

Anthony Lewis

A Letter to Spiro Agnew

New York

DEAR MR. VICE PRESIDENT: Congratulations on your coolness and quick articulation under fire from the four student critics on the David Frost show:

You kept bringing the discussion back to the subject likely to arouse the television viewers' emotions: Student violence. Most effective, judging by the reaction 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.

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THEY ARE BROUGHT UP on the creed of possession, 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.

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 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.

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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 naive 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.