

THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

SENATE ASSEMBLY

Minutes of Regular Meeting of 18 January 1988

ATTENDANCE

Present: Barlow, Bartholomew, Marcelo,
Alpern, Birdsall, Blane,
Borcherts, Borer, Brewer, Burdi,
Carnahan, Checkoway, Chudacoff,
Lady, Craig, Davis, Debler,
DeCamp, Diana, Dobbins, Edwards,
Floyd, Gage, Haefner, Brooks,
Hollingsworth, Hook, Hudson,
Inglehart, Kelsey, Ketefian,
Kirking, Lavoie, Lenaghan, Lomax,
Lougee, Margolis, Manis, McCarus,
McClamroch, McLaughlin, Meyer,
Meyerhoff, Miller, Moerman,
Moore, Moran, Mosher, Ness,
Cleinick, Olson, Pierce, Reed,
Rosenthal, Ross, Strang, Turner,
Whitehouse, Winn, Wiseman,
Wrobleski, Wulff, Crichton

Absent: Baird, Dandekar, Dressman,
Durrance, Eggertsen, Goldberg,
Gray, Hinton, Hutchinson,
Muirhead, Olsen, Owens, Sargous,
Scodel, Seligman, Tentler,
Warner, Weiler

Professor N. Harris McClamroch convened the meeting at 3:24
p.m.

MINUTES

The minutes of 14 December were approved as written.

MATTERS ARISING

There being no comments from the floor about the SACUA
minutes distributed with the agenda, Professor McClamroch called
attention to a minor change of format: liaison reports are now
presented in an appendix.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Professor Debler, noting that our meeting date coincided with the national commemoration of the birthday of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., asked that we stand in memory of the achievements of Dr. King and others who gave their lives in the struggle for civil rights. All rose for a moment of silence.

REMARKS BY PRESIDENT ROBBEN FLEMING

Professor McClamroch introduced President Fleming, who recalled that he had last addressed the Assembly nine years ago. He concentrated his remarks on the problem of racism. Referring to a statement by Regent Nellie Varner as the best that he had heard on the subject, he quoted her as saying that she was offended, as a graduate of Wayne State and as a Black, by some remarks that were made, even though she knew from personal acquaintance with the individuals that the remarks were not motivated by racism but were poorly stated thoughts. On the other hand she was aware of the complexity of the problems and that solving any one--poverty, urban schools, many others--will not solve the entire problem. Noting that his term as Interim President is expected to end no earlier than 1 July and no later than 1 September, President Fleming said he had decided after much consultation that this was the area in which he might best be able to make a contribution in a short time, by attempting to channel the issue into a path where rationality of discourse can be achieved. The problem is so deeply rooted in history and so emotional that we seem unable to approach it as we do other problems. He reminded us that, since most of us are white, we must all reach out to people of diverse backgrounds and make it clear that we do welcome them.

THE UNIVERSITY'S POSITION IN LEGAL REPRESENTATION OF FACULTY AND STAFF

Professor McClamroch called attention to the memorandum from John D. Ketelhut, distributed with the agenda. The memorandum gives a general statement of past practice and an illustrative list of cases. Requests have been handled on a case-by-case basis.

RULES COMMITTEE REQUEST

Professor Moran presented the recommendation, a full text of which was distributed, concerning changes in the wording of Article III, sections 4 and 5 of the Rules of the University Senate, the Senate Assembly and the Senate Advisory Committee on University Affairs. The effect would be that SACUA terms would begin on 1 May instead of 1 April, and that the election of officers would take place at the last SACUA meeting in April, instead of at the last SACUA meeting in March. The motion was moved and seconded, and carried unanimously without discussion.

"THE CHANGING FORMS OF RACISM--HISTORICAL AND CURRENT PERSPECTIVES." HAROLD R. JOHNSON, DEAN, SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK; LEMUEL A. JOHNSON, DIRECTOR, CENTER FOR AFROAMERICAN AND AFRICAN STUDIES

Introducing the two distinguished Black faculty members, Professor McClamroch noted that the topic was especially appropriate on the day officially commemorating the birthday of Martin Luther King. Professor Harold Johnson expressed sadness that racism is still so pervasive in American society and here at the University. He cited the brutalizing effects of everyday racism on minorities, provoking anger, hatred of society, self-hatred, and violence. Much racism is unintended, but nevertheless devastating. He said that almost every week a minority student comes to his office in tears because of some such remarks as "That's great work for you," or "You have exceeded my expectations." Stereotyping has especially bad effects on children. "Jimmy the Greek" recently attributed the high quality of Black athletes to some sort of genetic engineering during slavery; at least he also said they work harder. Professor Johnson commented that Blacks do make a special effort in sports because there they see role models and some hope of success; it is sad that there is not the same incentive in academics. He acknowledged that there has been progress. The Voting Rights Act has brought about a significant increase in the number of offices held by Blacks and other minorities; however, not one of the current Presidential candidates except Jesse Jackson has even one senior minority advisor on his campaign staff. At the University, opportunities have improved. We have a Black Vice-President and Vice-Provost, two Deans, but no minorities in senior positions in athletics. We have not done as much as we should to recruit and retain Black faculty and students. We must understand that this will be hard work. In conclusion, Professor Johnson urged us all to make mutual understanding a top priority. Hurling of accusations is counterproductive and only produces defensiveness.

Professor Lemuel Johnson approached the issue of racism on campus from a philosophical perspective. Black students and also Black faculty are confronted with the problem of how one functions intellectually at a university whose concepts of excellence are not negotiable. He referred to several research areas that have relevance for minorities, including some implications of medical research for Blacks (the Tuskegee syphilis experiment, the use of the Black female slave in gynecology) and the role of the availability of "disposable people and disposable places" in the development of nuclear weapons. There is a fundamental need to address racism both politically and with reference to how we define what various academic fields are. Jimmy the Greek's genetic remarks were crude, but the principles are there in Hegel and in Freud. Professor Johnson related an anecdote of a young Black man in England (where there have been Blacks since 1601) who is being

interviewed for a job by a white woman. The fact that this interview can take place at all is a linear change for the better. She asks the standard questions, including "Where were you born?" He replies, "In London." The interviewer persists, "Yes, but before that?" Without a fundamental restructuring of what we mean by knowledge, we will unavoidably continue to ask Blacks, in effect, this same question. The curriculum sometimes appears to Black students as a form of intellectual terrorism. It is difficult for them to function in a classroom where passages in, for instance, a philosophical or literary text that are distressing to them are passed over in silence, while they feel inhibited about voicing their concern in a predominantly white group. This results in a high level of tension. Simultaneously, from outside the university setting, they hear such things as remarks by Jimmy the Greek and the presumption of exclusion whenever Jesse Jackson's candidacy is mentioned. It is unfair to be still asking "Where were you born before that?" in 1988.

Professor McClamroch thanked the speakers and invited comments from the Assembly. A very thoughtful discussion followed. Professor Ross said he was bothered by a feeling that the University is lukewarm on this issue; we have so many goals individually and as an institution. Professor Hook, noting that the question of validation of knowledge poses itself especially in the humanities and social sciences, asked about mathematics and the natural sciences. Professor Lemuel Johnson said that the question of first principles could be raised here also to the extent that one is talking about patterns of cognition. He mentioned one problem in medical ethics--the tremendous concentration of excellent medical schools along the eastern corridor of the U.S. and the deplorable statistics of the delivery of health care to minorities in that region--as an instance where one should be concerned about how pure principles are applied to minorities. Professor Checkoway wondered whether, in the light of events of recent years, weeks, and days, the notion of excellence should be changed towards goodness. President Fleming responded that we are all prisoners of our backgrounds. Excellence is a many-splendored thing. We who are white tend to see all the obstacles to change. We need to sit down with people with different views and learn from them. Professor Lemuel Johnson responded that he did not accept the transition from excellence to (moral) goodness. Citing the concern of a Black student when a troublesome passage in Hegel is ignored, he said that to legitimate such a student's concern would be in pursuit of goodness, but that this would occur in the context of pursuit of an expanded form of excellence. Professor Birdsall mentioned that he had seen Lemuel Johnson frequently this year on the Budget Priorities Committee, and that he had initially assumed him to be a relatively new faculty member, whereas in fact he had been here longer than he (Birdsall) himself--this by way of illustrating how easy it is to have preconceptions. Professor Moerman said that anthropologists use the term "denaturalizing" for learning to take what one does as

being something other than perfectly natural. This is what we are being asked to do, and it is not simple. Professor McLaughlin cited the University's rewards system as a problem. She and some others at Flint work with inner city students, but this is not rewarded though it may have more impact than activities which are rewarded. Professor Winn said that we like to formulate our openness in "both-and" terms, but administrators have to make "either-or" decisions. He mentioned having excluded some texts from an English course in order to include others of interest to women and minorities. Professor Ness asked how we are to address the problems without allegations, which indeed do not help, given that we are in a political, structural situation. How do we question basic principles in an institutional setting? At this point President Fleming rose to leave, provoking friendly laughter at his seeming attempt to duck the question. Explaining that he had another meeting, he said, "If you find the answer, let me know." Professor Turner asked whether racism here is largely intentional or unintentional. Professor Harold Johnson responded that it is both, and that the two kinds require different interventions. There must be a clear proclamation of the official position of the University; once that is done, the answers to other questions become easier. He cautioned against shifting the emphasis from teaching and research to service activities, especially on the part of minority faculty, since that would make them second class citizens. Different disciplines will need different solutions, though we can learn from each other. Professor McClamroch thanked both speakers for their valuable contributions.

OLD BUSINESS

Professor Ness, apologizing for the anticlimax, presented the following motion.

"The Senate Assembly requests that the administration maintain that portion of the new travel policy concerning 'use of designated agents for University travel' as a voluntary rather than a mandatory policy."

A motion to table, and a second motion to table until the next meeting, were both defeated. The main motion carried by show of hands, with 46 in favor, none opposed, and 5 abstentions.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further Old Business or New Business, the meeting adjourned at 5:27 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Mary C. Crichton
Senate Secretary, pro tem