



A Presentation by

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The University of Michigan

The Challenge of Change

Inaugural Address
Hill Auditorium
October 6, 1988

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Introduction

Distinguished guests, members of the Board of Regents, faculty, students, and staff, alumni and friends. It is a great honor and privilege to be able to serve my university and my state in this new role. In a sense this marvelous institution embodies the hopes and dreams, the commitment and stewardship of eight generations of Michigan citizens. To be chosen as its eleventh president is a formidable responsibility to the people of this state and, indeed, to the nation and the world.

Actually, I should correct myself here, for I am really only the "approximately eleventh" president of the University. Let me explain. In that hectic period following the announcement of my appointment as president-designate, I received the following electronic mail message from two distinguished historians, who teach a course on the history of this University:

"Congratulations! Did you know that you are not the eleventh president of the University? For some reason, the Regents did not renumber the presidents in 1929 when they changed the date for the founding of the University from 1837 to 1817. There is no doubt, if the University of Michigan began in 1817, that our first president was John Monteith, who was so appointed and so signed his letters. You are the twelfth president, not the eleventh.

As eleventh or twelfth president, you have our support. Best wishes."

Peg and Nick Steneck

Maybe I should be regarded as the "11.4th president," since there were no students during the time of President Monteith.

The Michigan Presidents

Whether the eleventh or twelfth, the fact remains that in the 170-year history of the University, it has had remarkably few presidents compared to most institutions. Hence, it is both a manageable and a mandatory task for any new president to read carefully the inauguration addresses of his predecessors.

I was impressed by how each responded to the times and set the theme for the subsequent administration. I was particularly struck by the eloquent address of Marion LeRoy Burton who assumed the presidency of the University in 1920, shortly after the end of the First World War. Perhaps it was natural I would be attracted to Burton because of some rather uncanny similarities to my own situation:

1. He was a tall, redheaded man;
2. He was forty-five when he assumed the presidency of Michigan.
3. He was a graduate of Yale University in divinity—which is quite close to engineering (at least alphabetically).

Actually, I was particularly struck by Burton's very simple and direct statement of the role of the public university. He stated, "The function of the state university is to serve the state and through the state to serve the nation and the world."

The Historical Role of the Public University

To serve is perhaps the most unique theme of higher education in America, and the bonds between a university and society are particularly strong in this country. Historically, our institutions have been responsible to and shaped by the communities that founded them. They

draw their agenda from these communities.

Perhaps this is nowhere more apparent than in our State of Michigan and with its institutions. For example, the founding principle of this institution can be found in those familiar words from the Northwest Ordinance chiseled on Angell Hall, "Religion, morality, and knowledge being necessary to good government and the happiness of mankind, schools and the means of education shall forever be encouraged."

And perhaps it was appropriate that Michigan, a state with seemingly infinite resources of fur, timber, iron, and copper—a state with boundless confidence in the future—should play such a leadership role in developing the models of higher education which would later serve all of America. For while the University of Michigan was not the first of the state universities, it nevertheless is commonly regarded as the model of the true public university, responsible and responsive to the needs of the people who founded it and supported it, even as it sought to achieve quality equal to that of the most distinguished private institutions.

So too, our sister institution to the west, Michigan State University, is commonly regarded as the driving force behind the Morrill Act. It has become the prototype of the great land grant university that has served America so well. And our sister institution to the east, Wayne State University, has provided an important model of the urban university, seeking to serve the needs of one of our nation's great cities.

The State of Michigan, through these institutions and others which have arisen since, has provided a model of how higher education serves society through the triad mission of teaching, research, and public service. These institutions grew up with our state, responding to the changing needs and aspirations of its

people: i) first, as Michigan expanded to the frontier; ii) then as it evolved through the industrial revolution to become the manufacturing capital of the world; iii) as the population of our state surged following the war years; iv) and most recently, as Michigan has sought to strengthen and diversify its economic base.

Yet the strength of our state, its capacity to build and sustain such extraordinary institutions, lies not in looking to the past. Rather it lies in our state's ability to look to the future, in its willingness to take the actions and make the investments in the present that would yield prosperity and well-being for its people in the future.

Hence, as I assume the responsibilities of leading the University of Michigan, it seems appropriate that I look ahead. Let me suggest what some of the themes of our future will be and how our academic institutions must respond.

Challenges for Today Opportunities for Tomorrow

Think about it for a moment. The students we are educating today will spend most of their lives in the next century. They will be citizens of the 21st century. Yet we, their educators, are very much products of the 20th century. And our institutions, the universities of today, are in reality a product of the 19th century!

It is therefore important to ask whether the university as we know it today is really prepared to educate the citizens and serve the society of the 21st century.

While it is always dangerous to attempt to predict the future, three themes of 21st century America seem clear: i) the changing nature of the population of our nation; ii) our growing dependence on the global community; and iii)

our shift from a resource-intensive to a knowledge-intensive society. Let me consider each of these themes for a moment.

1. Demographic Change: Diversity and Pluralism

America is changing rapidly today. Our population is aging as the baby boomers enter middle age, and the number of young adults declines. There are already more people over the age of sixty-five than teenagers in this nation, and this situation will continue for decades to come. The United States will simply not be a nation of youth again in our lifetimes. This fact poses a serious challenge to institutions such as universities, which have traditionally served the young.

But there is a far more profound change occurring in the population of our nation. The United States is rapidly becoming one of the most pluralistic, multicultural nations on earth. Those groups we refer to today as “minorities” will become the majority population of our nation in the century ahead, just as they are today throughout the world. In this future, the full participation of currently underrepresented minorities will be of increasing concern as we strive to realize our commitment to equity and social justice. The achievement of this objective also will be the key to the future strength and prosperity of America, since our nation cannot afford to waste the human talent presented by its minority populations—this human potential, cultural richness, and social leadership.

If we do not create a nation that mobilizes the talents of all of our citizens, we are destined for a diminished role in the global community, increased social turbulence, and—most tragically—we will have failed to fulfill the promise of democracy upon which this nation was founded. This is perhaps the most serious challenge facing American society today. While it is true that universities cannot solve this

problem alone, we must not use this fact as an excuse for doing nothing. Rather, we must intensify our efforts to seek full participation of under-represented minorities among our students, faculty, staff, and leadership. As both a reflection and leader of society at large, we have a special challenge and responsibility to develop effective models of multicultural, pluralistic communities for our nation. We must strive to achieve new levels of understanding, tolerance, and mutual fulfillment for peoples of diverse racial and cultural backgrounds.

2. The Internationalization of America

We face a future in which America will become "internationalized," in which every aspect of American life must be viewed from the broader context of participation in the global community. Whether through travel and communication; through the arts and culture; and through the internationalization of commerce, capital, and labor, we will become increasingly dependent on other nations and other peoples.

Further, as the destination of roughly one-half the world's immigrants, the United States is rapidly becoming a "world nation" with strong ethnic ties to every part of the globe. Understanding cultures other than our own has become necessary not only for personal enrichment and good citizenship, but necessary for our very survival as a nation. If our institutions are to serve America in its role as a member of the global community, we must think and act more imaginatively, more aggressively, and more strategically to strengthen our role as truly international centers of learning.

3. The Age of Knowledge

Looking back over history, one can identify certain abrupt changes, discontinuities, in the nature, the very fabric of our civilization. There are many who contend that our society is once again undergoing such a dramatic shift in

fundamental perspective and structure as we enter a new age, an “age of knowledge”.

The signs are all about us. Today we are evolving rapidly to a post-industrial, knowledge-based society, just as a century ago our agrarian society evolved through the Industrial Revolution. New ideas and concepts are exploding forth at ever-increasing rates. We are increasingly surrounded by radical critiques of fundamental premises and scholarship. In many fields, the knowledge base is doubling every few years. Indeed, in some fields the knowledge taught undergraduates becomes obsolete even before they graduate!

The typical college graduate of today will be likely to change careers several times during a lifetime. A college education will serve only as a stepping stone to a process of lifelong education. The ability to adapt—indeed, to manage—change will become the most valuable skill of all.

Our society is becoming ever more knowledge-intensive and hence ever more dependent upon educated people and their ideas. Hence it is also becoming ever more dependent upon our research universities as primary sources of new knowledge and those capable of applying it.

The Need for a New Paradigm

The triad mission of the university as we know it today—teaching, research, and service—was shaped by the needs of an America of the past. Since our nation today is changing at an ever-accelerating pace, is it not appropriate to question whether our present concept of the research university, developed largely to serve a homogeneous, domestic, industrial society, must also evolve rapidly if we are to serve the highly pluralistic, knowledge-intensive world-nation that will be America of the 21st century?

Of course, there have been many in recent years who have suggested that the traditional paradigm of the public university must evolve to respond to the challenges that will confront our society in the years ahead. But will a gradual evolution of our traditional paradigm be sufficient? Or, will the changes ahead force a more dramatic, indeed revolutionary, shift in the paradigm of the contemporary research university?

The Challenge of Change

While it is always hazardous to speculate about the future, there is yet another theme I can predict with some certainty. That is the challenge of change itself. We face a future in which permanence and stability become less important than flexibility and creativity, in which the only certainty will be the presence of continual change. Here we face a particular challenge, since most of us have been trained to think in terms of change as a linear, causal, and rationale process. We have been taught that by looking at the past we can extrapolate to understand the future. Yet, perhaps because of my background as a physicist, I have become increasingly convinced that change in most complex systems, fields of knowledge, or complex institutions such as universities is: i) highly non-linear, ii) frequently discontinuous, and iii) usually stochastic or random in nature.

Just as with other institutions in our society, those universities that will thrive will be those that are capable not only of responding to this future of change, but that have the capacity to relish, stimulate, and manage change. In this perspective it may well be that the continual renewal of the role, mission, values, and goals of our institutions will become the greatest challenge of all!

The Foundation for Change

To prepare us for such a future of change I believe our institutions should keep in mind several essential themes:

1. The Commitment to Quality

Of course, one of the canonical invariants that will allow us to respond to a future of change is an unrelenting commitment to academic excellence and scholarly values. This will require that we also commit ourselves to focusing resources to achieve excellence since in a future of limited resources quality must inevitably dominate the breadth and capacity of our programs.

2. A Return to Fundamental Values

Furthermore, the change and renewal that will be important themes of the future can only occur upon a foundation of fundamental institutional values. Of course, academic institutions usually focus first on intellectual values, values of the mind: the seeking of wisdom, freedom of inquiry, intellectual integrity, discipline of the mind, and the respect for reasoned conclusions.

While these are, of course, essential in any university, there are other sets of values which we must not ignore: values of moral character such as honesty, integrity, courage, tolerance, and mutual respect. So too, we must bear in mind those all-important values which characterize civilized societies: caring and concern and compassion, cooperation and communication and civility. These are the values that pull us together as a community.

3. The Importance of Community

In a future characterized by rapid and unpredictable change, a future dominated by the themes of pluralism, internationalization,

and knowledge, it seems clear that our universities will increasingly become the crucibles in which the new ideas and social structures needed to respond to this future are created. Here we must take care that the ferment and controversy surrounding the birth of new ideas does not tear apart our communities. We must recognize that in this future of change, these values of comity will provide the bonds that allow us to function as a community of scholars dedicated to serving the society that supports us.

The Challenges Before Us

A future of change, a time of challenge, challenges to our institutions, and challenges to each and every one of us. Let me then take this opportunity to challenge each of the various constituencies involved with this university:

To the administration of the university—its Regents, Executive Officers, and Deans: The stewardship of this marvelous institution is a heavy responsibility. It requires total dedication and commitment on our part. Yet it is also the case that universities are very fragile institutions. They are highly volatile in nature. Indeed, they might be described as creative anarchies. We must never forget that while the primary responsibility for the distinction of the University rests on our shoulders, quality is determined at the grassroots level, through our teaching and our research. Hence, the momentum and quality of this university, of any great university, must flow up from the faculty and the students and energize those of us in administration.

To the faculty: It is sometimes said that great universities are run by their faculties, for their faculties. I must hasten to add here that they are also run for their students and their society as well! The quality of our institutions is determined by the quality of our faculty—by your talents, your commitments, your actions. However, while your commitment to quality in your

teaching and scholarship will determine the quality of this institution, let me suggest that something more is needed. Let me urge a greater sense of daring and adventure in your intellectual activities. For it is the excitement of attempting to push beyond the limits of our present knowledge that enlivens our teaching, our students, and our institution while best serving the society that depends upon us.

To our students:

If our faculty is the key to our distinction, then it must also be acknowledged that our students are the reason for our being. Then, let me challenge our students to seek wisdom from the knowledge that you will learn in your studies. And seek to learn responsibility from the very considerable freedoms you will be granted on our campuses.

To our staff:

While the primary functions of the university, teaching and research, appear at first glance involve primarily faculty and students, we all know that these complex and remarkable institutions depend just as heavily on the talents and dedication of our staff. I challenge you to serve with imagination, pride, and competence. I encourage you to be always alert to better ways for the institution to accomplish its goals. And I convey to you my personal conviction that the fundamental values of an academic community simply cannot be sustained without your valued and frequently valiant efforts.

To our alumni and friends: Become involved with your institution. Learn about us. Tell us when we are wrong. Take pride in our accomplishments. Challenge us to rise to new levels of excellence. And help us to serve our state and our nation.

To our sister institutions: One of the great strengths of higher education in America is the remarkable diversity among our institutions, a diversity that is all the more necessary to

respond to the pluralistic nature of American society. Yet, despite this diversity, we have far more in common than in contrast. It seems clear that we can only face the challenges of the future if we come together in a new spirit of cooperation, setting aside meaningless competition (this Saturday afternoon's game between Michigan and Michigan State excepted, of course), and instead working together to address the serious needs of our state, our nation, and the world.

To state and federal government: As we prepare to enter the age of knowledge, our ability to sustain the strength of our state and our nation, to achieve the quality of life for our citizens will be determined, more than any other factor, by how we develop, nurture, and educate that most precious of resources, our people. It is true that our state and our nation have developed the finest system of higher education in the world. But we must also remember this resulted from the willingness of past generations to look beyond the needs of the present and to invest in the future by building and sustaining educational institutions of exceptional quality, institutions that have provided those of us in this auditorium today with unsurpassed educational opportunities. Today's public leaders have inherited these marvelous institutions that represent the commitments and sacrifices of previous generations. They face the challenge of being responsible stewards to preserve and enhance these precious resources to serve generations of the future.

To the public at large: It is important to recognize that your public universities are deeply committed to serving the society that built and sustains them. They are not working on their own agenda but rather on an agenda to respond to your needs. It is always tempting to ask, "What have you done for me lately?" But it is also important to imbed this challenge to higher education in the dual context of the history of past service and the challenges that will face our society in the future. Higher education repre-

sents one of the most important investments a society can make in its future, since it is an investment in its human resources. Our generation has always believed deeply in providing each generation with the means for a better life. Our parents sacrificed for us, and we must be prepared to sacrifice for our children. We simply must re-establish the priority of both our personal and our public investments in education, in the future of our children, and hence in our own future.

A personal challenge: And, finally, it seems appropriate to challenge myself to listen, to learn, and to understand the nature of this remarkable institution, the sacrifices people have made to build and sustain it, and the manner in which this state, the nation, and the world have come to depend upon it. It is my challenge to demonstrate the patience, the courage, the dedication, and the wisdom to assist our university in continuing to serve the state and the nation that gave rise to its birth.

Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, I would like to direct my final remarks to the people of the State of Michigan. For over one hundred and seventy years there has been an unusually strong bond between the people of this state and your university, the University of Michigan. Generation after generation of Michigan citizens have reaffirmed the commitment to building and sustaining an institution capable of providing to their sons and daughters an education equal to the best in the nation.

Your ancestors sought an institution capable of attracting to their state the most outstanding scholars, scientists, engineers, doctors, lawyers, teachers, and other professionals so essential to prosperity and well-being. They recognized the need for an institution capable of creating—through its teaching, research, and scholarship—the new knowledge

and human capacities necessary to economic growth and development and to the fuller realization of the human potential. And they sought an institution that could address, through a myriad of public service activities, the many challenges facing our state and our nation.

This sustained public investment and confidence in the University over the decades has enabled it to serve the state in all of these ways and more. Through this unique partnership, the University in its activities and education, research, and public service has served Michigan and its citizens well.

Today our state faces serious challenges that will call once again on the vast resources of this institution: the challenge of pluralism, the challenge of participation in a global community, the challenge of the Age of Knowledge that is our future, and, of course, the challenge of change itself. Indeed, at perhaps no previous time in our state's history has there been a greater dependence upon this University for the people it educates, the knowledge it produces, and the services it provides.

It is true, indeed, that the University of Michigan belongs to the people of Michigan. It is your university. But it is also a university built and sustained through the commitments and sacrifices of your ancestors. And it is a university that must be preserved and strengthened through your commitments today if it is to serve your descendants tomorrow.

Through this unique partnership, between a people and their University, we face together a future of challenge and responsibility, a future of opportunity and excitement, a future in which the University of Michigan is deeply committed to serving the State of Michigan, and by serving our state, serving our nation and the world.

