

1 MSNBC's *Morning Joe*
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4 JOE SCARBOROUGH: Hey, welcome back to *Morning Joe*. It is great to have with us Pulitzer prize-
5 winning historian, Jon Meacham with us. Jon, I always love talking to you around the 4th of July. It
6 seems over the past four or five years there's been so much going on that it's always important to have
7 a reminder of who we are as a nation, where we've been, and how we're making our way toward being
8 that more perfect union.

9 I want to talk about what happened though – A lot of people talking, obviously, over the past few days
10 about Cassidy Hutchinson and her testimony on January 6 committee. Reminds me of something that you
11 speak a great deal about. And that is something that happened I believe on June the 1st 1950, with a
12 certain female senator from Maine. Tell us about what being an American, what being a patriot is really
13 all about on this 4th of July weekend.

14 JON MEACHAM: Yeah, it was Lincoln's birthday in 1950 when Joe McCarthy of Wisconsin drew the short
15 straw and went to speak to the Wheeling West Virginia Women's Republican gathering. Believe me.
16 Wheeling West Virginia was not where they sent the top tier folks of the Republican Party in 1950.

17 There McCarthy gave his famous speech that he had in his pocket, the names – the number kept moving
18 but circa 200 communists in the Department of State. It sets off our second great red scare. The first in
19 the late 19 teens and 20s. And he began really his reign of terror that Joe McCarthy was the author of in
20 1950.

21 And it was Margaret Chase Smith of Maine, Republican senator who gave the first great statement
22 against McCarthyism. It was very early. So, imagine February 12 to June 1. She went to the floor. She
23 gave a speech titled "The Declaration of Conscience," in which she said we can disagree about the goals
24 of policy but we should not question each other's motives. We cannot be un-American in that way.

25 She only got six co-sponsors. And McCarthy dismissed them as Snow White and the six dwarfs. But four
26 years later the Senate of the United States would side with Smith. She was right. The majority that had
27 decided to take an easier path, McCarthy seemed powerful. The press loved him. He understood how to
28 manipulate it.

29 And we had four years of madness. Dwight Eisenhower, much argument about that about what he did.
30 But he actually took a dive during the 1952 campaign and took out a section of his speech attacking
31 McCarthy. Because they just didn't want to affront the base.

32 Huh. That sounds pretty familiar, doesn't it?

33 SCARBOROUGH: You know, Eisenhower, one of my heroes when I was reading Larry Tye's great book on
34 McCarthy. Got to that point. It was really hard to read because Dwight Eisenhower was a hero. He was
35 going to win in Wisconsin easily. He had a chance to criticize Joe McCarthy, had a chance to criticize a
36 man who had gone after and tried to wreck the career, wreck the life of his mentor, General Marshall.
37 And he refused to say a negative word about him.

38 And like you said, actively went into the speech, took out a part that would have condemned
39 McCarthyism. Just didn't have the courage to do it. Just like so many people haven't had the courage to

1 cross Donald Trump. But once again, you have a strong woman here. You have Liz Cheney and again
2 Margaret Chase Smith.

3 When I talk about Larry Tye book, that reminds me, Jon. When I read history, it actually reminds me that
4 we aren't so disconnected from our past. We like to think that we somehow five years, ten years ago
5 were the halcyon days. We've been through this before. You read Larry Tye's book and you see
6 McCarthy owned – like you said – he had the press in his pocket. He ruined lives. He wrecked career. He
7 caused people to commit suicide. And he gained the loyalty of the Republican Party for a very long time.
8 The fever though eventually did break.

9 MEACHAM: And it was four years. It was a long time. And it's – What we're dealing with now is the
10 fullest manifestation of the darkest forces in American life. And those forces are perennial. They're far,
11 far, far older than America. They start in the Garden of Eden, right? It's the will to power. It's the putting
12 of your own ambition and appetite ahead of anything else.

13 And one of the things we commemorate on July 4th is the founding of a nation that however imperfect
14 and however incomplete its realization of that ideal is, was founded on an ideal that all men are created
15 equal and are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights. We have not always lived up to
16 it. We never will.

17 But I promise you as you talk about history; the moment you or I, or anybody else would want to go
18 back to that they're willing to admit to are moments where we expanded the definition of what it means
19 to be an American. We expanded the meaning of that incredibly important sentence written by Thomas
20 Jefferson as part of one of the great committees of all time. Right? and great committees, is like 20th
21 century French military victories. Right? It's not a huge category.

22 SCARBOROUGH: Yeah.

23 MEACHAM: But Ben Franklin and John Adams and Thomas Jefferson, Livingston, and Sherman, they
24 were on this little subcommittee and they wrote this declaration. And it was meant to be read. It was a
25 declaration to the world. Trying to make its case that the United States should have its own standing
26 among the powers of the Earth.

27 And what we're dealing with now and over the last six years in particular is an inversion of what we
28 should be. Too many people have put the pursuit of power at the center of their political public facing
29 being. And the thing about America is that we are at our best when the strong do not exploit the weak.
30 The rule of law is about putting up a guardrail because we're all fallen, frail, and fallible.

31 You grew up in Southern Baptist tradition. I grew up in a Southern Episcopalian tradition. We know that
32 we are sinful. And because a democracy is the fullest manifestation of all of us, then country is going to
33 be sinful too. And the reason you have the rule of law, the reason you have commandments is to try to
34 do better. And if you don't assent, if you don't agree to win by the rules or lose by the rules, then the
35 entire enterprise collapses.

36 And I'll say this: if we break the United States of America, we don't get it back.

37 SCARBOROUGH: Yeah. Saved by grace. As you and I were taught in the church and thank God because I'll
38 speak for myself, I know I need grace. I know the country I love so much needs grace. Let's talk about a
39 person that you've written about. You just mentioned him, Thomas Jefferson.

1 I think as we grapple with the challenges of coming to terms with our history and we have this debate
2 between those that are in the 1619 camp. and those in the 1776 camp. It's so important that we're able
3 to hold those two truths at the same time. It doesn't have to be an either or. I was explaining this to a
4 graduating class I spoke two weeks ago, that Thomas Jefferson can both be a man who was considered
5 deplorable by some standards even in own time and also be the man that wrote the words that have
6 freed more people than any other political document in the history of humankind.

7 Isn't that our challenge as we look at all of our leaders and we judge them, while understanding that two
8 truths can be held in mind at the same time. So, we don't just completely wipe away our history.

9 MEACHAM: Absolutely. And 1619 and 1776 and 1865 and 1920 for the 19th Amendment and 1944 with
10 the landings at Normandy, 1964 the civil rights movement, 1965 the votes rights act. All these are parts
11 of whole. And history, because it's human, is a couple of steps forward, a step or two back, and do it
12 again.

13 And there is nothing guaranteed about our success. There is nothing guaranteed about justice. but at
14 every point, we know what we should do. Whether we do it or not is an entirely different question. And
15 we should take no solace from the fact that it has worked out in the past. But what we should take
16 solace from is that human beings make it work out in the past. And they were not nobler or more
17 perfect than we are.

18 Our friend David McCulloch said nobody walked around in the past saying, "Wow, what an interesting
19 world the past is." They didn't know how it would turn out, either. But what we can learn again and
20 again is that when we lived into that sentence that Jeffersonian sentence, as flawed and difficult as he
21 was, we can create that more perfect union.

22 A paragraph, the more perfect union paragraph, written by Gouverneur Morris – I wish Mika were here
23 so she could hear me talk about Gouverneur Morris.

24 SCARBOROUGH: I do too, yes.

25 MEACHAM: [Laughter] I know she's going to miss this.

26 But Gouverneur Morris wrote that. He walked around on a peg leg because it was said that he had
27 jumped out the window when he was with another man's wife and the man showed up. These are not,
28 you know, Olympian figures. They're human and the remarkable thing about the United States s that it's
29 not just the powerful but it's also those far from power who meet in this dialect.

30 And, you know, another quick point is a line that President Obama loved and Dr. King loved from
31 Theodor Parker: the ark of a moral universe is long but it bends toward justice. But it only bends if there
32 are people like John Lewis and Rosa Parks and those men on the beaches in Normandy that insist that it
33 swerve.

34 Because there are always going to be forces of reaction. There are also going to be forces of stasis. And
35 that's just what history is and it's hard to remember that from day to day, the tsunami of news that we
36 live in. But if you take just half a step back, you understand that it really is up to us.

1 And I'd argue that this Fourth of July, as much as any in our history, certainly since the Civil War is one
2 where we have to realize that patriotism isn't passive. It's an active state and this is a stress test for
3 citizenship.

4 SCARBOROUGH: So, I tweeted a couple days ago a question I guess just because I was ready to be
5 abused. The question: even with all of our flaws, why are you proud to be an American?

6 That's a dangerous question to ask on Twitter. Got a lot of really positive responses, got obviously some
7 negative responses from people who are deeply concerned with where the country is right now.

8 But this is one of my favorites by Joe Reynolds and he said, "when you are some small person with your
9 back against the wall, a natural disaster, a political prisoner, or a pandemic, you don't say maybe India
10 will help us or maybe China. You say maybe America will help. We don't always live up to that but we
11 should."

12 I loved that answer because again, through all of our flaws, through all of our problems, this republic has
13 fed and freed more people than any country in history. And so on this Fourth of July weekend, I ask you
14 Jon: why are you proud to be an American?

15 MEACHAM: I'm proud to be an American for the same reason I'm proud to be a human being. I know
16 that I am capable of great evil and great shadow and great darkness, but I also know that there are days
17 and moments when there's light and life and love. And that if we can just get to light and life and love,
18 51 percent of the time, then we're having a good day and we're having a good era.

19 Don't let the perfect be the enemy of the good and I think that America is a marvelous example of a
20 human community that gets so much wrong, but which knows intuitively that if you do the right thing,
21 everybody benefits. And we have to see each other as neighbors and not as enemies.

22 SCARBOROUGH: Do not despair. Do not give up in the words of Churchill never, never, never give up.
23 Jon Meacham, as always, thank you so much for being with us. Hope you and your family are having a
24 great 4th of July weekend.

25 MEACHAM: Thank you, appreciate it, Joe.

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