

President Mary Sue Coleman Alumni Plaque Dedication Ceremony

**Alumni Center
3 p.m., September 11, 2002**

Today we have gathered for a ceremony without precedent, to honor eighteen daughters and sons of the University of Michigan, struck down by an act so notorious that we speak of it only as a date: September 11, 2001.

There are no words for the magnitude of our loss. Even those of us who are newcomers are moved to share in this time of collective bereavement. These eighteen alumni were a microcosm of our whole community. Sent out in pride and confidence as Michigan graduates, they were vibrant, energetic, caring members of their local communities, deeply involved with families, friends, and professional responsibilities. Their lives were interknit in complex ways; several worked at the same companies; three were fraternity brothers; two were mentor and protégé; many were parents of young children; one, the president of the U-M Alumni Club of New York, was an expectant father, just leaving to start a new job. One was Ethiopian; another part-Iranian; others were Asian-American, African-American, and European-American — all reflecting the rich diversity of our nation.

A year ago, all eighteen were busily at work, on planes, in the World Trade Center, and in the Pentagon. As exemplars and ambassadors of the University of Michigan, they had been called to serve in centers of American power, to share their gifts and talents with the world. And that is why this university community, here in the Midwest, experienced such a heavy loss.

Now, as we think of all that these eighteen alumni accomplished, and all that they were not allowed to accomplish, our voices fail. "Words strain, / Crack and sometimes break, under the burden, / Under the tension" — as T. S. Eliot wrote in *Four Quartets*. At this limit of language, we take comfort in silence. We draw strength from each other's presence, and we summon courage for another year's commitment to life.

In this quiet time, we are borne up by the certainty that the University of Michigan, as an institution, will not fall silent. What we as individuals cannot say, we here at the University must say as a community. We must ensure that Michigan, as foster mother, as alma mater, of the eighteen we have lost, will go on nourishing all its children with the vital sustenance of knowledge.

As a University, even on the anniversary of September 11, we must continue to frame hard questions, to give voice to the voiceless, and to piece together whatever shreds of understanding may inform our ongoing response to that unspeakable event. That is what we have done all year, and that is what we are doing today, in Ann Arbor, Dearborn, and Flint; in exhibits and concerts, in lectures and symposia, and in healing moments of silent reflection.

We also find comfort in renewing the commitment we made one year ago — even before we knew these eighteen names — when a community 15,000 strong gathered on the Diag in an outpouring of concern, to reaffirm the highest ideals of our institutional and national purpose.

In the spirit of that gathering, let us now inscribe on our hearts the names chiseled upon this tablet of remembrance. Together, let us remember Michigan's children David, Yeneneh, and Brian; her children Paul, James, and Steven; her children Darya, Todd, and Manish; her children Laurence, Stephen, and Gregory; her children Joshua, Christina, and; and her children Scott, Meredith, and Marc. As we record these names in our institutional history, may we forever entrust their living memory to our strong and diverse community, now and in the future.