**Reacting to the Past Reflection – Tom Hayden**

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Over the past week, I have watched the Democratic National Convention unfold. There has been a lot of debate over what the United States of America should deem important. I have made my opinions clear and did my best to ensure that the delegates hear what I say. Unfortunately, I am not sure that this matters. I concluded a while ago when I was first starting the SDS that today’s government is not here to benefit the people. People need to continue to let their voices be heard and not settle into normality. America is full of corruption, and it is up to the people to make our leaders understand that we will not take it. The convention was never going to be a solution to the problems in America, but I felt it could be used as a stage to reintroduce the importance of policies. We can only achieve a better America if we are willing to take the necessary action.

Today’s world is unlike anything that people had to deal with in the past. The war overseas results from corruption, and minority groups deal with oppression in many aspects of their lives (Hayden, 1964, cited in Proctor, 2020). At the convention, I noticed that there are still members of society who believe in these outdated practices; however, I was pleased when the delegates added Civil Rights and War on Poverty to the party’s platform. Progressive politics are important, and the delegates needed to bring them to the forefront. I feel that our demonstrations over this issue played a role in getting it added. I still think that it is possible to bring change through protest. I led three successful demonstrations throughout the convention, not just for awareness on issues but because I believe it is important to make the word and the wants of the people known. While I do not know if the government will ever truly hear our voices, informing them of our message is crucial to the advancement of this country. I came to this convention knowing the unfortunate truth that no candidate will have the ability to change the system. I search for democratic alternatives to the present and continually participate in social experimentation to demonstrate them for this reason. I feel there is nothing more worthy and fulfilling than doing this. It inspires me, and I hope it one day does the same for the rest of the young population around the country (Hayden, 1964, cited in Proctor, 2020). I have been pleased with the students’ efforts on college campuses across the country. Their demonstrations are some of the most important to the progression of our country. Universities are not helping students grow. They are preparing them to be a citizen in the United States. In this process, they destroy the creativeness and individuality of said students (Hayden, 1964, cited in Proctor, 2020). That is why they need to continue challenging the system and break the mold that society places them in. Young Americans can change the way America operates. By continuing to protest and showing discontent when it arises, this generation will show our leaders we will not take it anymore. If young Americans ask themselves questions that past generations avoided and focus on what is truly important in life, America will see growth and progress and become a place that everyone will be happy to call home.

I came to Chicago to help re-assert the presence and vitality of the antiwar movement. While having a platform that addresses issues helps, it is not enough. The truth is, I did not care about who was nominated. To bring change requires action, and that action falls upon myself and the young people of America. The outcome of the convention was never the solution. The need to get out of the war was my top priority. I feel if we accomplished this, America could begin to repair itself. In his “Book and Author Luncheon,” Robert Kennedy stated, “Political and economic reform is not simply idealistic slogans to be postponed until the fighting is over” (1968, cited in Proctor, 2020). Americans have fallen into the trap of believing that the war should be our focus, but the war has just distracted us from the problems in our country. Every day the United States of America forces African American soldiers to fight in a war overseas when these problems forced their daily lives in America to be difficult and full of oppression. For white men, the Vietnam War was the most significant problem they faced, and once they got home, their problems disappeared, but for black men, the issues were at home (Lorence, 1967, cited in Proctor, 2020). Our country has failed to create a free society. Therefore, it is hypocritical to say we are trying to build a Geat Society for Vietnam. I planned to make the world hear my thoughts on the war during the convention. I led a sit-in to force the delegates to listen to my voice; unfortunately, the Chicago Police Department arrested me before speaking. I was planning on addressing the discontent people have with the war. The mistake people make is they believe Americans are comfortable in prosperity, but many feel anxiety about what their government asks them to do in the world. Addressing this feeling can lead to the possibility of a better world for them to live in (Hayden, 1964, cited in Proctor, 2020). So many people believe that America has no other options. They have listened to the encouraging comments of politicians and think that America will get through whatever comes in its way (Hayden, 1964, cited in Proctor, 2020). This line of thinking has resulted in the world we live in today, corrupt and fake. If we want to move America forward, we can not have this outdated train of thought. We need to self-evaluate by asking ourselves questions. What is important? Can we live in a different and better way? How would we go about bringing change? Today’s society does not engage in these questions, but they are crucial for us to ask (Hayden, 1964, cited in Proctor, 2020). Only by discovering what we need out of life can we grow as people and a nation.

The past few days have seen a lot of action pushing towards goals. It needs to be made clear that the convention would never solve the problems people face in America. It needed to be used to re-assert the importance of these issues on a worldwide stage. If we want to bring change to America, it is on us, the people, to take action. The convention does not mark the end of our campaign. The people of America need to continue demonstrating their discontent with the government and fixing the system. The change America needs will only come if we are willing to change it.

**References**

Proctor. N. W. (2020). *Chicago, 1968: Policy and protest at the democratic national convention*. W. W. Norton & Company.

1. How have the issues addressed in the 1968 election shaped the way Americans (like yourself) think today? How are the perspectives of people in 1968 similar or different on these issues than folks today?

The 1968 election debated civil rights, war on poverty, infrastructure, law and order, and how America should conduct foreign policy. These topics have led to debates about how involved the government should be in people’s lives. The government has created social policies to help fight against poverty and poor areas around the country. People have formed strong beliefs about how America should help these areas. Some people believe the government should step in and help those people, while others think that handouts destroy the motivation for people to work. Minority groups are still fighting for equality, and the 1968 election also played a big part in bringing civil rights to the forefront. There are still conversations about how law enforcement should do its job and if the playing field is level. Today, people have different opinions on how much years of discrimination hold back members of minority groups and how the government should solve this problem. Finally, 1968 had massive implications on how people feel America should handle foreign policy. Vietnam caused a lot of controversy over how involved America should be in other countries. Some people believe that America is a powerful country and has the responsibility to spread influence worldwide. Others feel there are problems at home, and it is not our place to tell others how to live. The issues discussed in 1968 come down to America’s priorities and the level of government involvement in people’s lives.

The political views on progressive politics have continued to grow in society, and one

side of the political spectrum advocates for them. When it comes to dealing with the poorer areas of America like the inner cities, people’s views remain similar. A group of people believes that it is the government’s job to go in and rebuild those parts to level the playing field for everyone. Others feel that progress has come, and now everyone shares the same ability to have success. One thing that has for sure stayed the same is how people handle discontent. A large group of protestors went to the convention to show their displeasure. Today people continue this as a way to tell the government how they feel. Recently the BLM movement has sparked discussion about equality that groups like the Black Panther fought in 1968. Foreign policy has seen some development as well. In 2001, many Americans supported going to Afghanistan, but the support has changed as time has gone on. The debate on getting out was similar to how people felt about Vietnam. In both cases, some groups wanted out on America’s terms, and another group just wanted out. The topics and sides of the debate have changed since 1968, but there are similarities between them. It is more divisive between parties today than in 1968, which causes many arguments about running the country.

1. What was the most difficult aspect of role-playing your particular historical figure? How can your knowledge of your figure inform or change your view of the world today?

As the game was unfolding, I found it increasingly difficult to stay out of jail. Tom Hayden wanted to mobilize Americans and take action on the streets. To do this, I lead demonstrations out of the protest zone in every session. This part of the game was not too difficult but doing this while not being caught by the police was a different story. The best way I felt that I could attempt to stay out of jail was to organize a large protest with many people. I did a good job at doing this, but it did not help with my end goal. I understand why the police would want to pick off members in leadership positions, and this is why it was so challenging to avoid arrest. Another goal of mine was to keep Abbie Hoffman out of the limelight. I have learned that Tom Hayden did not respect the way Abbie went about conducting his demonstrations. It was challenging to keep Abbie Hoffman out of the eyes of the media. He is popular, and journalists continued to want to interview him to get stories. I was able to keep him from getting protest leader, but I failed to prevent him from being awarded media darling multiple times.

I think Tom Hayden was a brilliant man. He was cautious of the government and felt there were a lot of problems they needed to address, but he still believed in the importance of democracy. I think it is important to learn from Tom Hayden is that people do not have to agree with their political party on every issue. He demonstrated time after time against his party. Tom Hayden did not care who won the nomination for the Democratic party. He went to Chicago to make sure the delegates understood his and America’s discontent with the war. I do not believe protests should turn violent, but I do feel that if the political leaders are not representing your ideas, you have to express that. Today, many people side with a party, which is the end of their involvement with issues, but as Tom Hayden demonstrated, that is not how we should handle politics. I also find it fascinating that he ended up with a career in politics. I think it was a good fit for him, but, interestingly, someone who was so keen on forming protests and was not afraid of violence would end up working for it.