

**PRESIDENT TO PRESIDENTS LECTURE
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You know, when Muriel Howard called me to invite me to deliver this address, I was immediately humbled by the tremendous honor. And as I hung up that phone, that humility quickly became panic and anxiety. Anxiety that has followed me till right now.

I have been a member of AASCU for only six years, and I have seen the power of the presidents before me. What could I share with my amazing, accomplished and distinguished peers, and my AASCU family? What could I say that you would even care to listen? And of course, being a typical Puerto Rican woman, I thought, oh my God. Isn't this the address for those who have graduated into Seniorville?

But then I settled down and began reflecting upon my own journey, and how it has affected the lenses through which I see the world. It occurred to me that this experience affords me the opportunity to reflect upon what is critical and important to me as a president of an AASCU institution and to share those reflections with all of you.

What I am going to do today is talk about the intermingling of Millie the person and President Garcia. How for me, the personal has shaped the professional. As I thought about us as higher ed leaders, I thought about this particular time in history. We've witnessed the election and reelection of the first African American president. We've seen the first Latina – a Puertorriqueña – take her place at the Supreme Court. We celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of the march on Washington. We have seen more women and people of color become presidents of our institutions. And yes, I've seen myself become the first Latina ever appointed to the California State University system, the largest four-year public university in the nation.

For those of us who have been labeled minorities and/or women, we can point to significant progress among our ranks. But as we reflect today on how far we have come, we must simultaneously reflect on how far we haven't.

Reflecting on my own past, how my family and the larger society shaped where I started from and where I am, I recognize that I represent multiple selves. I'm a woman, a Latina, a New Yorican, a first generation college student from a family who migrated to New York. As my

critical theorist friends would say – and one is in the audience, Estella Bensimon [phonetic] – she would say I represent an intersectionality of identities.

My mother was a factory worker. My dad worked in those factories, too. And then became a numbers runner to support the family. I think that was illegal, by the way. Being the youngest girl in the family, I was Daddy's little girl. No, I'm not spoiled. And when he died, I was 12. I desperately missed him.

My mother, who was my shero, was left working in that factory in order to raise seven children. She wanted to ensure that we never felt poor, even though we had to move to the housing projects in Brooklyn. This sharing is very difficult. But you must understand that this is not about me, but who I represent. I share this with you because my reality – the personal Millie Garcia – has shaped the professional President Garcia.

My reality is why I'm passionate – and yes, impatient about the slowness of our progress with underrepresented and low-income students. My parents always told us that no matter how far we climb, we are always representing a group of people who are in this country seeking opportunity. We were seen as very different from the majority. We were lumped together as Hispanics. We were seen as one of those homogeneous groups. What this society couldn't understand was that this amazing Puerto Rican culture accepts our roots as Hispanic, indigenous and African.

In spite of all my parents' experiences – the mistreatment, the low wages, the oppressive conditions in those factories – being made to feel less than, my parents fought to seize that promise of hope and equality and education for their children.

Through their actions, they taught us to never forget where we came from, and that it is not only about us as individuals, but about representing our community. They always helped other migrant families when they came to New York, even inviting them to live with us in our small apartment while they settled in. They established the Culebra [phonetic] social club where people from my father's town would gather to help each other translate this new world.

They helped establish the first Puerto Rican day parade in New York, with me and my siblings marching in that parade. It was their efforts to show their pride in our culture – the contributions our community was making – to our new home. It was their determination to show that we, too, were part of this new world. We, too, are Americans.

So how does my family history shape what I see as our responsibilities as leaders in higher education? Allow me to review some historical data that also shaped my leadership values.

With the passage of the GI bill after World War II, the opportunity to earn a college degree was extended to large segments of working class Americans who previously did not have the

financial means to attend college. Consequently, higher education increased its student population significantly. Nearly all of the new enrollees were male and white.

In 1954, the landmark decision of *Brown vs. Board of Ed* began transforming our elementary and high schools. Ten years later, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was signed into law and access to higher education expanded once more – this time to include Americans of color. Things had begun to change.

Now let's look at high school graduation rates in the fifties. The 1959 census collected data for two groups: Caucasians and African Americans. In 1959, 67% of Caucasians between 24 and 29 had completed high school. Only 39% of African Americans finished high school.

Those historical events I just mentioned resulted in tremendous increases in high school graduation rates during the seventies and eighties. Caucasians jumped to 86%. And African Americans to almost 82%.

The first data on Latinos came in the eighties with a disappointing 58%. Now let's fast forward to the 2012 census data that reveals only slight increases for high school graduates – 90% Caucasian, 89% African American, 75% Latinos and Asian Americans first appear as a category at 96%.

So what about college data? In 1959, only a few graduated from college: 12% of Caucasians and approximately 6% of African Americans. During the seventies and eighties, both groups nearly doubled.

Again, fast forward to 2012. Caucasian college graduation rates were nearly 34%, African Americans at almost 23%, Asians at almost 61% and Latinos at approximately 15%.

All of this data demonstrates that while there has been progress, there are still achievement gaps of historically underrepresented groups. These achievement gaps are the largest for African American and Latinos. And if you desegregate the Asian American population, you'll see gaps in Asian American subgroups as well.

For Latinos alone, the largest growing ethnic group in this country, the achievement gap is almost 20%. I don't need to explain to all of you the tremendous loss of human talent and expertise that these disparities inflict on our nation. It is about economic stability, educational strength, national security and sustaining a diverse and robust democratic society.

This disparity is still so evident over the last 60 years, in spite of the GI bill, *Brown versus Board of Ed*, the 1964 Civil Rights Act, and the Affirmative Action endeavor. We continue to see the effects of the inequitable practices and racist policies that were implemented in this country – policies we are still trying to rectify.

Now let me return to my personal journey for a moment. My parents came to Brooklyn in the late forties with five of their seven children. My brother and I were born much later in Brooklyn – surprise! We lived between the exclusive Brooklyn Heights and the Ford Greene [phonetic] housing projects in a tenement. My older siblings attended the public schools in the housing project area. And my brother and I started school after Brown versus Board of Ed, and we were suddenly thrust into an upper middle class environment.

To say we were in culture shock is not an exaggeration. We lived in a row apartment, that was my reality. When I was invited to a classmate's home in Brooklyn Heights it was one of those wow moments! I remember thinking, oh my **god**, that's like a house on TV on *Father Knows Best*.

But the education I received was different from the education my older siblings received in their school. In my school, I was taught French in the second grade. Taught music lessons and, to the chagrin in my family, was given a violin to practice at home. There were field trips to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Carnegie Hall, classical concerts and Broadway plays. I was amazed at seeing my first Broadway play, *Purlie* with Melba Moore.

All of these field trips were subsidized by the public school system – things my parents would have never been able to afford. It is crystal clear why I was the first in my family to finish college. It wasn't because I was smarter than any of my siblings. Quite frankly, I am not. It was all about opportunity – a solid educational foundation and the encouragement given to me by those teachers, that I could enter into college and succeed.

This was a foreign concept for my family. We had always believed that college was for the majority population who were wealthy and white. It certainly wasn't for people of color and the poor. This is how my personal journey has shaped my professional journey.

People frequently ask me, why I chose education and ultimately a presidency? Clearly, it is about giving back. While we lament how difficult the job is, the 24/7, the lack of a personal life and the sacrifices we make, the truth is, we love what we do. We are engaged in transforming lives, in leading institutions in ways that enhance the lives of our populace, and providing welcoming environments where people learn, create and discover.

This journey has not only changed my life, but the lives of the generations in my family after me. And while I do not have children, my nieces and nephews have either gone to college or are thinking about which college they will attend. I have witnessed firsthand that the solution to poverty, incarceration, and violence is education.

As AASCU presidents, it is up to us to entice, encourage, recruit and mentor a new cadre of diverse AASCU leaders for our colleges and universities. ACE began to survey college presidents in 1986. Their first study reported that the profile of the typical campus leader was a white male in his fifties, married with children, Protestant, held a doctorate in education and

had served in his current position for six years. Only 5% were African American, 2% were Latino, and less than half a percent were Asian American or Native American. Oh, and did I mention that almost 91% were male?

Twenty-five years later, very little has changed. Our campuses have seen the racial and ethnic make-up of our student bodies change. But the composition of the presidency has changed very little. The authors share that between 1986 and 2011, presidents of color only increased 5%, while students of color increased 14%.

In 2012, 88% of the presidents were white, 6% African American, 3% Latino, 1% Asian American, and half of a percentage point Native American. The number of women presidents has grown over the last 25 years by almost 13%. Female presidents at AASCU institutions peaked in 2006 at 27%. But by 2011, the number has actually decreased to 25%.

So, while we could say in the words of the old commercial, we've come a long way, baby, the fact is, we still have a long way to go. And while many of us in the battle for equity and social justice are getting tired of the fight, we must march on.

I'm passionate about assuring opportunity for all students, faculty and staff. And I have very little patience for those who continue to tell me it takes time. I'm tired of national discussions about students – speaking of them as if they are a homogeneous group, not recognizing their differences, not dealing with their different ways of learning, not acknowledging the tremendous change in demographics, and not exploring how we – we must change in order to educate the new populace.

I'm exhausted when I hear that we can't hire a diverse faculty because they're not out there, or they don't meet our standards. And I'm tired of the word 'minority.' We are the new majority. Just yesterday we heard from Marina Gorbis, that when we change the way we communicate, we change society.

I'm also weary of seeing new magazines appear on my desk. Speaking to the new traditional students only to discover that the magazine's entire editorial board is white. This is not to say that Caucasians are not sensitive. But what does it say when people are speaking, writing and creating policies about us, and we are not at the table?

But better yet, outside of AASCU, I'm so bothered when I walk into groups and I am one of two – one Latino, one African American, maybe an Asian American – just so people can claim the group is diverse. Or when we hear discussions that we can't include another person of color because we already have one.

I don't believe those conversations occurred when it was all majority and all male and we wanted to include another one. And how do we change the perception that the only paths to the presidency are those that have traversed the traditional paths?

Our lives as presidents are so complex. Yes, being a faculty member or understanding faculty life is important. But is being the provost or vice president for academic affairs the one position that truly prepares us to be presidents in the 21st century?

And while we have seen some change, the conservative hiring practices are still dominant, and make the path even more difficult for women and people of color.

So here we are – still confronting tremendous resistance to change. The irony is that the external community sees us as stalwart liberal institutions. But in so many ways, our institutions and our profession has bought into conservative, Euro-centric, traditional models.

As tired as so many of us are, our role as presidents is to continue to confront these difficult issues. Allow me to share what I believe some of those issues are. This is where my personal identity intersects with my professional identity and provides me my compass on a day-to-day basis. I believe this is particularly true for us as presidents of AASCU institutions.

We must remain ever vigilant, asking ourselves how we stay true to what we believe in, and speak up for our AASCU values. We must remain student-focused in spite of the tide against those values.

I am so perplexed when I hear the criticism of my leadership, that I am too focused on students and student success. My trajectory has always been clear. The reason I entered higher education as a profession was to work toward providing students, regardless of background, an opportunity for higher education.

I just returned from attending the National Hispanic Foundation for the Arts gala. How amazing to see actors like Jimmy Smits and Rita Moreno raise funds for scholarships for those who want to become actors or specialists in the entertainment field. The students were wonderful.

And yet the scholarships went to those attending institutions like UCLA, USC, Columbia. I marveled that not one scholarship went to a state university, because all we have to do is look at our campuses to see the wonderful talent coming from our institutions.

As I sat next to the vice president of a new bilingual cable program, I voiced my concerns. I reminded him that Jimmy Smits graduated from Brooklyn College, an AASCU institution. It is sad that so many are buying into the elitist notion of only helping those that go to so-called selective institutions. We must continue to fight back against this elitist notion that see selective and research universities as the only model of excellence.

We are also nurturers of innovation. We provide environments that allow us to remain cutting edge in order to ensure that our students are successful in this rapidly changing world. Oh but we must be ever-so-careful. MOOCs and the online revolution are transforming our campuses. Yet do we know what and if our students are learning?

As presidents, we manage the tension between a profession that is slow to change and boards and system heads pushing us to change faster. Will online become a way to provide poor students and students of color access to this format of learning? Will the campus experience remain just for those who can afford it?

At a recent board of trustees meeting, I was so proud of our student trustee. As the governor and several board members pushed for building even more capacity for complete online programs, our student trustee voiced her concerns that not all students wanted a complete online education, and that many want to experience a collegiate, on-site experience.

So how do we as presidents ensure that we don't get swept up with policies that are forcing change without us understanding its implications? How do we ensure that we are not creating an even larger divide?

President Obama has asked that we graduate more students by 2020, while our governments and legislators are asking us to be more efficient. We applaud the president for taking on the abysmal college graduation rates of low-income and students of color.

The truth is, we as presidents embrace accountability. However, measures that speak only to four-year graduation rates, salaries upon graduation and the use of online for developmental work places our students at a distinct disadvantage. We need to help President Obama – to improve the integrity and credibility of his proposal.

For example, my first salary out of college would have been a failure under this proposal. It was the late seventies and there were no teaching jobs in New York City. I managed to obtain a teaching job in Westchester County in a Catholic high school making \$147 a week.

When looking at data on the income of recent Bachelor's degree recipients, it reveals that engineering has the highest salaries, followed by other STEM fields and the professions. Humanities, social sciences and education are at the bottom of the list. This country needs our citizenry to be educated. We need students to find passion in their life's work.

Yes, this country needs graduates in STEM. But we also need teachers, public servants, social workers, and nonprofit leaders. What message does it send to generously reward some fields and disrespect others? What role do we play as AASCU presidents to share with President Obama that there should be measures that reward the work that we do on a day-to-day basis, because we are serving those very students who need us – those very students who make up the new majority?

And while we all agree that our graduation rates can be better, we are all working on that. Graduation matters, but learning matters as well, and it's just as important. We can share with him that while we agree we can do better in helping students enter their careers upon graduation, salary cannot be the only measure of success.

As presidents, we can't just say no to these policies because we can't be seen as obstructionists who don't want to change. We must be bold and speak with a forceful voice against these government intrusions, offer solutions, and protect the very students we serve.

As performance measures are thrust upon us, how do we guarantee that we are not slamming the door on low-income and under-prepared students because we want to look good in the rankings? The students we serve struggle so very, very much. While some policy makers and elected officials continue to think about higher education in terms of the so-called traditional students, the true traditional students today, as you all know, work, have families, do not live on campus, and are juggling life's complexities.

Many are still the first in their families to go to college. **My entering class of over 9,000 students, 50% are still first generation college students.** For our students, simply setting foot in a college classroom represents a triumph over numerous financial, personal and social obstacles.

But what I do know is this. We as AASCU presidents are passionate about what we do. Many of us are type A++, impatient and tired. And yet it is these very traits that make us good at what we do. We know that if we are too forceful too many times, people will stop listening. We know that we must use our anger selectively if we are to drive our point home. And we are perplexed as to why some of our colleagues, who share the same values, remain silent.

It is here with our AASCU presidents that we confront these issues. It is what we share at our gatherings that I see true servant leaders for change. Even as my calendar gets packed and I make choices, this is what brings me back to this organization every time.

The work that we do together continues to inspire me to march on because I know I am not alone. It's like coming home, sharing the struggles, confiding in each other, getting that group hug, and then going back energized to continue to collectively lead.

While stakeholders are pounding the door for accountability measures, it was *this* group of presidents that took on the VSA [phonetic]. As other organizations turn away from P12 [phonetic] and partnerships and its affect on low-income and underrepresented students, it was *this* organization that formed a task force on college readiness, that produced a report offering exemplary programs and strategies. And it was at our summer council that we learned how one of our colleagues took on the true meaning of shared governance on his campus and shared the challenges, pitfalls and triumphs.

As other organizations speak about diversity, inclusion and equity in higher education, but don't practice it, AASCU sees it within its mission and does act on it. It's this group of colleagues that unequivocally supports the cultivation of diverse leaders by supporting MLI (Millennium Leadership Initiative) [phonetic], the President's Academy and the Provost

Program. And it is this group of presidents that truly grasps continuous learning for ourselves – engaging and participating in this new learning, in order for us to be as good as we can be.

So as I conclude my thoughts, my reflections on my personal and professional journeys, I realize that I have found a group of colleagues in AASCU – *los presidentes* – to whom I don't need to translate my impatience, my passion or my commitment. You understand.

You are also going through so many of this. I have found presidents who are not afraid to speak up on injustices. Because Martin Luther King challenged us to be engaged citizens in writing a new chapter of America, we do not stand on the sidelines. We are hitting these issues head-on.

We live in a time where some in this country have become obstructionists because they're nervous about the enormous change in our demographics, the changing complexion – literally and figuratively – of America. We know that the gap between the have's and have-not's is widening. We also know that if we don't speak up for those who have been historically underserved, they will get even less. And we know that the doors of educational equity, economic stability and social justice were squeaked open for a few of us.

And if we don't stand up now, those doors will slam shut for others. With all we confront, with all the challenges we face, I remain staunchly optimistic for the future. Linked together through AASCU, our collective legacy must be anchored in protecting the rights of all students who enter our doors to succeed. Educating all students is getting it right, and it is the personal and professional responsibility of all of us who have chosen higher education as our calling.

Thank you.

[Applause]

GEORGE PRUITT: Thanks, Millie. That concludes our program. I'm told I'm supposed to ask people to not fall in the pool and find their way back into the other side of the hotel. Thank you. We are adjourned.

[End of Transcript]