



Joshua Lederberg

How Can Random Rampages Alter Course in Vietnam?

REHOVOTH, Israel—Despite the dateline, this column concerns Stanford University in California. I am for the formal inauguration of Dr. Albert Sabin, developer of the oral polio vaccine now used throughout the world, as the new president of the Weizmann Institute. But my thoughts return to the battleground of the university and the incredible question whether it can survive as an institution of free inquiry.

The sit-ins that led to desegregation in the South were a direct confrontation with a particular law to test its moral and constitutional foundations. Such confrontations are not merely tolerable; they are an almost indispensable part of a legal system that depends on test cases for the evolution of timely law.

Random rampages we have seen in California, however, are almost random in their choice of targets. Can anyone rationally believe that they will force the Nixon administration to alter its program for disengagement in Vietnam? Will they not rather reinforce a powerful right in invoking its traditional penal approaches for the quieting of dissent?

IT IS BEYOND any doubt that we will extract ourselves from Southeast Asia. Today's overriding threat to our liberties is in the style with which we accommodate and settle our differences.

Every voluntary act of violence is a threat to my personal freedom, no matter where it is directed, for it pushes our society closer to the point where my liberty will depend on the size of my own gun. I have no illusions about the area of personal freedom today, but it is vastly greater than any citizen can carve out of the jungle by his own devices.

University campuses have so little direct authority over crucial national decisions that none of our eruptions can have a sensible relationship to concrete policy

decisions. We are the frontier where the life of the past meets the future.

Much of the ferment comes from an understandable anger at the legacy that is transmitted, but is also amplified and criticized there. We also care about our students much as parents do, while having even less authority, and suffer similar rebuffs and reactions.

This year's violence is taking a new turn. Many younger students are heavily involved. Instead of ideology leading to action, we now observe action leading to ideology in order to justify it.

SOME OF THE events are doubtless random. Others are shrewdly organized as a method of recruitment into a revolutionary life style—a method which uses the police as involuntary conspirators.

Idealistic students are persuaded to join in peaceful demonstrations and wooed in "affinity groups" that generate a novel sense of community among homesick youngsters. They can then sometimes be maneuvered onto a scene of violent or illegal action. It is then easy for an innocent bystander to be radicalized for life by the police doing their job in the only way they know how.

Students pride themselves on being able to separate

the radicals' laudable major ends from their unacceptable local means. But when you happen to have thrown a rock or burned down a bank in a moment of passion, your ideology is likely to change to match the event: whatever was burned must have been evil enough to justify the arson. Let him who has never deluded himself throw the next stone.

What do liberals have to offer to match such fun and excitement? Not much besides hard work and much discouragement, enough to make anyone "cop out" who is unsure of his own commitment to social reform. But our rare and hard-won successes may still bear some relationship to the ideals we started from.

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My column last week voiced my anxieties about the random violence that had infected many campuses in recent months. It was written before I had news of the tragic climax at Kent State University. The mass protest against the President's Cambodian policy is a style of politically relevant action totally different from the hit-and-run vandalism of the radical minority. From it, hope may still emerge. The President and the Congress dare not underestimate how much is at stake.