

1987

**Winter Commencement Address, G. Mennen Williams, December
13, 1987**

Eastern Michigan University

G. MENNEN WILLIAMS
EASTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS
DECEMBER 13, 1987

YOUR KIND AND GRACIOUS WELCOME AND YOUR BESTOWING A DEGREE HONORIS CAUSA IS PARTICULARLY HEARTWARMING AND APPRECIATED BY MY WIFE NANCY QUIRK AND BY ME. YPSILANTI AND EASTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY HAVE SPECIAL MEANING FOR BOTH OF US.

NANCY, OF COURSE, WAS BORN IN YPSILANTI AND HER QUIRK NAME WAS BORNE BY THE FOUNDER OF THE PAPER MILL HERE, A BANK PRESIDENT, A MAYOR AND THE FOUNDER OF A NATIONALLY REKNOWNED BARN THEATRE. THAT, BY THE WAY, IS WHY EASTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY'S THEATRE BEARS THE QUIRK NAME. NANCY ALSO BOTH WENT TO EASTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY'S TRAINING SCHOOL AS A CHILD AND RECEIVED AN HONORARY DEGREE FROM EASTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY AS AN ADULT.

WHILE THE WILLIAMS NAME IS NOT SO CLOSELY LINKED TO YPSILANTI AND EASTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY AS THE QUIRK NAME, THE WILLIAMS NAME IS NOT UNASSOCIATED. IN A WEDDING CEREMONY IN YPSILANTI SOME 50 YEARS AGO, G. MENNEN WILLIAMS PLAYED THE SUPPORTING ROLE TO NANCY QUIRK. ELEVEN YEARS AFTER THAT, THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF G. MENNEN WILLIAMS' FIRST RUN FOR GOVERNOR TOOK PLACE IN THE YPSILANTI GAR HALL WITH SOME 35 BRAVE AND THE WORLD THEN THOUGHT UNDULY HOPEFUL SOULS IN ATTENDANCE. ON FIVE SUBSEQUENT OCCASIONS GOVERNOR WILLIAMS' CAMPAIGN FOR RE-ELECTION KICKED OFF IN THE

EASTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY UNION, EACH TIME WITH HIGHLY SATISFACTORY RESULTS.

IN SHORT, I TRUST IT IS CLEAR TO ONE AND ALL WHY NANCY AND I ARE ESPECIALLY PROUD AND HAPPY TO HAVE THE GREATLY APPRECIATED EASTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY HONORARY DEGREE AS A WELCOMED RECOGNITION FROM THE COMMUNITY AND UNIVERSITY WITH WHICH WE HAVE SO MANY SIGNIFICANT AND PERSONAL TIES.

THIS WEEK THE WORLD REJOICES IN THE U.S.-SOVIET AGREEMENT TO DESTROY SHORT AND MEDIUM RANGE MISSILES. PEOPLE EVERYWHERE HOPE THAT THIS IS A SIGNIFICANT FIRST STEP IN THE REDUCTION OF THE NUCLEAR THREAT TO WORLD PEACE.

IS THERE ANY REALISTIC BASIS TO HOPE FOR NUCLEAR PEACE IN OUR TIME? IT IS MY HUMBLE LAYMAN'S OPINION THAT THERE IS.

HOPE LIES, I BELIEVE, NOT IN ANY ALTRUISTIC DESIGNS OF EITHER PRESIDENT REAGAN OR GENERAL SECRETARY GORBACHEV OR EVEN IN THE IMPORTANT INSPECTION PROVISIONS BUT IN THE SOLID SELF INTEREST OF BOTH COUNTRIES. BOTH LEADERS ARE TO BE APPLAUDED FOR THEIR PART IN THE INF AGREEMENT BUT THE SITUATIONS IN BOTH COUNTRIES MAKE THE AGREEMENT THE ONLY LOGICAL THING TO DO IN THEIR OWN SELF INTEREST.

OF COURSE, MANY OF US BELIEVE THAT PEACE IS THE ONLY RATIONAL POLICY MORALLY AND AS MATTER OF HUMANITY. BUT TODAY THERE ARE ALSO HARD AMORAL AND MATERIALISTIC REASONS FOR REACHING THE SAME CONCLUSION.

ONE DOESN'T HAVE TO BE AN EXPERT TO SEE THAT THE UNITED STATES HAS CREATED A NATIONAL DEFICIT THAT MAKES BUDGET RETRENCHMENT THE ONLY VIABLE ALTERNATIVE TO NATIONAL ECONOMIC DISASTER. GREATLY INCREASED TAXES, UNWELCOME DECREASES IN SOCIAL SERVICES OR REDUCTION IN DEFENSE EXPENDITURES APPEAR TO BE THE ONLY AVAILABLE BUDGET REMEDIES. INCREASED TAXES OR REDUCED SOCIAL SERVICES ARE NEITHER POLITICALLY NOR POPULARLY WELCOME SOLUTIONS. AS LONG AS THE SOVIET UNION PRESENTS AN IMMEDIATE NUCLEAR THREAT, GREATLY REDUCED DEFENSE SPENDING TO MANY MAY APPEAR A RISKY UNDERTAKING.

ON THE SOVIET SIDE, WHAT IS THEIR SITUATION? INTERESTINGLY ENOUGH IT IS SURPRISINGLY SIMILAR. THE SOVIET ECONOMY TOO IS IN SAD SHAPE. THE JOINT ECONOMIC COMMITTEE OF CONGRESS, AS REPORTED BY NEWSWEEK MAGAZINE, "PAINTS A CONVINCING PICTURE OF A DEBILITATED SOVIET ECONOMY". THE JOINT ECONOMIC COMMITTEE OF CONGRESS DOES NOT APPEAR TO BE ALONE IN THIS ANALYSIS.

THE SOVIET CIVILIAN ECONOMY, EVERYONE KNOWS, HAS LONG BEEN SQUEEZED AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE TO SUPPORT THE MILITARY. SO IF THE SOVIETS WANT TO PROVE TO THEIR PEOPLE AND THE WORLD THAT THE SOVIET SYSTEM IS THE BEST SYSTEM AND THAT THE SOVIETS REALLY ARE A SUPER POWER, IN THE IMMEDIATE FUTURE THE ONLY ANSWER LIES IN A REDUCED MILITARY BUDGET IN ORDER TO STRENGTHEN THE GENERAL ECONOMIC SYSTEM.

IN OTHER WORDS, THE REALITY OF THE SITUATION IN BOTH THE UNITED STATES AND THE SOVIET UNION IS THAT ARMS CONTROL AGREEMENTS SATISFYING EACH SIDE THAT THERE IS NO, OR NO SUBSTANTIAL, LOSS OF SECURITY WOULD BE A MOST WELCOME REMEDY TO THE INTOLERABLE ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL SITUATION PRESENTED BY THEIR PRESENT CIRCUMSTANCES. WHAT IS AT STAKE THEREFORE IS NOT THE ARMS AGREEMENT HALOES REAGAN AND GORBACHEV MAY WIN, BUT WHETHER OR NOT TWO SUPERPOWERS CAN MANAGE TO KEEP THEIR PLACES IN THE SUN. IF THIS ANALYSIS IS CORRECT, THEN THERE ARE FUNDAMENTAL FORCES AT WORK FAR STRONGER THAN THE POLITICAL FORTUNES OF THE TWO LEADERS INVOLVED AND NUCLEAR PEACE MAY BE A REAL POSSIBILITY.

AT THIS MOMENT, MAY I PAY MY TRIBUTE TO THE FEATURED ACADEMIC AREA HONORED AT THIS YEAR'S COMMENCEMENT, THE ARTS AND HUMANITIES. THEIR DISCIPLINES ALONG WITH THE OTHERS OF A LIBERAL EDUCATION ARE AND WILL BE CALLED UPON TO STEER A COURSE FOR THIS COUNTRY THAT WILL TAKE THE BEST ADVANTAGE OF THE HISTORIC OPPORTUNITY FOR A BETTER WORLD OFFERED BY TODAY'S CIRCUMSTANCES.

LET US TURN A MOMENT TO ONE OF THE HUMANITIES, HISTORY, TO SEE WHETHER IT IS TOO MUCH TO HOPE THAT WE CAN HAVE PEACE IN OUR TIME. THE CHANGES NANCY AND I HAVE SEEN IN OUR PERSONAL LIVES MAKE US OPEN MINDED AS TO WHAT PUBLIC CHANGES THERE CAN BE. NANCY STARTED DOING OUR FAMILY WASH ON A SCRUB-BOARD, IF YOU KNOW WHAT THAT IS -- WASHING MACHINES NOT HAVING BEEN INVENTED YET. I EVEN HAD TO SHOVEL COAL INTO A FURNANCE IN OUR FIRST HOUSE.

WE BOTH WENT TO BOARDING SCHOOL BY TRAIN. I SAW ONE OF THE FIRST AIRPLANES TO COME TO MICHIGAN. I SAW WORLD WAR II FOUGHT BY PROPELLER PLANES, NOTHING LIKE THE JETS OF TODAY. I WAS IN SCHOOL WHEN THE FIRST RADIOS CAME IN AND TELEVISION WAS A POST-WAR PHENOMENON. WHEN I WAS IN SCHOOL NEITHER TYPEWRITERS NOR ADDING MACHINES WERE ELECTRICALLY OPERATED AND COMPUTERS AS WE KNOW THEM WERE ALSO POST WORLD WAR II. TO ONE WHO SAW THE FIRST COMMERCIAL PLANES, THE IDEA OF A MAN ON THE MOON WAS PURE JULES VERNE AND A HEART TRANSPLANT JUST FANTASTIC.

BUT MORE TO THE POINT IN OUR TIME, I HAVE SEEN AMERICAN AND SOVIET POWER RISE AND FALL. THE UNITED STATES USED TO BE THE PREDOMINANT POWER IN ETHIOPIA AND THE SOVIET UNION THE PREDOMINANT POWER IN EGYPT. TODAY IT IS EXACTLY THE REVERSE.

BY ALL OF THIS I DON'T MEAN TO SAY THAT YOUR GENERATION WILL NOT HAVE TO BE CONCERNED ABOUT SOVIET EXPANSION ONE WAY OR ANOTHER. SINCE THE TIME OF THE CZARS THAT HAS BEEN THEIR NATIONAL NATURE. BUT I DO BELIEVE THAT IF WE DO OUR THING HERE AT HOME AND PURSUE A REASONABLE FOREIGN POLICY, YOU WON'T HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT SPENDING FOUR YEARS IN THE NAVY LIKE I DID.

SO LET ME CLOSE BY WISHING YOU A HAPPY AND PEACEFUL FUTURE. I TRULY BELIEVE YOU SHOULD HAVE ONE IF WE ALL TAKE ADVANTAGE OF OUR OPPORTUNITIES. MY CONGRATULATIONS TO THOSE WHO ARE GRADUATING, TO THE FAMILIES AND FRIENDS WHO HAVE HELPED YOU DO SO, AND TO THE FACULTY AND ADMINISTRATION OF THIS GREAT UNIVERSITY THAT HAVE PROVIDED YOU THE OPPORTUNITY TO GO OUT INTO THE WORLD EQUIPPED TO MAKE IT A BETTER PLACE FOR ALL OF US. GOD BLESS YOU.