

Bates College

SCARAB

Speeches

Edmund S. Muskie Papers

9-25-1968

Dialogue with student, Rick Brody, September 25, 1968

Edmund S. Muskie

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scarab.bates.edu/msp>

Recommended Citation

Muskie, Edmund S., "Dialogue with student, Rick Brody, September 25, 1968" (1968). *Speeches*. 3.
<https://scarab.bates.edu/msp/3>

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by the Edmund S. Muskie Papers at SCARAB. It has been accepted for inclusion in Speeches by an authorized administrator of SCARAB. For more information, please contact batesscarab@bates.edu.

REMARKS BY THE HONORABLE EDMUND S. MUSKIE
DEMOCRATIC NOMINEE FOR THE VICE PRESIDENCY

Washington County Courthouse
Washington, Pennsylvania
Wednesday, September 25, 1968

(Introduction of Senator Muskie)

(Applause, cheers and boos)

(Chant of "Stop the War!")

(Voice: "Give them hell, Senator. We are on your side.)

SENATOR MUSKIE: No, I am not going to outshout anybody.

(Applause)

(VOICE: "Atta Boy!")

SENATOR MUSKIE: I have never yet made a campaign a shouting match and I don't intend to start now.

Mr. Moreno, Chairman Mike Hanna, my good friend Congressman Tom Morgan (Applause), my good friend, Senator Joe Clark (Applause), Mike Flynn (Applause), Bill Kittrick (Applause), and Ladies and Gentlemen:

I think it was nine or ten years ago that I first came to Washington and Washington County. At that time, I was a first-year Senator, and Joe Morgan had been kind enough to extend the invitation of your people here to come here to speak at a Democratic Rally. I think because of a vote on the Housing Bill at that time I was late in leaving Washington, D. C., and finally arrived here about midnight.

At that time, the speaking had stopped and the floor show had started, and I was asked to interrupt the floor show and make a speech. Now, that is about the most difficult circumstances I have ever faced --

(VOICE: "How about Chicago?")

SENATOR MUSKIE: -- for a speech-making situation; until Chicago.

(Laughter)

SENATOR MUSKIE: And thanks to you gentlemen this afternoon. I mean you really make it easy for people to speak out, express their opinion, to speak sensibly. And I want to try to do that, if you will permit me.

I found it possible to do it in my State, I found it possible to do it in every State in the country, until I came to Washington to meet the students of Washington and Jefferson College.

(Applause and cheers)

SENATOR MUSKIE: It is hard for me to believe that you are different than other Americans in opening your minds and your hospitality and your courtesies to visiting people.

(VOICE: "Say something!")

SENATOR MUSKIE: Well, that's not a bad idea. If you will give me the chance, I will try.

(Cheers and applause)

(VOICE: "You have a chance. We don't.")

(VOICE: "Let's see you do something.")

SENATOR MUSKIE: I will suggest something right now to you young gentlemen. You pick out one of your number to come up here, right now, and I'll give him 10 minutes of uninterrupted attention. There is another side of this bargain, if on your part -- and you listen to this part of the bargain -- you give me your uninterrupted attention.

(Applause)

SENATOR MUSKIE: Come up here.

(A youth mounted the platform; Applause; Chorus of "Bravo!" and "Boos.")

THE YOUTH: It's like this. All right, everybody calls us dirty and unwashed.

(Boos)

SENATOR MUSKIE: Just a minute, please. I have invited these young men to send up a spokesman and this young man is their selection.

(Applause; Chorus of "I didn't select him.")

SENATOR MUSKIE: Now, just a minute. I am not going to get involved in your choice; you choose your man.

(VOICE: "He is there.")

SENATOR MUSKIE: All right, now, just let me say to the rest of you: I said that I was willing to listen to him, and I want that all of the rest of you will listen. Because I, in turn, would like to have an opportunity to say what is on my mind. So, thank you, please.

What is your name? (to the youth)

This young man's name is Rick Brody from W and J. Now, thank you please, all of you, give him your undivided attention.

(applause)

RICK BRODY: Thank you. This is a chance we usually don't get, and I think it's fine.

You guys say we are dirty and unwashed. We are the real Americans. We love the flag just as much as anyone else. We want America to stand for what the Constitution stands for, which is, everyone in equal under the law. Which is not true in this country.

(applause and cheers)

The reason I am out here in the streets is because no one listened to us at Chicago when Sen. McCarthy showed through the primaries that 70% of the American Democratic Party was dissatisfied with President Lyndon Baines Johnson's...

(laughter)

...stand on Vietnam and domestic issues. We are here as Americans, not as Commie Pinkos, or whatever you may think, just because we have long hair. We are here to make our voice heard. Everyone in this campaign -- Nixon, Wallace, Humphrey---heard. Everyone talks about law and order. Who speaks about justice?

(applause and chorus of "right")

For too long, the American public has sat around, satisfied, keeping quiet, letting things roll along to protect the status quo, and sat around and protected their status quo. It is time these things changed.

(cheers)

Wallace is no answer. Nixon is no answer. Humphrey is no answer. Sit out this election: don't vote for president.

-\$-

Get those people elected for Senators, Congressmen, local people, who believe as you do against the war, for the poverty program, for black autonomy of the ghettos. And let them know we don't want to have a President, we don't want to have it on their terms, if Daley dictates to us who the President is going to be. If they all dictate to us who the President is going to be, we don't need that (garbled).

(Applause and cheers)

RICK BRODY: I know you are going to hear a lot of stuff, a lot of platitudes, a lot of stuff about apple pie and motherhood. That is fine. I am all in favor of apple pie and motherhood, but does it bring change, any sort of qualitative change? No.

(Boos and applause)

RICK BRODY: Wait a minute. I have got a count down here.

All right, the thing is, I am going to be in the streets. I am going to continue to be in the streets, because I am protesting this election. I am not anti-Humphrey, I am not anti-Nixon, I am not anti-Wallace: I am anti-election.

(VOICE: "Get the hell out of the country, then.")

(VOICE: "Dont't be an American.")

RICK BRODY: I am an American. I am going to vote in this election. I am going to vote for people like Paul O'Dwyer, who believes as I do. I am going to vote for Senator Clark of Pennsylvania.

(Cheers and applause)

RICK BRODY: Humphrey sold out his soul a long time ago, and whatever he says now isn't going to recompense us for anything.

(VOICE: "Where is your soul?")

RICK BRODY: I have got a lot of soul, brother.

(Applause)

(VOICE: "The minority platform was the greatest!")

RICK BRODY: I have two minutes left. I am not going to waste any time. I say freedom of speech is acknowledged in this country and since he did give us a chance to express our views,

I, for one, will keep my cool while he expresses his, whatever they are.

Thank you very much. And you can just boo me, I don't care.

(Applause, boos, and cheers)

SENATOR MUSKIE: Thank you for the moment of quiet.

I appreciate this opportunity to be here and I appreciate the willingness of Rick Brody to come here and express his views.

May I say to him, whether or not he believes it -- he asked me to believe him, he protests that we don't -- I have been listening to young people all my life. I was young once myself, whether or not you think so. And I grew up in this country the son of an immigrant parent, when that wasn't exactly the accepted social status in my part of the country.

I was born the son of parents who knew the disadvantages that came with discrimination and poverty. If you think all of these things were invented yesterday, or since you were born, you are sadly mistaken.

I have had to work all of my life. I have worked for myself, I have worked for my family, I have worked for my community, I have worked for my State, and I have worked for my country.

(Applause)

And I did so under the guidance of a father who left Russian-occupied Poland under the Czarist tyranny when he was less than 17 years old, to find the very things that Rick Brody says you are protesting to find.

He tore himself out of his home life, tore himself away from a family he was never to see again, to go into a foreign land with only five years of formal education, with a newly learned trade as a tailor, to take up life and to find opportunity for himself and for the children who were yet unborn.

And the year before he died, his son became the first Polish-American ever elected to Governor of an American State.

(Applause)

Now, that may not justify the American system to you, but it sure did to him.

(Applause)

I have been in public life almost a quarter of a century. I returned to Maine to practice law -- although I had been given offers in a New York law firm -- because it seemed to me that I could make a greater contribution to the development of my State and enjoy life in the process than I could anywhere else. Because these were my people. Maine was a backward state, economically, and it has never been as viable and progressive as other states.

And so it was natural that after the war, I should gradually become interested in politics, even though that wasn't a very likely prospect for a Democrat in a Republican State. And I ran for the Legislature in 1946, not that I wanted a political career, but because I thought one term in that Body would be an interesting and useful and exciting experience.

It was while I was serving that term that I learned something of the consequences of the absence of a competitive political system. Maine was truly a one-party state, partly because of the apathy and indifference of Democrats who had suffered too many years of defeat, and who as a consequence did stay home at election time, did decide not to participate in the political process.

Because of that decision to stay out of the political process, we in effect turned it over to an establishment which wrote into the institutions, and the state government itself, safeguards to protect their one-party domination, safeguards that still exist, safeguards that three Democratic Governors have not yet been able to persuade Republican Legislators to remove.

So, at the price of apathy and indifference. Staying away from elections is that kind of price.

I remember at our State Convention this last spring, for the first time since I have been active in the Democratic Party, we had a viable and exciting presidential contest. So there was competition for Maine's delegates to the National Convention. But, unfortunately, we did not have a representative or effective method for selecting them. Why?

The reason is that over the years, at least the last quarter of a century, people had stayed away from Democratic caucuses and stayed away from Democratic State Conventions where delegates are selected.

So that it became a problem of the handful of people who did attend to somehow find enough people who could afford to go to the National Convention City, to go and represent that State.

It became a very unrepresentative process, but not by design. It was because of the default and apathy of people who should have been participating in the electoral process and the political process all of these years.

So that finally, when we came to a situation where we should have had an effective and representative and viable electoral base for the selection of delegates, we didn't have one. We improvised. We did the best we could to insure as far representation as was possible under the circumstances. And I think we didn't do a bad job.

But now, now that we have had that experience, we will reform that process. We will make sure that hereafter delegates to national conventions as long as we have them in Maine will be based upon the franchise of Maine Democrats or Maine Republicans, depending upon which convention is involved.

(Applause)

So I say to you fellows I don't care -- well, I do in a sense -- but really it is immaterial to me from a personal way how you vote in this election. But there are three choices and take it from me, you don't really move in the directions in which you want to move by taking the position "hands-off."

(Applause)

Rick Brody has made very clear your general attitude toward all three presidential candidates, but they are not carbon copies of each other. So look them over and make your choice because this is the best way in the long run to get this country moving in the direction in which you want it to move.

Now, when we started out this whole political system we were experimenting. The theory upon which the system was based was broad participation in institutions responsive to the masses of the people. But it didn't start out that way.

You all remember that the franchise started with a property qualification. Well, the franchise has gradually been broadened in an ever-increasing expansion of the privilege for 180 years. The property qualification was dropped. Then the sex qualifications were dropped. The color qualifications were dropped long before we wrote the implementing legislation to protect the right of the Negro to vote. But the constitutional disability was removed.

So we gradually expanded the franchise and now I think we are on the threshold of extending it to 18-year olds.

(Applause)

This has been the thrust of American history and American policy for 180 years and it doesn't bear a party label. It has been the thrust of the urge of the people to create here a broadly-based democracy.

Our institutions have been responsive or can be made more responsive in the same way. At the turn of the century, there was a great revulsion against state legislatures because it was felt that they were dominated by special interests. So at the turn of the century, we had such action as initiative and referendum and the recall to make legislatures more responsive to the popular will.

In 1916 we had the constitutional amendment to require the popular election of senators, because senators were elected by legislatures dominated by selfish interests.

So there has been a constant effort to make governmental institutions more responsive to the people.

Now, we are in a new plateau here, thanks to you young people -- and I say that with all of the sincerity of which I am capable -- thanks to you, I think we are on the threshold of broadening the franchise more, of liberalizing and democratizing not only our governmental institutions, but I hope our party institutions.

But above all, I hope that we are on the threshold of an era in which the individual citizens will drop the apathy of the past and become concerned not on a one-shot basis, but a continuing basis. Not on a one issue basis, but a continuing basis. Because the kinds of problems we face to create a society in which multitudes of different kinds of human beings can live in harmony, this kind of a problem is a problem that has never been solved by any society in the whole history of man.

We thought we had it solved in 1789, but we didn't. We simply began a movement toward that objective. And now the real test comes at a time when America is crowded; at a time when America is suffering some of the ills which have plagued other crowded societies in the past; at a time when the individual citizens feels himself helpless when confronted by the great institutions, private and public, that have been developed to serve the needs of a populated country.

These institutions are understandably impersonal, understandably unresponsive, and they must be jogged into responsiveness, jogged into an awareness of the base upon which they are

built.

And so you young people have got a great opportunity here to contribute to what must be done that the rest of us have not yet been able to do. And all I want to say to you in closing is this:

It is not my purpose to belabor you, or with any argument, or any point of view or any personal view. But I want to say to you that there are those of us in this system who have worked for the objectives that I hear you voicing every day. Maybe not as effectively as we might, because of our own shortcomings and weaknesses; maybe not in the way that you would and that you will when you are given the opportunity. But don't misjudge the basic good will of this American system toward the objective of making it truly a system responsive to the needs and the will and the voice of the 200 million Americans who make up this society.

Thank you very much.

- - -