

CAMBRIDGE, Mass.—The morning after Vice President Agnew teed off on the television networks, the car radio brought the announcement that CBS was inaugurating a new "series for the 70s," especially designed for us members of the "action generation."

To a middle-aged man stuck in the usual morning traffic on Route 2, it was mind-blowing just to learn one belonged to the "action generation." But the real dazzlement came when CBS told us who we would be hearing about in its new series on "action people."

If the notes scribbled at the next red light can be relied upon, the heroes of the series will be "sky divers, motorcyclists, scuba divers and protest demonstrators."

Intentionally or not, the announcement of the new series seemed a pertinent reply to the Vice President's question of the previous night, asking if the networks believe their "endless pursuit of controversy . . . more action, more excitement, more drama serves our national search for internal peace and stability?"

It can fairly be objected that the pursuit of happiness of which the Declaration of Independence speaks has little to do with the picture of the "silent American," sitting in his tepid bath and seeking a state of perfect tranquillity, conjured up by Mr. Agnew's words.

What cannot be denied is that there are some equally walloping cultural and personal values built into the decision to produce a series on the "action generation" that defines protest demonstrations as a seasonal sport, just like water-skiing or snorkeling.

AND THAT was one of the points the Vice President was trying to make in his much-criticized speech—a speech whose valid points may be overlooked in the denunciation of its one glaring error.

Mr. Agnew was not original, perhaps, but he was certainly right in pointing out that a television news program, like a newspaper's front page, is not simply a mirror of an objective reality, but an interpretation of events, filtered and selected through the conventions of

the medium and inevitably warped by the prejudices of the men who run them.

He was correct in noting that all journalism thrives on and emphasizes conflict. Television news, compressed in time and heavily dependent on dramatic effect, tends to treat any conflict as the clash of two antagonistic forces. The drama can be heightened if the clash is personalized and if the personalities spotlighted express or represent strongly diverging viewpoints on the issue. Thus, television news, even more than print journalism, tends to obliterate the middle-ground of compromise and agreement and to emphasize conflict and extreme positions.

Also, Mr. Agnew was correct in arguing that the concentration of editorial decision-making in New York and Washington—again, characteristic of all journalism but exaggerated in television—heightens the problem. Any journalist knows that his perspective changes as he moves into or away from that East Coast power center, in whose "geographical and intellectual confines," as Mr. Agnew said, influential people do read the same papers, go to the same cocktail parties and express that same thoughts. No journalistic medium has yet made an effective effort to exploit the rich variety of regional viewpoints and voices to help its readers or viewers examine the conventional wisdom of their own area.

IN ALL THIS, Mr. Agnew is on the right track. Where he goes wrong—and seriously wrong—is in arguing that the television commentators should either be quiet or "get with it." His suggestion that "perhaps it is time that the networks were made more responsive to the views of the nation" is either a threat of intimidation to a regulated industry

or it is a proposal for individual acts of cowardice by the men in that field of communications.

In either case, it is improper, especially coming from a man who is insensitive enough to use his own high office and the attention it commands for a small-minded stur on a figure like Averell Harriman, whose career of public service surely entitles him to the audience the networks at times have provided him.

Mr. Agnew is markedly inconsistent, too, in arguing that the networks should refrain from immediate comment on a presidential address—especially adverse comment. The notion that television should observe a respectful silence for some period of time after a President has uttered his truths to the nation is non-sensical. A President may or may not have information that is unavailable to his critics, but he certainly has no monopoly on wisdom. Mr. Agnew's plea for diversity of viewpoints on television merits serious consideration. His advocacy of silence or acquiescence deserves none.

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Mrs. Meir Hailed Nixon's Viet Speech

Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir warmly congratulated President Nixon on his Nov. 3 speech on Vietnam and wished him success in bringing about peace, it became known here yesterday.

She described the speech in a message to the President as "meaningful" and said that it "encourages and strengthens freedom-loving small nations the world over, which, striving to maintain their independent existence, look to that great democracy, the United States of America."



David S. Broder
**Agnew's Blast at Network News:
Often Valid But Wrongheaded**