

■ The problem is not new. It arises from many sources but specially from the *Mandarin system* creating "intense claustrophobia."

THE PROBLEM OF STUDENT VIOLENCE

As a historian Jacques Barzun is aware that American college campus violence is not new to this generation. He says that the impression one gets of students in medieval universities "is of an army of tramps, spongers, and hoodlums" and recalls that the faculty of the University of Virginia in 1825 petitioned the board for policemen to protect them from students. The era of relative peace on the American campus opened only at about the beginning of this century and ended in 1964.

But he adds: "To describe this tradition of violence is not to condone it but to encourage the search for causes."

In his own search for causes, Barzun pays scant heed to the Vietnam conflict, the civil rights debate, or the draft. More important,

he thinks, is the fact that modern society has created, without knowing it, a *mandarin system*.

"I mean by this that in order to achieve any goal, however modest, one must qualify. Qualifying means: having been trained, passed a course, obtained a certificate . . . The young in college were born into this system, which in this country is not much older than they, and they feel, quite rightly, intense claustrophobia. They have been in the groove since the sandbox."

Though he sympathizes with students in such a predicament, Barzun takes a firm paternalistic stand against what he calls:

". . . the arrogant pretensions and airs of holier-than-thou put forward by the institution goaders. They can seize the privilege of irres-

possibility if they will take the consequences. But they cannot turn it into a right to run the budget and lecture the trustees. Criticism is the student's prerogative under free speech, and they have it — though it seems at times a bit of effrontery also to claim sizeable subsidies from the administration in order to print daily insults about it."

The author notes a significant distinction between the protestors of the Thirties and those of today: "... the beardless Thirties were out to create a new world of which they had the blueprint. The hirsute Sixties are out to re-create themselves without a plan." And he challenges many of their current complaints. Of the widely heard demand for "relevance," he says:

"If a university is not to become an educational weather vane . . . it must avoid all 'relevance' of the obvious sort. The spirit of its teaching will be relevant if the members are good scholars and really teach. Nearly everywhere there is enough free choice among courses so

that no student is imprisoned for long in anything he cannot make relevant, if only he will forget the fantasy of instant utility. That fantasy is in fact what rules the world of credentials and qualifications which he so rightly kicks against."

Of the demand of earnest students that the university teach them "values," Barzun says:

"The wish is not so laudable as it sounds, being only the wish to have one's perplexities removed by someone else. Even if this were feasible and good, the practical question of what brand of values (i.e. what philosophy, religion, or politics) should prevail would be insoluble. It is a sufficient miracle if a college education, made up of many parts and many contacts with divergent minds, removes a little ignorance. Values (so-called) are not taught; they are breathed in or imitated. And here is the pity of the sophistication that no longer allows the undergraduate to admire some of his elders and fellows: he deprives himself of models and is

left with a task beyond the powers of most men, that of fashioning a self unaided."

The leaders of the student revolts will probably view such statements as those of a doddering oldtimer who has been a part of the establishment for much too long, but other students — the silent majority which still hopes to learn what it can from the older generation — will profit from them.

When he wrote *Teacher in America*, a quarter of a century ago, Barzun offered some pungent criticisms of administrators, saying among other things, "Nothing so strikes the foreign observer with surprise as the size and power of American collegiate administration." Now that he has been a dean and provost for a number of years, he offers his considered view of the administrative role:

"It sometimes seems to a university administration that their sole business is to keep students calmed down, the faculty on campus, and the neighbors contented. But administration is not troubleshooting, and these feats, though incessant and gruel-

ing, are only incidental. Administering a university has but one object: to distribute its resources to the best advantage. Resources here is not a genteel word for money. The resources of a university are seven in number: men, space, time, books, equipment, repute and money. All administrative acts serve this one purpose of stretching capital and dividing income fairly and fruitfully."

In his earlier book, Barzun was scornful of Columbia's Teachers College. In this one he mentions "the regeneration of Teachers College under the brilliant leadership of John Fisher (which) was probably helped rather than hindered by the intellectually inanimate state in which he found it."

In a chapter titled "Scholars in Orbit," Barzun reaffirms charges that have been made by many other writers: the Ph.D. program does not include an adequate preparation for the job of teaching, faculty promotions are based largely on research and publication, and within the faculty there is a con-

tinuous struggle between the young men in a hurry and the older men who are not yet ready to be pushed aside. But Barzun sees some improvement in at least one aspect of the Ph.D. program: "... the old monumental, life-sentence, eiderdown-quilt dissertation, which I described and deplored in *Teacher in America*, is receding into the past. Most departments approve only manageable topics and set limits to the number of pages that may be catapulted at a sponsor. The change has come partly in response to repeated urgings by graduate deans and partly in self-defense: the sponsor is swamped; he needs a pitchfork to turn over the papers on his desk and he therefore views with a lack-luster eye the student who has

chosen to tell all in twelve hundred typed pages."

It is not entirely clear what audience Barzun had in mind when he wrote his book. The chapter on today's students should appeal to a great many readers. The chapters on scholars and administrators will be of interest to most academic men and to some outside the university. But the large section of the book that deals with the financial problems of the contemporary private university in America seems less likely to hold the interest of anyone except administrators, university trustees, and potential donors, even though Barzun's analysis is a sophisticated one. — *By Paul Woodring in Saturday Review, December 21, 1968.*

OF RED CHINA'S THREAT

Our immediate problem in Asia is to enable neighboring countries to resist the crushing tropism of Communist China until they can develop a strong new system of their own. — *Salvador P. Lopez*