

FOR INFORMATION CONTACT: Karen Bartholomew
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KENNEDY, BEYERS DISCUSS STUDENT ACTIVISM AT STANFORD

STANFORD—

Because they are hospitable to all viewpoints, universities are "vulnerable to coercion," Stanford President Donald Kennedy said Monday, Nov. 11.

"Zealous people of all sorts of persuasions know this, and use it," Kennedy told about 75 attending a discussion of student activism sponsored by the Senate of the Associated Students and the Centennial Commission as part of the University's centennial celebration.

"Activism out of hand is a force universities are ill-equipped to handle because repression is so foreign to their tradition and their capacity, he added."

Nevertheless, "occasional acts of civil disobedience are necessary," Kennedy added, "and if carried out in full awareness of the consequences they are often deeply persuasive."

Also speaking on student activism was Bob Beyers, director of News and Publications Service, who said he was convinced that:

- Nonviolence usually works better than violence in securing change;
- The beneficiaries of change will bear most of its costs; and
- The most enduring changes are usually those which enable individuals to gain a greater degree of control over their own futures.

Civil disobedience

Civil disobedience, which Kennedy labeled an "honorable tradition," is a severe test for universities and invariably has a coercive aspect in that "nearly every rule broken under such circumstances is there to protect some other set of functions or freedoms that are important to the institution, which must then *choose* whether to tolerate the impairment or not," Kennedy said.

"There are rights on both sides, and these are often the most agonizing choices we have to make."

Responding to a question about campus judicial proceedings that might result from recent anti-apartheid demonstrations, Kennedy said he felt "a real part of a complete act of civil disobedience is to expect and accept risks and consequences. It's been our attempt to make clear what likely risks and consequences will follow" such an act.

Because the civil disobedience "interferes with other rights and other freedoms, it is the institution's responsibility to take action and not to treat the matter as though it were of no consequence."

Kennedy divided activism into four categories: public service, student involvement in University affairs, civil rights — civil liberties, and efforts to change national policy.

Public service activism grew out of a sense of *noblesse oblige*, the obligation by virtue of social and economic status to help the less privileged, he said.

Because college education now is available to a broader segment of society, public service on campuses now contains "so much more understanding of what it means to be less fortunate, so much more personal experience with difficulty. It is more compassionate and more effective than in the days of *noblesse oblige*."

The first sit-ins on American campuses exemplified Kennedy's second definition, student interest in University affairs — or student power — which developed in the 1960s. Before that, not many schools had thought of involving students in decision-making, Kennedy said.

Citing examples of student power at Stanford, Kennedy said criticism by students in 1966 of University decision-making processes led to the appointment of large numbers of students to serve on the 1966-69 Study of Education at Stanford, which proposed major institutional reforms and curriculum changes.

And after years of agitating by students, the Faculty Senate in 1977 agreed to include student evaluation of teaching as a part of the promotion and tenure process.

Perhaps the oldest tradition of activism is civil rights — civil liberties, which dates back "at least to the involvement of Harvard students in the Boston Tea Party," Kennedy — a Harvard graduate — said.

During a "truly frightening period in American history," students stood up to congressional investigations in 1953 of alleged communist activities, Kennedy said. He also cited the 1964 Mississippi Freedom Summer, a voter registration drive for blacks, as an example of civil rights — civil liberties activism.

Some of the greatest challenges to universities arise out of the fourth category of activism: efforts to change national policy. There is sometimes a "tendency to reach rather far in an effort to make the university relevant to the issue," Kennedy said.

"During the Vietnam War protests, a strained logic was often necessary to establish that there was 'complicity with the war' on the part of universities." The presence of classified military research or active ROTC programs at some campuses lent credibility to the claim, he said.

But even in the most "convincingly relevant cases, it is clear that the universities hardly represented a major part of the problem; so to many, the cry of 'stop the war machine' had a hollow ring because it seemed directed at a target much more attractive for its proximity and its vulnerability than for its real appropriateness."

While universities may take positions on matters of educational policy or their own governance, "it is quite another matter for the university to become institutionally committed to a particular position with respect to national policy. It is the university's duty to remain free for the expression of *all* views, including those most critical of its own orthodoxy at that particular moment.

"The enthusiasm that swept campuses in the late 1960s was not sensitive to this point."

Characteristics activists share

In 24 years of observing Stanford's social, political, educational, and informational activists on campus in his role as the University's chief information officer, Beyers has discovered three characteristics activists frequently share, he said:

- Those with long-term influence have had a sense of humor and perspective about what they are doing.

Recounting the tenure of Ilene Strelitz as editor of the *Stanford Daily* in fall 1963, Beyers said a large sign hung at the newspaper office proclaiming: "We have our standards — only they're low." He credited Strelitz with securing a reversal in the University's 70-year ban on sectarian worship.

Beyers also cited a sign in the Jackson, Miss., headquarters of the Mississippi Freedom Project, which read: "No one would dare bomb this place and end all this confusion."

- Activists effective over the long term tend to build broad coalitions.

Examples include the civil rights and women's movements, as well as the Vietnam Moratorium in October 1969, the largest political action gathering in the University's history with 8,000 participants. He also cited the Study of Education at Stanford, in which approximately 200 students were involved.

- The education of most activists equips them to adjust rapidly and well to novel situations.

Stanford activists

Stanford's record in activism is "somewhat surprising," Beyers said. He recalled a "very solid survey" by former Stanford Prof. Joseph Katz in 1965 — the year after the Free Speech Movement at UC-Berkeley — that compared Stanford seniors with their Berkeley counterparts.

"Stanford students were more involved on every dimension measured," including civil rights activities, politics, service projects, and service on student committees, he said. "The differences weren't large, but they were all in the same direction."

The study showed that "activism" attracted only 15 percent of the seniors. "Then as now — and as in the 1950s — most students were concerned with such personal questions as Who am I? Who loves me? and What will I become?"

Beyers, one of several Stanford staff members who took leave during summer 1964 to work in the Mississippi Freedom Project, paid tribute to Anthropology Prof. James Gibbs for stimulating his interest in the civil rights movement when the two were students together at Cornell.

The Mississippi project was a success in part because its leaders developed a well thought out plan of what they wanted to accomplish.

"One individual who really thinks things through can have an immense impact. The trouble is that most students want to have things happen immediately because they aren't going to be here that long and it's very hard to figure out ways to mobilize the kind of support to make something happen institutionally."

He praised students who are working on the arms control issue, which he believes is "the fundamental problem (in the world) right now."

Kennedy said people often underestimate the effectiveness of "committed individuals who gather support and lobby and are patient and adroitly harass people."

The program was organized by Elizabeth Gardner, a student member of the President's Centennial Committee, and Carey White, chairman of the Student Senate.