

Ethnic Studies Luncheon (10/5/90)

Background

Title: The Michigan Mandate:

To Build a Multicultural Learning Community for the 21st Century

Introduction

Thank you Representative Young,

and let me also take this opportunity to thank you for the leadership you have provided in the Legislature for education, for minorities, for our children, and for the future.

I am very happy to be with you today

to open this year's speaker's series of the Michigan Ethnic Heritage Studies Center.

Since the early 1970's

the UM has been the proud administrative home of this important Center that serves so many ethnic organizations and individuals in the Detroit metropolitan area and across our state and nation.

And that that cooperates with them

in so many significant service, educational and research efforts.

Recently, I understand that the Center now is developing

cooperative relations with foreign countries in need of expertise ethnicity and ethnic relations.

In fact this program was way ahead of its time

because the focus of its work, ethnicity, always important, has now become a dominant issue of survival for societies throughout the world.

Detroit Tour

My visit here today is very timely for me

since I am fresh from an all-day tour of the city of Detroit
organized on Monday by Neil Shine publisher of the Free Press
for leaders of the University.

We couldn't have had better guides in Neal,

reporter Peter Gavrilovitch and former police officer Ike McKinnon.

All three are native Detroiters who love this city and its people.

They didn't take us to the obvious tourist spots.

DIA, RenCen, Fox Theater--

Instead they took us out to the heart of the city

.... the neighborhoods.

We visited churches and shops and schools,

Western High School, Mrs. Thunderburg's Resaurant, a Chaldean store
and several churches and programs, places

where people are struggling together to sustain their communities.

We saw so many impressive grass roots efforts

in which countless ordinary people are heroically and creatively
reclaiming thier communities.

It was inspiring to witness these efforts

and meet so many extraordinary Detroiters first hand.

They are not waiting for someone else to do it for them,

they are leading, taking the initiative

---mobilizing communities to work together

to help each other, to care for the children and to build their future.

We visited African American, Hispanic, Chaldean, Laotian,

Polish, Vietnamese, Ukrainian, Rumanian, Greek, Italian,

and Irish neighborhoods--

Some of these neighborhoods still thrive today.

But others exist

only in the memory of those who grew up in them.

Their people may have moved on

and new groups have come to take their place.

But they are still vividly alive in the consciousness

of present generation of Detroiters

whose parents and grandparents

helped build the city and a future for their children.

My remarks today will not be academic.

Instead, I would like to be more informal.

To share with you some of my reflections after visiting the city

and to put this in the context

of what I think is happening not just to our city

but to our State and country

as we approach a new century...

And, as most of you know,

I am an engineer by training,

and we tend to think a lot about the future

to tell it like it is

and to think that we can change things for the better.

My remarks today will demonstrate all of those character flaws.

Observations about Detroit

The history of Detroit is the history of 20th century America.

It is a history of immigration.

It is a history of tremendous cultural diversity

of so many people with different traditions, beliefs, experiences.

But at the same time our diversity was transcended

by some shared values, hopes, and faith in the future.

Detroit was and is a gateway city

....a gateway to hope, challenge and opportunity.

For so many immigrant groups the very name Detroit spelled opportunity.

Whether they come from foreign countries or from other parts of the US,
they have come here to build things including a future for themselves.

In the past most of our ethnic groups were European or African in origin.

Today people are coming to us from Asia, Mexico
and other parts of Latin American, from the Middle East,
from Russia and Africa.

But both then and now our immigrants

have brought us incredible riches
in return for opportunity.

Of course, very few brought with them the riches of money
or the advantages of privilege.

Instead, they brought with them riches of far greater value---
riches that have formed the American culture and character.

The wealth they have brought to us--are still bringing to us--

is measured by their
unique talents energy, talent, creativity, cultural richness and traditions,

No other nation in history has been so rich

in the diversity of its people,
or in the incredible energy
that is unleashed when people are given
an equal chance to better themselves.

Not that there was always the reality of equal opportunity,
but that there was always the ideal of it--the possibility and faith in it.

This has not changed in all of our history.

It is true today.

We have received the cream off the top of the worlds people--
the adventurous, hardworking, the bold and creative
women and men who have risked leaving
home and family to make a better life
on our shores, and largely in our nation's great cities.

No, the the people and the gifts
they bring us have not changed.

But the nature of the opportunity they find here is changing.

Indeed our whole world is changing,
and at an accelerating pace,
driven by immense forces at work
that are transforming our
population, our workplace, our society and culture, our view of
ourselves,
and our place in the world.

Few, if any, places in our country have felt the force
of these transformations more directlymore painfully....
than the upeople of Michigan and, especially, of Detroit.

In little more than a generation,
we have seen one of our nation's greatest cities
lose as much as half of its popoulation.
And we have seen our seemingly invincible automoblie industry
threatened and diminished.

And Detroit is not alone--
look at how many of our cities are struggling to sustain themselves...
how many of America's former industrial giants are in decline.

What is Going on Here?

Few seem to realize the enormous

changes our society is undergoing as it approaches the 21st Century.

We are becoming more diverse, more pluralistic as a people. Indeed, almost 90% of the new entrants into our workforce during the 1990s will be people of color, women, or immigrants.

Our economy and commerce are becoming every day more interdependent with other nations as the United States becomes a world nation, a member of the global community -- as this past year's events in China, Russia, and Eastern Europe make all too apparent.

And we are rapidly evolving into a new post-industrial society, in which the key strategic resource necessary for prosperity and social well-being has become knowledge itself, that is, educated people and their ideas.

Indeed, knowledge will play the same role that in the past were played by natural resources or geographical location or labor pools...

Concerns...

Needless to say, these same challenges of pluralism, of globalization, and of this age of knowledge that is our future will pose great challenges and demand similar changes in our state and our nation.

The America of the 20th Century that we have known... was a nation characterized by a rather homogeneous, domestic, industrialized society...

But that is an America of the past.

Our children will inherit a far different nation...

a highly pluralistic, knowledge-intensive, world nation
that will be the America of the 21st century

Of course, these themes of the future,

the changing nature of the American population...
our increasing interdependence with other nations
and other peoples... and the shift to a knowledge-intensive,
post-industrial society.

Are actually not themes of the future

...but rather themes of today...

...in a sense, I have simply been reading the handwriting on the wall...

Yet I also fear that few have realized the enormous

changes that our society is going through as it
approaches the 21st Century.

The impact of these changes are already painfully apparent

to Michigan's workers and industries.

In fact, it is here in Michigan...in the heart of the "Rust Belt"

that the impact of these extraordinary changes are
most clearly seen...

We all know that past decade was a period of

great difficulty for our state...

Industries of great economic importance to our

nation such as steel and automobiles have

fallen victim to intense competition from abroad...

Plants have closed...we still have many people chronically

unemployed...or under employed...

There are many indicators of the impact of this

transition on our state...

Over the past decade, Michigan has slipped badly
in several key indicators of quality of life:

- 30th in per capita income
- 41st in overall employment
- 48th in business climate (perceived)
- 48th in high school graduation rates
- 50th in return on federal tax dollars

Oh, we still rank near the top in some things...

For example, we rank...

- 12th in property tax burden
- 14th in teenage unemployment rate
- 13th in incarceration rate (and rising rapidly)
- 13th in percentage of children in poverty
- 10th in infant mortality
- 4th in public aid recipients
- 1st in mortality from major disease

There is still one other category of indicators of some
concern, and these reflect our willingness to
invest in the future. Michigan ranks

- 37th in support of HE per student
- 45th in support of HE during 1980s
- 40th in support of K-12

It is clear that our state is in the midst of a profound transition...

...from an industrial economy based upon the abundance
of natural resources, unskilled labor, and, to some degree,
constrained, slowly moving domestic markets...

To a knowledge-based economy, characterized by intensely

competitive world markets, rapid change, and--most important of all--educated people and their ideas.

This has not been...and will not be...an easy transition to make.

The truth is that the outcome is still very much in doubt!

producing jobs and improving our quality of life.

Whether we will emerge from this transition as a

world economic leader once again...with a

strong, prosperous--albeit new--economy

Or whether we will fail to heed the warnings...

...to make the necessary investments and

sacrifices today necessary for strength and

prosperity tomorrow...

And become an economic backwater in the century ahead.

It is clear that we face a watershed--a fork in the road ahead.

My central theme is that education, broadly defined, will

be the pivotal issue in determining which of these two

alternative futures will be Michigan's...and America's.

Indeed, I am absolutely convinced that the dominant issue of

the 1990s will be the development of our human resources.

Previous economic transformations were closely associated

with major public investment in infrastructure such as

railroads, canals, electric networks, and highways.

In the coming economic transition, an equivalent

infrastructure will be an educated population.

The actions we must take today...

...and the investments we must make...

...will clearly determine our capacity to

respond to this future...

Keys to the Future

Years ago our parents stepped up to their responsibilities
by sacrificing to give us an opportunity for a better life
through education.

Now it is our generation's turn.

Today we are called upon to demonstrate a similar commitment
to our children...to the next generation...to the future.

But here I know I am preaching to the faithful.

For, it there has been one common thread
in the history of ethnic groups in America, in Michigan,
it is faith in the power of education.

People from every ethnic background
have shared that fundamental and abiding faith.

They have struggled and sacrificed, generation after generation,
no matter how hard the way, no matter how steep the odds.
how great the sacrifice

They have done what they have had to do to educate their children,
to build for them a better future than they themselves have had.

But I don't have to come here to this group to preach about education.

A good many of you are educators.

And I don't have to come with dire warnings
about the great challenges facing education in America today.

You know these first hand and all too well.

You know how many of our children are being cheated of their birthright,
how many are deprived of the opportunity
for the education so necessary for their future.

As a nation we have been spending our children's future
to pay for greedy consumption and quick fixes.

Instead of investing in our schools

We have squandered money on junk bonds and leveraged buyouts, on payouts and write-offs to people who already have enough.....or more than enough.

The dilemma facing our nation was brought home to me in very frightening and convincing terms at a recent conference with the top leaders of Japan.

We asked them, “What do you think are America’s greatest strengths and weaknesses?”

They gave us an in interesting reply.

They said America’s greatest strength is our system of higher education.

Then they said our greatest weakness was public education at the primary and secondary level.

Quite a contrast! Quite a challenge!

Higher Education in America

These Japanese leaders were right about America’s colleges and universities.

They are the strongest in the world.

The state of Michigan has one of the finest systems of higher education in the nation, including several of its great universities:

Wayne State University, Michigan State University and our own University of Michigan.

And of course this is because of the commitments and sacrifices of eight generations of Michigan citizens.

And perhaps the most impressive thing about Michigan education is the desire of our people to build outstanding universities with a public character--designed to serve the public interest--designed to provide, as one of our early Michigan president’s put it,

“an uncommon education for the common man.”

The fact that we are supported and sustained by the public,
carries with it a deep obligation to the people of this State.

At the University of Michigan we accept this challenge, this public trust.
We know we are privileged to serve the people of Michigan.

and not just to serve some of the people,
but to serve all of the people.

With Michigan’s other public universities
we are working more intensely than ever before
to serve the people of our State.

The University of Michigan

The University of Michigan feels a particular responsibility to
this city and its schools.

After all, you are the city of our birth--
we were founded in Detroit in 1817.

Further, just as our Detroit and the University of Michigan
have been closely linked in the past,
we believe it essential that we become more
closely linked together in the years ahead.

This is particularly important in the areas of K-12 education.

In particular, we seek to cooperate and collaborate with the schools
in Detroit to share our resources and knowledge.

You notice I didn’t say we wanted to come in and reform the schools,
to tell people what to do.

I didn’t say we have the answers.

We don’t.

What we do have are resources of people and ideas
that we can share.

We have the determination to work together with the Detroit community to enrich the education of Detroit children.

And whether it is through

...the King-Chavez-Parks program to bring students to our campus

...the Wade-McCree Incentive Scholarship Program

...the Detroit Compact

...the DAPSEP program

...or the over 60 individual projects the University now has running with various Detroit schools

We seek to work with your schools to provide them with the tools they need to assure each of their students the education so necessary for the 21st Century.

A Glance Backwards

Yet, while such partnerships are critical, it is also the case that the fundamental responsibility of a university is the education of the students enrolling on our campuses.

That is our primary mission.

Yet let me also acknowledge that here our record is mixed... both for higher education in general... and for the University of Michigan in particular.

Of course by any ranking, we at Michigan provide one of the best educations available anywhere in the world--

But we have not succeeded in making this marvelous education available to all.

It has to be said forthrightly and honestly that

we have failed to provide equal educational opportunity
to many ethnic groups through much of our history

While the University has admitted minority and disadvantages students
from its earliest days, and while graduates from many ethnic groups
have earned degrees at the University...

while we have never had an official policy of discrimination...

It is also true that you don't need

to have an official policy to discriminate.

What you have to have is an official policy and a plan
if you want to overcome discrimination.

because its effects are so de

We are trying to change our makeup and our culture, to
bring all ethnic groups into the life of our institution.

People sometimes ask me why the University
has made this commitment to change,
why I have made this change a cornerstone of my Presidency.

The reasons are simple.

First and foremost, it is morally right.

Second, we see this commitment as the cornerstone of our capacity to serve a changing nation and a changing world.

America today is rapidly evolving into one of the most diverse, multicultural societies on earth...

The America of the 21st Century will be a nation without a dominant ethnic majority--and to serve this changing nation, institutions such as the University of Michigan must also change.

And third, for the University to achieve excellence in its fundamental missions of teaching and scholarship, it is clear we must reflect the growing diversity of America and the world itself among our people and our activities.

To this end, over the past three years we have been developing and committing ourselves to a new agenda we call the Michigan Mandate.

Some of you may have heard of it.
many of you are a part of it.

The fundamental idea of the Mandate is that the University of Michigan must become a leader known for the racial and ethnic diversity of its faculty, students and staff.

A leader in creating a multicultural community that will be a model for higher education and a model for the society at large.

We don't believe we can serve this state and this nation,

unless our campus reflects the strengths,
perspectives, talents and experiences of people of color
in everything that we do.

But we know the Mandate is not by itself a magic cure---
that is not going to change our University overnight.

Instead it is a strategic plan,
it sets a direction and a points to a destination,

The Mandate evolved over these three years
through literally hundreds of meetings
with people inside the University and outside.

Signs of Progress

Today I can report to you
that the Michigan Mandate is starting to work.

From top to bottom, University decisions are now made
with our goals of diversity as a priority.

In fact, across the nation other colleges and universities
are using it as a guide for their own planning.

There are many signs of progress...

1. During the first two years of the Michigan Mandate we
have added 130 new faculty of color to the University,
including 62 African American faculty, -- almost doubling
this number.
2. During this short period we have increased minority
enrollments by 25% to the point when students of
color now comprise 17% of our student body--
include over 2,200 African American students.
3. Our early projections for this fall are particular
encouraging, with a 35% increase in African American

and a 25% increase in Hispanic American students
in our freshman cla

of the national population during the 1990s.

By now you are probably asking yourself the question,

“If they are making so much progress,
why are we still reading about racial incidents
on so many of Michigan’s universities, including
at the University of Michigan?”

The reason is that increasing the numbers

of minority faculty, students and staff
is only the first step in the Michigan Mandate.

If we only needed numbers it would take great effort and resources

but with determination we will get there in reasonable time.

But numbers are the easy part.

We all know that you can have a lot of different people

living in the same locale, working side by side,
shopping in the same stores, going to the same classes.

But that doesn't necessarily mean you have a community.
Just increasing the numbers and mix of people
doesn't mean that you have mutual respect,
that you can work towards common goals.
To have this, you have to have a new kind of community.
At the University of Michigan we are determined to seek
the changes needed to build this kind of community.
That is the hard part of the task ahead of us...
This is the new path we must blaze "in the wilderness".

Issues of Community

What we are seeing now on our campuses, I think,
are the birthpangs of this new type of community.
Our universities are confronting one of
the most painful and persistent problems in American history.
Because now, even as America's population is becoming more diverse,
it is also becoming more separated.
Tragically, students coming to our campus today have grown up
in communities that are separated by race and ethnic group,
by nationality and belief,
by occupational level and economic background.
Our communities and institutions have failed to create
a sense of community or to provide the models
for creative interaction that we need to build a new kind of society,
based on equality, mutual dependence, trust and respect.
The truth is that in America today
it is on our university and college campuses
that many students come together for the first time
and are expected to live and work together for the first time.

It is not surprising that they don't always get along,
that it is sometimes painful.

It also isn't surprising that this shows up in the newspapers
or on TV.

This is the price higher education pays because it is
one of the few institutions in the country
that is stepping up to the problem of racism and diversity in America.

Yet, I believe that such a mission is our destiny...our mandate.

For our campuses have become the crucibles
in which the multicultural, multiracial, world cultures
of 21st Century America are being brewed!

You don't get change without pain.

What we are experiencing is the first faltering steps forward.

We are seeing the effects of increasing the numbers of students of color,
and the early stages of creating a new kind of community
that is built on diversity.

Our job is to educate our students,
these world citizens of the 21st Century,
inspire them, and, if necessary, require them
to respect each other and learn to live together.

If the way ahead seems discouraging at times,
We should remember that we are not the only society
grappling with these problems of human failure.

Historians tell us that group conflict, discrimination, prejudice and oppression
have been with us since the beginning of human society.

It is a tragic part of human character to reject others.
in order to define oneself.

And we have only to look around us

to see that it exists today in all parts of the world.

We need only acknowledge the disgrace of apartheid in South Africa.

Elsewhere there is deep rooted division between Muslims and Hindus,
Jews and Arabs, Christians and Moslems in Lebanon,
Chinese and Malays, Eritreans and Ethiopians, Basques and Spaniards.
Catholics and Protestants.

Nearly every country and region is struggling

with the same problem we face on campus, in our State and nation.

But in today's world, we can't afford

to tolerate racism and prejudice and discrimination
any longer.

We cannot live divided from one another.

Our world has become one world.

Our people must learn

to accept our common humanity,
our common fate.

Just because a problem is old,

or widespread or complex ,or difficult
doesn't mean we have an excuse to ignore it or avoid it.

It may mean the job is harder to do.

But, I, for one, do not believe the task is impossible.

Maybe it is the engineer in me that makes me hopeful....

that makes me determined to try.

We have to begin somewhere, we have to take a stand.

High Goals

At the University of Michigan, we are trying to do just that.

We believe we have a Mandate to build

a new model of a learning community

that thrives on the glorious and unique differences
of our human heritage
which uses its common sense of values and
objectives to bind itself together.

We have set for ourselves and our University the highest goals.

I don't know if we can make made this dream possible.

I know that we will try.

Of course, I also know that we will sometimes fail.

We will take the wrong turn, stumble, lose our way at times,
be confused, not have all the answers.

But there is an old saying among engineers.

If you never fail you just haven't set your goals high enough.

So a few misteps or detours won't bother me
so long as we hold to our basic ideals and direction.

What will not change or falter is my personal determination to lead
the University in a direction that serves all the people of our society.

Of course I know that our University can't accomplish
its Mandate alone.

We are are determined to do our part.

But we also need your help
...your support...and your understanding.

And we ask you to join with us and others throughout this state,
in a commitment to provide the best possible education
for every child, for every citizen
to create the new models of multicultural communities
so necessary for the new century which lies ahead.

In years to come,

I hope our children can look back with pride and gratitude

and say that in this time and this place
the people of Michigan and Detroit took a stand;
they came together and worked together
to build a new model of community
for the good of the children.....

I hope that they can say that we that we made a difference.

That together we became a mighty force for change.

Nothing we do in our lives is more important than this.

Thank you very much.