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**Winter Commencement Address, "COMPLETING THE
TWENTIETH CENTURY AGENDA" , Howard F. Sims, FAIA,
December 17, 1989**

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Commencement Address

EASTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

December 17, 1989

COMPLETING THE TWENTIETH CENTURY AGENDA

By

Howard F. Sims, FAIA

I'M HONORED TO BE A PART OF THIS SIGNIFICANT OCCASION AND I AM ALSO PLEASED TO JOIN YOU IN CELEBRATING A SINGULAR VICTORY OF ACCOMPLISHMENT, NAMELY, THE COMPLETION OF YOUR UNDER-GRADUATE AND GRADUATE YEARS AND THE AWARDING OF YOUR WELL EARNED DEGREES. I WISH TO HEARTILY CONGRATULATE EACH OF YOU AND OFFER YOU MY BEST WISHES FOR A SUCCESSFUL AND FULFILLING FUTURE IN THE DIVERSE CAREERS WHICH YOU MAY CHOOSE TO FOLLOW.

IT WELL MAY BE THAT, IN THE MIDST OF THE CELEBRATIONS OF THIS DAY AND OF THE DAYS TO COME, EACH OF YOU WILL EXPERIENCE A PERIOD OF QUIET CONTEMPLATION, A REFLECTIVE TIME WHICH MAY LEAD YOU TO PAUSE AND SAY, "I'VE DONE IT, I'VE REALLY DONE IT. I'VE ACCOMPLISHED, PERHAPS NOT ALL, BUT A GREAT PORTION OF THOSE THINGS WHICH I SET OUT TO COMPLETE IN MY UNIVERSITY YEARS. I HAVE, FOR THE MOST PART, COMPLETED MY AGENDA". AS YOU SAVOR THAT SENSE OF FULFILLMENT, WHICH COMES WITH SUCH A MOMENT, YOU MAY ALSO BE LED TO RECOGNIZE HOW IMPORTANT IT IS TO COMPLETE ONE AGENDA BEFORE THE SETTING FORTH A NEW ONE.

IN KEEPING WITH THE SPIRIT OF THIS DAY, THE PASSING OF ONE PHASE OF LIFE AND THE BEGINNINGS OF A NEW AND PROMISING FUTURE, I AM REMINDED THAT IN ANOTHER FEW DAYS, ALL OF US WILL AGAIN BE CELEBRATING THE PASSING OF AN OLD TIME INTO THE BIRTH OF A NEW. AND AT SOME MOMENT OF THAT TIME, MANY OF US WILL ALSO BE QUIETLY REFLECTING ON THE ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF GOALS, AS WELL AS THE DISAPPOINTMENTS OF FAILED PROJECTS AND OUR RESOLUTIONS TO COMPLETE THE TASKS NECESSARY FOR THE AGENDA OF THE COMING YEAR.

IN MY OWN CONSIDERATIONS OF WHAT I MIGHT SAY TO YOU THAT WILL HAVE SOME MEANING FOR YOU TODAY, AS WELL AS IN THE DAYS TO COME, I WAS STRUCK BY THE THOUGHT THAT IN THE NOT TOO DISTANT FUTURE WE WILL BE ENTERING A NEW CENTURY, THE 21ST CENTURY. / AND WE WILL ONCE MORE, BE REQUIRED TO ASK OURSELVES, AS CITIZENS OF A FREE SOCIETY, IF THIS NATION HAS BROUGHT TO FRUITION THE GOALS AND HAS KEPT THE PROMISES THAT WERE MADE FOR THAT "BRIGHT, NEW DAY", OF THE 20TH CENTURY? HAVE WE COMPLETED THE 20TH CENTURY AGENDA BEFORE CONTEMPLATING AND PLANNING THE AGENDA OF THE 21ST?; HAVE WE COMPLETED THAT AGENDA OF 20TH CENTURY AMERICA, / WHICH PROMISED SOCIAL JUSTICE AND ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY FOR EVERY INDIVIDUAL - IN THIS, THE VERY LAND OF OPPORTUNITY?

AS WE REVIEW THE PROGRESS OF THE 20TH CENTURY, WE AS A NATION, CAN POINT WITH SOME PRIDE TO OUR ACCOMPLISHMENTS THUS FAR. NO OTHER ERA HAS SEEN THE APPLICATION OF SO MANY PRINCIPLES OF FREEDOM AS THIS CENTURY BROUGHT TO THE UNENFRANCHISED --- THE WOMEN, THE BLACKS, THE NON-EUROPEAN IMMIGRANTS AND THE POOR, IN GENERAL, OF WHATEVER SEX OR RACE. THEY, WHO STOOD OUTSIDE THE DOOR OF OPPORTUNITY, SOUGHT TO HAVE THOSE PRINCIPLES WHICH WERE EMBODIED IN WHAT FRANKLIN DELANO ROOSEVELT LATER COINED AS THE FOUR FREEDOMS, APPLY TO THEM AS WELL. THEY WISHED FOR FREEDOM OF SPEECH AND EXPRESSION --- THEY SOUGHT FREEDOM TO WORSHIP IN THEIR WAY -AND THEY DREAMED OF FREEDOM FROM WANT AND FREEDOM FROM FEAR.

THE PAST 89 YEARS HAVE SEEN SUFFRAGE LAWS ENACTED, ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION EXPANDED, DISCRIMINATION AND SEXISM IN THE WORKPLACE DECLARED ILLEGAL, DIFFERENTIAL PAY FOR THE SAME WORK ALL BUT ABANDONED, JIM CROW LAWS ABOLISHED, LEGAL SEGREGATION OF PUBLIC SCHOOLS ENDED, SEGREGATION OF PUBLIC ACCOMMODATIONS OUTLAWED, AND DISCRIMINATORY HOUSING PRACTICES DECLARED ILLEGAL.

BUT DESPITE THESE ACCOMPLISHMENTS, FOR TOO MANY AMERICANS, PARTICULARLY THE POOR, THESE FREEDOMS STILL REMAIN AS DREAMS AND UNFULFILLED PROMISES. IN A LAND WHERE THE MEANS TO EARN A LIVING MAY BE THE MOST IMPORTANT SINGLE MEASURE OF SELF-ESTEEM FOR ADULTS, INCREDIBLE AS IT MAY SEEM, 1 OF EVERY 3 ADULT MALES IN OUR CENTRAL CITIES IS UNEMPLOYED AND 1 OF EVERY 7 IN MANY RURAL AREAS; IN A LAND WHERE EDUCATION IS PRIZED AS THE ROAD TO A BETTER LIFE, WHAT HORACE MANN CALLED THE GREAT EQUALIZER OF THE CONDITIONS OF MAN, 1 OUT OF EVERY 4 OF OUR YOUNG PEOPLE LEAVE SCHOOL BEFORE THE 12TH GRADE - (AND THAT FIGURE HAS REACHED 50% IN DETROIT AND OTHER CITIES); IN A LAND WITH MEDICAL FACILITIES CONSIDERED THE BEST IN THE WORLD, INFANT MORTALITY RATES IN SOME AMERICAN CITIES RIVAL THOSE OF THIRD WORLD COUNTRIES; IN A LAND THAT PRODUCES FOOD WELL BEYOND ITS CAPACITY TO CONSUME, MANY GO HUNGRY AND MALNOURISHED; IN A LAND WHERE THE ANNUAL MEDIAN INCOME IS OVER \$31,000 PER FAMILY, MANY FAMILIES, EVEN THOSE WITH CHILDREN, LIVE IN THE STREETS OR IN TEMPORARY SHELTERS; IN A LAND WHERE READING IS FUNDAMENTAL TO LEARNING, OVER 20% OF OUR ADULT POPULATION IS CONSIDERED ILLITERATE AND 50% ARE UNABLE TO READ ABOVE AN 8TH GRADE LEVEL.

AS WE CONSIDER THE CHASM BETWEEN THE PROMISE AND THE REALITY OF THE 20TH CENTURY, WE MIGHT CONSIDER WHAT WE CAN DO TO IMPROVE CONDITIONS FOR THE UNDEREDUCATED, THE UNEMPLOYED, THE HUNGRY AND THE HOMELESS. SOME OF US WE MAY FEEL WE'RE TOO BUSY, WE HAVE FAMILIES TO RAISE, WE HAVE CAREERS TO PURSUE, WE JUST DON'T HAVE THE TIME. / WHAT WE ARE REALLY SAYING IS THAT WE DON'T WANT TO FIND THE TIME FOR THINGS THAT DON'T AFFECT US DIRECTLY. / IN ANSWER TO THESE TO THESE OBJECTIONS, I WOULD LIKE TO POINT OUT THAT IT IS INDEED POSSIBLE THAT SERVICE TO HUMANITY NEED NOT BE AT A COST TO ONE'S PROFESSION, OR TO ONE'S CAREER, OR TO ONE'S PERSONAL LIFE.

WE CAN FIND MANY EXAMPLES OF INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE SUCCESSFUL IN THEIR CHOSEN FIELDS AND ARE - AT THE SAME TIME - WELL KNOWN FOR THEIR HUMANITARIAN EFFORTS. THEY DO WELL AND DO GOOD AT THE SAME TIME. A FEW EXAMPLES QUICKLY COME TO MIND --- SOL LINOWITZ, FOR EXAMPLE, MEMBER OF A PRESTIGIOUS EAST COAST CONSULTING FIRM AND FORMER UNITED STATES AMBASSADOR TO THE MIDDLE EAST, FOUND THE TIME TO BE A CO-FOUNDER AND CHAIRMAN OF THE NATIONAL URBAN COALITION; FORMER PRESIDENT JIMMY CARTER, FINDS THE TIME FOR EFFORTS TO ASSIST THE ILL-HOUSED AND YET MAY BE BETTER KNOWN FOR THESE HUMANITARIAN WORKS, THAN FOR HIS STATESMANSHIP AS PRESIDENT.

/ IN OUR OWN STATE, EXAMPLES OF INDIVIDUALS, WHO HAVE TOUCHED MY OWN LIFE AND I KNOW CARE DEEPLY ABOUT THEIR FELLOW MAN AND DEMONSTRATED THIS CONCERN THROUGH ACTIVE HUMANITARIANISM INCLUDE SISTER MAUREEN FAY, PRESIDENT OF MERCY COLLEGE, WHO FOUND THE TIME TO SPEND OVER 2-1/2 YEARS SEEKING WAYS TO IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN DETROIT PUBLIC SCHOOLS; DENNIS GIBSON, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF A METROPOLITAN YOUTH FOUNDATION, WHO, IN ADDITION TO HIS COMMITMENT TO THE CAUSES OF YOUNG PEOPLE, ALSO FINDS THE TIME TO READ TO THE BLIND; / AND THE LATE HENRY FORD II, WHO FOUND THE TIME TO COMMIT HIMSELF AND HIS COMPANY TO A MULTI-MILLION DOLLAR INVESTMENT IN DOWNTOWN DETROIT WHEN THE OUTLOOK FOR THAT CITY WAS SO GLOOMY TO SOME OTHERS, THAT ONE NATIONAL MAGAZINE CARRIED THE HEADLINE ON ONE OF IT'S STORIES - "WILL THE LAST PERSON TO LEAVE DETROIT PLEASE TURN OUT THE LIGHTS".

EACH OF THESE MEN AND WOMEN, WHILE REACHING THE TOP OF THEIR CAREERS, FOUND THE TIME AND THE WILL TO SERVE HUMANITY . THEY EACH PROBABLY THOUGHT OF THEIR EFFORT, NOT ONLY AS THEIR DESIRE, BUT THEIR REponsibility, TO SERVE THEIR FELLOW MAN. SHOULD WE THEN NOT FEEL THE SAME? IS IT NOT, INDEED, THE RESPONSIBILITY OF WE THE FORTUNATE, THE EDUCATED, THE LEADERS, TO DEMONSTRATE OUR REALIZATION THAT THIS EARTH IS ONE PLANET INDIVISIBLE, AND THAT ONE MAN'S HUNGER IS EVERY OTHER MAN'S HUNGER?

YOU SCHOLARS OF THE 1989 CLASS, IN ALL OF YOUR VARIED FIELDS OF INTEREST - IN ARTS AND SCIENCE, IN EDUCATION, IN BUSINESS, IN HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICE, AND IN TECHNOLOGY - YOU CAN BRING YOUR SPECIAL SKILLS AND YOUR OWN BRAND OF DEDICATION, TO THE TASK OF MAKING FREEDOM FROM WANT AND FREEDOM FROM FEAR A REALITY FOR EVERY AMERICAN - IN WHAT REMAINS OF THE 20TH CENTURY. YOU HAVE THE MEANS, YOU HAVE THE KNOW-HOW, AND GOD WILLING, YOU WILL ALSO HAVE THE WILL - TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE.

I AM NOT AN EXPERT IN THE MANY FIELDS OF CONCENTRATION REPRESENTED IN THIS GRADUATING CLASS, SO I ASK EACH OF YOU TO CONSIDER HOW YOUR EDUCATION HAS PREPARED YOU TO MEET THE CHALLENGE OF EDUCATING THE UNDEREDUCATED, FEEDING THE HUNGRY, OR SHELTERING THE HOMELESS. FOR EXAMPLE, YOU IN THE TECHNOLOGY FIELDS, YOU TO WHOM THE THEME OF THIS COMMENCEMENT IS DEDICATED, YOU WHO WOULD SEEK TO BUILD A BETTER MOUSETRAP, A BETTER BUILDING, A BETTER ORGANIZATION, -- WILL YOU ALSO SEEK TO BUILD A BETTER SOCIETY?

THE OPPORTUNITIES ARE AS LIMITLESS AS YOUR IMAGINATION AND YOUR WILL TO SERVE.

IF THE NOTED AMERICAN PHILOSOPHER, WILLIAM JAMES, WAS AT ALL RIGHT WHEN HE SAID, " THE GREATEST USE OF LIFE IS TO SPEND IT FOR SOMETHING THAT WILL OUTLAST IT ", AND IF FREEDOM FROM WANT AND FREEDOM FROM FEAR - FOR ALL MEN AND WOMEN - ARE TRULY PART OF OUR TWENTIETH CENTURY AGENDA, THAT AGENDA WHICH MUST BE COMPLETED BEFORE WE GO ON TO ANOTHER, WE HAVE LITTLE TIME TO WASTE, THE ELEVENTH HOUR OF THE 20TH CENTURY IS ALREADY UPON US/ AND WE HAVE MUCH UNFINISHED BUSINESS TO COMPLETE. AND TO WHOM SHALL WE LOOK TO COMPLETE THIS UNFINISHED BUSINESS OF THE 20TH CENTURY? TO NO ONE BUT OURSELVES. I'M REMINDED OF THE OFT QUOTED WORDS OF THE 16TH CENTURY PRIEST AND POET, JOHN DONNE,/ WHICH, IN CLOSING, I'D LIKE TO PARAPHRASE, "NO MAN IS AN ISLAND, BUT A SMALL PART OF THE VAST CONTINENT OF HUMANITY. ANY MAN'S HUNGER OR MISFORTUNE AFFECTS ME, BECAUSE I AM INVOLVED WITH MANKIND. AND THEREFORE I ASK NOT FOR WHOM THE BELL TOLLS, / IT TOLLS FOR ME.