

"STAR TREKING AN EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE FROM 1963-1967 AT RUTGERS:
THE WRAITH OF KHAN, THE SEARCH FOR SPOCK, OR THE JOURNEY HOME?"

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Lecture by Ronald W. Brown
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Visions"

Let me begin by dedicating these remarks to three individuals who had a significant influence on the quality of my experience at Rutgers.

First, to a professor who moved back and forth across a lecture hall on this campus, throwing antinomianism to the right and manicheism to the left. My senior paper --- The Marquis de Sade and Sigmund Freud --- was written in his honors seminar and published in the Rutgers Review. Professor Warren Sussman. Thank you, for then.

Second, to my second year roommate, Gene Robinson, who taught me how to pick up a handkerchief while dancing and my dignity while standing still, and from whom among other things I learned education can make you smart, but only experience can make you wise. Thank you, for then.

And finally, to Suzanne, who stopped by the Douglass Student Center to watch a swan and listen to me play piano, with whom I shared dance concerts, the blues and jazz, the Temptations, the Four Tops, Dvorak, Muddy Waters, Buffy Saint Marie, Newport, e.e. cummings, fun with fine Jane, Lynn, Diane, Mary, Thea's wedding with Serge, Rita's wedding with John, cartoons From The Back of the Bus and Charles Schultz, who gave me "A Thousand Days" when I went to work in Washington, and a thousand beautiful moments here, and for whom some of the poems here were written. Thank you, for always.

I am a graduate of this University. History was my major. Certain expectations come with that; particularly so when one is bracketed by McCormicks and faced with an audience such as you. I shall try to meet those expectations.

The problem I see with trying to present both a retrospective and new visions is this: how can I say something to you about the way it was, that might be relevant to the way it is, and possibly suggest to all of us the way it could, might, or should be? The solution I think will work best is found in the title I have selected for my remarks: "Star Treking An Educational Experience From 1963-1967 at Rutgers: The Wrath Of Khan, The Search For Spock, or The Journey Home?" I would stress the words "star", "wraith", "search", and "journey".

When here, I was --- you now are, and those who come behind you will be --- an "enterprise", sometimes trying to go where no one "has gone before" in the way each of us as individuals have our own unique experience here, moving along on impulse or other power, on a "journey". Each of our treks begins with the same questions. Why come to Rutgers? What's here for me? What will I get out of "here"? The answers are found at the end of the journey by looking back and reflecting on where you've been, where you are, and where you are going from there.

For those of you who are not familiar with it, "Star Trek" was the name of a television series and has given rise to four feature length motion pictures on the further adventures of its crew. I have taken the name of the series and the titles of three of those films for my remarks tonight. In many ways this is appropriate. The series always began with the same memorable lines, from which I would now paraphrase: "These are the voyages of the starship RWB, whose 20 minute mission tonight is to summarize a four year experience from 1963 to 1967 looking back from 1989." In a figurative and real sense such a mission is quite a journey in both time and space.

In thinking about returning to Rutgers after all these years for tonight's remarks, I recalled these words:

"I feel like one
who treads alone
some banquet hall deserted
whose lights are fled
whose garlands dead
and all but he departed."

Well the hall is far from deserted, the lights are not fled, the garlands far from dead, and hopefully my remarks will not drive you to depart.

I also thought about what you might conclude from my remarks, what judgements you might make, and I hoped you might conclude about me, as Edward Gibbon concluded about the great Byzantine general Belisarius: "His imperfections flowed from the contagion of the times; his virtues were his own."

Finally, and at a deeper level, I thought about the introspection this evening might require of you and of me. Alfred Steiglitz's observation captured my feeling. Steiglitz said:

"You will find as you go through life that if you ask what a thing means, a picture, or music, or whatever (like what it was like here in 1963-1967) you may learn something about the people you ask, but as for learning about the thing you seek to know, you will have to sense it in the end through your own experience, so that you had better save your energy and not go through the world asking what can not be communicated in words."

But why a solution to the problem by talking about star trekking? Because a trek is a journey and you have to look up to see stars. You should look up when you travel; to see what's going on around you. Once you lift your eyes, your heart and your mind will start to rise.

If you go out to the Los Angeles museum, you can see representations of animals in the La Brea tarpits. In that representation some animals have sunk, some are sinking. But there is a mammoth and a saber tooth tiger that have not sunk. They are still there. Those two animals both have their heads up looking to the stars. The lesson: you go in the direction you look.

My experience at Rutgers between 1963 and 1967 involved "wraith" because of early feelings of isolation and alienation, which resulted from what might be described as an overbearing, almost overwhelming monochromatic monopoly (how do 1,764 white keys feel about 12 black keys on a piano?); "search" when I went to Africa for the summer of 1965; and "journey home" because of what I brought back from Africa at the end of that summer, found at Rutgers during my junior and senior years, and bring to you tonight --- the fourth time I have been on this campus is 22 years.

So let's begin our trek tonight with the "Wraith of Ron".

The Wraith of Khan begins with a simulated situation in which someone announces: "This was not a fair test, there was no way to win." The response: "A no win situation is one which every commander (student) must face." How does a student deal with the question: How do I pass my courses without flunking life? What life lessons are contained within and which outside my texts? How do I find and apply them? Or if education can make you learned but only experience can make you wise, how do I become both? Can I do so in sequence, simultaneously? Can I do it here, someplace else later, or now?

In the Closing Of The American Mind, Allan Bloom wrote this: "I used to think that young Americans began whatever education they were to get at the age of eighteen, that their early lives were spiritually empty, and that they arrived at the university clean slates unaware of their deeper selves and the world beyond their superficial experience (at 97)." In 1963, 1,764 male tabula rasas arrived in the entering freshman class at Rutgers College; of that number approximately 12 were black.

What was it like here in 1963? Two words best describe it: lonely and challenging.

In musical terms, way back then, Diana Ross was a "Lady" who had not yet learned how to "Sing The Blues" --- she would have if she had been a woman here --- and was still part of a trio called the Supremes. The crossfire was a dance and sometimes what you felt you were in if you tried to get into a frat dance on a Saturday night. The Fifth Dimension was a group that sang "Up, Up and Away" which was where some folks said you should go, if, borrowing from Candide and a theme of interest to Harriet Beecher Stowe, you had a different view of this "best of all possible places" and this "peculiar institution" which some saw as racially theirs to preserve rather than ours to possibly change and improve. Martha and the Vandellas, crooning out the hits for Motown, seem to have captured a feeling one sometimes had here, when in melodic lament they harmonized that there was "nowhere to run, and nowhere to hide". And when you heard Marvin Gaye ask the question in song "Can I get a witness?", if you were black and here then you would have had to answer back "Not yet!"

Things I remember.

I remember a pickup basketball game in the quad in September, Freshman year. There were five of us: Oscar Miller, Frank McClellan, Bill Chapman, Dave Brinkley and me. Five black guys. We were whipping everybody. Then these five white dudes came on the court. The crowd got big. It was like the NBA finals. Hand checks,

tight guarding, ferocious defense by this one dude while this other guy was throwing in swish jump shots from somewhere on the other side of Old Queens. We played two games. They killed us the first time. The second game was much closer. But we lost again. Athletic respect. Everyone shook hands. No rancor, just good sportsmanship. The crowd broke up. Someone I passed said, "you guys played good." I said, "we lost." He said, "Of course." I said, "what do you mean, 'of course'?" He said, "you didn't know who the two guys were that beat you all?" I said, "who were they?" He replied "Bob Lloyd and Jim Valvano. They were recruited to play basketball here."

I remember there was concern about nuclear war and race.

The easy one first: nuclear war. The following limerick from 1963 captured the doomsday humor some felt:

"O nuclear wind, when will thou blow
That the small rain down can rain
Christ, that my love were in my arms
And I had my arms again.

Rock of Ages cleft for me
Let me hide myself in thee
While the bombers thunder past
Shelter me from burn and blast
And though I know all men are brothers
Let the fallout fall on others."

Now the harder one: race.

I remember some early voices:

If you don't like it here, leave.

You knew Rutgers was a white school before you came. So why did you come.

The Negroes are in Rutgers. The niggers are in town. (When I was in town getting my hair cut, what was I? A "nigger-oe"?)

There were no colored people when I went to public school. You are the first one I ever met. Do you people tan?

Ross Barnett is speaking at Princeton University. The Rutger-Douglass N.A.A.C.P. is organizing a protest bus ride. Join us?

I'm leaving Rutgers. I've been accepted at Howard and I'm going. There are no black fraternities and no social life here. And social life is part of what I want to have and remember about my undergraduate years.

I remember being involved in the Mississippi Committee.

I remember when the N.A.A.C.P. was in financial trouble doing all the work to hold a fund-raising dance. The dance was successful and we not only paid back the debt that had been outstanding to the University, we had operating funds. My next project, a concert which would be part of a program honoring Paul Robeson. We are advised that honoring Robeson at this time would raise a lot of problems. Have the concert, and in the future honor Robeson. Since we are advised Robeson is sick at this time and would not be able to come, we reluctantly follow the advice to avoid problems.

In non-musical terms, one was faced then at Rutgers with what Regina Warner of the Urban League describes as "the dilemma of associational choice." In Warner's view, this dilemma has two related themes that flow out of the psychology of group life, or conforming in order to be accepted. If you are black and associate predominately with blacks you risk being labeled militant. If you associate predominately with whites you risk being labeled an "Uncle Tom" or an "oreo" (black on the outside, white on the inside).

My first two years at Rutgers, I felt alienated, and drifted toward militancy. My black friends would sometimes call me "Malcolm" because I would observe that although I did not believe that white people were devils, a lot of them around here sure acted awfully devilish! And I was angry about matters of race in this country. Part of that anger is captured in the following poem I wrote in 1963:

300 YEARS

Now! Run! Little black boy, run on
and on. Run
from others. Run
toward yasm in yourself.

Now! cry little back boy
cry the tears of Sambo
cry the tears of your history
cry the tears of your past tomorrows.

Now! whistle little black boy
Shuffle, and grin, and dance.
now stop. little black boy
I begin to tire of you.
Now, as always, you are the same.

Now! die quiet little black boy
die in obedience too.
DIE QUIET, in your own illusions.
that's it. Yasm's all right now.

Some insight from the Urban League's Regina Warner. Warner defines alienation as exclusion from full participation and acceptance in a setting, and integration as full participation and acceptance. What determines if a person is alienated or integrated in a setting? Adopting from her research on corporations, perhaps her answers there apply to a college situation as well: "successful integration... depends on how well the individual learns customs, folkways, and appropriate behaviors." Warner also found three elements that negatively relate to the degree of integration: "(1) racist perceptions of the (majority) group in the setting; (2) alien norms and behaviors indigenous to the (dominant) culture; and (3) self-imposed alienation by Blacks from the informal organizational networks (at 7-8)."

If you were here in 1963 and you were Black, you were more likely to be alienated than integrated. There was conflict between the few blacks and some whites. We frequently could not or at that time did not apply the words of Dag Hammarskjold, former U.N. Secretary General: "You can only hope to find a lasting solution to a conflict if you have learn to see the other objectively, but at the same time, to experience his difficulties subjectively."

Part of our difficulty is reflected in something I wrote in 1963 called "Extraterrestrial Conversation":

"The black earthlings
and the white earthlings
do not come together
as equals."

"There is fear among them,
rather than understanding."

"What is the nature of this fear?"

"It is a fear of time;
'someday' for them
is 'always',
never 'tomorrow'.

Why did I come to Rutgers in 1963?

I talked to people I knew and whose opinion I respected who said Rutgers was a "good school" (whatever that meant.) No graduate of Rutgers ever recruited me to come here. (And I might add that as a graduate of this University, I have never been requested to recruit for it.) Several of the people in my high school class were going to Rutgers. One of the important factors was one of the scholarships I had was restricted to a college or university in New Jersey. I was the first member of my family to go to college.

My answer to the question "what does 'get a good education' mean?" At a minimum a good education should assist you in knowing who you are, give you a point of view (hopefully enabling you to become informed before you become opinionated) and enable you to see things with a clearer vision. I obtained a good education here.

And though I have never been asked by Rutgers to do so, I am on my own initiative making my first recruiting effort tonight. Though he is not here this evening, I hope that my words will reach him.

Jamil Jackson of Elizabeth, like Bob Barker on "The Price is Right," I'm calling your name and saying "come on down!" I too grew up in Elizabeth and went to high school there. You live in Elizabeth. I did too and my relatives still do. Jamil Jackson of Elizabeth, I came to Rutgers. You should too. Jamil Jackson of Elizabeth, begin a future with Rutgers. I did. In 1989 we both should.

Why are all of you here tonight? Why are you here period? Why did you come here? If the easy answer is/was to get a good education, what does that mean to you, and to those who had tried to answer that question in other times? What is an education? Is it defined solely in terms of curriculum or by some other measures as well?

If you listen carefully, you can hear a continuum of voices providing answers. In this continuum, one may hear a melody of overlapping voices, but the basso continuo is clear.

"Education is our passport to the future, for tomorrow belongs to the people who prepare for it today."

Malcolm X

"Education should be sought for its own sake. This means that it should be sought for the enrichment of life, for the sheer enjoyment of knowing how to distinguish between truth and error, between good and evil, and between that which is first rate and that which is second rate.... The trained mind develops leadership, enabling a leader to deal with others from a position of strength rather than weakness.... Education is not for the purpose of lifting one above one's fellows but to enable one to help one's fellows. Following this aim, one learns that he cannot fulfill his destiny unless he uses his knowledge not only to benefit himself but to benefit others."

Benjamin Elijah Mays

"There must always be the continuing struggle to make the increasing knowledge of the world bear some fruit in increasing understanding and in the production of human happiness."

Charles R. Drew

"To make his way, the Negro must have firm resolve, persistence, tenacity. He must gear himself to hard work all the way. He can never let up. He can never have too much preparation and training. He must be a strong competitor. He must adhere staunchly to the basic principle that anything less than full equality is not enough. If he compromises on that principle his soul is dead."

Ralphe J. Bunche

"Civil rights don't take place in a vacuum. They are meaningful only in the real world where people have to survive, to work, to raise their families, to instill in their children hope for the future and the skills to function in a society where a broad back and a desire to work are no longer enough."

Vernon E. Jordan, Jr.

"Black Americans must begin to accept a larger share of responsibility for their lives. For too many years we have been crying that racism and oppression have to be fought on every front. But to fight any battle takes soldiers who are strong, healthy, committed, well-trained and confident. I don't believe that we will produce strong soldiers by moaning about what the enemy has done to us."

Jesse Jackson

For reference, let me give you a timeline which mixes events that were going on "out there" in our country and "in here" at Rutgers with me.

It amazes me when I think about it, but John Kennedy, Robert Kennedy, and Martin Luther King were all alive when I entered Rutgers, and all had been assassinated within one year after I graduated.

1963

I enter Rutgers in September and hear the shots in Dallas during Freshman English class in November. Lyndon Johnson becomes President. My name is posted on the Dean's List for the first time. Dave Brinkley, with whom I went to school from first to 12th grade is my roommate. Dave is black.

1964

The Johnson Presidency sees the enactment of the Civil Rights Act, a Housing Act, the Food Stamp program and a War on Poverty. I am doing well academically. To say I had a social life would be like characterizing the trunk of a Volkswagon beetle as a stretch limousine. Gene Robinson, who had returned from a tour of duty with the U.S. Army in Germany is my roommate. Gene is black. I believe Gene learns something from me about how to study. I learn from Gene about black poets such as Dudley Randall. Randall who would write this poem for Gwendolyn Brooks.

On Getting A Natural

She didn't know she was beautiful,
Though her smiles were dawn
Her voice was bells,
And her skin deep velvet night.

She didn't know she was beautiful,
Although her deeds,
Kind, generous, unobtrusive
Gave hope to some,
And help to others,
and inspiration to us all. And
Beauty is as beauty does,
They say.

Then one day there blossomed
A crown upon her head,
Bushy, bouffant, real Afro-down,
Queen Nefertiti again,
And now her regal wooly crown
Declares,
I know,
I'm Black
And
Beautiful.

Gene and I discuss religion, politics, international relations etc. I learn how to put a spin on a ping pong ball as well as a cha-cha-step, and a lot of lessons about living. I join the N.A.A.C.P. chapter here.

Some of the nicest people I meet here --- black and white --- are involved in the Rutgers-Douglass branch of the N.A.A.C.P.

There is a bus ride to Princeton to protest the racial positions of Ross Barnett. I go. On the bus, blacks and whites, seniors and freshmen sing "We Shall Overcome." I do not know what to expect when we get to Princeton, which has been described to me as the northern most university of the South.

When we arrive it is dark. Our plan is simply to march carrying protest signs and candles while singing and chanting. As we march around the campus I see signs hanging from some buildings. "Niggers go home!" There are also some large confederate flags. As we go by other buildings, some males inside at the windows drop their pants, and expose their rears to us. I turn to Wilma Harris and ask what are they doing. She says they are mooning us. I had never seen anyone do something so stupid and vulgar. The march is relatively uneventful. We get back on the bus to return. I look. Some have self-segregated themselves for the trip back, in marked contrast to how we all sat on the way down.

Nina Simone captures the spirit of the times in her song "Mississippi God Damn". On her concert tour she announces the song this way: "The name of this tune is Mississippi God damn. And I mean every word of it." The words:

Alabama's got me so upset. Tennessee made me lose my rest.
And everybody knows about Mississippi God damn. Can't you see it, can't you feel it. It's all in the air. I can't stand the pressures much longer. Somebody say a prayer.

Alabama's got me so upset. Tennessee made me lose my rest.
And everybody knows about Mississippi God damn.

Hound dogs on my trial. School children sitting in jail.
Black cat cross my path. Think every day is going to be
my last.

Lord have mercy on this land of mine. We all going to
get it in due time. I don't belong here. I don't belong
there.

I've even stopped believing in prayer.

Don't tell me, I'll tell you.
Me and my people just about through.
I've been there so I know.
Keep on saying go slow.

That's just the trouble. Too slow.
Washing windows. Too slow.
Picking the cotton. Too slow.

You just plain rotten. Too slow.
You too damn lazy. Too slow.
You think crazy. Too slow.

Picket lines, school boycotts.
They try to say it's a communist plot.
All I want is equality
for my sister, my brother, my people and me.

You lied to me all these years.
Told me to wash and clean my ears.
And talk real fine just like a lady
and you'd stop calling me sister Sadie.

This whole country is full of lies.
You all gonna die and die like flies.
I don't trust you any more.
You keep saying go slow.

But that's just the trouble. Too slow.
Desegregation. Too slow.
Mass participation. Too slow.
Unification. Too slow.
Do things gradually. Too slow.
Will bring more tragedy.

You don't have to live next to me.
Just give me my equality.
And everybody knows about Mississippi,
everybody knows about Alabama,
and everybody knows about Mississippi Goddamn.

1965

The 54 mile march from Selma to Montgomery Alabama. March 7, the bull whipping and billy clubbing at the Edmund Petus bridge in Selma; the Reverend James Reeb, a white minister from Boston, is clubbed to death by four white men in Selma who shout "nigger lover!" as they do their deadly deed.

Medicare, Aid to Education, Department of Housing and Urban Development, the Housing Act, Voting Rights Act and Antipoverty programs come out of Washington.

I learn about Operation Crossroads Africa, a summer program in Africa which was the model for the Peace Corps. A black beauty shop owner and a white retired school teacher help raise the money for me to go. I work with an integrated group of college students in Ethiopia building a school, working on a reforestation project, and a Coptic church. I see the stained glass windows of Afewaerk Tekle in the OAU building in Addis Ababa. I read of the archeological discoveries of the Leaky's in Oldivai gorge in Northern Tanzania, Nigeria's Benin bronzes, of the world civilizations of Timbuktu, Jenne, and Gao in the 14th-16th centuries. Our group works together and begins to transcend racial walls, a much more difficult work project than one could imagine even then. I find differences in my views and experiences from those of a black woman college student from the south, and a black woman college student from Denver. I find things in common as well as differences with a white male college student from Boston, a white woman college student from Berkeley, and a white woman college student from Syracuse. I learn I am more American than African. Our journey home will entail a flight to Eritrea, and a few days in Cairo. Before leaving Sidamo province in Ethiopia, I go to the library. The headlines from Time magazine: "Watts Riots!" What am I going "home" to?

I am in Egypt. I go to the museum. Nothing there resembles Hollywood's cast in the Ten Commandments. And the figures on the papyrus, the walls, everywhere are persons of various shades of color.

The darkest part of Africa is American ignorance of the place.

I also begin to think that perhaps some of the people I thought were deeply racist at Rutgers, were really people who were simply culturally shallow or at least isolated, who had never been out of homogeneous settings. As one of the people in our Crossroads group said, "being a white person in a black country taught me something I never could have learned at my college." To which I could have added, "being a black person in a black country with you taught me something I never could have learned at my college." Dag Hammerskjold's words applied.

I return to the U.S. While in Africa I did not get a haircut because our group leader had gotten a scalp reaction after he had returned

from a barbershop in Addis. I like the way I look. I go to the barber just to get my hair even. I have an original Afro. Self identity now extends fully to my head.

My crossroads friend from Berkeley invites me to visit her, her parents and boyfriend in Connecticut before she returns to California. I drive up. We all go sailing. I stay for dinner. We all have a wonderful time. This is the first time I have ever been invited to dinner in the home of someone who was not black.

1966

I am a preceptor in Mettler Hall. The country seems somehow inexplicably, impossibly, and some were saying irrationally and inextricably to have fallen deeply into Vietnam. I and someone special somehow inexplicably, impossibly, and some were saying irrationally have fallen more deeply in love than I could possibly imagine. We are not the same. I guess that makes us heterogeneous.

I could not possibly imagine being more deeply in love until I graduate from Rutgers and in 1969 meet in Harvard Law School, the Phi Beta Kappa, summa cum laude, Delta Sigma Theta graduate of Fisk University, to whom I have now been married for almost 17 years and with whom I would share this poem:

"Black Women

My hair is springy like the forest grasses
That cushion the feet of squirrels
Crinkled and blown as a south breeze
Like the small leaves of native bushes.

My Black eyes are coals burning
Like a low, full, jungle moon
Through the darkness of being
In a clear Pool I see my face,
Knowing my knowing.

My hands move pianissimo
Over the music of the night:
Gently birds fluttering through leaves and grasses
They have not always loved,
Nesting, finding home.

Where are my lovers?
Where are my tall, my lovely princes
Dancing in slow grace
Toward knowledge of my beauty?
Where
Are my beautiful
Black men?"

I would reply, "Here, beloved."

But back to 1966. Two things written then said it this way:
First:

"I love to watch you from a crowd
proud of your walk, hearing them talk
of claiming you, maiming you
and because you are beautiful, framing you.
Do not ask me who I am."

Second:

Take a walk along the shore
and find rest in the ebb and flow
of your spirit
on waves of peace and understanding
and touch without fear
knowing;
it is good.

But never
bring me an unmasked face;
or a nest of hair, freshly washed;
or a new idea, ready to share;
or an open heart, ready for company;
of a spirit, ready for togetherness,
or I will love you.

Symphony No. 5 in E Minor Opus 95 becomes part of our "new world" symphony. I am amazed to learn Dvorak, its composer, wrote these words in December of 1893:

I am convinced that the future music of this country must be founded on what are called Negro melodies. These can be the foundation of a serious and original school of composition, to be developed in the United States.... These beautiful and varied themes are the product of the soil. They are American. In the Negro melodies of America, I discover all that is needed for a great and noble school of music. They are pathetic, tender, passionate, melancholy, solemn, religious, bold, merry, gay, gracious or what you will.... There is nothing in the whole range of composition that can not find a thematic source there.

Our symphony of love not only includes Dvorak's four movements but also Curtis Mayfield and the Impressions, David Ruffin and the Temptations, Yusef Lateef Live At Pep's, and Rhassan Roland Kirk.

President Johnson speaks to the country from Howard University in Washington D.C. His words:

"You do not wipe away the scars of centuries by saying: Now you are free to go where you want and do as you desire and choose the leaders you please. You do not take a person who, for years, has been hobbled by chains and liberate him, bring him to the starting line of a race, and then say you are free to compete with all the others, and still just believe that you have been completely fair. Thus it is not enough just to open the gates of opportunity. All our citizens must have the ability to walk through those gates. This is the next and the more profound stage of the battle for civil rights. We seek not just freedom but opportunity. We seek not just legal equity but human ability, not just equality as a right and a theory but equality as a fact and equality as a result (The Vantage Point, at 166)."

Johnson described the mood of the times in this context: "The long history of Negro-white relations had entered a new and more bewildering stage. New problems of racial discrimination came to the forefront: the problems of poverty, slums, inadequate schooling, unemployment, delinquency, and substandard housing. These problems could not be solved entirely by laws, crusades, or marches.

No longer could the struggle for justice be regarded as a peculiarly Southern problem; nor could it be regarded as a problem to be solved entirely by improved attitudes in the white community. The effect on the black man of centuries of discrimination had become all too visible in the form of apathy, hatred, anger, and violence. The problems at this stage could not be solved by goodwill and compassion; they required large expenditures of public funds.

We were beset by contradictions -- movement and progress alongside stalemate and retrogression. Nowhere were these contradictions experienced more deeply than in the black community, where hopes aroused by the early victories were bright but hostilities caused by the persistent gap between promise and fulfillment were deep. It was a violative mixture.

A new mood began to develop in the black community symbolized by the 'black power' slogan. When asked about black power in 1966, I responded: 'I am not interested in black power or white power. What I am concerned with is democratic power, with a small d'. As I look back now, that answer seems totally insufficient. It is easy for a white man to say he is 'not interested in black power or white power.' Black power had a different meaning to the black man, who until recently had had to seek the white world's approval, and for whom success had come largely on white people's terms. To such a man, black power meant a great deal in areas that mattered the most -- dignity, pride and self-awareness.

As the mask of black submission began to fall, the countless years of suppressed anger exploded outward. The withering of hope, the failure to change the dismal conditions of life, and the complex tangle of attitudes, issues, beliefs, and circumstances all led to the tragic phenomena known as 'the riots' -- 'the long, hot summers' ". [The Vantage Point: Perspectives of the Presidency (1963-1969), Holt Rinehart and Winston, copyright 1971, at 167].

Things continue to go well academically. I am accepted in the State Department's Foreign Affairs Scholars program and go to work in Washington for the summer, assigned to the desk officer handling the program for refugees in Southern Africa. This includes work on Angola, Mozambique, and Namibia. I meet Secretary of State Rusk, and Ambassador Harriman.

Langston Hughes returns from a goodwill tour and I attend a de-briefing meeting. I tell my roommates I am going to invite Langston out for dinner and to come over to our house Saturday night and talk with us and all the others in our program. They say I am crazy, he will never do that. I ask him and he accepts. The only condition --- he makes it clear he likes scotch. Break out the Chevas and the Johnny Walker Red!

Langston says if I had not asked him out, he would probably have eaten alone in his hotel because people assumed he was always busy and did not ask him. Sometimes he was therefore left quite alone.

On August 21st I receive an autographed copy of his book I Wonder As I Wander with a postcard: "Dear Ron: I very much enjoyed the Washington evening and dinner.... Best ever Langston Hughes." Yes Langston, you were the "best ever".

That same summer my roommates and I drive out to Maryland to go to a beach. We get lost, see a man standing at the far end of his driveway, get out to ask him directions, and spend the afternoon talking with him. He is Todd Duncan, the baritone selected to play Porgy in Gershwin's 1935 production of Porgy and Bess.

One weekend I decide to drive up to Philadelphia to spend a few days working with friends involved with inner city children. A friend asks which way I will be driving. I reply up 95. He said: You are going to drive through Maryland, wearing a dashiki, with a big Afro, and the last name like "Brown". Brother, you had better drive slow and careful because you could get mistaken for H. Rap Brown and get killed. If I were you, I would change my clothes and get my hair cut down low before driving through Maryland looking like that. I get in my car, turn on the radio, drive about three blocks, hear the announcer talk about the unrest in Maryland, turn around, go back and change my clothes and stop in a barbershop before heading north.

1967

When I graduate from Rutgers there are approximately 12 black men in a class of 812. That is .011477%. Three or 25% of those 12 black men were consistently on the Dean's List. Of those 812 men, four or five were accepted at and attended Harvard Law School in the Fall of 1967. I was one. Of those 12 black men, one was also accepted at and attended Harvard Medical School.

In looking forward from 1967, I was glad to be going to Harvard and determined to do well. But Cambridge where I would study was not that far from Roxbury where I would work for six months at a time when:

40.6% of non-white Americans would be living in poverty as opposed to only 11% of white Americans; the black unemployment rate would be over 7% although the white rate would be only 3% and average black family income would be only 58% of white family income. Blacks in the United States would own only 7 of 17,500 authorized automobile dealerships; only 8 of 16,000 radios stations; only 20 of 13,762 commercially owned banks and non-deposit trust companies. Though constituting 12 percent of the total population and 11% of the civilian work force, blacks would constitute only 2.8% of the business managers, officials and proprietors of America. That less than 1% of the nation's business receipts would be obtained by black businessmen, 25% of whom would operate either beauty or barber shops, and less than 1.5% of all construction and wholesale trades and 1% of all manufacturing firms would be controlled by black owners.

If this journey has been consistent with Star Treking, there ought to be some lessons about life and about living that have been learned and applied and which are worth sharing. I would like to know yours. Here are mine.

There is a certain responsibility which attaches itself to a Rutgers education, namely to do something with it. What?

Apply what you learn in an increasingly interdependent and international world, in which culture, economics, history, and even health can no longer be understood or interpreted from one perspective. Listen to this poem:

The Way Of Man

All things in the Universe exist
in accordance with the natural law.
The Way of Man
is man following his natural path.

Man accepts himself
exactly as he is.
He accepts the world
exactly as it is.
He denies nothing,
he excludes no one.

With a grateful spirit
he lets things become what they are.
He applies the wisdom of the past
to the world of the future.
He rules over all things
by studying their authentic way
of being.

By using each thing
as its nature and the occasion
demand,
Man builds a just society --
free, ordered, and wise.

This poem was written (unfortunately without inclusive language) by Konosuke Matsushita, who in 1918 founded Matsushita Electric Industrial Company. Matsushita is a man, a company, a philosophy, and even a School of Government and Management where each morning students "recite 5 oaths: to carry out their original objectives to a conclusion; to be autonomous and self-reliant; to learn from everything; to be creative; and to be grateful and cooperative." You too should develop and apply a philosophy of learning and living. What will it be?

I believe and know as Dr. King advised us, "all men are brothers because they are children of a common father." As he reminded us: "Our religion reveals to us that God loves all of His children, and that every man, and woman, from a bass black to a treble white, is significant on God's keyboard. So we can now cry out with the eloquent poet:

"Fleecy locks and black complexion
Cannot forfeit nature's claim,
Skin may differ, but affection
Dwells in black and white the same.
And were I so tall as to reach the pole
Or to grasp the ocean at a span,
I must be measure by my soul.
The mind is the standard of the man."

I believe the three most important degrees that you can ever possess --- the ones that will be most obvious by their presence or absence, and the ones about which others will care most -- are different kinds of degrees than those conferred by institutions. The three degrees are: a degree of caring or compassion about things, or someone other than yourself; a degree of commitment; and a degree of class in dealing with other people. You will never succeed in life without these degrees. Rutgers can not give these degrees to you. You can only obtain them by the way you live.

Joseph Addeson said: "Three grand essentials to happiness in this life are something to do, something to love, and something to hope for." Let me take one of these essentials, and tell you what I hope for you.

I hope that your educated minds will always be compatible with caring hearts.

I hope that you will never become so ignorant as not to know or so learned as not to believe we are all members of the human family. That family is a global family. I hope you will be concerned, caring, and committed to improving the condition of that family wherever you find artificial limitations on the fulfillment of its potential.

I hope you will aim high, with a clear mind and an open heart, and I believe you will have started down the path toward success.

I hope you will keep a sense of humor as you go wonderfully into this beautiful night and into the dawn of tomorrow's new beginnings. We are a nation that sometimes seems to worship youth while at the same time fearing young people. I saw a sign that said: "Hire a teenager today, while they still know everything." Grace Paley, writing in "Upstaging Time" (Lears, January/February 1989) put this in a better perspective: "If, as Goethe said, youth is a disease that time cures, then age can be celebrated as the joyful survival of a life in progress." Soren Kiekegaard perhaps said it better when he told us, "Life is not a problem to be solved, but a reality to be experience." Spock said it best: "Live long and prosper".

I hope you will mark this occasion by adding to your own thoughts and achievements a personal commitment to some deep reflection followed by expressing your concern, caring and commitment about some things, and perhaps someone in that family who is less fortunate than you.

I hope that you will be concerned about the competence and compensation of those charged with providing an education for your mind, health care for your body, and culture for your spirit; concerned about nurturing and literacy of the young as well as nutrition and loneliness of the elderly; that you will care about the hungry as well as the homeless; about social and criminal justice; that you will be committed to doing something about drugs and dropouts, ecology and energy, mortality as well as mortgage rates, national defense and nuclear destruction.

If you do, then I believe the words once used to describe Thomas Jefferson will also come to describe you: one "in whom the power of thought and the power of action are perfectly balanced; (one) conscious of the past, equal to the present, and reaching into the future."

It was not Jack Kennedy but someone else who observed: "There will always be a frontier where there is an open mind and a willing hand." May your minds and hands represent such a frontier of caring, commitment and concern. In my judgement, that is appropriate for both a retrospective and for new visions.