

Speech by Edward Tim Cox (SDS Protester)

Student's Name

Course Name and number

Date

MY PERFECT WRITING

My name is Edward Tim Cox. I stand here as a member of Students for a Democratic Society. I did not come to Chicago to have fun. I came because I think there is something deeply wrong with this country. I am here because I feel that our democracy is not real. “We are people of this generation, bred in at least modest comfort... looking uncomfortably to the world we inherit.”¹ And I am here because the Vietnam War is not right and needs to be stopped.

I joined this protest because I could no longer stay silent anymore. I was raised with the assumption that the American dream was about freedom and justice, as is the case with many youths. But I see today quite a different thing. As the Port Huron Statement states, “The declaration “all men are created equal...” rang hollow before the facts of Negro life in the South and the big cities of the North.”² I observe leaders as they come up with decisions without consulting us. The ideas in the Port Huron Statement spoke to me. It said that citizens ought to possess a voice in matters that change their lives in a real sense. That is what we refer to as participatory democracy. What we have today is not that. It is a system that leaves power in the hands of a few. Instead, as the statement argues, “decision-making of basic social consequence be carried on by public groupings.”³

What I have seen at the Democratic Convention only confirms this. It is meant to be where there is a living democracy. Before anyone even opens their mouth, decisions have been arrived at. The demands of youth, activists, and the common citizens are sidelined. Beyond this wall, individuals are beaten for speaking out. The politicians are inside discussing unity and refusing to pay attention to the rage in the streets. This is how not to be democratic. This is a play. It is fake.

¹ Hayden, *The Port Huron Statement (1962)*, Para. 1.

² Hayden, *The Port Huron Statement (1962)*, para. 3.

³ Hayden, *The Port Huron Statement (1962)*, para. 5.

The system tells us to have faith in law and order. But whose law? And whose order? When the demonstrators use peaceful demonstrations and are responded to violently, it demonstrates that the system is afraid of its own citizens. The Kerner Report acknowledged that this country is fragmented and unequally distributed.⁴ It demonstrated that injustice and inequality are practices. But nothing of importance is being done. Rather, it is more control, more police, and more silence.

The Vietnam War is the clearest example of this broken system. This war is wrong. Defending freedom is not about it. It has to do with power and control. Thousands of young Americans are being deployed to battle in a land they do not know. Worse still, the innocents of Vietnam are being killed daily. Villages are destroyed. Family is divided. There is no justice. This is violence.

We are told that we must carry on with the war to safeguard democracy. But how shall we justify democracy overseas when we are unable to practice it at home? The concepts of the Port Huron Statement remind us that we need to select systems that bring suffering. This war brings about suffering on a huge scale. It must end. Not slowly. Not with conditions. It should be over by unilateral withdrawal. We should depart Vietnam altogether and promptly.

Many young men are being forced to fight in this war. There have been voices such as those of David Harris condemning this.⁵ He demonstrated how unjust the system is. Not all people are impacted by the draft. The poor and working-class citizens get to be sent to battle, and those who avoid it find other means. This is by no means justice. This is an inequality.

⁴ National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, "1968 Kerner Commission Report | Othering & Belonging Institute."

⁵ Harris and Harris, "David V. Harris Papers, 1950s - 2020s."

Some people say that protest is wrong. We are said to be causing trouble. The problem is not the protest. The solution to the problem is protest. When the system stops its ears, the people will have to make an even stronger noise. In the face of injustice, individuals are compelled to fight back. As the Black Panther Ten Point Program declares, “We want an immediate end to police brutality and murder of Black people.”⁶ The program also speaks to the need for justice and equality. It addresses the very system that turns a blind eye to and hurts individuals. This is not chaos, it is a fight for justice.

Protest is a way to demand change. It is one of the means to keep power in check. Nothing would ever change without protest. The civil rights movement demonstrated that to us. Silence will not bring about change. It arises out of action. It is the result of individuals causing an uprising, the people saying, Enough.

We are not here because we hate this country. We came because we are interested in it. We desire that it should make good its own promises. Others and I desire a democracy with everybody. We desire a nation that treasures human life, this nation and the rest of the world. We desire an end to hypocrisy. The leaders inside this Convention can turn a blind eye to us. They can attempt to put us into silence.

Therefore, I am not standing here as an individual, but as a representative and as part of a movement. A movement that holds onto true democracy. A movement that requires war to come to a stop. A movement not to remain silent.

We will continue to protest. We will keep talking it out. And we shall keep on confronting a system that has forgotten the people because this is our future. And we will not let it be decided without us.

⁶ Martin, “Black Panther Ten-Point Program,” para. 4.

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