

Founding Values in Today's World

Tracing institutional DNA can be just as revealing as mapping genomes. CMC's lineage extends far back—at least as far back as Harvard College—and looking at its shaping forces can help us understand why Claremont McKenna College confronts today's problems and tomorrow's solutions with so bold an outlook.



We are all familiar with stories of the 86 men who entered the College in 1946, most of them veterans returning from

noble service in World War II, who played football on Pomona's team, and who took courses at Pomona and Scripps as well as from their own seven faculty members. We are likely to think of Claremont Men's College as having sprung, fully formed, as a partner to older Claremont colleges—a partner charged with energy and with greater practicality than its undergraduate siblings founded in 1887 and 1926.

But there *were* forebears, many of them.

Immediately, of course, there was Pomona College. Nearly all of CMC's founders had Pomona connections—most were alumni, and many had learned important lessons about building a college through their work at Pomona and, later, Scripps. Pomona had immediately established itself as a distinguished institution: in its first class were students who entered Yale to earn Ph.D.s and, incidentally, the parents of CMC's first president.

Pomona and its siblings—all of them spawn of the Congregational Church: Harvard, Yale, Oberlin, Carleton, Grinnell, and Amherst, among others—honored learning and intellect, honed through reading and conversation. When the Congregational Church ceased to fund its colleges early in the twentieth century,

each learned to seek financial support from *individuals*, men and women who believed in their separate collegiate missions. It is no coincidence that the colleges with Congregational heritage have, by and large, built financial underpinnings sufficient to maintain the highest level of excellence among American colleges and universities.

This heritage of financial independence, high intellectual standards, and dedication to furthering human society and enterprise has passed from Pomona to each successive addition to the Claremont group and took root at CMC when American society had been shaken by both the Great Depression and World War II—forces that made CMC different from its older siblings.

Coolidge said before the Great Depression that the business of America is business, but in the thirties and beyond that phrase seemed to be a cynical catchphrase summing up the country's weakness. Keynesian economics and the politics of the New Deal became shaping forces and academic fashion. But some commercially successful Pomona alumni—among them CMC's founders—believed that these new fashions could destroy America's economic fabric. They believed that Claremont's college for men should couple the intellectual underpinnings provided by liberal arts education with lessons from functioning human organizations to produce leaders who understood how organizations work and could make them better and more effective.

Tumultuous decades shaped CMC's ethos. In the first decades after the College opened, students and alumni could make certain assumptions about America's self-sufficiency in resources, commercial enterprises, and workforce. Our riches and national benevolence helped lift other countries to higher standards of living. We numbered our allies and our foes using fairly simple tests.

CMC's graduates led their enterprises, their organizations, and their communities

using lessons their teachers had distilled from the wisdom of the West and from the experience of American institutions and organizations.

In the last few decades, however, assumptions that once appeared solid have become porous and unstable. Tom Friedman, a *Res Publica* speaker last year, showed in *The World Is Flat* how interdependent all countries have become—no longer can competition be contained within our boundaries. Europe's once-fractious nations have united in common enterprise. Surging cultural and religious forces we formerly ignored have become enemies we badly comprehend.

Does our founding DNA have meaning amidst such powerful evolutionary forces? What is the role of CMC today?

No simple answer can satisfy us.

When CMC opened, its student body was never to exceed 325, and a faculty serving that number could provide adequate coverage of what we needed to know about government and economics, then and still our principal fields. Today, with among the largest economic and government departments in our peer colleges, we are hard pressed to cover what we think important—and our departments are sized to serve a student population nearing 1,100.

Today's students enter with as great a desire to learn, to accomplish, and to serve as those who entered in 1946. The almost-total collapse of communism as a pattern of government has reinforced in today's students the belief in free enterprise common to our earliest students and faculty. But today our students must depart from CMC with vastly more sophisticated knowledge of a much more complex world, ready to lead with assurance that the guidestar that led the College's founders shines brightly still.

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