

TO: The Fisk Faculty
(Sponsored by the Fisk Chapter of AAUP)

TOPIC: "Where is the Fisk Faculty Going? On
Assessment of Group Responsibility"

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While I have accepted this opportunity to speak today with some enthusiasm, it is not because I feel qualified to critically evaluate the Fisk faculty, but that I am committed to a vision of the future, a vision I hope can be realized as a member of this group. I am not here to talk of your yesterdays, rather I am here to talk of our tomorrows. The challenge of our todays, lies not with the struggle to justify the authenticity, productivity, or commitment of yesterday, but rather it is the search for these things in the ambiguity of our tomorrows.

There are three assumptions about the university that might clarify my comments. (1) The university must be clear and profound about its purpose, its mission in the world. Located in the social space of history, culture, political management and conflict, the University only comes of age when it proclaims its mission in the world, and when this mission takes into full account the forces which work on it. (2) Secondly, the University has two equally important, though oft times viewed as contradictory, callings. It must be a service institution for its relevant community, and at the same time it must be a prophetic institution. In other words, it must meet the needs of its community today, but also lead the community into better tomorrows. (3) And third, the University is itself a community with a life of its own. I use community and not family to avoid including the arbitrary rule of paternalism as the prerogative of an administration or faculty, and instead want to focus on communal identity and corporate responsibility. The community must be based on shared values and have a vigorous life guided by the active and uninhibited interaction among all of its members.

Where is the Fisk faculty going? This question cannot be answered without first asking questions about where the faculty is now. (1) Are we clear about the purpose or mission of our University? (2) Have we incorporated both the servant and the prophetic role of the University into our communal involvement here at Fisk? And, (3) what is the basis on which we constitute a corporate body, a sector of a larger community? We must find answers to these questions or our tomorrows are doomed to repeat yesterday, a process controlled by the folly of negligence and not the rigor of commitment and reason. Hopefully, this meeting is a beginning, a move in the right direction.

Now that I have carefully established a framework for my comments, I'll violate this framework and walk the water of controversy, and risk the heretical charges of presumptuousness, lack of good taste, and worst of all --- YOUTH.

We, the Fisk faculty lack a common commitment and at best share as values higher pay, smaller teaching loads, and a "don't rock the boat attitude" about things;

We, the Fisk faculty have within our ranks anti-intellectual forces, anti-Negro sentiment, and self appointed fathers and mothers for our student body;

We, the Fisk faculty have exhibited no corporate vision, have sought to imitate and not initiate, and view our role as one of static system maintenance rather than managers or collaborators in dynamic and volatile social change.

Where is the Fisk faculty going? For some of us it means someplace that we're not going, either because we don't want to go, or can't go. Some of us have only got yesterdays, and a man with no tomorrows is not only not going anyplace, but must be considered dead.

Others of us must pitch in and create the excitement and fervor required by the time we live in. With the end of the civil war a blow was struck for humanity with the development of the Freedmans bureaus, and we especially remember General Clinton B. Fisk and George F. White. It might be that the civil rights movement, Black Power, political upheaval in Africa and the development of revolutionary countries like Zambia and Tanzania, and rebellions in too many of our cities to name (among other things) are ushering in a period of similar importance to us. But the answers of yesterday are not acceptable today, witness the Freedman Bureau -- like poverty program or the colonialistic style of certain Foundations we all know about.

One last comment: There are some of us on the faculty with a new spirit, a new thirst for creative ideas, a new kind of willingness to face the ambiguity of experimentation. And while its a bit raw, the cry of Black people in Lowndes County Alabama is most relevant here. This is our cry to those who would serve as obstacles "Move on Over, or we'll move on Over You."