

HOPE VS FATALISM

By Charles G. Adams

President Shapiro, Executive officers, Board of Regents, faculty, graduates and their families and friends, thank you for the privilege of addressing this joyful event.

Though usually on Sunday I address a group of like-minded persons who meet regularly under the aegis of a different spirit than the festive, fluid spirits that got by the guards to flow throughout this occasion, I am not too somber and sober to rejoice with you in your having met all necessary requirements to be graduated from this great university. Let me tell you that after twenty-eight years of living beyond my day of graduation from Michigan, it is a high honor to bear the imprimatur of this university and to be acclaimed ready to enter this difficult world as educated men and women. A Michigan degree is not a piece of cake. It is honored and respected all over the world. You have done the work, read the books, passed the exams and completed the experiments and problem sets as evidence that you are highly qualified to face the most difficult challenges, solve the most complex problems and do the most arduous and demanding work. This university is universally celebrated as a transforming frontier of challenge, curiosity, creativity, community and hope. It does not shudder nor cringe before any problem of society. It does not run from any battle of community. It does not surrender to any enemy of humanity.

As recipients and participants in the essence and experience of this place, you are today charged and called to to into all places as leaders not laggards; voices not whispers; head-lights not tail-lights; active agents not passive patients; achievers of excellence in all things, and instruments of peace with justice among all races, religions and nations. You represent the hope of the human race, the hope that science will be our helper and not our destroyer. You represent the hope that our vaunted atomic capacity will not take us over the precipice of existence. Prince Charles of England, speaking at the birthday of this Nation's first college said, "A good man is a nobler work than a good technologist. The aim of this university must not be simply to teach men to

make things but to produce people who are capable of assuming complete moral responsibility and control over all the things they make." How trenchant and true! As people of hope you must always nourish the capacity to work through your every achievement of power, science, and success until you reach that level of moral responsibility which alone can sustain our lives, secure our successes and save our world!

Most people fall short of hope and settle for easy, American optimism of the depressing fatalism which is the inevitable fruit of the unavoidable failure of optimism. Hope is not a superficial attainment; but it is the diamond buried deep within the bosom of discipline. It is the peak of the mountain of hard work, persistence and self-control. Just as faith is impossible without facts, joy inconceivable without pain, victory meaningless without a battle, life unavailable without death, freedom incomprehensible without limitations, love nothing without sacrifice, so hope is impossible, inconceivable and inaccessible without long term diligence and discipline and the will to resist optimism, persist in spite of pessimism and insist against discouragement that there is a solution to every problem, a way through every wilderness and a hope that will not fail. There is an agonizing, elusive, side of hope that renders it undesirable to those who, in the words of Frederick Douglas, want roses without rain, crops without ploughing and success without struggle. We prefer easy optimism to costly hope. As Bonhoeffer put it, we want cheap religion rather than the pain and sacrifice of authentic faith.

Especially in these privileged United States are we attracted to notions of simplistic solutions and quick nostrums which promise automatic success. Most of the world is not prepared like you for the long haul of struggle and sacrifice from hope to hope. That's why full democracy has not been realized. The sacrifice is too great to make our nation truly "one nation under God with liberty and justice for all." That is why school desegregation has not been accomplished after 34 years of half-hearted effort. The price is too high for those who are disciplined and prepared to hope boldly and work relentlessly to achieve justice. That is why affirmative action has been maligned and swamped by affirmative reaction and retrenchment. The privileged are unwilling to "abridge themselves of their superfluities," as John Winthrop put it, to sustain our common life. The fortunate are not prepared to forego luxuries in order that the rest of the world can have necessities. Nobody seems willing to take less in order that everybody else can have enough.

So tuberculosis has not been wiped out. Cancer has not been cured. The ecological war has not been won, the energy problem has not been solved, unemployment and underemployment have not been eliminated, the high cost of living has not been contained, the arms race toward human extinction has not been arrested, justice has not been perfected because a Nation, spoiled by privilege, is not sufficiently prepared to accept the discipline and diligence necessary to fulfill human rights and to solve human problems.

Optimism is easier than hope, in that it basks in the realized eschatology of instant gratification. Hope is oriented toward the future of the delayed eschatology of postponed gratification. Optimism is instant and immediate satisfaction. Hope is intelligent and committed patience.

Optimism demands everything now. Hope works and waits for necessary evolvments and painstaking developments. Most people are strung out on immediate instants. We drink instant coffee; it takes too long to brew. We eat instant potatoes, too much trouble to peel or boil or bake. We eat quickie foods; there is no time to cook and wait. We want instant intelligence, not the arduous development of the mind through reading; but the immediate titillation of the senses by television. We want to push a button, stay in bed and know it all. Thus we are producing a whole generation of non-readers, non-writers and non-thinkers.

Are we totally incapable of the protracted pain and long-term effort that hope requires? To be sure it is easier to settle for a smiling politics of happiness than to undertake the serious discipline of hope. There is something in the human spirit that prefers easy answers rather than difficult, complex, sacrificial solutions. How shall we both preserve economic freedom and distribute economic opportunity? One optimism says it's simple, "Do away with private ownership and collectivize the means of production." Another optimism says, "One need only follow the course of supply-side economics." Only hope will resist both easy answers and persist through the cycle of good times and bad times to find that diamond point where capitalistic profitability and social responsibility converge and support each other. How shall we have a clean, healthy environment? The optimism of the right says, "It's easy, just remove all environmental protections." The optimism of the left says, "Public regulation alone will solve the problem." Only authentic hope will strike the balance between personal discipline and public requirement. How shall we become a secure nation? The optimism of unlimited militarism says, "It's easy, just increase military spending, pile up the armaments and strategic defenses while

sharply reducing appropriations for health, education, welfare, job-training and every other social and domestic initiative and America will be a secure nation to the contrary notwithstanding that we shall be filled with hungry, frustrated, unschooled, unemployed, diseased and desperate people." The optimism of pacifism says, "Disarm unilaterally and renounce all violence to the contrary notwithstanding that we live in a hostile world where life is opposed to life and the disarmament of one nation does not dissuade the violence and greed of other nations." Only an indomitable hope will find that elusive point where an honorable people are realistic enough to protect themselves against violence and yet good enough to work diligently and indefatigably for peace with justice for all. How shall we solve the problem of terrorism in the world? The optimism of the right says, "Become like the terrorists, bomb the terrorists, attack Libya, murder their innocents as they have murdered our innocents, and we will defeat terrorism to the contrary notwithstanding that we shall only encourage the spread of terrorism." The optimism of the left says, "Ignore terrorism and pretend that it does not exist." Only a stubborn hope will find the solution to terrorism which will both treat its deep political and economic causes while it resolutely and responsibly takes action against its intolerable savagery.

How shall we solve the problem of geo-political tension and conflict? One optimism says, "Blame it all on the Russians, that Empire of Evil, and tolerate every other instance of avoidable suffering like human rights violations in El Salvador, South Korea and South Africa." The other optimism says, "Romanticize the Soviet Union and close your eyes to its oppression of the Jews, invasion of Afghanistan and suppression of individual freedoms." Only objective hope will visualize the good and the evil in both Super Powers and affirm goodness wherever it exists while opposing evil and inhumanity wherever and by whom-ever they are perpetrated.

How shall we confront the shame that thirty million Black Americans are still second class citizens, still eliminated from consideration on the basis of color alone? One optimism found among Blacks and Whites says, "There is no problem of race in America today. The civil rights movement is over because its battles have been won." The optimism of the other side is, "The problem will go away when all the structures and pre-arrangements of racist presumption and preference have been dismantled and all the doors of opportunity are opened to all people regardless of race, religion, ethnic group, sex, age, physicality or national origin." Only deathless hope will discern that the problem of racial oppression is both personal and structural, and that its

solution will require the re-arrangement of pre-arranged social and economic structures, the widening of the door of American opportunity with affirmative ramps of access for those who have become disabled by previous denial, the spiritual transformation of the oppressor and the dutiful discipline of the oppressed.

The easy answers of American optimism are not working solutions to humanity's problems. They are like dope which stimulates and then depresses and disappoints. They are not the hope that finds the way to truth and life. Optimism glosses over the depth of the human predicament, does not realize the cosmic dimensions of tragedy, minimizes or circumscribes the problem of evil.

You are about to take over a world that is plagued with problems which will not automatically go away. There is a fatal flaw in us and our generation which will not yield to superficial nostrums and quick fix solutions. We who are privileged and possessed of a Michigan education will do well to oppose any simple solution to any complex problem, and thus condemn any easy optimism that does not face up to the depths of cruelty and savagery of which educated people are capable unless their education is motivated, enlisted and fulfilled in a great hope that is totally inclusive and fully committed to the preservation and enhancement of all human life.

The hope that you represent is both within you and beyond you. As W. H. Auden observed, "Nothing but a miracle can save us." We have tried the mass solipsism of humanism; but history and humanity can neither explain themselves, cleanse themselves nor fulfill themselves. They presuppose a point of reference, a power of being and a source of meaning beyond themselves in order to interpret themselves.

We have tried hedonism but our preoccupation with enjoyment sours into boredom and excessive pleasures leave us numb, empty and dimless.

We have tried mere scientism and intellectualism; but two world wars, the Third Reich and South Africa have taught us that the most intelligent can become the most barbaric. The same Germany that gave the world Bach, Beethoven, Brahms, Immanuel Kant, and atomic energy also gave us Hitler, the Holocaust, and the permanent division of Germany and Europe. Right after World War I, Karl Barth, the father of crisis theology, noted that just at that moment when the state thought it had succeeded in making men out of wild animals, it found it necessary for national security to make wild animals out of men. Intelligence without integrity is the damnation of the soul and devastation of society. The culprits of Watergate, Koreagate and Irangate are not lacking in knowledge but in morals. We need a higher hope.

We have tried democracy and its many guaranteed freedoms; but something else is needed to go in and with democracy to make it work. The liberation of the individual can mutate into the license to self-destruct. The freedom of speech can be perverted into evil speeches that comfort cruel men. The freedom of assembly can yield a Ku Klux Klan, Nazi Party, lynch mob or a self-styled Moral Majority. The freedom of enterprise can irresponsibly poison the environment, destroy cities, compromise national purpose and kill human beings as in Bhopal, India and Midland, Michigan. The freedom of religion can lead to the intolerance of inquisitions, the cruelty of holy wars, and the suicidal fanaticisms of Jonestown. Ideologies that are not servants and instruments of a deeper, broader commitment to human life are always dangerous. The more pretentious human ideologies are, the more dangerous they become to others. The right to vote can be abused to exalt contrived, Hollywood images to the highest positions of power and responsibility. In recent days, America and the world have been shocked into the realization that grinning Presidential optimism is not sufficient to secure this nation or to save this world.

When one experiences the inevitable failures of optimism, it is easy to sink into a depressing pessimism or fatalism--the feeling that one is the sorry victim of blind inexorable forces and can do nothing to change the tragic turn of human events. Fatalism says that there is no solution to the problems of our time, no way to arrest the arms race and prevent the annihilation of the human race, no way to harmonize free enterprise and social responsibility, no way to achieve a full-employment society, no way to stop the exportation of 40,000 jobs a month from the American economy, no way to keep GM from shutting down its labor-intensive operations, no way to keep American steel mills going, no way to educate and liberate the people of the world, no way to feed the hungry, heal the sick or rehabilitate offenders. Fatalism gives up the human struggle and throws the human race into the teeth of the trends of the time, believing that there is no metaphysical hope undergirding all of reality.

An editor of Detroit Metro Times echoes the fatalism of a fallen optimism when he writes, "My name is Uni Despair and I refuse to have a nice day because life is empty, existence is meaningless and people are helpless. We can talk the talk and look the look, but inside we know that we're just another pair of arms flailing in the sea of humanity. Against the futility and meaninglessness of life, we defend ourselves by acting important, strutting like a gander in the barnyard. There is no cure for cancer and there will be none in our lifetime.

There is no answer to the human dilemma, no deliverance from the human predicament, no formula for world peace, no means of achieving racial harmony and ethnic mutuality and congeniality. Life is a lie, a meaningless, aimless hoax.

"We are born often unwelcome as another mouth to feed; we fight to get our fair share of the pie, do our best to pass on our genes (as we are programmed to do), bury our elders and finally sick and withered in some hospital bed tended by people who wish they were elsewhere, your inner workings slow down to a stop and you cease to exist for all eternity. Your body becomes a handful of dust. Your pile of possessions is argued over, your desk at work is taken over by someone else, your place on the assembly line is already occupied (possibly by a robot) and the universe continues on as if you had never existed; you are soon forgotten."

So we find ourselves suspended on a see-saw between an optimism that fails us and a fatalism that does not try to help us. Optimism says, "There is no sickness." Fatalism says, "There is no cure." Optimism says, "There is no death." Fatalism says, "There is no victory over death." Optimism says, "God is in his heaven; all's right with the world." Fatalism says,

"Life is but walking shadow; a poor player,
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
And then is heard no more; it is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing."

Is there no way out of this vicious, manic-depressive cycle of optimism and fatalism? I make bold to suggest that you who have been educated at Michigan can be open doors of hope into a system that is deemed closed, final and fatal. It is up to you to break the vicious cycle of nihilism and transform cyclical futility and fatality into linear progress and destiny. You have been trained here to go into all the world and stand and serve as living alternatives to ignorant optimism that blinds one to real difficulties and also to crippling fatalism and cynicism that freeze human initiative and paralyze human effort.

You are graduating from Michigan to inherit the whole world with all of its problems. Go into all the world and take the power of your mentality, the energy of your integrity, the efficiency of your technology and the fire of your spirit.

Go to Poland where the worker is not free.
Go to Lebanon where all sides are frustrated and confused.
Go to UNESCO which has been dangerously undermined.
Go to Geneva and find the formula for peace.
To to the Soviet Union and set Jewish captives free.

Go to South Africa and destroy the apartheid that is destroy-
 ing 23 million people.
 Go to Ireland and stop the blood-flow.
 Go to England and humanize the leadership.
 Go to Nicaragua and pull the tentacles of moral insensitivity
 and military madness from around the necks of the poor.
 Go to the cities of the United States and reverse endemic unemploy-
 ment, inadequate educational opportunity, substandard housing,
 absentee landlord desolation and blight, the lack of democratized
 health care, the systemic destruction of the family, unrelieved
 poverty, unmitigated despair.
 Go, Go, solve the problems, find the solutions, meet human needs,
 turn night into day, despair into hope, the trampled down into
 the upward bound.

Your degree from Michigan is your key to take the world not to dominate it;
 but to deliver it; not to exploit it; but to enrich it--Take your key and
 inherit the earth.

The past is yours, learn from it.
 The present is yours, fulfill it.
 The future is yours, preserve it.
 Knowledge is yours, use it.
 Cancer is yours, cure it.
 Racism is yours, end it.
 Injustice is yours, correct it.
 Sickness is yours, heal it.
 Ignorance is yours, banish it.
 The arms race is yours, freeze it.
 War is yours, stop it.
 Hope is yours, affirm it.
 People are yours, love them.
 America is yours, save it.
 The World is yours, serve it.
 The environment is yours, cleanse it.
 Death is yours, delay it.
 Life is yours, extend it.
 Truth is yours, know it.
 Victory is yours, claim it.

Don't be intimidated by anything; be enlarged by everything. You are the sons
 and daughters of Michigan and you have everything it takes to be the hope of the
 world.

Don't be blinded by prejudice
 disheartened by the times
 or discouraged by the system

But face the system
 challenge it
 change it
 confront it
 correct it.

Don't let anything paralyze your mind, tie your hands or defeat your spirit.

If you have a hard way to go, walk it by faith.
 If you face a mean problem, work with it until you
 work through it.
 If you have a misunderstanding, settle it.
 If you have a grudge, drop it.
 If you have hatred or resentment, shake it off.
 If you have a high mountain, move it by faith or
 climb it by work.
 If you have a battle, fight it.
 If you have a handicap, rise above it.
 If you have race prejudice, overcome it.
 If you have temptation, conquer it.
 If you have evil, destroy it.
 If you have a challenge, face it.
 If you have trouble, take it.
 If you have a cross, bear it.
 If they knock you down, get up.
 If they push you against the ropes, come
 out swinging.
 If they laugh at you, keep smiling at them.
 If they talk about you, keep praying for them.
 If they hate you, keep loving them and
 If they kill you, just rise again--

Thank you Michigan, you are the hope of the world, a light to the nations,
 a blessing to humanity. We shall overcome!!