

SYDNEY HARRIS / At Least Student Dissidents Care

A high school history teacher was saying the other day that he wished he had a few "troublemakers" in his class. "The problem with most of my kids," he said, "is that they're too passive and uninterested. They don't seem to have any particular values at all."

I think he is right, and we ought to be grateful for our dissident students in the colleges—who, after all, are deeply concerned with values and goals, even if they don't happen to be the values and goals of The Establishment.

The great majority of students are not so much apathetic as they are unconcerned. Most of them are disenchanted with the educational and social structure they have grown up in, but they aren't looking for ways to reform or improve it—they live in a moral and intellectual void, trying to get decent grades and then a satisfactory job.

But that isn't enough these days. Whatever the faults of the college dissidents—and there are plenty—they at least recognize that time is running out on the world, that it is not realistic merely to reject old standards without proposing some positive substitutions. To make no choice, as William James said long ago, is itself a choice.



Sydney Harris

One of The Establishment leaders who seems to understand what the college rebels are expressing is Edward E. Booher, president of McGraw-Hill, who remarked recently:

"I believe that they (college students) are questioning the basic values, or rather the lack of values, on the part of many, if not most, businessmen of my generation, other than the usual regard for growth and profits. It is, in my opinion, our failure as businessmen to recognize and emphasize individual rights and the need to improve the quality of society that closes channels of communication between us and the generation whose support we need and must have."

Whether we agree or disagree with the dissenters, it is a fact that they care about society, about the future, about war and poverty and prejudice. Their tactics may be distressing, or their solutions wrong, but they are filling a vacuum that no other segment of society is concerned with. It is up to us to channel their energy and idealism into productive paths, not to sneer, to scorn, or to shut them up.

Our real threat comes from the uninvolved, the disengaged, the blank-eyed students who simply go through the motions of conforming and believe nothing—who cynically reject the values of the past with-

out embracing any standard for the future except safety, security and self-satisfaction. This spirit is treason to the American dream.

Looking back on the last half-century, we can see that most changes were due to technological advances and our rapid adaptation to them, and most problems due to the rigidity of our institutions and their hostility to change; if, in the future, we could learn to be more critical of our technology and more flexible in our institutions, we might achieve a tolerable balance between the demands of change and the necessity of order.

While it is true that most people should read more, it is also true that, just as those who ride all the time lose the faculty for walking, those who read all the time often lose the capacity for thinking—which accounts for the stunning unoriginality of so much "scholarship."

The greatest and most dangerous fallacy still existing in this world of 1969 is that unilateral national defense is in any way feasible as a means of avoiding war, deterring war, or "winning" war; rather, without the reformation and strengthening of some such agency as the UN, the more the international system expands its offensive and defensive capabilities, the more likely the outbreak of an irreversible catastrophe.

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TEEN LETTERS

Students Dress According to the Degrees

During a recent cold spell, many girls at Patchogue High School wore slacks to school. Their reasons for doing so were soundly based. Because 16 of the school's classrooms are outside, every 50 minutes we have to run in and out of buildings. Warm clothing is needed to guard against colds and other infections.

Skirts, are just not so practical and warm as slacks. School officials are being stubborn, unrealistic and old-fashioned. They allow long hair, beards and turtle-necks on teachers; this is good, but strictly for the purpose of vanity. Officials are overlooking a major point: the comfort of students.

It is not only this recent incident which brings out the importance of the issue but also several in the past. Boys had to wear socks to summer school; at times we all find shoes and socks hot and uncomfortable. It is a lot to ask us to wear regular school dress to exams. Pressures are had enough at those times without our having to sweat in long pants, socks and dresses.

Consideration, a little understanding and some open-mindedness aren't too much to ask for. School is a place to learn and not trifle with trivia.

—Mary Ann Spavins, 17

TEEN LETTERS

LI Students Gain Power . . . Peaceably

Newsday has given a lot of publicity to the so-called student unrest in the high schools on Long Island, but my fellow students and I were disturbed when there was no recognition given to the fact that Levittown Memorial High School was the first school to start the drive for more student power in this area.

As a case in point, I refer to the issue of girls wearing slacks to school. On a recent Monday, two other girls and I secured the right to act as test cases in wearing slacks to classes. Our efforts proved successful, as later the same day it was announced that all girl students would be allowed to wear slacks to their classes. As a result of our actions, a few other high schools in District Five have permitted students to wear slacks to school.

We think it is wrong for newspapers to give wide coverage to schools that try to obtain new goals by violence, while ignoring the schools that adapt to change peacefully the way Levittown Memorial did. It prejudices the public against accepting changes in school systems and immediately conjures up visions of bloodshed and arrogant protest. District Five can attest to the fact that student power is not always a thing to be feared.

—Arlene Zimney, 17

Youth's Truthful Answers

I was shocked by Robert Hew's letter (Dec. 19) condemning today's youth. Referring to the younger generation as "self-destructing and much involved," Robert stated that teenagers "are the root of most evil."

Is it evil when a teenager marches 40 miles to protest the human suffering in Biafra? Is it evil when

a teenager says that war is wrong? Is it evil that more people are graduating from high school now than in any other previous generation and that more enroll in colleges and universities than ever before?

It is true that the young generation is involved. But after all, what's wrong with teenagers working in the campaign of a political figure or just plain caring about what's going to happen to our world? The younger generation is trying to make ours a more meaningful existence.

—Joshua J. Wiener, 16

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