

As prepared for delivery

**Beyond Good Will: Committing to Diversity, Inclusion, and  
the Scholarship of Belonging**

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It is wonderful to be here tonight celebrating the life of Dr. Edward Bouchet and the legacy of his example. I would like to thank President Peter Salovey for his kind invitation to receive Yale University's Bouchet Leadership Award Medal. I am also grateful to Dean Nearon for organizing this extraordinary program and to Provost Wutoh from Howard University. It is an honor for me to meet Professor Patton and his family. In addition to this personal distinction, I am very pleased that the University of Miami has recently been recognized as an institutional member of the Edward Alexander Bouchet Graduate Honor Society.

Dr. Bouchet was born about a century before me, in 1852. He was the son of a freed slave, a child growing up in an America still struggling under the nightmare of slavery and its aftermath.

As you know well, in 1876, at the age of 24, Bouchet became the first African American to earn a Ph.D. from any university in the United States and only the sixth person in the Western Hemisphere to earn a Ph.D. in physics. People do not casually choose to pursue a Ph.D. in physics; for Bouchet to do so reveals an extraordinary tenacity and commitment to learning.

And yet physicist and historian Ronald Mickens notes: "All the honors and academic credentials could not overcome the fact that Bouchet was Afro-American...the ticket of higher education held no promise as race prevented him from sharing the rewards bestowed on those of similar ability and educational achievement."<sup>1</sup>

Nearly 100 years after Bouchet's death, the pipeline for faculty of color remains too narrow; the ranks of African American scholars too thin. This is a challenge that all of us in higher education must address together, and I want to applaud President Salovey for the outstanding \$50 million dollar initiative to strengthen diversity among the faculty at Yale.

It is perhaps fitting that Dr. Bouchet's thesis was on the refraction of light through different kinds of glass—reflecting his fascination with the prism of colors both in the laboratory and in the segregated world in which he lived.

A 1979 Yale report on the Status of Black Graduate & Professional Students said about Dr. Bouchet:

“Preeminent, humane, undaunted by enormous odds, untouched by self-pity...We may never know the specifics of Bouchet’s suppression. We have no documents that give clues to his thoughts on his career. We know only that he lived during a period that can only be called terrible for Black people. His challenges must have been magnificent.”<sup>2</sup>

Today we recognize not only the magnificent challenges he faced, but his magnificent legacy. I am proud to play a part in honoring that legacy and to examine together the challenges that remain.

In February of last year, while I was serving as dean of the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, students and faculty there were reacting with alarm to incidents around the country that highlighted the disturbing persistence of racism and intolerance. We held a town hall discussion about events in Ferguson and New York, about the Black Lives Matter movement, and about the public health dimensions of racial injustice, which often center on health disparities and gun violence. To my surprise, the conversation shifted fairly quickly from what was happening *outside* our walls to what was happening *within* them. Students of color at the School spoke passionately about feelings of alienation and discomfort. It was evident that we had a diverse school where many felt that they did not belong and that Harvard was not the right place for them.

Students expressed anger and sadness over how the systemic racism revealed in those national flashpoints also permeated their School and University. Clearly, they didn’t feel they were part of a community that shared or was even interested in their pain. They sat in classes feeling isolated.

I was stunned. I was proud of our levels of diversity—one of the best at Harvard—but the town hall discussion made me realize that diversity in numbers was not enough. I know that universities exist as a part of society so I should not have been surprised, but I will admit that I was.

A month later—actually a year ago today—I participated in a retreat of the Council of Deans at Harvard, and a large part of the discussion centered on these national events and on issues of diversity and inclusion. That day Harvard President Drew Faust articulated the need to develop what she called a “scholarship of belonging.” This struck me as a powerful concept, and I began reflecting on the ways to put such a rigorous examination into practice.

When a few months later I became the sixth president of the University of Miami, diversity, inclusion, and belonging occupied a prominent place in my inaugural address. I articulated a defining vision for the institution, which included the core aspiration to be what I called “the exemplary university.” Let me briefly explain.

### **The exemplary university**

At different moments in history, universities have served as crucial models or examples to the larger world. Today we are again in a defining moment when universities must themselves embrace the values and behaviors that we would hope to see reflected in the society of which we are a part. At a time when many voices question the value universities add, I would submit that we must trace our *value* to our *values*. Integrity, respect, diversity, tolerance, resilience—such qualities are at the heart of what universities are and what we want them to be.

In a world that seems increasingly fractured and fractious, our sense of community is under threat. One of the most important ways in which universities can be exemplary is by embracing diversity in all its dimensions—race and ethnicity, national origin, gender, language, economic assets, sexual orientation, religion, age, physical capacities.

But I want to stress again that diversity by numbers is not enough. Representation means little without a culture of belonging—a sense of being at the right place, where *who* we are and *what* we do matters. Creating such an environment is no small task. It is somewhat ironic that in our interconnected world so many people feel the alienation that comes from a lack of meaningful connection to others. We need not only *virtual* connectivity but also *real* connectedness. To fulfill this ideal, we must understand better the circumstances that can foster it. Better understanding should lead to specific policies

and practices that enable inclusive, respectful, and safe interactions throughout our campuses.

Diversity can only flourish in a climate of tolerance—a value that is also under threat. In our turbulent times, universities must lead the way in intentionally cultivating the free expression of diverse perspectives. A global orientation can help this endeavor. The great British philosopher, Sir Isaiah Berlin has proposed the comparative studies of other cultures as an antidote against intolerance, stereotypes, and the dangerous delusion by individuals, states, political parties, ideologies or religions of being the sole possessors of truth. This kind of cultural awareness may promote empathy, that human characteristic which allows us to mentally participate in an unfamiliar reality, understand it, relate to it and, in the end, value both our differences and our common humanity. How, then, can our campuses be dynamic engines of tolerance, energized incubators of empathy?

For me this is deeply personal. My father and his family were forced to leave Germany in the 1930s. I would not be here today if they had not found a welcoming refuge in Mexico, a country that was poor economically but rich in the ways that matter most—tolerance, kindness to strangers, solidarity with those who suffer persecution. These values are as important today as when my family was given the opportunity to start a new life.

I am proud to be the University of Miami's first Hispanic president. I am also keenly aware that each of us holds diverse identities. Even as a white male, I have had occasions where I have felt the sting of difference, or been the subject of stereotypes as a Mexican, or as a Jew, or as a person of mixed German and Spanish descent. Because most of us have multiple identities, at least one facet of ourselves may fall out of the mainstream and be stigmatized in some way.

Your accent, the color of your skin, a disability, an illness, an economic burden, a family secret. Feeling the sting of stigma—or perceived stigma—leads us to do the hard work of what NYU legal scholar and Yale Law School alumnus Kenji Yoshino terms “covering” in his brilliantly crafted book titled exactly that: *Covering*.<sup>3</sup>

Some of these differences are more easily hidden than others. Some are more stigmatized. Some are illegal in certain parts of the world. Not all of the burdens we carry weigh the same. All forms of covering are not equally pernicious.

The great W. E. B. Du Bois powerfully describes what he called “a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity.” He goes on to observe: “One ever feels his twoness—an American, a Negro; two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.”<sup>4</sup>

Du Bois insightfully captures the challenge of integrating multiple identities, especially in a societal context where some of them are the subject of stigma or discrimination. In my view, the resolve to stand against the external forces of discrimination and intolerance can be strengthened if we embrace our inner diversity, rather than “being torn asunder.” By integrating and celebrating our diverse identities, we can reject an exclusionary definition of the ‘others.’ Each of us is all of us. National politics and international diplomacy would be much more effective if they were driven by this conviction. Exemplary universities must demonstrate to the larger world that such an enlightened pathway is indeed possible.

### **Culture of belonging**

Now, diversity and inclusion are very important, but institutions of higher education must take the next step of creating a true culture of belonging.

Author and political scientist Robert Putnam distinguishes between two types of social capital: bonding capital, which allows you to connect with people who are like you, and bridging capital, which allows you to connect with people who are different from you.

On campuses today you see much more of bonding. If we are not deliberate about creating the conditions that will encourage real bridging, we are left with multiplicity rather than real diversity. We are left with a series of disconnected conversations that do not feed or challenge one another, a kind of archipelago of like individuals occupying the same ocean, not a community forged of common ground.

While bonding can strengthen our identity, bridging can counteract the fear of loss of identity often associated with assimilation. Bridging can also reduce the fear of blowing our “cover.” For Yoshino, covering is a survivalist byproduct of what he calls “the dark side of assimilation.” He warns against “our current practice of fracturing into groups, each clamoring for state and social solicitude”<sup>5</sup>—that is, bonding at the expense of bridging. To influence society we must work across differences to build new forms of civic strength and belonging.

Ideally, college is a place where we forge our own identities while coming into contact with diverse communities. How can universities be both centers of belonging and of difficult and provocative discussions? How can they both nurture connection and the discomfort that is a necessary part of personal and social growth?

First, universities must create a safe environment where people feel respected and know that their points of view will be met with tolerance. This alone, as we know, is not a simple first step.

While striving together for a more perfect union of respect and tolerance, universities cannot seek to create an antiseptic environment that avoids conflict or discomfort. Striving to remain open in the face of strong disagreement will inevitably lead to conflict, misunderstanding, discord, and the failure of human beings to be fully present to one another. Universities rarely seek to characterize themselves with words like “conflict” and “friction.” And yet, if we are to enter together into the work of inclusively learning together, we must.

### **Building a scholarship of belonging**

Universities must commit to exploring these tough questions, mobilizing resources in teaching, research, and service—as well as in their own daily practices as exemplary institutions. These are indeed difficult questions, and that is why we need a scholarship of belonging.

If one deconstructs the word belonging, it contains two components: “be”—as in being—and “longing.” Being signifies authenticity and freedom from the need to cover

aspects of one's identity. Longing alludes to the profound human yearning to connect with others and be part of something that transcends us.

My colleague Isaac Prilleltensky, dean of the School of Education and Human Development at the University of Miami, offers a related conceptualization whereby the sense of belonging involves two mutually reinforcing elements: feeling valued and having the opportunity to add value.

Feeling valued is about recognition—being acknowledged for who we are authentically. Recognition is intrinsic to a sense of dignity. It is about honoring your unique strengths, identity, and biography. Acceptance and recognition are markers that we belong to a community—that we are seen, that we matter, that we count.

Feeling valued is important but not enough. We must also participate in the creation of our common future. Our strengths must be acknowledged and engaged in the work before us. The opportunity to add value is an affirmation of our impact on the world. Without real opportunities to add value, over time we feel less valued.

Osamudia James, a law professor at the University of Miami, talks eloquently about people of color being relegated in predominantly white schools to roles of “service but not belonging.” If people of color are not truly valued and do not operate in roles that enable them to add value to the community, then they are relegated to the role of satisfying an abstract ideal of “diversity” to enrich the learning environment of the majority. That is not true diversity, its instrumental diversity, and it should satisfy no one.

These are examples of scholars who are using their disciplinary might to shine light on the inequities that are all too often invisible in our society. Scholars have, of course, been studying community for as long as academia has existed, but I am calling for a renewed sense of urgency to be brought to the scholarship of belonging.

For far too long, society has treated minority groups from a deficit analysis, not an asset analysis.

For far too long, institutions have reacted to racial tensions instead of proactively creating inclusive spaces.



For far too long, we have taught people how to adjust to an unacceptable status quo instead of sharing the legitimate means to challenge injustice.

For far too long, we have let efficiency trump listening and allowed limited diversity to supplant real equity at the table, at the podium, and in the boardroom.

For far too long, we have blamed victims instead of engaging in a shared effort to understand the sources of bias and develop interventions to counter them.

All of us have goodwill, but we must move beyond goodwill. To create a truly inclusive society it is not enough to rely on good intentions. Universities can do much to improve a sense of belonging by setting clear goals, creating inclusive environments, and challenging negative stereotypes about certain groups.

If we want to foster an inclusive climate, we have to create structures that ensure participation of minority groups in decisions. We need to model and teach the competencies of deep listening and respectful dialogue across differences. We must also determine how to work in coalitions to transform the deeply embedded practices that have generated structural barriers to belonging.

Let us launch a movement to develop the scholarship of belonging, first by conceptualizing it with clarity, then by designing innovative interventions, and finally by conducting rigorous assessment.

I suggest that it is the responsibility of every discipline to offer their work to these challenges. I also suggest that we shun any inclination to consider this scholarship as removed from our daily lives. If we can effectively promote diversity, inclusion, and belonging in our universities, we will not only have enriched our lives in the academy, but we will have also set an example for the betterment of other social institutions.

Promoting belonging in universities cannot be fully achieved without considering the question of access. There are individuals who are not on our campuses today because they felt unwelcome, and we need to address that. But there are also many persons with great potential and promise who are not on our campuses today because they have been denied throughout their lives the same opportunities to learn and to thrive that others enjoy. It is worth noting that, despite these barriers, there are students, faculty, and staff

on every campus who have fought to be there and who see their time on that campus as a struggle to participate, to learn, and to belong. Most of you in this room are such leaders. Personally, I am grateful to so many who get to our campuses and stay on our campuses, working to build connections and holding us accountable. You inspire me each day.

## **Conclusion**

A year ago, I realized that a conversation inside my institution was equally as potent as the conversation outside our campus. Tonight, it is my hope that Yale University, Howard University, the University of Miami, and other universities around the country can build conversations, policies, and ways of living and knowing together that can serve as models for the community at large, the country at large, the world at large. Universities at their best are exemplars for society: crucibles of what Lincoln called the “angels of our better nature.”

Universities must also rely on their students and alumni to push them to change. If you do not feel you belong to your alma mater, your most valuable contribution may be to push it hard to become a better place. Universities must not respond defensively to these critiques. I know it is difficult to see resistance as a form of investment, but we must accept these challenges from within our communities as a companion part of what it means for our institutions to grow. We must model our tolerance for discord and conflict with the same self-confidence we display in our admissions brochures, our web sites, and our Instagram feeds.

Universities are often the most diverse community in which its members will ever live. Universities are a part of how many of us learn, for better or for worse, to accommodate the world and our own identity within it.

If we commit seriously to building campuses that engage deeply in these questions, we can offer a model for diverse societies which have not yet succeeded in creating a culture of belonging and have not figured out how to bond and how to bridge. We can move beyond good will. We can all add value. We can all feel valued. And we can all belong.

Thank you again for bestowing on me the honor of receiving Yale University's Bouchet Leadership Award Medal.

## References

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<sup>1</sup>Mickens, Ronald E., Willie Hobbs Imes, and Elmer Samuel Hobbs, eds. *Edward Bouchet: The First African-American Doctorate*. River Edge, NJ: World Scientific, 2002.

<sup>2</sup> Patton, Curtis L. *Status of Black Graduate & Professional Students*. Report. Yale University, 1979.

<sup>3</sup> Yoshino, Kenji. *Covering: The Hidden Assault on Our Civil Rights*. New York, NY: Random House, 2006.

<sup>4</sup> Du Bois, W.E.B. *The Souls of Black Folk; Essays and Sketches*. Chicago, IL: A.C. McClurg &, 1903.

<sup>5</sup> Yoshino, Kenji. *Covering: The Hidden Assault on Our Civil Rights*. New York, NY: Random House, 2006