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Speeches

Edmund S. Muskie Papers

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1-11-1970

**College and Society: Repression or Reform? - Remarks by Senator Edmund S. Muskie at the 56th Annual Meeting of the Association of American Colleges, Houston, Texas**

Edmund S. Muskie

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**"COLLEGE AND SOCIETY: REPRESSION OR REFORM?"**

- 2 -

**AN ADDRESS BY SENATOR EDMUND S. MUSKIE TO THE  
56th ANNUAL MEETING OF THE ASSOCIATION OF AMERICAN  
COLLEGES, HOUSTON, TEXAS, SUNDAY, JANUARY 11, 1970,  
8:30 P.M.**

**WHO HAS NOT BEEN ON THE FIRING LINE AS A COLLEGE  
PRESIDENT THE QUESTION YOU HAVE CHOSEN AS THE SUBJECT  
FOR YOUR MEETINGS HAS A DECEPTIVE SIMPLICITY ABOUT IT.  
IN SOME WAYS, AS A POLITICIAN, I MIGHT BE WISE TO GIVE  
YOU A SIMPLE ANSWER -- REFORM, YES; REPRESSION, NO --  
AND SIT DOWN. THAT APPROACH COULD SAVE ME SOME  
TROUBLE, BUT I DOUBT THAT IT WOULD ADVANCE YOUR OWN  
DELIBERATIONS.**

**HE SAID: "BEFORE HOW YOU ARE TO CARRY A POLICE  
I AM NOT WITHOUT EXPERIENCE ON THE COLLEGE  
CAMPUSES OR WITH STUDENTS. I HAVE ENCOUNTERED  
THEM DURING AND SINCE THE 1968 CAMPAIGN AND I AM  
ENGAGED IN A FAIRLY CONSTANT DIALOGUE WITH ONE  
STUDENT IN MY OWN FAMILY.**

**AT THE SAME TIME, I AM RELUCTANT TO BE TOO  
THEY ARE NOT. THEY WANT TO BE FREE OF CAMPUS RULES  
THEY CONSIDER OUTDATED: THEY WANT TO BE FREE OF**

DOGMAIC IN MY OBSERVATIONS AND PROPOSALS FOR DEALING  
WITH THE STUDENT PROBLEM ON THE CAMPUSES. I FEAR  
A LITTLE LEARNING MAY BE A DANGEROUS THING FOR ONE  
WHO HAS NOT BEEN ON THE FIRING LINE AS A COLLEGE  
PRESIDENT. AS I HAVE CONSIDERED YOUR PROBLEMS, WHICH  
ARE REALLY OUR PROBLEMS TOO, I HAVE BEEN REMINDED OF  
EDMUND BURKE'S ATTEMPTS TO EDUCATE THE BRITISH  
GOVERNMENT ON THE IMPORTANCE OF REFORM IN DEALING  
WITH THE AMERICAN COLONIES. YOU MAY RECALL HIS  
FIRST SPEECH ON CONCILIATION WITH AMERICA, IN WHICH  
HE SAID: "REFLECT HOW YOU ARE TO GOVERN A PEOPLE  
WHO THINK THEY OUGHT TO BE FREE AND THINK THEY ARE  
NOT. YOUR SCHEME YIELDS NO REVENUE; IT YIELDS NOTHING  
BUT DISCONTENT, DISORDER, DISOBEDIENCE."  
TODAY AS I HAVE CONSIDERED YOUR PROBLEMS, WHICH  
ARE REALLY OUR PROBLEMS TOO, I HAVE BEEN REMINDED OF  
EDMUND BURKE'S ATTEMPTS TO EDUCATE THE BRITISH  
GOVERNMENT ON THE IMPORTANCE OF REFORM IN DEALING  
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NOT. YOUR SCHEME YIELDS NO REVENUE; IT YIELDS NOTHING  
BUT DISCONTENT, DISORDER, DISOBEDIENCE."

TO CONTROL THEIR OWN DESTINIES; AND THEY WANT TO BE  
FREE TO CHANGE SOCIETY SO THAT IT CONFORMS WITH  
THEIR OWN DREAMS OF WHAT A SOCIETY SHOULD BE.

IT DOES LITTLE GOOD TO TELL THE STUDENTS OF  
TODAY THAT CAMPUS RULES ARE MUCH FREER THAN THEY  
WERE WHEN WE WERE IN COLLEGE. IT DOES NOT IMPRESS  
THEM TO TELL THEM HOW RESTRICTED OUR CHOICES WERE  
DURING THE DEPRESSION AND WORLD WAR II. THEY ARE  
NOT CONVINCED BY OUR REHEARSAL OF THE DIFFICULTIES  
IN ACHIEVING MEANINGFUL CHANGE IN ANY SOCIETY.

BEING CONCERNED WITH THESE ISSUES IS NOT A  
NEW EXPERIENCE WITH COLLEGE STUDENTS. IT IS NOT A  
NEW EXPERIENCE FOR CITIZENS IN A SOCIETY. WHAT IS  
NEW, IS THE MAGNITUDE OF THE STUDENT POPULATION,  
ITS RELATIVE MOBILITY, AND ITS ACCESS TO INFORMATION  
ON WHAT IS HAPPENING ON AND OFF THE CAMPUSES IN  
THIS AND OTHER COUNTRIES.

THE FIRST STEP IN DETERMINING A PROGRAM

of <sup>3</sup> **THE IVORY TOWER HAS BEEN SHATTERED BY THE  
IMMEDIACY OF THE OUTSIDE WORLD, PORTRAYED IN LIVING  
AND MOVING COLOR ON THE TUBES OF OUR TELEVISION SETS.  
BOOKS, THEOREMS, HISTORY AND THE HONING OF INTELLEC-  
TUAL SKILLS SEEM LESS REAL THAN THE FRAGMENTARY INCI-  
DENTS OF THE DAILY NEWS. MANY OF OUR STUDENTS LACK  
A SENSE OF HISTORY AND HAVE A LIMITED CONCEPTION OF  
THE FUTURE. FOR MANY, THE FUTURE MAY NOT EXIST.**

**THE BASIC PROBLEM FOR COLLEGE ADMINISTRATORS,  
IT SEEMS TO ME, IS TO DETERMINE HOW THE INSTITUTIONS  
OF HIGHER LEARNING CAN BE MADE MORE RELEVANT TO THE  
DAY-TO-DAY EXTERNAL CONCERNS OF THE STUDENTS WITH-  
OUT DESTROYING THOSE UNIQUE QUALITIES WHICH SUCH  
INSTITUTIONS ARE SUPPOSED TO POSSESS.**

**AN INSTITUTION OF HIGHER LEARNING IS NOT  
THE COLLEGE OR THE UNIVERSITY HAS WITHIN IT  
MANY OF THE ATTRIBUTES OF THE SOCIETY AROUND IT. BUT  
IT IS NOT THAT SOCIETY AND IT IS NOT A SMALLER VERSION  
OF THAT SOCIETY. THE FIRST STEP IN DETERMINING A PROGRAM  
IS TO IDENTIFY THE NEEDS AND TALENTS FOR THE WHOLE SOCIETY.**

of  
OF REFORM IS TO DECIDE WHAT YOU WISH TO PRESERVE.  
AND WHAT YOU WISH TO PRESERVE DEPENDS ON WHAT  
YOU PERCEIVE TO BE THE NATURE OF YOUR EDUCATIONAL  
INSTITUTIONS. AT THE RISK OF OVER-STEPPING MY COM-  
PETENCE I WOULD LIKE TO SUGGEST THREE PRINCIPAL  
FUNCTIONS WHICH THE COLLEGE OR UNIVERSITY MUST  
PERFORM.

1. IT IS A COMMUNITY OF SCHOLARS ENGAGED  
IN A SEARCH FOR A VARIETY OF TRUTHS. AS SUCH, IT  
MUST PROVIDE SOME INSULATION FROM THE HARASSMENTS  
AND DISTRACTIONS OF THE OUTSIDE WORLD AND ADEQUATE  
FACILITIES FOR RESEARCH, CONTEMPLATION, AND THE  
EXCHANGE OF IDEAS.

2. AN INSTITUTION OF HIGHER LEARNING IS JUST  
THAT. IT MUST PROVIDE TEACHERS WHO CAN AND DO  
TEACH.

3. A COLLEGE OR UNIVERSITY IS A RESOURCE OF  
IDEAS AND TALENT FOR THE WHOLE SOCIETY.

**IDEALLY, THE COLLEGE OR UNIVERSITY SHOULD DEVELOP AN APPROPRIATE BALANCE BETWEEN THESE THREE FUNCTIONS. IF IT IS TOO MUCH A COMMUNITY OF SCHOLARS AND NOT ENOUGH A TEACHING INSTITUTION, STUDENTS WILL FIND THEMSELVES SHUT OUT AND TURNED OFF. IF IT IS TOO MUCH A TEACHING INSTITUTION AND NOT ENOUGH A COMMUNITY OF SCHOLARS, THE CALIBER OF THE FACULTY WILL DIMINISH VERY RAPIDLY. IF IT IS TOO MUCH A RESOURCE FOR THE OUTSIDE COMMUNITY, BOTH THE INTELLECTUAL LIFE OF THE CAMPUS AND THE CALIBER OF TEACHING WILL SUFFER.**

**MUCH OF THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR ACHIEVING THAT BALANCE RESTS WITH THE COLLEGE ADMINISTRATORS. THERE IS, HOWEVER, A PUBLIC RESPONSIBILITY TO WHICH WE HAVE NOT DEVOTED SUFFICIENT ATTENTION.**

**RESEARCH HAS ON THE ALLOCATION OF UNIVERSITY RESOURCES.**

WE HAVE USED PUBLIC FUNDS IN A VARIETY OF WAYS TO SUPPORT COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES, BUT BECAUSE OF THE LONG-TIME OPPOSITION TO FEDERAL SUBSIDIES, WE HAVE TENDED TO GO THE BACK DOOR ROUTE. THIS HAS BEEN PARTICULARLY TRUE OF GRANTS AND CONTRACTS FOR RESEARCH ON BEHALF OF THE GOVERNMENT AGENCIES. IT GOES TO THE QUESTION OF HOW THE UNIVERSITY'S OUTSIDE PROMISEMENT THAT RESEARCH HAS NOT, IN ALL CASES, CONTRIBUTED TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE ON THE CAMPUS. CONTROVERSIES ON THE CAMPUSES OVER DEFENSE DEPARTMENT RESEARCH CONTRACTS HAVE HIGHLIGHTED THE PROBLEM. PART OF THE CONTROVERSY RELATES TO THE NATURE OF THE RESEARCH WHICH FACULTY MEMBERS HAVE UNDERTAKEN AND WHICH UNIVERSITY INSTITUTES HAVE ORGANIZED, BUT THE QUESTION GOES BEYOND SPECIFIC RESEARCH TOPICS TO THE EFFECT THAT SUCH RESEARCH HAS ON THE ALLOCATION OF UNIVERSITY RESOURCES. JUDGMENT AS TO WHETHER THE GRANTS OR CONTRACTS ARE FOR PURPOSES CONSISTENT WITH THE NEEDS AND GOALS OF THE UNIVERSITY.



WHEN STUDENTS FIND THEMSELVES SHORT-CHANGED BE-  
CAUSE THEIR PROFESSORS ARE ENGAGED IN PROJECTS UNRELATED  
TO THEIR EDUCATIONAL NEEDS, THEY HAVE A RIGHT TO RESENT THE  
SYSTEM AND TO DEMAND REFORM. THEIR DEMAND FOR RELEVANCE  
IN UNIVERSITY PROGRAMS GOES NOT ONLY TO THE QUESTION OF THE  
RELATIONSHIP OF THE UNIVERSITY TO THE OUTSIDE WORLD. IT GOES  
TO THE QUESTION OF HOW THE UNIVERSITY'S OUTSIDE INVOLVEMENT  
AFFECT ITS INTERNAL OBJECTIVES.

IT IS NOT ENOUGH TO CRITICISE UNIVERSITY ADMINISTRA-  
TORS AND FACULTIES FOR SUCH DISTORTIONS IN THEIR PROGRAMS.  
IF ADEQUATE FUNDS ARE NOT PROVIDED TO FINANCE FACILITIES AND TO  
TO PAY TEACHERS' SALARIES, ONE TECHNIQUE OR ANOTHER WILL BE  
USED TO PAY THE COSTS. AND UNDER THOSE CIRCUMSTANCES, THE  
ACCEPTANCE OR REJECTION OF GRANTS AND CONTRACTS WILL BE DE-  
TERMINED LARGELY BY FINANCIAL NEED AND NOT BY INDEPENDENT  
JUDGMENT AS TO WHETHER THE GRANTS OR CONTRACTS ARE FOR PUR-  
POSES CONSISTENT WITH THE NEEDS AND GOALS OF THE UNIVERSITY.

REFORM IN THE WAY WE SUPPORT EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS CANNOT BE ACHIEVED BY MEMBERS OF CONGRESS OR PUBLIC OFFICIALS ALONE. UNIVERSITY ADMINISTRATORS WILL HAVE TO COME TO GRIPS WITH THIS PROBLEM, ANALYZE ITS RAMIFICATIONS, AND MAKE RECOMMENDATIONS TO THOSE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF FEDERALLY SUPPORTED PROGRAMS.

ONE OF THE MOST TROUBLESOME ASPECTS OF BRINGING ABOUT REFORM IN THIS OR OTHER AREAS IS THE TRAUMATIC IMPACT OF PROTESTS AND CONFRONTATIONS ON THOSE WHO ARE ATTEMPTING REFORM. THERE COMES A POINT IN CONFRONTATION WHEN CHANGE FOR THE SAKE OF CHANGE BECOMES A DOMINANT NOTE. AT SUCH A TIME THE OBJECT OF REFORM IS FREQUENTLY LOST TO SIGHT. THEN AMBROSE BIERGE'S DEFINITION OF REFORM BECAUSES APPROPRIATE: "A THING THAT MOSTLY SATISFIES REFORMERS OPPOSED TO REFORMATION."

WATER." THAT OBSERVATION MAY OFFER SOME CONSOLATION TO

THOSE OF YOU WHO FEEL YOU HAVE BEEN IN HOT WATER FOR SOME  
TIME. THERE IS NO SIMPLE FORMULA FOR DEALING WITH THE  
PROBLEM OF CONFRONTATION. WHEN REDRESS OF GRIEVANCES  
IS DELAYED, SUCH CONFRONTATION IS INEVITABLE. WHEN AD-  
MINISTRATORS DO NOT INSIST ON THE PROTECTION OF THE  
RIGHTS OF EACH MEMBER OF THE COLLEGE COMMUNITY THE  
EFFECT OF THE CONFRONTATION IS AN UGLY DISTORTION OF THE  
AND LOSS OF REASON IN THE CONDUCT OF HUMAN AFFAIRS. IN TOO  
INSTITUTION.  
MANY INSTANCES IN THE LAST SEVERAL YEARS, ON THE CAMPUSES AND  
IN THE COUNTRY THE SUREST METHOD OF ACHIEVING LASTING REFORM  
WILL BE INEVITABLY SOME FORM OF DEMOCRATIC PROCEDURE.  
IT IS NOT ALWAYS THE SIMPLEST APPROACH, AND IT IS NEVER THE  
EASIEST. IT IS, HOWEVER, THE MOST DURABLE.  
FROM FACULTY, FROM INDIVIDUAL STUDENTS AND ORGANIZATIONS OF STUDENTS,  
I AM REMINDED OF FISHER AMES'S OBSERVATION: "A MON-  
ARCHY IS A MERCHANTMAN WHICH SAILS WELL, BUT WILL SOMETIMES  
STRIKE ON A ROCK, AND GO TO THE BOTTOM; A REPUBLIC IS A RAFT  
WHICH WILL NEVER SINK, BUT THEN YOUR FEET ARE ALWAYS IN THE  
WATER." THAT OBSERVATION MAY OFFER SOME CONSOLATION TO

THOSE OF YOU WHO FEEL YOU HAVE BEEN IN HOT WATER FOR SOME  
TIME, YOU MAY NOT BE SO BADLY OFF AS YOU THOUGHT, AND  
YOUR CAPACITY FOR SURVIVAL MAY BE GREATER THAN YOU ANTAG-  
ONISTS HAD SUPPOSED.  
IMPLEMENTATION.

IN THE FINAL ANALYSIS, THE MOST IMPORTANT REFORM MAY  
BE THE REINFUSION OF AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE IMPORTANCE  
AND USES OF REASON IN THE CONDUCT OF HUMAN AFFAIRS. IN TOO  
MANY INSTANCES IN THE LAST SEVERAL YEARS, ON THE CAMPUSES AND  
IN THE POLITICAL ARENA, EMOTIONAL ATTACKS, VERBIC AND DIS-  
TORTED RHETORIC HAVE TAKEN THE PLACE OF UNDERSTANDING AND A  
SEARCH FOR REASONABLE SOLUTIONS. SUCH MOVES HAVE COME FROM  
THE LEFT AND FROM THE RIGHT. THEY HAVE COME FROM STUDENTS,  
FROM FACULTY, FROM INDIVIDUAL CITIZENS AND OFFICIALS IN HIGH  
PLACES. IN PRACTICALLY EVERY CASE THEY HAVE BEEN PRESENTED  
UNDER THE GUISE OF "WHAT'S BEST FOR THE COUNTRY."

OUR SOCIETY NEEDS MANY CHANGES. THE DREAMS WE HAVE  
PROCLAIMED HAVE NOT ALWAYS BEEN ACHIEVED.

THE YOUNG HAVE GOOD REASONS FOR QUESTIONING THEIR PERSPECTIVE,  
IF IT IS SEVERED IN THEM AS A SORT OF BUSINESS. BY ALLOWING TO  
CONVINCE WE HAVE TALKED OF PEACE, AND ALLOWED OURSELVES TO  
BECOME MORE DEEPLY EMBROILED IN WAR, AND DISSATISFACTION  
WITH THE PRESENT AND OUR DETERMINATION TO WORK FOR CHANGE.

WE HAVE TALKED OF HUMAN RIGHTS, AND DELAYED THEIR  
IMPLEMENTATION. THE WASHINGTON COLUMNIST AND SOCIAL CRITIC, NICHOLAS  
VON HOFFEN, HAS RECENTLY THAT "BY NOW WE SHOULD ALL BE OLD  
ENOUGH TO

WE HAVE PROFESSED OUR DEVOTION TO CONSERVATION  
AND THE PROTECTION OF THE ENVIRONMENT, AND FOULED OUR  
LAND, WATER AND AIR.

WE HAVE SAID WE BELIEVE IN YOUTH, BUT TOLD THEM NOT  
TO PUSH TOO HARD FOR THE THINGS IN WHICH THEY BELIEVE.

REFORM AND REPRESSION BECAUSE WE HAVE NOT DISCIPLINED OURSELVES  
TO WORK AT SOLVING OUR PROBLEMS. WE BELIEVE ON OUR AFFLUENCE AND  
OUR GOOD WILL TO OVERCOME ALL PROBLEMS. IT HADN'T WORKED.

NOW WE KNOW THAT OUR RESOURCES ARE LIMITED, THAT GOOD  
WILL WITHOUT COMMITMENT IS HOLLOW, AND THAT COMFORT WITHOUT CONCERN  
WILL GUARANTEE UNREST. OUR PRESENT DISCOMFORT CAN BE THE BEGINNING  
OF NEW INSIGHT, IF WE ARE WILLING TO BE HONEST WITH OURSELVES AS TO WHAT  
WE REALLY WANT, CLARIFY ABOUT THE GOALS BY A LIBERAL EDUCATION, AND  
DETERMINED TO TEACH THE MEANING OF FREEDOM BY OUR OWN EXAMPLE.

THE YOUNG HAVE GOOD REASON TO QUESTION THEIR BIRTHRIGHT, IF IT IS OFFERED TO THEM AS A SET OF PROMISES. IF WE INTEND TO CONVINCE THEM OF THE VALUE OF ORDERLY CHANGE, CARRIED OUT THROUGH DEMOCRATIC PROCEDURES WE MUST DEMONSTRATE OUR OWN DISSATISFACTION WITH THE PRESENT AND OUR DETERMINATION TO WORK FOR CHANGE.

THE WASHINGTON COLUMNIST AND SOCIAL CRITIC, NICHOLAS VON HOFFMAN WROTE RECENTLY THAT "BY NOW WE SHOULD ALL BE OLD ENOUGH TO KNOW THAT PEACE AND VIRTUE ARE REALIZABLE ONLY THROUGH FORESIGHT, PLANNING, PRACTICE AND WORK." HE WAS REFERRING TO THE TENDENCY OF TOO MANY YOUNG PEOPLE--AND DOTING ELDERS--TO ASSUME THAT GOALS COULDBE REACHED BY WANTING THEM. HIS CRITICISM CAN BE APPLIED JUST AS EASILY TO OUR WHOLE SOCIETY.

WE HAVE COME TO THE POINT OF HAVING TO CHOOSE BETWEEN REFORM AND REPRESSION BECAUSE WE HAVE NOT DISCIPLINED OURSELVES TO WORK AT SOLVING OUR PROBLEMS. WE RELIED ON OUR AFFLUENCE AND OUR GOOD WILL TO OVERCOME ALL PROBLEMS. IT HASN'T WORKED.

ENGAGED IN  
NOW WE KNOW THAT OUR RESOURCES ARE LIMITED, THAT GOOD WILL WITHOUT COMMITMENT IS HOLLOW, AND THAT COMFORT WITHOUT CONCERN WILL GUARANTEE UNREST. OUR PRESENT DISCOMFORT CAN BE THE BEGINNING OF NEW INSIGHT, IF WE ARE WILLING TO BE HONEST WITH OURSELVES AS TO WHAT WE REALLY WANT, CLEAR ABOUT THE GOALS OF A LIBERAL EDUCATION, AND DETERMINED TO TEACH THE MEANING OF FREEDOM BY OUR OWN EXAMPLE.