

Ford faces fury of a college crowd

Knight News Service

ANN ARBOR (Mich.) — Vice-President Gerald Ford was shouted down yesterday by an angry University of Michigan audience when he defended President Nixon during a commencement address.

Ford, a 1935 Michigan graduate who was awarded an honorary doctor's degree at the ceremony, drew his strongest applause when he declared:

"I am proud to be a citizen of a country which can openly debate the legal and moral fitness of its highest government leaders . . ."

But a few moments later, when Ford got part way through a sentence that began, "I cannot understand how anyone can criticize the President," the audience of about 13,500 persons — which included graduates, their relatives and friends — exploded into boos, hissing and shouts of protest.

Ford had to wait for several seconds before the outburst subsided and he was able to finish the sentence:

"I cannot understand how anyone can criticize the President for taking his case to the people unless what the critic really wants is to negate the verdict of the people."

Ford was cheered when he said the transcribed conversations between Nixon and his aides "do not exactly



VICE-PRESIDENT FORD
Booed in Michigan

confer sainthood on anyone concerned . . ."

At the end, Ford received warm applause for nearly a minute as about half the audience stood. A few graduates already had walked out in protest.

From the beginning the commencement ceremony was stormy. After the graduates had filed into the arena, Steven Tolkin, a young university employe, rose from the audience to shout loudly:

"Impeach the (expletive)!"

His comment was applauded.

Just as Ford rose to

speak, six demonstrators carrying banners down an aisle began chanting: "Ford has the same idea. Impeachment isn't enough."

A man dressed in a gray flannel suit jumped into the aisle and punched a demonstrator's jaw. Security personnel broke up the fight quickly. No one was arrested.

The audience then settled down to listen to Ford, who continued to be interrupted occasionally by shouted obscenities and calls to "Tell us about Nixon."

Ford's press secretary, Paul Miltich, said the reaction was the harshest the Vice President had ever drawn.

After the speech, Ford spoke about the protest:

"I didn't pay any attention to it. You can't let something like that bother you. I just felt bad that they were disturbing the people who wanted to listen to the speech. Such behavior does not reflect the views of the American people — their feelings about civility and courtesy."