

**Remarks of the Honorable Mignon L. Clyburn
Federal Communications Commission**

*Founder's Day Convocation
Paine College, Augusta, Georgia
February 7, 2014*

To Dr. George Bradley, the distinguished President of this fine institution; to the Board of Trustees; Officers; Deans; Faculty; Staff; Students; Alumni; distinguished guests, and ladies and gentlemen of the Central Savannah River Area community.

It is truly an honor to be here today, as we celebrate 132 years of excellence at Paine College.

I am especially proud to join you this morning, not only in my role as an FCC Commissioner, but also as a neighbor and a daughter of the South. Many of you know of my deep South Carolina roots, so I say without hesitation that it's good to be home and among family.

As an FCC Commissioner, I am often asked to speak on a wide range of issues—usually relating to communications, technology, media, information, regulatory affairs, and occasionally the politics which affect the multibillion dollar communications industry.

My work is both rewarding and challenging, and I am grateful to our President for appointing me to serve in this capacity.

But, as the only African American on the FCC, I see my responsibilities through a unique set of lenses, born from my experiences in South Carolina as a public school student, who attended both segregated and integrated public schools; as an entrepreneur, painfully aware of the challenges of meeting payroll; as an elected member of my home State Utilities Commission, responsible for balancing the needs of consumers and the companies which serve them, and as one who understands, first hand, that many in this country do not share in some of the wonderful opportunities afforded to me and many of you in this audience.

So I see my role as public servant, as a facilitator of opportunities and a connector of the disconnected.

Government should have a limited role in our lives and the markets that are important when things are going well. But when they do not – when there is unfairness or inefficiency — then those of us in government have the responsibility to step in judiciously to ensure fairness and to restore foreclosed opportunities.

I believe it is important to make sure that there is not only a level playing field, but also that the game is open to every player who wants to step onto that field.

These are the ideals and principles which guide my day-to-activities and keep me headed in what I believe is the right direction, even in the face of headwinds or difficult challenges.

As I reflect on the Paine College Ideal—an ideal, developed by a faculty committee appointed by President E. C. Peters in 1933, and revised by the Board of Trustees at the Spring Meeting in 2003, I am inspired and reinvigorated.

For those who do not know the Paine College Ideal by heart, allow me to share its words:

The Paine College Ideal

To love truth, and seek it above material things;
 To ennoble and be ennobled by common fellowship;
 To keep the energies of life, at full tide;
 To cultivate an appreciation of the beautiful;
 To work well, and play with zest;
 To have an open, unprejudiced mind;
 To live simply, practicing a reasonable economy;
 To find joy, in work well done;
 To be an earnest disciple, in the school of Him, who brings, the abundant life;
 To work diligently, for a better understanding, of the White and Black races.
 Such is the spirit and ideal of Paine College.
 To all who share this spirit, and are eager for the pursuit of high things, we offer a hearty welcome.

What a motivating charge that is for students, staff, supporters and for us all. At a time when our society seems to be saddled with challenges, the principles expressed in these ideals seem in stark contrast to the streams of dissonance and discontent that flow throughout many of our communities.

But, as I reflect further on the history and mission of Paine College, over the last 132 years, your Mission stands out as a beacon of enlightenment and encouragement, and I am more motivated than ever.

- Quality
- Excellence
- Ethics
- Spirit
- Leadership
- Service

Paine's mission can be summarized in these six main principles, which I believe are not only essential for students and young leaders, but for us all.

Quality

In business, we often hear the axiom: "It is quality, not quantity, which matters." And to a great extent this is true. When it comes to an individual, it is not hard to pick out that person who exudes quality. In fact, when we describe someone's positive attributes, we often speak in terms of their "qualities".

Paine College has been producing young men and women of quality for dozens of years, and it is a mission that has yielded a successful and engaged group of alumni for this institution.

And as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. advised us: “The quality, not the longevity, of one’s life is what is important.”

Excellence

Excellence has been defined, as “possessing good qualities in an eminent degree; exalted merit; superiority in virtue.” Several years ago, following the publication of *In Search of Excellence* by Tom Peters, a bestselling New York Times author, the business world began to focus on the concept of excellence as a guiding principle. Today, excellence is still important to corporations and business leaders, and we all know, and reputable studies prove, that when excellence is expected and required, people generally rise to that standard.

John Gardner, a social activist once noted: “Some people have greatness thrust upon them. Few have excellence thrust upon them . . . they achieve it. They do not achieve it unwittingly”, he went on to say, “by doing what comes naturally, and they don’t stumble into it in the course of amusing themselves. All excellence involves discipline and tenacity of purpose.”

And I agree.

So as Paine College continues to expect and promote excellence among its students as an ideal and as part of its mission, through discipline and tenacity, you will continue to produce alumni who excel in their respective fields of endeavor, whatever those fields may be.

Ethics

Ethics remains important in our day-to-day lives. However, it is a principle which, unfortunately, some of our business and government leaders have not always gotten correctly.

Ethics also is one of those areas of responsibility where a person is not always outwardly rewarded for adhering to that standard. There is usually no plaque, no certificate, no bonus, and no parade for doing what is right and just. It is expected of us as law-abiding citizens and as responsible members of our communities.

But, as Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart observed: “Ethics is knowing the difference between what you have a right to do, and what is right to do.” And therein lies the challenge for many people today. We are bombarded with so many examples of the rich, famous and infamous, who do not always exemplify the best ethical behavior. And too often they seem to gain financially from that behavior.

Now don’t get me wrong. I am not saying there is a problem with being rich or famous. I am just saying that perhaps we should be taking more of our cues from the pillars of our communities—those professors, teachers, coaches, pastors, parents, who work hard day-in and day-out. They provide the shining examples of what ethics in action looks like.

Leadership

Leadership is a quality in great demand. In Washington, we often hear calls for leadership on this issue or that initiative. In our communities, we hear talk of leadership to address the problems like crime, or poor education or the lack of jobs.

But as one observer noted: “Leaders are made, not born. You learn to become a leader by doing what other excellent leaders have done before you. You become proficient in your job or skill, then you become proficient at understanding the motivations and behaviors of other people.” Then, and only then, do you take up the mantle of leadership on your own accord.

Like ethics, leadership can also be a tireless and thankless task—as we too often subject our leaders to higher expectations and higher levels of scrutiny. But I am often reminded of the saying that if you want to lead the orchestra, you must turn your back on the crowd.

America’s sixth president, John Quincy Adams noted that: “If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader.”

For those of you at Paine College, leadership is not a foreign concept. You have been teaching and training leaders for many years, and as you celebrate the vision of your founders, today, you are to be commended on the leadership and vision you have had in fulfilling your mission.

Service

As is often said, no person is an island. We all live, breathe, and work in an environment that affects others in both large and small ways. So service is one of the highest callings anyone can perform. Whether it is service to your family, your church, your community, your city, your state, your nation, “the best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others,” the great humanitarian, Mahatma Gandhi told us.

As someone who has been involved in public service for most of my life, I say without hesitation, that there is no greater feeling than to be able to help your fellow man without the expectation of something in return.

But you are surrounded by an entire community of servants here at Paine College, and what’s so great about service, is that it most often does not have to be a grandiose undertaking. It can come through volunteerism, philanthropy, good-neighborliness; lending a helping hand, and just looking out for one another. All of these are high callings, indeed.

And, as our 28th President of the United States, Woodrow Wilson, said: “You are not here merely to make a living. You are here to enable the world to live more amply, with greater vision, and with a finer spirit of hope and achievement. You are here to enrich the world. You impoverish yourself if you forget this errand.”

Everything you are doing here at Paine College is of great importance, and our nation needs you because you are being prepared with laudable principles, which will better equip you to engage a global community that is moving fast with technology, yet still has left some of those core fundamentals behind.

We all see those business leaders, entrepreneurs and movers and shakers who are amassing great fortunes and making great strides, but we see too few who have mastered the basic qualities of ethics, excellence, leadership and service – principles which are at the very core of your institution.

Thus, in the words of our 44th President, Barack Obama on the occasion of his First Inaugural Address, I leave this charge with you:

“What is required of us now, is a new era of responsibility — a recognition, on the part of every American, that we have duties to ourselves, our nation, and the world... duties that we do not grudgingly accept, but rather seize gladly, firm in the knowledge that there is nothing so satisfying to the spirit, so defining of our character, as giving our all to a difficult task.”

So, again, to Dr. Bradley and the entire Paine College community, thank you for the opportunity to share in this great *Founder's Day Convocation*. And to the students of this fine institution: Accept the charge. Embrace the principles codified by this institution, for your communities need you now more than ever. We are counting on you. And with the lessons from Paine College and its supporters, each and every day, you will receive all the tools you need to truly make a difference. None of us have any doubt. It lies inside of you.

So dream, live, aspire and realize those ideals which Paine College continues to instill in you.

Thank you and God bless.