

Bates College

**SCARAB**

---

Congressional Records

Edmund S. Muskie Papers

---

2-2-1970

## **Foreword by Senator Edmund S. Muskie to Shadows Over The Land by J. J. McCoy**

Edmund S. Muskie

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

---

Foreword by Senator Edmund S. Muskie  
To SHADOWS OVER THE LAND by J. J. McCoy  
Submitted to The Seabury Press  
January 19, 1970

---

3/2

Since Benjamin Franklin's time, men have debated the blessings and the dangers of technological progress.

In 1843 Henry David Thoreau said of machines: "They insult nature. Every machine, or particular application, seems a slight outrage against universal laws. How many fine inventions are there which do not clutter the ground?"

Unhappily, perhaps, a different thought prevailed—one expressed in 1909 by city planners Daniel Burnham and Edward H. Bennett in these words: "The rapidly increasing use of the automobile" would promote "good roads and (revive) the roadside inn as a place of rest and refreshment. With the perfection of this machine and the extension of its use, out of door life is promoted, and the pleasures of suburban life are brought within reach of multitudes of people who formerly were condemned to pass their entire time in the city."

With the benefit of hindsight, which view would we say was nearer the truth?

This much--surely--we know: that unless we change our ways, the price is one that threatens man's survival.

This, I believe, is the reason environmental protection has become such an important social and political issue.

It is important because the threat is real and present. It is important because it strikes at some cherished illusions about our society and about ourselves. It is important because the world which our children will inherit is in serious trouble.

The pollution problem is not new. Ancient societies sensed it. The Romans grappled with it. The British were plagued with it when they tried to use sea coal. Well over a century ago Thoreau was warning us against damage to the natural resources of New England.

But until very recently, man has been willing to accept pollution as "the price of progress." Now he is not certain that "progress" is worth the price.

Lord Ritchie-Calder observed recently that "the great achievements of Homo Sapiens become the disaster-ridden blunders of unthinking man--poisoned rivers and dead lakes, polluted with the effluents of industries which give something called 'prosperity' at the expense of posterity."

Americans today, young and old, are putting more stock in posterity than in the general dream of prosperity. They have

been frightened by the prospect of nuclear war and appalled by the destruction of conventional war. Their confidence has been undermined by the findings about cigarettes and health, the side-effects of certain drugs, the long-term damage of pesticides and insecticides, and the potential hazards of diet-sweeteners which are supposed to keep you slim and trim.

They have learned a great deal about these threats through the media from television specials and newspaper and magazine articles, and even from advertisements placed by companies eager to prove how concerned they are about the environment.

As always, men and women will lash out against the obvious threats to their health and well-being. They will attack nuclear power plants and oil refineries, paper mills and automobile factories, tanneries and steel mills. At the same time, unfortunately, very few will ask questions about their own demand for electrical energy, for fuel, for paper, for automobiles, shoes and steel products. Very few will question the damage they are causing as part of a consumption-oriented society.

We must understand that we cannot afford everything under the sun. Our technology has reached a point in its development where it is producing more kinds of things than we really want, more kinds of things than we really need, and more kinds of things than we can really live with. The time has come to face the realities of difficult choices.

We will turn the tide of pollution only if we successfully translate concern into action and rhetoric into financial commitment. If apathy evaporates, the roadblocks to effective control of the past need not be the roadblocks of the future.

\*\*\*\*\*