

**Excerpts from May 22, 1994
Case Western Reserve University Commencement**

The following poem by Poet Laureate, Rita Dove, was written to commemorate the replacing of the statue of freedom back to top of the dome of the United States Capitol after it had been cleaned and restored. Laureate Dove read this poem at the May 22, 1994 Case Western Reserve University Commencement at which she was awarded an honorary doctorate degree.

Lady Freedom Among Us

don't lower your eyes
or stare straight ahead to where
you think you ought to be going

don't mutter *oh no*
not another one
get a job fly a kite
go bury a bone

with her oldfashioned sandals
with her leaden skirts
with her stained cheeks and whiskers and heaped up trinkets
she has risen among us in blunt reproach

she has fitted her hair under a hand-me-down cap
and spruced it up with feathers and stars
slung over one shoulder she bears
the rainbowed layers of charity and murmurs
all of you even the least of you

don't cross to the other side of the square
don't think *another item to fit on a tourist's agenda*

consider her drenched gaze her shining brow
she who has brought mercy back into the streets
and will not retire politely to potter's field

having assumed the thick skin of this town
its gritted exhaust its sunscorch and blear
she rests in her weathered plumage
bigboned resolute

don't think you can ever forget her
don't even try
she's not going to budge

no choice but to grant her space
crown her with sky
for she is one of the many
and she is each of us

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What follows, delivered after the above poem, is the commencement address by Sidney Wolfe, who also received an honorary doctoral degree. The address is entitled:

**The Responsibility of a University
in Promoting Public and Community Service**

Congratulations to all of you, your families, friends, and teachers. I am unabashedly proud to be here, having wept quite openly when I received the letter from President Pytte about being chosen to receive an honorary degree. Twenty-nine years ago, when I graduated from this medical school, I sat where you are, and wondered exactly what--beyond an internship and residency in internal medicine--was commencing for me and also wondering what I would feel like when I reached the age of that commencement speaker.

Poet Laureate Rita Dove's poem, *Lady Freedom Among Us*, makes us confront the serious dilemma between the abstract but important concept of freedom--as embodied in the statue of freedom ascending her way back to the top of the United States Capitol--and the concrete problem of a lack of freedom. This problem is thrust into our faces every time we see or hear a plea from a homeless person or from another outcast of our society. Why, in our wealthy land of the free, are there so many people who are second class citizens as far as their own freedom?

Just as the poem expresses the discomfort most of us have when we encounter a homeless person, there are many other situations--magnified in number by radio, television and newspaper coverage--where, for some, the discomforting question arises, what do we do, how do we respond?

The list includes those who live in poverty with its attendant problems of increased illiteracy, poor health and poor health care, hunger, and malnutrition. It includes the millions who, though not economically poor, are working at dangerous jobs such as mining, manufacturing certain chemicals, or farming with dangerous pesticides or herbicides as the only alternative to poverty. It includes those who are seriously mentally ill but not adequately treated, many of whom are in homeless shelters, in jail, or--as in the poem *Lady Freedom*--on the streets primarily because of two reasons: they are seriously mentally ill and they live in a country which does a miserable job, in comparison to most other industrialized countries, of taking care of such vulnerable citizens. It includes women, children and others who are victims of the increasing amount of domestic and other kinds of violence in our society.

Where do we begin? You are very fortunate to be here, graduating today, for you are probably among the upper five percent or less of people in the world in terms of your health, your educational achievement and, most importantly, your ability to make a difference.

But the process of learning to make a difference does not begin with the university or other earlier education that you had but with the family. What did your parents do or what will you do, as the parents many of you will become, by way of being role models of community or public services or advocacy? A large number of you are fortunate enough to have parents who have served as teachers, public officials, volunteers in a large variety of community efforts or in other jobs or avocations which may have affected you as much as the personal attention they gave to you in helping you to learn to walk, to read or ride a bike.

But just as parents help children to take the first steps, the schools and universities and colleges also have a responsibility to help students with what for many may be the first steps of active citizenship.

Graduates from Cornell University--which I attended before transferring to Western Reserve--were recently asked, "knowing what you know now, what advice would you offer your graduating-from-college self?" Two, both of whom had later become lawyers, had these responses: One said that "Just as others have been waypavers for your good fortune, so you should aid those who will follow in your way. Think of your children and grandchildren to come, and do your part to make society as you would want it to be for them." The other said "law has offered me the opportunity to seek justice for all citizens. My advice would be: believe in yourself and your ability to do anything that you want to do; do and say what you believe to be right and not what you think people want to hear; and make time for family and friends." The two lawyers, Attorney General Janet Reno and Supreme Court Justice Ruth Ginsburg have both fortunately practiced what they would have liked to have been told more than 30 years ago.

Aside from what is said at the end of your stay, does the University have a primary responsibility to increase the likelihood that students will make a difference and improve the community and the country in which you live by incorporating what some have called service learning into the curriculum?

Case Western Reserve is one of 400 of the more progressive American colleges and universities which belong to a relatively new organization called Campus Compact: The Project for Public and Community Services. A recent survey of member institutions found that 66% offer courses that link service with the curriculum, 58% provide academic credit for service related to a course. The most common types of programs reported included tutoring, working with at-risk youth, homelessness/housing, mentoring, environment, hunger, the elderly and literacy. Many are also funding community service work-study programs for students who need financial help and would rather earn it in community service than at McDonalds.

Here at Case Western Reserve, there is much to be proud of. The recently created Office of Student Community Service, headed by

Glenn Odenbrett will increase the identification and matching of community needs with student willingness to help.

Then there is the nationally-recognized program in which biomedical engineering students design and fabricate medical appliances for disabled people who might not be able to afford extremely expensive and arguably less well-designed devices. This program has been featured in the *New York Times* and on network television as an example for others to follow.

Projects in the law school include the Student Public Interest Law Fellowship in which students contribute a share of their summer earnings to fund other students who work in low-paying jobs with legal aid societies, minority and tenant rights groups and organizations representing the elderly, poor and homeless.

The nursing school has made a giant leap forward, by going back to what was the predominant method of delivering babies until this century, the use of midwives. An alliance has recently been formed between the school and the Nursing Health Center, a free-standing non-profit facility which offers nurse-managed primary care and midwifery services to residents of underserved areas. This will provide a new model for faculty practice and new opportunities for student clinical experience.

As for the medical school, which I was fortunate enough to attend, there are also many examples. The first week of medical school, 34 years ago, we were all assigned to a poor family in which the woman was pregnant and was attending the University Hospitals clinics for her pre-natal care. The real learning for me was not in the few moments when, in a short white coat, I saw the woman with a physician-supervisor in the clinic but in what preceded and followed the visit. Before each visit, we had to visit the family in their home, in order to learn what their lives and struggles outside of the medical setting were like. Following visits, we met in small groups with a preceptor, such as former Medical School Dean, Dr. Fred Robbins, Ben Spock, Jerry Liebman, Ted Mortimer or many other men and women physicians who helped us digest these non-medical experiences we were having and integrate them into a more well-rounded view of our patients. I followed my family for five years, long after little Roger--now 33--was born. Dr. Robbins told me, last week, as he finished yet another year as preceptor to what we used to call family clinic, that the program is alive and well and that some students are electing to follow an elderly person instead of a pregnancy.

That same first week, we saw a movie, All My Babies, by the Georgia Midwives Association and learned how poor people could be well-served by using midwives. This movie made some of us wonder why more people do not use midwives. In a study we published this week, Unnecessary Cesarean Sections, Curing a National Epidemic, we point out that there has, in recent years, been a seven-fold growth in the number of certified nurse midwife deliveries in U.S. hospitals reaching 161,000 in 1991 and how one of the important

remedies to the epidemic of unnecessary c-sections is greatly expanded use of midwives.

Much of what has enabled me to feel extraordinarily fulfilled in the work I do comes from the programs and the people who influenced me during medical school and during my internship and residency.

Current programs involving medical students include the Area Health Education Center (AHEC) which ranges from teaching health promotion in public schools to primary care clerkships in the last two years. First-year students teach health promotion to 12,000 public school children each year and, according to AHEC Director Dr. Susan Wentz, 33.3% of this year's first year class and 51% of those finishing their second year have participated. Other AHEC projects have included working with community outreach workers, geriatric programs and the Black Women's Health Project.

One of the more exciting recent developments has been a proposal, by the Student Committee on Medical Education, to have experiences such as these made a part of the core curriculum which would be a requirement for graduation. Although this has not yet happened, there is strong movement in this direction of establishing what the students have called Community Science as a fundamental part of medical education.

But let us get back to the broader issues of the University's responsibilities in this area. There is little question that a variety of community service activities all will enrich students' learning experience by an on-site exposure to the struggles that those who are not as fortunate as we are face daily. In addition, however, there needs to be a re-definition of research to include researching the conditions in the surrounding communities. This could include inadequate housing and concomitant lead poisoning, inadequate access to preventive or curative medical services, air pollution, lack of access to social services and many other topics. Such research must answer questions relevant to the lives of those living in the communities and the results turned over to the communities, helping them to organize and thereby empowering them to advocate for change. Such change is sometimes viewed as "risky" because of the power structures which are being pushed and it is therefore critical that the universities strongly encourage faculty and students by nurturing such projects.

Whether the University is promoting community or national service or research activities as a part of the educational process, the mutual empowerment of the people in the community and the students can make such projects life-changing for both, leading to different career choices after graduation. Daniel Gardner, a recent college graduate who now works for the Campus Compact said, commenting on the fact that free democratic communities depend on mutual responsibility, "We as individuals and we as a social institution called higher education cannot flourish unless the communities we belong to flourish. Higher education must step

boldly but respectfully to rebuild the community where it is absent, not just through student service, but through participatory action research, through institutional partnerships, and through placing service-learning in the middle of the educational reform movement." Hopefully, as has already happened in a few instances, more and more colleges and universities will recognize the need, the advantages of making such activities a requirement for graduation.

At a recent 25th reunion of the Harvard Law School Class of 1969, although almost all class members were doing extremely well financially and were mainly happy with their personal lives, approximately one-half said that they did not, now at age fifty or so, feel as though they were fulfilled. Some expressed an interest in contributing to an organization--called the Appleseed Foundation started by the Class of 1958--to give recent graduates and others a chance to pursue advocacy career paths in public interest law centers around the country. Some contributors might, had they to do it over again, have chosen to work in such centers.

As you embark on your careers, it might be helpful to think about what mark you would like to leave. Will you make a difference? Will the most vulnerable in our society be better off because of your efforts? When you come back in 25 years, will you be fulfilled or will you be economically and personally prosperous, but otherwise empty? Because you are graduating from one of this country's leading universities, not only in traditional educational and research accomplishments but in its ever-improving attention to community and public needs, you have a much better chance of being fulfilled. But in order to do so, keep moving toward, not away from where the Lady Freedoms of the world are. Rita Dove has so eloquently written "She is one of the many and she is each of us." Each of us cannot, therefore, feel truly fulfilled unless we give of ourselves to solve these serious problems. Put another way, ignoring these problems is the same as denying an important part of yourself. Dare to allow yourself to be exposed to and affected by the Lady Freedoms who are among us, find out their needs, learn why they are needy, and devote as much of your talent and time as you can to work with them, for change.