

REACHING FOR ALTITUDE

INAUGURAL ADDRESS

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PRESIDENT OF CLARK UNIVERSITY

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Mechanics Hall

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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 here *with 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, both natural and important that today we look back as well as ahead. Recalling at least some aspects of the path we have already taken provides helpful context for where our institutional foot may fall next. In a moment I will share some reflections on our history and goals for our future, and ask you all to help me write a next chapter for Clark that is both faithful to our distinctive beginnings and also has us together reaching higher.

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 honor Clark as well.

Bob Zimmer, a giant of my professional life, was determined, despite all he is contending with healthwise, to record a message for today's event and I couldn't be more grateful or moved that he did so.

To David Rubenstein: the initiative that you and I worked on together at the University of Chicago was one of the greatest gifts and most exciting challenges of my professional career. I thank you for that opportunity as well as the gift of your friendship and your many roles of service to our country.

To Ross Gillman, chair of Clark's Board of Trustees, I express tremendous appreciation for being such a deeply invested partner in our work together. The entire Board of Trustees is a remarkably dedicated group that cares deeply about Clark and is unafraid of the challenging questions that lay before us, both at Clark and in higher education more broadly.

To my faculty colleagues who crafted and performed original musical compositions for today's ceremony—Matt Malsky, John Aylward, Calin Marcel Manson, and Yelena Beriyeveva—I am so grateful for the gift of your time and talent. To Leonardo Ciampa, the composer in residence and organist here at Mechanics Hall, thank you for showcasing that remarkable instrument in this historic space. To Clark senior Thomas Mueller, I know your performance—still to come—will bring today's ceremony to a happy and energizing conclusion. Thank you all, including the Sterling Brass Ensemble, very much.

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 step-father for the chance to people-watch.

Finally, let me thank the Inauguration Committee, the members of which are listed in your program, and the dozens of other staff and students who are supporting this weekend's festivities. Events like this never just happen and when they happen well it is because

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 Clark University's past is really a multiplicity of stories about Clark's people. Throughout its history, and to the present day, Clark has been home to remarkably talented and engaged teachers and scholars, researchers, students, and staff. Many have been intellectual pioneers and fearless proponents of unconventional thinking leading Clark time and again to having an outsized impact on the world.

G. Stanley Hall, Clark's first president, was a developmental psychologist who introduced the concept of adolescence, and founded the American Psychological Association. Clark physicist Robert H. Goddard's research in liquid-fuel rocketry brought us to the moon and earned him the title "Father of the Space Age." Clark biologist Charles Otis Whitman became the "Father of Zoology," and was the founding director of the Marine Biological Laboratory in Woods Hole, the oldest marine biological lab in North America, of which I am a proud trustee. Albert Michelson, the first American to win a Nobel Prize in science, did seminal work here at Clark in measuring the speed of light—work that inspired Albert Einstein. Professor Gregory Pincus's research at Clark later paved the way for the development of the birth control pill. A graduate student at Clark, Miriam Van Waters, became one of the most influential voices in prison reform in our country in the early 20th century. Paul Siple, another graduate student, advanced the theory of wind chill and devised a way to measure it. Still another graduate student at Clark, Francis Cecil Sumner, was the first black person in the United States to earn a Ph.D. in psychology, and went on to be instrumental in founding the psychology department at Howard University and to become known as the "Father of Black Psychology." Trustee Alice Higgins was the first woman to serve as chair of

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 the 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 Koelsch talks about three things that characterize Clark's institutional identity. The first is, in fact, this focus on the individual. The second is the focus on the quality of our people and their shared commitment to rigorous intellectual exploration along with a high degree of institutional loyalty. And the third is the attention we pay to our past as a resource for our present.

The Clark of today continues to be rooted in these characteristics, as well as a set of shared values that have not only endured but have strengthened over time. These include: A commitment to our institution, to each other, and to the communities we serve ... along with a fierce embrace of individuality. A commitment to discovering new solutions and creating new knowledge ... driven by a relentless passion to challenge the status quo and change our world for the better. A deeply held commitment to social justice and inclusive excellence ... which underpins an uncompromising commitment to translating our values into action and being a more just and equitable institution.

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, our "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 and unique history and, crucially, communicating all this more widely and effectively.

In many ways, Clark is stronger than it has ever been—and this, despite the global pandemic. It is this strong foundation that affords us the opportunity to push even further, to reach even higher, to secure our distinctive place in the future of the academy.

Our goals in the years ahead—laid out in the Strategic Framework on which we have been working for the past two years—are very straightforward: achieve greater excellence in our academic and research programs; improve the campus experience for all, but especially for our students; advance diversity, equity, and inclusion; expand our engagement outside of the University; and augment our institutional capacity.

We will **achieve broader excellence in our academic and research programs** by building on Clark’s distinctive University College model. We will seek to improve our academic reputation and research productivity overall in measurable and meaningful ways.

We will **improve the campus experience** by better promoting a sense of belonging, shared community, and vibrant campus life for students, faculty, and staff through direct engagement, enhanced support, and co-curricular programs. We will improve Clark’s facilities, grounds, and campus operations to inspire and enable opportunities to thrive, individually and as an institution.

We will **advance diversity, equity, and inclusion** to achieve an environment and campus culture that is more fully accepting and that supports our entire community well, allowing everyone to be themselves and do their best work. We will make Clark an ever more welcoming and attractive place especially for those who have been excluded historically. We will continue to embrace difference, including in intellectual thought, and we will work to achieve even greater breadth of perspectives and experiences in our community.

We will **expand our outward engagement** and broaden our reach by communicating more assertively, by more frequently convening great thinkers, and by more actively partnering with those locally, regionally, and further afield. At the same time, we will deepen our close ties to the Main South Community and the City of Worcester. Clark will more fully “act” on the global stage as an engaged, thought-provoking, and thought-leading research university.

Finally, we will **increase our institutional capacity** by attracting and driving philanthropic, grant, and operating revenue toward impact, and we will build strength through strategic partnerships. We will also catalyze momentum by the successful execution of our initiatives. We have for too long had to do *more with less* and over the coming decade we must do *more with more in a virtuous cycle*.

This Strategic Framework belongs to us all and the engagement of the campus community including the trustees has been remarkable. I could not be more grateful for the time and energy so many people invested in this work alongside so many other regular responsibilities and the extraordinary challenges of the pandemic. The fruits of your labor are already evident.

The ultimate aim of our Strategic Framework is that it further positions Clark University to be a relentless force for positive change in the world. We will achieve this through our research, through our scholarship, through our teaching, through the local and global impact of our alumni, and through the distinctive environment in which we champion the myriad talents of all the remarkable individuals that day-by-day comprise our community. And we will do this while remaining true to our institutional values and identity.

In short, it is through *a fearlessness to assert ourselves in the moment that we will reach greater altitude as a university*.

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 let 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.