

Black Power at Columbia

Stephen Donadio

AT NOON on Tuesday, April 23, 1968, a student rally was held at the sundial on the Columbia University campus—both the time and the place were traditional for such activities—to protest the University administration's disciplining of six radical student leaders, five of them members of the steering committee of the Columbia chapter of Students for a Democratic Society. According to the *Columbia Daily Spectator*, about five hundred people turned out at the sundial and "hundreds of bystanders waited on Low Plaza for the featured event of the afternoon—a march sponsored by Students for a Democratic Society into Low Library, the marble bastion of the Columbia administration."

While the bystanders waited, SDS leaders addressed the crowd. Nick Freudenberg, a sophomore, condemned Columbia's involvement with the Institute for Defense Analyses, an academically-affiliated independent research organization which has engaged in weapons evaluation and riot-control research for the Defense Department.* (Other members of IDA include MIT, Cal Tech, Stanford, Tulane, the University of Michigan, the University of Chicago, Penn State, Princeton, and the University of Illinois.) After Freudenberg had finished, Cicero Wilson, the undergraduate president of the Student's Afro-American Society, began to speak very forcefully against the new gymnasium Columbia was building in Morningside Park. "In a sense," an astute *Spectator* reporter pointed out, "Wilson's presence at the SDS rally was as significant as his address. SDS had never been able to unite with the black militant students, but the gymnasium issue provided a tenuous basis for alliance between the two student groups."†

Just how significant the gymnasium issue turned out to be will be seen, but it is necessary first to provide a little background information. In August 1961, Columbia had arranged to lease from New York City 2.1 acres of public park land in Morningside Park—the park that separates Morningside Heights from West Harlem—at a rental of \$3000 a year. On this site, it was agreed, the University was to construct a gymnasium to be shared

by the community, but plans regarding the precise nature and design of this facility were apparently not made public.

From relatively early on, the project had its opponents—among the most vociferous was the then Parks Commissioner Thomas P. F. Hoving, who maintained that the arrangements made by Columbia were irregular—but their protests seem largely to have been ignored. Detailed plans for construction were drawn up, contracts were signed, and despite the opposition things seemed to be running smoothly. From all appearances the West Harlem community was satisfied enough; parents who knew about the gym looked forward to a place where their children could go for recreation when they wanted to, and to a swimming pool they could use on long hot summer days.

As time passed, however, black community leaders and politicians from West Harlem began to express their dissatisfaction with the proposed gymnasium. They maintained that the community had not been consulted when Columbia was drawing up the plans, and that the community had not been provided with adequate space in what was supposed to be a shared facility. (Originally the plans called for the community to be given access to 10 or 11 per cent of the gym; as a result of continued protest this was later changed to about 15 per cent.) Moreover, the fact that there were to be two separate entrances to the gymnasium—one for Columbia and one for Harlem—became a touchy point, as did the revelation that the hours during which the community would be allowed to use its part of the facility were to be determined by Columbia. Throughout 1967, opposition to the gym as proposed grew more vocal, more insistent, and more angry, although it is probably true that many residents of

* The University's institutional involvement with IDA had been the major cause of a previous demonstration on March 27, one of the consequences of which was the disciplining of the six radical leaders. At that time, approximately one hundred students, many of them SDS members, defied President Grayson Kirk's ban on indoor demonstrations and marched into Low Library to protest Columbia's affiliation with IDA. The students, who roamed through the building for almost an hour, were particularly vehement about the fact that President Kirk, and William Burden, a member of the Columbia Board of Trustees, both serve as members of the Executive Committee of IDA—Burden as chairman.

† It should be pointed out, however, that the membership of the group which eventually came to be known as "The Black Students of Hamilton Hall" is not identical with that of the Students' Afro-American Society.

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West Harlem—not all of them misinformed—continued to feel that in the long run the new gym would be a good thing for their children, and saw no reason for the mounting fuss.

Nevertheless, the fuss continued to mount; and for the most part, Columbia's response to it was to insist repeatedly upon the *legality* of what the University was doing. (Ultimately, this was probably crucial: it may well account for the feeling of the black students that the only way they could combat an unresponsive but apparently legally invulnerable administration was by resorting to extreme—and illegal—methods.) Construction of the gym was started late in 1967. Bulldozers soon cleared the site and excavation was begun. During the early months of 1968, several demonstrations were held at the gym site, and numerous persons from Columbia and from the surrounding community were arrested on charges ranging from criminal trespass to felonious assault. In line with the reassertion of its legal right to continue the building of the gym as planned, the University administration seemed determined to press criminal charges against the demonstrators. Instead of discouraging further opposition, however, this merely had the effect of raising the ante, and by the third week in April groups like Harlem CORE were threatening more militant action than any that had yet been seen unless construction of the gymnasium were suspended and the plans for it reconsidered.

AT THE same time, opposition to the gymnasium project was growing within the University community as well. Professor George Collins of the School of Architecture circulated a petition opposing construction of a University gymnasium on public park land, but those students and members of the faculty who signed the petition did so with the sense that it was no more than a gesture. There seemed to be no way of stopping the University administration from doing what it had set out to do. Consequently, in the days immediately preceding April 23, an air of utter powerlessness combined with uneasy expectation settled over the campus. Black militants in Harlem had declared that they were far from giving up, while members of the Columbia administration, when they responded at all, declared that the issue had been decided long ago and that they had every intention of going ahead with the gym construction as planned. Something had to give.

As it turned out, everything did. In the weeks following, with Columbia in almost total chaos, and demands being advanced by any and all parties who felt themselves to be concerned directly or indirectly with the policies of the University in many different areas, it became virtually impossible to sort out the issues which had precipitated and were serving to sustain the crisis. Both the local and the national press came to

place varying degrees of emphasis on the demand for student power, on the students' hatred of the Vietnam war, their disgust at the "bankruptcy of corporate liberalism," etc. But it must be stressed that from a strategic point of view the central issue in the Columbia crisis was the issue of the gymnasium, and the most significant role in the crisis was played by the black students. For when the black students—if only for one brief moment—joined with the white radical SDS, they made direct action inevitable and at the same time virtually assured the success of the demonstration.

LET us examine this hypothesis first in relation to the role played by the white students. Consider the sequence of events. After the crowd at the sundial had marched to Low Library (which had been locked for the occasion) and there been confronted first by some three or four hundred counter-demonstrators, then by three campus security guards who prevented them from entering the building, someone suggested that they march to the gym. Approximately three hundred of the demonstrators, led by a group of black students, did so. According to the *Spectator* account, the demonstrators reached the gym site at roughly 12:40 P.M. and proceeded to tear down about forty feet of the chain-link fence surrounding the construction area. The police came, there were several skirmishes, and one student was arrested.

As he had attempted to do previously, Mark Rudd, the newly elected chairman of Columbia SDS, began to list what he conceived to be the group's available options at that time; but the group was clearly out of his control. Rudd proposed that a student strike be called for Thursday, he was shouted down, and finally the demonstrators marched back to the sundial, where they regathered briefly. Once again Rudd attempted to present the alternatives open to the demonstrators, but, according to the *Spectator*, "midway through the speech, someone standing behind Rudd yelled, 'To Hamilton'* and the group suddenly began to move toward Hamilton Hall, crowding into the lobby of the building, chanting 'IDA Must Go.'"

The crowd grew more and more dense and it gradually became known that the demonstrators intended to hold Acting Dean Henry S. Coleman as a hostage until the student arrested at the gym site was released. In the meantime, a steering committee consisting of seven of the demonstrators was established, and this group quickly proceeded to draw up the famous list of six demands: 1) that no disciplinary action be taken by the University administration against the student demonstrators; 2) that the ban on indoor demonstrations be rescinded; 3) that all future decisions

* Hamilton Hall is the building in which many of the classrooms and faculty offices and all of the administrative offices for Columbia College are located.

regarding discipline be made in open hearings presided over by faculty and students; 4) that all University ties with the Institute for Defense Analyses be severed; 5) that construction of the gymnasium in Morningside Park be terminated; 6) that criminal charges be dropped against all those persons arrested during demonstrations at the gym site. By early evening there seemed to be little question that the students intended to hold Dean Coleman and remain in the building until these six demands were met.

It was at this point that two strategic moves were made by the black students which transformed the situation from an unpleasant but minor campus incident into the gravest crisis in the University's history.

During the night the demonstrators divided into two groups: black and white. In the early hours of Wednesday morning the blacks informed the white students that they had decided to barricade Hamilton Hall. After careful deliberation, they said, they had come to believe that this would be the most effective way of continuing the demonstration. The white students found themselves divided on this question. Many of them felt that it was not advisable to employ a tactic which would involve disruption of the University and as a consequence perhaps lead to a head-on confrontation with the faculty and other students. Such a tactic, they argued, would end the possibility of "dialogue" among the various groups within the University, would alienate potentially valuable (and perhaps even necessary) allies, and would therefore result in the creation of a consensus hostile to the demonstrators. Discussion of this question continued, however; several votes were taken. And in the end a substantial number of the white students decided that they were prepared to accept the idea of barricading Hamilton Hall.

But in the meantime the black students had come to another crucial conclusion: they had decided that the white students should get out of Hamilton Hall. They wanted to hold the building by themselves, they said, in order to focus the protest on what they considered to be the immediate issue: Columbia's encroachment on the black community of Harlem. Moreover, they were not at all convinced that the students and faculty at Columbia were on the whole any less "racist" than the administration. So far as they were concerned, "dialogue" was no longer really possible: a confrontation was required to "dramatize" the issue of the University's relation to the surrounding community since all peaceful means of protesting that relation had unquestionably failed. The gym was being built, Columbia was buying up the neighborhood: these things had to be stopped. The black students argued that they had more at stake in the immediate struggle than the white students did, and that they were consequently prepared to risk more and to go much

further—to go very far indeed—to insure the success of their protest. And so the white students were asked to leave and told that if they wanted to do something that was relevant to the real, as opposed to the symbolic, issues involved in the protest, then they should take and hold as many buildings as they could.

In addition to fatigue and a certain amount of shock, the two to three hundred white demonstrators who filed slowly out of Hamilton toward Low Library undoubtedly experienced a variety of more or less complex emotions—among them, wounded pride. It was clear that they had to do something equal in militancy to what the blacks were about to do. And so, at approximately six o'clock on the morning of Wednesday, April 24, the group massed outside the security entrance to Low. Evidently a number of the demonstrators were a little queasy about what was happening, for when one of them picked up a sign and smashed through a windowpane in the security door, the undeniable, unmistakable sound of the shattering glass caused "more than fifty students, disturbed and shocked" (*Spectator*) to refuse to enter the building. But most of the students did enter, and those who did proceeded to President Kirk's private suite of offices; they broke in and barricaded the door behind them.

An apparently decisive move. But the white students seem to have been unsure of themselves, even at that point: they do not seem to have been completely decided about their precise objectives and about precisely how far they were willing to go to achieve them. Were they prepared to be arrested, for example? To resist the police? It was rumored that a bust was imminent. According to the *Spectator*, "at 6:45 a small force of New York City police arrived at Low, awaiting instructions from the University administration. One hour later, the police moved upstairs to President Kirk's office, broke down the student barricades and entered the President's suite. More than one hundred demonstrators jumped out of the side windows of his office and were not pursued." (Among those who jumped out the window and fled was Mark Rudd: clearly he would have a lot to live down later.) A hard-core group of twenty-seven students refused to leave when the police arrived, however: they sat down on the floor of one of the secretaries' offices and would not be moved. A few policemen remained in the office with them until later in the day, but no arrests were made and no one who left was prevented from re-entering.

SEEN IN terms of the possibilities they defined and those they excluded, these initial events in the crisis were really the most critical. Everything that happened later followed inevitably. Once the University had been effectively disrupted, it was but one short step to

complete paralysis. Once grievances were being voiced with passion and perhaps for the first time even listened to, *all* grievances rose to the surface: every group and splinter group demanded its due. All the smoldering resentment and loathing which had been collecting over the years welled up and spilled over. For weeks the University existed in what may be described as a state of almost total, almost cosmological nausea. People protested everything from the Vietnam war to tenure policy, from "imperialist aggression" to the structure of the University. In an institution where apparently everybody but a handful of administrators had been excluded from "the decision-making process," suddenly everybody demanded to be included.

On Wednesday night (April 24), students from the School of Architecture refused to leave Avery Hall; they gradually seized the building and thus joined the demonstration. No doubt some of them remembered—or had heard about—the attempt made several years ago by students and professors of architecture to protest the proposed design for Columbia's new Business School. At that time, students and professors had picketed and signed petitions, but the building had gone up anyway, even though it was (and continues to be) regarded as one of the most hideous ever conceived. Similar disapproval had been expressed again and again in relation to the proposed gymnasium, and had been similarly ignored.

In the early hours of Thursday morning (April 25), a group composed mainly of graduate students, many in History, occupied Fayerweather Hall (where many of the History department offices are located) and barricaded themselves in. In addition to the announced political issues, many of these graduate students were concerned with increasing student participation in decisions regarding their own education, especially in matters of curriculum and degree requirements. At Columbia they had been made painfully aware of the discrepancy between the kinds of moral and existential decisions they had to make each day as men (Should I protest the war? Should I be arrested? What if I turn in my draft card? What about my family? Should I emigrate to Canada? What would I be like after five years in prison?) and the kinds of decisions they had to make as students running what seemed to them to be the meaningless obstacle course of graduate education. They were dealing, too, with the powerlessness they felt as graduate students at Columbia, expressing their disgust with the dreary "institutional" quality of the education they were receiving and about which they had never been consulted. This sense of powerlessness, when linked with the fact of Columbia's notoriously retrograde program of financial aid, accounted for the feeling of many graduate students that they were not only being ignored but taken for granted and rooked as well.

But such issues, although undoubtedly important, might have the effect of diverting one's attention from the real workings of the Columbia situation. There is no question that the issues raised during the course of the crisis—from IDA participation to the governance of the University by a Board of self-elected Trustees—were, many of them, real and even significant. But the welter of issues of lesser and greater magnitude that eventually emerged when things broke wide open tends to obscure the fact that it was one issue in particular which made the blow-up possible (some would say, inevitable): the race issue. None of the other issues—and probably not all of them together—could have generated a crisis on the scale of the one which occurred at Columbia.

THE QUESTION of the University's involvement with the Institute for Defense Analyses, for instance, tied as it was to the more general, far-reaching question of the University's participation in the Vietnam war effort, had been problematic for some time: but no one would have wanted to close down the University on that account. As their hesitation in the early stages of the crisis would seem to indicate, not even the more radical white students were eager to engage in actions of that kind. And if they had, few if any faculty members would have supported them. For many faculty members at Columbia, including some of the most radical, the IDA issue was trivial, largely lacking in political significance. And in any case, an administration-faculty committee—the Henkin Committee—had been set up to investigate the University's relations to external organizations and to make recommendations regarding future policy in this area. Most faculty members would surely have been content to wait until the Henkin Committee report appeared—after all, it might well have recommended severing University ties of the kind in question—before deciding on a position, much less a course of action, with respect to IDA.

As for the issues of student discipline, no one can seriously believe that any widespread interest, let alone support, could have been mobilized for them at all had they been the only issues (or even if they had been linked with the IDA issue). The same is true of the ban on indoor demonstrations, and—perhaps to a lesser extent—of the demands which emerged later for greater student participation in the University's decision-making processes.

It goes without saying, however, that all the ingredients necessary for an explosion were present at Columbia, and in abundance. Each of the issues mentioned carried a certain charge. But a fuse was required, and that fuse turned out to be the proposed gymnasium in Morningside Park. Here was an issue about which a very large proportion of the University community, faculty members and students alike, could agree, despite

their many differences in other areas. (It should be noted that not even the counter-demonstrators at Columbia—a group which appeared to contain a significant percentage of the larger athletes, as well as numerous supporters from the Law and Business Schools—seemed very enthusiastic about the new gym. Indeed, throughout the crisis spokesmen for this group maintained that they were not necessarily objecting to the demands made by the demonstrators—except the one for amnesty—but to the tactics used.) What was at least as important, though, was the fact that unlike many of the other issues the gymnasium was not at all theoretical: it was an utterly concrete issue, the implications and possible consequences of which could be immediately grasped in the appearance of H. Rap Brown and Stokely Carmichael on the University campus; in the black crowds chanting in the streets; in the presence at rallies in support of the black students of Victor Solomon of Harlem CORE and the Harlem Mau-Mau leader, Charles 37X Kenyatta; in the unsettling rumor that there were firearms in Hamilton Hall; in the placards grimly warning, “Gym Goes Up, Columbia Comes Down.”

IT IS, indeed, only in terms of the race issue that the otherwise puzzling behavior of both the Columbia administration and the faculty can be understood.

At the very beginning of the demonstration on April 23, when it was still essentially an SDS affair, the administration, though concerned, was confident that it could keep things under control. After all, the antagonism between SDS and the Columbia administration had been overt and unambiguous for a long time; but all year long, through skillful maneuvering, Vice-President David B. Truman had managed to avert the show-down SDS appeared intent on having. But as soon as the black students became involved, the situation changed entirely, with the administration placed on the defensive. And as more and more black students—and more and more black community leaders—began to appear during the afternoon and evening of April 23, things became even touchier. Whereas at the beginning the administration might have decided that it was not going to call the police because there was no reason to do so yet, now other considerations had to be weighed in any decision they might ultimately reach. But by the next morning—Wednesday, April 24—many of the administration's options had literally vanished overnight as a result of the black students' expulsion of the whites from Hamilton Hall. So long as there had been long-haired radical white students mixed in with the blacks, the blacks had looked like students; by themselves, they simply looked like blacks. That made the prospect of mass arrests extremely unappealing, for it seemed quite within the realm

of probability that a lot of TV footage and front-page photographs of young blacks being led into police vans or up against the wall with their hands above their heads would have serious repercussions for the University, whose relations with the West Harlem community were not now at their zenith. Some members of the administration undoubtedly feared reprisals from the black militants—always available at times like these—only a few blocks away.

As for the Columbia faculty, it did not really enter the picture until Thursday afternoon, when an Ad Hoc Faculty Group was established, made up of concerned faculty members for the most part fairly liberal in outlook, at least in relation to the Columbia faculty as a whole. But very few of the members of the Ad Hoc Faculty Group felt anything like sympathy for SDS and the strike leaders; the feelings of most members ranged from distrust to downright antipathy. And Mark Rudd certainly did not do wonders for his cause when on Friday night—the night after a group of faculty members had been charged and clubbed attempting to keep the police out of Low Library—he addressed the Ad Hoc Group and told them that so far, talks with their representatives had amounted in general to “bullshit.”

On the other hand, the faculty appeared to be on the whole rather favorably impressed with the black students. Although they too were utterly intransigent, their intransigence was felt to be qualified by their obvious seriousness: they seemed to have none of the “wise guy” qualities of Mark Rudd and some of the other white strike leaders. Moreover, from the outset faculty support for the black students' position on the gym issue was one of the most constant and uncomplicated factors in crisis. However they might differ on the other issues involved (amnesty, open disciplinary hearings, etc.), on the gym issue the faculty stood more or less united, and from the beginning their statements to this effect were unequivocal and firm. It is indicative of the position taken by those members of the faculty most concerned about the crisis and most involved in attempts to resolve it that when, on the afternoon of Wednesday, April 24, the Columbia College faculty met in emergency session, in addition to placing itself on record against amnesty, it recommended “immediate suspension of on-site excavation of the gymnasium facility in Morning-side Park.”

Whether the College faculty did so out of fear of the demonstrations threatened by local black militants or simply on the basis of their judgment of the validity of the black students' demand is impossible to determine. By this time, these different aspects of the question had fused: they had become impossible to separate. Nevertheless, for many of the more liberal faculty members especially, the conviction that gym construction must be stopped was accompanied by the

sense, vague but unmistakable, largely unacknowledged but unquestionably felt, that although the white students were probably wrong to have used the extreme tactics they had (perhaps because the issues they were most concerned with did not appear to warrant them), the black students had had no choice but to do so.

Indeed, the fact is that for many people in the University the presence of the black students in Hamilton Hall provided the entire demonstration with an aura of legitimacy which it would not otherwise have had. There are a variety of reasons for this. First of all, the black students conducted themselves with a great deal more dignity than did many of the white students.* Secondly, their relations with the outside world were highly formalized; they did not speak as individuals but as a group. Access to Hamilton Hall, furthermore, was very strictly limited. The shades on all the windows were generally drawn. From outside the building looked as though it had been shut down and deserted; there were very few signs of life. (The only decoration suggestive of rebellion was a sign on the front door which read "Malcolm X University.") And by all accounts, the discipline inside was very tight. While white student demonstrators wandered in and out of the other occupied buildings and roamed the campus, wearing red armbands, jeering back at counter-demonstrators, shaking their Blakean locks, and looking generally flamboyant, the black students stayed put. And while the demonstrators in other buildings often dangled their feet over window ledges, waved to one another, and shouted "Up Against the Wall, Motherfucker!" in chorus at the police, the black students rarely if ever showed themselves at all.

IN ADDITION to all this, unlike many of the white strike leaders, the black student leaders were not very much inclined toward revolutionary rhetoric—which only served to confuse many people anyway. As Ray Brown, a spokesman for the black group, later observed,† "it was clearly realized by those in Hamilton Hall that what was going on was a demonstration, not 'the revolution.'" This made it harder for the press and for those hostile to the demonstration

* In all fairness to the white students, however, it ought to be pointed out that whereas the blacks were pretty much left alone until the police came, the white students were subject to almost constant attack and harassment by counter-demonstrators. The demonstrators in Low Library, for instance (who were crowded in to begin with), were pelted with eggs and the like almost as soon as they set foot on the ledge outside the windows; in addition, in an attempt to starve out the students inside, the counter-demonstrators surrounded the building and would not allow food or medical supplies to get past them. Under the circumstances, such behavior was inclined to engender an equally undignified response.

† In an interview conducted by the author and included in "Columbia: Seven Interviews," *Partisan Review*, Summer 1968—ED.

to identify the blacks as young hoodlums and rebels against all authority who desired nothing less than the violent overthrow of the government. And what made it even harder for the press, which at Columbia seemed to make it its business to understand everything too quickly, was the substantial support received by the black students from some very respectable politicians, as well as social workers, civil servants, and local community leaders.

In this connection, not the least of the factors which accounted for the special position occupied by the black students in the minds of many members of the University community was the fact that throughout the crisis the Hamilton Hall group maintained absolute autonomy. They were not to be confused with demonstrators in the other buildings: they had to be dealt with separately. No one was authorized to speak for them, and they spoke only for themselves. While the other four occupied buildings were presumably all represented by the Strike Co-ordinating Committee, Hamilton Hall was not. Indeed, the black students even had their own list of demands, from which two of the six demands mentioned previously were dropped because the black students felt they might be construed simply as "student power" demands.

The implications of these differences between the blacks and the white radicals are clear. For the black students, the most important issue involved in the protest action was the gym issue, which they regarded as "symbolic" only insofar as it typified Columbia's relations with the surrounding community. Bill Sales, representing the Hamilton Hall group in an interview, observed of the arrangement which the University had made with New York City authorities to lease land for the gym site in Morningside Park that "the method of acquiring land here is significant, as is the fact that Columbia got it for very little. . . . Moreover, Columbia will, over the next decade or so, employ this same method—or similar methods—to acquire land in the surrounding community in order to expand the University's living accommodations: in other words, to turn West Harlem into a white enclave. In this way, Columbia will be decreasing the supply of ghetto housing while the number of people who need that housing increases; and this can only perpetuate the dilapidated conditions and the social pathology that you find in the ghetto."

Ray Brown, in the course of the same interview, went on to say that "the black students are specifically opposed to Columbia University's use of its position of political strength to take advantage of the powerlessness of the black community. It's our position that insofar as we are able to we will either stop that kind of usurpation of power or focus attention on it by dramatizing it in the manner we did." Action of this kind, however, required that those persons who

engaged in it identify themselves primarily not as students but as the oppressed. For the black students, such an identification was not really theoretical (as it was for most of the white students). "I would say," Ray Brown observed, "that black students at this University have demonstrated that they view themselves essentially as an extension of the black community and that their primary identity is with the black community and not with the University community. And in that sense there are . . . certain obvious things that differentiate them from white students, who will generally, I suppose, view themselves primarily as members of an academic community."

FOR THE kind of demonstration which occurred at Columbia to have taken place at all, then, it was absolutely necessary that for a time at least the University be regarded as something *alien*. Interestingly enough, it was some of the more conservative observers of the situation at Columbia who first became aware of this aspect of it when they perceived that by refusing to acknowledge the legitimate authority of the administration to discipline them, the students were in effect denying their membership in the "University community"—or in any case denying that they owed it their primary allegiance in all things. At least initially, however, for all but a handful of the thousands of white students who eventually became involved in the demonstration, the prospect of detaching oneself from a community in which one was relatively secure and comfortable and in whose values one presumably shared would have presented extraordinary (and probably even insurmountable) psychological difficulties.

But no such difficulties existed for most of the black students—at least not to the same degree. In terms of their own psychological relation to it, the University was less a community than it was an institution; and if only by extension, they experienced it that way. (Years ago, when there were very few black students at Columbia—especially in the College—this would not have been the case. The explanation for the change lies not only in the increased militancy of the black community, but in Columbia's own policy in recent years of intensive recruiting in "disadvantaged" areas. Ironically enough, as a result of this policy, a new black community within the University community was formed. Consequently, whereas at one time the isolated Negro at Columbia would have had to assert—in one way or another and often a little desperately—that he was really "one of the boys," lately new possibilities had opened up.)

Thus, by presenting themselves as spokesmen within the University for those persons outside who had spoken but whose voices had not been heard, the black students at Columbia, more than any other single group involved in the crisis,

managed to convince thousands of students and faculty members of the reality of the University's existence as an institution operating in the larger society, rather than a community where blacks and whites could live together as equals and friends, a community of fair-minded and just men. If, as the blacks reasoned, Columbia was not such a community, then Columbia would have to be changed. And from that conviction, all else followed.

IT is in the context of this idea of the University as an alien institution that the tactic the black students introduced into the situation—the decision to occupy and barricade a building—must be understood. The black students were bringing what was essentially a Harlem protest (even if only the most militant members of the community were involved) home to the University. And in that sense the black students were acting for the militants outside. If this is so, then it is possible to argue that by barricading Hamilton Hall the black students were acting out, in a highly stylized way, the potential for violence against the University which already existed in the community. Moreover, this argument might continue, what the black students did may well have defused a really explosive situation, as well as improved Columbia's "image" in the eyes of the community and in the long run made it a safer place to be, since they managed to convince the militants outside that there were people inside the University who had their interests at heart, and who were willing to act for them.

In the long run, perhaps so. But there can be no doubt that the more immediate consequences of the tactic were a lot less heartening. Shutting down the University only invited confrontations—after all, that was the point of the tactic—and there were many people on the Columbia campus (a large number of whom acted out of various forms of frustration which were politically wholly irrelevant) eager to accept that invitation.* Moreover, although on April 30 the black students were arrested and led out of Hamilton Hall without incident, this was far from being the case at the other buildings involved in the protest, where cracked skulls and bloody faces were more the rule. To be sure, to a great extent this was due to the brutality of the police, but the point here is that the tactic of barricading buildings itself seemed to generate a range of possibilities of this

* It is necessary, however, to distinguish here between the kind of violence employed by the counter-demonstrators—real physical violence, directed against persons—and the "violence" involved in barricading a building. Significantly enough, the administration at Columbia did not choose to discipline the counter-demonstrators—who were fed by old alumni—even though their actions increased tensions and disrupted the University as much as anything else.

kind, possibilities that had not existed before (though the *potential* for bloodshed obviously had). The decision to barricade Hamilton Hall unquestionably established a dangerous precedent at the University—as may easily be seen in the re-occupation of that building on May 21-22. And so far as Harlem's relation to Columbia is concerned, the action taken by the black students, which led, in turn, to other actions, taken by other people, may well have unleashed forces beyond their control: after all, if its own students felt compelled to act against the University, then why should anyone else feel any qualms about doing so?

BUT THE most troubling aspect of this demonstration is really the amnesty demand. According to Ray Brown, the position taken by the black students on amnesty "is a moral one. We believe that the University must grant amnesty because by virtue of its racist policy toward the community the University is responsible for the situation that developed on this campus. . . . We are not responsible for what happened. We are not morally culpable: the University is. And for that reason we cannot acknowledge the University's right to take any punitive sanctions against us." For their part, of course, the white students also demanded amnesty, although their reasons for doing so were somewhat more obscure: they maintained that the University administration was an "illegitimate authority" and therefore had no right to punish them.

In either case, the amnesty demand, which predictably enough was one of the most serious obstacles to resolution of the crisis, is defensible only on purely pragmatic grounds; I myself would have to support it on those grounds. Morally and politically, it is ridiculous. Nevertheless, it typifies certain notions which have crept into our political thinking recently (probably as a result of the Vietnam War, which so many people found morally repugnant and yet which was being waged despite their protests with ever-increasing intransigence on the part of the U.S. government): for example, the notion that the individual's conception of justice, and the dictates of his conscience, must be served at any cost. Many members of the Strike Committee were explicit about this, and the "Why We Strike" pamphlet they issued is quite clear about it: "Strict civil libertarians argue that those who commit civil disobedience must suffer the legal consequences even if their cause is just. But we say people should not be disciplined for doing what is necessary to achieve what is right." The formulation is a trifle loose, but the thinking is recognizable enough: it differs only in degree (but not in kind) from that of the religious fanatic who feels compelled to act on messages he has received from God.

The position of the black students is no less

disturbing. In their version of what happened at Columbia, the entire situation, including the action which they took to rectify it, was the responsibility of the University administration. This claim of moral exemption has a number of unsettling implications, not the least of which is that once a man is relieved of the burden of individual conscience and responsibility, he becomes capable of many forms of action of which he would not otherwise be capable. The resulting state of mind should not be unfamiliar to anyone who has been watching TV these past few years: it is the state of mind of men at war.

ONCE THE University went to pieces it looked very much as though the events at Columbia were continuous with student rebellions in other parts of the world (Paris, Berlin). But the origins of the Columbia crisis, and from a strategic point of view the central issue involved, were quite different.

The logic of what happened at Columbia is not especially difficult to trace. On the afternoon and early evening of Tuesday, April 23, for a variety of reasons, the Columbia administration—which until very recently seemed relatively liberal, at least as such groups generally go—hesitated to move against the growing demonstration. Perhaps they hesitated out of concern for the safety of Dean Coleman, whom the demonstrators had taken as a hostage; perhaps they were extremely reluctant to call in city police to control a University situation.* Whatever their thinking was that day, however, it seems obvious that one of the paramount considerations which led to their initial indecision was the involvement of the black students. There is little question that the administration would have moved against white students occupying Hamilton without a second thought. But because the black students were involved in the use of this tactic, the administration's first response was the expression of what seems to have been a combination of guilt and fear.

The fear has already been discussed—it was the fear of reprisals from some of the more militant groups in the black community. The element of guilt was apparent in the administration's half-

* In retrospect, of course, hesitation on these grounds appears absurd at best, since when the police finally were used it was not by the tens but by the hundreds. Nonetheless, at the time many people—faculty members in particular—took the view that the campus should not be "violated" by the police. It is legitimate to wonder if they would have been inclined to take this view if the demonstrators who were occupying the buildings had been, say, supporters of George Wallace. Moreover, while it seems clear that many faculty members were extremely anxious about the possibility of violence if the police were called, it is evident that this possibility increased substantially as time went on and more and more students became involved in the demonstration.

hearted defense of the gym construction. Many high officials at Columbia undoubtedly felt that they were (literally) on shaky ground here; it is probable that for a long time they had had grave misgivings about the whole project. In past months, as opposition had grown more insistent and definite, they had seemed to grow less and less sure of themselves: most of the time their replies to opponents of the gym would take the form not of enthusiastic assertion but of uneasy rationalization and insistence on the legality of the undertaking. (Lately, of course, the "defense" of the gym construction has consisted largely of the rather depressing lament that Columbia could not get out of the project now even if it wanted to, since that would mean hundreds of thousands of dollars lost as a result of the contractual obligations already made, not to mention the millions in alumni contributions that would be cancelled.)

In addition, there was the point that you did not go out recruiting black students only to expel them the first time they broke the rules. Such considerations—combined with the fact that the administration suddenly found itself caught between a Board of Trustees which was on the whole more conservative, and a large group of faculty members more liberal, than it was—indicated that the administration was so full of internal contradictions that it would never be able to act in any clear or coherent way. And at the crucial moment, the administration froze. Like a wooden soldier, it stood at rigid attention with its arms glued to its sides. For a while it remained in this position, its eyes darting about wildly in its head. When it finally began to act again, it could do nothing but flail its arms pathetically, or (depending on your point of view) strike out in blind rage at everyone in sight.

WHEN THE administration failed to act initially, in effect it relinquished its authority. As a consequence, it lost control of the situation completely. Once this happened, it should have been realistic enough to acknowledge the fact and allow the Ad Hoc Faculty Group to resolve the crisis in whatever way it could. Undoubtedly, this would have required some concessions on the part of the administration (as it would have required others from the students), including amnesty—or something like it—for the demonstrators. But such concessions might well have averted the bloody confrontation with the police on April 30th. (This first bust was as ineffectual as it was violent. It may have ended the occupation, but—as is clearly indicated by the sit-in and consequent arrests at a local University-owned building and the re-occupation of Hamilton Hall on May 21-22 which led to the even more terrifying second bust—it certainly did not end the crisis.)

But the administration, perhaps as a result of pressure from the trustees, rejected the Ad Hoc

Faculty Group Resolution,* thus pitting itself against the liberal faculty as well as the students. Moreover, after both the newly-created Executive Committee of the Faculty and the Joint Committee on Disciplinary Affairs recommended that criminal trespass charges against the demonstrators be dropped as a first step toward reestablishing mutual trust at the University, the administration's decision (once again, perhaps, determined by the Trustees, but the administration does not seem to have disagreed) to press those charges can only be construed as vindictive and foolish. Their decision in this case seems clearly to reflect a desire for revenge against those students who had caused them to appear so ineffectual. Ultimately, of course, the refusal to drop criminal charges led to the reoccupation of Hamilton Hall, a second major bust, and the outbreak of open war between students and police.

BUT THE significance of what happened at Columbia is not simply to be found in the analysis of what, tactically, led to what (although it is revealing that especially by those most familiar with it, the situation is usually discussed only in those terms). The implications of the crisis extend beyond the highly specific situation at Columbia, and beyond its foreseeable effects on higher education in general.

To begin with, these events offer a clear indication (not that one was really necessary) of the almost irresistible appeal at this point of direct-action tactics as a means of resolving social and political questions. These tactics, and the mystique which accompanies them, represent one of the legacies of the civil-rights movement, in which mass civil disobedience was traditionally used to protest local laws or practices which violated rights guaranteed by the Constitution. In the early 60's, tactics of this kind were justified as a form of recourse to a higher legal authority; since that time, however, they have had a tendency to become a law unto themselves. Certainly this was the case at Columbia, where in the eyes of many socially and politically committed people direct-action tactics had clearly come to possess a kind of absolute legitimacy.

The same may be said for a certain kind of political rhetoric, which is as extreme as the tac-

* The students also rejected the Ad Hoc Group's offer (the black students never even replied to it), but this would not have made the slightest difference in its effect if the administration had accepted it. Section IV of the Ad Hoc Faculty Group Resolution of April 28 clearly stated: "These proposals being in our judgment a just solution to the crisis our University is presently undergoing, we pledge that: (a) If the President will not accept these proposals, we shall take all measures within our several consciences to prevent the use of force to vacate these buildings; (b) If the President does accept our proposals but the students in the buildings refuse to evacuate these buildings, we shall refuse further to interpose ourselves between the administration and the students."

tics it is used to justify. Such a rhetoric serves not so much to describe situations as to create them. Once the charge of "racism" was introduced into the Columbia situation, for example, that situation was changed: it became simplified (or "polarized," to use the current Columbia word). Accusations of this kind have the effect of setting up a head-on confrontation of the Good *vs.* Evil type.

The existence of such a situation requires the cooperation of all parties involved, however. At Columbia, the charge of "racism" stopped a vaguely liberal administration dead in its tracks. (A really conservative administration, of course, would have paid no attention at all to the charge: it would have acted against the students immediately—no matter who they were—never doubting for a moment that what it was doing was right.) As a result, the charge seemed to stick: hesitation at that crucial point could only be taken as acknowledgement of guilt. So far as the students who demonstrated earlier or later were concerned, they had no trouble whatsoever acting once they had levelled the charge (and been reinforced in their conviction of its validity by the administration's shakiness); things became very simple for them. All other moral categories suddenly dropped out of sight: moral considerations which appeared less grandiose became irrelevant and as a consequence all questions became, ultimately, *tactical* questions. The process bears a striking resemblance to the one which occurred after the U.S. government asserted that the Vietcong were wholly and solely the agents of North Vietnamese aggression.

IN THEIR OWN way, the press and the news media in general have unquestionably helped to encourage this tendency toward more extreme words and deeds. Once things got going at Columbia, the reporters and cameramen appeared like flies, eager for good action footage and for the most explosive statements they could get. They had not been very interested in the previous demonstrations at the gym site: not enough was happening there. And as the black students in Hamilton quickly learned during the occupation (when H. Rap Brown and Stokely Carmichael had to read the students' own press releases because the students themselves could not get them into the newspapers), the press really wasn't very interested unless you were famous or what you had to say was totally outrageous or inflammatory. The reporters at Columbia seemed a little disappointed that the black students did not appear wearing *dashikes* and necklaces made of teeth: *that*, from their point of view, would have been news.

The press coverage of the events at Columbia also points up the exacerbating effect in situations of this kind of the distortions, more or less gross, which appear in the news media daily. (Few people who experienced the crisis will ever read the *New York Times* in quite the same way again.) For the black students, these inaccuracies and misrepresentations were particularly frustrating. "If this kind of distortion continues," Ray Brown observed, "then the only thing that's likely is a continued escalation of the conflict because in effect the main participants are being ignored." And Bill Sales took a similar view. "Not only the local press but the national press," he said, "has in effect defined the problem here as related to student power issues: that is, as a problem involving young student rebels, alienated from their parents and from society in general, striking out in random fashion against authority. If this is the way the press will define the Columbia protest for the national community, then the basic issue of the University's relationship to the community will never be dealt with and will someday explode unexpectedly in a nationwide fashion. . . . One of the legitimate avenues of protest," he continued, "is . . . the press and publicity. In many ways, it's the last avenue of protest before more drastic action. And if the press can no longer serve this essential function—the muckraking function—then the country is in for a hard time and we're all in very deep difficulty."

IT is an irony from which no pleasure can be derived that while intense discussions of strategy and tactics made continuous, unrelenting demands on the minds of many of the most intelligent and sensitive people at Columbia, in the end the only group involved in the confrontation to get almost everything it asked for was the (relatively) extreme right wing, whose adherents were most mindless and most brutal in their response to events, and most hysterical in their alleged defense of "property rights." As if at the request of this group, the student demonstrators were not granted amnesty, the police were called, the buildings were cleared, criminal charges were pressed, there were many suspensions, and now expulsions seem in the offing. The possibility that a substantial number of the more liberal faculty will resign—not all of them for political reasons—is beginning to look very likely. The crisis at Columbia is far from over, and despite the optimistic long-range predictions of some detached observers, it seems clear that when (and if) the University opens this fall, at its heart, as a community, it will not be any more flexible, or any stronger, or any more just than it was last spring.