

ABOUT STUDENT ACTIVISM

This is a collection of excerpts from current comments about student activism. Those interested in full texts will find information on how to obtain them on the last page.

PRESIDENT STERLING:

Students have attracted attention, not mainly because of their numbers, but rather because of the criticisms which some of them have directed against discrimination, against their elders, against education, and against society at large. Some of the students who have attracted attention for these criticisms have attracted additional attention by the way they dress and by utilizing, on campus and off, the techniques of civil disobedience. The criticism, the attire, and the demonstrations appear not to sit well on a society, which, interestingly enough, has itself been prone to permissiveness.

The older age groups in our society tend to be irritated, if not offended, by the so-called beatnik type, the beard-and-sandal set.

But apparent aberrations from the conventional norm are not in themselves evil or unprecedented. Behind the unconventionality which some of today's students choose to adopt, and behind the conventionality of others, there may lie deep and honest concerns about society and its values, and it is these concerns which one should try to perceive and understand.

The need for such perception and understanding cannot be ignored; it will not go away, nor will it diminish. Ours is a young society and getting younger. In another ten or twelve years, more than 50% of our population will be not more than twenty-five years of age.

In our prosperous society, carried forward by scientific discovery and technological development, today's young men and women are not merely straining at the leash which youth has always strained at; they are trying to find their way through a present and into a future marked by pervasive, rapid, and unpredictable change.

Our society's better students have been repeatedly told they are bright; they cannot be blamed, therefore, if they come to believe what they have been told. They want very much to shape their own destiny, although many of them are uncertain of how to do this.

There is among them a disposition to regulate their own lives in

accord with their own not fully developed sense of values, and to resist having their lives regulated by others. Most of them have not yet reached the point where they are obliged to accept the responsibility for their own homes and families, and are not directly acquainted, therefore, with the need for regulation which the effective discharge of this responsibility entails.

In reaching for extension of personal freedoms — whether these freedoms have to do with speech or law or love — it may be that they have not come to appreciate that liberty to be possessed must be limited. And this precept needs appreciation.

One's own liberty to do as he pleases must be restrained by respect for the liberty of others. If this restraint is not imposed by self-discipline, some other sanction will and should be employed. The welfare of the community — including the University community — requires it. Civilized communities have learned to regulate themselves by law and convention. Law and convention are subject to review and modification, but they should not be disregarded.

Those who have been entrusted by a community with legal responsibility for its welfare cannot in good conscience take their trusteeship lightly. In this University that legal responsibility rests with the Trustees, and is shared, by delegation, with faculty and students. When any who have and share this responsibility act irresponsibly, the community suffers. I would invite every member of this University community — myself included — to bear that in mind.

The importance of this University far transcends the various manifestations of student unrest or individual irresponsibility that have dotted its history throughout the 75 years of its existence. I trust that all who love this University, and who have labored on its behalf, will also bear that in mind. I myself have faith that today's young men and women will learn how to deal effectively with problems which society has in store for them — problems old and new and probably more complex than those with which my generation had to deal.

And because I have this faith, I believe that a high proportion of today's Stanford students will have a genuine future interest in higher education, and in Stanford — an interest that will not be less than yours and mine.

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