetary resources committed to education after high school has shifted its locus to corporations, business, labor, the military, and other kinds of institutions that require an educated constituency. Higher education's recognition of the true importance and different educational requirements of adult learners is a relatively recent phenomena. The single most important characteristic of the adult learner, is that they bring a considerable amount of prior learning with them to the academy.

In 1970, there were less than fifty accredited colleges and universities that had formal processes for providing credit recognition for the lifelong-learning repository in the adult student. In 1982, their number is over a thousand. For this group, the critical issue has shifted from potential and aptitude assessment for the traditional age college freshman to the documentation of acquired knowledge for the adult student. The question for these students is not what can you learn, can you be taught, but, rather, what do you know, and can you prove it? The shift from speculating on the potential of eighteen year olds to documenting the achievement and competencies of older students represents the invasion port for the opening of the second front.

I think it appropriate at this point to share with you some information about the Edison State College external degree model. Edison State College was created in 1972 as the external degree college for the State of New Jersey. Our mission was defined simply for the purpose of expanding the spectrum of educational opportunities in the State by offering the opportunity to adult learners to earn college credit and degrees by demonstrating their knowledge of college-level subjects through examination and assessment. We have been authorized to offer four baccalaureate degrees -- Bachelor of Science; Bachelor

of Arts; Bachelor of Science in Business Administration; and Bachelor of Science in Nursing. In addition, we offer three associate degrees -- Associate in Science in Management; Associate in Applied Science in Radiologic Technology; and Associate in Arts. We provide no direct instruction.

College credit and degrees are earned through a combination of four processes -- college students can transfer in coursework taken at other accredited colleges and universities; credit-by-examination, including CLEP from the Educational Testing Service, PEP from the American College Testing Service, and individualized examinations developed by the College known as the Thomas Edison College Examination Program; credits may be earned through PONSI credit recommendations and military credit recommendations from the American Council on Education, as well as state licensure and certificate programs; and, finally, through individualized assessment of college-level learning through the portfolio assessment process. Through these various methods, students satisfy traditional curricula leading to the relevant degree. Where learning cannot be documented through one of these devices, the remaining work is taken through traditional college classes offered by accredited colleges and universities throughout the country and, in some cases, around the world.

Our main headquarters is in Trenton with two additional permanent sites in Cherry Hill and East Orange, New Jersey. These sites are supplemented by over 20 counselor sites spread throughout the State. The average age of our student body is 40, and they come from throughout the State of New Jersey and in every state of the Union. In the ten years since our founding, we have produced close to 5,000 graduates.

There are two questions that are commonly raised about our model. First we do not award credits or degrees for "life experience" but, rather, we award

credit based on learning that can be documented which has been achieved by some sort of experience. The other question relates to the quality of our program and the credibility of our degrees and our students. First, we are fully accredited by the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools, as well as all of the appropriate regulatory authorities of the State of New Jersey. Secondly, the final test of the quality of any institution is determined by the quality of graduates it produces. One statistic that suggests some conclusions in this regard is the fact that 70% of our graduates go on to graduate and professional schools and 90% to the institution of their first choice. If this measure is in any way an indicator of quality, then we are very good indeed. Our examinations and prior learning assessment processes are backed-up by some 500 faculty scholars in both public and private higher education in New Jersey.

The underlying and important principle to be understood in the external degree model is that learning and competencies once achieved are equally valuable and worthy without regard as to the vehicle or forum in which the learning took place. The critical factor is that the learner is in charge of his or her learning. The external degree model was developed in response to the realization that the failure of traditional higher education to appropriately consider and recognize the range of competencies achieved by the adult learner prior to entering the halls of academia effectively disenfranchised the majority of the population from meaningful access to educational opportunity. In this case, the disenfranchised people were not minorities but were adults of all races, cultures, and economic backgrounds. The Black or minority adult has been doubly disenfranchised. While adults were receiving little attention from higher education, Black adults are receiving no attention. While the access issues have been contested within

traditional colleges and universities where minorities have traditionally been excluded, at least the historically Black colleges and universities have and are excellent sources of education for traditional age minority students.

I made mention earlier that 1,000 or approximately 30% of our colleges and universities now have some kind of program for the recognition of prior learning. I know of no Black college in America that has a similar program for Black adults. Black colleges, especially those located in urban centers, have truncated their mission in ignoring a good deal of the constituency for which they were created and are sustained to serve. I have a strong affection for these institutions, and I have expressed in strong terms my hope that this omission be rectified. In all candor, however, these institutions are hard-pressed to continue serving in a quality manner a tremendous diversity resident in their traditional age student populations. Here is where you and I have an important contribution to make and role to play. There is perhaps no greater reservoir of untapped wealth in this society than the collective learning and wisdom in the Black adult population.

At the same time, the fundamental tenet of the external degree model allows us, at least for the time being, to bypass the exclusionary practices and barriers confronting the traditional age Black student. First, test scores and high school grades have no relevancy to external degree programs. We are not interested in what a person can learn but, rather, what the student has learned. Two, traditional age students are dependent upon access to faculties and laboratories to achieve their learning. The faculty and facilities for the adult learner are the sum total of persons and experiences throughout the adult learner's life. Third, the traditional age student can ill afford the prohibitive tuition and fees of traditional institutions, especially in light of reductions in federal financial assistance. The external degree model is considerably cheaper and more cost-effective. Fifth, the traditional

age student must commit an exclusive block of their lives devoted to study. The external degree is designed to allow the adult learner to continue their employment and protect their income uninterrupted. And, finally, the pacing and locus of control for the student's educational destiny shifts from the institution for the traditional age student to the individual for the adult learner. In short, the external degree model strips away all of the artificial and arbitrary barriers which for so long have excluded minorities at the traditional college age rank.

The only prerequisite for minority adults to achieve collegiate recognition for their work and learning is ability and commitment. My friends, that is as it ought to be. The educational enfranchisement for those in this society must include all those who can profit by the experience. The demography of our population suggests that the most able segment of Black America is receiving the least attention from the educational establishment.

I would like to stand before you and boast of Edison's accomplishment in addressing the unbalance of educational opportunity for Black adults. Candor and honesty prevents me from doing so. Minority students are underrepresented in the current enrollment of my College. There are no mystical, philosophical, or educational reasons for this but, rather, some simple defects in our outreach activities by which we make available to those we serve the necessary information to attract those we want to serve. Edison State College is committed to doing something about that. I am committed to doing something about that. It is my genuine hope that you will be committed to doing something about that.

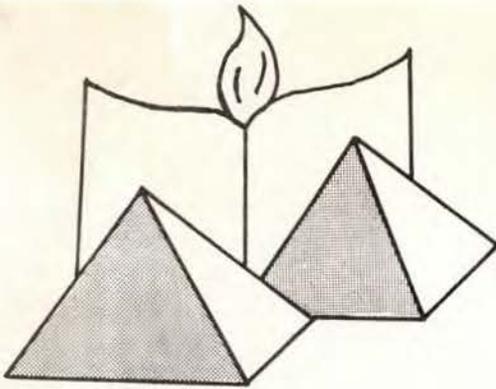
The need is there, the population is there, the ability to serve is there. Since the beginnings of this country, it has been a fundamental assumption that a free people must be an educated people. I would remind you of the admonition

that in a free society if all are not free then none are free. I would remind you in somewhat less desperate terms that those of you fighting to win educational opportunity for traditional age minority students will have won a shallow victory if some of us do not join the same battle for adults. Yes, there is a second front in the access battle for higher education. It is manned by those of us who foresee an opportunity to provide social justice for millions of our citizens who have yet found no champion.

In closing, I would remind you in keeping with my warfare analogy, that in the last great World War it was the second front that led to the ultimate victory.

Thank you.

George A. Pruitt  
President  
Thomas A. Edison State College



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# PENNSYLVANIA BLACK CONFERENCE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

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March 4, 1983

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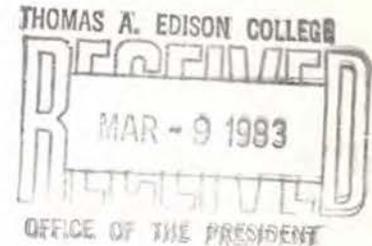
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Dear Dr. Pruitt:

As secretary of the Black Conference on Higher Education and on its behalf, I wish to thank you for assenting to keynote the dinner session on February 25, 1983, and for thoroughly electrifying attendees of the 13th Annual Black Conference on Higher Education.

Providing provocative food for thought, your speech was the perfect complement for the savory dinner which preceded it, supplying ample corporal nourishment.

The concerns you raised regarding the education of and the utilization of the resources of the "Forgotten Majority" were timely and stimulating. The audience seemed to take special delight in having its consciousness raised as you did — in your own inimitably erudite manner.

We thank you and wish you the greatest success in your work at Thomas Edison State College. If we can be of assistance in promoting or advancing any of your endeavors, do not hesitate to call upon us.

Yours truly,

*Joseph J. Rodgers, Jr.*  
Joseph J. Rodgers, Ph.D.  
Secretary

JJR/mmd

xc: Dr. Francene Haymon