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For the complete list of all GWC on campus Seminars [click here](#).

For a Face to Face with Greatness seminar in your area, [click here](#).

For a Statesmanship Seminar in your area, [click here](#).

The George Wythe College Alumni and Friends Gala

October 19-20, 2006
[click here for information](#)

For more newsletters, [click here](#).

TWO TOWERS

(This article is the first chapter of the New 2nd Edition of A Thomas Jefferson Education. This new edition is hardback, with 3 brand new chapters and updates in every chapter.)

*“Lay down true principles, and adhere to them inflexibly.
Do not be frightened into their surrender . . .”*
– Thomas Jefferson

“Oliver, turn on the radio, now!”

There was an urgency I’d seldom heard in Shanon’s voice, and he hung up without saying anything else. So I hurried to the radio and switched it on. Frankly, I am not a morning person and had failed to answer his three earlier phone calls. But on the fourth set of long rings, I finally picked it up. We didn’t have a television in the home—a typical summer routine for our family, meant to get us all to study, talk and build relationships instead of just waste our family time in front of the set. The radio told of an event that would change the world, and I immediately called Dr. Brooks back and told him to contact the student body and call a campus-wide meeting.

It was the morning of September 11, 2001.

What About the Future?

There is a longing that perhaps we all feel in the beginning decades of the 21st Century. Maybe human beings have always felt it, but something unique seems to be growing and spreading in our world today. Mediocrity, which became the norm and in some circles even the goal between 1968 and 2001, seemed to lose its hold on that tragic morning where the whole world tuned in to watch the Twin Towers fall—over and over and over. Since “9/11,” we now live in a different world.

It remains to be seen what the 21st Century holds in store, but we learned a few things on that morning that are valuable lessons for the future. First, every generation faces its challenges. The modern feeling of invincibility and the view that peace and prosperity are the natural state of things has been brought into question. Most of us are much more painfully aware of just how fragile our enjoyable lifestyle really is. Even the return to normalcy in the years since 9/11 only barely masks the new sense of vulnerability Americans now feel.

The looks on the faces of my students as I walked into the main classroom told me what a shock this really was. The questions were emotional and basic: “how long will it last?,” “what can we expect in the days and even years ahead?,” “what will this mean to the future of our nation?,” “are all my plans and dreams for the future gone forever?,” and “what should I be doing to help?”

These young people felt something new that day, something you don’t ever forget. Virtually all who experienced those feelings that morning are deeply changed. They know it could happen again, on any day at any given moment—and they live with that. Moreover, somewhere inside many people actually expect it. The youth of 9/11 are no longer living in a world of Comedy, where we all feel an underlying security that everything will turn out well. We lived through one of those junctures in history when a world of Comedy shifts to Tragedy, and with this on our minds, day after day, week after week, through each holiday season and with every new year, our souls steel with each passing month and our subconscious emotions prepare us for what’s ahead. I believe we all feel it on some level—even those who deny it.

Preparing for Leadership

“*What can I possibly say to these young people?*,” I wondered, wishing my father were present. He had served in Vietnam, and seemed to have come home with an ability to face any crisis—evenly and calmly giving brief words of wisdom that soothed and protected. My own experience hadn’t prepared me for this; when the Gulf War began in 1991 I watched in technicolor in a university auditorium and discussed the evils of war with my college classmates. By 2001, the ten years since that event felt like an eternity. In fact, it was an irony that most of the George Wythe College students were supposed to discuss the book *Alas Babylon* that morning. This modern classic, set during the Cold War, opens on a morning when a nuclear war changes the face of the land and the people who survive. Clearly, reading the book wasn’t anything like the reality of terrorists flying planes into buildings *right now*—in the real world.

I looked into the faces of the students, and wondered what to say. Fortunately, before I opened my mouth Dr. Erickson stood. He probably saw me in the same light as the students: young, shell-shocked, and scared. If so, he was right.

Dr. Erickson, who had lived through Pearl Harbor, stood and told of that time over fifty years before. By the time he finished, two things had occurred. First, I think everyone in the room was moved to tears. And second, we were calmed and anchored: things would work out, there were a lot of decisions ahead for our generation, and *there was much work to be done*. As students and faculty, we could either ignore these events and escape into campus life, or we could take this head on, realize that great things are going to be asked of our generation, and set out to prepare ourselves to help fill the leadership drought around the world. Dr. Erickson said all the right things. He gave us something to do. He led.

When I got the microphone back, I was ready. “At some point in your life,” I said, “you will face a situation where you are in a leadership position and dozens—maybe thousands or millions—look to you to lead. When that occurs, you won’t feel ready. But you will have to lead anyway. Today, we’re going to do something that in all probability isn’t being done anywhere else. We’re going to simulate the Situation Room at the White House today, and we’re going to learn first hand what’s happening.”

I assigned each student to a team led by a faculty member, and told them they had thirty minutes to find out the positions and names of every person who would likely be advising the President today, and to appoint a student to fill each position. Then I gave them one hour to research the person they were role-playing, and to meet back with recommendations for the President. I don't know if other groups simulated this event that day, but just like Pearl Harbor or Chamberlain's visit with Hitler, I'm sure it will be simulated by many students at many schools in the years to come. Simulation is a powerful learning tool, and that day was a sobering and life-changing experience for all who lived through it.

A second lesson of the day is that when crisis comes, we naturally turn to God. Before we broke for our research, one student raised his hand and asked if we could please pray. The room unanimously assented, and another student volunteered to say the prayer. We all felt the enormity of the task our world was facing, and more tears were shed during that prayer. People from many faiths and churches prayed that day in the United States, including many who hadn't set foot in a church for a long time. Across America, the level of religious observance on campus increased that day.

A third lesson from 9/11 is that when crisis hits, we automatically look to leadership. As we were preparing to break into groups for research, the door opened and in walked several former students. They were no longer studying at George Wythe College, but when they first heard the news of the terrorist attacks they immediately grabbed a change of clothes, jumped in their vehicles and drove to Cedar City—one student drove five hours and arrived just as we were making plans. Of course, the whole nation looked to President Bush, just as people in other nations looked to their leaders.

In crisis, leadership determines direction and our level of success—or failure. Unfortunately, in such times it is too late to prepare leaders. They must be trained, educated, and gain the needed experience before crisis occurs. Yet it is precisely in the years and decades before crisis that peace and prosperity convince the world that such leadership is not needed—making a living takes hold of society and material goals drive schools, teachers, parents and students alike. Professional training and job skills are all that people seek from “education,” and the concept of leadership education is considered quaint, outdated, cute, or absurd. Allan

Bloom's *Closing of the American Mind* was widely sold, but sparsely read and soundly rejected by a generation of educators. His suggestions, which would have helped prepare a generation of leaders for the 21st Century, were mostly ridiculed or ignored, just as the same suggestions by Jacques Barzun had been disregarded a generation earlier and those of Adler and Hutchins a generation before that.

Perhaps in the wake of 9/11, such prophetic warnings will be more closely considered. Certainly the warnings had been there for over a decade—terrorists were planning attacks on American soil. And in the broader context, a time is soon coming when a generation of leaders will be needed, when a society trained on the mostly narrow or otherwise deficient educational offerings that are now the norm in our nation will not be enough to overcome the challenges we face. This is the fourth lesson of 9/11, which it seems no society ever wants to learn: that we must learn from our past and heed the cycles, trends, and historical patterns that inevitably (in one form or another) repeat themselves. Santayana was right: if we don't learn the lessons of history we are doomed to repeat them.

Is Mediocre Education Enough?

A fifth lesson is that although wisdom is usually *thought* to be found in the old, in times of challenge it is often the young who provide answers. Many of the older generations, who lived and loved and raised families and went to work every day in a world of peace and prosperity, seem fully addicted to a view that crisis is just a passing fad, that everything will quickly return to normal if we just ignore the depth of the problems. As the months after 9/11 turned into years, adult America was only too happy to go back to “business as usual,” telling itself that maybe this was just a tragic one-time event that has passed and won't return. The young have no such illusion—they doubt they'll ever receive a Social Security check, and most of them are sure that serious conflicts are ahead. Naturally, they seek to prepare themselves—often bewildering their parents who wonder why they don't just focus on credentials and secure jobs. “As if any job will be secure in my world,” the under-thirty crowd quips.

A sixth lesson is that the young are all about one thing: making the world better. They want to do something, not just leave it to others. And with their leadership, a surprising number of the earlier generations join in the cause. A growing cadre of people are aligning their futures with leadership. This is not the “electronic herd” of 1980s yuppie fame or the dot.com millionaire crowd of the 1990s, but a new generation of social entrepreneurs, future societal leaders and statesmen who are convinced that something is happening in the world, that it is time for a new energy, a new direction and new way of doing things. In science, art, health—and just about every other arena—there is a momentum building.

But the idealism still has to face a glaring reality: in history there have been many such movements, and most of them have failed. Pure and simple. Failed.

The ones that succeeded, such as the generation of American Founding, the period of Abraham Lincoln, Gandhi’s successful revolution and Martin Luther King Jr.’s after him, did so in two waves: a wave of great leaders, preceded by a wave of great teachers. These are the two towers of any successful generation.¹ Without both, no generation effectively achieves its potential. Without one, the other never materializes. This is the seventh lesson I learned on that fateful day: if we don’t have the education, we cannot expect to have the leadership. Thankfully national leaders from all political views joined with international statesmen to condemn the terrorist attacks and re-focus the nation. But what if the crisis had been longer and harder, what if it was just the beginning of a period of world destabilization and challenge, what if the September morning that opened the 21st Century was just the beginning of a long day with many challenges ahead? What if?

Do we live in a time after the crisis where we can relax, enjoy, and get back to decades of smooth and routine living? Or are we at the beginning of a century or even a decade of turmoil? More to the point, should we be emphasizing the education of accountants, movie directors and secretaries, or using the educational years to train a generation of leaders, entrepreneurs, and statesmen? John Adams is credited with saying that he studied government and law so that his children could study math and science and his grandchildren art

and literature. Which generation are we? And more importantly, which are our children? As I looked into the eyes of fifty young people on September 11, 2001, I saw a generation of leaders.

I also saw a haunting drought of schools teaching leadership or training leaders. I had already written the First Edition of *A Thomas Jefferson Education* (which carries the subtitle: Training a Generation of Leaders for the 21st Century), but on that morning it took on new meaning. The question on my mind as I went home exhausted that night, well into the early hours of September 12, was: “Is the education our children are receiving on par with their potential?” It has plagued me ever since. Between that day and this, I have asked this question to tens of thousands of parents, teachers, administrators, legislators and students, and I have seldom received a satisfactory answer. It is time for a change in our educational system.

We Must Do Better

It has been over six years since the first edition of *A Thomas Jefferson Education* was published. Since that time, Rachel and I, as well as a number of dedicated faculty members and scholars at George Wythe College, have spoken in hundreds of venues to tens of thousands of people about the Thomas Jefferson Education model. We have done so on university campuses, private primary and secondary schools, in public elementary and high schools, and at convention centers, country clubs and town halls to professional educators, home schooling parents, legislators, corporate executives, and interested community members.

We have met many wonderful people and seen thousands of them apply the Thomas Jefferson Education principles in their homes, schools and organizations. We have made literally thousands of new friends, and we have watched them improve their own education and pass on a higher level of excitement and interest for learning to their colleagues and children. In short, we have witnessed a small revolution as many families, schools and companies have made drastic educational changes and seen the quality of their learning significantly increase.

But it is not enough.

“Is the education our children are receiving on par with their potential?” The answer is still a resounding “no.” The current educational system must change. This book is a call to that change. As such, it is obviously both audacious and insufficient. But it is a start. Our children deserve the very best education possible, not the most “realistic.” They need, and want, the highest quality education that exists, not the most practical. To those who criticize the Thomas Jefferson Education model, I have learned to simply ask, “When you look into the eyes of your children and grandchildren, when you picture their greatness and potential, do you feel that they are getting the education that is up to par with who they were born to become?”

Genius in Our Homes

Greatness isn't the work of a few geniuses, it is the purpose of each of us. It is why we were born. Every person you have ever met is a genius. Every one. Some of us have chosen not to develop it much, but it is there. It is in us. All of us. It is in your spouse. It is in each of your children. You live in a world of geniuses. How can we settle for anything less than the best education? How can we tell our children that mediocre education will do, when greatness is available? Like on the morning of 9/11, other calls will come to our generation in the years ahead, announcing new challenges and introducing new opportunities. Our generation, and that of our children, will face its share of crises, just like every generation in the past. When those calls come, will we be ready?

The answer depends on how we educate the next generation.

(Endnotes)

¹ See *The Two Towers* by J.R.R. Tolkien. The reference is also an allusion to the twin towers which fell under terrorist attack on September 11, 2001.