

# The Fearless Spectator

## Charles McCabe

### Nixon Discovers Youth

ONE HAS TO FEEL a certain compassion, as well as a certain dismay, at Mr. Nixon's recent attempts to get in touch with the young of this nation, especially the dissident young.

As our national father figure, he is supposed to represent the appropriate parental attitudes of his time. This he does beautifully. He has been the very personification of the older end of the Generation Gap. He believes that children, and that would be anyone under 30, should be seen and not heard.

Yet something has happened to him. A few weeks back, before Cambodia and the Kent shootings, he was unburdening himself about "campus bums" in the best style of his Charlie McCarthy, Mr. Agnew.

Now he is desperately wooing youth, in his way. Somebody must have told him something, and he must have listened. There was that crazy dawn meeting in the Capital, where he tried to "relate" to a group of what he had called "campus bums."

And last week there was that extraordinary performance before 75,000 persons at the Billy Graham Crusade in the University of Tennessee football stadium where he made an ALMOST all-out pitch for the support of the young.

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THE TROUBLE IS, he went after the young the way he would go after the Poles in Hamtramck, the Irish in Boston, or the Mexicans in Los Angeles. He told them what he thought they wanted to hear. The plastic preacher, the Rev. Graham, listened intently, as the President said:

"I believe in young America and I think they have something to say . . . It is a generation that is not the lost generation that some Americans think . . . it can be and it will become the great generation."

A careful reading of this bit of tortured rhetoric will convince anyone, I think, that the President still believes the precise opposite of what he was trying to say. The important words are "it can be." This means exactly that "it" isn't; but if "it" listens to exhortations by Mr. Nixon "it" can become "great," whatever that means.

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A MESSIANIC, or least Mosaic, streak in Mr. Nixon's character became evident that day after a small group of protesters, who had inexplicably gotten into the square enclave of a Billy Graham audience, began to heckle him. The President began to shout:

"I want this nation to be at peace, and we shall be.

"I want the air to be clean, and it will be clean.

"I want the water to be pure, and it will be pure."

He did everything but add, "Let there be light."

I doubt much that this extraordinary performance in the heart of the Bible Belt is going to do much to reassure the young all over this nation who look on their President as an increasing threat to their way of life and even existence.

Before Cambodia, the President was able successfully to con the young by coming out with periodic pious pronouncements on the subject of ecology, which was the device the young were then using to take their minds off the apparently insoluble problem of Vietnam.

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AS LONG AS Mr. Nixon rapped pollution, and praised trees, and vaguely deplored babies, he could divert attention from that nasty little adventure in Southeast Asia, which he had assured us he would promptly end, before he was elected.

Then came the brutal invasion of the frontiers of a neutral country, and the prospect that a lot more of our young men were going to be killed in that far land. You heard little about ecology from the young after that.

Two boys and two girls were shot by government forces in Ohio. You heard less and less about ecology, and more and more about Mr. Nixon, and none of that good. The President is going to have to do better than speeches at Billy Graham rallies to make the young believe him. I trust he can.