

Approximate Text of
Remarks by Gardner Ackley
at Meeting of LSA Faculty, March 27, 1970

Mr. Dean, and Members of the Faculty:

This has been a tragic year in the life of the University of Michigan -- a year that has begun the destruction of this University as a great center of learning -- destroyed not so much by outside forces as by the actions of its own faculty and administration.

This conclusion is independent of the outcome of the current crisis.

We are sometimes told that teaching is a lost art -- great teachers are no more. But the University of Michigan has, this year, taught one lesson so inescapably, so clearly, that it will long be remembered.

It is that, however ridiculous or worthy the cause, however miniscule or substantial its support, it will win in proportion to the willingness of its supporters to disrupt the life of the University.

The year began with the bookstore dispute -- a more ridiculous issue is hard to imagine. But its supporters were willing to disrupt and destroy. The University was unwilling or unable to resist or punish the destroyers. In the end, the Regents backed down, and precious resources were allocated to make possible the symbolic saving of pennies by the affluent students who pay for their own books -- resources which we now know could have been allocated to a far more vital use.

This was an issue on which an objective, empirical analysis of costs and benefits would have been quite simple and quite revealing. But no one asked for such an analysis and no one volunteered it. No one cared. Rather, the "truth" was more transcendental: it could be heard in the tramp of marching feet and the tinkle of broken glass.

After that, the issues succeeded one another in bewildering variety: Vietnam, ROTC, corporate recruiting, University research, tenants' rights, teaching fellow demands, pollution, University investments, "repression", the Chicago 7, black admissions and support.

Whatever the issue, these lessons were taught and learned:

That violence and disruption either cannot or will not be punished by the University;

That the big lie, loudly proclaimed, can become the truth;

That the desires of the overwhelming majority of students -- who only want to learn -- and of the overwhelming majority of the faculty -- who only want to teach and investigate -- count for little or nothing.

And so: the SDS, acknowledged to be dedicated to the destruction of the University, is still, so far as I know, an officially-recognized student organization. So far as I know, none of its members has been suspended. Its discipline has been entrusted to the Student Judiciary -- which is like asking the Mafia to investigate organized crime.

And so: teaching fellows strike against their students and are not punished but are reappointed. Other students who engage in destruction of University property are retained and reappointed in University employment.

And so: our libraries are vandalized, faculty and administrative files are ransacked and burglarized, faculty members are struck in the performance of their duties. In many cases, the perpetrators are known but have not been punished by the University. The investigation of the attack on Professor Young has been turned over not to the Administrative Board but to the Student Judiciary. I predict there will be no meaningful investigation, and no penalties.

And so: last Wednesday I watched the faculty of my own department, assembled in the Chairman's office, discuss a demand that all classes in our building be shut

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down, or else. We discussed this while the entrances to the building were sealed, and while the halls outside the room in which we were meeting were patrolled by men carrying pipes and clubs. We sought guidance from the College, and were told: "Do what you think best; you will have no protection". And so we cravenly capitulated, in fear -- if not for our own safety -- for that of our students and employees.

That day, the truth lay in those clubs.

Today, it lies in those chanting, marching columns. And if there is not truth enough in those, there are still the clubs -- and who knows what else.

And so: we will now submit in one way or another to all the demands of the BAM. In so doing, we will admit, explicitly or implicitly, that we are indeed a repressive, racist institution.

BUT THAT IS STILL A LIE!

And we will go on from there: the path is clear.

The next item? Some of us apparently believe that corporate recruiting in University facilities is wrong and should be suspended.

When I returned to the campus last fall after 8 years of absence, I found many changes. Among the most striking was this -- that University facilities are now available for anything students want to use them for. Our auditoriums and meeting rooms are available to promote any cause however absurd, obscene, revolting, or revolutionary. I have been amused to see, all year, a sign on the diagonal advertising the address -- in University facilities -- of the Anarchist Society.

And this is how it should be, I suppose.

But is it now improper for University facilities to be used by University students to meet prospective employers?

Yes, the new truth says it is, and such meetings will soon be banned.

After that, it will be books that a minority dislikes. Then courses; lines of faculty research; faculty appointments, promotions, retention.

My first appointment in this faculty was in 1940 -- thirty years ago. Since then I have seen much happen at this University. In the mid-1950's -- the McCarthy era -- I was a Department Chairman and President of the Michigan chapter of AAUP. More than once I was ashamed of actions -- or inaction -- by my University.

But I was never so ashamed as I was this morning, at 9 o'clock, and again at 11, when my students came to me to ask why we were not having class.

I didn't know what to tell them.

I still don't. Unless it is this:

There is no reason.

There is only power.