

Richard Nixon Presidential Library
White House Special Files Collection
Folder List

<u>Box Number</u>	<u>Folder Number</u>	<u>Document Date</u>	<u>Document Type</u>	<u>Document Description</u>
2	15	05/11/1970	Letter	Handwritten note from Miller Upton of Beloit College to Rose Mary Woods RE: Request to forward an enclosed letter to the President. 1 pg. Duplicate - Not Scanned.
2	15	05/11/1970	Letter	Letter from Miller Upton of Beloit College to RN RE: The state of higher education. 4 pgs. Duplicate - Not Scanned.
2	15	05/09/1970	Memo	Memo from Miller Upton of Beloit University to the Editor of The Round Table RE: Upcoming round table on the state of higher education. 2 pgs. Duplicate - Not Scanned.
2	15	05/11/1970	Letter	Copy of a letter from unknown to Rose Mary Woods regarding an enclosed item. 1 pg.
2	15	05/11/1970	Letter	From Miller Upton of Beloit College to RN regarding the national state of education. 4 pgs.
2	15	05/09/1970	Memo	From Miller Upton to the editor of The Round Table regarding support for Upton's recent letter to RN. 2 pgs.

BELOIT COLLEGE
BELOIT, WISCONSIN

OFFICE OF
THE PRESIDENT

May 11, 1970

Miss Woods,

I send the enclosed with the
thought it might be of possible interest
to the President.

Miller Hyster

BELOIT COLLEGE



BELOIT, WISCONSIN

53511

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

May 11, 1970

An Open Letter to President Richard M. Nixon

Dear Mr. President:

As a college president, a past scholar-teacher, and one who has consciously devoted his whole life to the cause of higher education in the conviction that it offers the greatest hope for social progress and the elevation of man to his highest potential, I wish to apologize to you and the nation for the grotesque failure of the academic community at this hour of national trial and turmoil.

I am fully aware of how extremely presumptuous it is for one to represent himself to apologize for the many, but I am constrained to do so nonetheless for the shame I feel for the community with which I have been so intimately related for so long and in which I have placed so much confidence in the past. Those who do not agree with me will, of course, be able and willing to speak for themselves.

Let me establish a point about myself at the outset so that my position can be more accurately interpreted. I was a conscientious objector during World War II, and were I of draft age now I would be a conscientious objector again. But my moral opposition to war, however deeply and conscientiously held, does not entitle me on any ethical or moral grounds to take violent action against those who disagree. I must bear witness to truth as I see it, but I must also respect the right of the other person to do the same. Certainly, I must never hurt or demean another simply because he won't go along with my own conviction.

This commitment to respect for the individual, intellectual openness, and freedom of inquiry is the transcendent value to which an academic community must be subservient. In fact, it is the only value to which the academy can pledge allegiance if it is to be consistent with itself. To elevate any other value is to break faith with this transcendent value and it is at this point that we have violated our public trust as professional educators: we have given in to violence and threats of violence in support of a particular point of view, and in doing so we have allowed the academic integrity of our individual institutions and the academic community at large to be violated.

Public Enrichment through Private Endowment

Being a conscientious objector to war and one who would issue such an open letter as this, I clearly am not opposed to dissent and protest. But I am vigorously opposed to violence in any form and for any reason, and most of all I am opposed to would-be leaders capitulating to intimidation and violence. Those who respect violence when used against them will inevitably employ violence when it suits their cause.

We in the colleges and universities have tolerated unspeakable intimidation and thought control on the part of radical students, faculty and others, and yet when Vice President Agnew speaks out forcefully against such the only voices that are heard from the academy are those who castigate him and you for repressing dissent. There are few college campuses, if any, where Vice President Agnew, or any member of your cabinet for that matter, could speak without disruption and even physical abuse and intimidation. But a convicted murderer, dope peddler, or one committed to the forceful overthrow of the government will receive not only a respectful hearing, but will be paid a handsome honorarium in addition. In the light of his high position, I have been embarrassed by some of the Vice President's intemperate language. But surely he has as much right to dissent and to be given a respectful hearing as any of the criminal element of our society.

Much of the academic community is now telling you how to settle the war in Vietnam and being critical of your effort to protect lives and shorten the war by moving troops into Cambodia. I find it highly unbecoming of us to presume to tell you how to fight the war in Vietnam when we aren't even able to settle the wars on our own campuses. Nor do I use the word war in this context lightly. The throwing of missiles to do physical harm, the throwing of firebombs to burn buildings, the use of guerrilla tactics via arson and vandalism, the shooting and killing of combatants and noncombatants is every bit as much war as that which prevails in Vietnam, Cambodia, and the Near East. I have often wondered sardonically how many protestors of napalm have themselves thrown fire bombs or engaged in arson.

I have also been appalled by a certain arrogance and inconsistency on our part with regard to the way we are free to tell you and others how to handle your jobs but become deeply resentful, insulted, and even hostile when there is any suggestion of your intrusion into "our" domain. I am quite sure that I am able to run Beloit College better than you, but by the same token I am sure that you are able to deal with the issues of the Presidency of the United States, including fighting the war in Vietnam, better than I. The widespread propensity of members of the "intellectual" community to make judgments without benefit of facts is one of my greatest disillusionments and embarrassments.

As a matter of fact, my early naivete led me to embrace the academic life because of my belief that members therein were committed to intellectual honesty, rational behavior and humanistic concern and compassion. Recent incidents have merely confirmed all the more what my life's experiences have suggested. Academic man is as much motivated by vested interest, is as much controlled by base emotion, and reasons as much from prejudice as any other mortal. My readings of Ecclesiastes, the New Testament and the life of Mahatma Gandhi should have prepared me for this, but they didn't.

We who work closely with young people and should know and understand them best have not been very helpful to them or to you and others of the adult community in serving as a vehicle of communication. We have too often taken sides ourselves and been critical of one group or the other and not been sufficiently discriminating in our communicative role.

Maybe we can be forgiven on the grounds that the task is such a difficult one. I know that the great bulk of college students are genuinely concerned about the inhumanity and futility of war and deeply question the legitimacy of a life that sanctions and even glorifies indiscriminate killing and maiming. I also know that the great bulk of adults and members of the establishment are sincere, dedicated individuals with the same hopes and aspirations as the young. But I also know that in each group there are examples that support the worst stereotype of each. The great frustration of the day is that despite this great community of interest and concern there is a growing separation based upon the sinful tendency to judge by stereotype and preconception. We in the academic community are frequently party to this sin even though our training should particularly help us to know better.

Although my own sentiments are basically with the young people, I must admit that there is a general pandering to the young at the present time that is both disgusting and irresponsible. Disgusting because it prostitutes normal respect and affection. Irresponsible because it is creating an unrealistic cleavage between age groups.

Of course, young people on the whole are wonderful, but what's new about that? The great reward of college work is the opportunity it affords to associate regularly with this age group. The idealism, absolutism, intellectual honesty and great aspiration of the young are the eternal attributes of this age group upon which society is dependent to preserve its vital, dynamic quality. These attributes are the standards of behavior to be expected, not glorified as unique in any narrow time span of human history.

Young people are first and foremost people. Those who are young today will be old tomorrow and having to relate to those who are younger then. As people they represent all types, some taller than others, some fatter

than others, some with higher IQs than others, some more criminally inclined than others, some more saintly than others, some more hostile than others, some more vocal than others, etc. There is no general virtue attributable to youth any more than there is general evil. We have done all young people a great disservice in recent years by suggesting to them that they are of a different breed from the rest of us and beyond reproach. They are nothing more than the fresh blood being pumped into the human society, just as we were in the past and their children will be in the future. We in Academe should have known this better than anyone else and not have failed them and you in your common need for understanding.

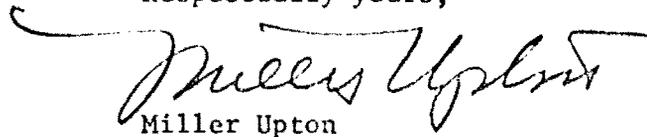
We have been quick to tell you that you are alienating the youth of America, but we seem to pay little attention to the way we are alienating our own constituencies by our failure to protect the authentic academic integrity of our institutions. Implicitly we are also alienating the youth of America over the long run by our failure to be faithful to our leadership responsibilities.

The pain that hurts most of all is the realization that I bear partial responsibility for the unnecessary deaths of four young people on the campus of Kent State University. The National Guard troops should never have been there in the first place, because we should never have permitted the conditions to develop which necessitated the presence of troops. Once this die was cast, it was simply a matter of time before tragedy would strike. If fault lies anywhere for the Kent State deaths it lies not with you and the Vietnam War but with the radical acts and excesses we have tolerated in the name of dissent.

I am sure you know, Mr. President, that I do not say these things with tongue in cheek to placate others, to curry favor, to advance partisan interest, or to defend your war policies. Last fall I joined with a number of other college presidents to urge your rapid withdrawal of troops from Vietnam. I reaffirm this plea. But when I consider the whole matter fully and objectively, I have to concede that you have been more faithful to your leadership responsibilities than we in Academe have been to our own.

With respect for the tremendous burdens you must bear for the rest of us and the conscientious way you are bearing them and with apology for the cruel injustices that have been foisted upon you by the professional community of which I am a part, I remain,

Respectfully yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Miller Upton".

Miller Upton

President Richard M. Nixon
The White House
Washington, D. C.

May 11, 1970

BELOIT COLLEGE



BELOIT, WISCONSIN

53511

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

May 9, 1970

TO: The Editor of The Round Table

FROM: Miller Upton, President

I want to congratulate you on your plan to get as many members of the community as possible to express their own genuine concern for the current conditions that plague us all. I trust you will get widespread participation. I can think of nothing that would be more salutary than for every student, faculty member, staff member and trustee to express himself openly and honestly about our common concern.

Institutions of higher learning exist because truth is uncertain and because different individuals with different perceptions of truth can help one another develop to a higher truth. Such a community of learning, therefore, can never become a community of advocacy without destroying the reason and essence of its own being. But without prejudging truth every such community can share a common concern with equivalent depth and sincerity among its members without expecting all members to agree as to solution. I am immensely proud of the way our own community has responded in this regard to the terrible tensions and turmoils of the day. The students, faculty and administrative personnel are to be congratulated. Let us not relax in our common concern for what is best for the country. And let us not forsake our rational and mutually respectful approach.

As for me, I have not felt so depressed and torn asunder since the darkest days of World War II. I have always been opposed to the Vietnam War, not in any selective sense but because of my moral opposition to war as an instrument of foreign policy. But my greatest torment now arises not from the Vietnam War but from the conditions within our country. I wonder why responsible members of our society want to incite to feelings of hostility and meanness with the inevitable consequence of violence. We cannot hope to make any contribution to the elimination of violence in Vietnam, in Israel and on our streets and campuses until we individually are successful in eliminating the impulse to hatred and violence that is within each of us.

As a matter of fact, my profound depression mainly arises from my disappointment with the academic community at large. A disappointment that

Public Enrichment through Private Endowment

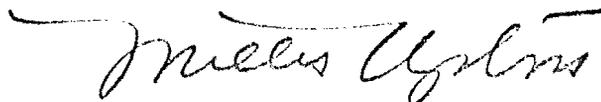
is all the more intense for my having invested so much of my life and my hopes in it.

This is why I have chosen to express myself in the form of a penance by way of an open letter of apology to President Nixon. We have had too much of buck passing, of throwing darts at others, of closing our eyes to our own sins while hostilely accusing others. The lessons of the past have been pounding through my mind: "Let him who has not sinned cast the first stone." "Judge not that you be not judged." "You cannot remove the speck from your brother's eye until you have removed the plank from your own."

Instead of pointing fingers at others we all need to start being honestly critical of ourselves. As we have learned from hideous experience over the last few years, to take any other approach, to arrogantly place blame on others simply results in inflaming passions more and leading to conditions of war at home that we are so critical of abroad. We must not fall into the emotional trap of being so opposed to war that we are willing to fight and kill for it.

Let me emphasize finally that I issue this statement as a deeply troubled and concerned human being, citizen and professional educator. In addressing an open letter to President Nixon I am addressing it to the nation and to my academic colleagues at large, not to Beloit College in my administrative capacity as President.

If anyone disagrees with or resents my position, I hope he will take it up with me. No one should vent his feelings on the College, the town, President Nixon, or any other innocent. I alone should bear the burden of my position. And any differences that exist between me and others can only be resolved by open, honest and respectful dialogue between ourselves in the best tradition of the academic community.



Miller Upton

MU:dk