

The New York Times

Published every day by The New York Times Company

ADOLPH S. OCHS, Publisher 1896-1935

ARTHUR HAYS SULZBERGER, Publisher 1935-1961

ORVIL E. DRYFOOS, Publisher 1961-1963



Mr. Nixon's Insensitive Reply

President Nixon has misread the report of his Commission on Campus Unrest, just as he persists in misunderstanding the mood of non-violent but concerned young Americans. His reply to former Governor Scranton, the commission's chairman, is defensive and insensitive.

There can be no quarrel with the President's condemnation of violence. Indeed, the Scranton panel not only called violence "criminal," whether engaged in by students or law-enforcement personnel, but extended this judgment to all those who condone violence.

But Mr. Nixon blames the universities unilaterally for the disorders that have shaken them. He ignores the fact that university administrations have already taken extraordinary—and costly—steps to correct past errors. They have done so without the Federal financial aid on which the commission placed such high priority.

Mr. Nixon's assessment of the students' views as representing only 4 per cent of the population is appalling political bookkeeping. Apart from the fact that college students constitute about 40 per cent of their generation, many young people who are not students, as well as many adults of both parties, share many of their ideals. Such loyal Republicans as Dr. James Allen, the former Commissioner of Education, and Walter Hickel, the former Secretary of Interior, risked the President's disfavor on just such counts.

The President is quite right in saying that "the traditional culture of American life" has millions of adherents among the young. He fails to comprehend that many are distressed precisely because they feel that present priorities are incompatible with the best American traditions.

The commission's plea that Mr. Nixon "bring us together" implied no disrespect. It was issued in recognition of the Presidency's moral power. When the commission asked that "the President seek to convince public officials and protesters alike that divisive and insulting rhetoric is dangerous," it appeared confident that Mr. Nixon would put national reconciliation ahead of politics.

Such optimism proved unfounded—then and now. High on the list of those who "have spoken or acted with forthrightness and courage on and off campus," Mr. Nixon now says, stands Vice President Agnew. Yet, Mr. Agnew led the pack of those who, to use the commission's words, played "irresponsible politics with the issue of campus unrest."

More appropriate than shock or anger is a sense of sadness. Much is lost when idealistic youths cannot see in the White House a symbol of their hopes and dreams. A special sadness flows from the discovery by many young men and women that their President is so concerned with balancing political books that he considers a call for conciliatory national leadership as a partisan attack or a personal affront.