

SUMMER COMMENCEMENT
THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN
August 24, 1980

Remarks By
President Harold T. Shapiro

On behalf of the entire University of Michigan community, it is my pleasure to welcome you all to our 1980 Summer Commencement exercises.

Commencement is the ceremonial "high watermark" of the academic year. It is that time of the year when the University community pauses in its on-going work, in order to honor and recognize the accomplishments of our students who have completed their current course of study. On behalf of The University of Michigan faculty, I would like to say that we are very proud of this year's graduating class. We are sure that they will bring great honor, not only to themselves, their families, and The University of Michigan, but to their communities, both here and abroad.

Although the center of attention today must be focused on our graduating students, it is with great pleasure that we also acknowledge the critical contributions of the families and friends of our students to the accomplishments we honor here today. Through their emotional, intellectual, and financial support, they have earned not only our gratitude but a justified pride in the achievements of today's graduates.

In order that the faculty of the University and the graduating students themselves have a public opportunity to express their appreciation for the steady support of their families and friends, I would ask all mothers, fathers, spouses, children, grandparents, and other family and friends to please stand and be recognized.

Let me now say a personal word or two to our graduating class. In the past few years you have all been members of a very privileged group. In addition to your own important efforts, other people, most importantly members of your family, and taxpayers in the State of Michigan, have helped support you in order that you might spend your time reading books, working in laboratories, and engaging in many other collegiate activities, scholarly and otherwise. You have been provided this opportunity for a special purpose, and it brings with it a special obligation.

It is now your obligation to respond thoughtfully and intelligently to local and national issues of concern--whether in politics or science--and to assist your communities in clarifying and understanding these issues so that we may all deal more effectively with the challenges before us. The underlying premise of a democracy is the active participation of a broad group of enlightened and thoughtful citizens. It is important, therefore, that all of you participate in this process.

Each generation of graduating students face their own dis-

tinctive series of challenges, as well as opportunities. Let me put this statement in some perspective. The graduating students of the 1930's and early 1940's--the generation of your grandparents--had to face the challenges of the Great Depression and World War II. These were traumatic events for the entire world.

The graduating students of the immediate post World War II decades--the generation of your parents--had to face the problem of healing the material and human wounds of the World War. In addition, they faced the challenge of a new super-power that confronted both the Western industrialized world and the aspirations of the less developed countries in political, economic, social, and military terms. Finally, they faced the challenge of building a new conception of mankind and its survival in the age of nuclear armaments.

In the most recent decades--the generation of your parents and perhaps your brothers and sisters--the challenge of the Vietnamese War and its implications have been confronted. More important, however, has been a series of quieter, but deeper issues faced by more recent graduates. For example, the changing dominance of the United States in world economic and political affairs has had, and is continuing to have, an important impact on our society and our conception of our role in the world community.. Of more critical long-run importance, however, has been the challenge that this

recent generation faced when it began anew the process of ensuring equal rights and opportunities for all citizens.

Perhaps the most publicized issue faced by the graduates of the late 1960's and 1970's was the confrontation between many of the most traditional values in our society and an alternative set of so-called "life styles." This confrontation often centered on the rejection of authority--the authority of tradition; the authority of institutions; and the authority of the family. In an important sense, this recent generation of graduates rejected their past in a kind of collective oedipal revolt. In many ways it was modern art--writ large across the institutions of society. Despite the many accomplishments of this movement, much of the enormous energy spent in these efforts degenerated into a paralysis of narcissistic sensibility, a feeling of impotence, and a withdrawal into concern with the self.

I do not know what all the great challenges of the next decades will be. One of the issues we will face together is the future and role of the "nuclear family" in our society. The 1980 census will reveal some startling changes in what has been a basic building block of our social life. It is in the family that our emotional bonds are first formed and no humane society can function without strong emotional ties of loyalty and friendship on the one hand, and authority on the other. It is one thing to favor plurality of

family life styles--which many people do--but it is another to meet the challenge of ensuring that family arrangements of all kinds remain capable of building these critical emotional bonds.

We live in a dynamic and changing world. At its best, it is a combination of ancient moorings and new conceptions. The development and implementation of new ideas and arrangements is critical to the vitality of our society. However, the creativity of our lives and the society we will build together does not depend on change per se, but on our capacity to select from the enormous number of proposed changes and novelties, those that speak to the critical problems of mankind in an effective way. I hope that your years here at The University of Michigan have enabled you to strengthen your capacity to test alternative images of our world so that, as citizens, you may help us select an appropriate path to our future. I know you all have the capacity--and on this day of your graduation, I salute you all.