

The true agenda of higher education: To honor the dignity and value of all

Duke professor addresses freshman in Fall Convocation

In a colorful, down-home style, Dr. Samuel Proctor brought a message of faith, hope and the value of hard work to ECSU's freshman during the Fall Convocation and Candlelighting Ceremony.

"What is the real agenda for higher education today?" asked,

Proctor, guest speaker for the event. "Is your agenda to retire at 55 and go to Florida and play golf? What are we here for—to make everybody rich?"

Calling America "a divided country," Proctor said the real agenda of higher education is to create "a total community that will include everybody, and to open up people to the life of the mind and new ideas.

"We've got to convince all members of our community that they have value," he added, "that they are children of God. I wish I had a spray gun that I could just spray it on some of these young folks to convince them they are somebody."

Higher education should create a model society that "honors the dignity and worth of persons and operates on the principle of justice for everybody."

Proctor encouraged students to ask themselves, "What can I do to make that society possible?"

Proctor praised the contributions of historically black institutions of higher learning, which he said were formed after the Civil War.

Before the advent of black colleges, "there were four million black slaves walking around barefoot, with no money," he said. "Black colleges began the development of the black middle class. Black people in America would all be close to slavery right now if not for the founding of those schools."

The black experience is unique in history, said Proctor. Although the Bible mentions that Jews were enslaved by the Babylonians, Jews only spent 70 years in captivity, he said.

"But Blacks spent over two hundred and twenty years in captivity," said Proctor. "Ours was chattel slavery, being sold like pigs and loads of wood. We did it and we survived. There is no one like us in the modern world."

Proctor admitted that when he was in college, he didn't have his priorities straight.

"All I wanted to do when I got to Virginia State College was to meet a cute



Freshman Melissa Young of Elizabeth City lights the "candle of knowledge" during the Fall Convocation and Candlelighting Ceremony. According to tradition, freshmen are welcomed as youth in a world of darkness who receive the light of knowledge from an upperclassman.

girl," he said. "I wanted to get a Chevy convertible to cruise up Norfolk with my radio going.

"I wish I could apologize to those professors who tried to teach me history," Proctor said. "Faculty, I hope you live long enough to see your students thank you."

He said that when he arrived on the ECSU campus he stopped to ask directions from "four dudes, whose pants were all hangin' down like they got a problem." The students were uninterested in attending the Convocation, according to Proctor, who quoted one student as saying, "I don't go to any mess like that."

"It's a disgrace," said Proctor. They had already been convinced they are nobody."

Proctor called on ECSU students to "reject rejection."

"We've got to convince all members of our community that they have value, that they are children of God."

Dr. Samuel Proctor

Photo by Craig Avondo

about how he taught a friend of his named Moose the difference between the nominative and objective case. After understanding the differences between the two cases, Moose said he'd spent years being confused by case, and added "You taught that to me in six minutes."

Proctor replied: "Somebody tried to teach that to you and you were half asleep. You didn't think you'd need it so you didn't try. Then some teacher found out you didn't care, and so she didn't care either.

"When you are put down and treated with contempt, don't give up. Don't be so quick to accept the negative."

Proctor recalled the time he was invited to speak in the Duke University Chapel—back in 1957. When the president of Duke learned a black man was to speak there, he said, "He'll preach there over my dead body." Proctor paused, then added, "He died. Know where he was buried? He was buried in a crypt that was under the pulpit. And when I spoke there I was preaching over his dead body!"

Proctor said the current dean of Duke's Divinity School was in the audience at the time of his speech. And he was so moved by the experience he later hired Proctor to teach there.

A native of Norfolk, Va., Proctor has been a pastor, dean, college president, professor, and Peace Corp administrator in Nigeria and Washington. He has also taught at Vanderbilt Yale and Rutgers. The recipient of numerous awards and honors, he is also the author of several books, including *The Young Negro in America*, *Sermons from the Black Pulpit* and *Preaching about Crises in the Community*.

Proctor and his wife, Bessie Tate Proctor, have four sons, Herbert, Timothy, Samuel and Steven.

POETRY

When it's Gone

*They always realize
after it's too late.
That's when they realize
they've made a mistake.
Mistook love for a weakness
abused all that sweetness.
Forgot all the caring things
that were done for them.
They begin to realize
how much they had
when it's gone....*

K. Wade-Simmons