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The 462d Convocation
The Inauguration of Don Michael Randel as President of the University

November 2, 2000

The Induction of the President
By Edgar D. Jannotta

On behalf of my fellow Trustees, welcome to this inaugural convocation. Thank you all for coming. This is a wonderful turnout of our University community, presidents and representatives of the universities and colleges of this country and abroad, delegates of learned societies, and friends of the University. There are also many friends and family of Don and Carol Randel—a warm welcome to them.

There are no oaths of office to be taken here today. As most of you know, Don Randel has been at Chicago since July 1, and I can represent to you that he is fully engaged as our President. So our purpose today is to celebrate our new President.

It was a year ago last summer that we started our search for a new President. And the University community was interested in who was going to be its President. We sent out the obligatory letter asking for suggestions, and people took us seriously. We got hundreds of letters, with over 350 suggestions.

At the top of our list of candidates last September was the then–Cornell provost, Don Randel, and when we finished in December he was still our first choice. Lucky for us, he said “Yes.”

We were attracted by his thirty years of experience at Cornell as faculty member, department head, dean of arts and sciences, and provost. Cornell’s president, Hunter Rawlings, told us, “Don is a man of the faculty.” He went on to say, “It has always seemed to me he was just on loan from the faculty to the administration. His heart is with the faculty.” That sounded quite good to us. As a musicologist, Don’s own scholarship is highly regarded, and our committee was impressed by his connoisseurship of the scholarship of others.

Of course, in coming to Chicago he is jumping on a moving streetcar. There are a lot of things underway: a major investment in our physical assets, new residential and dining halls, parking, a new scientific research facility, a new children’s hospital, a new business school campus, and, yes, new athletic facilities. We are also in the early planning stage of a capital campaign which should strengthen our financial position.

Our physical and financial assets have the sole purpose of supporting our intellectual assets: our faculty, which has a new Nobel feather in its cap, and our students, who help us realize our mission. It is our faculty that gives this University its great distinction.

Of course, an independent and strong faculty brings its challenges. “Universities” have been described as ungovernable and I suppose if there were national rankings of ungovernable universities, we would probably rank pretty high. But at the University of Chicago we don’t expect to be governed, we expect to be led, and this University has been blessed with a long string of outstanding leaders. When I first talked to Don Randel on the phone, he said, “The University of Chicago is the epitome of what university education should be.” In fact, he said, “I think I can name most if not all of the Presidents of the University of Chicago.” Two of our great Presidents are with us today, Hanna Gray and Hugo Sonnenschein.

Don Randel appreciates and understands the unique character of this University. He has the background and experience to help guide us in our challenges and opportunities, and the personal skills to bring us together as we seek to realize our full potential. He will be an outstanding leader.

The twelfth President of the University of Chicago, Don Michael Randel.

Edgar D. Jannotta is Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the University of Chicago.

Inaugural Address

By Don Michael Randel

T he question before us is how to become one in spirit, not necessar- 
yly in opinion.” Thus did Marion Talbot record the first remarks of our first President, William Rainey Harper, at the first meeting of our faculty, on October 1, 1891.

To have the great honor to become the twelfth President of this great institution is to be but the twelfth President to take up the very question. The record of this suc- cessional remark is remarkably consistent. The result is a oneness of spirit as palpably present today as ever it has been or could have been imagined to become and unique in the universe of universities anywhere. That oneness of spirit derives, as many have observed in one way and another, in con- siderable measure from the negative term that is the second part of President Harper’s famous remark. A successor might be tempted to observe that he said “not neces- sarily” one in opinion rather than “not ever” one in opinion. But at the center of that spirit is that we are of one opinion about our joint commitment to the university and under no obligation ever to be of one opin- ion about anything else. Does this mean that we hold nothing else in common? Certainly not.

A number of words and phrases recur through the eleven administrations and 108 years since that first faculty meeting. They speak of the privacy of research, the inti- mate relationship of research to teaching, and to the amelioration of the condition of humankind, a pioneering spirit, the “great conversation” among and across traditional disciplines that creates not only new knowledge but whole new fields of knowledge, the “experimental attitude” and the intel- lectual freedom that makes this attitude possible, the intimate and essential rela-
tionship to the city of Chicago, and, funda- mentally of all to this, a distinguished faculty committed to this spirit. At no other uni- versity is such a spirit so deeply and widely shared among faculty, students, and alumni.

Now, this close to election day, every- one has already heard quite enough speeches. The customary beginning points with pride. This leads inexorably to view- ing with alarm. There is surely much in the world— even just in the world of higher education—that ought to be viewed with alarm. But this is a day on which to assert not only our ferocious historical commit- ment to the University’s unique spirit and our continuing passionate devotion to it. It is a day on which to affirm that, because this spirit derives from all of us who have ever been privileged to be a part of the University, it is uniquely in our power to sustain it. Our enemies are only compla- cency and its sinister relative arrogance, and we need not view these with alarm because we need not succumb to them. The University’s own Mark Strand writes, in A Poet’s Alphabet, that “I am for before, the acknowledged antecedent of now, the innocent shape of earlier, the vague and beautiful cousin of ‘when,’ the tragic mother of ‘will become,’ the suicide of ‘too late.’ ” Ours is the responsibility to ensure that, against our fascination with powers of ten, our before remains seamlessly the strength and inspiration of our now and holds indentifiably at bay “too late.” We are now the makers of our university, and we together will determine its purpose hence- forth. Only we will be judged, not our forebears, according to whether its purpose here is a true continuation of the purpose that it has so long served.

The making of the university is, like the making of the scholarly work for which it exists, the making of a work of art, and in this it is like the making of a life itself. A.R. Ammons’ poem “Garbage” includes the following lines:

...art makes shape, order, meaning, purpose where there was none, or none discernible, none derivable: life, too, if it is to have meaning, must be made meaningful; if it is to have purpose, its purpose must be divined, invented, manifested, held to. . . .

The university’s purpose, too, must be divined, invented, manifested, held to. These words capture the sense in which the university is the product of its own creative will—a will that asserts itself against all that inhibits the pursuit of ideas and ulti- mately against the opposite of being, namely nothing. Strand writes,

N is also for nothing, which, in its all-embracing modesty, is the man- ageable sister of everything. Ah, nothing! About which anything can be said, and is. An absence that knows no bounds. The climax of inaction. . . . It is the original of sleep and the end of life.

The making of the individual work of schol- arship, like the making of the university, like the making of a life, is the assertion that life is worth living principally through the exercise of our profoundly human faculties. The making of the university in our daily lives asserts a collective spirit against experience that would otherwise seem shapeless, orderless, meaningless, purposeless.

Divine, invent, manifest, hold to. These words deserve a place among those that we use to evoke our spirit as a university, for they capture much about the work of each of us as members of the University, as well as much about what it takes to carry that spirit forward as a community. Like proper scholars, we turn to the Oxford English Dictionary for help on this point.

divine, v. 2. To make out by sagac- ity, intuition, or fortunate conjec- ture (that is, in some other way than by actual information); to con- jecture, guess.

The university does not exist to pursue what is easily predictable or what is pred- dictably useful. It requires the intellectual freedom in which to follow sagacity, intu- ition, and fortunate conjecture to what was previously unobtainable and to what is unpredictably useful at some current state of knowledge. In this sense, divine may be a better word than discover, which might imply that the search for truth is something like an Easter-egg hunt in which truth is a set of objects lying about per- fectly formed wherever your mother hid them, and clever girls and boys will in due course find them all. The truth, if that is what we are after, does not lie about waiting to be stumbled upon. It requires the active effort of a mind. This points to our second word:

invent, v. To find out or produce by mental activity.

†b. To compose as a work of
imagination or literary art; to treat in the way of literary or artistic composition.

3. To find out in the way of original contrivance; to create, produce, or construct by original thought. To originate (a new method of action, kind of instrument, etc.).

“Produce by mental activity,” “by origi-
nal thought or ingenuity”—these are the crucial phrases. But the resonance of “in the way of literary or artistic composition” contributes much to our sense of what investigators actually do and what the university is actually about. Invent is perhaps again better than discover, and it may even add something to pioneer, which privileges getting there first at the expense of any contribution to the nature of what one gets to. Like the scholarship that is produced in the laboratory or in the library, the university as an institution is the product of mental activity and original thought or ingenuity continue. But what becomes of the university and its work even in such a case?

manifest, v. l. trans. To make evi-
dent to the eye or to the understand-
ing, to show plainly, disclose, re-
veal.

3.a. To display (a quality, condi-
tion, feeling, etc.) by one’s action or behaviour; to give evidence of pos-
sessing, reveal the presence of, evince.

The purpose of the university must be manifested, just as the work of its indi-
viduals is. Here the purpose of the university runs head-on into the ivory tower, which has no obligations and from which nothing ex-
aposes. In this first instant, this implies the obligation to submit one’s ideas to the marketplace of ideas, where without con-
straint they will be tested, contested, re-
lined. But it also implies the obligation for the university to declare itself to a wider community and to return to that commu-
nity some of what it derives from its pres-
ence within that larger community. This has special resonance for our university. The University of Chicago was conceived by and in the city of Chicago. Our respon-
sibilities to it have from the beginning in-
cluded responsibility to our immediate neighbors, responsibility to return to the people of the city the fruits of our research on it, and responsibility to the city’s heart and soul as a city unfettered by prior ex-
 ample in its own invention of the nature of cit
es, their architecture, and their cultural institutions—a city as original as the most original that will be ever manifested.

What guarantees the university? Who takes responsibility for it?

hold, v. 2.a. To keep from getting away; to keep fast, grasp.

15.a. To do the act of holding; to keep hold, to maintain one’s grasp; to hold on. Also with by (taperon, to).

c. Commerce. To retain goods, etc.; not to sell.

17. To maintain one’s attachment; to remain faithful or attached; to adhere, keep, ‘stick’ to; to abide by.

Here is a good, hard-working monosyl-
labile. No Latin roots here. Only a couple of columns of high English and German. Meanings well into the double digits. Perhaps it is the most important word of all in relation to our tradition, our purpose, and our spirit. If they are to be held to, we alone will do the holding. It places the responsibility for the university squarely where it belongs—on the university community itself to remain faithful or attached, to stick to one another and to our beliefs about what the Univer-
sity is and ought to be.

Sticking to one another turns out to be the hard part of all of this. It is all well and good if every individual in the university sticks to its spirit as we have all come to define it. But it may well be for ought absent a genuine respect on the part of each of us for the many ways in which other individuals work out sticking to this spirit. Here, too, the spirit of the university is as likely to be corrupted from within as from without. It will begin when disciplines or departments or individuals assert their moral superiority over one another. This may simply mean every spirit of privilege enjoyed by one or another disci-
pline in relation to resources provided largely by the outside world. Or it may mask a belief that the public is not in relation to resources provided largely by the outside world constitutes a position of moral superiority. We all have different material requirements for the accomplish-
ment of our work. If we cannot, indepen-
dent of this fact, however, believe in the value of the work of others, it is hard to imagine how we can work together in the spirit in which we boas.

We should perhaps think briefly about the phrase “not to critic.” Critics of both the right and left have complained that the modern university has sold out to the wrong interests or has at least compromised its noblest interests in the pursuit of ideology or material gain. Accountability is conf-
 fused with accounting in the view of Bill Readings (in a book with the title The University in Ruins) and others, and the modern university, having given in to the crassest market forces, advertises itself as standing for excellence, a term that in con-
 sequence has become entirely vacuous. In an article in Critical Inquiry, Dominick LaCapra points out that this critique critically approaches the critique of neoconservatives in its too easy acceptance of an idea of a past—a before—that never really existed.

It is naive to suppose that universities have ever had independent of cultural, economic, and political forces. The ques-
tion is not whether the university’s position in relation to such forces but why and how they do. These are the questions that we must continuously ask about the university just as we ask them about life itself. For Martha Nussbaum the question in a recent paper is “how to live with dignity, as a rational animal, in a world of events that we do not fully control.” On the one hand well say of the university, the question is how it can exist with dignity, as an intellec-
tual community, in a world of events that it does not fully control. If this is the question that we must address in relation to the university, what might be said to be the university’s enabling condition? In a recent lecture on this cam-
 pus, Jacques Derrida took the view that the enabling condition for the university is that it exist precisely without condition. To exist without condition is to require neither consensus nor dissensus (in Readings’s term). It is to insist that the university’s spirit and the diversity, even the rambunctious diversity, of opinion that we know so well. I pledge myself, in all humil-
ity but with all my strength, to hold to this spirit and to its lasting presence in this university. Crescit scientia, vita excolatur.

Don Michael Randel is President of the University of Chicago.

Welcome on Behalf of Students

On behalf of the students of the University of Chicago, I would like to welcome Presi-
dent Don Michael Randel as he joins us all in the Chicago experience. Students are ex-
cited to collaborate with you to further the great academic traditions of our Uni-
versity. We invite you to join in our mission to enhance communication and coopera-
tion among students, administration, faculty, and staff. President Randel, the students of Chicago look forward to work-
ing with you over the coming years.

Deepak Shesh, Class of 2002, is President of Student Government.

Welcome on Behalf of Alumni

I am Kate Bensen, a 1980 graduate of the College and President of the University of Chicago Alumni Association. On behalf of the Alumni Association Board of Gover-
nors and of our 120,000 alumni world-
wide, I welcome you to our very special community. As you may already have dis-
covered, Chicago alumni are highly inde-
pendent and individual. (We've even been
 called eccentric.) But we are united by our ability to think critically, our love of discus-
sion, and our appreciation of the education we received from our alma mater. We look forward to working closely with you to build alumni services and strengthen alumni support for this great University. Welcome!

Katharine L. Bensen, A.B. ’80, is President of the University of Chicago Alumni Asso-
ciation Board of Governors.

Honorary Degrees

DOCTOR OF HUMANE LETTERS

Verna Das, the Krieger-Eisenhower Profes-
sor, Department of Anthropology, the Johns Hopkins University

The candidate was presented by Arjun Appadurai, the Samuel N. Harper Profes-
sor in the Department of Anthropology, the Department of South Asian Languages & Civilizations, and the College.

Verna Das has redefined the anthropology of complex societies in several remark-
able ways. She was the major figure to show how the religious texts of Hindu civilization could be both mirrors and foils for the analysis of contemporary ethnographic materials. She showed how the insights of French structuralism could be combined with the detailed documentation of family histories and per-
nonal narratives in the study of Hindu kin-
ship. In more recent work, she has brought the insights of poststructuralism, the center of medical anthropology, has shown how major public events can be illuminated through the analysis of intimate testimonies and micro-narratives, and has broken new ground in linking the study of ethnic and domestic violence to fundamental problems in language, testimony, and subjectivity. In general, she has infused the anthropology of India, and anthropology more generally, with a renewed sense of how to link small and large social scales and of how to tie intimate experiences with public debates and crises. In a word, she has moved the field to a new understanding of how to study the cultural processes by which civilizations become national societies. At the same time, she is one of the handful of anthropologists to show how the discipline—a fundamental con-
cern of classical anthropology—lives on as a powerful force in the social forms of the contemporary world.

Charles J. Fillmore, Professor Emeritus, Department of Linguistics, University of California, Berkeley

The candidate was presented by Amy Dahlstrom, Associate Professor in the Department of Linguistics and the College.

In nearly four decades of wide-ranging linguistic research, Professor Charles J. Fillmore has fundamentally shaped the course of linguistic theory, especially in the areas of syntax, semantics, and the study of contextual factors known as pragmatics. Many of his proposals—such as cyclic rule application and semantic cases—are now so central to the practice of linguistics that it is almost impossible to imagine the field without them. Likewise, his investigations in pragmatics have thoroughly established the complex and crucial role played by contextual factors in the semantics of indi-
vidual words, cultural frames, and gram-
matical constructions, with important consequences for psychology and other allied fields within cognitive science. All over the world, Professor Fillmore is not only respected for his contributions to linguistics but also famed for his modesty, humor, and kindness. We are delighted to honor him today.
THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO RECORD

The candidate was presented by Edward L. Shaughnessy, the Lorraine J., and Herelle C. Gilman Professor in the History of Science and Medicine, the President of the University, and a member of the Department of East Asian Languages & Civilizations and the College.

Quo Xigui is the leading paleographer of China. Over the course of four decades of unprecedented archaeological discovery in his homeland, he has led the effort to decipher all the various forms of early Chinese writing. From the formulaic prayers engraved in turtledeshell of the Shang dynasty (c. 1200 B.C.) through the philosophical essays written on bamboo strips and on silk of a millennium later, he has consistently demonstrated how to read the archaic graphs and how to interpret the thoughts behind them. His magisterial Chinese Writing is the textbook for all who wish to understand how this remarkable script developed.

Professor Quo has also contributed greatly to the ongoing reinterpretation of early Chinese cultural history. He has never beenaverse to challenging received opinion wherever the palaeographic evidence has led him, and the range of topics on which he has published, from agriculture to music to law to medicine, is astonishing. Known for his uncompromising honesty, Quo Xigui is a model of the scholarly citizen.

DOCTOR OF SCIENCE

David J. Aldous, Professor, Department of Statistics, University of California, Berkeley

The candidate was presented by Michael Stein, Professor Emeritus in the Department of Statistics and the College; Chairman of the Department of Statistics.

David Aldous has made profound contributions to a stunning array of areas in probability, particularly discrete and applied probability. His early work in classical probability demonstrated his ability to find highly original and unified approaches to problems that had previously been addressed by a variety of technicallly difficult methods.

Professor Aldous has been even more influential in his research in discrete prob-

ability and its applications to problems in biology, physics, and especially computer science. He introduced and developed the notion of rapidly mixing Markov chains, which has turned out to be a key mathematical tool for studying how fast Markov chain Monte Carlo methods converge to the correct answer. This work has made him a leader in the theory of computing. His algorithm for sampling spanning trees at random contains the essential idea behind what is known as perfect sampling, which is a topic of intense current interest in the theory of algorithms and in computational statistics. In just 250 pages, his 1993 monograph Probability Approximations via the Poisson Clumping Heuristic solves over 100 astonishingly varied and difficult problems in probability theory using a rela-
	ively straightforward recipe.

The breadth and depth of Professor Aldous’s mathematical results clearly place him among the top living developers of mathematical probability. That this same person is also at the leading active applied probabilist in the world and a ma-
jor contributor to the theory of computing is simply amazing.

John N. Bahcall, the Richard Black Professor, School of Natural Sciences, the Institute for Advanced Study, and Visiting Professor, Princeton University

The candidate was presented by Michael S. Turner, the Bruce V. and Diana M. Rauner Distinguished Service Professor in the Departments of Astronomy & Astrophysics and the Physics, the Enrico Fermi Institute, and the College; Chairman of the Depart-
ment of Astronomy & Astrophysics.

Without the insight and understanding provided by theory, astronomers would be, in Tycho Brahe’s words, blind watchers of the sky. John Bahcall is a theoretical astrophysicist whose work has given astrophysicists exceptional vision. His contributions to our understanding of the Universe span completely, from our own sun to the most distant quasars at the visible edge of the Universe. Bahcall’s mathematical models of the sun have for three decades been the standard and have guided the efforts to detect the neutrinos produced by the nuclear reactions that power it. When solar neutri-

nos were detected by the Davis experiment and others, the precision of Bahcall’s calculations allowed new properties of the neutrino to be discovered. As Professor of Astrophysics at the Insti-
tute for Advanced Study for the past thirty years, John Bahcall has mentored many of the leading theoretical astrophysicists of the past generation as well as the careers of numerous others. Bahcall was a driving force behind the Hubble Space Tele-
scope, and chaired Astronomy’s Decadal Survey for the 1990s. This report, known as the Bahcall Survey, provided the vision that led to the greatest decade of discovery in astrophysics, in which many of the boldest hopes of earlier scientists have not been blind watchers of the sky.

Raymond Davis, Jr., Research Professor, Department of Physics and Astronomy, University of Pennsylvania

The candidate was presented by James W. Cronin, University Professor Emeritus in the Departments of Physics and Astronomy, & Astrophysics, the Enrico Fermi Institute, and the College.

In the latter half of the nineteenth century, a battle raged over the age of the solar system. The opponents were biologists and geologists as represented by Charles Darwin and physicists as represented by Lord Kelvin. The naturalists predicted an age greater than 300 million years while the physicists predicted an age greater than 3 billion years. Then, in seminal work, John Bahcall showed that in 100,000 gal-

axies of cleaning fluid a few of the solar neutrinos would be captured each week producing a radioactive argon atom. Raymond Davis showed how to use the solar neutrinos to collect those few atoms, concentrate them in a Geiger counter, and detect their decay. Only a confident and daring scien-

tist would begin such an adventure. The nature of the solar furnace was confirmed and serendipitous discoveries concerning the nature of neutrinos were made as well.

Martin F. Gellert, Chief, Section of Mo-

lecular Genetics, Laboratory of Molecular Biology, National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases, National Institutes of Health

The candidate was presented by Lucia B. Rothman-Denes, Professor in the Depar-
tment of Molecular Genetics & Cell Biol-

ger, the Committee on Genetics, and the College.

Martin Gellert is renowned for his contri-

butions to our understanding of how cells rearrange, manipulate, and preserve their genomes. His passion for DNA enzymol-

ogy began with the discovery and charac-
terization of an enzyme that joins DNA ends, providing crucial insights into how cells replicate and process their DNA. His seminal contributions to the field of DNA recombination, and VI(D) immunoglobu-

lin gene recombination in particular, have profound implications for the evolution of the immune system, DNA mutations in cancer and the cell cycle. His achievements have been fundamental both to basic sci-

ence and the technological development of vaccines and have guided the efforts to ameliorate the effects of stereotypes in our schools.

In addition to his extraordinary research achievements, Professor Gellert’s record of undergraduate teaching and graduate student mentoring is exceptional, and he has earned a reputation for being both a generous colleague and an extraordinary visionary. Although Professor Steele was never a student at the University of Chi-

cago, his mother was a student here, his father-in-law served on the Board of the Divinity School, and Professor Steele serves on the External Advisory Committee to the University of Chicago’s Social Psychology Program. In his intelligence, intensity, breadth, and eloquence, Professor Steele embodies the life of the mind.

Alan Walker, Distinguished Professor, De-

partments of Anthropology and Biology, Pennsylvania State University

The candidate was presented by Russell H. Tuttel, Professor in the Department of Anthropology, the Committee on Evolu-
tionary Biology, the Morris Fishbein Center for the History of Science and Medicine, and the College.

For more than three decades, Alan Walker has been a flagbearer for an important line of research on early hominids that has been confirmed, reassessed and interpre-

tation of stunning specimens, which are of
major theoretical import to modeling anthropoid phylogeny. His innovative research is broadly interdisciplinary, spanning paleontology, geology, raphonomy, primatology, functional morphology, nutritional science and other fields that are encompassed by evolutionary biology. The products of his studies in Kenya have been of immense popular and scholarly interest internationally.

Notable among Professor Walker’s many contributions to hominid evolution—biology are the meticulous excavation, restoration, and award-winning monograph of a 1.5-million-year-old, nearly complete subadult skeleton (KNM-WT 15000), dubbed the “Turkana Boy,” from Nakakonora, west of Lake Turkana, Kenya; the recovery, assembly, and analysis of the 2.5-million-year-old “Black Skull” (KNM-WT 17000), which forced major revisions of hominid phylogenetic models; and, the interpretation of specimens from east of Lake Turkana, which confirmed that during the Pliocene and Early Pleistocene there were a variety of hominid species, some of which were sympatric. Thereafter, he continued to add branches to the bush, the most recent addition being the 4-million-year-old species Australopithecus anamensis.

Professor Walker has also contributed new species—Afropithecus, Turkana pichie, Sambulies—to the large pantheon of Miocene anthropoid primates, again via discoveries and analyses of specimens from the vicinity of Lake Victoria, Kenya, yielded a wealth of specimens and contextual information that allows well-founded functional and ecological interpretations of Miocene apes from that region.

One cannot say without hyperbole that we would be vastly more ignorant of our ancient heritage it were not for the labors and ingenuity of Professor Alan Walker.

Inaugural Luncheon Remarks

By Geoffrey R. Stone

November 2, 2000

At other colleges and universities, it is commonplace for honorary degrees to be bestowed upon con- gressmen and comedians, shortstops and sopranos, moguls and movie stars. Not so at the University of Chicago. As in so many ways, we follow our own path to honor.

Robert Maynard Hutchins once ob- served, “It is the glory of the University of Chicago that, since its founding, . . . it has had a sense of mission. It has had an idea, a purpose.” Many people have attempted over the years to articulate this idea, this purpose. In my view, Edward Levi said it best: “Universities,” he explained, “are the custodians, not only of the many cultures of man, but of the rational process itself. Universities,” he said, “are not neutral. They do exist for the propagation of a special point of view: namely, the worthwhileness of the intellectual pursuit of truth—using man’s highest powers, struggling against the irratiabilities which corrupt thought, and standing against the impotence of those who have lost faith in reason.”

The history of honorary degrees at the University of Chicago has evolved over time to meet this idea, this purpose. At the very founding of the University, in the same egalitarian spirit that led to the still-prevail- ing practice of not using such titles as “Professor Smith” or “Doctor Jones,” the University declared in 1891 that “no honor degree shall be conferred by the University.”

This policy got off to a rather limping start, however, for in 1898 President William Rainey Harper, always the pragmatist, changed his mind on this question when his fledgling University was unexpectedly pre- served with the opportunity to award an honorary degree to the President of the United States, William McKinley. The tem- plate for national publicity was, frankly, too great for Harper to resist.

Over the next fifty years, the University struggled to find a precedent, awarding honorary degrees to two presidents of the United States, a bevy of ambassadors, theologians, educators, and philanthropists, the Crown Prince of Denmark, and many accomplished scholars and scientists.

All this changed, however, with the University’s fiftieth anniversary convoca- tion in 1941. At that event, the University awarded thirty-five honorary degrees to what it described as “the world’s most distinguished scientists and scholars.”

As the University explained at the time: “The men and women selected to receive [these honorary] degrees are drawn from the pio- neering fringe of advanced learning. Scien- tists and scholars in many cases unknown to the general public, they have made funda- mental and far-reaching contributions to the underlying bases of their respective fields of learning.”

By 1948, the University’s governing policy was clearly and unequivocally stated by President Hutchins: “The only justifica- tion for honorary degrees” at the Univer- sity of Chicago, he declared, “is to promote the things we are most interested in—scholar- ship and contributions to science and understanding.”

This policy has been our guiding light ever since, and as Edward Levi observed some thirty years ago, it is the essential “criterion of scholarship” that makes the University of Chicago’s “policy on honorary degrees different from that of . . . other institutions.”

How seriously do we take this policy? In 1959, it was suggested by the mayor that the University award an honorary degree to Queen Elizabeth on the occasion of her state visit to Chicago. The proposal was unanimously rejected by the relevant fac- ulty committee, with the quip, “What books has she written?”

Forty years later, when the White House invited the University to invite the presi- dent of the United States to speak at our June convocation, representatives of the University explained as graciously as pos- sible to representatives of the White House that, unlike other institutions, the Univer- sity of Chicago does not offer honorary degrees to presidents of the United States. We did not want a misunderstanding. The representatives of the White House replied that they were well aware of the University’s policy, though it was clear they did not much like it.

Thus, for the past half-century every hon- orary degree awarded by the University of Chicago, except for those given to former Presidents of the University and Chairman of the Board, has been bestowed, in Hutchins’s words, “to celebrate the things we most care about—in scholarship and contributions to science and understanding.”

Why do we follow this rather peculiar path to honor? Our history suggests three reasons. First, this is both an expression of our commitment to the most tradi- tional and fundamental purposes of our work, and an expression of an intellectual outlook that allows us to refine and give meaning to our own knowledge of the limits of our capac- ity to judge excellence as well. And third, we embrace this policy be- cause it raises our own aspirations. By honoring those who are at “the pioneering fringe of advanced learning,” we spur our- selves to greater achievement. Excellence incites excellence. As Thomas Carlyle once observed: “Show me the man you honor, and I will show you the kind of man you are, for it shows me . . . what kind of man you long to be.”

There are two additional facets of our policy I should note, if only in passing. First, in identifying candidates for honor- ary degrees, we seek individuals who are not only at “the pioneering fringe of advanced learning,” but also who have already achieved excellence. This is a criterion we take seriously. For the University to honor an individual who already is laden with honors might show that we are no longer at the forefront of our field. And second, our policy requires that we have a legitimate basis for honoring each candidate. Thus, for the University to confer an honorary degree upon an individual who has not already been acknowledged by his peers, we must have a well-founded basis for believing that the candidate’s achievements might be recognized more broadly precisely because we have honored them. This is a fundamental part of our tradition. Indeed, several years ago we faced a minor crisis. Well into the course of our review process, a nominee for an honorary degree was awarded the Nobel Prize. The faculty agonized over whether this constitu- tuted a disqualification. Finally, however, the faculty decided that we could proceed with the honorary degree because we had clearly discerned the excellence of the candidate’s contributions first.

Second, I should say just a word about process. Each year, every academic unit of the University is invited to submit nomina- tions for honorary degrees. Such nomina- tions must not only be endorsed by the faculty of the nominating school or depart- ment, but also must include, and again I quote from our policy, “supporting letters from distinguished scholars in institutions outside the University of Chicago contain- ing their evaluations of the scholarly achievements of the nominee.”

These nominations are then reviewed and evaluated by the cognizant dean, by the nine-member faculty Committee on Hon- orary Degrees, by the seven-member Com- mittee of the Council of the University Senate, by the fifty-one–member Council of the University Senate, by the Provost, by the President, and, finally, by the Board of Trustees of the University. Those of you who are here today as our honorees must be the rather stunned to learn that we’ve been thinking about you so hard and for so long. This is, for us, a serious business. But it is a truly joyful one as well. For in appreci- ating the excellence of others, we celebrate and rediscover our own, most fundamental values. In the heat of debating among our- selves whom to honor—and we do debate these issues—we redefine and reaffirm the University of Chicago’s most central idea and purpose, its very raison d’etre. And this we do with high spirits and with joy.

Each of our honorees will be formally introduced at the convocation later this afternoon. For now, however, I would ask each of you, our honorees, to stand, so we can acknowledge your graciousness in join- ing us on this historic day in the life of our University.

Please join me in a toast to these remark- able individuals who exemplify what we hold most dear: “To the pursuit of knowledge.”

Geoffrey R. Stone is the Harry Kalven Jr., 1952, Professor of Law and the Director of the School and the College, and Provost of the University.
I can’t believe how much we have accomplished. Your successful project was instrumental in my decision to major in economics. It demonstrated the importance of intercepting change before it occurs. Our work together was a turning point in my academic career. I am confident that the skills I have acquired will serve me well in my future endeavors. Thank you for being such a great mentor and friend.
percent return on private equity invest-
ments. Both the fund’s one-year percentage
gain and one-year absolute dollar gain were
the sixth highest among major universities
publishing this information.

The budget implications are significant
and will be reflected in one long-range
planning. Results like that of year 2000

would have been unimaginable to my
father, who even in his time was a pioneer
in unorthodox investments for universities.
Both skill and luck play crucial roles.
Thank you, Jim Crown, Chairman of the
Investment Committee, and Philip Halpern,
Director of Investment Officer, for the skill side.
It’s all true.

In conclusion, many exciting things are


the life of a soldier, with long periods of
boredom interrupted by short periods of
terror). The most important of these ex-
flections are affectionately known as the
“Big Five.” In a classic analysis, Professor
Emeritus David Raup calculated that each of
the Big Five removes from 70 percent to,
in one case, a staggering 95 percent of the
species living in the sea. These are huge,
almost unimaginable losses. I have been
especially interested in the evolutionary
and ecological consequences of those events.
The Big Five have restructured ecosys-
tems and irrevocably altered the rates of
development of many groups—one sees the
dinosaurs or the trilobites. This is true, in
part, because the victims and survivors of mass
extinctions don’t correspond to the relative success
of lineages during normal times. They are not
random, but the rules of extinction and
survival change at these crucial intervals.
This can break the dominance of successful
groups and allow marginal ones to rise in
their place—hence the rise of the mammals.
Furthermore, the winners during the recov-
ery phase are just a subset of the survivors.
Some lineages win the extinction only to lose
the recovery. And others are cata-
pelled to unexpected prominence. Who
knows? It is not preordained. Before
immediately after the dinosaurs went
under, for example, would have been six-foot-tall
carnivorous birds, looking a bit like eagles
or hawks? But here, too, some
broad rules are beginning to emerge.
As with the origin of novelties, analyz-
ing extinctions and recoveries not just
through time but in space has produced
some surprises. For example, following the
extinction that ended the Mesozoic era 65
million years ago—which is the reason why
furry mammals instead of scaly dinosaurs run the show these days—North America
shows striking evolutionary pulses and
crashes not seen anywhere else. That
is fascinating in itself, but there is
an additional twist: invaders from other conti-
nents became a far larger role in the oceanic
recovery from this mass extinction in North
America than elsewhere. This spatial dy-
namic, with some regions donors and others
recipients of biodiversity, was quite
unexpected given the global nature of the
extinction event itself. It points the way
to future mass extinctions, since the rules of
covers unfold and how interchanges
among regions can enrich or impoverish
the post-extinction world.

These interchanges are of more
than academic interest, because human-medi-
ated invasions—rats, domesticated plants
and animals, insect pests—are one of
the major stresses being imposed on today’s
biosphere. So the more we can learn about
their causes, for example the imbalance or asymmetry in invasions I just described and
their consequences, the better.

Because we are beginning to sort out the
extinction rules and are making headway
on the rules that govern recovery dynamics,
we now have some hard data for evaluating
present day and projected losses. After all,
the fossil record shows us what happens when
ecological communities collapse or
go to pieces as different species migrate at
different rates and in different directions. It
shows us what happens when groups of
different vulnerability go into parallel de-
clines, when ecological stresses relax after
prolonged or severe episodes, and when
groups with different intrinsic evolution-
ary rates diversify in a depleted world awash
in biological invaders. Many of these things
are happening now. And clearly it is far
better to use the events in the fossil record
as a guide than to move forward and run
the uncontrolled experiment blindly today.

With all this talk of recoveries, you
might go home tonight thinking that the fossil
record shows that catastrophe and
recovery is a dime a dozen. But there is
nothing to worry about because Mother
Nature will right herself soon enough. And
that may be true over the broad sweep of
geologic time. But a key message of the
fossil record is the great disparity of the
time scales of extinctions and recovery.
Extinctions can be stunningly quick but recov-
eryes are painfully slow on human time
scales: it takes time to rebuild ecosystems and
exploit vacant niches. The mammals
did inherit the earth from the dinosaurs,
evolving grazers on the land, whales in the
sea, and bats in the sky. But it took them
about ten million years to do it—a bolt of
evolutionary lightning for a geologist, a
blip and you’ve got another thriving, di-
verse ecosystem. But it is unimaginably
slow compared to a human lifetime or even
the total lifespan of our species so far.

Our present situation has not reached
the massive proportions of the Big Five
extinction of the fossil record—read it
could if left unchecked, but luckily we are
not there yet. I say luckily because the Big
Five were not extinctions that actually see disturbances in the carbon cycle,
atmospheric and ocean chemistry, and other
basic components of the global environ-
ments. This is one of many situations where
the dynamics of the biosphere impinge di-
rectly on the nature of our physical world.

I’m a great honor to be asked to speak
on this very special occasion. You might
think it a bit strange, as we celebrate the
inauguration of a new University
President and thus are very much look-
ing towards the future, that the faculty
speaker tonight is a paleontologist, which
is how most of us paleontologists got
early in the profession. The
But it is much more than that. The
Chicago school has been the pioneer in
paleontology we do at Chicago. Over the
past twenty years, the program here has
evoluted into what was called in the New
York Times last year “the Chicago school of
paleontology.” And although relatively
small, this community of faculty and stu-
dents is very much a school as measured not
simply by its national and international
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a “distinctive approach” that attempts “to
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as a parade of spectacular evolutionary
transgressions, grotesqueries, and disasters. That
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FEBRUARY 15, 2001

By David Jablonski

“The Future of the Fossil Record”

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It is also important to realize that the fossil record can provide a window into the potential future of biodiversity long before we come to extinction intensities equal to the Big Five. Here, I will swing to the other extreme, the last two million years.

The past two million years have seen the most recent bout of ice ages, with about twenty glacial cycles that put the future sites of Chicago, New York, and London repeatedly under a mile of ice. These seem to the untrained eye to be very stressful times, and believe me a Hyde Park winter is only a pale shadow of glacial conditions, although it may not seem that way out on the Point at sunrise in January. But there is remarkably little extinction during an ice age. The one exception is the demise of large mammals like the mastodon and the woolly mammoth just 18,000 years ago, but these came at the end of the last ice age and probably had more to do with human hunting than climate.

So how did plants and animals cope with these huge climate swings? The answer is simple on both land and sea: they moved around, each species at its own rate, shifting south in the glacials, moving back north as the ice retreated. So what we have within them can track localized climates and still remain on protected ground. The fossil record is not just a laboratory, it is a predictive tool.

There are many reasons why Chicago has been such a boon to my own research and more generally has fostered such a strong program of research and teaching in paleontology. The immediate one, of course, is the University’s ability to attract and retain superb faculty and students. As one measure of quality, the paleontology group in Geophysical Sciences has the longest roster in the world of recipients of the Schuchert Award, which is the annual award for outstanding paleontologist under the age of forty and is thus the equivalent of the Clarke Medal in economics. Seven of these awards have gone to the Chicago faculty—every faculty member who has been eligible for the award since its inception has received it, and our former students are beginning to win them as well. We suffered a grave loss with the death of Jack Sepkoski last year, and we are working hard to bring ourselves back up to strength, hoping to make an appointment in the near future that will not just strengthen existing research but expand our scientific horizons.

In addition to quality, the diversity and the commitment of our scholars are key, and this works on several levels at Chicago. I have already mentioned that there is exceptional diversity across the earth sciences at the departmental level in geophysical sciences. This diversity doesn’t simply keep the intellectual pot boiling, it permits us the luxury—and the burden—of training students to design and carry out independent research from the very start of their careers. They don’t simply pursue some aspect of their adviser’s work. It is more labor-intensive for both sides, but the rewards are obvious from the academic success of our students, who really hit the ground running. In fact the biggest threat to the primacy of our program may be that one of our competitors gets smart and hires two or three of our students at once, and really gives us a run for our money.

Our paleontology program is also part of an even broader intellectual community, the Committee on Evolutionary Biology (C.E.B.). This committee draws on faculty from all four divisions of the University, and includes strong participation from the Field Museum, with additional faculty at the Brookfield Zoo and Argonne National Laboratory. C.E.B. brings together for the purposes of graduate education—and not incidentally the education of our fast-flung faculty—paleontologists, ecologists, bio-mechanics, stratigraphers, developmental biologists, geneticists, builders of evolutionary trees, conservation biologists, and many more in a remarkably productive partnership.

This sort of situation doesn’t just happen by itself, particularly over long periods of time, as other universities have found when they try to build C.E.B.s of their own. It takes a strong dose of academic altruism among the faculty, because every one of them has a home department that also requires a serious commitment. But just as importantly, it needs a nurturing administration, and that means not only resources, which are essential, but also a real lack of administrative impediments: minimal bureaucracy, a structure that ensures that faculty are not penalized for team-teaching courses or teaching in multiple divisions or serving as advisers across departments and divisions, an admissions process committed to excellence and intellectual diversity, and freedom of students to draw upon any faculty member in any part of the whole enterprise.

All of these factors and many more have come together at Chicago, in what has been for several decades an extraordinary community of dedicated earth and life scientists. We enjoy an unparalleled combination of breadth and depth here at Chicago, working from the scale of an entire past world to a molecule of DNA in a beaker, over half a billion years of multicellular life in the oceans to a generation of fruitflies in the lab. The Chicago school of paleontology is embedded in this unique setting, and under those circumstances I would venture to say that the future of the fossil record is looking very promising indeed.

David Jablonski is Professor in the Department of Geophysical Sciences, the Committee on Evolutionary Biology, and the College.