

Welcoming Dinner for Jonathan Holloway
September 25, 2017
Robert Hariman

Thank you, Morty. I am honored and pleased to have the opportunity to welcome Jonathan to Northwestern, and the invitation is yet another example of your support for shared governance. It also is a bit odd, as Jonathan and I go back . . . well, . . . days. I first met him last week. Our stars already were aligned, however, as his first day as a faculty member at Northwestern was my first day as Senate president. Since that day, *everyone* I have spoken with at Northwestern has asked me if I had met Jonathan.

Of course, the answer time and again was, “no.” This was not the answer that had been hoped for. There would be a pause, and then they would recover and ask brightly, “When are you scheduled to meet with him.” When I replied that the appointment had yet to be scheduled, their faces would waver between puzzlement and disappointment. Was I that clueless? Didn’t I know how the game was played? Was the new Senate president a *slacker*?

I had thought I was being considerate, but we can let that pass. And it soon became clear that there was an advantage to waiting: I could then ask if they had met Jonathan, and gather their impressions before forming my own. I also read his most recent book, *Jim Crow Wisdom*, which by the way is time well spent. Long story short, before I actually met Jonathan I was able to draw on others at Northwestern and his own work to sketch a portrait of our new provost.

As you can guess, there is much to like, but two concepts seemed particularly salient: Prudence and Integrity. As each can be undervalued and misunderstood, I’d like to briefly suggest how each term applies to Jonathan. Prudence often is defined as sheer expedience—and so put in contrast to integrity—or as over-cautiousness—and so averse to change. Both notions are mistaken in respect to the full history of the idea, and particularly so in respect to Jonathan. The richer conception that does apply is a capacity for judgment that can negotiate conflicting and often incommensurable perspectives, on behalf of mutually advantageous and sustainable solutions. Its opposites are not change but hubris and bitterness. In Jonathan’s story, this mentality was forged while growing up with a complex inheritance of trauma and privilege, remembrance and silence, diaspora and belonging, terror and the imagination. Jonathan has thought long and carefully about these bloody knots in the human condition, and we all will be the better for it.

Prudence is lodged in character, and so we get to integrity. We are of course familiar with the term, and it is a value we take seriously at Northwestern. A distinction might be useful nonetheless. Integrity often is taken as a merely baseline virtue, something to be taken for granted: of course we expect administrators, scholars, and teachers to have integrity. It then is left there, as if a stable but inert element, necessary

but insufficient for what actually needs to be done. Let me suggest instead that integrity can be a way of being in the world. It can be an orientation toward others and a disposition to action. Integrity in this sense is not merely a brake on misconduct, but rather a way of thinking forward to become a better person or a better institution. It need not be pure or unwavering—and can't be if we really are to listen to others—but it can equip you to take risks on behalf of other ideals.

Again, it is evident that Jonathan has put in the work that integrity requires. Let me close by suggesting why that is so important for Northwestern today. The present moment is both rich and daunting: we see the university's capital campaign surging to its goal and beyond, increasing diversity in our student population, and astonishing leaps forward in research and research funding. We also experience the anxieties provoked by powerful forces of change and reaction in the US and around the globe. My belief is that the challenge to Northwestern is not figuring out how to further optimize the strategies that brought us to this point. That work can continue, but we also need to think anew about how to prepare our students for more than personal success while facing the problems that will define and test the societies of the 21st century. Those problems include climate change, economic inequality, democratic dysfunction, and the rise of the post-human. To respond, Northwestern will need to better coordinate the sciences, arts, and humanities, recommit to the liberal arts education, and defend the idea of the university in the public sphere.

The institution that accepts these obligations will have to take risks. If Northwestern is to become a leader among the very best institutions, it cannot know whether any given effort will enhance or diminish its reputation, or how persistently and unfairly it will be criticized by those it confronts or baffles. We can ensure that we act with integrity: institutional, scholarly, and personal integrity. That is why I am confident that Jonathan Holloway is the right provost at the right time in the life of Northwestern University.

Jonathan, on behalf of my fellow senators and all the faculty, welcome to Northwestern.