

# Students Seen as Scapegoats

By JOSEPH RHODES

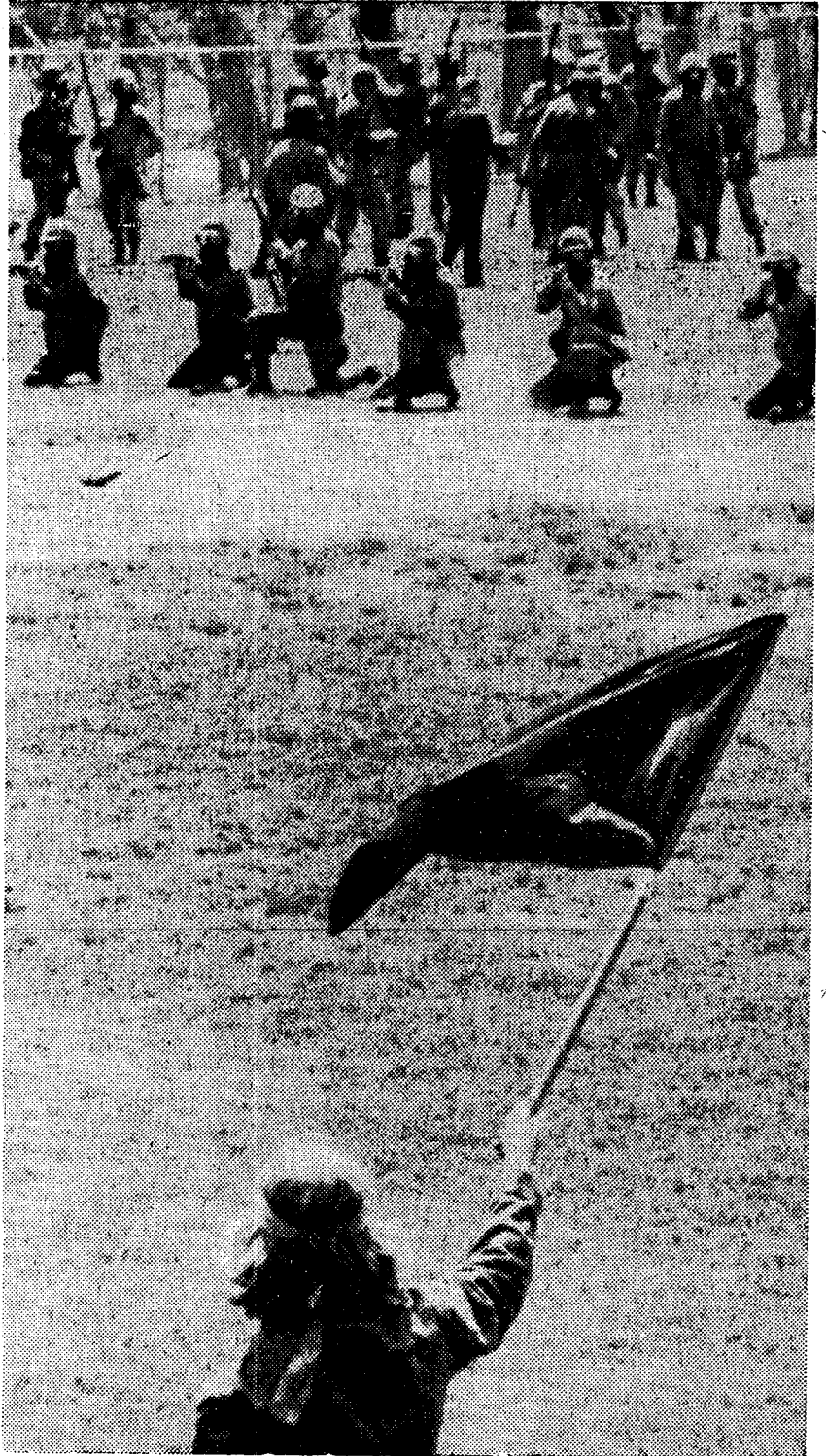
BOSTON—When I learned in late May that the President might appoint a Commission to Investigate Campus Violence, I hurried to Secretary Romney's office to propose a commission on Equal Justice Under the Law as an alternative.

Until recently, I haven't fully understood why I reacted so violently to a campus commission. The issue of "campus unrest" is a carefully laid snare to focus on campus unrest as a problem in an attempt to divert our attention from our real national problems. Students have not placed themselves in harm's way so they could become a "problem."

The students who fell at Kent and Jackson State did not die because of "campus unrest" or any feature of American society unique to the academy. The Mississippi Highway Patrolmen and Jackson City policemen fired a 400-round volley into the girls' dormitory because these lawmen function as the final and deadly stage of an elaborate system of injustice in Mississippi aimed at oppressing black people by any means necessary.

The Jackson students died because of the racist character of American society referred to by the Kerner Commission. The Jackson incident underscores the fact that racism is a dynamic of American society—a law governing social behavior. This beast in our country will lash out and destroy our black citizens whenever it can—here the scene is a college campus, a few days later it is a city street. The fact remains that the national policy toward black Americans continues to ignore their plight; the war on poverty has dwindled to a rearguard action. This is a real national crisis.

The Kent State incident presents a more complicated but no less fundamental case. The damage in downtown Kent on Friday night, three days before the shootings, and the Saturday burning of the R.O.T.C. building did not constitute events which in themselves would justify the commitment of the National Guard. The city officials seemed to believe that Kent had become a battleground of the "revolution" and this triggered their request for the Guard.



Associated Press

Governor Rhodes summed up this view in his Sunday morning press conference, the day before the shooting. He said: "I think we are up against the strongest, well-trained militant revolutionary group that has ever been assembled in America." He promised that "we are going to use every weapon possible." Strong words—unfortunate words. For those who fell the next day were just students, many Ohioans, who felt the President's invasion into Cambodia could not go unchallenged.

In making this statement, Governor Rhodes drew on the deep-rooted conflict between old and young cultures in our nation. This division has two major causes. America's social institutions have begun to fail for all of us and the student generation has developed new values. These are basic and important issues.

Almost no one in America is happy. This is not a function of class or education. We are an anxious people. Our cosmetic media and modularized lifestyles attempt to hide this fact but it haunts every feature of existence.

The panoply of American institutions has begun to disintegrate. They just don't deliver anymore. Americans are hungry, bored, sick, frustrated, polluted and discarded. We have simply used up the capability of these nineteenth-century institutions. The recent New York prison riots and the pending strike of Santa Barbara police-

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## *'Campus Unrest' Being Emphasized to Turn Us From Basic Issues*

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men who beat hundreds of students during the savage June attacks in Isla Vista illustrate the tragic irony of our situation.

The result of this institutional collapse has been a nation of deeply troubled people. And the young people offer a convenient and in many ways defenseless scapegoat to vent these frustrations. Students also can play the scapegoat role because they embody a new set of values. They seem different and we always employ the "alien" figure as our scapegoat.

American students have increasingly come to embrace a new value system which basically redefines the value of human life. It places human life over all other considerations. This new value system can place this ultimate value on life because the parents of students have sacrificed to create a society with the technological and organizational capacity to supply the resources to make such a life affirming value system a reality. In this way the preceding generation has sacrificed to make the sacrifices of the

students possible. This is a classic tragedy. The young are always charged with realizing the dreams of their parents.

A value system generates a pattern of perception. This fact further aggravates our situation because the young people see this advanced stage of institutional decay as a reality and feel compelled to say it. Their parents will go to any lengths to keep this reality from becoming evident. One generation says the house is on fire, the other says the house is just experiencing rapid oxidation.

To this younger generation so disinclined toward war, our Vietnam war represents the height of obscenity. Our war is a war fought for no apparent reason other than that we are there.

The campus unrest issue has been exploited by political figures who would rather keep the public's attention on the students than on the problems that actually plague our nation. This is a cruel trick to play on the American people—to take their pain and to aim it at their children. If we allow this cruel hoax to continue we will surely seal our fate and the students will have died in vain.

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