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THE PLURALISTIC UNIVERSITY: THE CONCERN FOR HUMAN VALUES^{a/}

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The invitation by the Board of Trustees of the University of Michigan to be their commencement speaker came in my first month at Michigan State University and bore witness to the growing bonds of true intellectual affinity between two great universities. Though our rivalries on the fields of athletic combat will continue, I am confident that we have embarked on a new era of mutual respect and cooperation. My remarks which follow are offered in that spirit. There are many problems which we share and many others upon which we must marshal our joint forces with those of the other colleges and universities if we are to respond appropriately and adequately to the educational needs of this great state.

^{a/} The idea of a "pluralistic university" was initially presented to the Detroit Economic Club, March 30, 1970.

Today, you graduates leave a great university to pursue your individual objectives. Concerns about your immediate future will be tempered by a sense of satisfaction and relief at having successfully completed a rigorous course of study. Yet, how many of you will ever really leave the university in fact or in spirit?

Many of you will return to this or another school to do graduate work. Some of you will return to teach. A few of you may even have the fortune or misfortune to become university presidents. You all will be alumni, subject to the blandishments and entreaties of the alumni association. And you will have children whom you will one day send off to a campus where you hope they will be prepared for a better, different world.

I readily concede that, in the heady atmosphere of this day when graduation becomes a reality rather than a goal, the university your children will attend may be rather remote in your thoughts.

But I would suggest -- indeed, implore -- that you keep this subject very much in mind in the years ahead. Like the improved environment that we want our children to enjoy, it is never too early to start. Attitudes and conceptions change slowly. The universities of today, with their internal turmoil, their groping for answers, their torturous adaptation to change, are a classic example of neglected opportunity to respond positively -- and more importantly, to anticipate. You, who have just completed your undergraduate or graduate education, are in a good position to use your experiences to influence the course this or other universities will take in the future.

It would be improper to blame today's problems on our universities. The campus, is, in many ways, simply a field of battle on which is fought a struggle against society's ills -- ills which usually are not of the university's doing or under its control. When the university is an intellectual battlefield -- where ideas are brought forward, debated, refined and disseminated -- then it is performing a valuable and traditional function. Unfortunately, the campus is too often becoming a battlefield in the literal sense, where emotionalism, confrontation, and violence are substituted for rational debate.

And to the further misfortune of the university, there are those in public and private life who would seize upon campus unrest as the illness rather than the symptom.

I do not, however, excuse the university from an important role in the shaping of our society and the preparation of youth to cope intelligently with its problems and its promise. For if the university does not exercise this role, who will? The modern pluralistic university has many responsibilities, but none is more basic and important than the education of youth. As obvious as that may sound, we are now being told that this is really a limited responsibility -- that we should preserve a "natural aristocracy" by limiting attendance at our major universities to those who meet certain special standards.

There is a disturbing parallel here to the "Know Nothings" of 100 years ago who believed that elective office belonged only to "native Americans." And the bitter irony is they did not mean American Indians. Today's "Know Nothings" would seem to refine this concept so as to limit the privileged group entitled to enter our major universities to those who have demonstrated some intellectual prowess or, more particularly, to the children of those who have "made it."

I would imagine that each of you graduating here today would almost automatically assume that your children, 18 or 20 years hence, will be going to college. It would hardly occur to you to question this.

There are others among you to whom a college education will become a family tradition -- starting with you. You were the educationally "disadvantaged." You may have come out of the ghettos, the hills or small farms -- and somehow in you the motivation and opportunity for a college education were fortunately combined.

Carry this a step further. How many are there left behind you who are the products of poor secondary schools, poverty or racial discrimination to whom college is not even part of the vocabulary, let alone a dream? Are these human beings pariahs, ineligible for a decent education or membership in the "natural aristocracy?" Or are they entitled to a chance, a helping hand?

Attacking the concept of universal higher education in terms of a "natural aristocracy" is an argument of unbecoming arrogance. Carried to its logical extreme, the same argument could be used to advocate that only those five or six-year-olds who pass a critical level of intelligence in their early years should receive primary and secondary education. Indeed, we may not be very far from that when it is seriously proposed that children of that age be tested for criminal deviance and isolated for special treatment. But as of now, at any rate, no one would argue against universal primary and secondary education. However, when it comes to universal access to higher education, we find objections on all sides.

It should be made plain, however, that universal access does not mean that everyone, no matter his innate ability, will have a right to enter the University of Michigan or any other particular university. It means only that there should be a public commitment that somehow in the state's institutions of higher education there is a place for everyone who has the desire and basic ability to do college work.

To meet this goal will naturally require increased funding -- just as the expansion of access has in the past. We have a responsibility to face this obligation.

Public assurance that practically all students will have a chance at college regardless of their parents' social or economic status carries with it reciprocal responsibilities. It is not a free ride. The student incurs an obligation to himself as a serious student and to the institution of which he becomes a part. Those who view college as simply an opportunity for disruption and violence, those nihilists who seek to destroy our institutions rather than improve them, forfeit their right of access to higher education.

Perhaps a major reason for the existence of both the adult "Know Nothings" and the youthful nihilists in our society is the failure of our institutions, particularly our universities, to display a genuine concern for human values. If the modern university of today is to re-establish its primacy as a social institution with a concern for the humane, then our colleges and universities must reaffirm their commitment to human values in all of their functions.

First and foremost, in renewing its concern for human values, the university must recognize its moral responsibility to meet the demands for access by the educationally disadvantaged segments of the community. In a pluralistic and democratic society it is neither feasible nor just to grant special rights to one group while refusing another. It should be noted that the largest single such group are disadvantaged whites, not blacks, Mexican-Americans, American Indians or other minorities.

The demand for access by the various disadvantaged groups is merely a demand for universal access to higher education. A recent Gallup poll showed that 97 percent of all parents want their children to go to college. Yet there are at every hand objections. It is said that:

--innate differences in ability and lack of adequate preparation
make this impractical.

--for social and economic reasons not everyone should go to college.

--the result would inevitably lower the standard of scholarship and
degrade the university into a second-rate college.

We tend to get so emotional about universal higher education that the facts are rarely examined. As I listen to the critics I sometimes wonder where they have been for the past thirty years. Let us look at the historical record. In 1910 there were only a little more than 350,000 students in American higher education.

Today, there are over 7 million enrolled in U. S. colleges and universities. The number of students in American higher education has increased over 2,000 percent in the sixty years since 1910.

In the past thirty years, student numbers increased almost 500 percent while population has grown by only 55 percent. A larger and larger proportion of our youth are going to college. Only five percent of the 18 to 21 age group were in college in 1910. About 15 percent were in college in 1940. Today, better than 40 percent of our young men and women between 18 and 21 are in college. If past rates of growth continue, in only twenty years you can expect to see all youth in college who have the ability and care to go. It seems obvious to me, even if not to others, that our nation decided on the goal of universal higher education decades ago.

What of the objection that the quality of education and academic standards will inevitably fall in the face of further expanded access to higher education? Historically, as enrollments have grown, so has the quality of American higher education. Our outstanding universities have deepened in excellence, and gained in diversity. The University of Michigan and Michigan State University are specific cases in point.

Three nation-wide studies evaluated and ranked the top twenty departments in various universities in 1924, 1957, and 1964. You may be interested to know that in 1924 sixteen at the University of Michigan were in the top ten in the nation; in the 1957 study, seventeen departments and in the 1964 study, twenty were in the top ten in the nation. I will leave it to you to judge if the University of Michigan has experienced a decline in its quality and standards over the past three decades at a time when its student numbers increased by 300 percent. But there are those who say that a widening of the doors means a fall in standards.

At Michigan State University over this same period, student enrollment increased seven times. And Michigan State developed from a small land-grant college into a fine university passing over the threshold of excellence.

Modesty and good manners normally prevent a president from saying such things of his own institution. Since this achievement is the product of other men's effort, I may, in good grace, say that when I came to East Lansing I entered in to the stewardship of a great university.

Michigan State since 1963 each year has enrolled as freshmen more National Merit Scholars than any other university in the United States, and this year we placed third in the National Science Foundation awards for doctoral fellowships to graduating seniors in an open competition across the nation.

I could go on to other evidence, but I will stop here. Clearly, rapidly growing enrollments have not produced any decline in academic standards or quality at Michigan or Michigan State. Quite the reverse has occurred.

There is, of course, the further argument that admitting those who are below standard or less than brilliant usurps a place which might have gone to another more qualified. The charge, however, is usually couched in terms of its impact upon the excellence of the University and its leading to the creation of a "diploma mill". The counter argument is rather obvious. I cannot remember anyone calling the Ivy League a "diploma mill", because its freshman classes have always included thousands of academically undistinguished sons of the wealthy who had the right lineage and family name. Nor can I recall an alumnus of a Big Ten university being too vocal at the admission of a less than brilliant potential All-American athlete because he took a slot which might have gone to a Merit Scholar.

The critical fact to retain is that the truly great university, like the great teacher, is able to serve this plurality and to provide an education both to those who are brilliant and those who are not. And what is most important, the university and society benefit. Intellectual ability is only one of the socially valued characteristics of man and sole reliance upon it may do a disservice both to the individual and to the nation. A university can survive on this sole criterion, but can our modern, complex, inter-related world?

I would argue strongly that it is not a dichotomous either/or situation. And to couch the criticism in this fashion is a distortion. Each university has a responsibility not only to the brilliant students, but to those of average ability, not only to produce the next generation of intellectuals and scholars but to provide educated men and women for a better society. Each university must necessarily meet this challenge in its own way, in accordance with its own special circumstance.

How did the myth arise that equates educational quality with high selective standards of admissions? Few in the public realize or remember that most universities have strengthened their admission criteria since World War II because, for the first time, they were in a seller's market. Indeed, this is when the idea of "selective admissions" was systematically introduced into American Higher education--it did not prevail in the 1930's or before. Thus the universities, particularly the public universities, up to the Great Depression served the previous generations of striving immigrant groups even when a smaller proportion of society entered college.

Following World War II selective admissions, based not on native ability but rather on evidence of the degree of academic preparation, have kept out the Black, the Mexican-American, the Puerto Rican.

We must recognize that the real measure of excellence is not how a person measures at entry to the freshman class, but rather his performance and capacity upon graduation. The better his academic preparation the less is the risk he will fail to realize his capacity or not graduate. Thus, one may speak of high or low risk students. But do not confuse credentials of academic preparation with intellectual ability. While there is some correlation, we have never really learned how to measure ability. We all recognize that original innate ability is randomly distributed in society regardless of race, creed, income level or class. The difficulty is that our societal structures and their imperfections have frequently inhibited or prevented full development of that potential. The problem is one of identifying the individual who has that native ability to benefit from a college education, yet who for economic and social reasons has received a disadvantaged education.

No responsible person I know in higher education has suggested that we admit disadvantaged students of low ability. The plea is that we admit the individual of outstanding potential ability into higher education no matter his social or economic background.

In recent years, a number of institutions have examined the relationship between their admissions criteria and subsequent performance of students and alumni. A major study was completed recently at Brown University, one of the highly selective Ivy League institutions. They discovered that 2,500 "high risk" students whose academic credentials on admission were "less than first rate", went on to graduate nearly as often as students who scored substantially higher on the College Board tests. These "high risk" students also did as well in graduate school even though they were admitted less frequently.

The outstanding universities are deliberately seeking out those young people who show promise, some high degree of motivation, some immeasurable factor which seems to be a good predictor of success. These are the young men and women who are being recruited by the universities under programs for the disadvantaged. Certainly, some of them fail, but many other succeed.

I should also point out that many of those who are coming in increasing numbers are fully qualified and fully admissible under the regular criteria. Somehow the public perceives such students as a monolithic, homogeneous mass. This is not true. I can safely predict that among them are just as fine minds as there were in the past. The difference is that in the past their intellectual forebears were denied access to the excellent facilities for learning in the predominantly white, elitist universities.

If these great minds of the past could make the contributions which they did despite the limited educational facilities which they had available to them, then I ask you what contributions will similar minds with far better preparation make for the well being of society in the future?

Look around you among your classmates who are graduating today, those who may have come from underprivileged backgrounds but who, during their years here, have demonstrated once again that intelligence and intellectual excellence is randomly distributed.

Ten or twenty years from now, I hope you will remember these words when several of your classmates receive their due recognition for the contributions which they will have made.

What are we to make then of the related objection that innate differences in ability and lack of adequate preparation make impractical universal access to higher education?

What is so terribly un-American about a person wanting an education to better himself or herself? The disadvantaged minorities--blacks, browns, yellows, red, and whites--are merely presenting at our windows the promissory note which we gave each of them at birth about the American dream--"A man's ultimate achievement is only limited by his willingness to work toward that goal"."Get an education and you can become and achieve any goal you wish." But there are those in our society who say, "no." The check can not be cashed; you may not enter.

But you and I know that ambition and hard work are of limited value in this modern world without an education. If we close the cashier's window we will have denied once again the realization of the American dream.

People forget that we once tested the practicality of universal access to higher education. Following World War II the G.I. Bill gave three million veterans an opportunity to go to college. Millions of them enrolled -- the rich and poor, young and old, the brilliant, the average intellect and many not so bright -- Americans all, in search of the American dream. They came to better themselves and stayed to enrich the university and society. The non-veterans in college in those days remember vividly how the competition from this cross-section of America raised academic standards and stimulated the intellectual environment. The cost of this great social investment has been returned to our nation many times over.

Some of these veterans were not great intellects but human beings with many other marvelous human potentialities who have since become leaders and creative people in many walks of life. They had as sure a right to develop their human capacities as had the brilliant. Certainly there is a portion of any population that lacks the innate capacity for college work. But to argue on various economic and social grounds today that an individual should not have access to all the education he can handle is false social economics.

There are a number of economic arguments which could readily show that the failure of our nation to provide effectively for the needs of higher education among the low income and socially disadvantaged has undoubtedly been a most neglected area of social investment. We economists can readily establish that education is an investment; and this is true whether we are dealing with primary or secondary or higher education. More is involved than merely the greater productivity of each person. Compare the costs to society in welfare payments, rising insurance risk premiums, or the patchwork of remedial measures designed to cope with that portion of our society which has been extruded as though they were waste. How much better would it have been if that same money had previously been invested in constructive channels so as to convert these individuals into productive, contributing members of society.

Somehow I feel that much of the argument by those who refuse to accept the inevitability and the need for universal access to higher education miss the essential point. The Blacks, Chicanos, Puerto Ricans, the true Native Americans--and yes, as I have said before and repeat again, the even larger number of disadvantaged whites--are not seeking an education as though it were something to be conferred like a prize.

They want an education because it is necessary for full access to economic and social opportunity in a modern pluralistic society such as ours.

Every time access to higher education has been expanded critics have issued dire warnings. The University of Michigan historian Andrew McLaughlin wrote in 1891 describing the criticisms of coeducation at the University of Michigan--

"The chief objections to coeducation were three: (1) The social difficulty--it being considered a foregone conclusion by many that young women could not take their places in a college class in competition with young men without losing their modesty, their maidenly reserve, and their womanly dignity, (2) The mental inequality, (3) The physical inequality."

He continues,

"The objection of prominent educators of the country was a conclusion deduced from the sum of these three--coeducation would inevitably lower the standard of scholarship and degrade the university into a second rate college or boarding school." ^{1/}

^{1/} Andrew C. McLaughlin, History of Higher Education in Michigan, Bureau of Education Circular of Information No. 4, Washington, D. C., 1891

Do those objections sound familiar? The same objections were heard when the issue was universal primary and secondary education. We now take universal primary and secondary education for granted as a good and necessary thing both for society and for the individual.

I cannot help but wonder what the United States would be like today if these early critics had succeeded in preventing the development of universal primary and secondary education. If primary and secondary education had not been made universal but limited to the elite of their day, it would have affected the sons and daughters of immigrant families -- Polish, Germans, Irish, Italian, and Greek -- the disadvantaged of their day. But the critics did not succeed. If they had, many of today's second and third generation immigrant families would probably have been denied the initial opportunity to change their life and to demonstrate and develop their intellectual abilities. Many of them could not be today in their high positions of eminence and success in private and public life. A position from which, I might add, they sometimes make pronouncements criticizing expanded educational opportunities for others who are still disadvantaged and whose forebears contributed sweat, blood and their lives to this nation long before the parents of these migrants landed on American shores.

The university has always prided itself on being man's basic repository of the humane. A first step toward the true achievement of this value is its recognition that it must reach more adequately those disadvantaged segments of our society which have a demonstrated capacity to take advantage of that education. If I may be pardoned a personal comment at this point, I commend President Fleming and the Board of Regents of the University of Michigan for having recognized and responded to the urgency of this task. This is a task which we all must face together -- each with our respective and unique resources.

Thus far, we have considered only one human value -- that of providing equal access to educational opportunity in order to help each individual develop his fullest inherent potential. Obviously there are many other human values which merit discussion, but we are limited by the constraints of time. However, I would like to emphasize one final and extremely important value, one which I believe is the irreducible essence of all human values -- namely, the recognition of human dignity. But perceptions of the "self" are also determined externally. Human dignity can only arise out of a recognition that each of us has unique qualities and something of value to contribute to other human beings. Individual human dignity cannot be attained through disrespect or intolerance for others.

Our universities and colleges should be among the most human of man's institutions for they have always represented the repository of that which has distinguished man from the animal as a rational being. Therefore, universities have a special obligation to maintain and to protect the human dignity of all the individuals who make up the university -- and our "pluralistic society." If universities are to transmit the humane, then we must begin by assuring humane practices internally in dealing with each other -- with students or professors, as well as with groundskeepers or accountants.

Our major universities are large-scale institutions and, therefore, fall prey to all the ills of bureaucracy. Consequently, problems abound in trying to cope with grievances, inequalities, and conflicts. These require the pursuit and guarantee of justice in institutional processes.

As a large complex bureaucracy, universities are also contributing to increased anomie and human alienation. As universities expand, they seem to have moved from a position where the institution was designed to serve people to the reverse position where large numbers of people are necessary to serve the institution. Large organizations tend not to treat people as individual human beings. Rather, they become vehicles for the institution and its goals, hence destroying any potential for humaneness.

The sanctity of human dignity and life has been much abused in this century. This, however, is what we must re-establish within the university. For of all places, the university should be an institution where human beings can have communion as equals, exploring the depths of their human capacities as well as a discipline.

The decline of humaneness is a major curse to society. Our goal should be very clear.

We are seeking to establish a humane value system, one which fosters human unity, yet sustains diversity, one which recognizes the precious worth of each individual and one which refuses to discard any human being as useless. For if we are ever to achieve an improvement in the human condition and move towards a greater sense of human unity, whether it be at the university or in the society at large, we dare not fail in that endeavor.

In the end, we are seeking a world which possesses both justice and love since they are ultimately inseparable. Compassion without justice is sentimentality; and justice without compassion has no power to heal the wounds of life.

TABLE 1

RESIDENT DEGREE-CREDIT ENROLLMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Date	Total U.S. ^{1/}	State of Michigan ^{3/}	University of Michigan ^{3/}	Michigan State University ^{3/}
1909-10	355,000	n.a.	4,755	1,215
1919-20	598,000	11,408	8,652	1,425
1929-30	1,111,000	33,315	10,298	3,281
1939-40	1,494,000	52,151	12,098	6,650
1949-50	2,659,000	101,390	20,841	16,044
1959-60	2,874,000	152,294	28,117	21,874
1968-69	6,983,000 ^{2/}	306,440	38,021	43,983

1/ Digest of Educational Statistics, 1968, Table 84, p. 70.

2/ Opening Fall Enrollment in Higher Education, 1968, Table 2, p. 6.

3/ There are some problems of comparability over time in these data. These series were compiled from the following U. S. Office of Education (formerly the U.S. Bureau of Education) publications: Statistics of State Universities and Other Institutions of Higher Education Partially Supported by the State, Bulletin No. 6, 1910. Statistics of State Universities and State Colleges, Bulletin No. 48, 1920. Statistics of Universities, Colleges, and Professional Schools 1919-1920, Bulletin No. 28, 1922. Biennial Survey of Education 1928-1930, Bulletin No. 20, 1931. Statistics of Higher Education 1939-40 and 1941-42, Circular No. 264, 1949. Opening Fall Enrollment in Higher Education, 1959 and 1968.