

ST. LOUIS: CITY WITH THE BLUES

By PATRICIA JANSEN DOYLE

ST. LOUIS is preoccupied with building monuments: the stunning Saarinen arch, the Busch Memorial stadium, the restored Court House. Civic pride has soared with the silvery arch, but this "Gateway to the West" on the Mississippi River casts its shadow over a city that is gray, both in appearance and in quality of human life. The downtown is dying, industry is sagging, and the verve needed to tackle the real problems of American cities—education, housing, jobs, and race—is stifled by a half-century of complacency. The city of St. Louis, its 62 square miles unaltered since 1876, long rebuffed consolidation pleas from the once sparsely settled 497-square-mile St. Louis County. It now finds the tables turned. People, industry, and money have fled to the county.

Economically, St. Louis has been on a downward roller coaster since Chicago captured the railroads at the turn of the century. Since 1950, the city's population has shrunk from 850,000 to 700,000 as 250,000 persons fled while their 100,000 replacements were mostly blacks out of the rural South and some anti-Negro hillbillies out of the Ozarks.

Today St. Louis has two Negroes for every five Caucasians. But the blacks are younger and their children go to public school, while the whites are often aged or German-Irish Catholics whose children enter parochial school. The implications for the public schools are tremendous. While the overall population dipped, school enrollments climbed. In the last twenty-five years, the public school enrollments have flipped from 78 per cent white to 63 per cent black. Last year, public schools enrolled 117,000 children, 62 per cent of them living in slum areas and 33,000 on Aid to Dependent Children.

The problems of the St. Louis schools are typical of the problems of big-city

school systems everywhere—underfinancing, de facto segregation, mounting enrollments of the black and the poor, rising teacher militancy. These are reflected in the large class size, the high dropout rate, the lag in reading achievement, and the growing blackboard jungle ranging from resistance to learning in the classroom to vandalism, drinking, and knife-wielding in the school corridors. Two-thirds of the poverty area children are retarded a half-year or more in reading, language, and arithmetic, and there are more high school dropouts and suspendees every year than graduates.

BUT what distinguishes St. Louis from other cities is the response—or, more accurately, the sluggishness of response—that mirrors the community itself. Only in recent years have the city fathers tried to halt the economic and social decline. About fifty of the top financial and business leaders joined in an organization called Civic Progress, Inc., which thus far has been successful primarily in image-making. Dominated by the downtown interests, especially the bankers, it has leaned heavily on the federal dollar rather than risk capital. Uncle Sam provided three-fourths of the \$43,000,000 spent beautifying the riverfront.

But Civic Progress has created more problems than it has solved. Urban renewal and highways have removed large amounts of property from the tax rolls, bulldozing away slum neighborhoods at the same time immigrants were arriving from the South. Construction of low-rent housing and schools lagged years behind. The homeless literally pushed middle-class whites out of the large, aging brick homes in the West End and into the suburbs, transforming Skinker Boulevard into a "Berlin Wall" between the city and county, the poor and the affluent, the black and the white.

Just as St. Louisans claim civic progress by erecting monuments rather than investing risk capital for business expansion, school leaders seek pie-in-the-sky solutions for financing and integration while avoiding innovations in the here



—Wide World.

"The verve needed to tackle the real problems of American cities—education, housing, jobs, and race—is stifled by a half-century of complacency."

and now. "We sit here realizing our city is dying but we do nothing about it," according to Board of Education president, James E. Hurt, Jr., a voice crying in the wilderness. "The school board has not come out strongly enough for the money it needs. It is still dictated to by the city fathers and the real estate board."

So today the St. Louis school system remains rigid and antiquated, the product of a complacent community whose German conservatism still lingers, and of a few men who guide its direction—from compulsive board leader Daniel L. Schlafly, regarded as Civic Progress's man on the board, to Superintendent William Kottmeyer, who admits he is "not a man for all seasons."

AGUM-CHEWER who peers down at people over dark-rimmed glasses, fifty-five-year-old Schlafly has made the school board his occupation for the last fifteen years. He has sparked critical decisions: the multitrack high school program, the Proficiency and Review (P&R) tests which all students will soon have to pass to obtain a high school diploma, stiff disciplinary measures, and the general go-slow attitude toward integration. Although Schlafly is proud that he ran in 1959 with the first Negro elected to the school board, or any city-wide office in St. Louis, blacks have become hostile toward him because they feel the programs of the "the white knight in shining armor" have hit their youth hardest.

Collectively, the school board members are honest and dedicated, yet they seem out of tune with the gut problems of big-city schools. The three Negro

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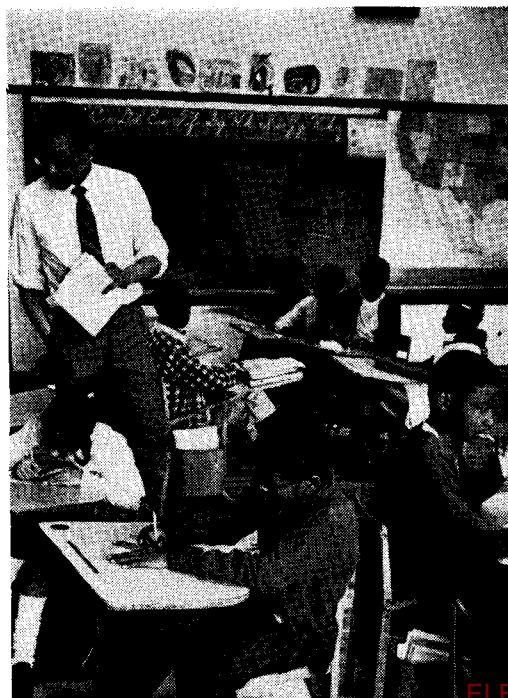
members—polished and middle-class—tend to vote the same way as white members. The occasional maverick is James Hurt, who works round the clock in the ghetto as head of a savings and loan company and is guiding the development of a black supermarket on urban renewal land. The son of a respected St. Louis physician, Hurt sees economic power as co-partner of black power. While not abandoning integration, he now soft-pedals the issue for, as one friend explained: "He found himself isolated from the (school board's) major decision-making conclaves."

The school board itself is highly touted as a blue-ribbon board in a community that tends to confuse absence of graft with quality of performance. A major clean-up campaign in the early Fifties ended the board's days of political patronage, and established Daniel Schlafly as chief reformer and board strong man. Today, board members are screened by a floating committee known as Citizens for Quality Schools. Schlafly dominates the choice of committee members, their choice of candidates, and substantially finances the election campaigns.

The St. Louis school system is a three-R system, rigid and test-happy, which clings to the neighborhood school principle. Until 1967, the system's six district superintendents administered only the kindergarten through eighth grade; now they have responsibility for the high schools as well. The district superintendents, however, must still look to the central administration for key decisions affecting curriculum, textbook selections, and the hiring of teachers.

**School in the Banneker district—
"Classes are noisy and casual, and the
teachers appear dedicated to their work."**

—George Harris.



When freshmen enter one of the ten four-year high schools, they are sorted into above average, average, and below average ability tracks. Bright pupils scoring above 125 on the Stanford-Binet are siphoned into a gifted track at about age ten. Telescoping grades five through eight into three years, they move into ninth-grade classes in the eighth grade and into college-level work in their senior year. The school district "discourages" entries after the seventh grade, thus slamming the door to the late bloomer, the one-subject genius, and the talented newcomer from another city.

SLOW learners also go into their own track and typically leave high school after two years—until recently without any job training. By 1970, every high school student will have to pass the Proficiency and Review tests in reading, language, spelling, and arithmetic to obtain a high school diploma. The tests reflect a Chamber of Commerce survey that found industrial employers up in arms over job applications filled out by high school graduates. "It was a cruel hoax to hand a high school diploma to boys and girls and turn them loose on the job market when they are spelling at the fifth-grade level," explained Boardman Schlafly, who converted the board to the P&R approach.

Changes not pushed by the business community have come less rapidly. Sex education worked its way into the curriculum just two years ago, in ninth-grade general science and tenth-grade biology. The system is just beginning to buy reference works and study materials on Negroes. It was slow to convert to modern biology and is just beginning to shift to modern physics. "We have not yielded to pressure groups that want us to institute a crash program . . .," explained Curriculum Director Dr. Earl Herminghaus. "Change is extremely expensive."

In an earlier generation, St. Louis pioneered kindergartens, ungraded primaries, and departmentalized instruction, but today principals and teachers look incredulous when a visitor inquires if they are considering team teaching, differentiated duties and salaries for faculty, independent study, flexible scheduling, and computer-assisted instruction for pupils (all found in various pilot stages no farther away than Kansas City). "We don't go in for fads" is the stock answer.

The board's overall sluggishness is illustrated in its approach to two major issues of the day—integration and inner-city education. St. Louis swiftly desegregated its schools after the 1954 Supreme Court decision. But it also began busing children in self-contained units from the overcrowded, resegregating West End. At the receiving schools, the transported

children arrived late, left early, and were kept segregated not only in the classrooms, but on the playgrounds and in the cafeterias.

Not until 1963, however, when civil rights militancy swept the country, did the school board come under fire. The West End Community Conference of middle-class whites and blacks, wanting to stabilize the community, not only questioned the segregated busing, but also charged that the school board was permitting white students to transfer out of schools while refusing Negroes the same privilege.

After a public hearing, then-Deputy Superintendent Kottmeyer, acting for ailing Superintendent Philip Hickey, drew up the administration's response to 136 charges, tending to belittle the central issues by surrounding them with trivial charges. The school board said "no" to everything except the NAACP's request for a citizens' commission. In a strong report in late June 1963, the commission called upon the administration to make every effort to integrate faculty and classes "in every public school" in the city. "Unrealistic," muttered some key administrators, while open opposition sprang from Patrons Alliance, a conservative rival of the PTA.

Ultimately, the school board approved the commission's open enrollment plan but rejected forced transfer of any faculty or the redrawing of any elementary school boundary lines. It announced it would end self-contained classes for the transported children, but delayed action more than a year to allow time to rent twenty-six classrooms in Protestant churches, throw up thirty-four portable classrooms, and construct other rooms. It rejected the idea for "multi-school complexes," which would have clustered overcrowded Negro schools with adjacent underutilized white schools in enlarged attendance areas. Proponents of the plan claimed 1,800 seats could be salvaged with no additional construction.

Lawsuits and counter-lawsuits filed by the NAACP and the school board were dropped when bused pupils were integrated into receiving schools in the fall of 1964. But the number transported had dropped to 700 from a peak of 4,600 just a year earlier. It climbed again to about 2,600, but the district has been building ghetto schools ever since so that today most St. Louis children attend classes in predominantly one-race schools.

But one must recognize that militancy has never been strong in St. Louis. The St. Louis Negro is Southern in style—polite, acquiescent, and, until recently, knew his place. Furthermore, the city has a second-generation Negro elite which exercises its own control over less-advantaged blacks while enjoying a comfortable niche with both the white elite and the politicians. The Negro elite—as



—Photos by St. Louis Post-Dispatch.

Superintendent William Kottmeyer
—“not a man for all seasons.”

well as the white community—has demonstrated that militancy doesn't pay.

One can only conclude that in the thirteen and a half years since the monumental Supreme Court decision, the St. Louis School Board has never accepted integration. While its basic policy is that it will set no barriers “that will prevent the achievement of maximum integration consistent with sound educational principles,” it has been single-minded in building schools where children live.

In a recent study for the U. S. Office of Education, Marilyn Gittell and T. Edward Hollander found the St. Louis school system—like the city itself—extremely resistant to change. “The board's integration policy is limited by its commitment to the neighborhood school concept,” they reported. Furthermore, “the board also has attempted to treat all schools within the system equally in the allocation of tax funds, thereby limiting the possibility for special programs in the ghetto schools beyond those financed with outside [largely federal] funds.”

In the vast poverty area where 70 per cent of the public school enrollees live, anti-poverty funds from Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) have been spent in traditional ways. One-third of the \$9,500,000 that poured in during the first two years of ESEA went to construct classrooms. Most went for the “Rooms of Twenty” program where, in a special class limited to twenty pupils, a single teacher works all day with ten- and eleven-year-olds who haven't mastered third-grade reading. The youngsters are put through an intensified three-R curriculum stripped of frills. Music, art, physical education, even remedial reading teachers do not darken the door. They are reserved for youngsters left in the regular classrooms where enrollments sometimes soar above forty in the ghetto.

Federal poverty funds also have hired 200 teacher aides, twenty-nine remedial reading teachers (augmenting seventy-four financed by local and state funds),

and provided ten mini-grants up to \$1,000 each to schools wanting to buy programed math texts and other special items. They also are underwriting free and reduced-cost sack lunches in a city that provided meals for the first time last year in all 158 elementary schools.

Federal funds have encouraged a few experimental programs. The Ford school, in a largely black neighborhood, is pioneering in after-school and night community service. Several hundred children are tutored after school, while both children and adults can take everything from typing to “slimnastics.” Two more schools launched similar programs last



Sam Shepard—Banneker district superintendent.

fall, but a prominent citizens committee has been unsuccessful in its more than six-month effort to tap private gifts for further expansion of community service schools.

Other innovations include the Lincoln Opportunity High School—where 300 of the toughest students are given small-group instruction, counseling, and on-the-job experience—and a foundation-financed school and clinic for pregnant girls. Vocational training centers for the mentally retarded opened this fall.

In examining the effectiveness of programs, however, Dr. Gerald Moeller, director of federal programs, found that the school system is getting more mileage out of its remedial reading clinics than its costly Rooms of Twenty. Tests showed that poverty-area youngsters were gaining only eight months in reading achievement each year. During 1966-67, children helped by remedial reading teachers advanced more than nine months at a cost of \$9 per child, while those in Rooms of Twenty advanced ten months at a cost of \$702 per child compared with \$482 per child spent for all other pupils in grades one through eight.

For a while, it seemed that better results were coming from a lively program in the Banneker district in the heart of the ghetto. Concerned that the tracking

system, adopted just two years after desegregation, was shunting Negro youth into the lower—and largely segregated—tracks, District Superintendent Sam Shepard launched a “motivational” program that sparked the students and teachers and elicited widespread parent participation.

THE typical Banneker motivation pitch radiates from classroom bulletin boards —“Don't Sleep”; “Your Chance”; “Keep Up with Your Studies”; “Be Better than You Are.” Classes are noisy and casual, and the teachers appear dedicated to their work. Shepard has pitted school against school and class against class, using competition to drive pupils and teachers to achieve. Parents flock to mass meetings and sign the Parent's Pledge listing ten ways they would support their children in school.

Such community involvement is unique in St. Louis. Nonetheless, the program is limited by central board restriction on curriculum and school organization. The schools are overcrowded and understaffed. And, although in the first years the motivational approach raised achievement by two years at the eighth-grade level, Banneker youth again slipped below the national average once the newness wore off, according to findings reported by the U. S. Commission on



Daniel L. Schlafly—“chief reformer and board strong man.”

Civil Rights. There is no doubt, however, that parents, teachers, and students like the Banneker district. “Banneker runs the best program in the city,” said Helen Floyd, Carr Lane PTA president. “We won't let Banneker kids be bused away.”

The main problem with Banneker is that Sam Shepard's program has been built on the quicksand of a school system whose citywide curriculum and approach to teaching is out of date. The St. Louis schools exude a mentality rooted partly in tradition, partly in fear. Curriculum Director Herminghaus asserts that there is no alternative to using the same texts and the same program throughout the

city when 40 per cent of the poverty area pupils move every year and blacks keep an eye on whether they are getting the same advantages.

Rigidity is carried to further extremes. Teachers in many elementary schools are required to organize their week according to a printed form. A fourth-grade teacher, for example, is called upon to teach seventy-five minutes of spelling, 250 of reading, 135 of science, etc., each week. The high schools with few exceptions — such as Southside's Cleveland, which offers German—duplicate one another in courses. "There aren't enough options to meet the variety of preparations of youngsters," according to Marie Hudson, one of the district's thirty-eight social workers. "There's too much stress on the P&R tests. What gets lost is: what is a complete education?"

While some contend that principals are pushed "to make their schools look good on paper," Principal Rebecca Hays at the Waring school explained: "The individual principal is responsible for the school. If the eighth grade is behind, they'll call me in and ask, 'What's wrong?' If a child breaks a leg, I'm responsible."

Finances often dictate choices. "When you don't have much money, you have to stay with the tried and true," remarked one administrator. Last spring, in a board-approved document, *A Tale of Two Cities*, Superintendent Kottmeyer underscored the need for more money. He estimated that a "model" school system would have spent \$93,000,000 instead of \$63,000,000 for operations the previous year.

YET, the school system has difficulty getting voters to approve its biennial operating levies, which require a simple majority vote, and bonds for construction, which require a two-thirds vote, seem completely beyond the reach of the city which saw a \$31,800,000 proposal go down the drain last spring and again

in August with 54 and 55 per cent majorities.

Now St. Louis, which has long antagonized state legislators by cutting itself off from the goals of "outstate" Missouri, including Kansas City, is courting state-wide support. Leaders contend that the city schools receive only 27 per cent of their operating funds from the states compared with a 34 per cent average state-wide. Legislators and county neighbors counter that the local tax in the city is low, half that of most of its suburban neighbors. The city system retaliates that city residents earn less and pay more.

YET St. Louis has never mounted a major educational campaign for the kind of school bond and levy money it needs, nor has it cultivated community support by sharing any significant role in planning with the public. Some believe that the power structure embodied in Civic Progress has maintained a veto over any all-out effort to raise school taxes to an adequate level, although the power structure's role is played out behind closed doors. "The leadership of this community is spongy," observed a St. Louis foundation executive. "It is difficult for the public to lodge clear-cut grievances because it is hard to find a target."

The school board takes a businessman's view of its operation. "We are not in trouble," explained Frederick E. Busse, board finance chairman. "We practice fiscal responsibility. If we don't have money, we don't spend it." But balancing a budget, with most funds tied to salaries and fringe benefits, will get tougher in the face of rising teacher militancy. The school system went to the brink of a strike in September when the union called it off on the eve of school reopening amid threats that strikers might lose their jobs, go to jail, or both. The immediate issue was not salaries but a push for an election to select a bargaining agent.

The union, probably not strong enough to sustain a strike, is regrouping. Meanwhile, the St. Louis Teachers Association, an NEA affiliate, has been working with the Missouri State Teachers Association to draft a state law that would mandate bargaining rights to the organization with the largest paid membership. It claims about 1,900 teachers to the union's estimated 1,200 among some 4,000 city teachers.

The union membership, however, has risen fast, drawing its strength from the toughest ghetto schools, and especially from the young, black, militant teachers. The union now is about 50 per cent black, mirroring the racial composition of the teaching force itself, while the NEA group is about 70 per cent white.

While both organizations talk of high-

er salaries and smaller class size, they differ primarily in their attitudes toward Superintendent Kottmeyer. Union President Demosthenes DuBose sees him as the authoritarian head of a white-managed bureaucracy. "If you work hard, keep your nose clean, don't rock the boat, you might get to the top," he said. The NEA leaders, on the other hand, stress the Superintendent's open-door attitude (he has chided them for not coming in as often as the union), his popularity because he came up through the ranks, and a general recognition that in St. Louis "it's a long hard route from paternalism to individual freedom."

In the midst of the teachers' drive for a piece of the action, Kottmeyer is sensitive to his dilemma as head of one of the nation's largest school systems. Jesuit educated, Aristotelian in logic, Kottmeyer revels in the days when the St. Louis Philosophic Society debated Hegelian ideas and aspired to make that city the cultural center of the world. His heroes are early St. Louis Superintendent William T. Harris, who believed that schools were charged to follow, not redirect, the practices of man; and Susan Blow, that cultivated gentlewoman, who, after studying under a disciple of Froebel, founded the first public school kindergarten in America in St. Louis ninety-five years ago.

Instead, Kottmeyer is buffeted by the AFT-NEA competition. "A struggle for power is going on—perhaps we should make the best bargain we can before they clobber us," he says. Yet he longs for the days when the "females" of German and Irish burghers "went into a crummy school, made a poor kid into a doctor, into a Horatio Alger—and did not care what was in their paycheck. . . . Parents and schools were teaching the same doctrines then, twenty-four hours a day, 365 days a year," Kottmeyer says. "Today, Negroes are trying to make it on six hours a day, 180 days a year. . . ."

"Inevitably, the black power people will take control of the big-city school systems. Maybe we are creating islands in the cities, islands of hate, malevolence, and malice, that white people and black people might not be able to live together on this continent. . . . The big-city school system is the most important problem on the American horizon."

As his blueprint for action now, Dr. Kottmeyer listed: reducing pupil-teacher ratio; searching for new sources of teacher supply; improving physical facilities; adding band-aid services, such as more psychiatric care, health education, social workers, counselors, special education teachers.

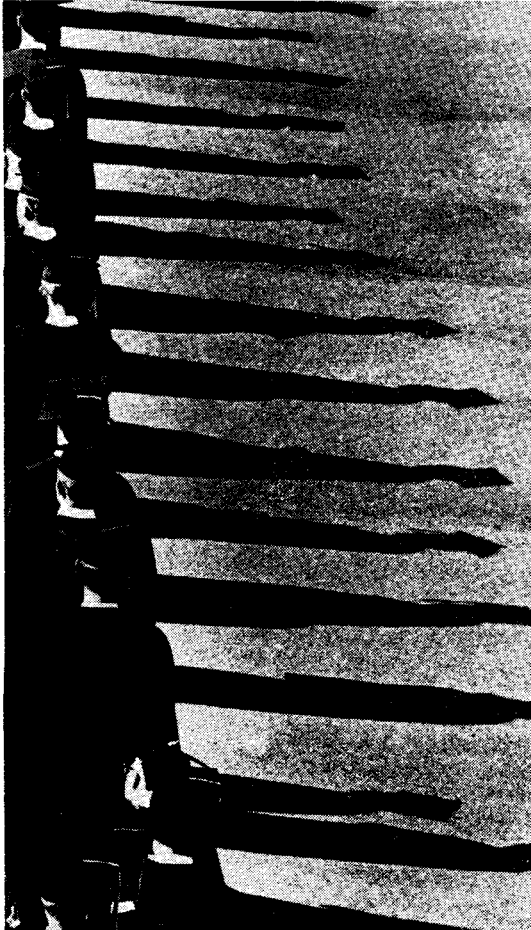
"Integration per se won't solve the problem," he says. "Unless you establish oneness of purpose with school and home, you won't solve the problem."

(Continued on page 105)



Board President James E. Hurt, Jr.—"the occasional maverick."

THE END OF THE GREAT TRADITION



—Edwin Stein.

"When the university and its scholars lost their monopoly as disseminators of news and ideas . . . the halo began to tarnish."

By PETER SCHRAG

HIGHER education has gone mainstream; the old distinctions have vanished; one can no longer determine where "higher education" ends and the rest of the world begins: peripatetic professors, government contracts, political students. The 1960s represented the last decade of the traditional rhetoric about the enterprise: Was the institution public or private? How many students were enrolled? What was the student-faculty ratio? How much student power should there be in university government? What was the proper "role" (God help us) of the university? We're going to look back a few years from now and think: "How quaint, how naive." Many of us will hope that nobody remembers the vast

amount of nonsense we published about what's bugging the students, or how we could be "relevant," or how we could combine "breadth with depth." What we are going to ask—if we still have a voice to do so—is whether it is possible to organize knowledge and understanding in such a way as to keep all of education—indeed all of society—from being divided between the emotional and the technical, between mystics and tinkers.

The division is not between Snow's two cultures, or students vs. faculty (or administration) or even the generation gap. The point is whether the idea of discipline—the way we used to talk about literature or history or mathematics—still makes sense or whether all education will be devoted either to technical questions (the building of economic models, or conflict resolution, or molecular biology) or to questions such as "Who am I?" and "How can I touch you?" For the radicals, the rallying cries are relationship, and confrontation, and engagement, and doing your own thing. Computers do the reasoning, and human beings *feel*. Does the book enable you to control spirits, like Prospero? Hell, no. The book enslaves, entraps, deludes, equivocates. "I don't want to read Augustine," says the kid to the professor, "because I don't like Augustine." The kid is a feeler. He already *knows*—doesn't want to know anything more. History is not his bag; history is a cop-out. He knows what it's like. He has the true faith. He is not merely a romantic; he has flipped back to sixth-century mysticism.

Don't blame him, or consider him as an example of "students" or the "young." By now, the star professor is back on the plane, off to do a little consulting or to check with the Institute of Applied Linguistics. The other students are grinding out the papers, or maybe trying to figure out how to put experience into machines, or what conflict-resolution has to do with poverty in Harlem. And everybody feeling guilty about feeling, or else proud that they feel more than anybody else. It is not the young against the old, but deciding where the young *and* the old are to go—how to keep abstraction from running away with passion, and vice versa.

A few years ago, Jacques Barzun declared that the liberal arts college is dead or dying because the high school had co-opted the first two years (general

education) and the graduate school the last two (specialization). What he should have said is that the liberal arts are dead or dying, not because literature and history aren't being taught, but because the common cultural assumptions in which they were rooted have been shattered. We have talked for years about the fact that the ideal of the Renaissance man was unattainable. Leibnitz, it has been said, was probably the last man to know everything: We know about the explosion of knowledge and all that. The point, however, is more significant. We have begun to lose faith in rational possibilities. Knowing we can't know, we have given up trying. The questions, therefore, are technical and the culture existential. The way to the frontier is a narrow path through the jungle. The way to establish one's sense of himself is by way of emotional sensibilities. "I feel, therefore I am." The dilemma is real. The problem is not merely that a few professors have sold out to the Defense Department, the CIA, or the corporations, or that students are obstreperous or slovenly or weak from pot. The problem is that lacking common cultural assumptions—about freedom or religion or the good life—there is no common ground for discourse.

LET'S be absolutely clear about this. The university was founded on Renaissance assumptions even if—as in America—it often became a vocational institution. The Renaissance assumptions were fairly simple, even after we had discovered (surely also a Renaissance kind of word) that nobody could know all about everything: belief in reason, a sense that the world—the world of God and man—was knowable, that the *terra incognita* of whatever sort would be explored eventually, that there were certain universal principles, and that "culture" was a unitary concept, not something that changed as one hopped from place to place or continent to continent. Yes, there were "higher" and "lower" cultures, but always on a linear scale with ourselves somewhere near the top. The Chinese were highly civilized while the West was still in the Dark Ages (catch them loaded words) because the Chinese had invented gunpowder. Wasn't that an achievement? And among the highest of the cultures was—naturally—the German, with Beethoven and Goethe and Schiller. But all of that evaporated at Auschwitz