

INAUGURAL ADDRESS

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Members of the campus community;

Graduates and friends of the College; and

Friends of Varyam and Tom Kessinger;

Welcome to Haverford College on this fine December day and welcome to this ceremony. I am honored by your presence.

No one in my position could help but be moved by the gathering of individuals that have taken the trouble to be here today. The participation of each of you is an indication of the respect and regard in which Haverford College is held. This I acknowledge with gratitude.

I would also like to recognize the more personal dimension that a number of you add to this occasion. For this hall contains mentors and class mates from my student days at Haverford and the University of Chicago, and colleagues (and some bosses) from my days on the faculty at the Universities of Virginia and Pennsylvania and on the staff of the Ford Foundation in Indonesia and India. There is even someone with whom I attended high school in northern New Jersey. It is a special pleasure to welcome the presidents of three other Quaker Colleges to

this occasion, to see among the college presidents two Haverford graduates, and to have the procession of delegates headed by an old friend and colleague who is an alumnus, the parent of an alumna and the parent of one of our current students.

The question that has been posed to me repeatedly over the three and a half months since I arrived from New Delhi is "what is it like to be back?" It is a question to which I have found it difficult to formulate a satisfactory response. Frames of reference are part of the problem. Back where? Back in the United States after living in Asia for almost twelve years? Back in higher education after leaving the faculty of the University of Pennsylvania in the mid-1970's? Back at Haverford more than 20 years after graduating? (Indeed this was summarized rather nicely the other day when after someone remarked on all of the places I had lived and worked since leaving Haverford, only to have another person point out that my current place of work, my office, is less than 150 feet from where I lived during my first year away from home--as a Freshman on the third floor of Barclay in 1959.)

The answers for the three different frames of reference respectively are: "staggering," "familiar," and "wonderful but frightening."

It is indeed staggering to be living in the United States again after a prolonged absence abroad. I anticipated some of this. Children who have grown up outside their own countries and moved frequently from country to country have been studied by scholars interested in the effects of such changes on individual adaptability and other aspects of

personality. Some of the findings can be summarized in the statement that these children tend to be "somewhat at home everywhere yet not quite at home anywhere." It is a feeling that I have had before and I expected to experience again, even though this time I was returning to a familiar place.

But there have been other reactions, much stronger reactions that I simply did not anticipate. I do not want to devote too much of our time to this, so I will simply describe three phenomena in rather telegraphic form in order to try to convey some sense of what is going on in my head. They relate to junk mail, the homeless, and the news media.

I have been struck but not disoriented by the flow of mail across the President's desk--newsletters from professional and interest groups, the offers of consultancy services on every imaginable aspect of the College's operations, and other unsolicited mailings. But I was not prepared for junk mail addressed to my home, ranging from the personally addressed "you may have just won a million dollars" to the flood of materials simply marked "resident," often received in multiple copies. This bothers me. Having spent a number of years observing various groups wrestling with the continuing process of deforestation in South and Southeast Asia; having visited extended tracts in India, Bangladesh and Nepal where women spend the better part of a day gathering enough fuel to last a week, often having to walk six to eight to ten miles to find enough wood because trees no longer exist any closer to their settlements, I cannot help but be affected by the pile of junk mail, much of it printed on high quality of paper, 90% of which is of no

interest to me, a fact that takes less than 90 seconds to determine. I may come to understand that it all makes sense, or more likely, I will simply get used to it. For the present I am deeply troubled.

Then there are the homeless. I will not go on at length about this terrible problem, for it thankfully is receiving enough attention to at least enter public consciousness even though one cannot help but be struck by how little attention it received in the Presidential campaign. When I moved back to Delhi in early 1987 after more than seven years in Indonesia, I was saddened to see that despite the very considerable progress that India has achieved in many areas, the phenomenon of whole families sleeping on sidewalks had begun to appear in Delhi and other major cities, whereas it had been confined to Bombay and Calcutta during my earlier years of residence. And then to return to the United States to confront the extent and growth of homelessness here, the richest country in the world. I am ashamed.

I will not take your time to multiple examples of the gap between rich and poor; of both a rich and a poor nation's use and abuse of its natural resources; and the plight of the poor in both a rich and a poor country with respect to one of the most basic of necessities--shelter. Nor will I suggest consequences or solutions at this time. Instead I would like to focus on news coverage and the news media, but with a different spin. Please understand that I return to the United States from a very different environment with respect to the flow of information. State monopoly over television is the norm in most settings in which I have been working. The Philippines and Thailand were exceptions, but even

there the government's capacity to "pull the plug" was very real. Government control of the print media in Southeast Asia was more subtle but very firm. In Indonesia, all editors knew they had to be prepared to explain why they published any story that caught the eye of one or another monitoring agency. Foreign correspondents work under the threat of having their credentials yanked, and newspapers and magazines coming in from outside the country were physically censored by the application of large globs of black ink applied manually to each individual copy to obliterate objectionable words, phrases, and paragraphs. So great was the attention to detail that even individual Chinese language characters on signs in pictures were blotted out--reflecting the anti-ethnic Chinese policies of the government. India was very different of course. There is vigorous private and essentially free press, but one that is less attentive to news reporting than commenting on the news. Indeed, a visitor reading an Indian newspaper for the first time might conclude that by local custom, editorials routinely appeared on the front page.

I think back over hundreds of hours of discussions with friends and colleagues talking about ways to get information on critical matters out and into discussion among important segments of the public in those settings. The contrast here is so sharp. We are awash in information and are the richer for it, although I fear that most of us take it for granted. It is also clear that information and knowledge are necessary but not sufficient for effective measures to bring about change. Issues of homelessness and the environment are receiving media attention, but it remains to be seen whether public attention and concern can be

focussed and sustained to bring about changes in government policy and public behavior to begin to address these challenges more effectively.

Familiar was the word I used to describe how it felt being back in higher education. There are two reasons for this. Academic institutions are, by their nature, essentially conservative beasts, changing their basic structure and roles very slowly. In addition, much of the time that I was in Asia was devoted to working with institutions of higher education. I visited hundreds of institutions in nine different countries and made frequent visits to twenty to thirty. My favorites over the years include Mountain State University, an institution comprised of a four year undergraduate college with a high school and some graduate departments designed to serve young people from the tribal communities surrounding La Trinidad in the northern Philippines, virtually all of whom were the first in their families to attend college; Satya Wacana University near Yogyakarta, the center of Javanese culture, which is surely the most diverse institution of higher education I have ever visited, drawing young men and women from virtually every inhabited island in the archangelic nation that is Indonesia; Chiang Mai University in its beautiful valley setting in Northern Thailand where the most advanced research and experimentation on sustainable agriculture in the world is underway; Can Tho University in the Mekong Delta in southern Vietnam, struggling as is most of that sad country with virtually no resources, where the university's labs grow yeast for sale to the bakeries in town to generate sufficient revenues to buy materials for student experiments; the Indian Institute of Management in Ahmedabad, western India, which was started on the model of the

Harvard Business School, and has evolved into an institution at once distinguished and distinctive, with numerous spin-offs in India and other parts of the developing world.

This exposure has taught me two lessons. The first is that institutions of higher education around the world are much more like each other than are the societies and nations in which they exist, underscoring their potential for cross national and cross cultural mediation and exchange.

The similarities were brought home to me again and again, often in some rather dramatic fashion. Some years ago I participated in a curriculum development workshop conducted by the Faculty of Agriculture at Chaing Mai University for its new cropping systems degree program. The undertaking is exceedingly ambitious for any setting--attempting to bring together agricultural scientists with economists and social scientists and find a balance of required courses that would satisfy both and receive certification and legitimization from the Ministry of Education. The workshop was proceeding well. English was being used because several experts from Australia and the United States had been invited as resource persons. Substantive issues did not present any particular problems, but then we go onto questions of new positions, selection of coordinators, control of budgets and suddenly everyone was talking, voices were raised and the whole discussion switched into Thai, which I am embarrassed to say I do not speak beyond the survival level. Things eventually settled down, one person spoke at a time, voices were lowered and the conversation slowly switched back into English. But then came the hard part. The Dean,

who was presiding, felt that he had to explain the outburst to his non-Thai speaking guests since we were participants in the meeting. This was a difficult task because of abhorrence of confrontation and the display of emotion that is so central to Thai culture and behavior. He fidgeted for a considerable time, trying to find a way to put and the said, "You have to understand, Dr. Kessinger," he said, "that we have something in our universities called departmental politics."

The other thing that I have come to appreciate against this backdrop is the richness of opportunity that exists in this country for post secondary education. No where in the world does a larger segment of the population have access to a wider variety of experiences for higher education than in the United States. This is not to say that we do not have problems. We do and we are frequently reminded of them. We have problems of cost, problems of access, problems of standards, problems of waste and of wasted opportunities, and we have problems of keeping up with new developments and changing needs brought on by the explosion and specialization of knowledge and embracing the diversity of our society. And if I have missed any, I will undoubtedly be reminded of them in Monday morning's mail. But we have opportunities of all sorts, for all kinds of people and at more stages of their lives than any where else in the world.

I said that it was wonderful but frightening to be at Haverford again. I was curious to see if all the things that have happened here had changed the character of an institution I knew and valued. The biggest difference, as many of you have heard me say, is size. Haverford today

is almost three times as large as the College that I attended. For the most part that growth has had a positive impact on the College as an educational institution and a community. Growth has allowed the student body and faculty to become more diverse with respect to gender, ethnicity, race and place of residence fairly quickly and without reducing the draw from the kinds of families and contexts from which students have come in the past. We need to do more. My point here is that we have been able to come some distance fairly rapidly because of the increase in the size of the institution.

Growth has allowed us to add some new departments and to deepen many existing ones. This has enabled us keep pace of developments in many fields and cover some that have been neglected or more recently come into prominence as the student body and faculty became more diverse.

But growth has had some negative consequences which I hope that we can relieve somewhat in the years ahead. While it may be hard to imagine as you walk around this beautiful campus--when it comes to inside space, we are full. Critical needs are classrooms, faculty offices and small and medium sized space for student groups and casual socializing. Similarly current work loads for the faculty and in some other areas are too heavy and need to be restructured in the long term interest of the institution. We are behind on maintenance, the burden of equipment purchases is immense, and we need to expand the pool of resources for student financial aid.

I said that being back was wonderful but frightening. But it is not the needs outlined above, the small size of the endowment, nor even the task of raising money that frighten me. Some time ago, after making a statement about my views on the College's current needs and prospects in a small meeting, a participant--a friend--remarked that I sounded like a middle level manager in a declining industry. Now that does frighten me.

Tom G. Kessinger

December 3, 1988