

October 16, 1997

Centennial convocation address

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Centennial Convocation Address October 16, 1997 Blackman Auditorium

Chairman [George] Matthews, chancellor [Kenneth] Ryder, president emeritus [John] Curry, faculty, students, staff, alumni, honored delegates from sister institutions and friends of Northeastern, thank you for joining us on this festive occasion and welcome to our home. Welcome to you all.

It is a special pleasure for me, as a sometime historian of higher education in Massachusetts, to be hosting this Centennial Convocation. As I stand before you, I can't help wondering what our first president Frank Palmer Speare would feel if he were here with us this afternoon. Would he recognize the splendor of this gathering - and the expanse of this campus - as extensions of ideas he conceived a century ago? Did he ever imagine that the institution he inaugurated would enjoy such a day as this?

We can only surmise. I suspect, however, President Speare would not be surprised. Despite the changes of the past century, as the old Evening Institute of the YMCA evolved into a national research university, the ideals Speare used to found Northeastern 99 years ago continue to be evident in every corner of this campus.

Speare's vision of an educational institution that would prepare its students for the practical worlds of work and service have

remained central to the spirit of Northeastern. That commitment will carry us into our second hundred years as we recognize that the workplace is still evolving and that we must change yet again. Our goal of fostering a new form of education that fully integrates the three great educational traditions on which we are based - professional education, liberal education and apprenticeship - will provide the nation with a model of learning appropriate for the 21st century, even as it preserves traditions that took root among us in the 19th.

Speare's idea that Boston should support an institution of opportunity for young men and working adults of modest means remains alive among us also. Over the years our belief in access at Northeastern has led us to extend our reach in ever widening rings and we will continue in the next century to reach out to those with more ambition, more energy, more talent than advantage. We are committed to being an ever more inclusive expression of what we set out to be: a place of opportunity for all those with determination and ability. And a pluralistic community that welcomes the contributions of people from all backgrounds.

Speare also taught us to cherish our Boston home, its people, its enterprises, its cultural riches and its social challenges. The idea that Boston should have a university whose programs speak directly to the concerns of the city is a central tenet of ours and it will continue to be even as we extend our reach nationally and internationally.

And so today if Northeastern is known around the world as an innovator in higher education it is because we have never lost sight of our founding principles. Throughout the tenure of President [Carl] Ell, who built upon the foundations laid down by Speare, and his successor President [Asa] Knowles, and then President Ryder, and then my immediate predecessor President Curry, this institution has held fast to the ideals of a place rooted in opportunity, committed to practice-oriented education and committed to engagement with the city.

Today, with a solid foundation, unprecedented support from our graduates, and great aspirations, we begin a yearlong celebration

recognizing the contributions of those who have made this day possible. If our future looks bright, it is because of the dedication and hard work of so many who are here today, and so many others who have come before - educators, alumni, friends of this campus. And it is my privilege, as the sixth president of Northeastern, to assure all those who care about this institution, all those who love this institution, that we will nurture the values for which we have always stood even as we seek new forms of contribution and extended levels of recognition in the century that lies ahead.

Thank you.

Other addresses:

1998

- [State of the University Address](#), October 8, 1998
- [Address to the Northeastern Corporation](#), May 21, 1998

1997

- [Remarks before the National Commission on the Cost of Higher Education](#), November 7, 1997
- [State of the University Address](#), September 29, 1997
- [Address to the Northeastern Corporation](#), May 28, 1997
- [Remarks to the Boston Chamber of Commerce](#), April 4, 1997
- [Address to the University Community](#), February 27, 1997
- [Inaugural Address](#), January 17, 1997

1996

- [State of the University Address](#), September 30, 1996
- [Acceptance Remarks to the University Community](#), May 29, 1996

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