

UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN COMMENCEMENT SPEECH*

By

John A. Perkins

Under Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare

Mr. President, Regents, Faculty and Friends:

Our first order of business is to congratulate the graduates receiving degrees today. My felicitations are offered them with special emphasis. First, such degrees as I have were earned at this University. Therefore, I especially revere Michigan graduates. Secondly, coming as I do from assignment in our Nation's Capital, where daily events emphasize the strategic role of our Country in world affairs, and the inimitable worth of the educated man in the fulfillment of that role, I view products of higher learning with more than ordinary respect. As college graduates you should understand the high esteem you command in the minds of all thinking people.

Such people are also interested to find out what you are thinking. Recently the General Electric Company polled college students to find out. Among the questions asked was one on your attitude about finishing college. Nearly seventy per cent of those polled declared themselves impatient to "get going." Aside from the nostalgia of parting, you who are graduating today are doubtless also impatient to "get going," perhaps even more so that the mine-run collegian, for purposeful

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Michigan graduates are, as I have suggested, no ordinary lot.

When you and your counterparts at other universities say you are anxious to "get going" you mean, I suspect, to earn a living. Whatever your field of specialization, you will all make much needed additions to the present inadequate pool of highly educated manpower. While there is much happiness to be found in the daily labor before you, that will not suffice. A passage from George Eliot's Ramola describes a wider satisfaction in toil that I would have you discover:

"We can only have the highest happiness,..."
Eliot writes, "by having wide thoughts and much feeling for the rest of the world as well as ourselves; and this sort of happiness often brings so much pain with it that we can only tell it from pain by its being what we would choose before everything else..."

Eliot is saying: You will never experience the full rewards and satisfactions of life if you conceive of your work merely as personally getting on in the world. As well, you must help the world get on. Considering the posture of the United States in world affairs, all graduates must assume this larger responsibility. When we measure the effectiveness of the United States as a world leader, we must not think so much about the State Department,

Mr. Dulles, President Eisenhower, or Congress on the Hill, but about ourselves. Painful though it may be, to paraphrase George Eliot, what we contribute personally to the rest of the world by our work is what will count. To fail to contribute may cost you not only your successful career, but your very life. Recall the Biblical injunction: "Who-soever shall lose his life... the same shall save it." (Mark 8:35). If you are willing to lose your life, probably you will save it and your country's as well.

As college graduates you must take a hand in solving the major problems of the Nation and the world. As Michigan graduates your participation must be above the ordinary in quality and extent.

This is not the first time that educated people have had such a vital assignment. Plato and Aristotle endeavored to educate the Greeks for a similar responsibility. They were, 2,400 years ago, concerned to save their world from extinction. They were concerned for the continuance of the Hellenic civilization which is so closely akin to our modern world and its problems. Read, if you will, contemporary history and at the same time Pericles' Funeral Oration. You will recognize the kinship, not only of ideals but of accomplishments and of situations. The Peloponnesian Wars, in the Fifth Century B.C., and World Wars I and II, in our own Century, have had much the same effect. Pericles' once

highly civilized Aegean community was divided between partisans of the great cities Athens and Sparta. In like manner the peoples of our world are dividing between Washington and Moscow.

In our zeal to set the world aright, there is danger we may overlook the real issue in an angry attempt to catch up with the Russians. Because our pride has been stung we must not simply "keep up with the Ivans" in science, weapons, steel and power. We must also go on making life better for as many people as possible -- better socially, culturally and spiritually, as well as materially.

In a recent article entitled, "Earth Satellites and Foreign Policy," Mr. Lloyd V. Berkner of the President's Scientific Advisory Committee pointed out that the United States and Russia are both capable of destroying the other by a single blow. He suggested that these destructive forces tend to offset each other in the struggle for allegiance of the uncommitted peoples of the world. A new basis for leadership will have to be developed. Mr. Berkner suggests we have the chance to earn this leadership through intellectual pre-eminence. The political significance of intellectual leadership must be widely understood.

Early last fall Mr. Halldor Laxness, the Icelandic Nobel Prize Winner in Literature, visited America after an

absence of many years. The University of Delaware had the pleasure of entertaining him. In writing about the United States to his countrymen in Iceland Mr. Laxness said:

"Often I was asked if I considered America the leader of the nations that considered themselves free. I answered that leadership belongs to the nation that earns it by good example. No nation can possess that leadership without being indisputedly superior to all other nations in intellectual and cultural achievements."

The implications of the statements by Mr. Berkner and Mr. Laxness should be clear to you. Unless this country exhibits intellectual superiority over the Russians, we assuredly cannot bring into alliance with us the peoples of the world. As a nation -- especially you who are the paragons of its learning -- we must become the apostles of education not only through words but through deeds. "Faith if it hath not works is dead," admonished an earlier Apostle (James 2:17). Our survival may well depend on the extent to which each of you contributes to our national strength. More significantly still, you must understand that our national strength, at bottom, rests upon our contributions not only to science but to the alleviation of poverty and sickness, to arts and letters, and to ethics and morality.

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It is the function of a great university to prepare its students for their epoch. It is equally the function of its graduates to acknowledge the character of their age and wrestle with its problems. The knowledge you have been accumulating these several years past is not an end in itself. It is, as Socrates suggested, a guide to action. Intelligent action is needed in the seminar room and in the board room, in the bank and in the court of law, in the laboratory and in the legislature. Intellectuality is as vital in one place as in another. It must walk abroad among men of every calling in every circumstance.

Graduation from the University of Michigan places upon you a special responsibility to be intellectuals in action. You have a unique heritage of educational leadership. Do be aware, in more than a vague way, of the role that the University of Michigan has played in American intellectual growth. This role has not been one of simply "doing it first" west of the Alleghenies. Your University's leadership extends east as well as west, in this hemisphere and abroad.

To review together a few of these pioneer accomplishments is not to become drum-beating alumni, but rather for us to recognize, in humility and fortitude, the challenge which the past and the present now thrust upon all its graduates.

Ours was the first true university in the west. This prototype evolved here approximately one hundred years ago with the organization of instruction in law and medicine in juxtaposition to the liberal arts, and through recognition that the latter needed to be extended through graduate studies for students of full maturity and complete dedication.

Michigan was among the first also, if not the first, to break with the prescribed classical curriculum, by offering instruction in modern languages and modern history, and introducing the laboratory study of the sciences. Nowadays, I interject, science is so much in the news that the untutored may think that science has always been accorded highest esteem amidst higher learning. Not so at all! Your University helped make it so.

Back of these and other innovations, and in large part responsible for them, was the very organization of this University. With full faith in democratic principles, the people of this Commonwealth vested in themselves the right to elect directly the University's governing board, the Regents. In the very Constitution of the State they gave the Regents powers coordinate with, rather than subordinate to, the legislature and the executive branches of government. Even today few state universities enjoy such advantages and independence in their governance. That this marriage of frontier democracy and higher

learning took place is a great testament to both. What is more, that both partners have flourished so brilliantly and brought forth such a proud progeny in citizenship and scholarship constitutes an example for mankind, which it pleases me to call leadership.

It seems to me that there are four specific great examples of this intellectual leadership to be drawn from the long list of our University's pioneering accomplishments. They exemplify on a university basis what I would have you exemplify on a personal basis.

First, in 1870 Michigan, in the face of the strongest criticism and even anguished protest, opened its doors to women. No other large university at that time had done so; half the human race -- for truly, whatever else they may also be, women are human -- had hitherto been virtually excluded from university learning. This daring intellectual venture not only set the pattern for all public higher education, but enabled our country to develop and utilize a rich intellectual resource too long untapped. Indeed, there is said to be a positive correlation between the cultural and intellectual excellence of a society and the extent to which its women are given educational equality.

Secondly, it seems incredible that this Nation had been a self-governing republic for four score years and more before its universities, led by the University of Michigan, organized instruction in Political Science. A resolution by the Regents in 1860 approved lectures to seniors on Constitutional Law and History by the later-to-be-renowned Thomas M. Cooley. Probably these led to his great work entitled Constitutional Limitations, a book which had marked influence upon the highest courts of our land. Political Science was not only loftily taught but pragmatically conceived in this period, for courses in Forestry Administration and Sanitary Science were within its scope; these latter were the forerunners of the Schools of Forestry and Public Health.

Thirdly, recent "heavenly" events compel me to point out that the telescope for Old University Observatory was, in 1854, one of the three largest in the world. The other two were at Harvard and -- significantly -- Pulkowa, Russia. This observatory and its telescope resulted from emphasis on science and research given the institution by its first president. A hundred and four years ago, nobody could have prophesied the world's intense concentration on astral matters in 1958. To classicists and lumberjacks alike such expenditures of energy and wealth must have seemed sheer waste. Oh, why must so many people

be so slow to learn amidst such examples that theory and research and exploration do pay off? It is to the credit of our universities that they promote such activities with or without popular approval.

Finally, I would mention the Phoenix Project as a more recent example of Michigan's intellectual leadership. This was the first large project independent of government designed to study and develop atomic energy for peaceful purposes. Significantly, too, this was a student conception of an appropriate memorial for classmates lost in the first Atomic War. In making this seminal proposal, undergraduates a decade ago perhaps did not appreciate the extent to which an earlier Michigan endeavor made their proposal not only feasible but logical. As early as 1928, Professor Harrison M. Randall, as head of the Department of Physics, inaugurated symposia in theoretical and nuclear physics which had both national and international influence. To these symposia came such non-famous scientists as Fermi, Pauli, Oppenheimer, Heisenberg, Bohr, Compton and Lawrence.

Michigan students, in conceiving such a memorial, based on peaceful use of atomic power, contributed intellectual leadership exactly in accord with Mr. Berkner's and Mr. Laxness' admonition to America. Leadership of the free

peoples of the world is to come from the trained mind in action.

It is with more than ordinary confidence, therefore, that I challenge you who are impatient to "get going" to assume the intellectual leadership of your era. My confidence is great because it rests upon first-hand knowledge of this pre-eminent institution and its past graduates.

You will have savored the essence of your education, whatever your field of specialization, only if you use it, and in using it give instead of get. Much more than your personal well-being depends upon your success or failure. If more than my own testimony is needed, let me quote the words of a great modern philosopher, the late Alfred North Whitehead:

"Every epoch has its character determined by the way its population reacts to the material events which they encounter. They may rise to the greatness of an opportunity, seizing its drama, perfecting its art, exploiting its adventure, mastering intellectually and physically the network of relations that constitute the very being of the epoch. On the other hand, they may collapse before the complexities confronting them." Whitehead concludes, "How they act, depends partly on their courage, partly upon their intellectual grasp."

Many Michigan men have risen to the greatness of their opportunity and have reacted in an exemplary way to the material events they encountered. Happily enough, Michigan alumni in public life are often men of diverse views. But they are all struggling with the network of relations that constitute the very being of our epoch. There is the recent Secretary of the Treasury, Mr. George Humphrey. Two others who used their legal training for more than personal gain come to mind: One, a graduate of the Literary School, Thomas E. Dewey, became racket buster, later long-time governor of the Empire State; and Governor G. Mennen Williams of this Commonwealth, a product of Michigan's Law School, has spent much of his life in the public service.

Other men making the great struggle too, but in different roles, are Dr. Herold Hunt, one-time Michigan school teacher, superintendent of successively larger school systems, including Kansas City and Chicago; Dr. Richard E. McArdle, now Chief of the United States Forest Service; and Physicist Robert F. Bacher, member of the original Atomic Energy Commission.

One can indeed be part of one's epoch without being in public life; some men seize its drama in the world of business. Two such are: Albert Bradley, Chairman of the Board of the largest corporation in the world --

General Motors --, and Regent Leland Doan, the President of the Dow Chemical Company.

In the same spirit, but in another realm of service, Michigan men rose to the greatness of an opportunity: A graduate of my own class, Dr. Thomas H. Weller, Nobel Prize Winner in Physiology and medicine, discovered the technique of virus tissue cultivation which opened the way for the development of the Salk vaccine. As for perfecting art, I only need mention another contemporary of mine, Playwright Arthur Miller, Pulitzer Prize Winner for Drama, who wrote Death of a Salesman and All My Sons.

This enumeration could go on indefinitely, but I have made my point. These are Men of Michigan who have shown both courage and intellectual grasp.

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If I were sitting where you are -- as indeed I was some years ago -- I wonder what would be my reaction to the admonition just offered you. Would this be my thought? -- "This man is not talking to me. After all, I am going to be just an ordinary chemist, a teacher, a doctor, an engineer, a lawyer or a nurse...."

But my young friends, I am talking to you. You may

remember the play, "The Green Pastures." In that play Noah said to the Lord, "I ain't very much, but I'm all I got." Well, you are very much, whatever you think; you are all this Country's got. And as the future of the epoch falls into your hands, pray God you, as Men *and Women* of Michigan, will have both the courage and the intellectual grasp to rise to the greatness of your opportunity.