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## The Long View

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## **The Long View**

*Mary B. Marcy*

The fall semester, and the past four months in the nation, held a mix of tragedy, heroism, anger and despair. As we begin a new year and reflect on the one just past, there is value in the tradition of taking stock.

The cumulative toll of events over the last few months is undeniable. Few places felt the toll as completely as college campuses like mine -- small enough to know almost everyone not only by name but by personal biography, large enough to be directly impacted by nearly every major event.

As the fall semester began, so did the onslaught. Tragedy and division in Charlottesville were followed by incendiary posters and conflict on our campuses. Hurricane Harvey hit Texas; students from Houston faced evacuation and the loss of family homes. The next week, the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program was rescinded, putting another group of students in distress. Hurricane Irma hit Florida, and more of our students' families were impacted. Federal Title IX guidelines were withdrawn. The California legislature passed a sanctuary bill. The Las Vegas gunman rained terror on a crowd that included more of our students. The national climate penetrated college and university communities. Anxiety and uncertainty led to a dramatic increase in demands on campus counseling services.

And midway through the semester, the fires began. Napa and Sonoma Counties, our near neighbors, endured the most devastating wildfires in California history. More than 400 of our students, faculty, and staff members live in the region. A number of them lost homes, and dozens were evacuated. The Red Cross moved into our gym for two weeks. Everyone involved with our college was affected.

How does a community -- how does a country -- manage the burden of such seemingly relentless tragedies? Beckett wrote: "I can't go on. You must go on. I'll go on." Some days, we in higher education simply go on. But we must also nourish the soul. We must reaffirm our purpose. We must take the long view

Earlier this year, I was in Washington D.C. to seek support for our DACA students. I had a morning on the National Mall, that national autobiography masquerading as a series of monuments. I began at the Lincoln Memorial, symbol of our greatest internecine convulsion and also the seat of this nation's greatest healer. The walk proceeded through the Korean and Vietnam memorials, holding our country's hubris, venality and loss in equal measure. Along the reflecting pool to witness the heroism and sacrifice of World War II. Across the street to pay respects to George Washington, who decreed that he, and those who followed, would serve a republic, not a monarchy. Across another street, past the testament to our nation's original sin, the new African American History Museum. And on, past the Smithsonian and the Archives, repository of some of this nation's greatest creations and

achievements. Finally, to the foot of the Capitol. Inside they may govern in prose – and sometimes in profanity -- but outside, the dome is all poetry.

A walk on the Mall tells us to take the long view. This country has endured through great tragedy and crisis. The long view tells us it will endure again. As we start a new year and a new semester, the question is what form that endurance will take.

My campus is taking the long view. Dominican University was founded over 125 years ago on little more than faith, a belief in education and a good eye for real estate. It was decades before we conferred our first degree. We have conferred thousands since. The founding order saw their Mother House burned to the ground. They rebuilt. The first lay president of the university was killed six months into his tenure. We hired a new president, grew and strengthened.

Today, facing the most recent set of challenges, through the series of crises that we have shared with the nation, we have a renewed sense of mission. Our students look like California, which means they look like the future of the United States: highly diverse, often first-generation, from all walks of life and indeed all parts of the country. They are at a campus that is an agent of social mobility, and they know it. They are eager and also afraid, curious but uncertain, innocent and yet oh-so-worldly. And they are watching, even as they help define, our national discourse. If we can summon their bias for integration rather than separation, if we can engage their intellects and their commitment to justice, if we can build in them a sense of national purpose leavened with critique, then we will have gone a considerable way to shaping a positive future -- not only for them but also for the nation.

The long view tells us we are crafting such a future. The long view tells us it is time to recommit to mission, and to common ground. History tells us that when we prioritize human dignity and equity, when we embrace a range of voices and offer opportunity across that diversity, education has a way of changing the world for the better.

The last few months have tested the nation and every citizen in it. A walk on the mall, or on a college campus, tells us we will endure. We must go on? Of course we must. The question is the how we go on, and how we shape the future in the process.

*Mary B. Marcy is president of Dominican University of California*