



Remarks for New Student Orientation –  
“What the World Needs... Are the Men of Hampden-Sydney”  
Benton R. Anderson '20, Student Body President  
Opening Convocation: August 27, 2019

Good afternoon students, faculty, staff, and welcome back to campus! My name is Ben Anderson, and I am honored to be serving as your Student Body President for the upcoming academic year. As everyone has started to settle in on the Hill, I've enjoyed hearing about summer trips, jobs, and internships. I'm excited for what this year has to bring and I'm excited to share with you my thoughts as we take on this new academic year.

It was November 3, 1980, the evening before Ronald Reagan's election. It was on this night that Reagan addressed the nation for nearly half an hour outlining his “Vision for America.” Reagan stated, “The eyes of all people are upon us, so that if we shall deal falsely with our God in this work we have undertaken, and so cause him to withdraw his present help from us, we shall be made a story and a byword throughout the world. Well, America became more than a story or a byword. More than a sterile footnote in history. I have quoted John Winthrop's words more than once on the campaign trail this year, for I believe that Americans in 1980 are every bit as committed to that vision of a shining city on a hill, as were those long ago settlers.”

Some of you may be familiar with this phrase I just mentioned: “a city on a hill.” This phrase originates from scripture but has been used by politicians in reference to America for decades. Ronald Reagan's reference is perhaps the most famous, though he credits his ideals to a man by the name of John Winthrop.

John Winthrop, an English politician, colonial settler, and American visionary, originally made this charge as he and his people came across the Atlantic to begin their new life in America. In their “city on a hill.” They had their reasons for leaving, a purpose for their travel, and a vision for what was to come.

Winthrop's leadership came during a familiar time in the mid-1600's. For all of you non-history majors like myself, a revolution took place during the 1600's. The English Civil War, that is. Many Englishmen had their reasons for rebellion and fought hard for what they believed in. This included two individuals we hold dear to our hearts here at the College — John Hampden and Algernon Sydney — our spiritual founders and namesakes.

According to *The Key*, the first president of the college, Samuel Stanhope Smith, chose the name Hampden-Sydney to symbolize devotion to the principles of representative government and full civil and religious freedom, which the Englishmen John Hampden and Algernon Sydney had supported and for which they had given their lives. They were revered by American colonial patriots, and their names associated the College with the cause of independence headed up by Patrick Henry, James Madison, and others who collectively made our College's first Board of Trustees. Winthrop had a vision for his

community on “the Hill”—as did our founders. A peaceful place for visionaries. “A beautiful place where honor is a virtue, civility a habit, and learning a goal,” according to Tommy Shomo, class of 1969.

One of my favorite traditions here at the College is the signing of the Honor Code. Without further explanation, I’d say it’s safe to assume no Hampden-Sydney man forgets that night. This past Thursday, I listened as my good friend John Pittman addressed the freshman class before the signing, and one of his points really stuck with me. I couldn’t have said it better myself, so I’d like to share with you what he said:

“You know who we are and what we do here, but if you are going to join us, there are a couple of things I want you to know. The tribulations of a wicked society stop at the gates. There is no place in the world like this College, where we take each other at each other’s word, where we are all our brother’s keeper, where we can be idealists. Some of us are here tonight because we thought that Hampden-Sydney would be fun, which it is. Some of us are here tonight because our fathers went here, and we value tradition, which is commendable. Many of us are here because we believe in lauded things long forgotten and long forsaken by the world and we saw coming here as the right thing to do.” (Pittman)

We all came here for various reasons. Of course, many of us came for the academics—which are challenging, and help to prepare us for careers after graduation. Many of us came for athletics, as a result of getting recruited in high school to come join one of our competitive teams. Maybe some of us came here because we value history or tradition or the Honor Code. A pretty campus, small class sizes, fraternities, the alumni network, friendly people—these all could be reasons as well. Maybe some of us just came because we heard it was fun, which, like John said, it is.

My point is, we all had a reason for coming here. When each and every one of us stepped foot on this campus, there was something about this place that drew us in. We all knew this place was different. We all knew it was special. For one reason or another, we all came here because we saw it as the right thing to do.

For those of you who attended freshman orientation this past Thursday, you heard me emphasize how Hampden-Sydney is more than just a campus, but a community. For us students, it’s our home away from home. This year, let’s not forget to take care of it and treat it as our own.

Winthrop and the colonists came here because they saw an opportunity. Reagan ran for office because he saw an opportunity. And we all came to Hampden-Sydney because we saw an opportunity. Over the past few weeks I’ve been reflecting on the opportunities Hampden-Sydney has provided me. I’ve thought about why I came to this place and how my purpose has evolved during my time here. What was your reason for coming to Hampden-Sydney? What is your purpose here? Have a vision for this school year. Maybe you want to make Dean’s List or make First Team All-ODAC. Maybe you have a desire to get more involved around campus or live a healthier lifestyle.

Whatever reasons you may have or whatever you may see as your purpose, it is important to strive to be the best Hampden-Sydney man you can be. We are all representatives of the College. Keep Hampden-Sydney on top of the Hill. Now more than ever, the world needs gentlemen. The world needs good men and good citizens. The world needs the men of Hampden-Sydney College.

Good luck to everyone on a safe and successful school year, and go Tigers.