

Talking Points

Dr. Boyer's commencement speech at
Eastern Michigan University

April 21, 1979

Suggest that the theme of the talk be international education. Eastern Michigan students are emerging into a world of global "trade-offs."

The accident at the Three-Mile Island nuclear generating plant has given us all a sober taste of the decisions faced not by some unborn future generation more elegantly educated and wiser, but by ourselves -- the people who must make decisions today.

Let us not minimize the truly utopian dream of electrical power in practical abundance -- power which makes our environment comfortable under any conditions of climate. Which drives machines that make the products we consider essential to our lives. Which carries the loads men once carried. Which brings us information and performs calculations once beyond the capability of human effort.

Nuclear generation has very nearly put this utopia within the grasp of all mankind.

Yet at what cost? Can we convincingly calculate the risk to future generations? Can we, morally, assume that the waste we generate today will become manageable as technology progresses?

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Questions like these must be answered from a global perspective. All of humankind must be considered in their implications.

"Trade-offs" have been made in the past. Perhaps not widely understood as such but at least perceived by some observers.

The railroad -- which has such a warmly nostalgic place in our history, our folklore, our music, and our literature -- had a darker side to Charles Dickens. In 1846, in Dombey & Son, he wrote:

"The power that forced itself upon its iron way . . . defiant of all paths and roads, piercing through the heart of every obstacle, and dragging living creatures of all classes, ages and degrees behind it, was a type of the triumphant monster, Death."

The automobile as a threat to a way of life was clearly foreseen in 1918 by Booth Tarkington in The Magnificent Ambersons. Indeed progress and the passing of old orders has been a rich source of human drama since Eve ate the apple.

But the new orders being visualized today have become bleaker. We seem to be acquiring a Manichean ambivalence about progress. E. B. White gently stated this in a story

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written in the 1940's. He characterized a near future era -- about now probably -- as "a time of brilliant but disturbing discoveries, such as that gold fillings cause varicose veins."

Even a future free from want -- still the dream of more than half the world's people -- has its threatening side. French students rioting in 1968 are said to have shouted the slogan, "We refuse to buy the right not to die of hunger by running the risk of dying of boredom." (It sounds French all right, but as a slogan it loses something in the translation.)

In the eyes of most of the people on earth it is the pinnacle of philosophical boorishness for Americans to question progress or materialism. Our riches, our options, our opportunities are the envy and the hope of most of the rest of mankind -- even those who deplore the way we use them.

But we must try to understand the effect of our culture on all the world and respect, appreciate, and learn from other cultures.

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(Remarks on international education to follow)

Possible points of local color:

1. The Geography & Geology Department at EMU has enjoyed a national reputation for some time - they hosted a national energy conference last summer that was well received.
2. The Enrico Fermi Nuclear Power Plant is located in nearby Monroe County - approximately 25 miles away.
3. The most topical item on campus is the search for a new president. The search has been going on a long time now and the students would likely be responsive to some humorous remark about it. A candidate was expected to be announced last December but now it looks like it may be well into the summer. Dr. Evans has been doing a good job as acting president and is a personal friend of Dr. Boyer. He might want to check with Dr. Evans first.
4. The previous president, Jim Brickey, was a former Lt. Governor who vowed not to return to politics when he assumed the presidency of EMU. He stayed four years and is now Lt. Governor again.

Source .. Kathy Tinney, Information Services Office, EMU. (313-487-4400)

NOTE
 THE CONCERN
 IS IN CAMP.
~~FILED~~ (HARD TO FIND)
 SHAW & BILL FORDS
 LITERARY MENTOR
 HAVE AN INTEREST
 IN THE
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CORRECTION TO LOCAL INFORMATION
RE: EASTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY SPEECH

NOTE

1. ENRICO FERMI NUCLEAR POWER PLANT #I

Located in nearby Monroe County, had an "accident" similar to three-mile island in 1971 and suffered a near melt down. It was closed at that time, but public didn't learn about the accident until 1978.

2. NEW ENRICO FERMI PLANT #II is under construction at the same site, but won't be operational until 1981.

3. ANOTHER NUCLEAR PLANT is operating at Midland, Michigan about 100 miles north -- big demonstration there two days ago.

A large, stylized handwritten signature, possibly reading 'V', is written above the date '4/20'.