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James Anthony Schnur

Shawn Reynolds

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The Speeches of Lowell E. Davis
Dean of USF St. Petersburg, 1986-1989
(Archives Record Group 215)



Dr. Lowell "Everlasting" Davis

A Collection Guide by

Shawn Reynolds
Archives Assistant

James Schnur
Associate Librarian

Special Collections and Archives
Nelson Poynter Memorial Library
University of South Florida St. Petersburg

31 October 2007

Introduction to the Collection

Dr. Lowell E. Davis served as dean during an important phase of USF St. Petersburg's history. He arrived in August 1986 and promptly set into motion an agenda that supported the expansion of course offerings and academic majors at USF St. Petersburg. Davis took a strong position in advocating greater autonomy and independence for the growing campus at a time when many Tampa-based administrators hoped to limit curricular initiatives at the University's "branch" campuses. His untimely death in the fall of 1989 slowed the process but did not extinguish the dreams of greater autonomy. Subsequent administrators at USF St. Petersburg have benefited from the university and community leadership that defined Lowell Davis's tenure as dean.

Pearl Williamson provided the Poynter Library with a notebook containing a representative collection of Dr. Davis's speeches at USF St. Petersburg, other academic institutions, and various organizations. These transcripts illustrate his strong concern for ensuring academic excellence for all students, as well as his special concern for increasing opportunities for African American students.

Biographical Note: Lowell E. Davis

*"Lowell's legacy is that he taught us to dream great things about the future of this campus."
–Paul Getting, then executive vice president of the St. Petersburg Area Chamber of Commerce, at the September 1990 dedication of "Davis Memorial Hall."*

A native of Jamaica, Lowell Davis came to the United States in the mid-1950s to pursue his dream of getting a college education. He earned his undergraduate degree at Howard University and completed his doctorate in biology at Case Western Reserve University.

Davis became USF's first African-American dean. He immediately set in motion plans to expand the physical size of the campus, as well as enhance its course offerings and resources. During his tenure, the endowment for the campus grew from \$600,000 to \$2.2 million. He moved ahead plans for the Campus Activities Center and expanded student scholarship opportunities.

A popular administrator, he cultivated a collegial atmosphere at USF St. Petersburg. Students, staff, and faculty became members of a large and extended family with a shared sense of academic purpose and zeal. Just as he planned to move forward with an aggressive agenda to increase autonomy and set a new tone for the campus, he suffered a debilitating stroke on August 23, 1989. Five weeks later, on September 30, he passed away. Those who knew Lowell realize that he made an "everlasting" impression on the campus.

Preservation Note

The speeches in this collection occupy one bound notebook. While preservation measures may slow the physical deterioration of such items, these steps cannot prevent damage from occurring. To prevent further damage to the fragile materials in this collection, avoid exposing them to light for an extended period of time. Please report any tears or other damage so that library staff may take appropriate preservation or conservation measures. While no restrictions limit access to this collection, library staff will evaluate photocopying or digitization requests on an individual basis to ensure the long-term preservation of this unique collection. Patrons using this collection must adhere to copyright and fair-use guidelines and provide proper citation of sources appearing in their research.

Provenance of the Speeches of Lowell E. Davis

This collection falls under Archives Record Group 215 (Lowell E. Davis Administration) of the Special Collections and Archives department, Nelson Poynter Memorial Library, USF St. Petersburg.

Scope and Contents

The contents occupy one notebook (approximately 0.40 ln. ft.). Inclusive dates cover from 1986 through 1989. Items reside in reverse chronological order.

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List of Speeches

“Let Us Go Back to Our Old Campgrounds” [Undated]

Summation: The new generation of blacks in America has forgotten the struggles associated with the Civil Rights Movement and, consequently, believes that racism has disappeared. This generation has been lulled to sleep by the media and other distractions. Blacks must return to the church for strength and guidance.

Supplemental materials: Highlighted copy of Rabbi Kenneth Berger’s “Five Minutes to Live” used in preparation and delivery of the speech.

“The Cadet and the Character” [7 April 1989 at ROTC Dinner]

Summation: Many Reserve Officers’ Training Corps cadets received recognitions and honors at an awards ceremony earlier in the week. Hard work and perseverance have helped many achieve successes thus far. Moral character is emphasized as is the importance of giving one’s self.

“The Mission of Masonry and Free Men Everywhere” [14 January 1989]

Summation: Prince Hall Freemasonry, inspired by the exclusion of blacks from other American lodges, is the largest and oldest black fraternal organization in the world. Blacks have come a long way, but are still quite far from “total equality, total freedom, total opportunities, and the complete eradication of racial distrust and hatred.” Many quotes offer that we should be bound by love. Davis’s comments include statistics regarding the educational attainment levels of whites, blacks and Hispanics and discussed his hope that education will erase social and economic barriers.

“Making History - Providing Hope”

[11 June 1988 at Senior Showcase 13th Annual Banquet, Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance]

Summation: Each individual has his own history and each has made sacrifices to create the path he has already started to take. Great futures must be planned and will be difficult. Most importantly, he reminds those in attendance that they will need to make sacrifices. People control their own destinies.

“The 3 D’s: Dedication, Determination, and Discipline”

[8 April 1988 at the National Society of Black Engineering Students]

Summation: Successes in life revolves around Dedication, Determination, and Discipline. Also, students should employ internal power, seek out opportunities, engage in a renewed philosophical approach, and maintain their ability to dream.

“Join in Celebrating Black History Month”

[17 February 1988 at St. Petersburg High School]

Summation: There are two reasons that this juncture of life (the time spent in high school) is so important: this is the time when personal foundations are built and this is the time the character assumes its permanent shape as young men and women transform into responsible citizens.

“Redrafting the Veteran (Teacher)”

[15 November 1987 at the Association of Retired Teachers]

Summation: There are two messages for retired teachers: the “war” for education has “escalated and intensified” and many of these “veteran” teachers need to be redrafted through “voluntary enlistment.” Davis provided statistics showing that illiteracy rates, low graduation rates, and the limited number of minorities entering graduate programs pose challenges educators must confront. He made a plea to retirees to utilize their talents so that many youths do not give up on their educational goals or dreams.

“Intellect and Humanity: Instruments of Life”

[13 May 1989 at Syracuse University]

Summation: Each person is an artist with their own instruments. These instruments include knowledge, skills, and talents. People must celebrate the potential of humanity to make music of these ingredients and this improve the world for future generations.

“Society for the Advancement of Poynter Library”

[23 April 1987 for SAPL Meeting]

Summation: An argument is made, through quotations, for the importance of books. The possibility of future reliance on computers as a storage medium is addressed. He proclaims that a good university and a good library go hand-in-hand.

**“A Future Look at USF – St Pete”
[29 March 1987 at the Ambassador Club]**

Summation: Davis describes the city’s recent acquisition of twenty-four acres, plans for a multipurpose building [now the Campus Activities Center], student enrollment trends, and the need to secure outside support. He considers state’s needs in colleges such as business, engineering and education. He also discussed blacks in higher education.

**“Making History – Providing Hope” (3/28/87 to Alpha Phi Alpha Leadership Inst)
[28 March 1987 at the Alpha Phi Alpha Leadership Institute]**

Summation: [Very similar to 11 June 1988 speech] Each individual has their own history and each has made sacrifices to create the path. Great futures must be planned and will be difficult. Most important are the sacrifices. People control their own destinies.

**“Hospice Address”
[25 March 1987 at the National Conference]**

Summation: Davis addresses the inception and ensuing rapid growth of Hospice as that organization’s role in helping people cope with the pain of losing a loved one. The grieving process is covered with testimonies. He mentions ways that people might deal with children throughout this process and the availability of programs for educators to help with these difficult circumstances.

**“Kiwaniis Club”
[20 January 1987]**

Summation: Same as 29 March 1987 speech.

**“Tribute to Martin Luther King”
[18 January 1987 at the Sheraton Sand Key, Clearwater Beach]**

Summation: Davis begins his speech by offering a brief history of Dr. Martin Luther King’s life. He then illustrates that that racial violence existed well into the 1970s and continues today. Davis argues that African Americans must work with one another and take advantage of educational opportunities to help the larger society overcome racism.

**"USF St Pete Graduation Ceremony"
[13 December 1986]**

Summation: Davis speaks to the campus about his impressions during his first semester as dean, as well as his praise for student accomplishments.

"United Way Speech"
[21 November 1986]

Summation: Davis expresses his appreciation to those in the audience for volunteering time and resources. He addresses benchmarks set in 1986 campaign, looks to future successes, and explains the various opportunities made available through the United Way.

"Comments to Campus Advisory Board Executive Committee"
[13 November 1986]

Summation: Same as 29 March 1987 speech.

"Florida Mental Health Banquet"
[11 October 1986 at the Belleview Biltmore Hotel]

Summation: He addresses availability of drugs on college campuses, as well as use patterns of college students. He discusses substance abuse treatment programs as a positive alternative provided by mental health practitioners. He also suggests a couple of ideas for implementation: revamp current program on health education and return to teaching basic values.

"SPJC Annual Fall Meeting"
[21 August 1986]

Summation: Davis mentions individual student successes and looks to the combined future of USF and St. Petersburg Junior College. He speaks of the new, multi-purpose recreational facility as well as the potential acquisition by the city of new land for campus growth.