



TO NOBLER DESTINY

by

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Address Delivered At Her Inauguration

As 14th President, University of Liberia

13 September 2017

2:00 P.M.

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13 September 2017

Madam Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, President of the Republic of Liberia, and Visitor of the University of Liberia; Mr. Joseph Nyuma Boakai, Vice President of the Republic of Liberia; Officers & Members of the Board of Trustees; Distinguished Officials of Government, Members of the Diplomatic Corps, Dr. Emmet A. Dennis, 13th President of the University of Liberia; Dr. Joseph Isaac, President of the Association of Liberia Universities; Presidents and Special Representatives of Universities and Colleges, Dr. Osei K. Darkwa, President of Ghana Technology University College; Officers & Members of the Alumni Association, Students, Faculty, Administrators and Staff of the University of Liberia, Relatives, Friends and Well-Wishers, Members of the Press, Ladies and Gentlemen:

Thanks and Appreciation

I would like to say thank you to the Special Convocation Organizing Committee for the fantastic job they've done under the leadership of our own Vice President for Administration Professor Weade Kobbah-Wureh, as well as our Protocol Director Dekontee Tubman. When things move smoothly people think everything is a piece of cake, not knowing that its because folks have worked so hard to make it seem like a piece of cake. Special thanks go to Mr. Zizi Zubah for his dedication and commitment to the University of Liberia. I've worked closely and continuously with him during my tenure first as Dean, then as Vice President of Academic Affairs, and now as President. Thanks to faculty, administrators, staff and students who continue to put the University of Liberia first.

It is with the deepest of conviction that I reiterate, that I will faithfully execute all duties and responsibilities entrusted to me as President of the University of Liberia, in accordance with the Charter, the Constitution and By-Laws, and the rules and regulations of the University of Liberia, and that I will endeavor at all times to maintain and uphold the privileges, rights and DIGNITY (with a capital "D") of the university, so help me God. I promise to be **vigilant**, Madam President, and I will try my very best to be **wise** in my actions.

¹History Professor and Vice Chancellor, University of Calabar;

²HE Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, 24th President of the Republic of Liberia

It is with very deep and varied emotions, that I stand here today to present to you my inaugural address. **Because**, I have no doubt that my parents, Rocheforte Lafayette Weeks, Sr. and Angelique Eupheme Geraldine Cooper Weeks, both of whom are deceased (my father 31 years ago, my mother less than a year ago), would be beaming with pride. I know my siblings (many could not be here today) and my family as a whole all are, because they have told me so in so many ways.

*I am experiencing very deep and varied emotions **because**, 58 years ago, as the only girl, with 5 brothers, I finally had a newborn baby sister, just around the same time my father was entrusted with the responsibility of serving as the 3rd president of the University of Liberia. I was a child in the audience that day, on the Capital Hill campus of the University of Liberia, at the amphitheater.*

*I am experiencing very deep and varied emotions **because**, I had always envisioned myself one day serving as a Professor at the University of Liberia, but I had not envisioned myself serving as President of the University of Liberia.*

*I am experiencing very deep and varied emotions **because**, the duties and responsibilities of a university president, should scare anyone, especially that of the University of Liberia, with its many challenges.*

And there are many more "**Becauses**". Yet, as a competitive athlete for many years, I have always liked a good challenge. A good and successful athlete is one who is prepared. So while I envision many challenges ahead, I'd like to think that the varied experiences I have had during my entire life in tertiary education settings: first, as an observing-child, then as a student...resident and commuting, as a publishing tenure-track professor who rose through-the-ranks to full professor, as a mentor to undergraduate and graduate students, as well as to faculty, as a funded researcher, as a university academic program developer, as an administrator, as a minority and a majority outside Liberia and within Liberia, ALL will serve me well, as **we** navigate the challenges,...*with valor unpretending*. Yes, **we**.

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Because while it is true that I am the chief executive officer of the University of Liberia, the work of this university, the success of the University of Liberia, is not a one person responsibility. This is a collective, all-hands-on-board responsibility. It requires that everyone plays his and her role. No role is too small to make a difference. The janitor who cleans the bathrooms, classrooms, and offices, and makes sure the rooms are open and available for use; the instructor who shows up for class as scheduled and on time to ensure that the students cover course material as prescribed so that they are prepared for the next course in the sequence; the instructor who turns in grades on time so that students can receive their grades, and are able to plan their academic schedule and register within the scheduled registration calendar; the students who show up for class prepared, so that they are in a better position to absorb the lessons of the day and better able to acquire knowledge incrementally in an effective and efficient manner; the scholarship sponsors who actually pay the funds for University of Liberia Student Union (ULSU) scholarships as promised and not leave the University hanging semester after semester, as the university sinks into a financial abyss; the funds from the government of Liberia that are made available to the University of Liberia so that the best professors are attracted and maintained, so that infrastructure is built, improved and maintained, so that student services are made available, maintained, and improved, so that we are able to offer to the people of Liberia a University of Liberia that we are all proud of. So that the flagship University of Liberia is more representative of what a university should be in the 21st century. These are just some examples of the “we” of which I speak.

At this point in time, I would like to recognize Florida International University (FIU), in Miami, Florida (but first pray that all are safe following Hurricane Irma...I know exactly what they may have experienced; I was in my home when Hurricane Andrew ripped through it). Thank you FIU, with particular thanks to the faculty, staff and students of the Biological Sciences Department, where I spent 30 years as a faculty member. It was a nurturing and academically-stimulating

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environment, and I will always be grateful for FIU's willingness to second me to the University of Liberia. Thank you FIU.

I would like to personally thank you Madam President for making it possible for the University of Liberia to be largely housed at its Fendall campus today. I say this because that \$25M US dollars in assistance from the Chinese government could have been spent elsewhere, considering all of Liberia's competing priorities, but *you* made the decision that it should be used to build needed buildings for our Fendall campus. Had you not made that decision, we still might not have been here today, so, Thank you Madam President.

I would like to also personally thank Dr. Dennis for where he has brought the University of Liberia over the last 9 years. I had the honor of serving under his leadership for half of that time. This was a period when many times the University of Liberia was a veritable "collection of hand grenades", during which time people and circumstances attempted, and in some cases succeeded in pulling the pins...some went off, we worked together and picked-up the pieces; others were diffused, we learned from them...so, taking liberty with Maya Angelou's words, '*...but still we continue to rise*'.

The accomplishments have been outstanding. Sixty plus (60+) additional faculty trained with advanced degrees, at least 10% with terminal degrees; two new colleges that include a Technical & Vocational Associate-Degree College in Sinje, Grand Cape Mount County, and an Engineering College on the Fendall campus; a BSc.-granting Nursing program that will put out its first graduates this year, in December 2017; relocation to the Fendall campus of most of the university's academic programs and services; establishment and continuation of many, collaborative and partnership programs with regional and international universities, colleges, and organizations like USAID, Trustees of Donations for Education in Liberia (located in Boston); the University Consortium for Liberia (located in Atlanta); massive reduction in student unrest; our entrance examination gaining restored trust, and many more. But most importantly, Dr. Dennis, a solid

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foundation has been established on which we can continue to build-on. Thank you.

A Resonating Theme

Hopefully, at this point, you have realized glimpses of the theme of my address, which is also the theme I have adopted for my administration, ...***to nobler destiny***. These three words are part of the last phrase found in the first stanza of the “Lone Star Forever, written by Liberia’s 18th President, Edwin James Barclay. This phrase has always resonated with me. And I finally found an occasion to use it as a theme.

As I researched information for my theme, I happened upon E. A. Ayandele’s¹ 1979 book entitled “*African Historical Studies*”. There is a segment in the book on *Nation-Building*, which pointed out that President William V. S. Tubman’s vision for Liberia was ***to ‘rouse a nation long forlorn to nobler destiny’***; and that in 1951, as part of his effort at nation-building, the University of Liberia was established. It was a “wow” moment for me. It might also interest you to know that Ayandele also stated that in 1947 there were only 2 universities in Africa, but by 1974 there were 60. Back then African leaders had begun to realize that universities were institutions that they could expect to provide solutions to problems like *manpower development*, *research* that could lead to improved agricultural practices, *formulas* for economic development and industrialization, and so forth.

Government Ministries and agencies need to be reminded that the University of Liberia is a reservoir of knowledge with a wide cross-section of experts who tend to be overlooked, but should be more involved in all aspects of nation-building, and called on to be at the table at all times. We should be the “go-to” resource for assistance with policy development, and so on.

There are many historical examples for ***‘nobler destiny’***, but in the interest of time, two will suffice.

Ghana, home of the visionary President Nkrumah, is one of our

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neighbors that we tend to look to with great admiration, and tend to use as a measure of progress and national success. But this was not always the case. Instead there was a time when exactly the opposite was the prevailing sentiment. But Ghanaians changed things around and I cannot help but think that during a crucial period in time in their history, Ghanaians paid heed to the words of their president Jerry John Rawlings who asserted “...if we are to see a sturdy tree of democracy grow, we need to learn from the past and nurture very carefully and deliberately political institutions that will become the pillars upon which the people's power will be erected. A new sense of responsibility must be created in each workplace, each village, each district”.

Liberia's first president Joseph Jenkins Roberts, an inspirational figure of courage and enterprise, was *destined* to lead the first black Republic of Africa after independence was declared July 26, 1847. Today, he is adoringly remembered as the only president of Liberia to have left a bequest for the education of Liberia's young people. The J.J. Roberts Foundation of the First United Methodist Church in Monrovia has fiduciary control over this endowment. The University of Liberia was beneficiary of the fund in the 1990's when the foundation underwrote the cost of a month's salary for faculty as the then Interim Government of National Unity was in dire financial straits.

Nobler Destiny Attributes

What are nobler destiny attributes? Attributes that make up the foundation for a nobler destiny include among other things, a *sense of mission, perseverance, and courage, pursuit of excellence, diligence, **Discipline**, humility, **Integrity**, compassion, and **perspicacity** (vision, strategic thinking).*

The Way Forward

So where do we go from here? What can be expected of me as the 14th president and chief executive officer of the University of Liberia, entrusted with administering the University of Liberia's affairs to maximize benefits for students, faculty, staff, and ultimately for Liberia? I am a trained and experienced scientist, and I am a gardener at heart.

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As such, we will rely on data to provide evidence for what needs to be done, for how we pro-act, react, and, for what we do. And, in the context of a gardener we will do those things that will ensure a thriving, productive and successful garden. *What do I mean by this?*

The previous administration of which I am proud to say I was an active part of, had a *good growing season*, and a *lot of produce* to show for it. This previous administration has provided us with a pretty good plot of information soil to work with. We have to determine now, what is needed to *fortify the soil for this next growing season*. Now, we have to examine the soil thoroughly to determine what may be helpful and useful for the seeds and the plants that are to be grown, and what may not. There may be weeds that may have grown in the soil during the past growing season, and they will have to be pulled-out. And, we will have to be vigilant and wise as we provide the right about of water, sunshine, shade and fertilizer, and we will need wisdom to know the right time to harvest.

We will establish a *Personnel Evaluation and Enhancement Program (PEEP)*, to help determine effectiveness and efficiency on the job, as well as to help determine mechanisms that need to be put in place to increase productivity. This will allow us to retain productive personnel. We will re-tool and re-train dedicated and committed staff who need boosters, and we will minimize deadwood. We are beginning the process initially with a committee to review a recently completed personnel audit report, generated during the Dennis administration. The TOR of the committee is straightforward: determine steps to address, including implement recommendations made in the report. This is one of the most important exercises at the onset of this administration because no matter what we plan to do, or what we plan to accomplish, it will only happen if the right persons are in place to make them happen.

*What do I mean by the **right** person?* I mean Individuals who have the requisite skills and experience for the job at hand; individuals who are committed to the *ideals* and success of the University of Liberia, individuals who are trustworthy, individuals with integrity (with a capital

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“I”). I can imagine you saying “ hah! good luck!” But we have people like that presently at the University of Liberia; we are looking for more. You are welcome to come join us. Malfeasance, misfeasance and nonfeasance (MMN) are not welcome, and our policy moving forward is zero tolerance for MMN!

Many Rivers to Cross...bridges will help

Before I even begin talking about this next segment, which I refer to as “*Many rivers to cross...bridges will help*”. It may seem like a lot to accomplish, but it is important to keep in mind that some were already underway during the Dennis administration, many will be accomplished in parallel, most will happen within the next 3 years, a few will take longer. We will inform you about each milestone, and ask you to hold us accountable. These are very exciting times at the University of Liberia, and we are very enthusiastic about the future. We ask you to join us and we welcome your assistance in all forms.

Within the next three (3) years we hope to accomplish the following in terms of **Faculty and Capacity Building**, and in the process, we hope to realize qualitative and quantitative improvement in our Faculty Profile:

- We will determine instructional needs of each academic unit based on required course offerings each semester, and specifically focus on training and hiring advanced degree faculty in these disciplines, as well as where we have specific gaps.
- We will reduce *part-time (PT)* faculty by 50%; increase *full time (FT)* faculty to a ratio of 3 FT::1 PT.
- We will reduce by 85% the number of faculty with solely first degrees.
- We will increase the number of faculty with terminal degrees by 30%.
- We will implement our newly established (presently only on paper) ***Teaching & Learning Center (TLC)***...thanks to Mr. Daniel Smith who drafted the organizational document for the center, He is one of our young faculty members who is presently working on his PhD.

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On Curricular issues, we hope to:

- Complete review and revision of all academic programs at the University of Liberia that have not been reviewed within the last 5 years.
- And introduce a few *hybrid & on-line* courses at UL.

On Program Development, the following five (5) undergraduate and two (2) graduate programs will be established within the next 3-4 years (for undergraduate programs: mechanical engineering, architecture, information communications technology, fisheries, and an Honors College; for graduate programs: Masters in Public Health and Masters in Environmental Sciences). Some will require less than three years because the developmental process is underway, others will take more than three years, due to the complexity of the program, and availability of funding. For example:

- We are close to putting the finishing touches on establishing a ***Mechanical Engineering program*** in the COE, and if all goes well, that could take place some time next year, thanks to Dean Gus Moore and his team of dedicated Engineering faculty. Let me also take this time to tell you about our *Fee-for-Service Program*, which includes soil testing among many other services in the COE. Our *Fee-for-Service Program* will help us financially sustain our laboratories. Come visit us and see some of the state-of-the-art engineering laboratories that we have, here today, thanks to USAID's assistance.
- In partnership and collaboration with the Liberian Institute of Architects (LIA) and regional universities, we hope to develop and implement a 4-5 year ***Architecture Program*** at the University of Liberia. We began discussions on this a while back and look forward to making it actually happen.
- Also, in partnership with the Ministry of Health, JFKMMC and International Partner Universities, a ***Master of Public Health (MPH)*** curriculum is being drafted.
- Working with the Environmental Protection Agency of Liberia, we look forward to establishing a ***Graduate Program in Environmental***

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Sciences. But let me say a little more about this. We recognize that it makes sense to develop *in-country graduate programs* so that some of our best baccalaureate graduates can continue their science education at the graduate level *in Liberia*. We hope **to increase the likelihood that these students will remain in Liberia and contribute to its development after graduation**. *No such educational opportunities in the sciences or engineering currently exist at the University of Liberia.*

- To this end, the University of Liberia looks forward to developing a *M.Sc. in Environmental Sciences* that will academically prepare and provide students with the foundation, tools and framework to be productive researchers and proactive contributors to national and, regional development. The aim of the M.Sc. Program in Environmental Science is to provide graduate education in the causes, effects and management of environmental challenges, particularly in Liberia. Targeted applicants for this program are individuals with degrees in the basic sciences, engineering, social science and legal disciplines. We anticipate that after completion of this program, these trained environmental scientists will provide monitorial, investigational and advisory expertise in environmental management.
- We hope to establish an ***Information and Communications Technology (ICT) Division*** in the TJR Faulkner College of Science & Technology, because a 21st century University with a Science & Technology College but no ICT programs, can be likened to a jog in the desert without water!
- We are in the process of developing a ***Fisheries Program*** in the College of Agriculture and Forestry (CAF).
- As well, we are already working on transforming our Honors Program *at the University of Liberia*, into an ***Honors College***. A draft proposal document has been prepared by Director Mamawa Moore and her team, and is presently in the process of undergoing requisite vetting, and funding feasibility review.

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On Students Success

Through our recent and successful entrance examination exercise, Thanks to a large number of persons but most especially Dr Peter Humphrey, our Dean for the College of Science & Technology, Mr Preston Tulay USAID Education Consultant in the Engineering College, and so many others, we are on the road to realizing a fully functioning **Testing & Evaluation Center**, one that is not limited to entrance exams.

- We hope to put in place a **Students Success & Service Center**.

Through government ministries, corporate and private organizations, individuals, and more, the University of Liberia Student Union, (ULSU), provides the largest financial aid to students at the University of Liberia. Every semester (except for last academic year), thousands of students wait for ULSU to submit the financial aid list of students to the University of Liberia Administration in order to register for classes. But, many students do not make the list, and they don't register. Seemingly, the selection process is not necessarily merit-based, nor is there a specific timeline for selection, all of which contribute to prolonged registration periods, which in turn adversely affects the entire University of Liberia academic calendar. As well, there is a present deficit in the ULSU financial aid program of about fifty (50) million Liberian dollars!

In an attempt to correct this situation, restore discipline, and at the same time infuse good leadership training for our students, there is a need to overhaul the ULSU Financial Aid Program and in the process provide improved oversight, and introduce a more structured merit-based and need-based selection system that is fair and transparent.

Possibly, a *Student Academic Success and Service Center* could be an alternative, through which students are recruited, evaluated, monitored and placed in various university-wide academic and administrative work-study settings. The students would receive tuition waivers and monthly stipends, and more of their free time, would be spent in structured settings. Hopefully they would learn to be more responsible with the use of their time, learn to be more disciplined and

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strategic in thought and actions, and receive assistance with development of more directed and productive leadership skills.

On infrastructure Improvement:

- There will be *wi-fi and internet access* for the 4 campuses of the University of Liberia by the end of the year. This was already in the making and we look forward to their realization.
- Our challenge continues to be having access to a fully *integrated network platform/system* for enrollment, human resource and financial management, which requires a level of finance that we do not presently have, but we are hopeful.

On Staff Development:

- Earlier, I referred to establishing a ***Personnel Evaluation and Enhancement Program (PEEP)***
- And, we will also provide opportunities for staff to attain advanced degrees and participate in job-related refresher workshops, seminars, symposia and short courses

For our Enrichment Programs, with local and international partners

- The College of Agriculture and Forestry, in partnership with the Ministry of Agriculture and the University of Georgia will develop a ***Poultry Program*** with focal involvement of youths (using the 4H model), and women in communities that surround our Fendall and Sinje campuses.
- We will establish a productive ***University Farm*** and a thriving ***Farmers' Market*** (We have the land to make both happen)

The following group of big-ticket projects may require more time to fund-raise, but are potentially revenue-generating.

- In partnership with the University of Liberia Alumni Chorus (ULAC) we are currently working together to construct a ***Performing Arts Center***. This project was initiated a little over a year ago.

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- We look forward to putting in place a ***Recreation & Wellness Center***. This is a needed facility for our entire University family, for reasons that we all know!
- We hope to construct a permanent ***Convocation Complex***, rather than having to construct and dismantle temporary structures every year.
- We will put in place our very own ***University Printing Press***.
- Lastly, for now, we would like to build a ***Demonstration School*** for our Teachers College.

Let me take this opportunity to say a little more about why we need a Demonstration school. Thanks to the efforts of our newly appointed Dean of Teachers College, Dr. Cecelia Cassell, with the assistance of a team of talented Liberian educators, our faculty Senate recently approved the University of Liberia curriculum for *Early Childhood Teacher Education (ECTE)*, one of many steps before submission to the Board of Trustees. Still wanting is construction of a demonstration school for our trainees.

Lee Shulman in his 2011 publication wrote: “if teacher training programs only focus their training on the theoretical aspect, that is, content of the courses in the classrooms, and fail to engage trainees in understanding the relationship between these courses and practice, the growth of their trainees would be impaired.” He further noted that knowledge *of teaching* differs from *knowledge about teaching*, and explained that one may learn about teaching by doing courses, but teaching skills can only be acquired by active engagement in teaching practice. To this end, we welcome assistance with the construction of our demonstration school for our Early Childhood, Primary and Secondary Teacher Education Programs.

When All is Said...

Madam President, and Visitor of the University of Liberia; Mr. Vice President; Officers & Members of the Board of Trustees; Distinguished

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Officials of Government; Members of the Diplomatic Corps; Presidents and Special Representatives of Universities and Colleges, Officers & Members of the Alumni Association; Students, Faculty, and Staff of the University of Liberia; Relatives, Friends and Well-Wishers; Members of the Press; Ladies and Gentlemen, **towards a nobler destiny**, we must *up the ante* and offer to the people of Liberia a University of Liberia that we are all proud of, so that **the flagship University of Liberia** is more representative of what a university should be in the 21st century.

I am energized and motivated by the words of a very famous and wise person: "...if your dreams don't scare you, they're not big enough"²

I thank you.

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