

Remarks by President Bill Clinton at the Morgan State University Commencement Ceremony  
Baltimore, Maryland  
May 18th, 1997

Thank you. Dr. Richardson, Judge Cole, Governor Glendening, Lieutenant Governor Kennedy-Townsend, Mr. Mayor, City Council President, other elected officials, Mr. Speaker, Senator Miller, Senator Sarbanes, Congressman Cardin, and Congressman Cummings, my great partners, to the board of regents, to the faculty, staff, to distinguished alumni, to the magnificent band and choir. I thought it was a great day when I got here, but I know it is now. Thank you very much.

To the members of the class of 1997, your family, and your friends, congratulations on this important day in your lives, the lives of your Nation, and the life of this great institution. Your diploma reflects a level of knowledge that will give you the chance to make the most of the rapidly unfolding new reality of the 21st century. It gives your country a better chance to lead the world toward a better place, and it reaffirms the historic mission of Morgan State and the other historically black colleges and universities of our great land.

When the doors of college were closed to all but white students, Morgan State and the Nation's other historically black institutions of higher education gave young African-Americans the education they deserved and the pride they needed to rise above cruelty and bigotry. Today, these institutions still produce the lion's share of our black doctors and judges and business people, and Morgan State graduates most of the black engineers and scientists in the great State of Maryland.

I am here today not because Morgan State is just a great historically black university; it is a great American university. You have produced some of our Nation's finest leaders: your grads like Parren Mitchell, Kweisi Mfume, and Earl Graves; judicial leaders like Judge Bell and Judge Cole; public servants like State Treasurer Dixon; and on a very personal note, my fine assistant, Terry Edmonds, class of 1972, the first African-American ever to serve as a speechwriter for the President of the United States. There he is. [Applause]

Now, you're getting too much applause now, Terry. [Laughter]

You graduate today into a world brimming with promise and rich with opportunity. Our economy is the strongest in a generation, our unemployment the lowest in 24 years, with the largest decline in income inequality since the 1960's.

On Friday we finalized the details of an historic agreement with the leaders of Congress to balance the Federal budget for the first time in nearly three decades, in a way that will keep our economy going and in balance with our values, caring for those in need, extending health care to 5 million more children, cleaning and preserving and restoring our environment, helping people to move from welfare to work, and most important, funding the largest investment in education in a generation and the largest increase in higher education since the GI bill in 1945, more than 50 years ago.

It will open the doors of college to all, with the largest increase in Pell grant scholarships in three decades, \$35 billion in tax relief to help families pay for higher education, including tax deductions for the cost of all education after high school, and our HOPE scholarship tuition tax credits to make the first 2 years of college as universal by the year 2000 as a high school diploma is today.

And this agreement contains a major investment in science and technology, inspired in our administration by the leadership of Vice President Gore, to keep America on the cutting edge of positive change, to create the best jobs of tomorrow, to advance the quality of life of all Americans.

This is a magic moment, but like all moments, it will not last forever. We must make the most of it. In commencement addresses across the Nation this year, I will focus our attention on what we must do to prepare our Nation for the next century, including how we can make sure that our rich diversity brings us together rather than driving us apart and how we must meet our continuing obligation to lead the world away from the wars and cold war of the 20th century through the present threats of terrorism and ethnic hatred, weapons proliferation and drug smuggling, to a more peaceful and free and prosperous 21st century.

But today, here, I ask you simply to imagine that new century, full of its promise, molded by science, shaped by technology, powered by knowledge. These potent transforming forces can give us lives fuller and richer than we have ever known. They can be used for good or ill.

If we are to make the most of this new century, we, all of us, each and every one of us, regardless of our background, must work to master these forces with vision and wisdom and determination. The past half-century has seen mankind split the atom, splice genes, create the microchip, explore the heavens. We enter the next century propelled by new and stunning developments.

Just in the past year, we saw the cloning of Dolly the sheep, the Hubble telescope bringing into focus dark corners of the cosmos never seen before, innovations in computer technology and communications, creating what Bill Gates calls "the world's new digital nervous system," and now cures for our most dreaded diseases, diabetes, cystic fibrosis, repair for spinal cord injuries. These miracles actually seem within reach. The sweep of it is truly humbling. Why, just last week we saw a computer named Deep Blue defeat the world's reigning chess champion. I really think there ought to be a limit to this. No computer should be allowed to learn to play golf. [Laughter.] But seriously, my friends, in science, if the last 50 years were the age of physics, the next 50 years will be the age of biology.

We are now embarking on our most daring explorations, unraveling the mysteries of our inner world and charting new routes to the conquest of disease. We have not and we must not shrink from exploring the frontiers of science. But as we consider how to use the fruits of discovery, we must also never retreat from our commitment to human values, the good of society, our basic sense of right and wrong.

Science must continue to serve humanity, never the other way around. The stakes are very high. America's future, indeed the world's future, will be more powerfully influenced by science and

technology than ever before. Where once nations measured their strength by the size of their armies and arsenals, in the world of the future, knowledge will matter most. Fully half the growth in economic productivity over the last half-century can be traced to research and technology.

But science is about more than material wealth or the acquisition of knowledge. Fundamentally, it is about our dreams. America is a nation always becoming, always defined by the great goals we set, the great dreams we dream. We are restless, questing people. We have always believed, with President Thomas Jefferson, that freedom is the first-born daughter of science. With that belief and with willpower, resources, and great national effort, we have always reached our far horizons and set out for new ones.

Thirty-six years ago, President Kennedy looked to the heavens and proclaimed that the flag of peace and democracy, not war and tyranny, must be the first to be planted on the Moon. He gave us a goal of reaching the Moon, and we achieved it, ahead of time. Today, let us look within and step up to the challenge of our time, a challenge with consequences far more immediate for the life and death of millions around the world. AIDS will soon overtake tuberculosis and malaria as the leading infectious killer in the world. More than 29 million people have been infected, 3 million in the last year alone, 95 percent of them in the poorest parts of our globe.

Here at home, we are grateful that new and effective anti-HIV strategies are available and bringing longer and better lives to those who are infected, but we dare not be complacent. HIV is capable of mutating and becoming resistant to therapies and could well become even more dangerous. Only a truly effective, preventive HIV vaccine can limit and eventually eliminate the threat of AIDS.

This year's budget contains increased funding of a third over 2 years ago to search for this vaccine. In the first 4 years, we have increased funding for AIDS research, prevention, and care by 50 percent, but it is not enough. So let us today set a new national goal for science in the age of biology. Today, let us commit ourselves to developing an AIDS vaccine within the next decade. There are no guarantees. It will take energy and focus and demand great effort from our greatest minds. But with the strides of recent years, it is no longer a question of whether we can develop an AIDS vaccine, it is simply a question of when. And it cannot come a day too soon. If America commits to find an AIDS vaccine and we enlist others in our cause, we will do it. I am prepared to do all I can to make it happen. Our scientists at the National Institutes of Health and our research universities have been at the forefront of this battle.

Today I'm pleased to announce the National Institutes of Health will establish a new AIDS vaccine research center dedicated to this crusade. And next month at the summit of the industrialized nations in Denver, I will enlist other nations to join us in a worldwide effort to find a vaccine to stop one of the world's greatest killers. We will challenge America's pharmaceutical industry, which leads the world in innovative research and development to work with us and to make the successful development of an AIDS vaccine part of its basic mission.

My fellow Americans, if the 21st century is to be the century of biology, let us make an AIDS vaccine its first great triumph. Let us resolve further to work with other nations to deal with great

problems like global climate change, to break our reliance on energy use destructive of our environment, to make giant strides to free ourselves and future generations from the tyranny of disease and hunger and ignorance that today still enslaves too many millions around the world. And let us also pledge to redouble our vigilance to make sure that the knowledge of the 21st century serves our most enduring human values.

Science often moves faster than our ability to understand its implications, leaving a maze of moral and ethical questions in its wake. The Internet can be a new town square or a new Tower of Babel. The same computer that can put the Library of Congress at our fingertips can also be used by purveyors of hate to spread blueprints for bombs. The same knowledge that is developing new life-saving drugs can be used to create poisons of mass destruction. Science can enable us to feed billions more people in comfort, in safety, and in harmony with our Earth, or it can spark a war with weapons of mass destruction rooted in primitive hatreds.

Science has no soul of its own. It is up to us to determine whether it will be used as a force for good or evil. We must do nothing to stifle our basic quest for knowledge. After all, it has propelled from field to factory to cyberspace. But how we use the fruits of science and how we apply it to human endeavors is not properly the domain of science alone or of scientists alone. The answers to these questions require the application of ethical and moral principles that have guided our great democracy toward a more perfect union for more than 200 years now. As such, they are the province of every American citizen.

We must decide together how to apply these principles to the dazzling new discoveries of science. Here are four guideposts. First, science and its benefits must be directed toward making life better for all Americans, never just a privileged few. Their opportunities and benefits should be available to all. Science must not create a new line of separation between the haves and the have-nots, those with and those without the tools and understanding to learn and use technology. In the 21st century, a child in a school that does not have a link to the Internet or the student who does not have access to a computer will be like the 19th century child without school books. That is why we are ensuring that every child in every school, not matter how rich or poor, will have access to the same technology by connecting every classroom and library to the Internet by the year 2000.

Science must always respect the dignity of every American. Here at one of America's great black universities let me underscore something I said just a few days ago at the White House. We must never allow our citizens to be unwitting guinea pigs in scientific experiments that put them at risk without their consent and full knowledge. Whether it is withholding a syphilis treatment from the black men of Tuskegee or the cold war experiments that subjected some of our citizens to dangerous doses of radiation, we must never go back to those awful days in modern disguise. We have now apologized for the mistakes of the past; we must not repeat them, never again.

Second, none of our discoveries should be used to label or discriminate against any group or individual. Increasing knowledge about the great diversity within the human species must not change the basic belief upon which our ethics, our Government, our society are founded. All of us are created equal, entitled to equal treatment under the law. With stunning speed, scientists are now moving to unlock the secrets of our genetic code. Genetic testing has the potential to

identify hidden inherited tendencies toward disease and spur early treatment. But that information could also be used, for example, by insurance companies and others to discriminate against and stigmatize people.

We know that in the 1970's, some African-Americans were denied health care coverage by insurers and jobs by employers because they were identified as sickle cell anemia carriers. We also know that one of the main reasons women refuse genetic testing for susceptibility to breast cancer is their fear that the insurance companies may either deny them coverage or raise their rates to unaffordable levels. No insurer should be able to use genetic data to underwrite or discriminate against any American seeking health insurance. This should not simply be a matter of principle but a matter of law. Period. To that end, I urge the Congress to pass bipartisan legislation to prohibit insurance companies from using genetic screening information to determine the premium rates or eligibility of Americans for health insurance.

Third, technology should not be used to break down the wall of privacy and autonomy free citizens are guaranteed in a free society. The right to privacy is one of our most cherished freedoms. As society has grown more complex and people have become more interconnected in every way, we have had to work even harder to respect the privacy, the dignity, the autonomy of each individual. Today, when marketers can follow every aspect of our lives, from the first phone call we make in the morning to the time our security system says we have left the house, to the video camera at the toll booth and the charge slip we have for lunch, we cannot afford to forget this most basic lesson.

As the Internet reaches to touch every business and every household and we face the frightening prospect that private information, even medical records, could be made instantly available to the world, we must develop new protections for privacy in the face of new technological reality.

Fourth, we must always remember that science is not God. Our deepest truths remain outside the realm of science. We must temper our euphoria over the recent breakthrough in animal cloning with sobering attention to our most cherished concepts of humanity and faith.

My own view is that each human life is unique, born of a miracle that reaches beyond laboratory science. I believe we should respect this profound gift. I believe we should resist the temptation to replicate ourselves. But this is a decision no President should make alone. No President is qualified to understand all of the implications. That is why I have asked our distinguished National Bioethics Advisory Commission, headed by President Harold Shapiro of Princeton, to conduct a thorough review of the legal and ethical issues raised by this new cloning discovery. They will give me their first recommendations within the next few weeks, and I can hardly wait.

These, then, are four guideposts, rooted in our traditional principles of ethics and morals, that must guide us if we are to master the powerful forces of change in the new century: one, science that produces a better life for all and not the few; two, science that honors our tradition of equal treatment under the law; three, science that respects the privacy and autonomy of the individual; four, science that never confuses faith in technology with faith in God. If we hold fast to these principles, we can make this time of change a moment of dazzling opportunity for all Americans.

Finally, let me say again, science can serve the values and interests of all Americans, but only if all Americans are given a chance to participate in science. We cannot move forward without the voices and talents of everyone in this stadium and especially those of you who are going on to pursue a career in science and technology.

African-Americans have always been at the forefront of American science. This is nothing new. Nothing, not slavery, not discrimination, not poverty, nothing has ever been able to hold back their scientific urge or creative genius. Benjamin Banneker was a self-taught mathematician, surveyor, astronomer, who published an annual almanac and helped to design the city of Washington. George Washington Carver was born a slave but went on to become one of our Nation's greatest agricultural scientists. Ernest Everett Just of Charleston, South Carolina, is recognized as one of our greatest biologists. Charles Drew lived through the darkest days of segregation to become a pioneer in blood preservation. And today you honor an African-American doctor at Johns Hopkins University who is truly one of the outstanding physicians of our time.

All these people show us that we don't have a person to waste, and our diversity is our greatest strength in the world of today and tomorrow. Now, members of the class of 1997, it is your time. It is up to you to honor their legacy, to live their dreams, to be the investigators, the doctors, and the scholars who will make and apply the discoveries of tomorrow, who will keep our science rooted in our values, who will fashion America's greatest days. You can do it. Dream large. Work hard. And listen to your soul.

Thank you, and God bless you all.