

REACHING FOR ALTITUDE

INAUGURAL ADDRESS
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It is a great honor and privilege for me to be standing here today, having just been formally invested with the symbols of Clark's presidency. It is an even greater honor and privilege to have all of you herewith me—along with others watching this ceremony online—and to have everyone across this very special weekend participating for Clark. Ours is a great university and deserving of moments like this one through which it can be formally recognized and celebrated. Thank you all for doing just that.

I am truly humbled and deeply grateful for the opportunity I have been given by the Board of Trustees to return home to my alma mater as its 10th president.

What you are observing today is a ritual of academic life that at its core is about continuity. It is, then,

Let me first thank those who brought such personal, warm, and thoughtful greetings
Mayor Petty, David Greene, Robert Tobin, Maria Gallant, Rena Zisser, Aditi Singh and Mary
Owens Your presence and words mean so much to me personally and greatly

Let me also thank all of the faculty who presented at the Academic Symposium yesterday. Your work and your ability to connect it so compellingly to the many challenges we face as a society is a testament to why Clark offers such a compelling education and has such an impact on the world.

Of one thing I am sure: I am the beneficiary of a strong foundation upon which to build because of the outstanding leadership of my most recent predecessors. Please join me in acknowledging the eighth and ninth presidents of Clark University, John Bassett and David Angel.

It is truly my honor to welcome as guests today distinguished colleagues representing colleges and universities along with learned societies and academic associations across the country; valued partners from city and state government; members of Clark's remarkable faculty, staff, and student body; and dear friends and family.

I especially want to acknowledge my sisters Dianne Pisarek and Lisa Fithian, and my stepsister Diane Stefanic. Their hard work and resilience, as well as their creativity, causes, and accomplishments have been an inspiration to me. My husband, Michael Rodriguez, has—since the time we met three decades ago at Yale—been a catalyst every day for the very full and happy life we have shared together. I am deeply grateful to all my family for their love and support and the many ways they enrich my life and contribute to the person I am. My parents, were they alive, would have loved this occasion—my father for the bagpipes, my mother for the photographs, and my stepfather for the chance to people-watch.

tirelessly dedicated colleagues attend to countless details. I am very grateful to these colleagues and thankful for the opportunity to serve with them.

The story of Clak University's past is really

a board of a private American research university, which she did with great distinction at Clark from 1967-1974.

These are just a few of the Clark people who fill the pages of our University's first chapters, and there have been many more since. What I believe all of these individuals had in common was the will and determination to push beyond what was known and knowable at the time. They all reached for something more, something higher, and Clark was an environment that embraced, nurtured, and bolstered their efforts.

Consider Robert Goddard "Father of the Space Age." His work was about a future that few could even imagine, one powered by freshly conceived technologies and the audacity to exceed the limits of what was believed to be true, let alone possible. Goddard wasn't content to look only toward the horizon. He looked up and out beyond the horizon and saw no limitation despite the claims of so many that his ideas were nothing more than science fiction fantasy. Goddard reached higher. Goddard's drive to achieve what most people thought was beyond human endeavor reflects the pioneering ambitions of our founder, Jonas Clark, who envisioned an institution that would defy prevailing attitudes and expectations by doing important, true, and daring things in this world. His University would be characterized by a fearlessness to assert itself when the moment arose — through innovation, through boldness of thought, and with a desire to do the hard work and the good work.

I think we, today, must do the same. We must fearlessly assert ourselves when the moment arises.

To be sure, when we talk about Clark's people, it's not just about famous names like Goddard and Michelson. It is also about the individuals who put their Clark education or their professional experience to work everyday, challenging convention and changing our world in ways equally important if not always as well recognized. It's not just our faculty and students carrying Clark's ideals forward, but also our staff, including administrators like Jim Collins and Jack Foley who are here today and who each gave 40 or more years of

their professional lives to Clark, or Lu Ann Pacenka, a publications associate at Marsh Institute, who has been at Clark nearly 42 years, or Bill Racki, Clark's longest serving employee who has been a custodian on our campus for 51 years

In looking back at our history, I focus on Clark's people—their talents, their aspirations, their ambitions, their accomplishments but also their commitment and devotion—because this is what will define our future. However we describe the mission of our institution, unleashing human promise and potential, inspiring curiosity and an eagerness to grow in knowledge and understanding developing passionate leaders and helping them to succeed. This is why we exist and why we matter.

This focus may be true at other academies, but what is especially true at Clark is the way in which we engage with our students, faculty, and staff as individuals and the nature of our distinctive educational environment.

In his book, *Clark University, 1887-1987, A Narrative History* professor emeritus William

I have no doubt that we can, indeed, achieve the vision we've set for ourselves when we collectively embody these core values. We can, indeed, reach for altitude through the preservation, persistence, progress, and perpetuity of our distinctive identity as Clark University.

Let me go back to our trailblazing Trustee Alice Higgins and a sentiment of hers that was captured in Koelsch's book. In the lead up to Clark's Centennial, the year I graduated from Clark, Mrs. Higgins was asked why Clark hadn't come apart at any of several times of great institutional stress in the 1960s and 1970s. She replied: "One [factor] was what can only be called good will. Each one of us depended upon the wisdom and generosity of others. Paramount [she continued] was the dedication to the institution, which is characteristic of Clark, on the part of the Faculty, administration, Trustees, students, staff, secretaries, grounds people—literally everyone who works for Clark in any capacity. It is a thread that seems to run through the whole institution. That thread," Higgins observed, "has stretched; it has frayed, but it has never broken. It is ephemeral, but it is there, and it may be our most precious possession."

Among my commitments to you as president, is that I will not allow us to lose touch with who and what we are as an institution—our core values, our identity, or "most precious possession"—even as we will of necessity have to evolve in response to circumstances in higher education and in society.

In my State of the University Address I have spoken of the competitive landscape in which we find ourselves and some of the ways in which our peer institutions are winning more students and faculty who might otherwise have chosen Clark but for this or that. To be sure, our goal should not be for Clark to compete by trying to do everything that others are doing, nor should we do those things we feel make sense for us in precisely the same way others have done them. Instead, we must together make wise choices about our distinctive

strengths, emerging opportunities, our wealth of cultural capital and human achievement—all the while drawing on our profound

Let me conclude on a personal note. I believe my path to Yale, to Harvard, and to the University of Chicago from Westlake High School in Thornwood, New York was an improbable one. Except for the fact that it went through Clark.

Clark was unquestionably the right place for me at that early stage of my life. The rigorous liberal arts education I received at Clark; the individualized attention I got from not one but virtually every faculty member and staff person I encountered in my four years here; the embrace of difference and not just its acceptance; the sense of being at a place that was about something larger than itself and was unconstrained by its modest footprint; a place where it was okay to stumble and not be made to feel you were wrongly admitted. All of this is the reason I am here today.

Reflecting on my education at Clark, it is plain to me that the skills I honed, the habits of mind and ability to think critically that I developed here, the way faculty who cared about me pushed me, and the opportunities to learn about the world by learning about life in Worcester, served me well.

And now I have been given the tremendous privilege of leading Clark and helping to sustain and advance the education we provide to new generations of students. Students for whom liberal arts study and/or professional and graduate training—given current political, social, economic, and environmental challenges—is as relevant, necessary, and essential as ever.

I am here today because my own higher education enabled me to reach for more, to reach beyond what I might have expected or alone imagined as a child. Today, while some question whether higher education can and should endure, I stand here to say it must and it will, and that Clark is ready to play a leading role in that future. I intend to repay the tremendous gift of my Clark education by doing everything I can as president to help Clark itself reach higher and I hope you will agree with me that that is as relevant, necessary, and essential as ever. Thank you very much.