

“OF TEMPEST AND TRUST”

Keynote Address by Robert W. Morse
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Fifteen years ago, or even less than that, we might all have been talking about "the pursuit of excellence," "the college of your choice," or any other of those success-scented slogans of higher education functioning in a sellers' market.

After the Soviets beat us to the draw in space, and for a number of euphoric years thereafter, we scarcely had to put our hand out—either for things tangible: for students, for grants, for gifts; or for things intangible: for visibility, for charisma, for credibility.

Of these, the most prized was the least sought, credibility. It was just there. We were, after all, selling progress and security.

Now, in the most serious and critical hours of modern American life, we find ourselves everywhere and in every way, in an embattled position. All of our traditional associations—with students, with business, with government, with research—are under question, if not from within then from without. And we are in deep financial crisis.

We have needs we have never had before, most of all for trust.

We are living in an America that may not want to believe us.

We are living in an America that is more given to fragmentation than to coalition, more disposed to rhetoric than to action, more responsive to what is whimsical and impetuous than to what is rational.

We suffer, in the America of 1970, false and dangerous perceptions.

We have somehow lost our vision of what America can be. The thrust is gone. As a nation, we are dangerously and deeply demoralized. This is the eloquent tragedy of Viet Nam. This is what young people smell.

If we have fear, if we sense alarm, if we are uneasy, we should be, because we may now be entering a period which will shape and mold America no less profoundly than the Great Depression. I believe the magnitude of our present national crisis—economic, social, and moral—can only be compared with the 1930's in scale and seriousness.

We do not yet know the true dimensions of our present period of crisis, nor its duration, nor its possible course and outcome. The campus and its problems must be viewed, not as events that have independent meaning and solution, but as signals of a much deeper set of problems for America. In 1929, the collapse of the stock market signalled the onset of the Depression. In 1970, the campuses are the seismometers of a new and perhaps more complex national crisis.

Such a national crisis comes when we continue to try to live on national values long after they have become obsolete clichés. In the Twenties it was, as Coolidge so economically phrased it, "the business of America is business." Today we still have Cold War values and Cold War responses when the world cries out for a new stance.

I, for one, repudiate the concept that we must solve Indochina's problems before we can address America's. I, for one, repudiate the logic of spending \$40 billion for a doubtful ABM system to defend cities that no one can live in.

In the universities our perceptions can be no less perilous.

And in the universities as in the nation we should beware of distractions. Let us not devise solutions to alleviate the symptoms of distress. That is false work. Let us not be so preoccupied with the trauma of campus unrest that we define its solution as an end in itself. It is not the task of universities to pacify youth any more than it is to indulge their fantasies. Our task is to educate.

Like other presidents I will be a field marshall only if I must, but then reluctantly and knowing that it is not our real job.

Let us always remind ourselves that universities are, or should be, radical enterprises—radical because they are based on the proposition that the world can and must be transformed into something better—radical because they are based on the proposition that man through his intellect, his initiative, and his integrity can advance his own well-being.

Universities, if they are functioning as they should, are predisposed to question, to debate, to change, to criticize, and to challenge.

If universities are ever free of contro-

versy or project a feeling of comfort and security to all, then that is when we should worry most about them. We should thoroughly reject the notion that campus unrest proves that higher education is failing. Or that it separates us from America.

Today is not the college America of a few hundred thousand social or intellectual elite, cordoned off from life on tranquil, sequestered campuses, but an America with some seven million able, energetic, and humanitarian young people—wide in their diversification—who want a piece of the action now, and who for the most part, care deeply about their world, the world they are being educated to live in.

Their base, higher education, is now under attack.

By the creatures of chaos.

By the anti-intellectual who, after too short a sleep, has risen again.

By the anarchist and the bomb-thrower who roams across the nation seeking soft spots and sanctuaries on our campuses.

By the political mouthpiece who, for selfish reasons, uses higher education as a means to an end.

By the old who have always instinctively resented youth for its freedom and its irreverance. By those who see change and social turbulence as a threat to their petty securities.

By legislatures that are eager, as if they are voting on a cabaret tax, to ram through repressive and redundant laws on campus unrest.

By those in our midst who, in fear of the radical left or the radical right, are content to emasculate the First Amendment in their desperate hope, wishful and wrong, that they can buy peace by avoiding controversy.

And by the impacted millions who, as they view us, rightly have scant regard for higher education as a source of the personal power, of the justice, of the equal opportunities they now seek.

We are in danger, in this most critical time, that America's essential concerns—those of the cities, of the dispossessed, of the environment, of the life-supporting systems, of war and peace, of the marketplace—could be debated and decided outside the sphere of colleges and universities. We are in danger of being rejected at the time when we are needed most.

America does not know what college is. America does not see the function of higher education.

Our credibility is challenged even more because we know we cannot remain the same.

We must change. We are changing. And over the course we must run if we are to survive and serve, change produces more enemies than allies. Think about the process of self-examination and self-renewal, deep and pervasive, in which we are now engaged, then consider the American public's sense of our stability, our purpose, our usefulness, and, yes, our reliability.

How can we debate, in full public view, such fundamental issues as tenure, campus justice, drugs, sex, pass-fail, academic requirements, admissions standards, fund-raising, constitutional rights, professional responsibility, pollution, the release of ethnic peoples and minorities from isolation and oppression, the War in Southeast Asia, ROTC, Women's Lib, abortion, coed dorms, and all the rest—without public wonderment about who we are and what we do.

In our own constituencies, those who help determine our solvency, our flexibility, our independence, our very existence, there are individuals who themselves resist change or crave tranquility, who question our motives, who in such hard times call us spineless or worse.

At the very moment when their institutions and their nation need the strength of their support, moral and material, they abandon or defer their financial backing, vilify us in the public press, absent themselves from our councils, and, with pitiable ease, disclaim the very essence of the university process which gave them powers and perspectives they otherwise might not have had.

There are those who question whether we should reach out to deliver the powers of an education to the disadvantaged and the dispossessed. If we don't, who will?

There are those who wonder if we should be close to students, as though students are enemies in our own camp. If we can't be, who can?

There are those who discredit our competence to govern ourselves, who would prefer that we call in the armed militia or cripple due process, who in crisis wish that we would run for some cover other than our own auspices. If we run, who stays?

And there are those, themselves advocates of the passive politicalization of our campuses, who challenge our right to speak to the issues. If we can't, who can?

What utter nonsense it is to decree that only those engaged in profit or politics or propaganda should have a constitutional right to speak their convictions. Imagine what this nation would be were it not for the voices of the tax-exempt, or, for that matter, the tax-supported.

The concept of a voiceless college campus, where the cap and gown is the reward for passivity rather than activism, is a concept we must reject. You know and I know that college students have voice because they are in college. It is in many ways a new voice on the American scene. We should welcome it and learn to deal with it, for where else and how else can the coming generation speak? In business? In government? In Viet Nam?

It was not too many years ago that this nation bemoaned "the silent generation." Now the same nation, populated in part by alumni of that voiceless generation, reject the young people who talk out and talk back.

The campus is where America prepares

its youth for high levels of competence—managers, professionals, and leaders—those whose hands will soon grasp the throttles of the nation, and no less who will help give it conscience and values. Now, in these times of new national imperatives, colleges and universities cannot be satisfied to produce people who passively fill vacant slots in society.

The imperatives of our age, and this is what so many of our most perceptive youth are trying to tell us, is to shape our institutions, our processes, and our programs so that they do in fact reflect human values and aspirations. Is that an anti-American concept?

The battle is now joined in earnest. Colleges and universities, intended as places for the rational and the concerned, are functioning, when they can, between the value incongruities of a society in transition.

Priorities for human success put students on a collision course with what they perceive to be a drab, stubborn, unfeeling, even rapacious establishment, in whatever form it is found, and worse than that, a society so shaped and institutionalized for adult experience as to render the young capable of too little more than rhetoric, revolt, and their own thing.

The nation's problems are serious and real, here and abroad. When, and if, the war clouds are dispersed over Southeast Asia, the enormous domestic and inter-

national problems now obscured by that conflict will be seen and sensed as never before—stark, overwhelming, for some almost beyond calculation or correction.

Housing in the cities.

Transportation in and between the world's critical marketplaces.

Disease and malnutrition.

The large-scale failure of large-scale systems, like health care, like public education, like money-management, like human rights, like natural resources, like population, and like power production and distribution.

And abroad, the competition from new world markets whose economies have not suffered the dislocation of an overseas adventure costing hundreds of billions of dollars.

Universities alone cannot solve these problems, nor should they. Colleges and universities, if they remain true to their function, can however furnish the nation ideas and people and intelligent expression, no small contribution in itself. But there are other things we can do, too.

Let me offer these suggestions for colleges and universities willing to change, able to speak, eager for national service, undaunted by the perils of high visibility:

I suggest first that higher education adopt a new attitude about itself, not one that is apologetic for campus ferment, not one that begs the indulgence of its constituencies, not one that abandons its unique prerogatives, but one which speaks with confidence and claims suc-

cess. Forget the notion, if you have it, that higher education has failed or will fail.

I suggest in the second place that colleges and universities further encourage their faculties to be close to students, for in that relationship as in no other is the essence and strength of the college experience.

I suggest that higher education, while mindful of its particular capabilities, while careful not to be drawn into unwise or unproductive alliances, seek urgently to define its place as a partner with others in American growth. It is not enough to cast aside some of the doubtful enterprises in which we have been engaged, such as weapons development, without entering into new liaisons which put us in direct touch with the nation. A retreat to an institutional ghetto is nothing but dropping out. The world is still real.

I suggest that colleges and universities strive anew to be champions of individual initiative, of personal values, of diversified points of view, and this has nothing to do with whether higher education is publicly or privately financed.

I suggest that we reduce our rhetoric and build our programs. Let us not be slavish to the agenda of either end of the radical fringes. We must move on our own agenda, not on theirs. To be reactive to them is to fall back from both principle and purpose. And let us not be lulled to sleep by our own eloquence. This nation is now strangling in a curious hypocrisy

whereby promise is claimed as performance, whereby wish is said to be fulfillment, whereby slogans and cliches and epithets are substituted for genuine involvement. The nation needs handles, solutions, and, most of all, deeds.

I suggest to you, who are so deeply engaged in alumni work, that the graduates of our institutions be asked to be a more effective bridge between the general society and the campus. No one else is more qualified. The potential of alumni—in relation to students rather than to institutions—needs total re-examination and re-tooling. In a buyers' market, in a skeptical nation, we need to be better at what we do.

For financing, we must now look more to indigenous and continuous funding than in the past. We now must place more reliance in the intensive search for operating funds on an annual and short-term basis than in occasional thrusts for capital support. Some major programs in some universities are so large in scale as to eclipse the size of some older institution-wide campaigns.

For communications, we now must strive to reach greater numbers of people—some who have never seen a college campus—through highly tactical, flexible, and mobile programs than through rigid and routine systems of information and interpretation. Our brochures sometimes suffer by comparison with the mimeograph machines of the transient radicals.

You, in The American Alumni Council, are wise to have chosen "professionalism" as your central theme for this conference. It is apt and timely.

You can have pride in what you have already done, but tomorrow is here. The stakes are high. The decade ahead will demand a deep and decisive reordering of our institutions. Some will have brilliant futures. Others will slip from mediocrity to oblivion, impotent and unwanted on the American scene. Competition rises and accelerates around us.

Fifteen years ago, we were riding the crest of national imperatives more technological than humanitarian, more global than national, more institutional than personal; now, the new wave, which will either engulf us or propel us, is the democratic survival of the American people.

It is up to us whether we are with it or out of it. The choice is still ours. In this tempest, we need trust.



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Before coming to Case, Dr. Morse had been Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Research and Development for two years. He received his Ph. D. in 1949 from Brown University, where he later served as Professor of Physics, Chairman of the Physics Department and Dean of the College.

Dr. Morse is a Fellow of the American Physical Society and former chairman of its Division of Solid State Physics; a Fellow and former President of the Acoustical Society of America; a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences; and a member of the AIP Committee on Physics and Society. He is a trustee of Hawken School, the Musical Arts Association, the PATH Association, University Circle, Inc. and the Argonne Universities Association, and is a member of the Corporation of the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute and the Advisory Board of the U.S. Naval Postgraduate School.

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