

Morals of Present-Day College Students -- First in Series

By Max Lerner

On one of the college campuses where I happened to be lecturing a few weeks ago, I got into a dinner conversation with a group of girls and boys.

The girls especially talked with candor about the problem of dating—about the claims, urgencies, and expectations of the boys, and how they assumed that every date would automatically turn into a petting party.

Suddenly a girl on the margin of the group asked, "May I say something?"

We had hardly noticed her until then. She seemed scarcely turned 17, and there was a mixture of sharpness and innocence in her look. "Of course," I said, "go ahead."

"Well," she said, "all the upper-classmen here go on calmly talking about petting and necking as if they were quite ordinary things. They talk of them in a bored and sophisticated way."

Everyone was looking at her curiously now. "Me," she went on, "I'm not bored or sophisticated. I've just come here as a freshman, and I'm frank to say I'm shocked by what I've already seen on this campus."

There was derisive but muffled applause from several of the boys. "What have you seen?" I asked her.

"Plenty," she said. "But it isn't just what you see. It's what everyone takes for granted. When I got here the first two or three boys I went out with were surprised and angry that I didn't pet. They said all the girls did, and I'd be thought queer if I didn't."

"That's always their line," said one of the girls, a junior wise with two years of college experience. "Don't tell me you fell for it."

"I don't know," said the little freshman. "Maybe it was just a line. But I've kept my eyes open, and others seem to have fallen for it too. I don't mind telling you it shocked me. This wasn't what I thought college would be like. And it wasn't what we did at high school."

Three or four of the girls laughed in dis-

The 'Who's Who' on Author Max Lerner

The college student of today—his outlook on life, his moral code and behavior, his changing standards.

That's the subject of this article, which is the first of a series of eight by Max Lerner, American authority on sociology and politics. The series ran this fall in the New York Post, and will be reprinted in full in the Emerald.

What of this man Max Lerner? He has been close to the college student for many years, having taught at Sarah Lawrence, Wellesley, Harvard, and Williams colleges.

He was assistant editor of the Encyclopedia of Social Sciences, has written at least four books, and spent three years as editor of Nation.

"My political convictions are on the left, although I belong to no party," Lerner has declared. "I feel that my energies must lie with the movement toward a democratic socialism."

belief. "You couldn't have come from a high school like the one I went to," said one.

"How big a town did you come from?" I asked the freshman.

"Four thousand," she said.

"I come from Cleveland," said the junior.

"And I was shocked at the age of four."

"I'm writing to my mother," said the freshman, "and I'm going to tell her what's happening."

"Tell her to come down here herself and enroll," said one of the girls. "It will do you both some good."

Scenes like the above are being enacted on campuses all over the country, as new and old students meet and maneuver and test each other out, and boast a bit, and perhaps feel lonely and a bit grim.

This is the season of the fathers' discontent, when mothers (and fathers too) start worrying about college manners and morals, about Johnny's pursuit of happiness on the campus, and perhaps happiness's pursuit of Susy on the campus.

From my own impressions, and with the help of a New York Post reporter who invaded a half dozen diverse college campuses in and around New York, asking questions and interviewing students and faculty, I want to give an unscientific preliminary report on what the student of

1950 talks about and thinks about, how he behaves morally, and what is new about him and what is old and unchanging.

I write not only as a newspaperman, but also as a teacher and a parent. I have taught college youngsters over a longer period than I care to remember, and I now have one daughter finishing her college career and a second daughter who has just entered college. I have, I suppose, the usual anxieties of a parent, but they are tempered by my experience as teacher.

The first fact I can report has to do with the mood and morale of students, which underlies their morals. We have all said—and I hope we believe it—that the America of tomorrow is being shaped in the mind and faith of the college boy and girl of today. If we have a future, this is going to be it.

By every rule of logic, in an era of war tensions, with the shadow of a possible Third World War ahead, you would think that the students would be carrying around with them a what-the-hell-tomorrow-we-may-be-in-uniform-and-the-day-after-tomorrow-dead attitude.

The big fact to report is that this has not proved true. Except for a couple of years right after the war, when campuses

were filled with returned soldiers studying hard on the G.I. Bill, it is hard to recall a time when students were taking their work and their world more seriously and soberly than they are doing this year.

I have checked my own impressions with those of other teachers. A Princeton social science professor says: "Before I returned this fall I was afraid I would find that the outbreak of the war had made the students much less interested in their work. I figured their studies would be terrible, and that I would have a lot of trouble with them."

"What I found kind of knocked the pins out from under me. They're more eager to learn than ever before—and almost every one of them is subject to the draft."

A sociologist at CCNY says: "Despite the war threat and all other pressures, they are working harder than ever, and they are thinking ahead more than ever to a career and future."

Part of the answer, of course, lies in the promise that General Hershey has made to the university officials of America that students of high standing will get draft deferments. This has given an incalculable lift to student morale on every college campus.

Well, then, what about that conversation I started with, and the freshman's sense of shock at the attitudes and assumptions she found among the students? How does that jibe with the mood of hard work and high seriousness I have just described?

The answer is that college students are growing toward maturity. While they are working hard, they are also experimenting with various moral attitudes, looking for a code they can stick by, a faith they can believe in, an inner security that will be a fortress in a crumbling world.

It is to their bewilderment, and their fumbling for a code, a faith, and a sense of security, that the rest of this series will be directed.

(Next: Moral Code and Actual Behavior)



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1951--A Time of Crisis on Earth

The New Year, 1951.

Red Communists launch a full-scale offensive in South Korea with 300,000 men on the front lines. The House of Representatives holds a session for the first time in its long history. And vacationing students pull themselves together for a hasty return to their studies. These are indices of the times—times that are marked by a penetrating soberness—and everyone wonders whether there will be any celebrations at all on the first day of 1952.

The New Year, 1901.

Great Britain and the Boers struggle for supremacy in South Africa; the former are defeated at Helvetia. The nation relaxes for a while as the kidnapper of the son of a well known mid-western family is tracked down. In Eugene, sham kings and princes prepare to attend a masquerade ball in the armory, and citizen John Handsaker is bed-ridden with the measles. There is an air of expectancy as the new century opens up on this day fifty days ago.

The New Year, 1851.

George Thompson, the uncompromising anti-slavery Abolitionist from England, is charged by die-hard Southerners with trying to disrupt the Union as he stumps around opposing the fugitive slave bill. But John Quincy Adams says that "to call a government including slavery a democracy is to insult the understanding of mankind," and radicals join him to shout that the "Constitution is a covenant with death and an agreement with hell." America is still attempting to adjust itself during the days of one hundred years ago.

And now—come back to the New Year, 1951. Yes, it is a New Year, and not merely Another Year. 1851 found America facing one of its greatest crises; 1901 found two nations and then the World come to grasps with many more of them. And today, 1951, finds the people of all nations and the world facing what is certainly the greatest of them all.—T.K.



Sky's The Limit

The Educational System: It's Floundering at Sea

By Sam Fidman

Now that final examinations, along with a nearly adequate period of rest, are safely past, it seems appropriate to make a comment on, and analysis of, the American educational system.

Unfortunately, the grasp of this physically rapturous Pacific Northwest, on matters that even hint of change, is stodgy and stagnant. To pour out an idea in this section is not unlike delivering an oration in an empty meadow, or to a majestic brace of trees.

Issues and ideas are snubbed and ignored. But then, an oration delivered to the trees is at least good practice for the time when it may be expounded before more understanding and receptive audiences.

With no more authority than that of being a senior in an American university, I believe that the American educational system, with emphasis on the higher level, has missed the boat, and is presently floundering about in the water.

Why has it missed the boat? Because that stinker in our social setting, which is often called the profit motive, has been brought down to the educational level and deposited, like so much garbage wrapped in gold foil and tinsel.

The profit motive in our education is the grade. It is the pivot point of the major pursuit, and is so designed as to be the ultimate goal in the scholastic effort.

No sane educator will admit that a grade is all he expects or wants his students to take with them from his lecture. And not many sane educators will defend the grade system as it stands.

Consequently, without malice to the shell-like conservative ear of Oregon, why not establish a committee within the state system, or at the university to investigate the matter, and examine various suggestions for—pardon the sinful expression—change.

THE DAILY 'E'...

goes to Alpha Xi Delta sorority for topping the fall term GPA list for living organizations with a healthy house accumulative of 2.89. With this "E" goes another to all Oregon women. Their grades again averaged above the men's.

THE OREGON LEMON...

to Stan Ray hall for finishing 64th and last on the same list with a deplorable GPA of 1.95.

It Could Be Oregon



"Well, we've simply got to flunk someone! Get me a list of the students who are taking this course as an elective."