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EDUCATION
FOR
POLITICS



by
Allen Drury
Pulitzer Prize Winner, 1960,
for his **Advise and Consent**

ROLLINS COLLEGE BULLETIN

EDUCATION FOR POLITICS

An article "published" in the Rollins Animated Magazine, Volume XXXIV, Number 1, February 26, 1961, on the occasion of the Diamond Jubilee observance of the founding of Rollins College, 1885-1960.

Allen Drury

Author of the internationally acclaimed novel, **Advise and Consent**, Mr. Drury presently is serving as Washington, D. C., correspondent for the **Reader's Digest**. The noted author received the Pulitzer Prize in 1960 for his powerful best seller on the political scene in the nation's capital. The novel was recently adapted to play form and is currently a hit on Broadway. Journalist and political correspondent in Washington for many years, Mr. Drury has served as United Press Senate staff member, national editor for the **Pathfinder Magazine**, staff member of the **Washington Evening Star** and Senate correspondent for the **New York Times**. His professional work as marked by his by-line has earned the respect of millions of readers throughout the world. Under the title "What Makes America Great" Mr. Drury presents a powerful analysis of this question in the lead article of **McCall's** magazine of January, 1961. **A Shade of Difference**, Mr. Drury's second novel and a sequel to **Advise and Consent** will be ready for publication in 1962.

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EDUCATION FOR POLITICS

I thought that I would talk to you today — briefly, as President McKean suggested, and briefly, as befits the spirit which now animates Washington speech-makers, and which I consider a very good thing — about “Education for Politics.”

I use the word politics in the classic sense of the science of governing; and I say education for politics rather than education and politics because I think that in the age in which we live, and in the face of the perils we confront, it would be best for us if the two did not run parallel, but convergent.

As one of those who has believed for a long time that it will indeed be decided in these very few next years whether this nation and the whole free world can continue to live, it seems to me imperative that we train and educate men and women capable of understanding and administering the great mechanisms of our liberty. And by this I mean not only the national level, but down through every level, from national to state to local.

FREEDOM IS NOT EASY

We need people who realize what it means to have free government, and who know how to go about seeing that it is strengthened and maintained in every area of our national life. We need a general tightening-up all along the line to get rid of the flabbiness which has crept into our attitude toward our own country in recent years. We have drifted too long on the theory that freedom is easy. It is time we realized that it is not, and time to begin consciously to prepare the citizens coming to maturity who will have charge of it in the fearful years immediately ahead.

We now have a President who sees this, and that in itself is a great step forward in setting the psychological climate without which the job cannot be done. But it is not enough — it is never enough — to slough off our own responsibilities upon the President, whoever he may be. The President has plenty to worry about without doing the jobs the citizenry should be doing for itself. And it is in our schools, and on just such campuses as this, everywhere throughout the land and at all grades, that the task must be accomplished.

Initially, it seems to me, there must be a drastic and immediate reappraisal of the teaching of American history, from the earliest grades on up. There is a great story here in this Republic, yet millions of citizens have come to voting age in the past couple of decades with only the haziest notion of what it is.

Along with the educative fad that it would be best not to teach anyone English, so that everyone could be sure to talk and write at the same level of scholasticized illiteracy, it has also been the fad to play down one of the greatest sagas of struggle and triumph that any people has ever known in all of recorded time.

COURAGE MADE AMERICA GREAT

Somehow — and, I suspect, good teachers with some sense of dedication to their country can do it without too much extra trouble and strain — Americans must be brought back to a realization of the glories of their own heritage.

They must be reminded, and made to feel, what it meant to cross the ocean in a tiny boat and land in an unknown and hostile wilderness to start a colony.

They must be reminded, and made to feel, what it meant to take up arms against what was then the overwhelming world might of the British Empire—and win.

They must be reminded, and made to feel, what it meant to sit down in Philadelphia in a steaming summer long ago and patiently, step by step and argument by argument, hammer out a Constitution and a government that works.

They must be reminded of all the struggles that went on in the Congress as the nation spread westward, the frontier opened, and civil war threatened and finally came.

They must be told again of the awesome bravery of the pioneers, which was not a nice comfortable TV show that could be watched in your living-room, but a matter of fortitude beyond imagination and courage beyond belief in which people died in terrible deserts and ate one another at Donner Pass.

They must understand anew the things earlier Americans did, and why they did them, in all the long pageant of nearly two hundred years in which the Lord has seen fit to raise us up,

from a handful of colonizers, scattered along a thin thread of seaboard, to what every day becomes more truly what Mr. Lincoln called it, the last best hope of earth.

They must be given again a sense of cohesion with their past, of unity with the nation and with one another. They must find again a sense of their own history, for only out of it can come the inner conviction and courage to carry them on into a future, not of the death and extinction that the Communists intend for us, but of justice and strength and compassion in which we can both save ourselves and lead a world in shadows back toward the light.

THEY DARED TO BE DIFFERENT

In some such fashion, it seems to me, the schools and colleges of America can do their part; plus, also, a greater stress on political science and civics courses, the basic understanding of government; and a much greater emphasis upon what, in today's academic and social climate, may seem to be the rankest heresy, namely **the individual's obligation to be individual.**

I spoke in October to the Whig-Cliosophic Society at Princeton, and after the session one of the students drove me back down to Philadelphia, where I was spending the night. He was a very nice fellow, I would say about 18, from Illinois; very much disturbed about the college world.

"You know," he said, "I'm really bothered about it. The whole emphasis is on the group—on everybody being equal—on nobody excelling anybody else—on everybody showing the same level of activity and achievement—on nobody showing initiative—on nobody being outstanding. The whole emphasis is that we should all conform to the same median pattern. It bothers me, and I don't like it."

His complaint—and certainly he is not the only one of his generation to voice it—might also be considered, I think, in connection with education for politics.

If the highest aim of American education in this fearfully threatened world is to grind out a bland paste of conformity in which all lumps and scratchy pieces have been ground away in a sort of vast academic Waring blender, then that is one thing.

SECOND RATE LEADERS WON'T DO

But if the highest **obligation** of American education is to create leaders self-assured enough to lead and a citizenry intelligent enough to follow them constructively, then that is quite another.

Somehow, it seems to me, we have got to get away from this frightening insistence that everybody be exactly the same as everybody else. This was not the spirit that landed on alien shores, or went across the plains, or, on both sides, fought a civil war; or that helped us create the bounties we have.

The pressures for conformity which surround the young in school and college are bad enough without their being the organized objectives of an entire society. Somehow we have got to break the grip of the drab and lackluster level of sameness which is oozing like wet cement through all levels of our national life. A little while longer, and it will begin to harden; and then no amount of education for politics, or education for anything else, will be able to break through.

We need leaders. We need them desperately. We need every bright and unusual student we can get, because we are up against the grimmest foes that ever lived and we can't beat them with the second-rate.

It is going to demand every bit of brilliance in this nation to see us safely through what lies ahead. If we really want to win—and I don't know about you, but I do—it is going to mean the scrapping, completely and at once, of that other sickly educative fad of recent years, the one that says that everybody must be just alike and nobody must ever raise his head above the herd.

If we stick to that much longer, we are going to have a nation of mediocrities governed by mediocrities; and that is not the way to survive in this jungle century.

BUILDING AN INSTITUTE OF GOVERNMENT

Education for politics; in conclusion, one specific proposal of my own, springing from a purely personal attempt to find some constructive alternative to the empty and endless proposals to clutter up the nation's capital with lifeless stone excrescences in the names of great men who are gone.

Instead of a statue to President X or a stone monolith to President Z—why should we not have in Washington a National Institute of Government to do honor to them all—a living memorial in which all our great men could be honored in a way that would mean the most, both to them and to posterity—namely the education of men and women in the practical science of governing free men?

It could be done, it seems to me, without much difficulty, and it could pay in living dividends of leadership ten thousand times over.

Let it be created by Congressional charter as an educational institution supported partly by government contributions, principally by private charitable donations.

Let it be established somewhere within the District of Columbia or in the immediate countryside nearby—a number of private estates would undoubtedly be available if the project were seriously proposed.

Let it have a grand entryway, if you like, with statues standing about and fine sentiments inscribed on the walls as you go in.

But inside, **let it be alive.**

Suppose it to consist of a two-year post-graduate course, its students drawn by competitive examination and interview from all over the country. Suppose the staff to consist of a small administrative group and a constantly changing body of lecturers.

Suppose the lecturers to be drawn partly from universities, perhaps, but in far greater measure from those who really know the science of politics, because they have successfully passed the test; the members of the Senate, the members of the House, members of the President's Cabinet, other high administrative officials, possibly also members of the Washington press, who both record and at times participate in the processes of free government.

Let the students draw upon these men for lectures, ideas, just plain talk. Let them draw also upon all the vast resources that Washington provides for the study of government; the Library of Congress, the Archives, all the various departmental and agency libraries and files.

Further, let the two-year course consist, and perhaps more importantly, of several direct and practical applications.

Let it consist of, say, six months attached to the Executive department or departments of the student's choice, with the privilege of continuing to attend lectures when convenient. Let it consist of six months attached to the office of a Senator or Congressman on Capitol Hill. Let it consist, either in its first or last six months, depending upon whether the student starts his course in a Congressional election year or an off-year, of six months working in the home district or state of a Congressman or Senator, participating in the everyday drudgery of dealing with constituents, appealing to the electorate, rounding up votes.

Let it, in short, be informative, educative and practical, drawing upon all the wealth of men, material and knowledgeable experience that resides in the city of Washington. Let its students study government and politics at the fountainhead. Let it be truly a National Institute of Government.

A LIVING MEMORIAL

Then there would be one memorial for all the men whom it is now proposed to honor by hunks of lifeless stone all over downtown Washington. Teddy Roosevelt's family is unhappy about the one they're proposing to him, Franklin Roosevelt's family is unhappy about the one they're proposing to him. Woodrow Wilson's family is upset, and sooner or later the Eisenhowers will be called upon to be unhappy about the one somebody will propose to him.

But, good or bad in design, they will still be cold, lifeless, sterile and unproductive pieces of stone, steel and marble, incapable of contributing to the country one one-thousandth of what could be contributed by a living memorial of governmental experience in which all leaders could be honored and new ones could be constantly trained.

Let us reaffirm our past; let us educate our future. The times are hard, the cold winds of history blow about us. Whether we live or die depends, in some degree it is true, upon our enemies; but the ultimate answer as to which it will be depends upon us.

We must not fail history's challenge, my friends, for this is a lovely land we have; and it would be shame indeed to lose it.