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LAFAYETTE COLLEGE

Report of POST WAR COMMITTEE

JULY, 1944

IMPORTANT!

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W. M. LEWIS,
President

Chapter Six

COLLEGE LIFE AND STUDENT LIVING

On one point the critics of the pre-war college in America are all but unanimous: No reform in the curriculum can be successful unless it is accompanied by a corresponding change in the complex pattern of extra-curricular organizations, activities, and traditions familiarly known as "college life." If the pace of the undergraduate was too leisurely before Pearl Harbor, the solution lies less in a purely quantitative expansion of the daily assignment and the weekly hour schedule than in the creation of an atmosphere in which more students will take full advantage of their educational opportunities. With one or two vociferous exceptions, educators do not advocate an undergraduate college devoted solely to the worship of the unadulterated intellect. They are merely determined that, in the development of the well-rounded man, the classroom shall play a more dominant role than the ballroom. They insist that the postwar campus should be pervaded by a new seriousness of purpose.

Although some educators assume fatalistically that the undergraduate varies little from generation to generation, there was evidence before the sobering advent of war that this new attitude was on the way. In a celebrated article in June, 1936, the editors of Fortune concluded, after a nationwide survey, that the jazz-age undergraduate--"iconoclastic, exhibitionistic, ignorant, raucous, socially irresponsible, and self-indulgent"--had been largely replaced by a more earnest and mature young man with a surer set of values and a realization that the "four happiest years" could not be hermetically sealed from the serious world outside:

The old-style campus big man no longer commands unqualified allegiance. The football star, the crew captain, the "muscular Christian" from the college Y.M.C.A., the smoothie from the big prep school who becomes track manager, the socially graceful prom leader--these still have honor and respect. But the intellectually curious person, who used to be considered queer or "wet" unless he had extra-intellectual characteristics to recommend him, is climbing past the conventional big man.

Many alumni who recalled the frivolity of their own college days were quick to agree with the soundness of this conclusion. But despite the new spirit, there were in America before Pearl Harbor too many country clubs thinly disguised as colleges. And in nearly all colleges--including Lafayette--education was seriously hampered by a lunatic fringe of "superkindergarteners" who were consistently bent on trying to realize college life à la Hollywood.

Some prophets predict that the postwar campus atmosphere--at least for a period of several years--will be automatically surcharged

with seriousness. They argue that the returning veterans who will make up an appreciable part of the student body will be more mature, sobered by their wartime experience, chastened by military discipline, conscious of their duty to finish their education rapidly and find their places in peacetime society. We wish we could share this optimism. But if the experience of the twenties is any criterion, there are reasons to fear that many demobilized students will react naturally against the restrictions and horrors of the war years by trying to turn the campus into a postwar playground. At any rate, it is highly probable that college authorities will have to retard the change from military discipline to civilian independence by holding a tighter rein on undergraduate activities than in normal times.

Regardless of the makeup of the student body, we agree that the postwar policy on extra-curricular activities should be aimed at preserving a more serious atmosphere than that of the campus before the war. This means a clearcut distinction between organizations and traditions which have a useful purpose and those which serve only as an archaic excuse for delaying the departure of adolescence. It is undoubtedly true that boys will sometimes be boys, but a college should be a place where they may also become men.

Fraternities

1. THE FRATERNITY SYSTEM SHOULD BE MAINTAINED AFTER THE WAR, BUT ON CONDITION THAT IT MUST GIVE MORE POSITIVE PROOF OF ITS VALUE ON THE CAMPUS.

The tendency to question the worth of the college fraternity has spread far in the last ten years. Of the many objections to it, three stand out: (1) The system is a hierarchy by which the student body is divided according to artificial standards of wealth and social background; the arbitrary distinctions between "good" and "bad" houses and between Greeks and non-Greeks reveal a snobbery which has no place on a democratic college campus. (2) Instead of encouraging the development of the individual personality, the fraternity puts a premium on conformity, tending to reduce all students to one social and intellectual level. (3) The average fraternity offers--even to undergraduates who do not live in the house--too many spurious excuses for not studying and too many distractions during periods ostensibly devoted to study. These and similar evils are conceded, not only by non-Greeks but by many fraternity men who have attempted to view the system with a detachment free from sentimental prejudice. On none of the three counts can the fraternity system at Lafayette plead complete innocence.

On the other side defenders of the tradition maintain that the fraternity offers an excellent opportunity for similar undergraduates to band together for the pursuit of common ends, to learn "group living", to form lasting friendships, to enjoy healthful recreation, and even to assist each other in study; and that it serves the alumnus as an aid in "getting ahead" in life and as a home base

for reunions. Undoubtedly many of these benefits could be provided by a modern, well-regulated dormitory plan. But this is the crux of the whole problem. Under the House Plan at Harvard and the College Plan at Yale, the fraternity has far less reason for existing than at Lafayette, where its abandonment would only aggravate the already serious problem of housing and feeding the undergraduates. From a practical and unsentimental point of view this is the most important reason for keeping the fraternity system alive on our campus.

2. IF THE SYSTEM IS TO BE CONTINUED, THERE MUST BE A REGULAR POLICY FOR BOTH THE ADMISSION OF NEW CHAPTERS AND THE ABOLITION OF OLD ONES.

We believe that there were too many national fraternities (17) on the campus immediately before the war. The postwar policy, however, should be designed, not to set an arbitrary limit on the number of chapters but to eliminate the weak ones while leaving the door open for the establishment of new houses which appear to fill a legitimate need. For example, it seems likely that the college will need another Jewish fraternity after the war. It is also probable that students entering under the veterans' program will include sizable groups of transfers from other colleges who will wish to establish chapters of their fraternities at Lafayette. These needs must be met as they arise.

At the same time the college should deal more promptly and effectively with existing chapters which show convincing evidence of failure to conform to a high standard of fraternity behavior. A house should be penalized, not only for flagrant violations of the social code but for a scholastic rating which is appreciably below the college average. If it becomes obvious over a period of several years that any chapter has a consistent record of low enrollment, financial bungling, or scholastic failure, that chapter should be compelled to close its doors. It is better for college morale to practise euthanasia on a dying fraternity than to abandon it to a lingering death.

3. THE COLLEGE ADMINISTRATION AND THE INTERFRATERNITY COUNCIL SHOULD AGREE JOINTLY ON AN UPPER LIMIT TO CHAPTER MEMBERSHIP, AND NO HOUSE SHOULD BE PERMITTED TO EXCEED THIS LIMIT.

Where no maximum exists, two or three chapters with memberships distinctly out of line with the facilities which they provide can monopolize the pledging and perpetuate themselves in power by sheer strength of numbers.

4. ALL FRATERNITY HOUSES SHOULD BE LOCATED ON THE CAMPUS OR NEAR ENOUGH TO BE UNDER THE DIRECT SUPERVISION OF THE COLLEGE ADMINISTRATION.

In the past some of the houses more than a block from the campus have been both a disciplinary problem and a neighborhood nuisance.

5. WE RECOMMEND THE CONSIDERATION OF A POLICY UNDER WHICH GROUPS OF TWO OR MORE HOUSES IN THE SAME VICINITY WOULD SHARE A COMMON DINING ROOM AND OTHER FACILITIES.

Our wartime experience has proved that men of different fraternities need not and should not remain as isolated from each other as they were before the war. The gradual introduction of such a policy--especially if it were considered in future building plans--might well lead to a division of the college social life into larger units than the pre-war fraternity. Eventually one of the main evils of the present housing system would disappear.

6. THE PRESENT PLEDGING MACHINERY SHOULD REMAIN IN EFFECT DURING A TRANSITION PERIOD OF THREE OR FOUR YEARS IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING THE WAR. AS SOON; HOWEVER, AS FRATERNITY MEMBERSHIPS ARE BACK TO NORMAL--AND AFTER A ONE-YEAR WARNING PERIOD--THE ADMINISTRATION SHOULD INVOKE A RULE STATING THAT NO STUDENT SHALL BE RUSHED FOR A FRATERNITY UNTIL THE BEGINNING OF HIS SECOND ACADEMIC YEAR.

The pre-war rushing agreement is an improvement over the old system under which the cut-throat rushing began before the awed freshman stepped off the train. The fact remains, however, that, even under the new regulations, the average fraternity man is signed, sealed, and delivered within the first six bewildering weeks of the Freshman year. Despite the annual warning of the Frosh Bible--"Picking your fraternity is one of the biggest steps in your college career"--the choice for too many students has been a blind spin of the roulette wheel. Nor is making the wrong choice the only evil in Freshman rushing. When the novice from the secondary school is swept into college in the fall amid the Mardi gras atmosphere of pajama parade and pep rally; wafted magically from a Hell of Sophomore sadism to a Heaven of fawning and flattery, wining and dining; jerked as quickly down again to serve in serfdom under his new masters; and then, just as the second term is beginning, condemned to another week of organized distraction--he can hardly be expected to believe that college life is not a continuous Hollywood scenario. The wonder is not that the pre-war Freshman often got off on the wrong foot but that he sometimes got back on the right one before it was too late.

7. HELL WEEK AND ALL OTHER INITIATION ACTIVITIES WHICH SERIOUSLY INTERFERE WITH THE STUDENT'S ACADEMIC WORK SHOULD BE PERMANENTLY ABOLISHED.

The official administrative attitude on "hazing", as announced in the Undergraduate Manual, did much to cut down on the severity of initiations during the years before the war. But until recently a full-fledged Hell Week--involving private sadism if not public exhibitionism--has continued to exist in many chapters.

8. FACULTY ADVISERS SHOULD TAKE A MORE ACTIVE PART IN THE AFFAIRS OF THEIR CHAPTERS, ESPECIALLY IN SCHOLASTIC MATTERS.

In the past, many advisers have been mere figureheads. They should organize and hold regular stated meetings to discuss common fraternity problems.

9. WE SUGGEST REGULAR FACULTY NIGHTS AT ALL HOUSES.

The adoption and continuance of this custom should, however, be entirely at the discretion of the undergraduates in the house.

10. THE COLLEGE BOARD OF HEALTH SHOULD MAKE FREQUENT, PERIODIC INSPECTIONS OF BOTH SANITARY AND SAFETY CONDITIONS IN ALL FRATERNITY HOUSES.

In the recent past these inspections have been neither regular nor thorough.

11. FINALLY, WE SUGGEST THAT EACH FRATERNITY SERIOUSLY CONSIDER THE ADVANTAGES OF EMPLOYING A HOUSE MOTHER.

Other Organizations, Activities, and Traditions

The decade before the war was marked at Lafayette by a noticeable decline in the quality of organized extra-curricular activities. This may have resulted partly from the changing undergraduate attitude which we have noted. It may have been partly due to the increasing enrollment in Engineering; with a steadily expanding hour schedule, the average Engineer found less time and energy to devote to campus activities than the Arts student. But a more satisfactory explanation of the decline is simply that the campus has been honey-combed with too many organizations, with the result that the most able undergraduates, despite perennial warnings by administration and faculty, have spread themselves too thinly to do justice either to the organizations or to themselves. With few exceptions, the students who have made the greatest contribution to the life of the campus and derived the most benefit from it are those who have concentrated their energies on one or two worthwhile activities. Regardless of undergraduate opinion, they have been the real "Big Men" on the campus.

One other conclusion is equally apparent. Almost without exception, the most consistently successful activities have been those which are most directly under faculty supervision. The Choir, the Little Theater, and the Brainerdy Society are notable examples.

In view of this evidence, we propose the following program:

1. EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES SHOULD BE CONFINED, AS FAR AS POSSIBLE, TO A SMALL NUMBER OF FLOURISHING ORGANIZATIONS WHICH MAKE AN UNQUESTIONED CONTRIBUTION TO STUDENT DEVELOPMENT AND WELFARE.
2. ALL STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS--OLD OR NEW--EXCEPT FRATERNITIES AND GROUPS UNDER DIRECT DEPARTMENTAL SUPERVISION--MUST PETITION THE FACULTY THROUGH THE COMMITTEE ON STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS FOR CONFIRMATION OF THEIR OFFICIAL STATUS.

This procedure, which is now required of new organizations, should be extended to others regardless of their pre-war status. In this way the faculty will be able to reconsider all pre-war organizations, approving only those which have definitely proved their value in the past.

3. EVERY STUDENT ORGANIZATION SHOULD HAVE AN ACTIVE FACULTY ADVISER APPOINTED BY THE ADMINISTRATION WITH THE CONSENT OF THE STUDENT OFFICERS.

By emphasizing the importance of faculty supervision, we do not wish to inaugurate an era of undue interference in undergraduate activities. Students should continue to formulate their own policies by democratic procedure, and the ultimate responsibility for the success of the organization should remain on their shoulders. In this respect, a college should differ appreciably from a secondary school. We feel, however, that college undergraduates, not only need the guidance of more experienced men but are anxious to have it. If, however, faculty guidance is to be improved, the few key men selected to supervise student organizations should not be overburdened, as some are now, with too many other duties.

4. NO STUDENT, REGARDLESS OF HIS SCHOLASTIC STANDING, SHOULD BE A MEMBER OF MORE THAN TWO ORGANIZATIONS--OTHER THAN FRATERNITIES AND ATHLETIC TEAMS--AT ONE TIME.

The pre-war policy of requiring all campus organizations to submit annual membership lists to the Dean and the Chairman of the Committee on Student Organizations should be enforced again after the war.

5. DEPARTMENTAL CLUBS--ESPECIALLY THOSE IN THE VARIOUS FIELDS OF ENGINEERING--SHOULD COLLABORATE MORE OFTEN ON ACTIVITIES OF COMMON INTEREST.

Such organizations, for example, as the A.S.M.E., the A.I.E.E., the A.I.E.M., the A.I.M.M.E., the A.S.C.E., and the A.I.Ch.E. have too much in common to pursue isolated paths. By co-ordinating their activities, they could carry out more interesting and valuable programs.

6. THERE SHOULD BE ONLY TWO STUDENT PUBLICATIONS: A YEARBOOK (THE MELANGE) AND A WEEKLY (THE LAFAYETTE).¹

In suggesting the need for curtailing publications, we believe we are expressing the almost unanimous feeling of both administration and faculty. Well conducted, a student magazine or newspaper can be as rewarding as any activity on the campus; irresponsibly edited, it can do little good for the students and irreparable harm to the reputation of the college. In the decade before the war, the Lafayette degenerated from a sizable semi-weekly newspaper which was at least no worse than comparable publication in other colleges to a flimsy weekly, carelessly written, abominably printed, padded with third-hand news and half-page cigarette ads. The Lyre, a fraternity house organ clinging faithfully to a standard of campus humor no less bawdy than anachronistic, was, if possible, more disreputable than the national average in its field. The Touchstone, existing by a spasmodic process of alternate death and resurrection, could hardly be dignified as a "periodical".

1. This section does not refer to the Frosh Bible, the Interfraternity Handbook, and the Brainerd Directory--useful student guides which should continue to appear regularly.

Certainly the main reasons for this situation are clear. The editors of a successful college periodical must be students who possess a rare combination of literary talent, intelligence, maturity, and industry. In a college the size of Lafayette, the number who meet this exacting standard is severely limited in any college generation. In no year is it large enough to justify the publication of a class annual, a newspaper, a "literary" magazine, and a "humorous" magazine. Such a setup not only means an ineffectual dispersion of student talent, but it also implies a whole series of arbitrary journalistic distinctions--literature cannot be humorous, humor cannot be literary, and news and editorial opinion need not, perhaps be even literate.

We believe that a single undergraduate weekly, published regularly once a week, could successfully combine the best features of the Lafayette, the Lyre, and the Touchstone. It would contain accurate summaries and forecasts of important campus activities (making no pretense of publishing "all the latest news"); carefully prepared articles of fact and opinion (rather than half-baked, last-minute editorials); genuine campus humor (that is, well-written sidelights on authentic campus folly, not antiquated two-line gags purloined from other publications); and occasional examples of the best undergraduate fiction and poetry.

7. WE RECOMMEND THE ABOLITION OF THE HONORARY JUNIOR-SENIOR SOCIETY KNOWN AS K.R.T. (THE KNIGHTS OF THE ROUND TABLE).

We believe that for some years this organization has been indirectly responsible for some of the most obvious shortcomings of Lafayette's system of extra-curricular activities. Basing membership on an involved scheme of points, it has encouraged student joiners to enter organizations indiscriminately with the aim, not of making a significant contribution to campus life, but of earning the dubious right to a flannel cap and a pompous Melange pedigree. K.R.T.'s few worthwhile activities--such as the sponsorship of step-singing--could be competently handled by the Student Council or the Interfraternity Council. Its other activities, such as the annual revival of a dying tradition regarding the persecution of Freshmen should have no place in the more serious atmosphere of the postwar campus.

This move would involve, we hope, a substantial diminution in so-called "Freshman regulations" and the disappearance of much of the Freshman-Sophomore strife which has been simulated artificially in the name of "Class Spirit". We have no objection to the traditional dink, or to some sort of badge of recognition for new students. But maroon ties, black socks, pipe cleaners, matches, paddles, and green signs reading "I am a Wise Frosh" are badges of an outmoded collegiatism which has been all but abandoned in most of the better colleges of the East. The fiction that "Wise frosh" are "disciplined" by such proceedings need hardly be taken seriously in view of the vastly more undisciplined behavior of the Sophomores. The assumption that each generation should go through the same inevitable motions as its predecessors only because its predecessors went through them is a sentimental denial of the possibility of progress. If, as we propose, the Freshmen are kept from joining a fraternity until their second year, and if, as present plans portend, they are not only housed in the same dormitories but fed in the same dining

hall, they will have a basis for genuine class spirit which no amount of sacred horseplay could possibly produce.

8. THE HONORARY SOCIETY KNOWN AS MAROON KEY SHOULD BE CONTINUED ON THE FOLLOWING CONDITIONS:

a. Seniors, as well as Juniors, should be eligible for membership.

b. Election should be on a less artificial basis than a system of activity points.

c. The society should be restricted to its original function: playing host to visiting students (athletic teams, etc.) from other colleges.

The abolition of K.R.T. would mean little if Maroon Key were permitted to take over its activities. In recent years the two organizations have shared the "disciplining" of Freshmen.

9. THERE SHOULD BE MORE ANNUAL AWARDS FOR DISTINGUISHED LEADERSHIP IN UNDERGRADUATE ACTIVITIES.

We believe that student leadership is better recognized by such awards as the Pepper Prize and the 1913 Cup than by election to undergraduate organizations of questionable value. Since both these prizes--the former indirectly, the latter directly--place emphasis on athletic ability, we feel that there is a definite need for awards to student leaders who, through no fault of their own, are not athletes. We also feel that the method of electing the Pepper Prize man should be clearly and permanently stated and that it should be strictly followed without perennial variations.

10. WE RECOMMEND THAT UNDERGRADUATES BE ALLOWED TWO "BIG" DANCE WEEKENDS A YEAR (FALL AND SPRING), THAT THE DATES BE PERMANENTLY FIXED IN THE CALENDAR BEFORE THE BEGINNING OF THE TERM, AND THAT EACH OF THE TWO SATURDAYS BE ANNOUNCED AND OBSERVED AS AN OFFICIAL COLLEGE HOLIDAY.

It is absurd for the faculty to continue the farce of pretending to conduct classes on the Saturday following a late Friday night dance.