

*Black White  
file*

328-7th St., S.E.  
Mpls., Minn. 55414  
November 12, 1969



President William Carlson  
University of Wyoming  
Laramie, Wyoming 82071

Dear President Carlson,

Now that some of the rhetoric surrounding the recent suspension of the Black football players has been toned down, perhaps it will be possible to assess in a more sober light the issues raised by the incident. As alumni of the University we believe in the University. We believe it has been and can continue to be the type of institution that alumni, students, citizens of the State of Wyoming and Americans can be proud of. However, we believe that your handling of the incident was wrong and that this handling raises several vital issues which can potentially destroy the University as a viable educational institution.

The Black students' idea of wearing armbands in protest of BYU was a rather peaceful and quite valid way of protesting a grievance they, no doubt, felt quite strongly. They did not take over a building, they did not physically intimidate students who did not agree with them, and they did not break any law: civil, criminal, or moral. More importantly, they did not suddenly appear on the field wearing the armbands. In all, the protest was comparatively quiet, peaceful and supremely considerate of the rights of others. There was little potential for arousing violence.

On the surface we are afraid that the incident has probably radicalized and polarized the student body and the people of the state. Certainly it has upset those who are sympathetic to the difficulties of Black students--difficulties that are real and severe in an environment radically different from anything many of them have known. They are isolated among white students, a large number of whom are avowedly racist. They have a great difficulty in finding outlets for expressing their blackness, especially when this expression inevitably provokes reactions. How would you feel, President Carlson, if you and several other white students were placed in Harlem for a year, where there are no white bars where you can go drink, where there are taboos on your dating Black girls, and where--no matter what you do or where you go--people stare at you and call you honky or pig under their breath and sometimes outwardly? Have you ever been walking down a street with your wife and had a truckload of drunken men drive by, throw a beer can at you, and then race off yelling "Nigger!"? We doubt it, but it has happened to Black students in Wyoming.

All this shows that you are obviously seriously out of touch with the student body. You should have known the attitude of the Black students toward BYU. They have always had a grievance against the racial policies of BYU. Even as far back as two years ago when we were students, the Black athletes had expressed a definite attitude towards BYU. Anyone remotely familiar with the increased racial pride of Black students and the pattern of college demonstrations across the country should have been aware of the attitudes of the Black students, not only towards BYU, but towards the University as well. This unbelievable lack of communication shows that you have been seriously lax in your duties as a university president. Undoubtedly you subscribed to the "It can't happen here" philosophy. Well it happened, you were unprepared and out of touch, and it will continue to happen unless you make a major overhaul of your entire administrative apparatus.



Not only are you out of touch with Black students, you are out of touch with your student body. To have the Student Senate repudiate your action was a slap in the face whose meaning is obvious to everyone familiar with university students. It points to the familiar polarization of students vs. administration which has been a prelude to some of the most sickening acts we Americans have had to watch during the last few years. It points the finger squarely at an administration which is out of touch with the feelings of the students of this generation. It points the finger at the rigidity of that administration.

Undoubtedly you are now having fewer and fewer restful nights. The "It can't happen here" has become a deeply questioning "Can it happen here?". Not only are you asking this question of yourself, but you are also having it asked by concerned parents and alumni. We, too, ask you that question: "Can it happen here?". We suggest that the answer is yes, and that unless you initiate a thorough review of your attitudes and policies that yes will become fact.

First, you must begin by asking the question, "Why do Universities collapse, why do demonstrations occur?". From the standpoint of the students demonstrating the answers are obvious. They occur when administrations become rigid and out of touch with their students. They occur where an administration has no channels for receiving and responding to grievances in a dynamic way. They occur in administrations that have no way of judging the validity of student grievances. Every time a demonstration has occurred these points have been raised. They are all obviously interrelated. If you are in touch with your students you will know their grievances and you will know whether these grievances are a result of rabble-rousing, SDS types and other communist dupes or whether they are genuinely valid grievances. These things are only possible if you keep your channels open to all students--to hippies as well as the well dressed majority, to Blacks as well as whites, to liberals as well as conservatives, to the SDS as well as the YAF.

As alumni of the University we think it is an important and good thing that the University does not contain a large group of rabble rousers. We think this puts you in a unique position, but we are afraid the rabble rousers will destroy the University if you continue to be rigid and out of touch. Anyone can tell you that the tactic of the SDS is to seize on a legitimate grievance and push the grievance to an extreme point. Study the Berkely protests, the Columbia take over, and all the other major demonstrations. They all began with a legitimate grievance that was held by a great many students. Because the administrations were out of touch and unwilling to compromise, the demonstrations became violent. An attitude of we vs. them was allowed to grow on both sides until confrontation was inevitable.

Wyoming can prevent this by opening its channels of communication and becoming responsible to student feelings. Sit down and talk. Have students over to dinner. Set aside one day a week, just an hour or so, to go talk to students in the dorms, apartments, fraternity and sorority houses. Be willing to grant student demands when they seem legitimate. Find out if they are legitimate. Most of all, discard the paternalistic policy that seems to guide much of your attitude towards students. Remember that non-students their age are earning a living, maintaining a household, defending their country, and sometimes voting, drinking and taking part in all those adult rights which they receive when they become twenty-one. Remember you are dealing with the most intelligent, most dynamic and most idealistic generation this country has ever seen. Remember also that they are one of the most confused--but their confusion does not surrender to force, it surrenders only to reason, rationality and understanding.



In addition recognize the possibility that future protests will occur. Set up guidelines and make it clear you will enforce them; something on the line of a statement that reads that anything which interferes with the legitimate legal rights of other students, faculty, administrators and citizens will be punished. Make it clear that these rights include the rights to use and take advantage of all the facilities of the University.

Once you have stated such a policy discuss it with the students. Make it clear just what will and will not be tolerated. For God's sake be sure they understand. If violence occurs it is their heads that will get busted as well as those of the police and innocent bystanders.

Finally, make this clear to the people of the state also. DO NOT PLAY POLITICS! State to them that you intend to enforce your guidelines; that you will not tolerate outside interference with this enforcement unless you specifically ask for it. Make clear your idea of the University. Whatever you do, refrain from the overblown rhetoric of the Reagans and their opponents. A cry for law and order is a cry no one will dispute, but make it clear what you mean by law and order.

In closing we hope we have not offended you too much. We have tried to state our views of the incident and how future incidents can be avoided. We do not expect you to follow all of <sup>our</sup> ~~us~~ <sup>ideas</sup>, but we do hope you will seriously consider all the questions we have raised. We want to see the University become even greater and it can attain that greatness through a cooperative effort of mutual respect and understanding between students, faculty, administrators and citizens of the state of Wyoming.

Sincerely,

*Ralph A. and Donna J. Brauer*

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M.A. '69      B.A. '68