

An Answer to the Mississippi Doctor

By JOSEPH KELNER

What hath God wrought in our younger generation? Are the college kids mostly empty-headed swingers dedicated to pot and sex, long hair and smashing windows? Certainly not. They are the most idealistic, clear thinking generation ever to come along. They ask penetrating and embarrassing questions about the status quo. Would we really prefer that they be otherwise?

In his letter advising his college son last week, Dr. Paul Williamson of Mississippi suggested that young men in college mind their own business and devote their time to kissing coeds rather than to protesting injustice. Would we really prefer it that way, or can't they do both?

For every lunatic dynamiter there are a thousand serious-minded young people who really give a damn about American ideals and dreams. But hypersensitive high government officials have branded them as "bums" and "revolutionaries" because of their strident protests against continuance of an undeclared, unconstitutional and pointless war which disrupts their education, kills, blinds and cripples them by the hundreds of thousands.

We, the older generation, have much to answer for. We have allowed our country to decay and deteriorate. We were too permissive of our own government. We stood by passively while our elected officials inched us into the bottomless pit of Vietnam. While our land, water and air were polluted and fouled for decades by profit-hungry industry, we were reticent and compliant, each of us devoting our energies to the pursuit of happiness and material gain in the good Horatio Alger tradition. The college kids simply cannot see us spending hundreds of billions on Vietnams and ABM's while our

cities rot and people are hungry. They see our priorities aborted and our principles perverted to favor a military-industrial complex.

So they protest. Some throw rocks and a few criminal extremists go much further. The Kent State massacre could have happened on any campus. Consider the setting. High government officials had attacked college protesters as "bums" and "trouble-makers." This over-heated an atmosphere already inflamed by our invasion of Cambodia. It set the stage for a self-righteous National Guard firing squad to execute defenseless students.

This is new in America. The constitutional right to protest and dissent was shattered by a volley or rifle shots at Kent State. The victims were hundreds of feet from the firing squad—too far away to make the most abject coward truly apprehensive for his own safety.

This was unjustifiable killing for the expression of words and ideas, not for self-defense or deeds. But the Ohio county grand jury, reflecting a callous community conscience, indicted everyone but those who pulled the triggers, and the blindfolded lady justice atop the county courthouse must have wept at these omissions.

Dr. Williamson professes to be a compassionate man. He expressed sorrow that "the sweet little girl in Kent was killed." She was on her way from one college building to another on her campus and stopped to see what was going on. A bullet from a National Guardsman over 300 feet away cut her down and ended her young life. The doctor ruefully says "she got what a revolutionary should expect" and that "it is rather remarkable that they didn't shoot 200 more." This, too, is new in America.

Jeffrey Miller was shot through the head over 250 feet from the execution

squad. He died instantly. The picture of a young girl weeping over his lifeless body went around the world. Her tears were not for Jeffrey alone. They were for America's shame before the world that this could happen here. The scene somehow was out of focus. Its locale should have been against a wall in Castro's Cuba or near a ditch at Auschwitz.

Young Americans are a proud and sturdy lot who are not going to disappear. They are keenly aware of the current scene. To talk to them is to admire them. They think we can do better to put our values in order. They have the natural impatience of youth against decades of indolence and crusty traditions of inertia which have permitted America to deteriorate. Why their violent protests when we marched into Cambodia without Congressional authority? To them this was an extension of Vietnam's horror, a compounding of the original felony.

What else bugs our youth? Racism and poverty and an establishment unresponsive to the need for real change. They resent the divisive hard line of government officials castigating dissent and dissenters in colleges or in our publicity media. But a growing number of uptight Americans seem willing to suppress minority views. We appear to be galloping toward a mass totalitarian intolerance of minority ideas.

The complaint of our youth is not against the Constitution but that its spirit is being ignored and circumvented by hypocrisy.

Joseph Kelner, a former president of the American Trial Lawyers Association, represents the estate of Jeffrey Miller in a lawsuit arising from the shooting of Jeffrey Miller at Kent State University.