

OUR BELLEAGUERED UNIVERSITIES

Many memories and emotions are stirred when a native returns to this familiar place. Hill Auditorium is a relatively ancient landmark in an environment whose outward look has changed so much in 48 years, the time that has elapsed since I enrolled in the University of Michigan and began acquiring what has become for me life membership. What has impressed me most in returns that have been frequent, is the continuity that persists behind external change. The University of Michigan was a great university when I first came here in 1920. It is greater now in all that really matters -- the quality of its faculty and student body, its insistence on standards of excellence, the spirit of free inquiry and toleration that it fosters. I cannot describe my surprise and delight when I was told that I was to graduate a third and last time.

In speaking to the graduates of 1968 I operate under a severe handicap, for it is evident that I am over 30. Credibility would be forfeited entirely if I were to try to equate my own experience with yours. But this much can be said. As an undergraduate I was lost, bewildered and disaffected, as some of you no doubt have been, and like many of my contemporaries at that time viewed with extreme distaste the false values, materialism and complacency of our society in the twenties. It took some time for me to find my way, as may be the case with some of you.

This seems to me fairly normal. A university education ought to be a somewhat dislocating experience. It is the lucid interval in which inherited delusions are shed and the individual has not yet become deeply engaged in our larger society in ways that can distort or obscure his view of it. When minds are set free and stimulated to examine our society critically, great gaps are revealed between the realities of the life around us and our own declared ideals. In the 1950's for a time it seemed otherwise. There were many complaints over the apathy and submissiveness of college students, who seemed to aim no higher than to live in Levittown, or if they aimed really high, Grosse Pointe. It is a function of universities to foster capacities for criticism. I think it can be said that in this they have now succeeded.

They have succeeded also in many other ways. The American people have been persuaded that education is worth a huge investment. To a large proportion of useful and productive activity a college degree has become an admission card. Among our young people the number and percentage who demand higher education is constantly rising. Its cost, measured as the cost of teaching per student, is rising still more steeply. Reading the figures makes one wonder how many private institutions, large or small, can survive without a huge infusion of public funds. Furthermore, universities are called on to render services to our society in so many ways that their

energies are diverted and their resources strained. The dilemma is that they cannot reject all these demands and insist that their sole tasks are the advancement of basic knowledge and the training of students, when education is becoming the heaviest charge on tax revenues except the cost of past, present and future wars.

By external tests, then, our universities have had an enormous success. But this very success has accelerated demand and they are driven to attempt much more than they can do well. They have shared what we had thought to be the success of American society as a whole and have contributed greatly to it. But neither higher education nor American society as a whole is in such a state that anyone can be complacent now, in 1968. We have had our warnings. They come in particular from two protest movements whose leaders could hardly be more completely different. One is a group of highly advantaged students. The others come from and speak for the most deprived.

There is no difficulty in identifying the most deprived, the occupants of our urban and rural slums. It is the prospect for our cities that fills us now with dread. There are many poor of different races but the concentration in increasing numbers and degree is in black people in the cities. The leadership of protest has rapidly passed to proponents of black power, who often speak in most menacing language.

Behind the language there is a purpose that we should be able to understand -- to achieve for their own people self-reliance and self-respect. To those who object to the separatism they advocate they can say with justice: we merely adopt the apartheid that has existed so long in fact. The question is whether these new forms of self-assertion can find the means, in time, to open the prisons of poverty and despair. We have had enough violence already to know that the remedy is not more violence in a rising spiral but an enormous effort over decades to remove the causes.

Student activism as we know it now is in large part a protest against these same conditions. Historically it is a direct descendant of the civil rights movement. When in the early 1960's the conscience of America was finally stirred, students, teachers, ministers, nuns left their colleges, churches and cloisters to protest the wrongs done in the South. The sit-in was not invented by them -- it had been widely used in the 1930's in labor-management conflicts -- but they made it respectable. Religious motives that have tended since to disappear from the protest movements, were strong at that time. With Martin Luther King as the great spiritual leader it became honorable to risk arrest, even to solicit arrest, in so good a cause. It was a good cause, though there was an assumption of superior virtue in reserving all indignation for the South. So the sit-in became an approved technique of political persuasion --

the peaceable sit-in that aims to disrupt and transfers blame to those using force to end the disruption. Both the method and the motive have survived. I believe that many student activists mean what they say, that racial injustice and poverty, the destroyers of human dignity that work in combination, provide one of the main reasons why they condemn our society totally.

The second reason of course is the Viet Nam war. I think it is a significant fact that articulate opposition to the war was organized in the universities and colleges. And I think this was because, during the gradual escalation, our political processes for criticism, debate and shared decision were neutralized and effectively paralyzed. From within the academic communities opposition came from young and old and from persons whose political opinions on other issues varied widely. The issues involved stirred passion and still do. In this century what issue has been so divisive as that dreadful ~~Viet Nam~~ War? For young people disposed strongly toward dissent, the Viet Nam peasant was equated with sharecroppers in the South and the prisoners of the ghettos. All were equally victims of American imperialism, whose aggressions, it was thought, could not be stopped by political means.

The student leaders who have reacted most strongly I have already described as highly advantaged. A high percentage come from families of at least moderate income, some of them mildly ~~highly~~ affluent. The studies so far indicate

that on scales of intelligence most of the committed activists rate high. Their prospects for the future in our society would be promising if they were willing to join it. But most of them do not seem to be joiners. They are rebels without a cause in the sense that there is the greatest diversity in ultimate objectives. Russian communism seems not to hold much appeal because of the discipline it imposes on conduct and belief. Kosygin is positively bourgeois, though Chairman Mao (of all people) and Castro are admired by some. A recurrent theme is a philosophical anarchism that places great faith in human nature after force and coercion have been removed. We face (perhaps I should say we confront) a considerable group of unusually able young people, reacting with passion against the injustices of our society, who have centered on the universities as their instrument of radical political change. The universities are to be "radicalized" as the first step toward a complete recasting of our society.

Allies outside the universities have been hard to find. The leadership of the black power movement has sought no help from bright young whites and is disposed less and less to accept it. In the 1930's it was with the labor movement that young reformers made common cause but the labor movement now is monumentally indifferent. There has not occurred anything comparable to the amazing episode in France this spring,

when a sit-in by students brought on strikes and sit-ins by millions of workers and paralyzed the country. So far as one can tell the most common reaction in the American public has been a mixture of bewilderment and impatience, verging on disgust. Is this why tax money is being spent? Why not call the police?

The reason why universities are such tempting targets is that they are so reluctant to call the police. They are organized as a proving ground for all kinds of ideas whose expression brings no reprisal. Students are meant to be free to mobilize opinion on all issues that concern them. But if universities are a proving ground they are not equipped as a battleground. Most of the penalties they can impose are mild; the ultimate sanction is dismissal. But dismissal means denial of access to education and this too is used with extreme reluctance. Persons who live in academic communities are deeply committed to resolving disputes by reasoned discussion after assembling all the evidence. Higher education, like other great human enterprises, depends on continuing human relations based on respect, candor and trust which take much longer to create than to destroy. Universities are extremely vulnerable, not only because the force at their command is limited but because they can be so easily disrupted.

Yet when reasoned discussion has been exhaustively tried and has failed and the disruption caused is serious,

the time does come when the aid of the police must be asked for. We must prepare our minds for this. The solution that is truly intolerable is to grant a series of demands, each reinforced by occupation of essential facilities and disrupting essential university operations, so that it is proved for all to see that only violence pays.

Are there any distinctions between the sit-ins used in the early years of the civil rights movement, which seemed to many of us to be justified, and the sit-ins with which the great universities have been afflicted? I think there are. The injury to others is far more direct and vastly out of proportion where a few hundred can deny to many thousands the educational opportunities that the thousands desire. Furthermore, unless one is ready to declare our whole society immoral, as some dissenters do, there is involved the larger issue of civil disobedience, of which this is clearly one form. In the moral justification of civil disobedience there are at least two elements. One of them is a willingness to accept the consequences of violating law, ~~and the other is an overriding need.~~ We cannot admit that members of a university community can make forays on our society, not with ideas but with physical violence, and then escape to the enclave and claim immunity in the name of academic freedom. ^{ca} The second element, ^{injustifying actual disobedience} an overriding need, ^{this} means to me ^{both} a moral purpose of the highest order and a complete absence of any other recourse.

It is the other recourse that universities can and must provide, on issues within their province. But many issues are outside their province. Universities cannot stop the Viet Nam war or rebuild the ghettos, though some of their members can provide material for new thought on those subjects. I say some of their members because on all the great issues of policy we must expect and insist, that divergent views over the widest range are heard and fully considered. There could be no greater disaster than for universities to become the instruments for direct political and social action, committed to specific programs that they themselves promote. If they could be captured for this purpose, as a few dissenters now propose, they would quickly forfeit the independence and the freedom of inquiry on which their mission completely depends. Some memories are short. German universities in 1933 were occupied by storm troops, wearing brown shirts, not blue jeans. The German universities became instruments of political and social action and served their masters well.

In the resolution of issues that are within their province the university can and must provide not one but many alternatives to the use of force. Not that this is easy. When student bodies increase from 10 thousand to 20 thousand and then 30 thousand and more and faculties increase in proportion, maintaining communication becomes a constant struggle, though communication is the first prerequisite. As students

grow more numerous and more diversified in origins and interests, standard forms of representative democracy face similar problems in keeping student representatives in touch with their own constituents. The faculty has its problems. In well-run institutions the faculty determines educational policy and has a large share in its administration. Members of faculties grumble at this but want it so and it should be so. There is driving pressure to get on with research, for there cannot be good teaching unless teachers continue to learn and to play their own part in advancing the frontiers of knowledge. This is one of our primary missions and we resist diversions from it, whether or not we have ^{not} joined the jet-set. Nevertheless, and I say this with deliberation, I think that most of our great faculties have forgotten what it is like to be a student, that in the broad spectrum of success our great failure is in a task that is really ours, the care and nurture of students.

Further complications come from the demands for student power. I confess that many of these demands I do not understand. Some of them are disingenuous, to say the least, when they come from students who also declare that they aim to destroy the universities, as a first step in building a new society out of the debris. But again we should not be misled by rhetoric. Student discontent is real, much of it

is justified and most of it does not produce the impulse to destroy. The desire of students to participate in decisions that affect them adds a fourth dimension to relations that already seem almost unmanageably complex, between governing boards, administrators and faculty. I can only suggest that in the history of political ideas the most sterile and destructive of all the debates have been those over the location of ultimate power. The whole issue of power must be by-passed as it has been in all the great institutions as responsibility for education was transferred gradually but fully to the faculty.

What is needed, I believe, is a large-scale application of intelligent thought and a major change of attitudes. The initiative for both must come from the faculty, though administrative leadership can make an enormous difference. In a large university the sources of misunderstanding and discontent are not 10 but 10,000, changing every day. New procedures are needed, some of them formal and some most informal, for joint decision on some issues but above all for free and open consultation. New teaching, scheduling and residential arrangements, tied together, offer great promise. In this, as in so many other ways, the University of Michigan is providing leadership. But formal procedures mean little unless there is mutual interest and respect. It is true, I do believe, that the old can learn from the young, but time, attention and inventive thought devoted to this are not a diversion from our task. They are part of our task, not because we fear sit-ins and the passions they arouse, but because communication with young minds is the duty, the privilege and the reward of teaching.

On the whole it seems to me that the dangers raised by the student sit-ins, symptom though they are, cannot be compared with the dangers of war in the ghettos. Yet both are alike in this -- that we must anticipate such dangers, search out their causes and make a start in removing them long before violence erupts. To the problems of poverty and racial injustice in the cities we have come too late to escape a heavy penalty. With the problems raised by student disaffection we are not, I believe, so late but they will be with us for a long time to come. They can be dealt with only by the methods of free and reasoned discussion to which the universities are committed. In the words of Justice Brandeis, who surely did not lack passion though his passion ^{was} ruled by a powerful mind:

"If we would guide by the light of reason, we should let our minds be bold."