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SPEECHES

Statement on Proposal for Black Cultural Center 13 May, 1970

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STATEMENT BY DR. CLIFTON R. WHARTON, JR.
President, Michigan State University
On Proposal for Black Cultural Center
May 18, 1970

"The recent tragic events in Georgia and Mississippi have accelerated awareness within the University community, among both Blacks and whites, of the nature of the protracted struggle of minorities in the United States to be free of all forms of repression and discrimination. Michigan State University is deeply aware of its responsibilities in this struggle, and it has sought to be in the forefront of public institutions in developing greater educational opportunities for Black students and in being responsive to their needs on campus.

"In a new examination of the situation in the wake of the Georgia and Mississippi deaths, many individuals and groups on campus have proposed various courses of action to show their concern. Obviously, it is the Black community which feels these events most deeply, and in our efforts to help see that something constructive emerges from these tragic circumstances, we look to that community to guide us.

"The Black Liberation Front International has proposed a general meeting of the MSU Black community Tuesday afternoon and a cultural event that evening. The University administration respects the BLFI's wishes and offers its full assistance in facilitating the two meetings. University flags will continue to fly at halfmast through Tuesday as a mark of its respect for those who died at Jackson State.

"The University also is very interested in moving forward in new, meaningful endeavors which would positively affect the lives of Black students and faculty on this campus. One creative suggestion developed from recent deliberations with the Black community is the need for a meeting place and cultural headquarters for members of the Black campus community. (Those persons included in recent discussions have included the Executive Board of the BLFI (Lamar Thomas, George Flemming, Bill Powers, and Tony Martin); Professor Irving Vance, Chairman of the Black Faculty Caucus; Dr. Robert F. Green, Director, Center for Urban Affairs; Mr. Nolen Ellison, CUA; and Dr. Thomas Gunnings, Counseling Center.)

"I believe this is a very worthwhile proposal on which action has been long overdue, and which would be a permanent monument to the causes for which Blacks have lived and died.

"Consequently, I am proposing a major fund-raising drive among faculty, students and alumni to finance an off-campus Black Cultural Center. Such a center would serve as a hub for the Black community's social and student activities. Discussion regarding the type of center desired by the Black students and faculty will be initiated immediately.

"The first major step will be to secure funds for the rental of adequate space to initiate the center as rapidly as possible, pending the development of a more permanent structure. The MSU Development Fund has been asked to establish a separate account for this purpose and will receive the funds contributed. A fund-raising committee will be established to give the campaign direction.

"I am hopeful that all concerned persons in the area, whether connected with the University or not, will support this effort so that the center will be a tangible response of the total community to a determined attack against minority oppression."