EDUCATIONAL HOUSING
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HENRY M. WRISTON

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FOREWORD

This is the second of three statements to be sent to all Brown alumni by direction of the Board of Trustees and the Board of Fellows. In particular I was asked to explain the reasons for undertaking a comprehensive housing project and to outline what we hoped to do. This exposition was prepared with the advice of a committee of the Corporation; it was then read to the full meeting of that body where it was discussed and amended in order fully to reflect the official opinion of all the members of the governing body who were present.

The third statement, which defines the over-all program of the University and its meaning for alumni, will reach you in a few weeks.

Henry M. Wriston
A casual inspection of Brown University reveals little damage from the war. Save for the service flag on the balcony of Faunce House, things appear much as before. But in our hearts we know that this superficial view neglects vital changes.

The war, even though victorious, makes the task of a liberal college vastly more arduous. War was the lesser of two evils with which we were confronted, but it remains profoundly evil. Sometimes a raging forest fire can be fought only with dynamite and back fires; nonetheless the drastic countermeasures, which at length check the great conflagration, are themselves bitterly destructive.

Victory has checkmated forces which would have destroyed us; for that we are deeply grateful. Nevertheless war sets loose forces within our individual lives and within the life of the nation and of the world which challenge all who are engaged in an enterprise of the spirit. Victory does not guarantee the survival of the liberal ideal for the promotion of which this institution was established. It only preserves, for a time, the possibility of vindicating that program of education. Yet,
paradoxically, it has made that vindication more
difficult, for war has fostered a climate of public
opinion increasingly hostile to a genuinely liberal
education.

 Armed conflict accelerated a drift already ap-
parent. It is no exaggeration to say that the period
between the two wars saw the ideal of a liberal
education in process of disintegration. That trag-
edy was not the result of poor teaching; it was
the educational reflection of a revolutionary shift
in values within the public mind. It was caused by
a social, political, economic, and moral dislocation
of the most profound character. This is now fully
revealed by the fact that victory has not
heightened the prestige of democracy nearly so
much as of communism.

 The liberal ideal puts the individual man at the
very center of all human values, but the world was
turning its back on that ideal; the individual was
steadily being subordinated to society—to the
state. The liberal ideal puts character before com-
petence, though it neglects neither; the mood of
the time exalted the expert above the man; it
prized skill more than integrity. The liberal ideal
seeks to orient the individual in time and space,
but even more to equip him to find his way in the
vast immensities of ideas and sensations; yet be-
tween the two wars reason and esthetics both sold
in the world market at a disastrous discount. The
liberal ideal offers no slick solution to momentary problems, but strengthens man to wrestle with eternal problems as well as to cope with the daily round; the world despaired of individual competence; it has sought to relieve the individual of responsibility. Everything possible was done, not to stimulate him to vital decisions, but to help him escape hard choices.

All these developments represented deep-seated change and all made our mission more difficult. For well over a century after the establishment of Brown University, the liberal thesis went almost unchallenged; the values for which it stood were not underrated. The environment offered just enough resistance to evoke effort. As the weather of New England stimulated men to industry, so the variable rigors in the climate of opinion kept the exponents of the liberal ideal alert and energetic. Without inducing softness the environment was fundamentally hospitable to liberal education.

In contrast, no legislative enactment between the two wars embodied words of praise for liberal education such as those which the colonial assembly wrote into the Brown Charter: "Whereas institutions for liberal education are highly beneficial to society by forming the rising generation to virtue, knowledge, and useful literature, and thus preserving in the community a succession of men duly qualified for discharging the offices of life
with usefulness and reputation, they have therefore justly merited and received the attention and encouragement of every wise and well-regulated state."

Our founders would not have supposed it credible that men who wrestle with the basic issues of life itself, who search out truth and seek to understand its meaning, who guide youth in the ways of enlightenment and righteousness, could ever be accused of unreality. They would never have mocked them as dwellers in an ivory tower. None of them would have supposed it possible that the power of the mind or the vigor of the human spirit could ever be regarded as subordinate to skills essentially mechanical. Yet those are the characteristic happenings of our time. He who underestimates the hostility which envelopes the liberal program is as foolish as those who did not see, or seeing did not comprehend, either the viciousness or the corrupting power of the Nazi state.

When the temper of the world, the local environment, the customs of our people were all hospitable, the need to be deeply concerned with the domestic environment of college students did not seem urgent. Even so, our forefathers did not place the college in the center of the town; they set it apart upon a hill from whose summit there were far perspectives. They made no mean provision
for its life; they erected the largest building in the Colony. The “Edifice” was so huge that our neighbors in Boston mocked it; they called it “a College near as large as Babel; sufficient to contain ten Times the Number of Students that ever have, or ever will, oblige the Tutors of that popular University with Opportunity of educating, or instructing them.” Stephen Bonsal, referring to University Hall in his recent book, *When the French Were Here*, states that while their army used it as a hospital, they regarded it as “a very handsome house.” Its shabby treatment in the nineteenth century almost destroyed that great tradition. Now again we can appreciate the “College Edifice.” In much the same way we need to recapture an awareness of the beauty and the utility of the liberal ideal.

As University Hall reflected the high ambitions and elevated spirit of the founders, so the enthu-

siasms and the ideals of each succeeding period were woven into the fabric of successive buildings. The vast enthusiasm for the classical revival, for ex-

ample, shaped the stately pillars of Manning; poverty might dictate construction with stucco instead of costly marble, but the majestic proportions were retained.

Even at its best, however, the University never satisfied the demands of that flaming apostle of popular enlightenment, Francis Wayland. In his famous report to the Corporation, he denounced
our student housing: “We assume the responsibility of a superintendence which we have rendered ourselves incapable of fulfilling; . . . we have lost the humanizing effect produced by the daily association of students with older and well bred gentlemen, so obvious in an English college; . . . we have expended almost all the funds appropriated to education in the construction of unsightly buildings, we had almost said barracks, for which, perhaps, the highest merit that can be claimed is, that they are not positively and universally a nuisance.” The truth and significance of what he said should be clear enough today, yet his contemporaries failed to understand him, and did nothing.

Thus for a century and more the educational values inherent in the living conditions of the students were neglected. Dormitories still took their cue from barracks; virtually no provision was made for students to eat together under circumstances which might promote an urbane life. Looking back upon this period with perceptive eyes, no one can doubt that failure to heed Wayland’s plea cost us dear; only a public opinion cordial to the liberal ideal kept poor domestic structures from defeating the aims of the College.

Certainly no one who moves abroad in the world, or who fairly assesses the hostility in the midst of which liberal learning must now proceed,
can tolerate the further neglect of suitable living facilities for students. We must do again what our eighteenth century forefathers did so well: we must re-create a domestic environment hospitable to our educational ideal; we must inculcate a way of life consistent with our aims. Our educational purpose must be evident in the structures themselves; it must be reflected in the manners and customs which they promote, just as it must dominate the temper of our teaching, indeed our every relationship.

In my very first report to the Corporation of Brown University nearly nine years ago I launched a long campaign to reorganize student housing: "If we are to have a genuine liberal college, we must have a care for the living conditions of our students. Their education is received not only in the classroom and the library but from all the contacts with their fellows and from their daily surroundings. We must regard the dormitories, therefore, as an important part of our educational project. . . . We should lay more and more emphasis upon the dormitories as instruments of instruction, and upon the student's room as a place where he may do his work in quiet and without interruption."

New buildings are no substitute for good teaching, but appropriate living conditions support and supplement good teaching and good teaching
needs every possible support. Brick and mortar are no substitute for inspired and devoted men, but better environment helps their efforts. If it were not so, men would have been content to worship in barns; they would not have sought with all their hearts, and with all their skill, and with all their treasure to build cathedrals. Education can no more neglect that lesson than religion. If, therefore, we are to show forth a primary regard for the individual, if we are to insist upon his infinite value, and emphasize his obligation to wrestle with infinite problems, we must create a fitting environment.

There is no sense in undoing with one hand what we seek to achieve with the other. Yet that is just what we do when we teach economics and let students neglect to pay their bills. It is ridiculous to teach art and surround that instruction with an aesthetic environment hostile to everything students learn in the classroom. It is absurd to expect undergraduates to have a private life of the mind when we provide no private life at all. It is a contradiction to expect them to cultivate in college values which the University itself neglects.

These considerations are fundamental to the proposal to reorient and rehouse student life at Brown University—in the College, in Pembroke, and, I trust, in the Graduate School. The ideal is not more stately mansions. There is nothing
grandiloquent in our plans; we seek only more appropriate provision for the life of the scholar; we want living conditions to encourage his intellectual, moral, and social progress.

The proposed program is no light undertaking. In 181 years we have invested between seven and eight million dollars in land and buildings. The current plan involves prompt expenditure of five million for student housing alone. That vast expenditure is necessary to re-create a domestic environment suitable to our educational objectives.

In the College we need two quadrangles capable of housing between six and seven hundred undergraduates including the members of seventeen fraternities. There should be a refectory where all resident students would eat and where those who commute may be accommodated at lunch. We must bring to the problem of food management the most efficient arrangements and a satisfactory dietary, in the most attractive surroundings. We propose to provide a private dining-room for each fraternity, giving full opportunity for whatever stimulus to morale and social solidarity that may bring. This will be a costly investment in fraternity life, and, as a policy, runs counter to significant developments in other colleges, where there is a strong tendency to challenge such groupings.

This illustrates how, in conceiving the plan and designing appropriate structures, it was essential
to decide whether the fraternity system should be strengthened or discarded. The future of fraternities as such was by no means the fundamental question; nonetheless it was a collateral issue which had to be faced. Broadly speaking, there were two possible approaches to a rational conclusion. We could follow the currently fashionable mode of appraisal—an over-all "balance sheet" taking account of physical, financial, intellectual, moral, and social assets and liabilities. Or, following a course more nearly in accord with the temper and the tradition of our institution, we could base our decision upon a longer perspective, informed with the deathless motto of our Commonwealth, "Hope."

The balance sheet revealed a situation unfavorable in many respects. Some thoughtful men concluded fraternities should be abolished. A persuasive argument to some has been that the fraternity system, having played its part for over a century, has become an anachronism and should be discarded. As one soldier back on a brief furlough from the fighting front put it pungently to me, "You are blowing on a dead coal."

The supporters of this view presented strong arguments. The waning acceptability of the fraternity system within the undergraduate body was evidenced by the progressively smaller percentage who joined the chapters. Organizations which once
had scholastic aims and contributed importantly to the intellectual life of the College community had become neutral at best; at worst they had become influences hostile to intellectual effort. The scholastic condition of the fraternities had been progressively unsatisfactory.

Few of the houses are desirable permanent residences for Brown students; there have been no significant evidences of any intention either to build new houses or to make present properties fully satisfactory. The only building project undertaken by a fraternity in the last twenty years was abandoned. The financing of several was unstable, the physical condition of some intolerable. Considerable sums were paid to national organizations; in many instances the returns seemed incommensurate.

There was, finally, an argument which the fraternities have had recurrently to meet ever since their foundation, one which many years ago led John Quincy Adams to reveal the secrets of Phi Beta Kappa. There is a fundamental doubt whether secret societies, self-selected, can escape the dangers of snobbishness and whether they are compatible with the democratic, egalitarian social temper of American life. Those questions become more insistent and more difficult to answer satisfactorily as smaller percentages of the student body participate in fraternity life.

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No one can brush aside as trivial these formidable elements in an adverse balance. Those alumni who felt that it was a mistake to preserve the fraternities were obviously sincere and could muster impressive evidence on their side.

Nonetheless, as the plans for new student housing were shaped, a different conclusion was reached. A great majority of the members of the Corporation felt that fraternities should be continued and strengthened. That is, and always has been, my personal view. Although it was conceded that scrutiny of a balance sheet might lead to an adverse judgment, it was decided to pay more attention to the historical tradition—an element in the life of every university, but unusually potent in old institutions. Since Brown was among the first to permit fraternities, the tradition here was both long and strong.

A survey of our distinguished alumni revealed that a disproportionate number of those upon whom the fame of the University and its current strength depend were fraternity men. Alumni generally were proud of their fraternity affiliations. The fraternities, when not burdened by debt and when occupying attractive quarters, furnish a center for alumni reunions. They perform a useful service in tying the generations together, keeping the graduates and the student body in contact as no other agency can. Circumstances have been
such that in only a few instances has that desirable end been achieved at Brown. The new project, by leaving the chapters debt-free in beautiful houses, should greatly stimulate and intensify this service of fraternities.

Though it was conceded that the payments to national treasuries have often been out of proportion to the direct benefits received, it was recognized that national membership has value in maintaining intercollegiate contacts and in helping break down undergraduate provincialism. Moreover, if fraternities were discontinued, since youth is gregarious, other social organizations would spring up. Experience in institutions that have banned fraternities supports this inference. Such ephemeral organizations have many of the disadvantages and few of the advantages of national chapters of well-established fraternities. Starting anew, they possess no helpful tradition, no body of alumni available for counsel, guidance, and aid.

Finally, it was evident that the current condition of the fraternities was by no means wholly their fault. What Wayland proclaimed with such vigor in 1850 has remained true ever since. The housing policy of the University itself had never been defined with adequate clarity or administered with sufficient energy. Moreover unsatisfactory design, poor housekeeping, and a continuing state of disrepair in University dormitories had not set a good
example to the fraternities in structure, maintenance, or finance. It was clear that fraternity reform and reform of University practices must proceed together.

Two modes of approach to the fraternity problem led to opposite conclusions: on the basis of a cold "balance sheet" estimate, large expenditures for continuation of the fraternities were hardly justified; decision on the basis of a longer perspective called for a renewed effort. Chapters, at their best, make a real contribution to the College and its objectives. It seemed, therefore, wiser to attempt to reinvigorate a waning tradition rather than abandon it.

When the Corporation committed itself to the perpetuation and strengthening of the fraternity system, the sensible program was a vigorous cooperative undertaking to free all the fraternities of debt, move them into satisfactory houses, relieve the alumni of management problems and the undergraduates of housekeeping with which neither was in a position effectively to cope, and unite the whole institution in a close-knit and harmonious whole.

Nothing short of a revolution in student domestic life would suffice to achieve these reforms. Nothing less would supply all undergraduates with adequate and appropriate college homes, or feed them with care for their health in an urbane
atmosphere. In no other way could we encourage the fraternities to discharge the high functions which their rituals proclaim as their objective and which experience has shown they can approximate under proper circumstances.

The real strength of the fraternities lies in the manly virtues of their members. The reform initiated by the Corporation leaves the basic character of the organizations unchanged. There will be healthy rivalry among the chapters. It is no part of their ritual, it is no element in their tradition that one fraternity should be superior to another in the size and cost of its house. Those are irrelevant and extraneous factors which tend to increase the dangers of snobbishness and crowd out legitimate bases of competition. The fraternities will retain everything important in their individuality—their enthusiastic loyalty, their ideals, their scholarship, their moral tone, their contribution to the social life, their taste in decorating their houses, and their student activities and intramural athletics.

The undergraduates will continue to live together as an intimate, self-governing, social group. They will have, as before, all the opportunities for upper-class leadership. They will manage all they can possibly handle competently. But there is no excuse for turning over the problems of running a dining-room to an undergraduate whose inexperi-
ence or carelessness may penalize a whole fraternity both in money and health. The problems of living together in peace and happiness—and those are very serious problems in any group—are left where they belong, for the boys to work out for themselves. The position of alumni as guides, counsellors, and friends is improved by relieving them of the status of landlords.

By structural design which permits a fraternity unit to be enlarged when its numbers grow and shrink when membership falls, the fraternities would be free, on the one hand, from carrying the costs of empty rooms, and would be assured, on the other, that all members could be accommodated. By having the students occupy their rooms under contract with the University and pay their bills to the bursar, one student would not be involuntarily penalized for the failure of another to pay his own bills. No other way has been suggested to achieve those two desirable objects.

The proposed housing reform involves somewhat greater supervision of the life of all students, whether or not they are members of fraternities. That is inevitable if we intend student life to contribute to educational ends. The elective system as proposed by Francis Wayland and developed by Charles William Eliot was a salutary move toward breaking up curricular vested interests; it transferred to the student some measure of re-
sponsibility for the pattern of his education. Those desirable results disappeared, however, when the elective system was carried to an extreme. The curriculum virtually dissolved; instead of promoting student responsibility, too free election encouraged quixotism. In much the same way control of student life was relaxed to such a degree as to promote disorder. All over the country college faculties are now restoring more rigorous curricular requirements. To return to Francis Wayland's phrase, they are accepting the "responsibility of superintendence" in determining courses of study. The radicals who once led the way toward extreme programs of free election now rush in the opposite direction, allowing virtually no electives and developing rigid control. In curricular reform, as in housing reform, Brown seeks the golden mean. We can no longer neglect living conditions, but we intend to maintain student initiative.

There is no Charter obligation more serious than that of taking care of "the morals of the College"; indeed that obligation is set "above all." In restoring both the meaning and the program of "responsible superintendence" there will be no return to the brutal disciplines of earliest days or to the rigid proctoring of later times. But there will be no effort to dodge the responsibilities laid on us by the Charter.

No simple or wholly agreeable program can
attain all these objectives. Any reform causes some heartache. To do nothing invited collapse of the fraternity system, for which the University would have to share the responsibility, with resulting bitterness. If the University had simply abolished the fraternities, the action would have been resented. The alumni corporations of the several chapters would have been left with properties not readily salable at anything like the investment put into them. Those who had made gifts for purchase or debt retirement would have felt they were being treated unfairly. The purchase of some by the University and refusal to purchase others would have been regarded as grossly discriminatory. If some had been taken over subject to their mortgages, it would have penalized others whose thrift or generosity had cleared their debts.

Since the location of none of the houses fell within the comprehensive plan for the development of the University and none was desired for permanent University use, purchase was obviously imprudent. Such expenditures would have imposed serious costs upon the University without compensating benefit, and would make more difficult the financing of the essential new construction. Finally, since the preservation of the fraternity system required the maintenance of at least as many chapters as were still active, the plan had to provide for those who were in the worst scholastic,
financial, or physical condition as well as those who were better off in any or all those respects.

To meet as many of these problems as possible the Corporation solicited the liquidation of all debts and acquisition of all houses by the University on a basis as nearly uniform as practicable. The program finally decided upon allows for the orderly disposal of many of the properties after the chapters are permanently housed; meanwhile none is left without a home. No plan could be wholly satisfactory to everybody. But in two years of discussion no one has suggested an alternative which achieves so many desirable objectives.

Considering the sentimental and emotional factors and the tangled nature of the problem, the wonder is not that there should have been expressions of doubt and fear; the really remarkable fact is that any general proposal could rally so much support. Those who felt that it was better to liquidate the whole fraternity system have yielded that point gracefully. Those fraternities who had paid their debts have not complained unduly because others less fortunate were subsidized to some extent by a friend of the University. Those who had sentimental attachments to particular locations have regretfully recognized the advantages of living more closely together. The best evidence of the acceptability of the plan has been the experience of those who set out with energy and good
will to liquidate the chapter debts and have found alumni generous both in spirit and in cash.

The program is vast. It needs the wisdom and the help of everyone. For that reason all the co-operating fraternities are represented on an advisory committee. They are being kept informed of every step in our progress; their counsel is sought and given full weight.

The plans now taking shape involve a profound educational reform. They are designed to reenforce the tradition which stimulated the foundation of the College and remains its reason for being—the cultivation of the liberal arts. They seek to revivify the intellectual and social life of all our students. They are intended to perpetuate and strengthen the democratic character of student life. They are calculated to provide a more orderly, a more gracious, and a more effective environment for the undergraduate as scholar and gentleman.

All Brown men, indeed the whole community, can unite in unwavering support of that program.