

A Salute to "Challenge"

The current crop of college students is notorious for its passivity and absence of idealistic fervor. It strives primarily for security, and is appallingly lacking in the spirit of adventurous commitment. Most observers attribute this phenomenon to the disillusionment born of several decades of "hot and cold running wars."

These impressions are documented in a survey of college teachers conducted by the Nation (March 9, 1957) on 16 campuses ranging from Stanford University to Princeton, and including institutions of all sizes, both public and private. With monotonous regularity the same remarks recur:

"Quiet enervation. . . ." ". . . acknowledge no heroes, profess only lukewarm admirations, shun causes. . . ." "Sceptical, indifferent. . . ." ". . . detached. . . ." "Passivity, indifference. . . ." "Timid, unadventurous and conforming. . . . Accept the opinions of their professors."

If these attitudes are typical at Stanford, Yale and Princeton, they are even more typical at the state colleges, where most students hold down full or part time jobs, and commute to the campus for the sake of the increased earning power associated with a degree. The average state college student of today is a sober, plodding individual. In this respect, San Diego State College is no exception.

No faculty can cure this disease. Its cure must come among the students themselves. And at last an encouraging sign has appeared in the form of "Challenge," a student movement which is springing up on campuses across the nation for the purpose of arousing interest in and concern for vital issues. It does this by sponsoring debates and discussions on significant controversial topics, but it does not take sides.

Shortly after "Challenge" organized an active chapter at San Diego State College, it sponsored a debate between Tom Lanphier and Admiral Leslie E. Gehres on the subject of national defense. This debate drew an audience of 12,000.

The weekly business meetings and discussion sessions have been held at Henry George House, and never had the privilege of associating with as keen and perceptive a group of students, although I taught school for four years before coming to San Diego.

In the fall, "Challenge" will present such topics as "Should the Income Tax Be Abolished?" and "Individualism vs. Collectivism." When college students spontaneously address themselves to subjects such as these, there is reason to be hopeful that the barriers of dull conformity are finally being breached, and that a new era of student vitality and enthusiasm will soon be under way.

—Robert V. Andelson

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