Letters

Antioch Student Protest

I was interested to read the call, signed by 19 behavioral scientists at Stanford (5 July, p. 20), for a nationwide study of the student protests involving tactics of confrontation. As a student personally involved in one demonstration specifically mentioned in the statement, I am disturbed by the implications of such a study.

Harry Jerison, one of the signing fellows and head of the Antioch College Behavioral Research Laboratory (BRL), was faced last fall with a student Committee Against Defense Research (CADRE), a chained laboratory door, demonstrations, and an atmosphere of accusation and innuendo. I became part of the informal student opposition to CADRE's tactics which grew up spontaneously as a reaction to reports that CADRE was planning to follow the previous week's lock-in with a sit-in at BRL. Literally overnight we spread the word by leaflet to every dormitory room on campus, calling for a counterdemonstration against CADRE's tactics. The next morning our "counterpickets," using the slogan "Demonstrate Don't Obstruct," actually outnumbered CADRE and its sympathizers. After about 45 minutes of discussion, the demonstration was broken off. Thus, the emotionally charged confrontation ended; discussion of the issues began. I believe this change was possible only because most of the students still felt they could trust in the good faith and open-mindedness of the college administration.

CADRE presented a lengthy and detailed position paper. Other position papers were soon distributed, including Jerison's. The finishing touch on the defusing of the confrontation took place when President James P. Dixon established the Antioch College Assembly on Vietnam. It was composed of two assemblies of 25 elected community members (students, faculty members, and college employees), one assembly for fall quarter and one assembly for winter quarter. (Winter quarter students were all off on jobs during the fall.) The differences between the two assemblies were to be resolved by a conference committee which, of course, couldn't possibly report until March. Known affectionately or derisively as the "50-legged Behemoth," the assembly's very existence made it impossible for the radical activists to convincingly claim that their arguments were being ignored by the college.

That response to the confrontation crisis made sense. By focusing on the issues being raised by the protesters, the college took the crisis out of the realm of volatile emotional action. Had President Dixon, however, responded in the spirit of the Stanford fellows, he would have convened a panel of noted behavioral scientists to examine the psychodynamics of the social phenomenon of campus protest at Antioch. That panel, its very existence a slur on the sanity and intelligence of the protesters, would have been a perfect proof of the underlying contention that the college was not interested in serious discussion of the issues. I suggest that the Stanford fellows call instead for a study of the blindness, stubbornness, and hypocrisy of university administrations across the country, in order to determine why they seem unable to grasp the urgency of the need for reforms in their institutions. The students, after all, have been stating all along what changes they want. (Instead of a national study, the Stanford fellows need no more than subscriptions to the New York *Times*.) Instead of *studying* the students, why not start *listening* to us?

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College Boards: What Kind of Relevance Should Be Achieved?

The goal of testing ("Relevance in testing," by W. W. Turnbull, 28 June, p. 1424), should be to supply society with persons who will make a far greater contribution as a consequence of their advanced education than they might have made without it. . . . A cross section of American leaders, whether it be industry, government, law, or engineering, does not reveal more than a small percentage of "straight-A" students and, in fact, many of today's leaders would not have been admitted to college if the present testing standards had prevailed when they were candidates. . . . Relevance should pertain to the 50-odd years *after* college, not to the 4 to 8 years *in* college.

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Academic tests can judge academic proficiency only, and such proficiency is but a part, for instance, of a scientist's ability. Traditional tests view academic proficiency as a maximum of diversified remembering (*1*), and in spite of Turnbull's assertions, his institution's tests are traditional in this sense. Modern high school science curricula recognize that science is as much a mode of inquiry as it is a body of fact, and traditional means of testing cannot judge student inquisitiveness, much less the host of other traits a gifted person possesses.

The central fallacy of Turnbull's thesis is the assumption that the content of tests can be altered to meet modern needs. No matter how diverse they may be, tests are still *tests*—reducing intellect to a number. The assumption that the student who scores well has a comparable ability in other areas which cannot be adapted to testing is only partially true, and rigid adherence to that assumption must lead to a great waste of talent.

Secondary education is, almost by definition, caught up in "objective" testing of student ability, and it is thus unlikely that Turnbull's second stage (that of the school's record alone being used for college placement) will be of any more value than the current system. How many secondary schools recognize intellect when they see it? What they judge to be intellect is often mere studiousness, and the truly gifted student is dismissed as a disciplinary problem. . . .

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Reference

1. K. Eble, *A Perfect Education* (Macmillan, New York, 1966), p. 106.