

DEDICATION
OF
ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY WEST
Phoenix, Arizona

September 12, 1991

by

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It is indeed exciting to be here at Arizona's newest university campus. It has emerged on the west side of the Valley of the Sun to take its place in Arizona's educational system. Despite a sputtering economy, Maricopa County continues to grow and expand. The urban area relentlessly spreads in all directions. On this west side, where farms once dominated the area, we see mile after mile of houses, apartments, and small businesses. Even with the new freeways, it is a long drive to Tempe from this area.

I was still in the Arizona State Senate when Sterling and Barbara Ridge began talking about a west side campus. That was in the early 70's. Even good ideas need time to germinate. And this idea has taken more than 20 years to come to fruition. Looking around this evening at this handsome campus and the enthusiastic students and friends of this new University, it is clear that the wait has been rewarded.

The student population here reflects some interesting social realities about higher education today. Almost three quarters of the students here are part-time, not full-time. More than half are female, and more than half are between 25 and 40 years old.

I suspect this is a result of the increased number of women in the work force today, and the increasing need of women to obtain secure and better paying jobs. A university degree in business, science, engineering, or education can provide the opportunity for better employment. This university is clearly fulfilling a need for upper level education which can be obtained on a part-time basis by all who wish to enter.

I want to suggest that there is another great need to be fulfilled by this university in the years ahead -- a need to equip the students here to live and be full participants in preserving and improving our unique American culture.

Gunnar Myrdal of Sweden wrote that Americans of "all national origins, regions, creeds, and colors . . . [hold in common] the most explicitly expressed system of general ideals" of any Western nation. What are these ideals? They are the ideals, reflected in the Bill of Rights and the 14th Amendment to our Constitution, of the dignity and equality of all people, of our right to equal justice under law. Recent events in Eastern Europe and the now dissolved U.S.S.R. can be traced in large part to the fervent desire of all people to obtain protection under a rule of law affording basic human rights and freedoms. But we are also witnessing the assertion of separate political status for many ethnic groups that have lived for more than half this century in a larger composite union.

America's most remarkable success has been its ability to welcome and absorb into our special American culture people from every part of the globe and from every nation. Our concept was

that of the melting pot, from which all would share in the opportunities for work and for prosperity. We have not always succeeded in this ideal. Our treatment of black Americans, of native Americans, and, for much of our history, of women, has been seriously flawed. Despite the progress made in civil rights, deficiencies still remain. Stirred by these failures, minority groups across the land have expressed a desire for identification, not with the melting pot ideal of the American culture, but with their own separate ethnic identities.

This has been particularly true in our universities, with both good and bad results. On one hand, we have seen a wonderful flowering of study, in fields that barely existed a generation ago. Students can take courses in the history of groups like black Americans or Hispanics, groups whose past was once rarely studied in college. All sorts of national literatures have become the subjects of scholarship, and the subjects of courses. The effect has been to broaden the base of knowledge available to Americans with a college education, and to make us all aware of the contributions of people who may have been overlooked in the past by the mainstream culture.

On the other hand, this trend toward ethnic identification has had its ugly side, as it has often come at the expense of the unity represented by the symbol of the melting pot. As Arthur Schlesinger has described it, "The recent [emergence] of ethnicity, black, brown, red, yellow, white, has revived the dismal prospect [of] a society fragmented into ethnic groups. The cult of ethnicity exaggerates differences, intensifies

resentments and antagonisms, drives ever deeper the awful wedges between races and nationalities. The end-game is self-pity and self-ghettoization."

These divisions are something this country has never seen before. In the past, divisions between groups were imposed from above, by those in power. This is a tragic and familiar story to all of us -- black Americans were forced to send their children to separate schools, women were denied access to the better jobs, native Americans were moved to reservations, and so on. But the ethnic divisions we are seeing today are springing from the very groups who are being divided.

This separatism manifests itself on campuses in any number of ways. Many universities now have separate houses for students with different ethnic backgrounds, so that black Americans live only with black Americans, Asians only with Asians, Hispanics only with Hispanics. Many universities have balkanized their academic departments. It used to be that a student majoring in History would learn the history of many cultures, and a student studying literature would read books written in all different periods in all different places. But now, students can major in Black Studies, in Latin American Studies, in East Asian Studies - - a student can graduate without knowing a single thing about any culture other than his own.

This is a trend I find quite disturbing. By structuring our universities this way, I fear we run the risk of losing what we share as a culture. Theodore Roosevelt may have put it best, in an era when our ethnic groups were primarily European. He said:

"The one absolutely certain way of bringing this nation to ruin, of preventing all possibility of its continuing to be a nation at all, would be to permit it to become a tangle of squabbling nationalities, an intricate knot of German-Americans, Irish-Americans, English-Americans, French-Americans, Scandinavian-Americans, or Italian-Americans, each preserving its separate nationality." The idea of a uniquely American culture, forged by contributions from the countless groups who have come to the United States from other parts of the world, cannot last long when those groups want no part of one another.

I find it particularly shameful that this new separatism is taking root in universities, of all places. Our universities are uniquely placed to enable students of all cultures to come together, to learn both from each other and about each other. This is particularly true of ASU West, a school located in a state that is one of our most culturally diverse. It should be one of the biggest benefits of attending a university like ASU that, rather than sealing oneself off in a group of similar people, one can grow through experiences with others of different ethnic backgrounds.

Just as important, our universities have also traditionally been the place where students learned what Americans share in common -- our common history; our common beliefs, however imperfectly realized, in freedom and equality; in short, our common culture. It has always been fashionable in academic circles to emphasize our failures over our successes, and the modern day is no different. But on balance, I'd say we've done

fairly well. In the last few years, people all over the globe have looked to us as a model of how a nation should be governed, people in China, in Eastern Europe, and in what was once, long ago, called the Soviet Union. This common heritage of ours is something our students should be learning, if we expect them to be able to transmit it to their students, and to their students' students.

In the last few years, we have seen a strange upsurge in ethnic tensions on some university campuses. For the first time in our history, our slow but steady trend toward harmony among the various groups that make up our society has shown signs of reversing. These incidents of racial and religious intolerance are, I hope, not the wave of the future. They are without doubt fostered partly by the prejudices that college students bring with them to school. Still, an atmosphere of ethnic self-segregation is hardly likely to engender tolerance and understanding.

Finally, a focus solely on one's own culture, at the expense of an understanding of the culture we all share, may be contributing to the economic inequalities that still persist as relics of past discrimination. As Thomas Sowell has observed, "[t]hose who use the term 'cultural diversity' to promote a multiplicity of segregated ethnic enclaves are doing an enormous harm to the people in those enclaves. However they live socially, the people in those enclaves are going to have to compete economically for a livelihood. Even if they were not disadvantaged before, they will be very disadvantaged if their

competitors from the general population are free to tap the knowledge, skills, and analytical techniques which Western civilization has drawn from all the other civilizations of the world, while those in the enclaves are restricted to what exists in the subculture immediately around them."

I think this observation is right on the money. At a time when too many minority groups live in inner-city ghettos, sealed off from the mainstream culture, it seems positively counterproductive to encourage similar separatism in education. A knowledge of our common culture, and an ability to communicate in our common language, are essential to achieving financial success today, just as they have always been. Separatism denies students access to this common ground, and those students may suffer in the long run.

In short, the current vogue of multiculturalism on campus, like most such trends, has its strengths and its weaknesses. At best, it awakens us to the contributions of all people, and makes us aware that the way we live now truly is a melting pot -- an amalgam of the ways of life of people who have come to the United States from all over the world. At worst, it teaches members of one group to be blind to the achievements of others, and blind to the fact that much of what we celebrate in this country would not exist but for the interaction and cooperation of all groups.

As ASU West develops in the future, I hope that students, professors, administrators, and all those connected with the campus will bear this in mind. There is a unique opportunity here at this University -- the chance to help people from many

different backgrounds to advance their lives, and to learn what it is that has enabled us all to get this far.

Arizona is culturally a remarkably diverse state. It has a long history of Hispanic influences, an even longer history of native American cultures, with at least 14 different tribes within the state. More recently the state has seen an influx of peoples from all around the globe. I urge you not to let this opportunity slip away by glorifying what makes us different instead of building on what we have in common.

Thank you for the privilege of sharing in the dedication of this new star in Arizona's crown of educational institutions. I am sure you will make us proud.