

**Speech by the Warden of Rhodes House, Oxford,
Dr Donald Markwell,
at the Departure Lunch for the 2010 US, Bermuda, and Caribbean
Rhodes Scholars,
Cosmos Club, Washington, DC,
Wednesday 29 September 2010**

What an enormous personal pleasure it is for me to be with you here in Washington – with the Scholars of the class of 2010 from the US, Jamaica and the Commonwealth Caribbean, and Bermuda, and with Rhodes alumni of many generations. Many thanks to Steve Crown, George Keys, and so many other friends in the AARS for making me – but more importantly, our new Scholars – so welcome during this Bon Voyage Weekend, and many thanks also to Elliot Gerson, our US national secretary, for his tireless work.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank Joyce and Beth in the Washington office for their support for Scholars from election on, their miracle-working with visas, their saintliness and patience with online applications, and so much more. We are all immensely grateful.

I look forward very much to welcoming our new Scholars at Rhodes House, Oxford, on Saturday – unless the Supreme Court finds in the meantime, as I suspect it will, that enduring two speeches from me in under 72 hours is ‘cruel and unusual punishment’. I will of course be welcoming you with nearly 50 other Scholars from a dozen other countries around the world, lifelong friends waiting to be met and made.

As part of the superb and inspiring BVW programme, the 2010 Scholars yesterday heard a fascinating presentation from Jack Zoeller on Alain Locke (Pennsylvania & Hertford 1907). Locke was, as you will know, the first African-American Rhodes Scholar, and the last African-American Scholar until 1963, even as many black Rhodes Scholars were elected from other countries over the intervening decades. Locke was the victim of racial discrimination by his fellow Scholars, amongst many others. This is not an episode of which we can be proud, but it is one from which we can learn – including about the risks of discrimination even by people apparently chosen on the basis of character, and the importance of standing up against it whenever it may be found. Is this not relevant to various forms of discrimination, including on the basis of religion, today?

After yesterday’s session on Locke, a 2010 Scholar said to me that a lesson he drew from Locke’s experience was the importance of connecting in Oxford with Scholars and students of other countries. I couldn’t agree more. There is an episode related to this that may be of interest.

Locke went up to Oxford in 1907. In 1910, a London *Daily Mail* article entitled ‘The Americans at Oxford’ attacked US Rhodes Scholars for keeping themselves to

themselves and not engaging their English surroundings and fellow Oxford students. The writer said, quote, 'the American Rhodes scholar makes friends only with his compatriots... After the first week in Oxford the words "British insularity" are murmured with an accompanying shrug of the shoulders, and the American retires into his shell – the [American] club – where he reads American papers, discusses American politics, sings American songs, and might, indeed, just as well be back in America for all the good he does to himself or to Oxford.'

The *Daily Mail's* writer, simply called 'An Oxford Man', argued that this was directly contrary to the purpose of the Rhodes Scholarship. In recent decades we have often spoken primarily of the purpose of the Rhodes Scholarship as being to develop future leaders who will fight 'the world's fight' and come 'to esteem the performance of public duties as [their] highest goal'. This is certainly an important, a very important, goal of the Scholarship: public spiritedness, active citizenship, public service, public leadership. This was brilliantly displayed for our new Scholars yesterday by Senator Sarbanes and Senator Lugar. But this was not the only purpose, and in the early years of the Scholarship many people were probably more aware of another of Cecil Rhodes's goals - nothing less than nurturing international understanding and peace. I think the relevant codicil from Cecil Rhodes's will is worth quoting: 'The object is that an understanding between the three great powers [the British Empire, the United States, and Germany] will render war impossible and educational relations make the strongest tie.' Let me repeat that: 'The object is that an understanding between the three great powers will render war impossible and educational relations make the strongest tie.'

Rhodes apparently understood that the development of such understanding took time, and despite the outbreak of war in 1914 and 1939, the goal – through educational relations to promote peace – has endured, and – for example - after both world wars the Rhodes Scholarships for Germany, abolished or suspended during the wars, were ultimately created afresh, in 1930 and again in 1970. Last Friday at Rhodes House we marked the 40th anniversary of the creation again in 1970 of the Rhodes Scholarships for Germany, and the retirement of Thomas Böcking, German national secretary for the last 31 years, and of Silvia Böcking.

The *Daily Mail* article of 1910 criticising American Rhodes Scholars as keeping to themselves and not getting to know other students, and so defeating this purpose of the Rhodes scholarships, caused considerable controversy on both sides of the Atlantic. For example, The *New York Times* ran a large article headed 'Rhodes Scholars resent "An Oxford Man's" attack', saying that the criticisms made in the London *Daily Mail* misrepresented them, and they 'do not avoid close association and friendship with Englishmen'. Alain Locke also drafted a response. He began: 'The Rhodes bequest is a huge and unique educational experiment...' He argued that 'the Rhodes idea, in its original and [deep] intention, was that the Rhodes Scholar should' seek 'to confront national bias, eradicate national prejudice, and educate nations to mutual good will and understanding' by what he did back 'in his home country and as a result of his training and experience as a Rhodes scholar'. He also noted that unexpected differences in temperament and values between the English and Americans led to misunderstanding, and tried to explain some of these. Locke concluded that the 'primary aim and obligation' of a Rhodes Scholar 'is to

acquire at Oxford and abroad generally a liberal education, and to continue subsequently the Rhodes mission [of international understanding] throughout life and in his own country. If once more it should prove impossible for nations to understand one another as nations, then, as Goethe said, they must learn to tolerate each other as individuals.'

Tolerance and understanding are helped, I think, if we heed the prayer of the great poet of Scotland, Robbie Burns – to be able to see ourselves as others see us. Consider whether your behaviour will be seen by others as extending the hand of friendship, or as sticking only to your own nationality.

This also means stepping outside the expectations and assumptions formed by our own upbringing and life experience to date, and finding what we can of value in the new environment. One US Rhodes Scholar wrote to me recently – and I quote directly: 'letting go of US-centric expectations ... means, at least: not expecting a huge amount of coddling from advisors, accepting (and even revelling in!) the odd formalities of certain Oxford traditions, giving cricket, rugby and rowing a chance, and learning to laugh at cold rain. My two most rewarding extra-curricular experiences at Oxford', he wrote, 'were learning (and later obsessing over) competitive cricket and renting [and] tending an allotment garden... These are experiences that simply do not exist in the US, much less at US universities. It would have been easier to stick with my hobbies from [college back home], but much less rewarding'.

You are joining a community, in Oxford and globally, of outstanding people drawn from 14 countries or groupings of countries around the world. Seizing every chance to get to know fellow Rhodes Scholars and other students from other countries is one of the most valuable aspects of the remarkable opportunity that lies before you. On my first day as Warden in July last year, I emailed all of the then-current Scholars and asked them for ideas about improving the Scholarship. The most powerfully recurrent theme in responses from Scholars from the US and many other countries was the desire for more opportunities to mix with Scholars of other countries, and our parties and meals and other events at Rhodes House aim to help provide such opportunities. Please always come when you can, and engage with Scholars of other countries!

One of the most important figures in the history of the Rhodes Scholarships – anywhere, anytime – was the first American national secretary to the Rhodes Trust, Frank Aydelotte, who served in that role from 1918 to 1952, also serving as President of Swarthmore for nearly 20 years during that period. In referring to Frank Aydelotte, I wish to pay a tribute of admiration and gratitude to all the American national secretaries – Frank Aydelotte, Courtney Smith, Bill Barber, David Alexander, and Elliot Gerson. I am grateful that Elliot was able to represent us all at the memorial service for David Alexander at Pomona College on Saturday, as we are all grateful to David for seventeen years of outstanding service to the Rhodes Scholarships as US national secretary.

Frank Aydelotte's charming book of 1946, *The American Rhodes Scholarships: A Review of the First Forty Years*, shows that the issues I'm discussing now were

equally relevant then. In a chapter entitled 'What the American Rhodes Scholar gets from Oxford', Aydelotte notes that coursework is prescribed in less detail than many American students are used to, and that there is a greater stress on individual initiative and independent work, and thus a greater challenge of managing your own time, including so as to balance the academic work that is essential in vacations with the travel that is also desirable. Even after several decades, Aydelotte's is an excellent introduction, and I encourage you to find it and read it.

Frank Aydelotte, like Alain Locke, had much to say about American Scholars engaging with the British and with Scholars of other countries. Writing at the end of World War II, and explicitly describing Rhodes's purpose as overcoming 'the scourge of war and anarchy', Aydelotte's image is of continual conversation between students from the US, the UK, Commonwealth and other countries, and travel well-chosen and well-balanced with academic work, leading to American Rhodes Scholars developing what he calls 'an internationalist point of view'. Amongst much else, he said, the American Scholar comes no longer to speak of 'the English' but to understand and appreciate the diversity of the English, liking some and not liking others, as with individuals at home. Aydelotte believed that time in Oxford as a Rhodes Scholar makes you both 'a better American', your pride in your country better grounded than before, and also 'a citizen of the world'.

Frank Aydelotte may have described the US Rhodes Scholar in different language from Alain Locke years before, but both well understood the mission of the Scholarship to promote international understanding, and the need for Scholars of all nations to interact.

Locke, as we all know, was the victim of racial discrimination. As we also know, one of the most powerful cries against discrimination rang forth from the Lincoln Memorial in this city in 1963, when Dr King dreamt that his children would 'not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.'

'The content of their character'. If the promotion of international understanding is a primary goal of the Rhodes Scholarships, then a criterion of selection has always been and always will be the content of your character. Cecil Rhodes said not only that he wanted Scholars with 'moral force of character and ... instincts to lead', but specified many of the qualities of character he sought: 'truth, courage, devotion to duty, sympathy for and protection of the weak, kindness, unselfishness and fellowship'. The winning of a Rhodes Scholarship is not a certificate to say you have such character; it is a lifelong challenge to you to show that you do. It is a challenge to live a life of integrity and authenticity.

As you may know, Groucho Marx is said to have said: 'what people want these days is sincerity. If you can fake that, you've really got it made'. In a slightly more useful vein, Frank Aydelotte wrote:

It is interesting to note that Rhodes evidently regarded leadership as founded upon moral courage and public spirit, concern for the common welfare, as much as upon more aggressive qualities... The go-getter, who covets for himself the largest number of undergraduate offices, the big man of the

campus, is not so likely to be a leader in middle life as the [student] whose concern is the common good rather than personal kudos, and who seeks to relate his college studies to some aspect of the public welfare in the present or the future.

Aydelotte wrote that the choice of Rhodes Scholars was hard, and the members of selection committees must be 'good judges of human nature, ...free from prejudice, ... gifted with intuition and imagination', and with experience. Aren't you lucky to have faced such selection committees last November! But your work is not done yet. Your character will continue to be judged by your fellow Rhodes Scholars and by the communities you serve over the years and decades ahead.

President Kennedy once misquoted Dante as saying that the hottest places in hell are reserved for those who in moments of great moral crisis maintain their neutrality. Even if Dante didn't say that, it is a good sentiment. In this Cosmos Club last December, I met with several Rhodes alumni who have worked in the public and non-profit sectors, and we discussed the values of the Scholarship. A retired general asked how a selection committee could identify the young person who, when all was said and done, had the courage to stand and fight, not cut and run. It is a good question, and another challenge to us all.

I have been talking about some of the great values on which this Scholarship is founded. Today the Rhodes community has an opportunity to think afresh about how we give the best effect we can to these great values. Last Saturday in Oxford about 125 or more Rhodes Scholars of many countries and years took part in a forum on big issues about 'The Rhodes Scholarships for the 21st century'. As at some previous discussions, we looked at such questions as:

- How do we make the Scholarship equally attractive to outstanding young women as to outstanding young men, and to outstanding young people from all parts of the community in all Rhodes countries? This is an important question which has not yet received the full attention it merits in the global Rhodes community.
- From what countries should Rhodes Scholars be drawn over the decades ahead?
- How do we respond best to the profound challenge of reduced resources and increased costs?
- And several more.

These questions are part of a broader process of consultation over the last 15 months, which has already produced many results:

- The creation I have already mentioned of more opportunities for Scholars in Oxford to engage with each other, including with Scholars of other countries;
- governance protocols which provide that from now on between half and two-thirds of Rhodes Trustees will be Rhodes Scholars;
- the appointment, after consultation, of eight new Trustees from several countries around the world, five of them Scholars passionately committed to the Scholarship;

- the creation of new Trustee committees, including the Scholarship Committee with the task of advising on what needs to be done to ensure that the Rhodes Scholarship remains the world's leading scholarship in perpetuity;
- a growing openness to creating, if funds can be found from new sources, Scholarships for new countries, including from countries once served by Rhodes Scholarships, to refresh the Scholarship's geographic footprint for the realities of this century;
- the distribution just a few weeks ago of details of Scholars going down; and
- the creation of additional opportunities for alumni engagement and connectivity, including a refreshed website and a task force of Scholars now working on how we best develop an online Rhodes community. We are in some ways, which I am sure will evolve in dialogue over the years ahead, hoping to build upon, and perhaps take global, the fine work which the AARS has been and is doing, for which I know I am far from alone in being very grateful.

I mention the outcome of consultations to date to encourage you to take part in the future in helping to shape the Scholarship to help give the best effect we can to its great values in the 21st century.

The 110th anniversary reunion in Oxford in 2013 will provide an opportunity for Scholars of all countries and all generations to meet – in Cecil Rhodes's phrase, 'meeting and discussing their experiences and prospects' – and help to shape its future. Many members of the class of 2010 will still be in Oxford then, and I hope that others will return for the reunion. I hope that they will join with me in making all of you very welcome back at Rhodes House, just as you have made me so welcome here in Washington, and as I hope and intend to make the 2010 Scholars welcome at Rhodes House this Saturday - and as I would like to make you welcome at Rhodes House whenever you are able to visit.

I am also, of course, deeply – daily – conscious that we face a significant financial challenge – an unsustainable rate of drawdown on our endowment in the wake of international financial storms and increasing costs - and I am extremely grateful to all Scholars who have already stepped forward through annual giving, through bequest pledges, and through major gifts. But that, you will be pleased to know, is a topic for another day.

Today, it is a delight, a luxury, to be here with you celebrating the values that make this Scholarship truly unique in this country, in the Caribbean and Bermuda, and globally. To all of you, many thanks. To the class of 2010: congratulations, good luck, bon voyage, and welcome!