

To the Editor:

In a letter published on Monday, Barry H. Garfinkel notes that Frederick G. Fisher Jr. was the young lawyer at issue when Joseph N. Welch made his memorable plea to Senator Joseph McCarthy, "Have you no sense of decency?" He says that in a column of Feb. 21 I erroneously indicated that James St. Clair was the subject of the plea.

I did not think I was implying that Mr. St. Clair was the subject of the episode. I wrote that during that emotional moment Mr. Welch referred to "Jim St. Clair, who sits on my right." The quoted words were taken from the record.

Since others got the same wrong impression as Mr. Garfinkel, I must plead guilty to unclear writing. I was deliberately trying to leave Mr. Fisher out of a column that was about Mr. St. Clair, and I evidently failed. But I am in no danger of confusing Frederick Fisher and James St. Clair, for a number of reasons. One of them is that that day of the hearings, June 9, 1954, was memorable for me. It was the day my first child was born.

ANTHONY LEWIS

New Haven, March 4, 1974