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"Inauguration of President Millar"

Branford Price Millar

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Branford Price Millar
"Inauguration of President Millar"
October 18, 1959
Portland State College

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[orchestral music playing, 00:00-4:10]

MORGAN ODELL: O Lord, our God. As we stand before thee on this eventful occasion in the affairs of our community and state, we seek thy divine presence and guidance that all things may be so done as to advance thy kingdom of truth and goodness among men. We give thee thanks for the life of learning by which man has advanced his luck in life, his horizons of knowledge, his civil and political rights, and his understanding of thy universe and thy moral laws. We give thee thanks for wise men and teachers who have discerned thy ways of creation and growth, of beauty and order, of freedom and justice, of charity and mercy, and have made them known to the generations of men. We give thee thanks for that hunger to know which lies deep in the minds of parents and children, and which urges this establishment of schools and colleges and commands the energies of youth for years of study. Bless, we pray thee, Portland State College, our directors, administrators, faculty, and students, that the life of learning may be given all care and devotion.

Be ever-present with thy servant Branford Millar, that he may have the wisdom, courage, and strength to realize here the visions of excellence which have drawn him to this task. Grant him an understanding heart and a patient spirit as he gives leadership and friendship to faculty and students. Bless him with the confidence and the loyalty of those with whom he labors, that he may discharge happily and fruitfully his high vocation of teacher.

Accept now our thanks for the many blessings of life, of work, of freedom, of opportunity, and of responsibility granted to us in this our land. Accept now our rededication to those patterns of truth, of righteousness, and of reverence for our fellows and for thee, which will advance the interests of peace and joy for thy children everywhere. In the name of God, Amen.

JOHN RICHARDS: Governor Hatfield, representatives of learned organizations everywhere, faculty of Portland State College, ladies and gentlemen. As Chancellor of the State System of Higher Education, I am pleased to join with you today in the induction of the second president of Portland State College. Portland State College recently formed as one of the units of the Oregon State System of Higher Education. As such, it has the rights and privileges of all other institutions, including the right to have an outstanding educational leader as its president. Under our system of higher education, although we operate with but a single board, we still endow our presidents with the responsibility and the authorities of leadership. It is true that at times we are able to release our presidents from some of the housekeeping and business management functions of their institutions. This is intended to give them time and the freedom of thought to be aggressive, vital, and creative leaders for their institutions.

Such a man was sought by Portland State College for many months, and the search finally culminated in the selection of Branford Price Millar, whom we mean to induct into office today and to hear his message. But first, we are honored to have with us a great and long friend of higher education in Oregon, and one who actually has been most active throughout much of his career in higher education: the Honorable Mark O. Hatfield, Governor of Oregon, to give you his greetings. Governor Hatfield.

[applause]

[Governor Hatfield's remarks not recorded; music playing 09:28-12:36]

[applause]

SPEAKER [unidentified]: We come then to the climax of this particular meeting, when the President of the Board of Higher Education will induct President Millar. The Board of Higher Education, as almost all of you know, is the single lay board made up of nine citizens of Oregon. It administers under a rather complete authority the affairs of eight institutions. It has often been said that one of the most important activities of an educational board, if not the most important part, is the selection of a new president. The reason for this is that the board itself cannot be expected to delve into the day-to-day details of the administration of a large institution. Instead, it must depend upon a chief executive officer, who by reason of support

from his faculty and complete rapport with that faculty, is able to give concentrated leadership to the program. In this case, the Board of Higher Education has completed its very important task of selection, and the President of the Board, Mr. Henry Cabell, a prominent civic leader and financier in the city of Portland, will carry out this function. Mr. Cabell is President of the Board of Higher Education, and I shall ask him to come forward and to ask President Millar to stand for this purpose.

HENRY CABELL: As President of the Board of Higher Education, I speak with great confidence in saying that the entire board feels that Portland State College has been extremely fortunate in obtaining the services of Branford Price Millar as its new president. It is a distinct pleasure on my part at this time to induct him in his new and highly responsible position. Dr. Millar, by virtue of the authority conferred on me by law as President of the Oregon State Board of Higher Education, I hereby formally induct you as the new president of Portland State College. My congratulations.

[applause]

BRANFORD MILLAR: Chairman, Mr. Hatfield, Chancellor Richards, my colleagues, honored guests, and ladies and gentlemen. It is not possible on an occasion like this for me to disguise to myself the fact that I am affected by feelings of pride, humility, and exhilaration. It seems to me that I would be lacking both in candidness and graciousness if I did not declare them openly. Although there are certainly higher levels of achievement in the academic world than a presidency, and although every academic and teacher has a terrifyingly impressive share of the future of humanity as his constant business, yet the office of college president is an honorable and an important one. It chiefly exists to facilitate the work of the scholar, the teacher, the student, and their community. In a public system, it is a part of the public economy, charged with the duty of converting some of the state's material and financial resources to human assets which are vital to its continued social and economic health. Because of the competing demands upon the state's resources, or to put it in another way, because of public desire to contain the expenditure of resources for public aims, it must get this job done with an efficiency that would startle most of the critics of its efficiency, if they were to become sufficiently familiar with its operations to avoid drawing hasty conclusions and analogies between the production of goods and the education of human beings. Yet, this official must strive to increase the efficiency, while at the same time sensing both the shifting borders and boundaries of knowledge and the changing requirements of society for knowledge. And as a conscientious public servant, he must walk the fine line between the execution of assigned tasks and the identification and prosecution of new and legitimate goals. He must keep attuned

to that public's expressed interest and its sometimes divergent higher aspirations, even though they may not be expressed clearly or indeed unanimously.

Under any circumstances, then, to be chosen to such an office is an honor to any man, and I am proud and grateful to be trusted to succeed to it. Yet the task is such that the man who has the temerity to undertake it may, without lacking confidence in those who elected him, have some reservations about his ability to execute it with sureness and vision. Especially if that man should be myself, for, as I reminded the faculty shortly after I reported on the job, I had not aspired to be the president of a college. I have not been one for very long, and no man is the president of a college very often.

But no matter how challenging such an office would ordinarily be, the challenge is raised to the potency of exhilaration in a young college, which is excited by a sense of its uncertain future, rather than being lulled by the comfortable awareness of a rich past. Here is a new vessel in which we have the chance to brew a heady concoction of the old and the new, to sustain and nourish the ever-increasing appetite of individuals and society for knowledge. No one who has been associated with this college for long can fail to detect the presence of such feelings in its faculty. Since the founding of this institution has already made it possible for thousands of students in this area to go to college who perhaps would not have otherwise been able to do so, it is not surprising that they too are imbued with the seriousness of forward vision. There are frequent evidences, too, that the community in which, and primarily for which the college exists, as it recognizes that a major state institution is developing in its midst, shares in the air of accomplishment and anticipation. Such is the institution of which I am being inaugurated as president today.

If the particular position I am undertaking is indeed a responsible one, it is equally and fortunately true that I am not expected to go it alone and that the responsibility is shared. The business of a college is complex. It is a partnership of coordinated enterprises both inside and outside itself. And the celebration and rededication of this enterprise is what really gives the importance to this occasion today. It is unlikely for any of us to believe that a gathering such as this should be solely for the purpose of getting one man inducted into office and on the job. If the object were only to hand over a commission, this could have been done much more simply for us all. But it is quite transparent that the object is more than this, and the composition of those of us who are here present dramatizes the nature of the partnership, including as it does the governor of the state, the chairman of the State Board of Higher Education, the chancellor of the State System of Higher Education, the faculty and staff, delegates from other colleges and learned societies, various state officials elected and appointed, students, and friends. Everyone here has an interest in the college and in varying degrees, no matter how remote or

immediate, an influence on it. Which is one reason of course why public institutions move ponderously, since they answer not to themselves alone, nor depend for their support in themselves alone.

This is quite a partnership, but it is no more no mere rhetorical fiction. As I have said, public higher education is a part of the economy or the politics, sometimes even the politics of a state. Though its allegiance is much broader than the state, it is a creature of the state and is sustained by and is responsive to the state, and may be encouraged or inhibited by the state. Yet by reason of the obligations with which a college is charged, the state and the public must leave partially undefined and open-ended certain of the college's essential functions, and they must take the consequences. It would not be prudent for society at large to try to lay down a party line or a publicly acceptable methodology in ichthyology or nuclear physics, in statistics or genetics. There are no public heresies in these respects, though there are certainly public consequences. The public may be more quick to detect unorthodoxies in social or economic theory, or to raise questions about value in art or literature and perhaps to exert some control over them, though history has shown these controls to be largely ineffectual, as the postmaster general has just demonstrated for us again. The plain fact is that it is difficult, very difficult, to restrain all scholars from learning, from advancing and reorienting knowledge, both theoretical and practical. The only way I know of doing it is to cross them up by keeping them in the classroom most of the time and in committees the rest of the time.

[laughter]

Having learned, then, it becomes the scholar's task as teacher to impart his knowledge to the tender young. Though he must be very careful to differentiate between the areas of his substantial knowledge and the areas of his less authoritative and responsible opinion. Although parenthetically, I could say that in its own interest, the public also wisely restrains and refrains from judging a man's physics by his politics. The advancement of knowledge runs the risk of imperiling present knowledge and habits. Thus, in sponsoring institutions of higher learning, the public must learn, must not only intend to preserve its stock of knowledge, its heritage and reflections, but to refine, to criticize and even to revolutionize them.

While, then, the public college is an instrument of the political commonwealth, and in a healthy state is a significant factor in the balance of the economy of that commonwealth's enterprise, at the same time, in the very act of carrying out its public responsibilities, it must acknowledge that it has a responsibility to itself and to the commonwealth of learning. It has allegiances and alliances outside the state and country, even outside of time and place. And in order for it, like the state, to be healthy, it must observe and reflect the balance of the economy of the

commonwealth of learning. This is an intellectual balance which is indifferent to other demands. In state like Oregon with a coordinated system of higher education, the intellectual balance is particularly delicate, but it has been managed over the years with great astuteness. It has, I think, wisely avoided the creation of a series of autonomous institutions each in which became all things to all men and nothing great to any of them. Thus, it might allow for each to encompass the whole spectrum of learning in all its fine shadings, but by doing so it runs the risk of dissipating its resources. It would not, in this state, with its population and resources, be able as it has done to guarantee that each of the fundamental fields of learning or related clusters of them would be assured somewhere in the system of being developed to its greatest depth and richness. Not being able to bring the maximum of strength in every area to bear at every point within the system, it has been able to concentrate areas of strength so as to give to each institution its own distinctive character and function. In large then, the system has created a commonwealth of learning within this political commonwealth.

At the same time, fortunately, it has been able to allocate to each of the institutions enough of the fundamental disciplines so that each in its turn may seek and maintain an intellectual balance and purpose. To do so, it has naturally had to duplicate some offerings, and as the student population has increased, there has been an increase of duplication. For a while there is some mobility of students, there are limits in this respect, and in setting up colleges in the various areas it is necessary to ensure that that portion of the students who are not mobile will be enabled as much as possible to develop their potentiality without undue limitation by the institution.

What kind of a commonwealth is Portland State College? It is an urban college for the liberal arts and a few of the primary professions. If I may, I should like to repeat some remarks I made to the faculty when I was first presented to them, and as I was trying to orient myself to my new situation. I said then and I still think this: “I am not at all sure what is meant by an urban college. Whether it is in a city, or for it, or of it. Especially, when it is not the city’s college, but the state’s, and is part of a carefully coordinated system which forbids its independent expansion in the interest of an overall academic economy. I suspect, however, that a good college is a good one anywhere, regardless of clientele or location. And that the good ones are more alike than they are different. It is somehow a place where intellect prevails. Somewhat sheltered, though serviceable enough to be worn out in the dirt. A place which is more in the nature of a secular sanctuary than a marketplace. If you will allow me some easy distinctions, I would think that it is fundamentally preoccupied with learning, rather than with know-how. And that inasmuch as it is concerned with the latter, this concern shall be to see that it is never far removed from its intellectual roots or the fundamentals which undergird it.

“Portland State College is, I suppose, to be described as a liberal arts college with some professional curricula. The essential question here is, is this a dichotomy? My feeling is emphatically no. Not unless, at least, we manage to do the job poorly. For better or worse, the public liberal arts college… excuse me, the *pure* liberal arts college, scarcely exists anywhere in this country. It is by now largely an interesting segment of history or myth, and the reasons are not far to seek in a pragmatic and mobile society. I think it is simply that we do not feel that there is, or ought to be, any useless learning. That the most detached knowledge may have a bearing at any point that the biological analogy of organicism, which now is seen to prevail widely in the physical universe, is a valid one. That knowledge, like the universe we live in, animate and inanimate, is intricately intertwined and interdependent.

“Moreover, we are increasingly a society which depends upon knowledge either for running machines or dealing with people. There are no longer a few professions such as law, medicine, and theology which grow immediately out of the fundamental disciplines. There are many professions which reflect the startling thrust and ramifications of specialized knowledge in the past fifty years, and which have insinuated themselves into the texture of our daily existence. Therefore, I do not see our liberal arts/professional nature as a divisive factor. I do think the two parts should be close together in character. If the one is primarily concerned with a search for and a preservation of knowledge and tradition and not with the abdication thereof, it should benefit from the contact with the applications to the affairs of men, and should not be forever removed from empirical validation. Action is, after all, the mark of man. And if the professional curricula are primarily concerned with the applications of knowledge, they had better be pretty firmly grounded in the fundamental disciplines, or they will be badly predicated and soon obsolete. The liberal arts and the professional curricula do reinforce each other and I am firmly convinced that they thrive in each other's atmosphere. I hope that our academic structure and our personal habits will keep them in close union here at Portland State College.” End of a long quotation.

Now we do have, then, a balanced enterprise at Portland State College, and as elsewhere within the state system, we shall strive to bring it to the highest point of excellence. But excellence and balance in offerings is not enough. It is equally imperative that the offering be to a purpose. Excellence is all very well in itself, and in these days academic or even intellectual excellence is a fad. The thinking man even has his own filter. The pursuit of academic excellence has now been sanctified by a particularly wealthy foundation which recently announced it almost, as if it were a new discovery, after a number of other foundations have been supporting experiments in the detection and eliciting of excellence, as if this were a novel enterprise or at best a lost or submerged art. There’s something a little ridiculous about this, but it is unfortunately true that in the democratic drive for equality of opportunity, we may have gone

so far as to commit the sin of intellectual egalitarianism in our attempt to provide education at all levels for greater and greater proportions of our population. Which is, in itself, a legitimate and worthy, and altogether necessary and obligatory aim.

And as I have said, balance of offering is not enough, at least if the offering is as it so often is in modern universities, a mere availability of offering. The modern university presents a paradox and a parable. One of its glories, certainly, is that every element of the commonwealth of knowledge, every narrow band in the intellectual spectrum, every subject matter, and every subdivision of it has been rigorously and imaginatively studied and refined into a discipline of great platitude and elegance. And the more we refine, the more vistas we open up, and more practical areas of practical application we discover. This is the virtue of an age of intense specialization. And it is this which has made possible the extraordinary growth of knowledge in the last generation or two. But it has often left the specialist talking to himself, or to a few like himself, and it has often robbed him of the power to follow the implication of his studies in other specialties when he comes to the facts of nature which refuse to be conveniently compartmentalized. Whatever his capacity for infinite precision and refinement, he may also have trained himself to exclude the capacity for the overarching vision, the imaginative synthesis, and the sense of wholeness and continuity. As Wordsworth said, we murder to dissect.

In some senses the modern university is a tower of Babel, a very loose commonwealth, some of whose members speak English and some Hottentot. But what about the *lingua franca*? Only at certain times do we talk the common language of the enlightened man and of liberal occasion, especially on occasions… of liberal education, and especially on occasions like this. Not only is there a strangeness of language, but there is a profound ignorance about what each of us is doing. Of how the physicist has altered our conception of the universe, or the sociologist our conception of man in society. And unfortunately, I regret to say, sometimes in equal indifference. Now, we haven't progressed, as my remarks might seem to suggest, to a state of downright anarchy. We still think of the commonwealth and not always of its separate members. But the centrifugal tug is very strong, and we must take constant care to counterpose to it the course of a central educational purpose. We need, in the midst of a welter of disciplines, to discipline ourselves in respect to our fundamental responsibility, the education of the enlightened man. The civilized, gregarious animal mingling and working both alone and in concert with his fellows on the plain of common humanity, in the face of the natural world and what he has made of it.

I'm trying to say that what we need is to survey the whole commonwealth in order to survey the whole man. And that, as in a political state, we need to observe an economy in what we can

do for the man, and for the commonwealth. We don't just turn the student loose in a sea of specializations without a paddle. We don't overwhelm him with intellectual hors d'ouvres no matter how excellently concocted. It is for these reasons that after the historical introduction of the system of free electives, which is really to abandon the notion of purpose except for the satisfaction of curiosity, or is at least to abandon the notion of any common agreement about the state of knowledge and the sharing of values. After this step was taken, it was reduced to a complete shamble by the sudden expansion of knowledge which proliferated to literally thousands of courses in the various colleges. It has been necessary to return to the idea of a general education, and I think we had better stick to this notion. For there is no real education without it. General education demands that the incomprehensible diversity and diffuse knowledge somehow be reducible, in some sense, to the scope of one man's mind. Just as the infinite complexity of nature somehow can be the scene of one man's living. In a way, a general education, I think, is a kind of geography for the intellect. It displays the continents and their great masses and the countries and their lesser entities. It discovers the divisive barriers, the channels of commerce and communication. It observes the classes of men going about their intricately interwoven and mutually interdependent activities, and all of these seen within a global dimension, having a completeness and an entirety, even as its patterns shift and change.

If a college believes this, it will order itself and not allow itself to be fragmented, but will retain its condition as a responsible and united commonwealth, and it will have a purpose for its students. That is, intellectually, to be able to grasp a meaningful world of man and nature, though a changing one. We have, of course, no intention of casting out our specializations, nor of insulating the helpless undergraduate from them. For from them we have learned something very important to general education. In the face of so many specializations and in the particular pursuit of at least one of them, we gain a sense of the depth, the complexity that prevails at every point. The universe of the atom within the cloud, the uniqueness of every event. As educators, we have become convinced that it is necessary to do this kind of looking and probing in a particular subject, because here not only does the view change, but the point of view and the methodology. And besides, from a utilitarian point of view, most students will depend upon a vocation to exist in this unfortunate world of ours, and in a world increasingly dependent on specialized knowledge. An educated man had probably better acquire a degree of specialization to fit in to work in such a world.

A college then, as I see it, must truly keep itself in balance, to see itself as an economy with a discretely ordered relation of the parts to the whole. All of us together, we shall be able to present to the students a picture of richness and variety, of order and excitement, of stubborn pacts and of human values. Of as much truth as a man can grasp, with a tenacious intellect and an insight into what is unknown to him, or perhaps to any man, and as proper a respect for

what he doesn't know as for what he knows. If we can do this, we will have done enough. We will have acquitted ourselves to our political commonwealth. If, in this way, higher education in America will not have transformed society; if we will not have given to all society a faith, a fervor, a high purpose to arm it spiritually and materially for existing among alternative ideologies, that is not our business alone; and we cannot ourselves be entirely free of the symptoms of some of the real or imagined sicknesses and inadequacies of our society. But we can, at the very least, set up some powerful immunizations against the barbarian rule of ignorance and indifference. And, at best, we can provide the weapons of the intellect which will ensure recognition of those truths which men must discern if they are to have a sense of great purpose. The circle of the economy will be complete, and as the commonwealth of learning, in knowing and serving itself in observing its own economy, will have played its role in the economy of the social commonwealth. Thank you.

[applause]

SPEAKER [unidentified]: Congratulations and good wishes, President Millar. The students are always important, particularly in a large college; they swarm in; we like them, they give great character to the college. At Portland State College, the Associated Students are the governing body of the students, and on the platform tonight has been Mr. Robert Ziemer, the president of this group. Will you stand, Robert, and be recognized?

[applause]

We come now to the end of this ceremony, and Dr. Odell, President of Lewis and Clark College, will close. Dr. Odell.

ODELL: Stand to receive the benediction. May thy blessing and guidance, O God, rest richly upon President Millar, and may the words of our mouths and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in thy sight now and forever more. O Lord, our strength and our redeemer, Amen.

[music plays until program ends, 49:00-58:35]