

Has America Lost

By Jules Loh
Associated Press

If the old political maxim is true that "the people determine the issues," then a most curious feature of the current presidential race is not so much what the issues are as what they are not.

Specifically, the scandal-in-government nonissue.

A Gallup poll in mid-campaign indicated that "only a small percentage of the electorate believe corruption in government to be one of the nation's top problems" and, Sen. George

McGovern has been unable to get the issue very high off the runway.

"I must say I'm puzzled," a dismayed McGovern said. "It would seem that what has come out would be enough to defeat a president."

Its Sense of Outrage?

"What has come out," replied a source close to President Nixon's campaign, "are merely unproven allegations not even directly connected to the President."

Putting aside the partisan interests of both camps, a brief glance at history shows

that the howls of indignation that greeted high-level improprieties in the past, none of them directly connected to the president then in office—fur coats, deep freezes, five-precenterers—plainly are unheard today.

Americans in factories, of-

fice buildings, rectories and homes around the country were asked why. They offered a variety of reasons.

One was the startling discovery that the public is simply not informed. Ray Morgan, a correspondent for the Kansas City Star, inter-

viewed 350 persons in late September and found only a handful acquainted with the details of the alleged scandals.

The Rev. Theodore Hesburgh, president of Notre

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FATHER HESBURGH
War and affluence

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Dame University, suggests the deeper irony that it is the communications explosion itself that is in part responsible for the message not getting through.

"We have been so engulfed for so long with so much evil on such a massive scale that our nerve ends are numb," he said. "We tune out."

"Evil has been magnified in numbers and by repetition to a point where we can't comprehend it. Machiavelli said if you have 125 people to kill, do it all at once, not one at a time, and you might get away with it. If a people can succeed in depersonalizing evil, they can deal with it as a thing, not a reality."

The Reasons

The reason Fr. Hesburgh believes this numbness has come about is primarily the Vietnam war, secondarily the nation's affluence.

"The war has corrupted the best ideals of this country," he said. "With such expressions as 'body count' it has even cheapened our language. We have lost our capacity to be surprised or scandalized."

"Moreover," he said, "we have lost our sense of outrage because we have it made. To be given over to materialism and security and comfort is to become fat—and fatheaded. We have, I'm afraid, become morally anesthetized."

"It's nothing new. Read Amos lecturing the establishment of ancient Israel, the fat cats. What we need today are some prophets."

One Republican, one who can speak from some experience about chosen issues falling on deaf ears—Alfred M. Landon of Kansas, the 1936 GOP candidate—has some theories.

"Our people have lost their familiar mooring posts," he said wistfully. "They don't know where to turn, whom to trust, whom to believe."

Life Confusing

"They open their newspapers and see indecision in the guise of so-called balance — Buckley played off against Wicker, one 'informed person' saying one thing, another saying the opposite. Is it any wonder they discount both? Life has become terribly confusing."

So confusing, in the view of Nelson Poynter, president of Congressional Quarterly, that he has awarded \$500,000 to his alma mater, Indiana University, to finance a pilot project designed to bridge the credibility gap "between the citizenry and the institutions of American democracy."