

# FORTUNE

Time & Life Building, Rockefeller Center, New York, New York 10020

Editorial Department

December 4, 1969

Dr. John R. Coleman, President  
Haverford College  
Haverford, Pennsylvania 19041

Dear Jack:

I've been meaning to write since I was down for the Visiting Committee meeting (or that part of it I was able to attend), but a seven-day-and-night-a-week vigil at the typewriter makes it very difficult for me to keep up my other obligations. (The book is going well. I'm on the next to the last chapter, and the response to what has been finished has been very favorable from both the members of my Advisory Commission and my editors at Random House.)

If you have not already picked it up from your own grapevine -- or if you have not already been presented with it -- you should know that the black students are preparing to demand that one floor of one of the dormitories (I don't know which, but it apparently has four suites of four rooms each on the first floor) be assigned to black students for next year. That's a pretty tame demand, as black student demands go these days.

I am concerned, though, for the reasons I suggested last spring. I had a steady stream of students in our suite all night long the night I was down -- all white until about 10 o'clock, when a delegation of black students joined the crowd. And I spent some time (and Arlene a lot more time) over Thanksgiving Weekend with Skippy and a friend (his first name is Sherman; I can't recall the last name) who had come home with him for the weekend.

I get the sense that the black students' pain is somewhat less than it had seemed last spring -- perhaps because it is still fall and the pain builds up during the year, or perhaps because it is easier, now that there are substantial numbers of black freshman and sophomores.

Several things concern me, though. Perhaps because there are more blacks, perhaps because this is the way it has always been, the black students keep their gripes to themselves, rather than discussing them with their white roommates or dormmates, or rather than just exploding in anger at the time the incident occurs. The result is that anger over the essentially trivial and generally unconscious slights builds and feeds upon itself, as the black students keep churning over the same incident. As an instance, the black freshmen in Barclay, being more serious and less

collegiate than the whites, are irritated by the water fights and other such activities, which interfere with their studying or sleeping. But in their insecurity, they have said nothing to the white students. A week or two or three ago, a group of black students had a party which lasted some time into the morning; the white students, quite naturally, came to complain about the noise. The black students were furious, feeling that the whites were employing a double standard against them -- but said nothing at the time, and have not discussed the double set of gripes since. Instead, the anger has been building up.

In this instance (and the same sort of thing keeps recurring), someone has to persuade the black students that it not only is all right, but would be a lot healthier for everybody, if they would try to convey their anger and the reasons for it to the white students at the time of the incident.

As another instance, Sherman's roommate apparently makes occasional and perhaps unconscious patronizing remarks, e.g., when Sherman got a B+ on a Philosophy exam, asking him if it was because he was smart or because the instructor was marking easy (Sherman is a Merit Scholar). Since I don't know the roommate, I obviously can't judge whether there's malice or not, or whether it's easily correctable or not. My impression, though, is that Sherman hasn't tried. Instead, he's moving into a single room.

The danger is that all this feeds into the new rhetoric of extreme militancy and separatism. The rhetoric is useful, perhaps essential, in helping create pride in color and race -- up to a point. After that, it tends to take on a life and a reality of its own and thus provides a substitute for thinking. The tendency gets stronger and stronger to substitute "all honkies are like that" for an attempt to analyze and deal with the situation in question, whatever it may be. (Thus, on the one hand, Skippy is writing poetry, which would have been unimaginable six months ago; but on the other, he substitutes "pig," "honky," etc., whenever he is stuck for an image -- and to a considerable degree, the rage is synthetic.) And the black students I met angrily denounced the peace movement as whitey's attempt to cop out of dealing with the problem of the black man here. With the lack of any sense of history which this whole generation, white and black, seems to have, these kids had forgotten, if they ever knew, that it was Stokely Carmichael and Rap Brown who two years ago were insisting that the real issue for blacks in the United States was the war in Vietnam.

What I'm leading to is that the rhetoric of separatism and, increasingly of revolution, with its celebration of violence, may in time make it very difficult for the black students at Haverford to feel any commitment to Haverford as an institution. If the issue appears to be "black survival" versus "survival of Haverford," the choice is clear.

December 4, 1969


I don't have any answers. But I think that whatever can be done to sensitize the white students to their unconscious patronization and slurs should be done. I also think that it is important to get the black students as involved as possible in every aspect of the college governance and activities, so that they will feel free to express the commitment to the college that they really do feel. In a sense, the problem here is that the college is so magnificent, and responds so quickly to any reasonable student demand or desire, that the students have nothing to fight against, which means that they do not have any victories they can call their own, or any decisions they can point to as theirs. I wonder if perhaps the reform of the curriculum and the introduction of the freshman seminars went too smoothly. Don't misunderstand me; I can't imagine a better place to be than Haverford, and I do not in any way share Jamie Redfield's concern that the college is too supportive and too free of conflict. What I am suggesting, I think -- I'm really thinking out loud -- is that the supportive character of the college and the absence of conflict may mean that it would be useful to try to find some substitute for the sense of community and of identification with the institution that grows out of successful conflict.

What I'm saying, I guess, is that Haverford may well be the one place where black/white amity can be pulled off; for all their anger and ambivalence, the black students I've met know that Haverford is better than anywhere else and feel real attachment to it. But the tide of revolution is so strong that that present attachment may not be enough. They need a sense that they have changed the college for the better and through their own efforts. I don't know how this can be done, but I think it is important, perhaps essential.

Does this make any sense?

As ever,



Charles E. Silberman / 

Dictated but not read by  
CES:gs-12/10/69

December 14, 1969

Mr. Charles E. Silberman  
FORTUNE Magazine  
Editorial Department  
Time & Life Building  
Rockefeller Center  
New York, New York 10020

Dear Charles:

I do value your letter. I want to share it at once with some of the senior administrators who are closest to me on matters involving race. The initial reaction I have is that it is full of wise thoughts and good insights -- but I'm most anxious to see how others whose judgment I respect highly react to it.

For a variety of reasons I've been thinking about the subject of insensitivity as a possible theme for my spring Collection talk. Your comments, from Skip and from Sherman Smith, reinforce the determination to try to do something about this. The road is long, but it's a good one to travel.

I'll be in touch with you again very soon.

All best wishes to Arlene and yourself,  
and to Rich.

Sincerely,

John R. Coleman

JRC:bc



*Haverford College*

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

*Visiting Committee*

HAVERFORD, PA. 19041 215-649-9600

To: James Lyons, David Potter, William Ambler, Zelbert Moore,  
Greg Kannerstein

Subject: Attached letter from Charles Silberman

I'd be very interested in hearing your comments on this recent letter from Charles Silberman. Maybe we should meet to discuss it -- I'll await first reactions from you before deciding whether we should plan an early get-together.

JRC:bc

# Haverford College

TO: Jack Coleman FROM: James W. Lyons  
RE: Silberman Letter DATE: 1/5/70

Thanks for sharing his letter with me.

I, for one, am quite aware of the validity of his observations. And I find myself having to admit that I've engaged in an almost conscious pattern of avoiding the issue. This by wishful thinking that before too long students (white and black) will somehow find the courage and know how to drop their cool interpersonal veneers and begin talking and listening together.

I'm afraid, though, that this emotional loneliness is more widespread than we dare admit. Because of it, the special needs and pains of the black students are repressed from view.

Yes. By all means let's get together soon. May I urge that Jim Vaughan be included early in our discussions.

JWL:ls

