



## APPENDIX 1.7

### CONFIDENTIAL CABLE FROM THE US EMBASSY IN MANILA, “MRS. MARCOS CHIDES NEW ALMA MATER,” 19 APRIL 1977

This document shows what happened when a close Marcos affiliate—Imelda Marcos, no less—was honored by the University of the Philippines during martial law. There was dissent, but it was swiftly silenced.

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To SecState WashDC 8558

C o n f i d e n t i a l Manila 5757

E.O. 11652: GDS

Tags: Pint, RP

Subject: Mrs. Marcos Chides New Alma Mater

Ref: Manila A-91, 4/14/77

1. Summary: the University of the Philippines has awarded Imelda Marcos an honorary degree. During commencement [sic] exercises the Metro Manila governor weathered a brief incident, plunging ahead with prepared speech in which she urged educated Filipinos to discard western intellectual tradition in favor of one more “thoroughly humanist”. End summary.

2. The highlight of April 17 commencement exercises at the prestigious University of the Philippines (UP) was awarding of honorary

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SUBJECT: MRS. MARCOS CHIDES NEW ALMA MATER

REF: MANILA A-91, 4/14/77

1. SUMMARY: THE UNIVERSITY OF THE PHILIPPINES HAS AWARDED IMELDA MARCOS AN HONORARY DEGREE. DURING COMMENCEMENT EXERCISES THE METRO MANILA GOVERNOR WEATHERED A BRIEF INCIDENT, PLUNGING AHEAD WITH PREPARED SPEECH IN WHICH SHE URGED EDUCATED FILIPINOS TO DISCARD WESTERN INTELLECTUAL TRADITION IN FAVOR OF ONE MORE "THOROUGHLY HUMANIST". END SUMMARY.

2. THE HIGHLIGHT OF APRIL 17 COMMENCEMENT EXERCISES AT THE PRESTIGIOUS UNIVERSITY OF THE PHILIPPINES (UP) WAS AWARDING OF HONORARY DOCTOR OF LAWS DEGREE TO MRS. IMELDA MARCOS, THE FIRST WIFE OF A PHILIPPINE PRESIDENT TO BE SO HONORED. CONFERMENT OF DEGREE AND SUBSEQUENT COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS BY MRS. MARCOS WERE WITNESSED BY PRESIDENT MARCOS, SEVERAL DOZEN UNIVERSITY AND GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS, AND 3,500 GRADUATING STUDENTS AND THEIR FAMILIES. IN PRESENTING DEGREE, UP PRESIDENT ONOFRE CORPUS CITED MRS. MARCOS' VARIOUS HUMANITARIAN PROJECTS AND METRO MANILA LEADERSHIP LAUDED HER "FELICITIOUS TRIUMPH

Figure 1. A copy of the declassified cable.

Source: US Department of State. 1977 April 19. "Mrs. Marcos Chides New Alma Mater."

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<https://aad.archives.gov/aad/createpdf?rid=87848&dt=2532&dl=1629>.

doctor of laws degree to Mrs. Imelda Marcos, the first wife of a Philippine president to be so honored. Conferment of degree and subsequent commencement address by Mrs. Marcos were witnessed by president Marcos, several dozen university and government officials, and 3,500 graduating students and their families. In presenting degree, UP president Onofre Corpus cited Mrs. Marcos' various humanitarian projects and Metro Manila leadership lauded her "felicitious triumph over tradition" and "considerable elegance and luminous grace".

3. In commencement address, Mrs. Marcos said that although UP provided intellectual leadership for national independence, it has yet to produce new breed of leaders for the more demanding task of nation building. Exception, she said, was one UP alumnus (i.e. president Marcos) who broke with tradition to halt national's social decline. Mrs. Marcos attributed "social impoverishment" of UP intellectual elite largely to too great an adherence to the western intellectual tradition, which she characterized as "so coldly analytical as to be insensitive". Warming to theme of sensitivity [sic], Mrs. Marcos said it was this quality which had brought success to her diplomatic endeavors. Alluding to her recent Libya trip, she said, "without sensitivity, the ability to feel (sic) a situation or a person...we would have failed."

4. In middle of Mrs. Marcos' address, a male student somewhere in center of crowded amphitheater began shouting repeatedly Tagalog phrase meaning "enough of this". Another male voice closer to the stage could then be heard chanting (also in Tagalog) "there is no law." Student applause, timid at first, for an instant almost drowned out Mrs. Marcos, but the chanting died down as quickly as it began. (some witnesses claim at least one student was forcibly removed from amphitheater [sic].) Remainder of speech was uneventful. Only other student reaction was much cringing, slapping of foreheads, and suppressed laughter when Mrs. Marcos referred to UP as her "new alma mater".

5. Another noteworthy feature of graduation ceremony was pointed reference by president Corpus [sic] to U.S. human rights policy. Conferring degrees on College of Law Confidential graduates, Corpus said, "In our country we do not violate human rights—not by making war in foreign lands nor through the manufacture and sale throughout the world of weapons and instruments of mass destruction."

6. Comment: Awarding of honorary degree to Mrs. Marcos, whose extravagant, overbearing style has long been bitterly criticized at UP, was taken as affront by many in the university community, and there was much brave talk about organizing some form of protest. UP

administration pushed nervously ahead, however, on theory that since the past school year was unusually quiet (see refair) now is propitious a time as any to bring Mrs. Marcos onto campus for award which she apparently has long coveted. Security was tight, with numerous intelligence operatives, many garbed in graduation gowns, scattered throughout the audience. Nevertheless, bold intrusion of Mrs. Marcos into the heartland of Philippine radicalism [sic] is indicative of Marcos' regime's confidence that they now have UP firmly under control.

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