

## Character: More than an Ivy League Education

By Noah Riner

Noah Riner is the Student Body President of Dartmouth College. Recently he addressed the incoming freshmen class. In his speech he spoke of the value of character and how such a virtue is not the result of status or privilege but rather must be forged in the heart. These dramatic words reflect a maturity well beyond his years.

We at **Blow the Trumpet** were genuinely moved by the great moral truth Mr. Riner displayed when addressing his collegiate brethren. We offer two thoughts concerning him and that truth. First, Noah Riner brings great honor to his parents and to his faith. And second, the profound wisdom his words carry should he considered by ancient and infant alike.

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### Remarks by Student Body President Noah Riner at Convocation Sept. 20, 2005

You've been told that you are a special class. A quick look at the statistics confirms that claim: quite simply, you are the smartest and most diverse group of freshmen to set foot on the Dartmouth campus. You have more potential than all of the other classes. You really are special.

But it isn't enough to be special. It isn't enough to be talented, to be beautiful, to be smart. Generations of amazing students have come before you, and have sat in your seats. Some have been good, some have been bad. All have been special.

In fact, there's quite a long list of very special, very corrupt people who have graduated from Dartmouth. William Walter Remington, Class of 1939, started out as a Boy Scout and a choirboy and graduated Phi Beta Kappa. He ended up as a Soviet spy, was convicted of perjury and beaten to death in prison.

Daniel Mason '93 was just about to graduate from Boston Medical School when he shot two men – killing one – after a parking dispute.

Just a few weeks ago, I read in the D about PJ Halas, Class of 1998. His great uncle George founded the Chicago Bears, and PJ lived up to the family name, co-captaining the basketball team his senior year at Dartmouth and coaching at a high school team following graduation. He was also a history teacher, and, this summer, he was arrested for sexually assaulting a 15-year-old student.

These stories demonstrate that it takes more than a Dartmouth degree to build character.

As former Dartmouth President John Sloan Dickey said, at Dartmouth our business is learning. And I'll have to agree with the motto of Faber College, featured in the movie Animal House, "Knowledge is Good." But if all we get from this place is knowledge, we've missed something. There's one subject that you won't learn about in class, one topic that orientation didn't cover, and that your UGA won't mention: character.

What is the purpose of our education? Why are we at Dartmouth?

Martin Luther King, Jr. said:

"But education which stops with efficiency may prove the greatest menace to society.... We must remember that intelligence is not enough. Intelligence plus character – that is the goal of true education."

We hear very little about character in our classrooms, yet, as Dr. King suggests, the real problem in the world is not a lack of education.

For example, in the past few weeks we've seen some pretty revealing things happening on the Gulf Coast in the wake of hurricane Katrina. We've seen acts of selfless heroism and millions around the country have united to help the refugees. On the other hand, we've been disgusted by the looting, violence, and raping that took place even in the supposed refuge areas. In a time of crisis and death, people were paddling around in rafts, stealing TV's and VCR's. How could Americans go so low?

My purpose in mentioning the horrible things done by certain people on the Gulf Coast isn't to condemn just them; rather it's to condemn all of us. Supposedly, character is what you do when no one is looking, but I'm afraid to say all the things I've done when no one was looking. Cheating, stealing, lusting, you name it - How different are we? It's easy to say that we've never gone that far: never stolen that much; never lusted so much that we'd rape; and the people we've cheated, they were rich anyway.

Let's be honest, the differences are in degree. We have the same flaws as the individuals who pillaged New Orleans. Ours haven't been given such free range, but they exist and are part of us all the same.

The Times of London once asked readers for comments on what was wrong with the world. British author, G. K. Chesterton responded simply: "Dear Sir, I am."

Not many of us have the same clarity that Chesterton had. Just days after Hurricane Katrina had ravaged the Gulf Coast, politicians and pundits were distributing more blame than aid. It's so easy to see the faults of others, but so difficult to see our own. In the words of Cassius in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, "the fault, dear Brutus is not in our stars but in ourselves."

Character has a lot to do with sacrifice, laying our personal interests down for something bigger. The best example of this is Jesus. In the Garden of Gethsemane, just hours before his crucifixion, Jesus prayed, "Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done." He knew the right thing to do. He knew the cost would be agonizing torture and death. He did it anyway. That's character.

Jesus is a good example of character, but He's also much more than that. He is the solution to flawed people like corrupt Dartmouth alums, looters, and me.

It's so easy to focus on the defects of others and ignore my own. But I need saving as much as they do. Jesus' message of redemption is simple. People are imperfect, and there are consequences for our actions. He gave His life for our sin so that we wouldn't have to bear the penalty of the law; so we could see love. The problem is me; the solution is God's love: Jesus on the cross, for us.

In the words of Bono:

If only we could be a bit more like Him, the world would be transformed. ...When I look at the Cross of Christ, what I see up there is all my s\_\_\_ and everybody else's. So I ask myself a question a lot of people have asked: Who is this man? And was He who He said He was, or was He just a religious nut? And there it is, and that's the question.

You want the best undergraduate education in the world, and you've come to the right place to get that. But there's more to college than achievement. With Martin Luther King, we must dream of a nation – and a college – where people are not judged by the superficial, "but by the content of their character."

Thus, as you begin your four years here, you've got to come to some conclusions about your own character because you won't get it by just going to class. What is the content of your character? Who are you? And how will you become what you need to be?