

"A TIME FOR PRAGMATISM, PASSION, AND PROMISE"

Recently, a group of students at Webster gave a program for Family Weekend which they called "Kaleidoscope, A Multi-Media Glimpse into Webster College." I really hope that the kaleidoscope is an appropriate image to express the structure of Webster. In some ways I see it as a good image of the structure that is emerging today out of all the seeming anarchy we are experiencing in this nation today, both in the general sense of the body politic and very intensely in the body politic we call higher education. I remember playing with a toy kaleidoscope as a little girl and being fascinated with the unity and integrity of the moving patterns that were always patterns but never the same pattern.

Let me suggest first that each of us must try to get some insight into the history of the movements that are both wracking and vitalizing our campuses today. Each of us will tend to see that history--both in the span of centuries and in the span of a decade--in substantially different ways. Indeed, we have finally begun to realize in education that we must have students at all levels read many views of history if they are at all to pierce through the personal biases of others to achieve subjectively their own objective views even centuries later.

It seems to me that students across the nation in various ways are all concerned with a kind of opposition to what they call the system, to what they call the establishment. The real question is whether they are in opposition to the very notion of any system, the very notion of any establishment, to the very notion of structure of any kind. There are, I believe, within the movements, people who are quite honestly against any notion of structure, any institutionalization. Intellectually, I have no sympathy with that

position, though I would fight to the death for their right to speak and to lobby even for that system of non-system.

It is obvious that the students in our world today are potentially at least in instant communication with students everywhere else. St. Louis area students can communicate through television, newspapers, and other over-ground and underground channels with students in Russia, in Paris, in Tokyo, with students at Columbia and San Francisco State, at Brandeis and Swarthmore. Because you are in instant communication with students all over the world, you are in a continuing kind of communion with students all over the world. And so we have a pressure cooker, if you will, of the whole world universe, where what happens at San Francisco State, known partially by students at Washington University or Webster College, has an influence on them and on students in Tokyo and on students everywhere. And I would say that that is a good thing. We in the university world have always maintained that knowledge is never dangerous. In the face of knowledge hitting us in the face, in the face of sometimes being unable to cope with instant communication, we must not chain the new bibles to the old stands. We must realize and declare the value of this kind of instant communication, this kind of developing world communion. It is very difficult to handle. It is as difficult to cope with as are competing political systems on the universal level. Even when small children take their first steps outside the family, they are not as easy to manage as they were when they knew only the dogmas and the support of their own family unit. We must be grateful in a sense that this world-wide communication has developed even though we know that it will take our lifetimes to begin to understand it and transform our systems to accommodate it.

Next, I want to suggest from my point of view, what I see as some of the obvious causes of the great disruption that has hit us in the last two

or three years. I agree, I think, with the prevailing opinion that the unrest about the Vietnam War has been the immediate cause. Not only the polarization of the militarist and the pacifist, the hawk and the dove; but also the shifting ambiguities about the Vietnam War in all sectors of the population over the last few years. All this has been an immediate cause, perhaps the most important single cause of the eruption, but not the deep underlying cause. Everything that has affected the student; the disruption of their lives, everything symbolized by the fight over the draft, all of these things have begun to move in on students. Most of us who were college age during the Second World War simply took for granted that everybody who was going was heroic. At least the general population had no questions, no ambiguities about that Second World War, and we were not nearly so tormented.

Wherever one stands, I think, on the Vietnam War, it is still important to realize the degree of unrest that has been caused in this age group by this very real ambiguity. But deeply under that, is the whole question, which I think the younger people have had in a very deep sense and which some of us share, about the developing international policy of the United States of America since that Second World War. The students have great trouble understanding that other kind of isolationism which was characteristic of the United States in the thirties, the kind of isolationism that you and I have to live with when we realize we were alive and I was not quite their age during the perpetrations of Nazi Germany when we did nothing and nobody else did anything. I believe passionately that one does not understand what one reads in history books the way one understands what he feels in his own guts and in his own heart. And so some of us are trying to live with those guilts of the thirties even as we try to analyze the degree to which our kind of benevolent political and economic imperialism is indeed an imperialism or the degree to which it is a concern as our brother's keeper. And so,

in a sense, the students realize the present ambiguity more easily than it is possible for most of us to realize it. At the same time, because they don't have our kind of lifeline, they cannot bring the same degree of ambiguity to the past that is our anguishing overlay to the present one.

Where does all of this focus itself in higher education? It focuses itself in higher education in a special way even though it is not directly in the field of higher education. Today's students are honestly concerned over the world order which they are only beginning to understand and to appreciate. I am utterly convinced that their concern is orders of magnitude greater than was ours. I came from a background which was very much like the background of many of the young men and young women at Webster today. I am simply saying that if you take a cross-section group from similar groups today and twenty years ago (not a Harvard intellectual group twenty years ago and a provincial sub-set today, but similar groups) it seems to me that the degree of concern, the degree of skepticism of this generation is orders of magnitude greater than a relative degree of concern and skepticism in my own.

How do many of our students view higher education? At their most cynical they see higher education as the ladder to the system in the establishment. They have lived in a fairly affluent society and they do not know what it is to be poor by old standards. But they still see, and perhaps all the more see, the world of higher education as the way that will make them financially independent so that they can sock the establishment in the face. They see higher education as the defender-preserver of the system, of the establishment. I think we ought to admit that it is. And I admit proudly that it is that, but that it cannot be only that. Higher education in the Western World has been the preserver of the history of the culture and of Western civilization and of Christianity. But it is not enough for it to be the preserver of Western civilization and Christianity. It must, I

believe, continue to be the preserver of tradition and culture. It must even defend their right to preservation, but it must not be a "defender of the faith" in the old sense either in the church or in the body politic. Students see higher education as the citadel of tradition, but they also realize somehow that it has traditionally been a citadel of dissent, the center of looking toward the future, the center of denying some of the "truths" of the past in order to assert the emerging truth of the future. At the same time, the students in these institutions have begun to move, by our permissivism, into the making and shaping of those universities. These are the young people whom we have raised up to question, to whom we have said, "You must be intellectual, you must be concerned." They have begun to take us at our word. They have begun to assert themselves. They have seen the movement of the masses into higher education. The United States has at least begun to realize that where you were born or out of what economic strata you were born shall not determine your entrance into a good college or university anymore than it should determine your entrance into a good third grade. Many students recognize that economic need in the United States says that the masses have to go to colleges and universities. First of all, anything one does in a highly technological, bureaucratic, sophisticated society is going to take more and more sophistication of one kind or another. People moving in that society are going to need tools, need insights, need the ability to learn to learn. (Some students, some faculty, and some administrators question seriously the competence of much of traditional education in providing those tools, those insights, that ability to learn to learn.)

Many students recognize also, as you and I recognize, that we cannot afford to have great numbers of them on the labor market; we cannot afford to have great numbers of them "earning their living." Most of their

grandfathers and many of their fathers were economic adults at eighteen and were, therefore, accepted as adults by traditional society. A society geared toward longer and longer education, for the reasons I have already stated or for other reasons you may perceive, is forcing our eighteen to twenty-five year-olds to remain economically adolescents, dependent on family or university benefaction for their personal and professional livelihood.

This generation of students has been reared and educated in the most permissive culture our nation has ever known. Ironically, I submit it has also been the most dependent culture our nation has ever known. Their "freedom" is dependent almost entirely on the willingness of parents and other authorities to go on supporting them. But parents and philanthropic granters of fellowships determine their support--understandably and perhaps rightly so--by their general approval of students' "free" choices.

I believe that it is critical that we begin immediately to make this generation of students economically independent of parents, economically independent of college administrators, economically independent of the Ford Foundation; and, in a functional way, economically independent of state and federal legislators. Whether it be guaranteed income for college students, or a massive G-I bill-type subsidy for all college students, we must make them financially independent units who personally bear the consequences of their own economic decisions. I submit that unless we face this fact, we are headed for continuing anarchy, for continuing chaos. Unless we face this fact, we will continue to have to deal with students on any and all issues, and they will never have to face personally the consequences of their own decisions. Students have seen the academic intellectuals within the faculty for the first time in history begin to have as a group a concern for social justice, to move from the pure academic theoretical concern to the activist and even actionist concern in the tactical world of the political

sector. Professors were in the early freedom rides. A few professors have been in the forefront of political and economic change in the United States. But many of those professors, often like the students themselves (and like myself) went into this social-political sector with no real background, no effective experience in decision making. We entered often from the position of armchair critics who have never played nor coached the game. It is easy on a Monday morning after a famous Sunday to qualify one's opinion of Joe Namath. Even sports writers have to face their pre-game judgments in the light of the game. What I want us to consider is not only our reevaluation from the armchair, but our deeper realization that the armchair is not the game, that none of us even now has the experience of Joe Namath or the poor coach of the Baltimore Colts. None of us was facing each individual player in the game, forced to make decisions that could not be made again, but only modified as the game went on. The Baltimore Colts--and the sportswriters--cannot modify what they did until next year and then will never modify what they did but only what they are going to do in the light of that Sunday afternoon.

It seems to me that a college president, a conceptual planner for Monsanto, a Bishop of a Diocese, a president of the United States, a man in the U. N. is always in this position. In some way, so are the students. Unless they have the experience of living with the consequences of decisions they make (not merely the review and protest of the consequences of the decisions board members make or presidents make or faculty committees make) unless we continue to find ways that they make decisions and they live in concrete areas with the consequences of those decisions, many of them will, I believe, become more and more naive, more and more arrogant, and more and more impossible to live within themselves. They will continue to carry placards about the Vietnam war, about investment portfolios in South Africa, and about instant changes in the curriculum. And many of them won't even

know whether or not the placards they are carrying have been well thought out or not. They may quickly decide to carry a new kind of placard tomorrow. Most of them don't really believe that we are going to let them into the decision-making process. I held a meeting with a militant group in great controversy in the college in December. I wanted them to elect two students to a committee which was going to interview a person for a job. They refused out-of-hand to join the committee, and they were honest. They said that the reason they wanted to stay off the committee was that they wanted to stay in a position of being able to ride the guy out on the rails two months from now if they didn't like him. And that to me is the heart of the question. I would say, at the point of being ridden out on the rails myself, that I will not willingly yield to them that kind of freedom, because it is fascist. Because if indeed I yield to them a freedom in which they have no responsibility in making a decision but in which they hold ipso facto right from the body politic to move in and make me play the queen of hearts in chopping off the head of anyone they might be against momentarily, we violate human rights at the deepest level. And we simply invert, it seems to me, the mistake of the unfinished business of centuries. Instead of an autocrat at the top arbitrarily telling everybody what to do, we permit any instant group, self-established as a plebiscite democracy, to turn the authority figure into a fascist, this time into a fascist rubber stamp: a fascist rubber stamp that can intervene and do away with the due process of law. This, I believe is the most critical dilemma we are facing in higher education and in the body politic in our world today.

The question haunting society is whether or not the individual at all controls his own destiny. Every person in this audience, if he or she is bright, has asked that question. The father thought to be most conservative by his daughter or son asks that question all the time. The long beard or the clean-shaven asks that question as it relates to him personally. Each



of us wants to have some control over, not our destiny, but my destiny. Each of us is self interested in a lovely and beautiful and real way. But where do we get control over our own destiny in a world that is going to have to get bigger and bigger, more and more bureaucratic. If there is any hope at all that the world community includes a North and South Vietnam and Biafra, as well as Webster Groves and Paris, then there is only a world community coming somewhere, a world-government coming somewhere. Even the unfinished business of the United States was to make a little world community out of a lot of fractured communities. And the reason we have a pretty big bureaucracy is because we haven't got a lot of fractured states.

We have to keep learning how to deal with a big community. I resent out of hand the assumption that a world community in the international sense or in the sense of Washington University or of Webster College can be run like a town meeting. I am as fearful of my destiny or your destiny being controlled by a benevolent matriarch or patriarch. I think the first condition is no better than the second perhaps even worse. What we are really crying out for is the right to richness, the right to difference. If we believe in the right to richness and the right to difference, I would maintain that it is as inconsistent for a person forcefully to obstruct someone else from registering for the military draft or from taking a job with Dow Chemical, as it is for someone else forcefully to intervene outside the legal process with the person who is protesting against those things. If we really believe that none of us is infallible, if we really believe that no man or no group of men ever has the absolute answer, then dissent has got to be there. But the dissenters in recognizing the mistakes society has made, cannot assume, as a radical group, the new kind of divine right of Kings, and by sitting in my office, or by commanding the switchboard, or by any other kind of rule, make their own reign of terror over the community. The French

Revolution in its way gave us a glimpse into that kind of rule. The American process with all its mistakes, with all its unfinished business, is probably the best we have yet done because it preserves better than most the right of enterprise of the human mind, the right for an individual to think what he wants to think, to express what he wants to express.

I know that the radical groups today are very very concerned that they assert their new kind of social justice tomorrow. But, if that is possible, then it becomes possible also for others to assert what they see as their kind of social justice tomorrow. The world was open to Joe McCarthy and Bull Conner and will be again if it is open to the fascist left. It is this that I think we have to communicate. I don't think we will communicate it by speeches very much at all. The student newspaper a couple of weeks ago said that not many students at Webster College are affected by Miss Grennan's rhetoric. I think I knew that long before they did. Rhetoric at best can be a description of one's own experience, a limited attempt to give somebody in a verbal communication where we stand as a result of experience. No student can believe or disbelieve what I believe in any way, unless he or she had had the opportunity and the necessity to face something like the same sets of decisions, not the same decisions, but the kinds of decisions that I have had to make. And so we are indulging in pure rhetoric unless we are all the time trying to maneuver the situation, not to create the thing they must do, but to create a situation in which they must decide what to do, and in which they must live with the consequences of what they do. Unless this is possible, our rhetoric is indeed sounding brass and tinkling symbols. Our rhetoric at best can be only a filter through which they say at some time, "My God, maybe that is what she meant." I know that that is what I have been doing at the best moments of my own life. The old joke, "It's amazing how bright Dad has gotten in the last five years," like

many homely truths, has an important insight in it. The experience we are getting is being used against a filter.

It is because I believe one must learn to make decisions by making decisions, the consequences of which one must personally bear that I will fight to the death against a town-meeting approach in running a college or running a country. A town-meeting on every issue turns us all by majority vote into a new military logistic. More and more I would like to see us work out ways that the decisions affecting groups of people be made by the smallest number possible. As often as possible I would like to see that number be one. I have been arguing for many years against the notion of a college or university as a closed, self-contained community. No student's life should be lived under my domination. As soon as I say that, students begin protesting that I deliver tomorrow. Instead I have said, "Let us open the question, let us see whether we can help in our years to design a community in which it is possible for students to have options. There is no where else in the world where a young person or old person lives under one authority.

We made a first step this semester by breaking the compulsory food package for resident students. I meet students in the grocery store now shopping with a real sense of economy. They tell me that it is amazing how many things you can warm up and how many things are not so expensive. The seniors coming to my house for dinner this semester announce that they really look forward to the assurance of something other than hamburgers for the fifth day this week. But the only alternative we gave them before, in what we call a learning situation, was to walk through the cafeteria door and to condemn us if we didn't give them more than three good choices in the twenty meals we required them to eat in our cafeteria. They had nothing to live with but the food manager's choices. And so their only choice was

to protest against someone else.

Our students grew up in a generation in which they drove cars legally at sixteen. This, if nothing else, gave them privacy, total privacy, and we are fools if we don't realize that fact. And still, in our colleges and universities, we try to manufacture worlds in which we supervise their so-called privacy, and they don't have to face their own decisions in determining their moral codes. They can focus so much of their energy on whether or not they are beating our system, (even as they are rebelling against our system) that they never have to face or evaluate their own moral choices. We keep meeting their demands about parietals instead of releasing them to a plurality of choices in making lease arrangements for their own housing.

I don't at all think these kinds of things can be done overnight. But I think we have to begin to distribute decision making. Even our faculty is beginning to be convinced that money that is spent on one thing cannot be spent on another. They are even beginning to realize that small classes probably mean lower salaries, and they have got to decide which priority is more critical for quality teaching and learning. Decisions that involve certain people have got to be made intensely by those people. Let me indulge in passionate rhetoric, if only as a possible echoing filter for you. When you are protesting for the right to enter superficially into every decision, that means that anybody has the right to enter into or intervene in your decision and to control your life. In such a system, every aspect of your world is always a compromise. Rather, I am convinced personal freedom is dependent on a choice among alternatives. The best we can do is to multiply the alternatives. But let us remember (those of us who can remember, even as young, young people) the days of Joe McCarthy. And let us remember how close the world of higher education came to losing academic freedom and the due process of law. Let us be aware of the Congressional Committee inquiry

that has no respect for the due process which is a characteristic of the legal procedure in the United States, unfinished as it is, imperfect as it is. If we rob another man of due process of law, be he professor, student, president, trustee, governor or Pope, we are helping to create a world which opens the intellectual and social gate for that to happen to us. I think somehow we have got to get this into our bloodstream if we are to understand what is happening in higher education today. I have the utmost sympathy for students. We have lived through a history of higher education in which children were seen and not heard, in which some legislators and some editorial writers are still saying: "You knew what your college was before you came here. Take your college as a package or take nothing at all." I reject that notion. That implies that Webster College and Washington University are not learning institutions themselves. If indeed a college is a package at any time, it defies the very thing it says it is going to be, namely a learning institution. I have said, and I will continue to say, that I have got to listen to what many people say; that I have got to listen to the twenty-year-olds, because my memory is very short, and because when I was twenty the world was not like it is today. But you also have to listen to me. You must at least consider that Chancellor Eliot and I have to make some decisions after having listened to you and to many other vested-interest views. Those decisions cannot be the fascist determination made by the intervention of one group who seizes power. If they are, we have moved, in my estimation, to a very retrogressive posture in the world. I started to say this two years ago at a National Students Association meeting in Maryland and I was, to my great amazement, called by some a first cousin of Ronald Reagan.

At this point I think we must stand up and be counted. I believe that those of us who have fostered the permissive generation, those of us who have fostered the voice of the students, must not out of a kind of fear that

they call us the wrong names, must not now yield to a coddling of that generation by refusing to fight back. If indeed the new generation are peers of the rest of us in any way they are really peers. One of the reasons that I so enjoy the Board of Directors of Webster College is because they treat me as a peer. They treat me as a peer by giving me the hardest darn time imaginable. And I know day after day, month after month, and I think year after year, that their respect for me is almost in direct proportion to the hard time they give me because they think that will hone in my mind and that I am capable of taking it. If students believe (and I believe they do) that they are now capable of sharing in that kind of adult dialogue, I will prove to them that I believe in it by engaging in that kind of dialogue with them. They may in answer forcefully ride us out on the rails or cause more presidential heart attacks, but mutual respect implies that we both respect our mutual rights to tell it like it is.

It is for all of us a time for pragmatism in learning and practicing the most effective tactics we can learn and invent in renewing the wounded and unfinished society to which we belong.

It is for all of us a time for passion in communicating what we believe and for passionate commitment to the causes we believe in.

It is for all of us a time of promise of a new era of human dignity and respect for personal choice if we do not destroy the very fabric of those rights in our most sincere efforts to extend them to all men.