



**Mr. William C. Friday  
at the Opening Celebration in honor the  
1999-2001 William C. Friday Fellows for Human Relations**

**October 6, 1999 in Charlotte, NC**

Thank you, Jeanne, for your very kind words. I wish to thank you and Herman Blumenthal and all the members of your family present for this grand occasion. Through the Wildacres Retreat, your influence, thought, and action are seen across the state and region.

By bringing together this generation of young leaders, you manifest a glorious expression of faith in the future of North Carolina. It is a splendid example of an investment in human capital to insure the continuation of that splendid tradition in North Carolina of public service and of giving of oneself.

Four years ago Jim Preston, Rolfe Neill, Mark Bernstein and Billy Wireman were generators of ideas and persistent advocates of the essentialness of a first-rate leadership program. North Carolina is much the better state for their efforts.

A special word of thanks, too, to all of the members of the Board of Advisors who constituted themselves as the selection committee for this first generation of Fellows. Your very substantial commitment of time has brought to us this great evening of celebration.

And to this new class of scholars, I congratulate your adventurous spirit and your now professed willingness to grow and to learn about the affairs of state for the next eighteen months. You're taking on a major assignment and we are grateful.

And to Leslie Takahashi-Morris, I join the unanimous expression of gratitude and appreciation being expressed to her by everyone here.

Ida and I were children of the Depression. This glorious occasion is a kind of experience that one never imagined in the Depression. You struggled to survive. Adversity is a teacher. That is why we are profoundly grateful for the opportunity to be a part of the Initiative's work. There is no way I could deserve the high honor you pay me; but having it been done, I want to help each of you to make this program a great success.

Now a personal word to each of the Fellows. First, warmest congratulations on being chosen. You have before you an awesome and unprecedented personal challenge. Indeed it is an enormous opportunity for growth and learning and especially for learning about yourselves. You will soon discover how willing you are to change. You will find out how tolerant you are of a point of view that conflicts with your own. You are going to discover how much courage you really have in challenging demagoguery, hypocrisy, expediency, and misdirected ego. You will find out how willing you are to do and not just to observe. The Blumenthal Foundation has in fact given you a public trust. Guard it carefully; enter it with gusto and personal dedication.

Rolfe Neill once cited a definition of Daniel Boorstin regarding leadership:

The hero was distinguished by his achievement, the celebrity by his image or trademark. The hero created himself; the celebrity is created by the media. The hero was a big man; the celebrity is a big name.

The overkill of information by the mass media dealing with rock stars, athletes, talk show personalities and some politicians has yet to produce a single authentic hero or leader fitting Boorstin's definition. What a tragedy for each of them and for our country. Let me assure you that the selection committee for this Institute is not confused, and it has made that choice based upon the rich promise of your career so far. So the real question is how well you will prepare yourself to grapple with issues that are certain to challenge you. Let me illustrate: When we look at the national scene, we observe a consistent opinion of criticism and disrespect for the political process in our country. If you turn on your radio, you will hear over and over again the abuse being heaped upon the Office of the Presidency of the United States and just recently we have seen the judicial process of our country become the subject of much criticism and disrespect. Fewer and fewer Americans exercise the right to vote and become participants in our democracy. Look at recent elections.

These are very dangerous symptoms of a disillusioned and unhappy American public. So the question is, What will you do to correct these conditions? How much of your time and energy and thought will you share in giving redirection to the Republic?

But let's talk about our own home region. This evening over one million of our fellow citizens live below the poverty line. Far too many of our citizens cannot communicate adequately to meet competitive requirements in business and industry. One out of three North Carolinians do not have adequate health care and this morning over four hundred thousand children went off to school hungry. This is a shameful circumstance in a state that had a billion-dollar surplus. Our emphasis has been on building prisons and cutting taxes rather than trying to discover answers to these crippling circumstances that so hobble the future of our state. What we really speak about here is the gaining of hope, the importance of self-respect, and a sense of personal dignity is essential to human health. And we speak about the future of our state. So the question is, What will you do to correct these conditions? How will you make your mark in finding an answer? Will you speak for these people who apparently have no voice at all?

Leadership and your success as a leader depend upon your own sense of moral standards and personal accountability in the use of your considerable skills and native intelligence. In public life, character and integrity - once lost - cannot be restored. So guard jealously against the temptations of expediency, celebrity status and short-term gain. Please understand that leadership is difficult, that it is demanding, and that it is sometimes abused. But it is supremely rewarding even with the price that must be paid for being ahead in thinking.

Clearly, we must do better and improve the political process. We must stop the abuse of our public servants so that very talented person who could lead us to a more civil and reasoning society will be willing to serve.

A decade from now you will need to assess what you have done with the golden opportunity given you this evening. I trust each of you will fully justify the faith the Blumenthal family expresses in you tonight. It is quite clear that the greatest need in our state and country is for a generation of leaders with moral principles and ethical standards that are a part of all that they do. We need a generation of leaders with an unshakable commitment to courage and fairness

manifested with grace and courtesy and decency. We need a generation that understands the devastation of poverty, poor health and homelessness. I have asked the Governor to strongly consider appointing a Friday Fellow to the North Carolina Progress Board. You must meet these challenges because their resolution assures that North Carolina will remain the leader in educational growth and in the development of a better life for all of our people. This is a great state. These are great people like the Blumenthal family. North Carolina remains the goodliest land under the scope of Heaven.

You are very special people with a very special trust. Hold on to your sense of mission and work hard to fulfill it. May the Father of us all guide and bless you in this splendid year that lies ahead.