



PERSPECTIVES ON NEWARK AND NJIT

AUTHOR: Cory Booker, elected mayor of the City of Newark in 2006, was the keynote speaker at NJIT's University Convocation in September. The following remarks are excerpted from Mayor Booker's address.

I was overwhelmed when I got this invitation. The more I learn about NJIT...the more awestruck I am. This institution has done so much for the city and continues to be a major force not only within Newark, not only within the State of New Jersey, but within the United States and internationally. The more I've read, the more I've learned, the more I've engaged the students, the faculty, the staff, the more I've realized that hope exists here.

The mission of this institution — education, research, service, economic empowerment — resoundingly resonates with the mission I have for the City of Newark, and in my heart and mind resounds with the mission of this nation, the very principles upon which we stand.

I've already seen in my first 66 days you have so much to teach me, which I can learn, which I can borrow, which I can infuse our city with to further advance our progress. But as I thought about what we share in common, not simply what I hope to draw from this community, I realized that there is something that, maybe, I can share — if nothing less than to give you some recognition of what you represent on a deeper spiritual level.

The divisions that still exist within our country are powerful. I once asked Colin Powell after a speech about terrorism, about nuclear proliferation, about a number of things challenging us, "What is the greatest threat to American democracy in the next fifty years?" He did not hesitate. He looked at me and said, concentrated poverty still exists in our country, our inability to educate all of our children equally and at a high level, and the separations and divisions that still exist between Americans.

Indeed, we stand in an exciting age, where we are breaking down barriers all around us, barriers between disciplines,

where people used to work in silos. We talk about connectivity constantly, about how technology is democratizing the population further than we could have ever imagined. We talk about streamlining the ways companies work, about bringing things together, making efficiencies. It is so much excitement, and here in this institution you are all on the edge — the edge of learning, the edge of research, the edge of applying that research to create new industries, new resources, new opportunities.

But the challenges still exist; the divisions that hurt us are still there. We must find ways to unify where there is division. This institution is representative in its very birth in 1881 of the challenge that went out from the state legislature. Any city that was willing to match the three- to five-thousand-dollar investment of the state could be home to this institution. Competing individuals within Newark — in industry, in politics, in the community, the city council — all unified behind this effort to produce this result. Their vision, their self-sacrifice, the subsuming of their egos produced the greatness that I witness on a daily basis. We urgently need that now if we are truly going to be one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

This institution that you are a part of is on the front lines of the fight for America, this nation upon which we stand. We are the rich inheritors of people who dug wells that we now drink from. The obligation of this university to continue in its striving for excellence is more urgent now at this point in our history than ever. You must break down the walls that separate man from man. You must break down the walls that separate person from person, institution from institution, science from science. You must open this nation up and make it as strong as the early dreamers hoped it one day would be. This is an academic mission; this is a spiritual mission. ■