

# THE ALTERNATIVE

to bare the witness and the truth.

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Published remarkably without regard to race, color, creed, or (most redundantly of all) national origin — and yes, sex, even sex.

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## The Continuing Crisis

● Mr. Lyndon Johnson suffered a heart attack on April 7, and Jack Nicklaus won the Masters Golf Tournament. The massive invasion of South Vietnam by some ten or eleven North Vietnamese divisions was used by Mr. Nixon as a pretext for sending B-52 bombers deeper than ever into an almost defenseless North Vietnam. On April 9 the B-52s rained destruction over Hanoi and Hai-phong, setting off fuel fires in what the North Vietnamese described as mostly hospitals, convents, nurseries and pet shops.

● With Mr. Nixon's increased military activity in Indochina, campus violence again reared its idealistic head. The University of Illinois reported that an unknown male student broke into a women's dormitory and forcibly administered enemas to three unsuspecting coeds; no professors were harmed. The Nixon Administration's bombing touched off a week of political awareness at Columbia when students were prevented from attending classes when militants captured five buildings, picketing others. But the assiduously vigilant American Civil Liberties Union leapt to the battlements. Charging that the university imperiled the militants' rights to privacy and a free press by cutting off their telephones in the occupied buildings, the ACLU filed suit in United States District Court.

● In Cambridge highly motivated

street people rampaged through Harvard's Center for International Affairs building, destroying potentially dangerous research and furniture. Similar scenarios were enacted at many of the institutions of higher learning throughout the country during much of the month.

● Peace demonstrations were held in many major cities, but none featured the numbers or the *elan* of previous outings. It was all quite curious. And on the evening of April 26, Mr. Nixon announced plans to withdraw another twenty thousand troops from South Vietnam by July 1, though he will keep bombing North Vietnam until Hanoi halts its "massive invasion." As for the battles raging in South Vietnam, not much can be definitively stated at this writing except that the situation in the central highlands is not promising and the situation in the north is worse.

● Politics continued to stir the dust. Bujumbura Radio reported that Ex-King Ntare the Fifth of Burundi was arrested by Burundi's President Micombero and the Palace Guard, Michael Crawford. The Wisconsin and Massachusetts primaries were won by Senator McGovern. The Pennsylvania race went to Senator Humphrey. But Governor Wallace showed astounding strength, finishing second in both

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# Thugs

**I**N HIS ARTICLE "Is Television News Biased?" (*The Public Interest*, Winter 1972), Professor Paul Weaver analyzes, among other things, the form of television news stories. According to Mr. Weaver, a television news story needs a short and simple narrative to attract and hold the attention of viewers. What unifies the narrative and thereby provides the focus of the story is a theme. Particular events are used to illustrate the theme. Mr. Weaver points out that, while the events that illustrate the themes of television news stories change from day to day, the themes themselves tend to be repeated over and over again.

My impression is that, from the upheaval at Berkeley in the fall of 1964 to the incidents at Kent State and Jackson State and the nationwide student strike in May 1970, the themes of television news stories (as well as newspaper and magazine feature articles) about American colleges and universities were generally these: a) discontent, b) protest (peaceful and unpeaceful, legal and illegal, ranging from campus to international issues), c) political activism (most of it radical), and d) the rejection of traditional teaching, learning and scholarship (often because of their alleged lack of "relevance"). My impression also is that, from the summer of 1970 to our present protests over the renewed American bombing of North Vietnam, the themes of stories about American colleges and universities were generally these: a) content or "quiet despair," b) absence of protest, c) political indifference or "moderate" political activity ("working within the system") and d) a return to traditional teaching, learning and scholarship. (I am talking about my "impressions" of the story themes because I have not conducted a study of this matter and, as far as I know, no one else has either.)

The themes of television news stories are illustrated by particular events, but they are not derived from systematic investigations of events or patterns of events. Television reporters do not have the training, the time, the resources or the desire to conduct such investigations; what they do have are a distinctive journalistic vocabulary and their imaginations. Television reporters are sent out to cover particular events or situations and then, drawing on their journalistic vocabulary and exercising their imaginations when they decide how to employ that vocabulary, they produce their stories. These stories are unified and given focus by themes.

From the standpoint of the television reporters, who must produce their stories within short periods of time, the virtues of the themes are their simplicity and their adaptability, that is, they can be and are used to characterize varieties of events and situations. And, since they are used in this way, they create an impression of uniformity.

So, taken together, the themes of television news stories convey a conception of life as a collection of simple and uniform, even if changing, phenomena. But life in general and life at American colleges and universities in particular is complex and diverse. The complexity and diversity of life can be conceptualized and interpreted in many ways, but, in general, television news does not take account of this complexity and diversity in any way; the very form of television news stories works against its doing so.

All of this might matter only to students of mass media were it not that most peoples' "knowledge" of American colleges and universities consists almost exclusively of their familiarity with the themes of television news stories and newspaper and magazine feature articles about American colleges and universities. Familiarity with these themes may have more influence on what people think and do than their own experience, especially if their own experience does not include ongoing personal experience of a college or university. Their own experience, however, probably can provide them with a better sense of complexity and diversity than the themes of television news stories, which create an impression of simplicity and uniformity.

What worries me is not just that many people apparently do not take their own experience seriously enough but that they take television news very seriously indeed. These people seem to believe that, by watching the evening news, they are not just combating boredom but acquiring knowledge. In fact, they are acquiring familiarity with themes that drastically simplify life and that, therefore, can mislead people who take them as adequate descriptions or explanations of life. At one point in *Intelligence and Democratic Action*, Frank H. Knight says: "The worst trouble ... is not so much ignorance, but that people do not know they are ignorant; they know so much that is not true." People who assume that, since they watch television news, they know all that is worth knowing about American higher education and scores of other matters, "do not know they are ignorant." From the standpoint of their own intellectual integrity, they would be better off watching re-

runs of "McHale's Navy" than watching "NBC Nightly News."

Still, even people who are inclined to take television news seriously can appreciate that the themes of television news stories have conveyed conceptions of life at American colleges and universities that have been, at best, incomplete. From the autumn of 1964 to the end of May 1970, not all students or teachers were discontented, protesting, politically active or rejecting traditional teaching, learning and scholarship. Similarly, since the end of May 1970, not all students or teachers have been content, abstaining from protest, politically indifferent or returning to traditional teaching, learning and scholarship. In fact, traditional teaching, learning and scholarship have remained under attack, not only indirectly by people who advocate establishing quotas in the name of social representativeness or reallocating resources and redesigning curricula in the name of social responsiveness but also directly by people who want to prevent scholars from doing work on controversial matters or holding unpopular opinions about them.

Throughout this past academic year, Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) and other radical groups have led a campaign of harassment and intimidation against some prominent scholars who have done work on the relationship between intelligence and race or intelligence and social class. The campaign's goal has been to force colleges and universities to dismiss these scholars from their positions and remove their works from reading lists. The campaign's means have ranged from distributing slanderous printed material (leaflets, pamphlets, posters, and so on) to physically harassing the scholars who are the objects of the campaign in classrooms and meetings halls and even on the streets.

The SDS newspaper *New Left Notes* has covered the campaign, urged its readers to participate in it and suggested ways in which they might do so. For example, on page five of one issue of *New Left Notes*—I cannot cite the issue's date or number because the issues of *New Left Notes* are neither dated nor numbered—there is an item about Edward C. Banfield, formerly Henry Lee Shattuck Professor of Urban Government at Harvard University, now a University Professor at the University of Pennsylvania, and author of *The Unheavenly City* (reviewed in *The Alternative*, December 1970). The headline of the item is: "WAYS TO FIGHT BANFIELD AT YOUR SCHOOL." The item reads: "All over the country, in Detroit, Philadelphia, Boston, Chicago, SDS and others are fighting the racism pushed in Edward Banfield's *Unheavenly City*. It's no accident Banfield is being used in many (if not most) colleges. The government wants to soften people up

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