

President Richard Nixon told reporters today that he talked with a small group of students this morning at sunrise beside the Lincoln Memorial. The President said he went to bed last night around 2:30 but could not sleep. He got up around 4 o'clock and asked his valet whether he had ever seen the Lincoln Memorial at night. Then they drove with a group of Secret Service men to the Memorial. The President said no unusual security arrangements had been made and the Secret Service was "petrified."

About eight students were there when the President arrived and by the time he left there were about 50. He said he told the group, "I know you think we are a bunch of so-and-so's." He said he used a stronger word to them. He continued, "I know how you feel. You want to get the war over. Try to understand what we are doing. Sure, you came here to protest. Go shout your slogans. That is all right, just keep it peaceful."

Some of the students said they were concerned about air and water pollution and the President replied, "We're going to clean up those things. But you can clean all those up and you still have smoggy cities but no warmth, no color, no quality. The real problem is how to get people back to life." The President also said he is concerned about the way blacks are separating from whites. He told the group, "I don't know a way of communicating with them." He added that Indians are "the forgotten people of all our people even though they have never known the bonds of slavery."

The President commented on his encounter with the students and said, "They were fine kids and I love the country. I was trying to relate to them in a way they could feel I understood their problems." He added, "I told them to have a good time here in Washington and not to go away bitter."

Seven students from Syracuse, New York, gave their impressions of the meeting with the President. One said, "It was unreal. He was trying so hard to relate on a personal basis, but he was really concerned with why we were here." Another student commented, "I hope it was because he was ^{tired} tired, but most of what he was saying was absurd. Here we had come from a university that's completely uptight, on strike, and when we told him where we were from he talked about the football team." A third student said Mr. Nixon "did not make sense. People would ask him questions and he would talk about something else."

See also this file 8 May 70 (filed 1 May 70); 2 May 70.

Also filed Indochina - Reaction.

See that file for other versions of this.

See Lawrence Lipton, 15 May 70, filed Indochina/Comment.

See New York Magazine 24 Jun 74 (filed W/gate) and notes on article in that magazine suggesting dealing with another incident following the one above (this file, 24 Jun 74); on Nixon's activities during the previous seven hours, see Reston, NYT 7 May 75, filed W/gate.

OVER - B

OVER - A

- (A) See also: Nixon Visits POW Kin, With Vow - SF Examiner 16 Oct 72, filed POWs:R.
President Says 'Opinion Leaders' Failed Him on War - NYTimes 17 Oct 72, filed Nix Ad.
- (B) See review by Christopher Lehmann-Haupt of "Before the Fall. An Inside View of the Pre-Watergate White House," by William Safire, which gives another version of Nixon's behavior at the Lincoln Memorial. (This file.)