our common life and undermine our ability to solve our common problems—the simple idea that our differences are more important than our common humanity.

When the human genome was sequenced...the most interesting thing to me was the discovery that human beings with their three billion genes are 99.9 percent identical genetically. So if you look around this vast crowd today, at the military caps and the baseball caps and the cowboy hats and the turbans, if you look at all the different colors of skin, all the heights, all the widths, all the everything—it’s all rooted in one-tenth of 1 percent of our genetic make-up. Don’t you think it’s interesting that not just people you find appalling, but all the rest of us, spend 90 percent of our lives thinking about that one-tenth of 1 percent? [D]on’t we all?...

Do I disagree with a thousand things that are going on? Absolutely. But it all flows from the idea that we can violate elemental standards of learning and reason and even the humanity of our fellow human beings because our differences matter more. That’s what makes you worship power over purpose. Our differences matter more...

And I leave you with this thought. When Martin Luther King was invited here in 1968, the country was still awash in racism. The next decade it was awash in sexism, and after that in homophobia. And occasionally those things rear their ugly head along the way, but by and large, nobody in this class is going to carry those chains around through life.

But...[c]he great temptation for all of you is to believe that the one-tenth of 1 percent of you which is different and which brought you here and which can bring you great riches or whatever else you want, is really the sum of who you are and that you deserve your good fate, and others deserve their bad one. That is the trap into which you must not fall...

In the central highlands in Africa where I work, when people meet each other walking...on the trails, and one person says, “Hello, how are you, good morning,” the answer is not, “I’m fine, how are you?” The answer translated into English is this: “I see you.”

Think of that. “I see you.”

How many people do all of us pass every day that we never see? You know, [after] we all haul out of here, somebody’s going to come in here and fold up 20-something thousand chairs. And clean off whatever mess we leave here. And get ready for tomorrow and then after tomorrow, someone will have to fix that. Many of those people feel that no one ever sees them....

And so, I leave you with that thought. Be true to the tradition of the great people who have come here. Spend as much of your time and your heart and your spirit as you possibly can thinking about the 99.9 percent....Enjoy your good fortune. Enjoy your differences, but realize that our common humanity matters much, much more.

God bless you and good luck.

“The public is growing restive”

President Derek Bok used his “last occasion to report to the alumni” to “share some parting reflections on the challenges for this University and others like it.” He began with a moment of personal reflection: “I realize that more than 55 years have elapsed since I first laid eyes on Harvard as an entering Law School student. I remember crossing a bridge in a top-down canary yellow Chevy convertible, fresh from southern California and ready to scale the heights of legal education.”

Bok then outlined five subjects facing the modern university, from “whom we should be educating” and “how international American higher education should become” to “how to make the most of opportunities in science” and how universities can best “nurture and inspire the humanities.” The second of the five questions Bok posed concerned a subject especially dear to his heart as an educator.

How can we best help students to learn?...Technology offers novel ways of teaching whose effectiveness needs to be tested and explored. Advances in cognitive psychology suggest innovative ways of helping students learn more and retain more. New techniques of measurement can help us determine how much progress our students are really making. And these are all promising developments. The question is whether universities will make the most of it. For as we know, academic culture is remarkably resistant to seeking new ways
of improving teaching and learning. And so in this environment, methods of instruction change rather slowly.

But meanwhile there are signs that the public is growing restive. Outside our walls, public officials and voters who elect them are urging universities to demonstrate just how much undergraduates are progressing. Growing competition from abroad is pressuring us to do a better job of preparing our students. And so the challenge now is to overcome our inertia and recognize that we will never improve our instruction very much, unless we discover how much our students are learning so that we can discover where our weaknesses are and experiment with new ways of helping to achieve our goals better. And Harvard, of course, should be a leader in making that happen.

“An experiment in faith”

The second president of Radcliffe, Le Baron Briggs, described Radcliffe as “an experiment in faith”…

From the very beginning of Elizabeth Cary Agassiz’s inspiration, to the vision of Mary Ingraham Bunting…to the foresight of Neil Rudenstine, Radcliffe has always represented a commitment of faith—to intellectual excellence and to the principle of opening access to higher education to all who are talented enough to benefit from it.

I owe an enormous debt to all of them, and I owe an enormous debt to all of you. My commitment to this “experiment in faith” will remain unaltering. I have loved being Radcliffe’s founding dean, and I thank you all for giving me this opportunity and helping me all along the way. Thank you from the bottom of my heart for this.

∼ Drew Gilpin Faust, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study dean and Harvard University president-elect, at the Radcliffe Day luncheon, June 8

We can make market forces work better for the poor if we can develop a more creative capitalism…

If we can find approaches that meet the needs of the poor in ways that generate profits for business and votes for politicians, we will have found a sustainable way to reduce inequity in the world. This task is open-ended. It can never be finished. But a conscious effort to answer this challenge can change the world.

I am optimistic that we can do this, but I talk to skeptics who claim there is no hope. They say: “Inequity has been with us since the beginning, and will be with us until the end—because people just don’t care.” I completely disagree.

I believe we have more caring than we know what to do with…

The barrier to change is not too little caring; it is too much complexity.

To turn caring into action, we need to see a problem, see a solution, and see the impact. But complexity blocks all three steps…

The AIDS epidemic offers an example. The broad goal, of course, is to end the disease. The highest-leverage approach is prevention. The ideal technology would be a vaccine that gives life-long immunity with a single dose. So governments, drug companies, and foundations are funding vaccine research. But their work is likely to take more than a decade, so in the meantime, we have to work with what we have in hand—and the best prevention approach we have now is getting people to avoid risky behavior…

The final step—after seeing the problem and finding an approach—is to measure the impact of the work and to share that suc-

Excerpts from the Commencement address by
William H. Gates III, co-founder and chairman of
Microsoft Corporation and co-founder and co-chair of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

I was transformed by my years at Harvard, the friendships I made, and the ideas I worked on.

But taking a serious look back…I do have one big regret.

I left Harvard with no real awareness of the awful inequities in the world—the appalling disparities of health, and wealth, and opportunity that condemn millions of people to lives of despair.

I learned a lot here at Harvard about new ideas in economics and politics. I got great exposure to the advances being made in the sciences.

But humanity’s greatest advances are not in its discoveries—but in how those discoveries are applied to reduce inequity. Whether through democracy, strong public education, quality healthcare, or broad economic opportunity—reducing inequity is the highest human achievement.

I left campus knowing little about the millions of young people cheated out of educational opportunities here in this country. And I knew nothing about the millions of people living in unspeakable poverty and disease in developing countries.

It took me decades to find out…

Imagine, just for the sake of discussion, that you had a few hours a week and a few dollars a month to donate to a cause—and you wanted to spend that time and money where it would have the greatest impact in saving and improving lives. Where would you spend it?…

During our discussions on this question, Melinda and I read an article about the millions of children who were dying every year in poor countries from diseases that we had long ago made harmless in this country. Measles, malaria, pneumonia, hepatitis B, yellow fever. One disease that I had never heard of, rotavirus, was killing half a million children each year—none of them in the United States.

We were shocked. We had assumed that if millions of children were dying and they could be saved, the world would make it a priority to discover and deliver the medicines to save them. But it did not. For under a dollar, there were interventions that could save lives that just weren’t being delivered.

If you believe that every life has equal value, it’s revolting to learn that some lives are seen as worth saving and others are not. We said to ourselves: “This can’t be true. But if it is true, it deserves to be the priority of our giving…”

We asked: “How could the world let these children die?”

The answer is simple, and harsh. The market did not reward saving the lives of these children, and governments did not subsidize it. So the children died because their mothers and fathers had no power in the market and no voice in the system. But you and I have both.

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