



HENDRIX

C O L L E G E

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Be Hendrix.

ADDRESS GIVEN BY WILLIAM M. TSUTSUI AT HIS INAUGURATION AS THE 11TH PRESIDENT OF HENDRIX COLLEGE, APRIL 18, 2015.

Thank you all for being here today, Hendrix students and alums, faculty and staff, trustees and former trustees, distinguished guests from around Arkansas, the nation, and the world, friends and family. It feels slightly unreal, exciting, terrifying, and, above all, humbling to be standing here before you. To be entrusted with the office of president of this institution is, as my predecessors in the audience are well aware, a huge honor and a huge responsibility. The very thought of leading a college like Hendrix with such a rich history, such a strong character, so much to be proud of, and so much to look forward to, is daunting as well as exhilarating. But I am reassured this afternoon, seeing all of you here in this beautiful place and thinking of the many thousands of members of the Hendrix family that could not join us in person today, that I am not alone as I take on this new role. While I will review more spreadsheets, attend more committee meetings, shake more hands, and eat more BBQ on behalf of Hendrix than the rest of you will, it is a source of comfort and strength to me to know that the future of Hendrix rests not just on my shoulders, but with all of us who have been touched by this college and care so passionately about it.

Now as everyone here is, I think, aware, I was announced as the eleventh president of Hendrix College on November 1st, 2013. And as of today, I have been on the payroll here for almost exactly ten-and-a-half months. Which means I have had the longest probationary appointment in the history of any Hendrix employee ever. Putting it another way, after a short courtship, the college and I had a long engagement, and this afternoon we are finally tying the knot. I've been asked many times why it took us so long to come to this point. Why not a shotgun inauguration in September or a stealthy elopement last October? Why almost a year of cohabitation, shackin' up in Fausett Hall?

Partly, of course, it was logistical. Bringing together a series of events as complex as an inauguration is no small task and almost everyone on this campus had a hand in the making of this week's festivities. This has been a huge community undertaking, planned with almost military precision, and executed with good humor and endless care by small armies of groundskeepers and facilities staff, cooks and servers, graphic designers and media specialists, faculty marshals, alumni volunteers, inflatable-Godzilla wranglers, student musicians and singers, service project members, and officers from Social Committee and Campus Kitty. I am so grateful to all of these people.

Some cynical folks have suggested that we waited until today for the inauguration so that we would have a ready-made audience of loyal alums. Otherwise, as I overheard whispered in the hallways of campus, who else was going to turn up to listen to a historian in funny clothes and a necklace drone on about the liberal arts for 30 minutes.

For me, though, I can tell you why I wanted to wait so long for this day, this ceremony, and this address to the extended Hendrix family. Eight months ago, when the students began arriving back in Conway and I declared myself the college's oldest freshman, I barely knew this campus and this community. I had learned the names of the buildings, recognized lots of faces, and had begun to discover what made the college so special, but I am the first to admit that I did not know Hendrix. Today, while I still guarantee that I have a great deal to learn,

I feel more confident that I am coming to understand and fully appreciate this place, and that I can speak to you today with knowledge and passion (even if not yet with full authority) on the past, present, and future of Hendrix College.

Ever since the moving van from Dallas unloaded Marjorie and me on Winfield Street, I have tried to immerse myself in the life of this campus, to meet Hendrix graduates, parents, prospective students, and friends, to listen, learn, and live the college. I have visited classes in medical ethics, French phonetics, and molecular genetics. I have been to choir concerts, waltz nights, musical recitals, art shows, and theatrical performances. I've attended a game, match, meet, or practice for every one of the intercollegiate sports we play. (And the volleyball team even shared some of their bling from winning the conference championship with me.) I've been to Shirttails, cooked with international students in Culinary Club, participated in a zumbathon, judged a songwriting contest, and have a cameo role at next week's Red Brick Film Festival. I have met alums over pulled pork at United Methodist church halls across Arkansas, in the stands at the football stadium, in the check-out line at Kroger's, in a pancake house in rural Wyoming, and in cities around the country. I have spent time every month with the college staff, answering phones at the switchboard, washing dishes in the Caf, swabbing bathrooms in Martin Hall, and, most recently, shoveling shells in the Pecan Court. I vowed to have lunch with every current faculty member in a small group and, to date, have corralled 106 out of 120 into sitting, eating, and talking with me. And I have become one with the Hendrix Bubble: Marjorie and I have worn grooves in the paths walking our dog around campus and feel wonderfully content in a world bounded by Bailey Library, the Preserve, the WAC, Captain Martin's grave, and the Turtle Pond. In short, I can speak to you today as someone who calls Hendrix home and who shares with you a deep affection and admiration for this college and its community.

When, back in the fall, I gave my first interview to *The Profile*, the student newspaper, the freshman reporter asked me what my biggest surprise had been in coming to Hendrix. I replied immediately that my biggest surprise was not being more surprised. At Hendrix, what you see is what you get and the reputation of this institution is, as I have found, well aligned with the reality of the college today. In particular, if I were asked to tease apart what distinguishes Hendrix, and really makes us who we are and have been, I would point to three intertwined qualities that I have observed, embraced, and celebrated here: our community, our fearlessness in challenging ourselves and others, and something hard to capture in words, that spirit (perhaps I should call it) of being Hendrix.

Our college long has, and happily continues to be, distinguished by a strong, cohesive, and supportive community. As soon as you set foot on this campus, the sense of that collectivity is ever about you: in the constant buzz of student activity around the SLTC, in poetry readings at Murphy House, in less sedate Saturday night gatherings in the Brick Pit, in classes and office hours, in the bleachers at a softball game, during a service in Greene Chapel, in the spirited (sometimes bare-fisted) democracy of faculty meetings, in the thousands of earnest conversations, chance encounters, and ephemeral texts and tweets that take place in hallways and stairwells, locker rooms and computer labs, apartment suites and parking lots. This spirit of community, the feeling of belonging to Hendrix and of caring deeply, even passionately, about the college and the people that define it even extends far beyond the low walls that circle this campus. The Hendrix Mafia, that shadowy network of alums in Arkansas and beyond, is real, is formidable, and is a marvelous thing. The families of Hendrix students and grads — parents and grandparents, sisters and brothers, husbands, wives, and partners — are some of our most devoted supporters. Community is something authentic here at Hendrix: it is not an abstract notion or a convenient fiction or a marketing slogan. Community at Hendrix is a welcoming handshake, a shoulder to cry on, and an occasional kick in the backside; a call to action and a collective conscience; a guarantee of acceptance and understanding. Community at Hendrix is a generous, genuine, affirming embrace that lasts a lifetime, a bear-hug that never ends, with friends and classmates, faculty and staff, those who have gone before, and those who someday will follow.

But Hendrix College is also, as all of us here today know, very much about rigor, about high standards both academic and personal, about the challenge (that comes both from within and from without) to be the best

that one can possibly be. This is a serious place, a place that values (and rewards) effort and achievement, and a place that encourages, even inspires, excellence and accomplishment, character and integrity. Hendrix is not for slouches; there is no hiding in the back row here, no coasting through for four years, no good enough will do. I have been consistently impressed by the high expectations that professors and coaches have for their students, that students have for their peers, and that the students have for themselves. And, as I travel around the state and hear what people think about Hendrix, our graduates, and the kind of recruits we consistently attract, the word that gets mentioned most often is “smart.” Ours is a community of bright, thoughtful, talented individuals, not conceited or obnoxious, but confident, creative, and eager for a challenge. As one faculty member (and alum) described the college to me, it is full of overachievers, people with curious, restless minds, people who feel compelled to do more, do better, and do right.

And then there is that other quality that so strongly distinguishes our community, that elusive, indefinable, endearing part of our collective character that some call quirky but which I (and many others on campus) would rather refer to simply as being Hendrixy. There is no set yardstick out there for Hendrixy, no rubric one can apply or checklist one must satisfy. Yet each of us in this community has some implicit standard, some criterion that we use to approvingly deem an act or a situation, a person or a group, an Odyssey project or an April Fool’s joke to be Hendrixy. For me, at least, for something to be Hendrixy it must be creative and clever, perpendicular to convention, unexpected and a bit whimsical, thought-provoking to be sure, but never, ever mean-spirited. I like to imagine that a president with a weakness for cowboy boots, an obsession with smoked meat, and an unnatural interest in a reptilian Japanese movie monster is genuinely Hendrixy. But I may just be kidding myself. What is undeniably Hendrixy is a community that good-naturedly and heartily accepts such an idiosyncratic CEO.

The character of Hendrix, in other words, is something quite remarkable. This is a place where we welcome young people of talent and potential, independent spirits, free thinkers, and dreamers; where our community encourages, empowers, and challenges; where students build, from friends and fellowship, classwork and internships, study abroad and sportsmanship, the sure foundations for lives of personal fulfillment, professional accomplishment, engaged citizenship, and selfless service. This wondrous alchemy continues every day, every semester, and every year on this campus thanks to the tireless work of our faculty and staff, under-compensated and overstretched, who (to their eternal credit) find it so hard to say no to a student request or turn their backs on a community need. And, of course, Hendrix is the place which it is today because of its heritage: the faculty, staff, and trustees of decades past, the generations of students and alumni, the families who every August have entrusted their sons and daughters to us, the strength from the historic relationship with the United Methodist Church, the foresight of generous donors, the benefit of being in a dynamic, entrepreneurial community like Conway, the wise decisions and minor miscues, the collective vision and the institutional ambition, the serendipitous developments and the consequences of just plain dumb luck. There is something almost miraculous in the history of Hendrix and something undeniably wonderful in the fact that this place, its mission, and its spirit endure and indeed flourish even today.

And yet, on an almost daily basis now, it seems the American media is telling us that Hendrix and places like it, small residential liberal arts colleges, are anachronisms in the landscape of twenty-first-century higher education, institutional dinosaurs too traditional, too complacent, too rural, too analog, too expensive, too exclusive, and too insular to possibly survive. All of us are only too familiar with the details of the talking heads’ diagnosis of the fatal ills of the liberal arts, so I will not rehash them. In any case, I have no interest in answering the critics here. After all, this is a gathering of true believers, who understand the promise of the liberal arts and have been enriched by all that a Hendrix education offers. More importantly, though, I feel no need to “defend” the liberal arts or apologize for them. All too often, advocates for the liberal arts have fallen back on their heels, ceded the initiative to skeptics and naysayers, and become lost in a haze of well-meaning but unconvincing generalities and abstractions. One need only look at Hendrix — who we are and what we do — to blunt the barbs of media critics. Look at the academic profile of our recruits; look at our retention and graduation rates, the highest in this state; look at our record of admissions to top-tier professional schools

and doctoral programs; look at the list of competitive fellowships and grants won by our students; look at the loan debt of our graduates, far lower than the national and even the Arkansas averages; look around you at the success of our alumni, who have excelled on Main Street as well as Wall Street, in clinics in the Delta as well as at the Cleveland Clinic, who have done well and done good with a Hendrix liberal arts education. We have nothing to apologize for and nothing we need to defend; what we have is a lot to be proud of and a great story to tell. Now is not the time to wring our hands and hang our heads. And it is not the time to be consumed by self-doubt. It is the time, though, to be a little less shy and a little less modest. It's time to put on a little Hendrix swagger. And as a Texan, with that Lone Star predisposition to swagger, I am happy to lead the way.

As we look to an uncertain future for American higher education, what should concern us most is not competition from other colleges or changes in technology and the labor market or the shifting preferences of 17-year-olds or all of the media's premature obituaries for the liberal arts. Hendrix has faced such challenges many times before and mastered them every time. But now and in the coming years, at a historical moment when public understanding of and appreciation for small residential liberal arts colleges seems to be at an all-time low, the worst thing that can befall Hendrix College is that we lose confidence in who we are and what we do. We must not join the desperate stampede of college administrators, boards of trustees, Chronicle of Higher Ed columnists, and educational consultants jumping blindly on trendy bandwagons propelled mainly by novelty, momentum, and a pathetic fear of somehow being left behind. We should not rush headfirst into pedagogies and technologies better suited for Arizona State or the University of Phoenix, nor should we acquiesce too hastily to a public drumbeat demanding a soulless practicality or narrow vocational training. Instead, at Hendrix, we should affirm our character and our historic identity, concentrating on doing even better that which we do best: offering a broad and rigorous education in the liberal arts and sciences, high-touch, personalized, and labor-intensive, committed to engaged learning that links the classroom to the world beyond, dedicated to cultivating the whole person (intellectually, spiritually, physically), in an intimate, supportive, and vibrant community.

We are, of course, very good at what we do here at Hendrix, but we should not be complacent. The shoals and rocks of American higher education in the twenty-first century are too treacherous for us ever to become too comfortable. Happily, complacency is not a part of the Hendrix character. But embracing a challenge is, and we will need that passion to push ourselves to be the best that we can possibly be in the years ahead. Community is also at the very core of who we are and we will need the collective investment of all those who care for Hendrix as we work to stay at the forefront of liberal arts colleges in a time of profound economic, political, and social change. And nothing may serve us better as we look forward to a future full of opportunities as well as pitfalls than that quality of being Hendrixy, that smart, ingenious, unpredictable, undeniable creativity that is so us. We should not forget that we have an enviable tradition of innovation at Hendrix, from the inspired creation of the Odyssey program to the new urbanism of The Village to the more recent development of The Engaged Citizen course. As we look ahead as an institution and a community, it is imperative that even as we stay true to our historic roots and uphold the distinctive spirit and character that define us, we embrace the challenge of being ever better and striving ever higher, pushing ourselves to test our limits and stretch our imaginations.

So what should be on our agenda? As we look ahead, and as we consider the almost countless possibilities before the college, I believe that we need first to feed the core to ensure that we continue to be the best that we can be. This means intensive rather than extensive growth, deepening and strengthening our ability to do even better what we already do so well, not spreading ourselves thinner in a proliferation of new directions that dissipate our energies and distract our concentration from our fundamental mission and proven strengths. This means focus rather than flash, small-ball rather than home-run swings, deep, meaningful growth rather than ever more and ever bigger. We need to bring the historic residence halls up to twenty-first-century standards; we need to build a new front door to campus, a welcome center that rolls out the red (or, better yet, the orange) carpet to recruits and the larger community; we need to strengthen our web of support for students, from counseling services to career planning to programming in multicultural and gender affairs; we need to

invest in faculty development, in that essential work of teaching and learning, and find ways to better support research initiatives that bring together scholars and students; we need to elevate the Hendrix Murphy Foundation and its programs in language and literature as a focal point of distinction for the college; we need to mobilize the campus to ensure that Hendrix remains a pacesetter in retention and graduation rates in Arkansas and the region; and we need to find the means to better reward those who dedicate their lives to serving the college, whether that be from the front of a classroom or the back of a lawnmower.

As we look ahead, we should not forget that, even as Hendrix is recognized as a national liberal arts college with reach and impact and ambitions that extend around the country and the world, our roots are here in Arkansas and our future is intertwined with that of our home state. Hendrix has been shaped by (and has, in turn, shaped) the place, the people, and the culture of Arkansas. Nowhere are we better known and more respected than in this state; and nowhere else, I daresay, are we more misunderstood and mistrusted, resented and even reviled. It is incumbent upon us to reach out to Arkansas, to make our Bubble a little less impermeable, so that we might better serve our state and so that we (and particularly our students) might take full benefit of the opportunities available here. And as we forge more vibrant partnerships off campus and make clear our ongoing commitment to the place where we live and learn, we can hope that some of those tenacious stereotypes — about Hendrix, about Arkansas — will grow hazy and eventually fade. Hendrix's legacy as well as its destiny is to be of Arkansas as well as in Arkansas: in order for Hendrix to remain a thought-leader, an engine of human resource development, and the college of choice for the best and brightest in this state, we need to own Arkansas as well as fully embrace our home.

Finally and perhaps most importantly, as we look ahead we must imagine a future where Hendrix is a model of diversity and inclusion, not just among liberal arts colleges, not just for Arkansas, but for our entire troubled and divided nation. For if we cannot make real the American promise of a free and just society here in these 180 acres and in this accepting community, what hope does our vast, endlessly varied, and deeply fractured country have? As I have said more times than I care to remember, Hendrix has always served as a social escalator for Arkansas, taking bright young people, often of very modest means, and empowering them, through a world-class education, to become leaders in their communities, for the state, and across the nation. We must celebrate this heritage and build upon it, rededicating ourselves to the premise that Hendrix is not just for a thin slice of the elite, but should be accessible to all those of talent who would benefit from the transformative experience we offer here. We need to be more intentional and more ambitious in seeking diversity, broadly defined, on this campus. But we should remember that being the kind of community we want to be is not just about numbers, about headcounts and proportions; it is also very much about creating a culture of inclusion, where everyone is valued, respected, heard, and supported, where we live collectively the aspirations I know we all hold in our hearts.

Over the past year, we have launched a series of ambitious programs to make real our college's commitment to accessibility, affordability, diversity, and inclusion. The Hendrix Arkansas Advantage brings our unparalleled liberal arts education within the financial reach of all the bright young people in our state. Our agreement with the Arkansas League of United Latin American Citizens will enable more Latino/Latina students to join our community. And the partnership signed last week with the KIPP Delta Public Schools underlines our institutional resolve to stand up for diversity, to champion excellence, and to reach out to Arkansas. We can be proud of the steps we have taken, but they are, of course, not enough. They are just a promising start in what will inevitably be a long and sometimes difficult, but unquestionably essential, process. To prepare our students for the world of the twenty-first century, we must be a diverse and inclusive community. To serve Arkansas and America, we must reflect Arkansas and America in the diversity of our student body, faculty, staff, administration, and board of trustees. And we must go further: we must create a truly inclusive community, one far beyond what we have yet to achieve in our great American national experiment, one that welcomes all, that embraces social justice, and that cultivates values that can heal and unite rather than inflame and divide.

As we look ahead today, we can take great pride in all that Hendrix College has accomplished, while

recognizing that much still remains to be done. But for all the uncertainty that the future may bring, we can be confident in what we do, in why we do it, and in our determination, even our eagerness, to tackle challenges together, with smarts and creativity, collective passion and an expectation of excellence. Even as we are buffeted by sweeping global change and turmoil in higher education, Hendrix should not become a weathervane, whipped in multiple directions by the shifting winds of fashion and fear and conformity, chasing the “next big thing” or hurrying down the path of expediency. We must continue to do what we are best at. We must affirm our historic values and be bold in our unfolding vision. And we must not shy away from exerting leadership, in the academy, in our home state, and in the world. Above all, we must trust in ourselves, trust in our heritage, trust in the spirit of our community, and look forward together to an even brighter future. God bless you all, God bless our state and nation, and God bless Hendrix College. Thank you.