

Inaugural Response
Tyronza Richmond
NCCU: A Bridge of Opportunity
November 7, 1987

Mr. Louis Randolph, President Spangler, Chairman Holland, Chancellor Whiting, President Ponder, other distinguished platform participants, distinguished delegates and guests, governmental officials, members of the Boards of Governors and Trustees, members of the NCCU Foundation Board, members of the NCCU Board of Visitors, alumni, faculty and staff members, members of my family, and most importantly students of North Carolina Central University:

It is my eternal prayer that you accept my deep and sincere gratitude for your presence, participation, and many deeds of kindness, warmth, and affection during this very special and historic occasion. While the center of attention is focused in my direction, and while I fully intend to bask in the attention and accolades afforded my family and me, it is imperative that we do not lose sight of the full significance of the moment and of this inaugural exercise.

As we celebrate the joy and splendor of this occasion, it is important that we pay homage to the many dedicated men and women whose talents, sacrifice, and labors have given birth to this moment, to this occasion. As we celebrate, it is necessary that we be ever mindful of past contributors to this venerable institution. My valiant efforts to serve and lead this great enterprise will always be tempered by the words and wisdom of Dr. John Hope Franklin, who recently wrote that:

Few events or developments are without precedent. Few leaders, however creative or ingenious, can look back and see no predecessors. Those who stand tall in our presence appear to be of unusual height because, in most cases, they stand on the shoulders of giants who have preceded them...

Lest we forget, this institution stands as a pillar of academic strength because of the devotion, skill, and sacrifice of intellectual giants who have preceded us and upon whose broad

shoulders we continue to build an institution anchored in TRUTH AND SERVICE. We who have the privilege and honor to work and study here owe a debt that will never be fully repaid to our visionary Founder and first president, Dr. James Edward Shepard. Our gratitude must also be extended to:

- ◆ Dr. Albert E. Manley, Miss Ruth G. Rush, and Dr. Albert L. Turner who served as the first interim management committee following the death of Dr. Shepard;
- ◆ Dr. Alfonso Elder, our second president;
- ◆ Dr. Samuel P. Massie, our third president and my academic advisor at Fisk University;
- ◆ Mr. William Jones, Dr. Helen G. Edmonds, and Dr. William H. Brown who comprised the institution's second interim management committee;
- ◆ Dr. Albert N. Whiting, our fourth and last president and our first chancellor; and
- ◆ Dr. LeRoy T. Walker who served as chancellor from 1983 to 1986.

From its beginning days in 1910 as the National Religious Training School and Chautauqua, this institution has served as a bridge of opportunity for the politically disadvantaged, a bridge of hope for the economically handicapped, and a bridge of faith for the socially disinherited. Today, almost eight decades later, a large fraction of our student clientele still comes from the ranks of the economically handicapped. Demographers consistently project that, by the turn of the century, this great nation will be one-third minority. Unless dramatic national changes occur, it is almost a certainty that minorities will not represent one-third of the enrollment in higher educational institutions. There is an ever increasing awareness that the under representation of minorities in American higher education as students and as faculty members is a matter of critical importance. Dr. Reginald Wilson of the American Council on Education has been one of the nation's most vigilant spokesman for the potential magnitude of this threat to the American way of life. Dr. Wilson has consistently stated that:

If that third of the population has less access to higher education, you will not only have a racially divided society, with minorities at the bottom and whites at the top, but also a sharply divided class society where poor under-

educated people are kept from upward mobility, and the middle and upper classes are the only ones with access.

Wilson has continued to say:

Unless these trends are reversed, the quality of American life and education will suffer. You can't leave one-third of the population at the bottom of the barrel without also damaging the viability of every-one else's social and economic well-being. Improving access is a matter of national interest.

While most states have experienced declines, significant declines, in the enrollment of minorities in higher education, North Carolina has defied these national trends. Under the leadership of President C. D. Spangler, the enrollment of black students in the 16-campus University of North Carolina has increased from 14,440 in 1972 to 24,207 during the Fall 1986 term. While North Carolinians are fortunate and indeed blessed to have a superior University system and have been unusually successful in recruiting and enrolling students, particularly black students, now is not the time to rest on our laurels and past successes. The future promises to offer immense challenge as this institution attempts to continue to serve as a bridge of opportunity for a segment of our population that has been described as disadvantaged or disinherited. Demographers and researchers, such as Harold Hodgkinson, have made us painfully aware that the freshman class of year 2000 is now four years old. They have told us in very plain language that:

- ◆ Twenty-four percent of the 3.6 million 4-year-olds, our pool for the freshman class of year 2000, live below the poverty line.
- ◆ One-third of our 3.6 million 4-year-olds are nonwhite.
- ◆ Eighteen percent of our potential applicant pool for the freshman class of year 2000 was born out of wedlock.
- ◆ Fifty-four percent of potential pool for the freshmen class of the year 2000 receives some form of day care.

- ◆ Twenty percent of the girls among our potential applicant pool for our freshman class of the year 2000 will become pregnant as teenagers.

North Carolina Central University in its fourth quarter-century of existence has made a commitment to provide its current and future students with an educational environment and experience that will stimulate their intellectual curiosities; enhance and develop academic and professional skills; instill a sense of pride, dignity, and discipline; and promote a consciousness of social responsibility and dedication to the advancement of the general welfare of the people of North Carolina, the United States, and the world. That academic vigor of expectation must be rekindled in every classroom and in every dormitory room on this campus.

This is our mission. This is our challenge. If our mission is to be fulfilled, if the challenge of meeting the diverse educational needs of the freshman class of the year 2000 is to be met, we must have the will, the resolve, and the reserve to accept change as a permanent and necessary part of our mission. There is only one course, one proper course, open to us.

- ◆ This University must create administrative and management systems that will maintain and build on the University's exemplary record of public accountability, as well as allow the flexibility to respond quickly to significant changes in the educational marketplace.
- ◆ NCCU must be a major source of future master teachers for the Durham City and County Schools. Our success in continuing to recruit and enroll well prepared students will be determined more by our ability to prepare quality committed teachers than by any other single activity. In concert and in full partnership with the Durham City and County Schools, North Carolina Central University must promote the concept of the educational system as a seamless web. We must aggressively seek to remove all barriers which separate the elementary school from the high school and the high school from this University.

This institution which has conferred 1,528 master's degrees in Education during the past 15 years; 34 Sixth-Year Certificates in Education during its existence and five PhDs in Education

must again place a special priority on the preparation of teachers. We are obligated to share the responsibility of promoting teaching as a career for our most talented, our most prepared students.

- ◆ While undergraduate teaching will remain as the institution's primary and fundamental objective, the University must extend its reach well beyond the sloping hills of this beautiful campus. The talents of the University's faculty and students must be brought to bear on problems and issues that confront this community. Research and tangible support for faculty and student research must become a more integral part of the life, culture and mores of this institution. The Triangle community must be given full and useful access to the University, its resources, ideals, and standards.
- ◆ The University has a major role to assume in the economic development efforts of local, regional, and state agencies. If our state is to continue and build on our envied quality of life, we must work in partnership with government and private firms to keep aglow that entrepreneurial spirit that gave birth to North Carolina Mutual Life Insurance Company, that same spirit that gave rise to Custom Molders, to Mechanics & Farmers Bank, as well as the internationally renowned Research Triangle Park. The elimination of poverty and illiteracy are as much our responsibility as it is the community college system or county social service departments.
- ◆ While we must remain committed to have our professional programs in law, business administration, education, library science, nursing and home economics ranked among the best in the southeast, we must never overlook the overarching role and value of the liberal arts and sciences. Our heritage, strength, and tradition are entrenched in the liberal education. That tradition lives and will continue to thrive and prosper on these sloping hills and verdant green.
- ◆ A new set of common minimum admission standards have been adopted for the 16-campus University of North Carolina. While these standards will certainly represent a challenge to this institution and, like institutions in both their interim and final forms, this University community must understand that these minimum admission

standards will lead to an eventual total uplifting of academic quality at all educational levels. Let us leave this place – faculty, alumni, students, and friends – committed to serve as missionaries to insure that students and parents are informed fully about these standards. Let us employ our energies and talents in a productive and positive fashion. That is our tradition. That is our heritage.

- ◆ With the support provided by the UNC Board of Governors and the North Carolina General Assembly, North Carolina Central University has blossomed into the grand institution we value today. We are grateful for that support. But if this institution is to be that reliable bridge of opportunity that this State needs and deserves, then increased philanthropic support is imperative. Current funding sources are insufficient to provide the resources essential to North Carolina Central University's pursuit of excellence. This University will look to alumni, faculty, staff, friends, and the business community to assist in the building of a permanent endowment to ensure that excellence will be sustained.

North Carolina Central University will continue to be a bridge of opportunity for the citizens of this region and state.

To each of you, I do thank you for the rare and special opportunity that you have afforded me. I solemnly pledge that I will always give my best in service to this institution. I do seek and need your support, your criticism, your interest, and your prayers. Thank you and God bless you.