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Dear Mr. Vice President

By ANTHONY LEWIS

Dear Mr. Vice President:

Congratulations on your coolness and quick articulation under fire from the four student critics on the David Frost show. I watched you tape the program, and I was impressed.

You kept bringing the discussion back to the subject likely to arouse the television viewers' emotions: student violence. Most effective, judging by the reaction of the studio audience, was your comment that violence "has existed in this country because of the disgusting and permissive attitude of the people in command of the college campuses."

As a political sally, that was great stuff. American parents love hearing that someone else—a band of conspiratorial teachers—is responsible for the rebellion of their children. But there is always the danger that a politician may begin to believe what he says. In this case, I think it would be unfortunate if you did.

The real reasons for the restlessness of the young in America are not obscure:

They are brought up on the creed of possession, sold hard by the advertising message that goods are happiness. But they soon find that possessions do not assure human satisfaction.

They know beauty; they have read about it. But they likely live in an esthetically arid suburb, and all around them they see the most beautiful of countries wantonly destroyed for reasons of private greed.

Their nation is the richest in history, but they see that it allows its poor to go hungry and its cities to decay; that its tax system encourages life on ex-

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pense accounts and favors personal consumption over urgent social needs.

They see that the United States cannot bring itself to do as well as relatively impoverished Britain in providing a decent system of medical care; they read about large numbers of American doctors, the most prosperous anywhere, fiddling their tax returns.

They hear much about law and order, but they know that corruption is widespread among American politicians and law enforcement officers.

They are told that violence is evil, but they know that guns can be bought and sold in the United States as in no other civilized land. And they observe the President of the United States photographed happily with union leaders—some with criminal records—whose members have just made news by beating up young people opposed to the Vietnam war.

They have dinned into them from childhood the appeal of sensuality, assured that this cigarette or that car or deodorant will bring them sexual success. They see on every hand evidence of their elders' exploitation and commercialization of sex. Yet their own possibly naïve efforts to express sexual feelings in an open, easy way are met by moralizing outcry and repression.

Those among them who have tried marijuana are lectured, on inadequate facts, about the potential danger; some are sent to jail. But they see billions spent, legally, to promote the use of

the proven narcotic killers, alcohol and tobacco.

They are told by their political leaders that the Vietnam war was necessary to save the South Vietnamese from Communist savagery. But however real that threat was in 1954 or 1964, they know that even Lyndon Johnson or Dean Rusk would not have considered the price of American intervention—the price in dead Vietnamese, a ravaged culture, a polarized America—worth paying if it had been known in advance. And still we profess the same objectives.

It is the values of American life, sir, and the hypocrisy, that make the young so uneasy. What intelligent parent, including you, has not found his child troubled by those values, and challenging them? Violence is wrong. But if there is violence, it is hardly to be laid to college faculties.

"You're not listening," you were told on the Frost show by Eva Jefferson, that appealing Negro girl from Northwestern.

You were listening, all right—but to the prospective mass television audience, not to her and the other students in the studio. And of course in political terms you were so right. In the short run, even the medium run, you are likely to profit by tuning out Eva Jefferson and those like her.

But one need have no purple glasses to recognize that many American college students these days have an extraordinarily clear and loving perception of this country. To ignore them, to jeer at them, may be profitable for you today. But it will be misery for America unless someone in power starts listening soon.

Yours faithfully.