

Eugene J. McCarthy

Eugene J. McCarthy is best known as a Democratic Representative and Senator from Minnesota, and a 1968 Presidential candidate. In that campaign, he became a leading voice for liberal causes.

McCarthy's political career began with his election to Congress in 1949 but it was his social activism in the 1950s and 1960s for which he is remembered. In 1956 McCarthy organized a group of fellow liberals to counter the "southern manifesto" (which can be found in this reader) and its denunciation of civil rights. Known as "McCarthy's Mavericks," the group later became formalized as the Democratic Study Group (DSG). In the late 1950s the DSG promoted a progressive legislative agenda, and during the 1960s it led the ultimately successful fight to reform the archaic rules and procedures of the House.

As a Senator, McCarthy served from 1959 to 1971. He served as chairman of the Senate Special Committee on Unemployment Problems in 1959 and 1960 and helped outline many of the economic development and social welfare programs later enacted by the Kennedy and Johnson administrations. He was an avid supporter of minimum wage coverage for migrant workers, for Medicare coverage for the mentally ill, and for expansion of unemployment compensation.

McCarthy turned his attention to the White House in 1968. An early opponent of the Vietnam War, he challenged Lyndon Johnson for the party nomination. His unexpected success in the New Hampshire primary and elsewhere nudged President Johnson out of the race and brought in Sen. Robert F. Kennedy of New York.

McCarthy retired from the Senate in 1971. He ran for president as an independent in 1976, successfully challenging numerous state laws limiting ballot access to independent and third-party candidates. At McCarthy's initiative, in 1975 and 1976 a challenge to the constitutionality of the Federal Election Campaign Act Amendments of 1974 was carried to the Supreme Court which ruled to protect basic freedoms of speech.

In 1992 McCarthy ran for president as a Democrat; he called for a tax on capital gains to eliminate the national debt and for a shorter working day to reduce chronic unemployment. Although he was on the primary ballot in major states, the networks and the Democratic party excluded him from televised debates.

McCarthy's speeches have been included in your reader in order for you to note changes in definitions of the rights and responsibilities of citizenship over a period of almost 200 years. Look for comparisons in McCarthy's complaints against U.S. aggression in Vietnam and Jefferson's complaints against Britain. Look for references to a higher authority and his use of morality. Do you agree with McCarthy's four basic civil rights? Has he gone too far beyond the original intent of the Founders? Should we today?

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Declaration of Candidacy for the Democratic Nomination for President

*Statement by Senator Eugene J. McCarthy
November 30, 1967*

I intend to enter the Democratic primaries in Wisconsin, Oregon, California, and Nebraska. The decision with reference to Massachusetts and New Hampshire will be made within two weeks. In so far as Massachusetts is concerned, it will depend principally upon the outcome of the meeting of the Democratic State Committee this weekend.

Since I first said that I thought the issue of Vietnam and other related issues should be raised in the primaries, I have talked to Democratic party leaders in twenty-six states, to candidates – especially Senate candidates – who will be up for re-election next year, and to many other persons.

My decision to challenge the President's position has been strengthened by recent announcements from the Administration of plans for continued escalation and intensification of the war in Vietnam and, on the other hand, by the absence of any positive indications or suggestions for a compromise or negotiated political settlement. I am concerned that the Administration seems to

have set no limits on the price that it will pay for military victory.

Let me summarize the cost of the war up to this point:

- the physical destruction of much of a small, weak nation by the military operations of the most powerful nation on this earth;
- 100,000 to 150,000 civilian casualties in South Vietnam alone, according to the estimates of the Senate subcommittee on refugees;
- the uprooting and fracturing of the social structure of South Vietnam, where one-fourth to one-third of the population are now refugees;
- for the United States, 15,058 combat dead and 94,469 wounded through November 25, 1967;
- a monthly expenditure by the United States of between \$2 and \$3 billion on the war;

I am also concerned over the bearing of the war on other areas of United States responsibility:

- the failure to appropriate adequate funds for the poverty program, for housing, for education and other national needs, and the prospect of additional cuts as a condition for congressional approval of a tax bill;
- the drastic reduction of our foreign aid program in other parts of the world;
- the dangerous rise of inflation and, as an indirect but serious consequence, the devaluation of the British pound which is more important east of the Suez than is the British navy.

There is growing evidence of a deepening moral crisis in America: discontent, frustration, and a disposition to extralegal – if not illegal – manifestations of protest.

I am hopeful that a challenge may alleviate the sense of political helplessness and restore to many people a belief in the processes of American politics and of American government. On college campuses especially, but also among other thoughtful adult Americans, it may counter the growing sense of alienation from politics which is currently reflected in a tendency to withdraw in either frustration or cynicism, to talk of non-participation and to make threats of support for a third party or fourth party or other irregular political movements.

I do not see in my move any great threat to the unity and the strength of the Democratic party.

The issue of the war in Vietnam is not a separate issue but is one which must be dealt with in the configuration of problems in which it occurs. It is within this context that I intend to take the case to the people of the United States.

I am not for peace at any price but for an honorable, rational, and political solution to this war; a solution which I believe will enhance our world position, encourage the respect of our allies and potential adversaries, which will permit us to give the necessary attention to our other commitments abroad – both military and nonmilitary – and leave us with both resources and moral energy to deal effectively with the pressing domestic problems of the United States itself. In this total effort, I believe we can restore to this nation a clearer sense of purpose and of dedication to the achievement of that purpose.

The New Civil Rights

*Speech by Senator Eugene J. McCarthy
Sargent Gymnasium, Boston University
Boston, Massachusetts
April 11, 1968*

Professor Galbraith, students, faculty, and friends here at Boston University.

This has been in many ways a most unusual experiment in American politics. I hesitate to call it a campaign because it is just beginning to take on that character. It was said in the beginning that we could not accomplish what we set out to do because there was no precedent for what we were doing. That left the way open to all of us, particularly students, the academic profession, the more venturesome citizens of this country, and at least one politician who was prepared to take some chances. You have to be most careful of a politician who has no further ambitions, because he might run for President.

And so, by a coming together of judgment and of confidence and a feeling of what had to be done in America, we did begin last November this effort which is continuing with such success. At least I thought it began last November after I had been on five or six college campuses around this country and found a demand that somehow the American political process be tested and that the people of this country be given a chance to pass upon what at that time obviously were the great national issues facing this nation.

I read Jimmy Breslin the other day and he said I decided to do it in Dublin at Easter time in 1966. I did not know it went back that far; he said it happened at three o'clock in the morning. Well, no one ought to dispute Breslin at three o'clock in the morning if he remembers something from Dublin, Ireland, and it might have been the right time because we were observing the fiftieth anniversary of the Easter Uprising. And for our movement in a kind of 1968 uprising, in which all of you have participated and are participating, I think that the colleges and the students of the colleges of this country deserve the principal credit for influencing me to move to the point at which I thought that something had to take place in this country, that something had to happen, that someone had to provide the leadership.

As to just what went into my making the decision to move as I did – well, that remains something of a political and personal secret, but I suppose that at some point I will have to explain it.

As of now I am reading all the columnists, all those who wrote about me in the early stages – the liberals who explained me in terms of some kind of psychological disturbance, and the conservatives who were more inclined to use traditional vices like anger or envy or jealousy or hatred. I got to a point where I almost favored the conservative columnists; they even attributed to me some vices that I thought had been forgotten in the modern world.

In any case, the campaign has moved along, mobilizing the general concern that was abroad in this country only four or five months ago that somehow the country had come apart, that it was unraveling, that instead of rather clear lines and threads we had become a nation of pulp in which no clear or positive decision would be made.

I think that it is quite clear now, by virtue of what has happened in two primaries and from other indications, that changes have taken place in this country, that this nation has made a decision with reference to the war in Vietnam. A public judgment has been passed.

And I do not say that this has happened because of the particular arguments that any of us made (although I think that perhaps our presentation of the case helped some), but it did happen because we were prepared to put the issue before the public, to test their judgment and to test their will. Their response has been such that, in my opinion, this Administration or any administration that follows will have to dedicate itself and commit its powers to bringing that war to an end as quickly as possible.

The citizens of this country have taken it upon themselves to pass judgment, not leaving it to the executive branch of the government, not leaving it to the Congress, not leaving it to the national conventions, but in public forum, openly and clearly having said that they feel that this war cannot continue to be justified on a military basis or a diplomatic basis or an economic basis, but principally that the war must end because it is not morally justified. For the most part in the rest of this campaign, I think we can consider this mission if not altogether accomplished, at least half accomplished, and begin to deal with the other most pressing problems which face this country: the issue of civil rights and the needs of the people who live in poverty and suppression in our great cities.

I want to talk to you tonight principally about this problem and relate it at least in the beginning to the recent assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King. I sat on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in 1963 when the first great march on Washington occurred. Martin Luther King was one of the speakers that day. The object of the march was to move the Congress of the United States to act on what we considered to be the basic or traditional civil rights, the limited civil rights – the right to vote, the right to equal protection under the law – those things which are very clearly defined in the Constitution of the United States and are as old as this country and even older in the history of the Western culture out of which our Constitution is drawn. The right to vote, the right of equality under the law – all of these in 1963 and 1964 were so accepted and so proved that there should not have been any necessity for a march on Washington and not even any need for special legislation. But the fact is that the march was necessary and the special legislation was also needed.

During the century which followed the Civil War, our country's Negro population had endured the system of discrimination and segregation which is totally incompatible with the Constitution of the United States and with the whole philosophy upon which we have been attempting to build this democracy for nearly two hundred years. For all those Americans traditionally classified as minorities, most of the legal barriers to the enjoyment of the simple rights, the elemental rights of American citizenship, were cleared away with the passage of the Civil Rights bills of 1964 and 1965. Yet as the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders pointed out and as Martin Luther King understood when he planned the Poor People's March this year, these legal victories did

very little to alleviate the social and economic conditions which were at the root of the ghetto dweller's plight in America. Still remaining in this country is what the commission called the pervasive discrimination and segregation in employment, in education, and in housing which have resulted in the continued exclusion of Negroes from our current prosperity. What, in effect, we have is a kind of colonial nation living in our midst which is not allowed full participation in the good life of America – not very different, in fact, from the way in which some of the European countries were treating their colonial subjects with the one difference that their subjects were separated by geography and ours are here in our own country.

Still remaining, as the commission also point out, is the pattern of Negro migration into the core areas of our cities, combined with a corresponding exodus of the white population, creating new ghettos. What we have is the convergence of all of these conditions – poor housing, limited educational opportunities, inadequate health care, low income, and dependency on welfare – a kind of handout state. Mired in a cycle of poverty, Negro Americans (especially the young ones) are presented through television with the constant reminder of the benefits of our society, of the good life which is now enjoyed by the overwhelming majority of the white citizens of this country.

In many respects, the legislative gains of three or four years ago have heightened this frustration because there was implied in the passage of that basic civil rights legislation the promise that the people who were to be benefited by it would see a new America. The door, in a sense, was opened to them, but once it was opened, they found that on the other side was the same kind of dismal and disappointing life they had been suffering from before the passage of the Civil Rights bill. The expected new participation in the good life which so many Negro citizens had longed for and hoped for and even anticipated simply did not materialize after we passed the 1964 and 1965 Civil Rights bills. This is the picture of disappointment and frustration which was drawn by the President's commission on Civil Disorders – a most responsible and perhaps the most significant political document to be published in this country in this century.

Some people have said that the picture which is painted in the report is overly grim and overly defensive. I do not think that this is a fair judgment. The report, as I read it, was written with a kind of optimism, the optimism which I think is the only kind of honest optimism, the only kind we can accept, which comes when you see things to be

as bad as in fact they are, when you take an honest look at the situation, but having done that, you still proceed in the belief and in the hope that something positive and constructive can be done about the circumstances. This must be our attitude, and certainly this is the only alternative to the kind of pessimism in which you see how bad things are and then despair and decide that nothing can be done about the situation.

Leaving aside all considerations of the past and all traditions and all history, there is sufficient moral burden upon us within the immediacy of this year itself to compel us to take action. And this is the significant conclusion of the President's commission's report: that we must begin immediately and on a massive scale to attack the causes of unrest and of dissent and of riots, and to proceed to bring within reach of all Americans all of those things which make up what we call the good life. This was the second dream and the object of Martin Luther King's most recent effort. Now that he has been assassinated in the pursuit of this cause, we can only resolve even more strongly to dedicate ourselves to the end that equality may become in America not a word, not a phrase, not a desirable object, but a reality.

In addition to those traditional and constitutionally guaranteed legal civil rights, we must move on to establish a whole new set of civil rights which we consider to be the rights of every American citizen. First among these must be the right to a decent job, one which is becoming the dignity of a man, a job which returns him satisfaction as an intelligent and creative person, and also an income with which he can support his family in dignity and in decency. This is not a simple declaration of a desirable objective, such as it was in 1946 when we passed the full-employment act, but rather an objective statement which must be realized within a period of two or three years. In order to secure it in the first instance, we must move on the question of income. The federal government must proceed to determine what a minimum income is and attempt to insure it for all Americans.

The second new citizen's right which we must pursue is the right to adequate health care without regard to income or without regard to race or without regard to habitation. This is a right which is not specifically guaranteed under the Constitution, but is very clearly implied in the concept of equality and in the search for happiness which is basic to the whole American way of life. To secure this right, we must have a federally subsidized insurance program to assure that no citizen will be deprived of health care because of

lack of funds, because of income, or because of lack of facilities. This is not particularly revolutionary; most states now require automobile liability insurance, and it seems to me that we can take another step and say we ought to have some kind of insurance simply to protect the health of our people, whether they are hurt in automobile accidents or whether they just get sick.

Third, every American must now be accorded the right not simply to equal education or a kind of average education, but to that kind of education and that amount of education which is necessary to develop his full potential. This for the most talented among us, whose gifts, of course, must be brought to serve the whole society, but also for those of average gift, and those who are most handicapped and least gifted, but who have the potential to come to some knowledge of the truth no matter how limited that knowledge may be. In order to secure this right, we must have a massive program to upgrade the education of our adults who have been trapped in the poverty syndrome. This can be done through federally subsidized on-the-job training, through special vocational schools, and through adult literacy courses, and all of the other devices which are at hand for this purpose. For young Americans, projects such as Head Start, and late start, and even middle start must be established and perfected and expanded. Vocational training should come, as I see it, not in the form of some kind of public works program, but in on-the-job training programs provided largely within private industry itself.

This is a special problem for us today because the old more or less natural process by which men and women rose from being utterly unskilled to being semiskilled, to being skilled workers – a process which ran in this country for a hundred years, which was open to most immigrants but closed to the Negroes – no longer exists. Because of automation and the progress of technology, most of the middle steps of progress have been eliminated. What we must do is take people who are unskilled by virtue of social pressures, which kept them from rising at a time when they might have risen through the normal steps to being skilled and even to being professional people, and move them over within one generation at least two steps, which have at the present time been altogether removed from the process by which men rose in American industry and in American business in years past.

The final new citizen's right which I will speak of to you tonight is the right to a decent house – not a house in isolation, not a house in a ghetto, but a house in a neighborhood which is part of a

community which must be a part of the United States of America.

There is no time for postponement, for the time is now. One of the witnesses who appeared before the commission noted that he had read the reports of the 1919 Chicago race riot and had found that what is recorded was essentially the same as that which was recorded after the Harlem riot of 1935, and even essentially the same as what the McCone Commission reported on the Watts riots of recent times. He said this is a kind of *Alice in Wonderland* world with the same moving picture shown over and over again, the same analysis, the same recommendations, and, he said, the same inaction. The time has come to put an end to that kind of meaningless and purposeless and ineffective rerun of old reports.

I think the people of this country are ready for action and that this action – this readiness for action – is not limited to any racial minority or any single political interest group, but is shared almost universally by Americans, just the sense of sorrow at the assassination and at the devastation which followed is also shared almost universally in this country of ours. It can be said, of course, that extremists and agitators exist on every side – on the white and on the black side. We cannot altogether eliminate the kind of wickedness of those who committed or participated in the assassination of the Reverend Martin Luther King and some who seem even to have applauded afterward and those who fomented the riots or applauded them after they occurred. These people are not even worthy of being considered, in my judgment, a minority in America, but are a deviation from the general pattern in this country. The most important and profound causes of riots are rooted, we must accept, in the conditions of modern urban life, in poverty, and, especially, in the ghettos of our great cities. Just as American Negroes are weary of the demeaning conditions and the racist attitudes which have brought rioting to our cities, so are all other Americans tired of the riots that these conditions cause. The country is longing for rational judgment and, on that basis, for a reconciliation which leads us to a new unity and to the strength of common purpose.

Throughout my campaign, whether it was in the somewhat cold and somewhat lonely towns and villages of northern New Hampshire or even in the more crowded streets of south Milwaukee, I have stressed the need for this kind of reconciliation, not a reconciliation of unreason, not a kind of unity for the sake of unity, not something which comes of our putting aside any kind of analysis of what our problems are or from refusing to consider the

causes of division in this country, but, rather, a reconciliation which is based on reasoned judgment, and moral commitment. This, I believe, is the great difference between the kind of political challenge which faces us in 1968 and that which faced us just a few years ago in 1948 and 1958 when the issues we were raising were relatively simple.

The need for medical care for the aged, for example, in 1948 was really not a great test of intelligence. It seemed a rather obvious thing. To see the need for federal aid to education in 1948, we did not require consultation with experts. The evidence was every place. To see the need for a housing program, particularly for public housing in the years after World War II, did not require any special kind of revelation or special insight. It was obvious that this need was present and the same was true of the basic civil rights bill, which we began to talk about so long ago as 1948. In addition to that, support for these programs did not require a great moral commitment, because almost everyone could see some personal benefit in it for himself, a kind of direct and almost selfish benefit. But the issues we are talking about today and the problems we are talking about today and the kinds of commitment we are calling for today – this does require something different. It requires a greater commitment of intellect to understand the problems of our cities, the problems of racial discrimination and racial antagonism, to understand the problems we face in international affairs. It requires a much greater commitment of intellect and much greater application of whatever knowledge we possess, but more important than that, a greater commitment of our moral strength, a greater commitment of will, than we have ever been called upon to commit in the past. This is the challenge.

I would say to you here tonight that I believe that this nation is prepared to make both of these commitments. We have passed a judgment on the war and we have also passed the point of no return with reference to our domestic problems, and somehow in these two steps the spirit of this country has been released. I sense a new flow of confidence in America, a new sense of understanding and of common purpose. Not that we are proceeding as though this were a new kind of dream world in which there would be no more contention, no more trouble, no more dissension, and no more war, one from which all potential for fault and failure had been eliminated – because this is certainly not the case; but this is an America which I think is not just on the edge but beyond the edge of repudiating the somewhat cynical criticism which some Europeans have been directing at us in

recent years: that this would be the first great nation in the world that would decline before it had reached its peak. I do not think that will happen. Or the first nation that would grow old before it had reached maturity. We are repudiating that judgment upon us in this year of 1968.

We are demonstrating that we are not afraid to deal with differences in our own country as we have in the past (differences of nationality), as today we are prepared to deal significantly with racial differences and economic differences. We are not even afraid of the prospect of one billion Chinese by the year 2000 – even with nuclear weapons – as Secretary Rusk suggested a few months ago. We are not afraid of the future, and I would say we are proving that we have avoided that one fear against which Franklin Roosevelt warned us – that we are not even afraid of fear itself. We are not afraid of decision; we are not afraid of responsibility; and we have proved that we are not afraid, in this campaign, to test American democracy.

We are proving again, as we have in the past, when put to the test that we, the people of the United States, deserve self-government and deserve this democracy, but on the other hand, that democracy, self-government, and freedom are also being well served by the American people.