



On Freedom and Leadership

2004 Commencement Remarks
by President Thomas E. Cronin

To the Class of 2004 . . .

When you arrived here four years ago, you immediately enjoyed a greater sense of personal and intellectual freedom than you had previously experienced. Today, May 23, 2004, with the liberation of graduation, your freedom expands even more.

Embrace this freedom; yet understand its consequences. With freedom come obligations. Liberty and duty, freedom and responsibility: they come together. That's the deal.

We celebrate you today for your achievements in learning — and also for your courage, honor, love, hope and aspirations. And it is our hope that each of you will become a leader in your community and in your profession, and that in whatever way you decide, you will use your imagination and your intellectual abilities to help people.

Social justice, civil liberties, human rights, a sustainable environment, constitutional democracy, healthy communities and great works of art don't just happen. They require countless acts of imagination, courage and leadership.

Leadership is all about making things happen that otherwise might not happen, and about preventing things from happening that ordinarily would happen. It is a process of unlocking the talents and energies of good people so they can work together to achieve common goals and dreams.

There is no sure-fire, do-it-yourself leadership kit. Yet a few realities about leadership are worth noting.

John Lennon famously noted that "life is what happens while you are busy making other plans," and I believe it was Benjamin Disraeli who said that "what we anticipate seldom occurs; what we least expect generally happens."

Rarely can one leader provide an organization's entire range of leadership needs. Most organizations and societies have all kinds of leaders, and these diverse leaders, in turn, are usually highly dependent for their success on the leadership performed by other leaders. Certain leaders are excellent at creating or inventing new structures. Others are splendid task or managerial leaders — helping to encourage groups at problem solving. Others are imaginative social architects, helping to enrich morale and renew the spirit of an organization or a people. These are leaders who are indispensable in providing the human glue holding us together. Still other leaders influence us because of their integrity, their character and their moral authority. They compel us to ask ourselves: Is this justice? Is this right? They raise their voices on behalf of the voiceless and those who have been hurt or left behind.

They are the mentors and consciousness raisers who urge us on toward social responsibility, social justice, individual freedom, and racial, religious and sexual tolerance. They are the prescient ones who remind

us that power wielded justly today may be wielded corruptly tomorrow. They are the leaders who rally us to protest when they know a policy is wrong or when some of our sisters or brothers find their rights and liberties diminished.

All societies have warrior and diplomatic leaders, liberation or exodus-leaders, moral or consciousness-raising leaders, intellectual leaders and political as well as organizational and business leaders. Not to be forgotten, too, are artistic or cultural leaders. Spirited critical discussion about leadership and the moral and virtuous uses of power is extremely important. Artists, poets, critics, scientists, writers, theologians and scholars of all kinds often are able to help us determine whether we are using power or whether power is using us.

Leadership is not equivalent to "office-holding or high prestige or authority or decision-making." The most lasting and pervasive leadership is often intangible and comes from people who are not in positions of high, formal, institutional authority. It is the leadership fostered by ideas embodied in social, political or artistic movements, in books, in documents, in speeches, and in the memory of valiant lives valiantly lived. Intellectual or idea leadership at its best is provided by those, often not in high corporate or political positions, who can clarify values and the implication of such values for policy.

Leaders are individuals who help create options and opportunities,

who help clarify problems and choices, who build morale and coalitions, who inspire others and point to the possibilities and promise of what might be: a better society, a better nation, a better world.

Most of our best leaders are lifelong learners who with determination, energy and a passion for improving things are marked by self-confidence, optimism and idealism. Most leaders have a contagious self-confidence, a relentless optimism and a fearless idealism that motivates them to mobilize their associates and collaborators to undertake tasks they may never dreamed they could undertake. The power of leadership is the power of integrating and creating distinctive communities of motivated people in search of solutions and accomplishments.

Leaders can be single-minded and tough-minded and tenacious in their beliefs and commitments. Their passion for change and achievement may make them abrasive and thorny personalities.

Remember that leadership is ultimately a relationship or chemistry between leaders and their associates. Leadership is an engagement among partners and collaborators. It is a collective enterprise. What makes it collective is the always on-going, if subtle, interplay between common needs and wants of a group and a leader's capacity to understand and respond to these collective aspirations.

To study leaders divorced from loyalties and mutual trust and the complex interactions they have with followers, constituents and team members is to miss the most important aspect of leadership. Effective leadership ceases to exist when leaders have lost the trust and support of their followers — think of King Creon in Sophocles' *Antigone*, Captain Vere in Melville's *Billy Budd* or Captain Queeg in Herman Wouk's *The Caine Mutiny*.

Another major reality about the nature of leadership is that strong leaders, even though they are the

products of our group aspirations, can lead us astray as well as lead us aright. Leadership as a process can go wrong, it can sometimes be used to enslave us as well as to liberate us. Leadership can be a safe and healthy means only if linked to deeply rooted moral ends. Leaders, we need to be reminded, have been responsible for the most horrible crimes and the most tragic follies to disgrace the human race. Evil leaders are all too real, past and present. There will doubtless always be those who reach out for our darker side, who seek to rule on the basis of fear, hatred, paranoia, and along the way become destroyers of our civilized processes.

James Madison understood this when he wrote that the essence of government is power, and power lodged, as it must be, in human hands, will ever be liable to abuse.

Informed Americans ever since Madison's day have feared the potential abuse of power. We are fond of quoting Lord Acton's phrase that "power tends to corrupt" even if we also know from the writings of Hobbes, Machiavelli and others, that the absence of power can paralyze us if not corrupt us.

Just as it is often said that good leadership requires good "followership," so also leadership needs to be counter-checked and balanced by a healthy skepticism. Democracy requires us, not as passive/mindless followers but as assertive citizens, to be questioning of our leaders and never too trusting of any one group or individual with too much power.

Effective, desirable leaders are people who have learned that the world is an incomparable classroom, and life a memorable teacher for those who are not afraid of it. Leaders have overcome their fear of failure, are willing to take reasonable risks, and seek out challenges that keep them alive, vital and self-renewing.

Freedom and obligation: they go together. Liberty and responsibility: they go together. The answer lies not in producing a few larger-than-life leaders, the answer lies in educating

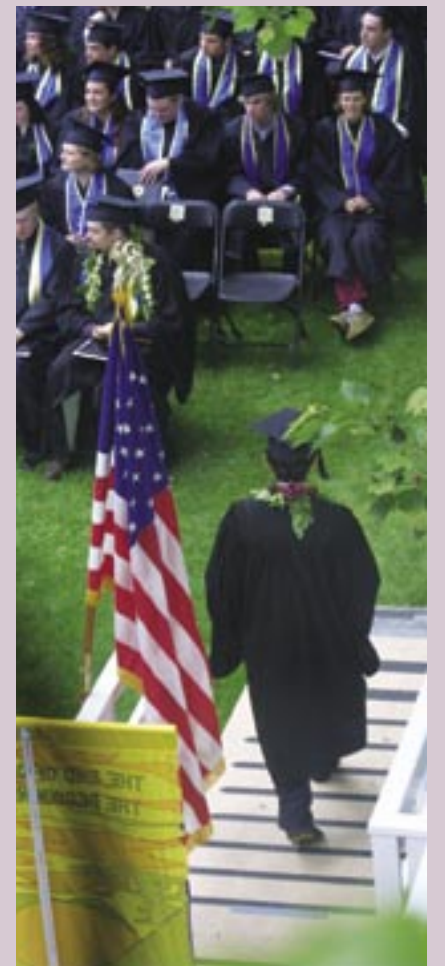
a nation of *citizen*-leaders who, beyond their private and professional concerns, will also make the concerns of human-kind, at the very least, their avocation.

We shall know we are making progress, not when we produce another handful of charismatic Mt. Rushmore leaders, but when we can boast we are a nation no longer in need of those larger-than-life "great leaders" because we have become a nation of citizens who believe one person can make a difference, and every one of us should try.

We're proud of you. We expect a lot of you. Congratulations.

Tom Cronin

President Tom Cronin



COMMENCEMENT 2004



To the Graduates . . .

Do remember Whitman College when you leave. I have taught in the university systems of Canada, the United Kingdom, and France, and from my experience, American higher education is the best in the world, especially because of the strength of its private liberal arts colleges. One reason for their strength is the astounding generosity of their alumni, their willingness to give back to the institutions that gave them their chance. Please continue that fine tradition.

Having given you a piece of financial advice, let me move on to the staple fare of any commencement address: moral advice. No person of my advanced years, given this honor, can avoid succumbing to the temptation to give advice to an audience held captive like this, and I shall succumb like all the others.

My theme is "living fearlessly in a fearful world." Living fearlessly is not the same thing as never being afraid. It's good to be afraid occasionally. Fear is a great teacher. What's not good is living in fear, allowing fear to dictate your choices, allowing fear to define who you are. Living fearlessly means standing up to fear, taking its measure, refusing to let it shape and define your life. Living fearlessly means taking risks, taking gambles, not playing it safe. It means refusing to take no for an answer when you are sure that the answer should have been yes. It means refusing to settle for less than what is your due, what is yours by right, what is yours by the

sweat of your labor and your effort. To those of you who have had to struggle to get here, who sometimes doubted that you were going to get through, remember this: you have already come too far to settle for less than the best.

Why am I talking about fear at a moment like this? Because your adult life is really about to begin: jobs, professions, marriages, relationships, children, responsibilities, burdens, worries, and yes, fear. Fear that you are not good enough to make the grade. Fear that you haven't got what it takes to carry the burden. Fear that you can't meet the expectations of all those people watching you today as you step up and accept your degree.

Fight the fear. Remember the most important thing about a life is that it is yours and nobody else's. You cannot live a life for the sake of your family, your parents, your brothers, your sisters, your children. A life without duty to these loved ones would not be a good life, but a life lived entirely to meet their expectations is not a good life. It is the ones who love us most who put the fear into us, who burden us with expectations and responsibilities we feel unable to meet. So we need to say: this is our life, not yours, and we are going to do this our way.

One of the greatest feelings in life is the conviction that you have lived the life you wanted to live — with the rough and smooth, the good and the bad — but yours, shaped by your own choices, and not someone else's. To do that, you have to conquer fear, get control of the expectations that drive your life and decide what goals are truly yours to achieve.

Doing this — making sure that the life you lead is the one you want to lead and that you are prepared to lead it this way, whatever anybody says — is never easy. It's not made any easier by the times we live in.

We live in a fearful time, perhaps the most fearful time for the United States since the Vietnam War. When I graduated, it was June of 1969, and Americans were dying in the hundreds every week in southeast Asia. Today as you graduate, young Americans are dying every day in Iraq. Like Vietnam, Iraq divides Americans, and so it should. America is a democracy as well as a community of sacrifice. But sacrifice is only acceptable in a democracy if its rationale is supported by a majority of citizens. Questioning the rationale for war is not unpatriotic. Democratic debate does not demean the sacrifice of brave men and women: indeed, democratic debate — the lifeblood of freedom — is what the bravery is supposed to be defending.

As young citizens, you should not be bystanders in this debate. This war concerns you because its course and its outcome will determine your security for years to come. The conduct of the war defines America as a nation: its moral reputation at home and abroad. So in this election year, when so many young Americans don't bother to vote, please don't listen to the cynics who say it doesn't matter how you vote or whether you vote. Please don't listen to the people who say: I don't know who to believe, so I'm staying home on election day. Take part. Get involved. Become a precinct captain. Drive people to the polls. Canvass for your candidate.

Raise money for people who run for political office. Be a good citizen because that is what it actually means to be a good American.

Being a good citizen and being a good American also means looking fair and square at disagreeable realities. Being a good citizen means living in truth. Living in truth is hard. It's hard to face the truth about ourselves, and it's hard to face the truth about our country. But we know that living in truth is better than living a lie.

We are living a moment of truth in Iraq, a moment in which we have to look fair and square at disagreeable realities, in which we have to look at ourselves. The pictures from Abu Ghraib prison are a kind of mirror in which we have to look at ourselves and ask: what kind of people did

this? How did this become possible? Could I have done a thing like this to those people?

We do need to ask ourselves, as a society, as a free people, how we came to this pass. Those soldiers were acting in the name of America, and they disgraced its name. We have to ask who authorized them to do so. Who should take responsibility here?

We need answers to these questions, and we need to take responsibility as citizens that we get answers and that accountability is established, right up the chain of command if need be, so that we do not go there again as a country.

Responsibility is a key element of living fearlessly. Taking responsibility: not being afraid to "carry the can," when the can has to be carried by someone, not being afraid to

Living Fearlessly in a Fearful World

*The 2004 Commencement Address
by Michael Ignatieff
May 23, 2004*



Michael Ignatieff is the Carr Professor of Human Rights Policy and director of the Carr Center for Human Rights at the Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University. His most recent book is *The Lesser Evil: Political Ethics in an Age of Terror* (Princeton University Press, 2004).

Pictured at the top of the page, from left, are assistant commencement marshal Sonja Ray, class of 2005; graduates David Beckley and Laura Bartholomew; graduate Tiger Kushamba, and professor Rogers Miles.

Commencement photography by Adam Hardtke, '03, and Lore Fauver.



Solemn graduates Scott Erickson, left, and Noelle Chung contemplate Michael Ignatieff's words.

demand that someone take responsibility when everyone is ducking it. It's hard to be responsible. It's hard to take responsibility. But that is what it means to be an adult and a citizen.

I don't like watching leaders who won't take responsibility for what happened in those prisons. I don't like ordinary soldiers carrying the can for errors of judgment and errors of command that went to the top of the chain of command. We deserve better from our leaders. We deserve better of those who serve in our name.

We need to acknowledge that the United States is a great country, but it is currently feared and hated by millions of people throughout the world. It is hated for being what it is: the most successful and powerful country in the history of the world. It is hated for what it does, for the policies of its governments, in all administrations. As young adults, you have to take responsibility to do something about this hatred, this intense dislike for everything that America is and does that is sweeping through the Middle East and Europe. You may think it is undeserved. You may think it is unfair. You would be right. But that doesn't matter. The fact is America is as unpopular as at anytime in the last half century.

This gives us reason to fear. There are people out there who want to kill us and destroy our way of life. We have to live with this. It is a fact of life nowadays like the weather.

There is only one thing we can do about this: live the way we are supposed to live, as our Constitution commands us to, with dignity and respect for all. Being an American is not easy. It is hard. We are required to keep some serious promises. We are judged by a high standard, one we crafted for ourselves in the founding documents of the republic, the ones that talk about the equality of all people, the ones that tell us that government is of the people, by the people, and for the people. We need to live by this, at home and abroad, and it is just about the only thing we can do to face the hatred of those who want to destroy us. Our best defense is to stay true to who we are. Our best defense is to refuse to live in fear, of them, of ourselves, of anyone.

We have examples to guide us. America is constantly affording us proof that its people understand what it is to be a member of this particular democratic experiment. It is right to remember Army Specialist Joseph Darby and celebrate his fearlessness today. He is the young reservist in

the 372nd Military Police Company who put the note under a superior's door detailing the abuse by fellow members of his unit. It was his disclosure that led to the uncovering of the worst scandal in American military history since the My Lai Massacre.

Consider what he was up against: loyalty to his own unit, fear that he would not be believed, fear that his fellow unit members would take revenge if they found out or ostracize him and his family. He risked himself, his career, and his good name to get the truth out. Because he saw something in Abu Ghraib that shamed him as a human being and as an American. Something that made him afraid. Something that was wrong.

Thanks to his fearlessness, we are in the middle of a painful but essential moment of truth in righting our course in Iraq and the wider Middle East. Some voices are saying: we are making too much of this. Some voices are calling on America to circle the wagons. Some are even saying that our enemies do worse, so we should respond in kind. The problem here is that this is America. This is a constitutional republic based on the rule of law and equal respect for all persons. We can't pretend that we can bend the rules any which way. We made the rules for ourselves. We have to live by them. Specialist Darby understood that. He is one of the fearless ones, someone who fought fear and doubt in order to tell a necessary if painful truth. Darby's mother said of her son, "Tell the truth, always remain true to yourself and remain true to your country. I think he did all three." He certainly did, and our country is the better for it.

Not everyone is going to be a Specialist Darby. Your lives may not call for or require any special heroism. Yet all lives require an encounter with fear, a battle with an emotion that can carry us away from our true selves. So we need to remember heroic people's example, so that we can live ordinary lives decently and in truth. My final word to you is this: in a fearful time, try to be one of the fearless ones.

Consider the Duck

by George Ball,
Professor of Biblical
Literature Emeritus

About 60 years ago the *New Yorker* magazine contained a whimsical poem, called "Consider the Duck," which offered a profound insight. The poet imagined a duck sitting calmly out in the Atlantic Ocean:

Now we are ready to look at something special.

It is a duck riding the ocean a hundred feet beyond the surf.

No, it isn't a gull;

A gull always has a raucous sound about him.

This is some sort of a duck and he cuddles in the swells;

He isn't cold; he is thinking things over.

There is a big heaving on the Atlantic, and he is part of it.

He looks a bit like a mandarin, or the Lord Buddha,

Meditating under the Bo-tree.

But he has hardly enough above the eyes to be a philosopher.

He has poise, however, which is what a philosopher must have.

He can rest while the Atlantic heaves, because he rests in the Atlantic.

Probably he doesn't know how large the Atlantic is.

And neither do you.

But he realizes it.

And what does he do, I ask you? He sits down in it.

He reposes in the immediate, as if it were the infinite — which it is.

That is religion, and the duck has it.

He has made himself part of the boundless, by easing himself in to it.

Just where it touches him.

I like the little duck.

He doesn't know much.

But he has religion.

One line seems to me as important as any line in poetry I know, even in Shakespeare: "He reposes in the immediate, as if it were the infinite —

which it is." The immediate is, of course, the ocean close around the duck, and the infinite is the total ocean and all that the ocean itself is a part of, that is, the universe.

This idea, that the universe is a single entity, all parts interrelated and interdependent and equally entitled to be valued, is the taproot of all philosophy, all religion, and all ethics: the concept of a single universal entity of which everything is part, to which everything belongs. The universe has but a single meaning, and whatever that meaning is, it is our meaning, too.

Reinhold Niebuhr, a leading 20th-century Christian theologian, said, "All moral demands are demands of unity." We should therefore cooperate and share in ways that will reflect the fact that everything affects the welfare of everything else. Bertrand Russell, Nobel Prize-winning math-

ematician and atheist philosopher, said the same thing: "... in all that differentiates between a good life and a bad one, the world is a unity." Both writers base their notions of ethics on the unity of all things and how you express that unity in your living and deciding.

In the last chapter of the *Divine Comedy*, Dante is finally ushered into the presence of the Eternal Light, and he says, "I saw how it contained within its depth all things bound in a single book by love." Dante of course went beyond the unity of all things to the Christian God who was viewed as the creator of that unity, in which Dante sees all things as bound together in a single volume. The duck does not add this theological refinement. He gives no thought as to how this unity comes to be.

Neither does Montaigne, the great 16th-century French essayist, who

Baccalaureate

The Baccalaureate Addresses
May 22, 2004

Dr. George Ball, who has taught, guided, counseled, and mentored Whitman students since 1960, celebrated his 89th birthday on Commencement day, May 23.





Rising above her classmates at top is English major Sara Weibmann. Above, pianist Stephen Beus, class of 2004, takes a bow after playing at Baccalaureate. Beus won the 2004 national Kosciuszko Chopin Competition in New York.

sees the great sequence as including life and death: "The same transition you made from death to life, without suffering, without fear, make it again from life to death. . . . Your death is one of the parts of the order of the universe; it is part of the life of the world."

In a complete change of approach, we could look at a great line in a Dr. Seuss book, *Happy Birthday To You*. It is, "There is no one on earth who is youer than you." If we switch the angle a little, the sentence becomes, "There is nothing in the universe that is more fully a part of the universe than you are." The universe is a single entity; all parts equally belong and are to be equally valued.

I recall that when I was a student and first encountered the Jain religion, learning that some Jains will not drink water until they have first filtered it through a fine sieve to avoid consuming any invisibly small creatures, it seemed to me at the time that this was carrying the idea of the importance of all life too far. However, I must at the very least assign major ethical value to those who treat all life as important and deserving to be honored.

This does not mean that living beings cannot consume other living creatures, but it does mean that when human beings take and consume other life, it needs to be done with respect and with awareness that all life is eventually sacrificed for other life to perpetuate the production of new life. The universe is indeed a single entity with all parts interrelated and interdependent.

Thus, all the world's major religions are true insofar as they foster the unity of all things, which they do, for they all explicitly affirm the golden rule, placing all of us at the service of all beings who can be affected by an act or decision of ours. All the world's religions are wrong insofar as they offer some unique and separate destiny apart from the interwoven life of the universe, where everything is part of everything else. This oneness of all things is what the duck was experiencing. It is indeed the essence of religion.

Developing New Wings

by Heidi Dobson,
Associate Professor
of Biology

During your years at Whitman College, you have taken many different courses, in large classes and in small classes, but you have also had close one-to-one interactions with teachers. It is during these more focused interactions that the greatest benefits of mentoring emerge. Working with mentors can mark your life and transform it, opening new doors to visions and goals, yielding new tools to reach these goals, giving you wings to explore paths that will lead to a fulfilling life.

We all have mentors. Ranging from family members to teachers or colleagues, they offer valuable advice and strong guidance, share long-lived teachings, provide encouragement, and serve as inspiring models. They open our eyes to new worlds. They believe in us and our ability to reach for the stars.

Mentoring is not necessarily one-sided. In fact, it is most often a two-way street, with both parties learning from each other. Extensive mentoring occurs here at Whitman College, and you have all been part of it. In the realm of student-teacher mentoring, it occurs at many different times: through independent studies, writing



Amelia Jones, '03, prepares flowers for experiments at the ecological research station in Öland, Sweden.



Scott Rinear, '02

of papers, advising, and completion of senior theses and projects. But strongest perhaps is the mentoring that takes place in the research collaborations between students and faculty in the many disciplines across campus. We are fortunate to be in a college that fosters this wonderful form of collaborative learning.

In the biological sciences, guiding students through the research process is a fundamental part of their growth. It is through this hands-on research that students come to really understand the essence of science, that we see our students transform into scientists; it is here that the students develop the strongest wings that will carry them to new horizons.

My greatest passion in teaching at Whitman College is the opportunity to mentor students in research and in their senior theses. These are special, intense periods of growth, both intellectually and emotionally. Some students do research on campus, but most of my collaborative research is done with students who have joined me in Sweden during the past 10 summers, investigating various aspects of the interactions between flowers and wild bees. The setting on the island of Öland, where



The 2003 "bee team" included, from left, Jordan Bell, '03, Professor Heidi Dobson, Jamie Williamson, '04, Jana Seaman, '03, and Tim Johnson, '04.

the research station is located, is serene, open, and beautiful in its simplicity. We travel on bicycles, live healthily, and a team spirit pervades our group.

The research, like all academic research, has its ups and downs, its challenging, frustrating times, and its uplifting, exciting times. Throughout, the students and I work closely together, going over basic concepts, overcoming problems and bottlenecks, and discussing the meaning of it all. Students help design experimental protocols, develop procedures to accomplish delicate work efficiently, including marking of very small bees, become acute to new forms of life, learn fundamental techniques, go through the rigors of extensive data collection, and receive training in the handling of special equipment in the lab and in the field. The work requires creativity in exploring ways to build artificial flower models with different odors and colors so that bees will be interested in them and will fly to them as they do to real flowers. Students use innovation and resourcefulness in coming up with different ways to effectively collect data — and to keep bees from flying out of cages! But research also involves mechanical skills, making old equipment fit current needs, figuring out how to put up tents . . . and having to deal with erratic climatic variables such as rain and wind.

All newly developed experimental designs are passed on to future teams of students, so that we are all learning from each other, not only over the course of one summer, but across years and different groups of students.

After the gathering of results, there are, as in all research, the long hours of data compilation, reading

Faculty mentoring gives students "wings to explore new paths," said Heidi Dobson, associate professor of biology, in her Baccalaureate address.



the literature, brainstorming sessions to try to make sense out of the findings, out of what sometimes seems to be chaos. These are times of major breakthroughs, when new connections are found. Excitement over new discoveries, and a sense of humor, do wonders during this intellectually demanding stage.

Taking Whitman students to other countries for research has the added benefit of bringing them into a new culture. On Öland, friendships are made with local inhabitants and with people from diverse countries, knowledge of new lands is acquired, and participation in local festivities leads to a greater appreciation of local traditions. And in completing the cultural exchange, our students share their own traditions. When all this is done, we are left with close and lasting friendships, good memories, greater knowledge and understanding, and new visions and wings. The exchange between student and mentor has been two-sided, a true form of cross-pollination, and we have all gained and grown from the process.

So, as you contemplate the road ahead of you, savor the many new directions that have been opened to you during your close interactions with mentors here at Whitman College and at other places and times of your life. And remember that we are here also to help you after you graduate, and that you can turn back to us when you need support in finding your path.

The Power of Language

by Robert Tobin,
Professor of Foreign
Languages & Literatures

I am deeply honored to have the opportunity to speak at the Baccalaureate of the class of 2004, especially because we have experienced a similar fate in the last four years. Having just completed a four-year stint as an administrator, I — like the graduates of 2004 — have acquired a host of new skills and learned a great deal from the many disciplines

(2) a cinematic, mid-20th-century American fantasy version of (3) a depression-era British book about (4) the glories and foibles of Edwardian England and its nannies — doesn't really translate, although there are certainly German-dubbed versions of *Mary Poppins*. If you must know, the word is translated as "Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious."

The same difficulties of translation exist in reverse. There are many words, phrases, and concepts enmeshed in their own contexts in other languages that lose power and meaning as they are translated into English — if they are translated into English. One aspect of the global dominion of the United States is that a vast amount of American

not enough that the rest of the world understands Americans — Americans need to understand others, as well. When virtually no Americans making or executing policy in the Middle East can speak or read Arabic, is it any wonder that we don't get right all of the nuances of the situation in Iraq? And while we all probably already suspected that too few Americans were pursuing studies of Arabic and of other Asian and African languages, even the study of Spanish, French, and German is not as strong as it should be, meaning that the cultures of Europe and Latin America are also becoming increasingly foreign to the United States.

But my concern for language is not confined to foreign languages.

What's important is attention to language when writing or speaking. Today there are certainly many people who wish that Oregon legislators had been more precise when they defined marriage as "a civil contract entered into in person by males [plural] at least 17 years of age and females [plural] at least 17 years of age." Most commentators agree that those vague plurals leave unclear just how many "males" and "females" are supposed to be in any particular marriage.

In fact, many of the controversies surrounding hot-button social issues emerge from questions of language. Let me make clear that the only agenda that I want to promote here is the linguistic one — I am not

marriage." Before certain late-19th-century German scholars started using the term "homosexual," it was not linguistically possible to talk about the really quite abstract notion of a certain group of people who are romantically and sexually inclined toward members of their own sex. This doesn't mean that there weren't such people, but it does suggest that power was organized through different linguistic channels — there were other groups and other exclusions. And once you create a group of people called "homosexuals," then you establish



"Many of the controversies surrounding hot-button social issues emerge from questions of language," said Bob Tobin, professor of German.

The center of the proud group at right is Rich Harris, who won an elite NCAA Ethnic Minority Postgraduate scholarship. Pictured next is Samantha Saalfield, who is headed to Dartmouth with a full-ride fellowship. Columns of graduates stand ready to march (third photo), and far right, magna cum laude graduate Nathanael LeRud reacts to a speaker.



question of where transsexual people fit into our definition of marriage. Instead, I'd like to shift to one more point. Sometimes — perhaps now, as conflict rages in the Middle East and contentious social issues disturb our family gatherings — the enjoyment and study of literature may seem to be escapist. I'd like to close by contradicting that assumption. Literature is that kind of language that takes itself seriously. Literature is language that not only conveys a message, imparts information, promulgates an opinion; literature is language that also constantly gauges and monitors itself as language. And if language is as important as I have attempted to demonstrate in these few minutes, then literature can serve a valuable function in constantly revealing to us the structures, strengths, weaknesses, and beauties of language.

So I will conclude by expressing my heartfelt congratulations to you, the graduates of 2004, and best wishes to your family and friends. If any of you are in the mood for taking any final words of wisdom, here would be mine: keep learning about other cultures and working on foreign languages, punctuate correctly, pay attention to the linguistic dimension of social issues, and read a good novel.

taught at Whitman College. As I try to distill the meaning that I take from my experiences, I repeatedly return to the power of language.

My appreciation for the importance of language developed with my study of foreign languages. In this field we are daily confronted with our inadequacies, inadequacies that are really a testament to the rich possibilities of expression of human experience. Someone might ask, how do you say "supercalifragilisticexpialidocious" in German? Well, you don't. And even if you did, the whole context of *Mary Poppins* — of (1) our 21st-century ironic reflections on

cultural production is translated into other languages, while very little produced abroad makes its way into the English-language market. In this respect, our culture is far more close-minded than others, many of which are avidly studying America.

At the same time many people in other countries are assiduously learning English, while relatively few Americans bother to study foreign languages. The fact that people in the rest of the world know English leads some Americans to think that their linguistic weaknesses don't really matter — after all, "they can understand us." Even if that were true, it is

We need to be vigilant in our concern for English as well. I, for instance, like to think of myself as a hard-liner on issues of punctuation. You know: commas and periods come before quotation marks, unless you have a parenthetical reference, in which case you close the quote, insert the parenthetical reference, and then place your comma or period. If, however, the quotation is indented, then you don't need quotation marks and the parenthetical reference comes after the period. It's not really that hard, you should have learned it in high school, and I hope you've figured it out by now.

bringing up these issues in order to brow-beat you into a certain political stance. To stay with the example of same-sex marriage, it is striking how significant language is in this matter. Arguably, what is at stake is nothing but the very word "marriage," to which both the state and a variety of religious organizations lay claim. In any case, all sides agree that in this debate words — or at least the word "marriage" — matter.

The whole question regarding the vocabulary of marriage might never have come up, had not an emergent discourse of sexuality made possible the very discussion of "gay

a linguistic space for the discussion of whether this group of people deserves or does not deserve certain rights, for instance the right to marriage. Indeed, there were already people in the 1870s in Germany, just a few years after the articulation of the concept of homosexuality, calling for the right of homosexual couples to marry. Here you have the origins of a contemporary controversy in the innovations of 19th-century language.

I will leave aside the even more profound question of whether the language of "male" and "female" is itself adequate to describe gender relations. I won't even address the



Music major Jill Becker



Jessica Lawson, class of '04, and Lauren McCune, '06



James Garrison, left, Gaurav Garg, and Marie Hoguet, right



Alex Raines, left, and Andrew McLean

After Accountability

The Phi Beta Kappa Address

By Edward Foster, Mina Schwabacher
Professor of English & the Humanities
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The word “accountability” has become popular in the last few years. That can be a good thing, but let me explain what I think can go wrong with accountability in the critique of individuals, institutions, and nations. My concern is not with the word accountability, though it is not a particularly felicitous word, and it does have the ring more of book-keeping than of moral philosophy. Still, it is just a six-syllable English word composed of not disagreeable sounds. Nor is my problem with the idea of accountability, if by it we mean that our actions, behavior, and performance should be assessed, and we should be held responsible for them. My problem, as my title indicates, is what happens after accountability. Too often, accountability has become simply a code word for assigning blame. But true accountability should have larger consequences; it should lead to a genuine recognition of error, deficiency, or culpability and an attempt to remedy whatever has gone wrong.

I am afraid that as individuals and as a society we too often let blame substitute for renewal; that is, we are inclined to content ourselves with blame and not go on to the construc-

tive opportunities that should come next. The linguist in me cannot help but notice that blame is a really ugly word. Just listen to it. Blame, blame, blame, blame, blame. Its explosive beginning consonant and its long, blaring, nasal vowel: it is an ugly word for an ugly idea, whose ugliness somehow gloats that we have uncovered wrongdoing and misleadingly suggests that, by the very act, we have done something worthwhile. I want to speak out against simple blame and the self-deception it facilitates; I am afraid we are becoming a “culture of blame.” After accountability, we seem to be satisfied with blame and, sometimes, if we can get up the energy, retribution. I think we should ask more of ourselves.

In some ways, laying blame seems so gratifying. Having identified the guilty or deficient among us, we can feel good about our intelligence and moral superiority. However, without suggesting that human beings should not be held responsible for their actions, I would like to suggest that blame, and even blame and punishment, is an insufficient response, and that blame can be a corrosive reaction to culpability, destructive of the blamer and useless for the blamee.

As a student of literature, I turn to Shakespeare for advice. In the four great tragedies, *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *King Lear*, and *Macbeth*, Shakespeare gives us an anatomy of evil and shows how it ravages the heart and destroys worlds. In his last two plays, *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest*, he shows how the only way to transcend treachery, corruption, and malice is by the healing power of forgiveness. In *The Winter's Tale*, the main character, Leontes, disrupts his whole world by irrationally and peremptorily accusing and convicting his innocent wife, Hermione, of infidelity. He wreaks havoc and causes irreparable harm. . . . [Too late, he] recognizes his guilt and is profoundly repentant. . . . The ending is bitter-sweet; evil has its consequences. But Shakespeare's point, and mine, is that after accountability comes forgiveness, not a residual, aching blame. Leontes says:

*If this be magic, let it be an art
Lawful as eating.*

Even if the errors of the past cannot be entirely undone, blame kills the spirit; forgiveness has the magic of generative and regenerative power; it gives life.

In *The Tempest*, Shakespeare takes forgiveness a step farther. . . . Prospero uses the most magical power of all — he forgives [the villains]. On this magical island, Prospero forgives even the unrepentant Antonio and Sebastian. That is probably too much to hope for, and perhaps even dangerous, in our unmagical world. But it does point to an ideal which, if beyond our capacity, is worth imagining.

Such matters are not just the idiosyncratic concern of an Elizabethan playwright. In our own world, even on the international level, we have horrifying examples of the accountability that issues only in blame and retribution. In the Middle East Palestinians kill Israelis, and Israelis kill Palestinians, and the false gratification of blame and retribution perpetuates violence and gives feeble and illusory comfort. On a more hopeful note, in Northern Ireland, the Western European counterpart of Israel and Palestine, slow progress seems to be under way to break the spiral of revenge that the unrestrained culture of blame engenders. Perhaps most hopefully, imperfect as it is, in South Africa the Truth and Reconciliation Commission has a chance to provide one model of how the pattern can be broken.

Although I suspect it is unrealistic to think that such efforts will end the sad cycles of blame and retribution on the international level, perhaps it is not too much to hope that we could start to eliminate the pattern in our own lives. Is it not possible that with our colleagues and associates we could take accountability beyond blame to forgiveness and thereby free ourselves of a corrosive poison? If the quality of mercy is “twice-blest”, as Portia says in *The Merchant of Venice*, in blessing the giver and the receiver, is not forgiveness even more blessed in that it frees the blamer, the blamed, and the surrounding societies that are damaged by the noxious destructiveness of unrelieved grievance?

Perhaps the replacement of a culture of blame with a culture of

forgiveness in our personal lives could have broader effects by the renovation of the human spirit one heart at a time. Even if the world is not made perfect, it could be made better. We could at least purify our own lives, liberate them from self-destructive hatred, ennoble both ourselves and the forgiven, and allow us to, as W. B. Yeats put it, regain “radical innocence.” In the attempt we make ourselves vulnerable, but it may be a chance worth taking, and this generosity of spirit may be as catching as the culture of blame.

It is traditional to give graduates, especially graduates so distinguished as Phi Beta Kappa members, advice about personal success and changing the world. My advice is humbler, but maybe harder: to replace the ugliness of blame with the beauty of forgiveness. Accountability cannot

and should not be discarded or irresponsibility will reign supreme. But rather than wallowing in the corrosive self-indulgence of blame, let, after accountability, come forgiveness:

*If this be magic, let it be an art
Lawful as eating.*

This week I retire after 40 years in academic life. Thank you and all your fellow students for allowing me to have had a long career without ever having had a job. And congratulations to members of Phi Beta Kappa, who have understood that academic inquiry is not just one of the wonderful things to do at Whitman, but the primary and noblest reason for our coming together as a community.

*The above is slightly abbreviated from
Professor Foster's Phi Beta Kappa address.*

Professor Ed Foster presented the annual Phi Beta Kappa address at a luncheon honoring new members and their families. He spoke of “sad cycles of blame and retribution,” and encouraged his audience to “take accountability beyond blame to forgiveness.”

