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September 8, 1989

Dear John:

I am delighted to congratulate you on receiving the Distinguished Public Service Award from the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, New England Region.

You have earned distinction through your unwavering commitment to academic excellence at Boston University. By demanding the best of your educators and their students, you have made Boston University a more visible presence in the Jewish community and the greater Boston area. A university can be simply located in a city or it can be a fertile ground for the social, cultural, and professional enrichment of its environment. Your efforts have ensured that Boston University is on the latter course. I commend you for your outstanding work.

Barbara joins me in sending our best wishes.

Sincerely,

GEORGE BUSH

Dr. John Silber
President
Boston University
Boston, Massachusetts

SENT TO:
Mr. Leonard Zakim
Executive Director
Anti-Defamation League
of B'nai B'rith
Suite 301, One Lincoln Plaza
South and Essex Streets
Boston, Massachusetts 02111

✓ GB:ES:TL:CH:jfc (9PMNC)
cc: Sara DeCamp
✓ cc: Ellen Strichartz

EXPRESS MAIL

DRAFT OF PRESIDENTIAL LETTER

DRAFT DATE: 9/7/89	COMPUTER DRAFT DOCUMENT TITLE:
INITIALS: GB/ ES <i>102</i>	CC:
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ENCLOSURES, SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS: <i>Sed Expre Mail</i>	

Dear John:

I am delighted to congratulate you on receiving the Distinguished Public Service Award by the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, New England Region.

You have *earned distinction* distinguished yourself through your unwavering commitment to academic excellence at Boston University. *By demanding the best of your students, educators and their students, you have made Boston University a more visible presence in the Jewish community and in the Boston area, as a whole through its social, cultural and professional outreach.* You are to be commended *you* for your *outstanding work*.

Barbara joins me in sending our best wishes .

Sincerely,

GB

Inside:

Dr. John Silber

President

Boston University

Boston, Massachusetts

Mail to:

Mr. Leonard Zakim

Executive Director

Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith
South and Essex Streets
One Lincoln Plaza, #301
Boston, Massachusetts 02111,

cc: Sarah DrCamp

cc: Ellen Strichartz

simply located in a city or it can be a fertile ground for the social, cultural and professional enrichment of its environment. Your efforts at BU have ensured that that BU is on the latter course.

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Ellen
Linda
Sarah De Camp

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DATE

7/24/89

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☐ FYI

Message:

725 info together
8

more info
re: Dr. Silberfar
Pres. message.
Trump
End D.

From:

Jacqui Cragg

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

9/10

July 24, 1989

MEMORANDUM FOR ~~LINDA~~ WATSON

FROM: SARAH DECAMP *SD*
OFFICE OF PUBLIC LIAISON

RE: PRESIDENTIAL MESSAGE FOR DR. SILBER

The Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith (New England region) has requested a Presidential Message for Dr. Silber whom they will honor at a dinner on September 25. If possible, they would like to receive the message by September 1 so it can be printed in their commemorative journal. Dr. Silber is president of Boston University where President Bush delivered a commencement address this spring. Dr. Silber will be presented with ADL's Distinguished Public Service Award.

Attached please find information about Dr. Silber and the President's visit to Boston University earlier this year.

The Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith is one of the most important and influential Jewish organizations in the country. I strongly recommend that we prepare a message for Dr. Silber as requested by ADL.

[Handwritten signature]

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Pres. - B'nai B'rith

Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith

New England Regional Office - South and Essex Streets
One Lincoln Plaza - Suite 301, Boston, MA 02111 • (617) 330-9696



May 22, 1989

The Office of the President
The White House
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

On September 25, 1989, the New England Region Anti-Defamation League will honor Dr. John Silber, President of Boston University, with its Distinguished Public Service Award.

As you well know, Dr. Silber has distinguished himself through his unwavering commitment to academic and educational excellence. Under his leadership, Boston University has also become a more visible presence in the Jewish community and the greater Boston community through its social, cultural and professional outreach.

In light of your leadership in supporting the values and issues of the Anti-Defamation League and your recent visit to Boston University to deliver the commencement address, I would like to invite you to recognize this special ADL event with a letter acknowledging Dr. Silber and Boston University. The letter will be placed in the commemorative Journal which will be distributed at the Award Dinner. In doing so, you will honor the Anti-Defamation League, as well.

Thank you for your time and your support. I look forward to hearing from you. Should your staff have any questions, please have them call me at the Anti-Defamation League, (617) 330-9669.

Respectfully yours,

Leonard Zakim
Executive Director

PRESIDENTS' DAY AT BU



President and Barbara Bush share the stage with French President François Mitterrand at the Boston University commencement yesterday.

Bush, Mitterrand reflect on commitments

By Stephen Kurkjian
Globe Staff

President Bush and President François Mitterrand of France gave graduating students at Boston University different lessons on the world's condition yesterday, with Bush saying the West must remain vigilant but flexible in its defense against communism and Mitterrand assailing poverty and environmental pollution.

With 31,000 people watching, Bush and Mitterrand declared in joint commencement addresses that the Western alliance remains united in its commitment to democracy and must steer a steady course during this time of upheaval in the communist world.

Later at a joint news conference, both men indicated that the Cold War and the tension and suspicion that has marked East-West relations since the end of World

War II are now ending. But they said Western countries await further proof that Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev wishes to make cuts in nuclear and conventional military forces before reducing NATO's strength in Europe.

Commenting on the student upheaval in China, Bush called on Chinese students and authorities to practice restraint, invoking the ideals of one of BU's most illustrious graduates, Martin Luther King Jr.

"I don't want to be gratuitous in giving advice, but I would encourage restraint. I do not want to see bloodshed," Bush added later at the news conference.

"We revere the model of Martin Luther King in this country for his peaceful protests, and so I might suggest a familiarization with that for the people in China," Bush said.

Bush's remarks were his first extended comments on the massive demonstrations started by students in Beijing. He embraced the protesters' goals but added that he did not want to say anything that might "stir up a military confrontation."

The presence of the two world leaders and their wives at Boston University provided a strong dose of excitement and drama to the customary pomp and circumstance of a college graduation.

While commencement exercises were held at more than 35 colleges throughout New England yesterday, only those at BU's Nickerson Field got to watch the arrival and departure of the presidential entourage via US Marine helicopter or witness speeches that were being covered by the international media as well as shown live by television stations in Boston and throughout the world.

Inconveniences posed by traffic jams and long lines of people waiting to pass through metal detectors appeared to be shrugged off. The crowd roundly applauded numerous times during both commencement addresses and when the two presidents and Barbara Bush received honorary degrees.

Gov. Dukakis also attended the ceremony, sitting just a few feet away from Bush. The two men shook hands and briefly exchanged pleasantries in a reception line before the commencement exercises. Dukakis also received vigorous applause, especially from students, when his name was announced.

Bush appeared upbeat during the two-hour ceremony, which was held under partly cloudy skies. The president waved heartily as he left the field and gave thumbs-up signals to graduating students.

Some discord

The day was not without discord, however. As Bush began to speak, several students got out of their chairs for a few moments and waved large banners criticizing him for the Iran-contra affair. Others held signs advocating abortion rights.

BU's commencement exercises capped two days of meetings between Bush and Mitterrand. The two leaders had engaged in bilateral talks Saturday at Bush's vacation compound in Kennebunkport, Maine, and had flown together to Boston after morning church services.

The most immediate issue involving the United States and France, the rift inside NATO over the Soviet initiative to reduce short-range nuclear missiles in Europe, appeared closer to settlement but still not mended.

Bush told reporters yesterday that he believed the dispute would be resolved before the NATO leaders meet in Brussels next week.

West Germany, which could be the main battlefield in the event of a European nuclear war, has been pressing for early arms talks with the Soviets. But Bush has refused arguing that US nuclear weapons are needed to deter superior Soviet conventional forces.

Mitterrand has backed the US proposal that no talks begin until the Soviets cut their conventional forces, but the French president has recommended that modernization of the missile force be put off until at least 1992.

"Not yet totally overcome"

In his commencement address, Bush defended his slow response to Gorbachev's flurry of peace initiatives as prudent because the Soviet Union's "new thinking has not yet totally overcome" its hostile policies of the past.

Under pressure by European allies to move more swiftly into arms agreements with Gorbachev, Bush warned that there is "a growing complacency throughout the West."

"I believe in a deliberate, step-by-step approach to East-West relations because recurring signs

show that while change in the Soviet Union is dramatic, it is not yet complete," Bush said.

Mitterrand, meanwhile, concentrated his address on the disparity between rich and poor nations.

As for the environment, Mitterrand said that "soon no one will be able to escape" the problems brought on by pollution. The situation is a "matter of extreme urgency," he said. "The Earth is our planet, so let us save it," Mitterrand said.

Mitterrand hopeful

To reporters, Mitterrand said NATO periodically faces internal controversies such as the current one, adding he was hopeful that this latest difficulty would be resolved before the summit opens. "I'd be happy if the views can be reconciled," the French leader said.



Globe staff photo/John J. ...

The crown jewel of Silber's reign

By Sally Jacobs
and Sean Murphy
Globe Staff

The two presidents who spoke at Boston University's commencement yesterday were clearly the biggest draw of the day, but it was a third president who had thrust the university before the world's eye.

It was John Silber, BU's controversial president, who groomed the university over the past two decades, Silber who won it attention both good and bad over the years, and Silber who bagged the big one for the university's 150th birthday yesterday.

His efforts culminated in a commencement extravaganza as the university preened before unprecedented attention. Through it all Silber beamed under his black velvet hat and gold tassel, for in the hierarchy of college commencements, this was the one to attend.

People came to view it from distances short

BUSH AND MITTERRAND AT BU

Circumstances of extra pomp: a crown jewel of Silber reign

and long, nearly 31,000 in all, and stood patiently for an hour or more in a line that stretched nearly half a mile up Commonwealth Avenue and down a maze of side streets. What drew many of them was the chance to glimpse President George Bush and French President Francois Mitterrand, the commencement speakers and apparently the first two heads of state to receive honorary degrees at the same commencement.

"Whatever you think of Bush, he's our president and I think it's great he's here," said graduating senior Lisa Hochman, who was teetering atop a folding chair before the ceremony. "It really says a lot about the university. Not everyone could have gotten him to come."

Nor did everyone want him to come. Some students protested Bush's presence, in objection to his policies and also because they felt he would eclipse their graduation. Because of tight security, the 5,224 graduating students had to arrive at the school's Nickerson Field several hours early. Students, who were limited to four guest tickets each, also objected to the limited seating. Several thousand spectators watched the event over closed-circuit television in the Commonwealth Armory.

"It's not our graduation. It's Silber's day in the sun," said graduating senior Heather Schwartz, wearing a black peace sign on the back of her red graduation gown and a sign reading

"Bush Knew" on her black mortarboard. "We're just lucky we're invited."

Other mortarboards also carried taped-on messages, including the standards, "Thanks Mom and Dad," and "Unemployed," and some of them repeated Schwartz's critical reference to Bush's role in the Iran-contra affair. But even some students wearing those caps conceded that they were delighted by the president's presence.

Despite the potential for disruption, the 116th commencement went smoothly. Even a cover of clouds broke after a brief sprinkle as the ceremony began.

Like some of the students, the university and surrounding streets were dressed in their best for the occasion. Red, white and blue bunting hung from several buildings in honor of the French and US governments, and many vendors on Commonwealth Avenue had hung signs congratulating the graduates and their families. Even the buses, parked in long, purring rows along the street, offered "Congratulations BU Graduates" on their foreheads.

Traffic on Commonwealth Avenue was detoured between Boston University Bridge near Kenmore Square and Packard Square in Brighton for nearly four hours, leaving Commonwealth Avenue oddly quiet in the university area. Most guests parked in Cambridge and boarded MBTA buses for shuttle service to the school, where a corps of about 2,000 BU staff members ushered the crowd into Nickerson Field. By 10 a.m., a

line of visitors four across had formed along several blocks of Commonwealth Avenue and adjacent side streets.

Security rules in force

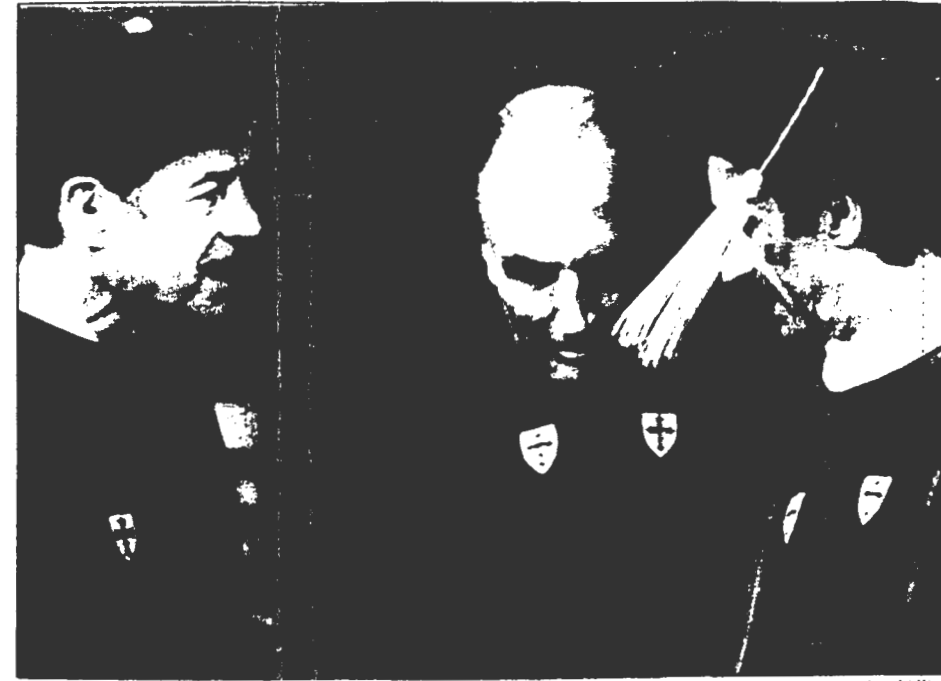
Students had been warned in letters from the university that bottles of champagne, French or otherwise, would be confiscated at the entrance to the field. Many students paraded around the field in cap and gown, happily clutching bottles of carbonated water instead.

"They said popping champagne bottles would make the Secret Service think somebody's shooting a gun," said Rebecca Tafien, 21, of Fort Lauderdale, Fla., a graduate in mass communications.

Although university officials declined to detail protection measures, security contingents from France, the White House and local police were present. During the ceremony, Secret Service officers watched the crowd through binoculars from atop the high-rise dormitories of the West Campus, and dozens of silent, suited agents with wires coming out of their ears mingled conspicuously amid the crowd. Police looking for weapons funneled guests through metal detectors at the entrances.

State Police also kept watch from an elevated section of the Massachusetts Turnpike overlooking Nickerson Field. Boston, Metropolitan and BU police provided other security, both inside and outside the field, but no unusual incidents were reported.

Two groups of students, however, briefly upset the orderliness



Globe staff photo/Yunghi Kim

BU president John Silber (left) chats with Mitterrand and professor Elie Wiesel, who gave the invocation.

of the afternoon. Just as Bush was introduced, two large banners were unraveled and displayed. They read: "Women's life, women's choice," and "Iran-Contra: Indict Bush."

Faculty marshals quickly converged and ordered the banners lowered. At the completion of Bush's speech, the students carried the banners through the stadium, eliciting both boos and cheers from the audience.

"Wanted people to think"

"We just wanted people to think about the kind of dishonesty that operates at the highest level of government," said Stuart Shulman, 22, of Brookline, a grad-

uate in liberal arts. "When we were walking out, a guy tried to grab the banner away from us. He said we didn't love our country."

Out on Commonwealth Avenue, a few dozen protesters chanted loudly under a huge banner reading, "1,000 points of outrage." Other signs said, "Fight Bush and the Capitalist Offensive" and "US Mind Your Own Uterus." A group of Asian students with a loudspeaker, protesting events unfolding in China, chanted, "Stop martial law. Don't kill the students."

To many among the crowd such protests were an inevitable commencement component, evi-

dence that the students have developed a healthy habit of questioning the status quo. Many said they regarded the occasion as a sign that Boston University itself has attained a new level in its maturation.

"I think that today there is a recognition that Boston University has truly emerged in the past few years at the forefront of American universities. This is tangible recognition of greatness," said William F. Surette, an alumnus and vice chairman of the university Board of Trustees, waving an arm at the crowd. "BU has a right to be pretty proud today."



John Silber,
president of B.U.,
in his office.

Far right: Students
gathered on a hill
behind the campus
— a site known as
the "B.U. Beach"
— near the banks of
the Charles River.

Crusader on

OUTSPOKEN, SOMETIMES
OUTRAGEOUS, BOSTON UNIVERSITY'S
JOHN SILBER HAS BEEN MONARCH
OF THE CAMPUS FOR 18 YEARS.

By Helen Epstein

THE CITY OF CHELSEA, just northeast of Boston, might have been created as a case study for American educators. Its residents are poor, more than half are Hispanic or Asian immigrants, and they have one of the highest rates of tuberculosis, alcoholism, drug abuse and teen-age pregnancy in the commonwealth. About half of Chelsea's school children speak English as a second language or not at all; its high school dropout rate is 52 percent. Three years ago, a group of Chelsea's citizens turned to John R. Silber. They knew the Boston University president had offered to manage the troubled schools of Boston, and had been turned down. They asked him to consider Chelsea, and Silber grabbed at the chance.

He appeared on television, advocating prenatal nutrition programs for women of childbearing age, 9-to-5 day care for preschoolers and literacy education for parents — all ideas he

has been pushing since he was an adviser for Operation Head Start 25 years ago.

If all goes according to plan, Boston University could become the first private university in the country to manage an entire public school system. On March 29, the Chelsea Board of Aldermen passed a resolution in support of the partnership. Enabling legislation for a vote at the state level is expected later this spring, and corporate fund-raising is in progress.

The Massachusetts Federation of Teachers has taken B.U. to court over the constitutionality of the arrangement, but Silber isn't overly concerned. He's already in litigation over the ownership of Martin Luther King's papers, a severance case and a sex discrimination/tenure case, among others, and is used to fighting for what he wants. In fact, he is so contentious a figure that although nationally it's the Chelsea plan that is drawing attention, many Bostonians see the whole thing as just another episode in the saga of John Silber.

In a city where higher education is what the automotive industry is to Detroit, Silber presides over a payroll of 6,738; a student body of 28,920 full- and part-time students and a budget of more than half a billion dollars. He will not make public his current salary, but he drew \$240,000 in 1987. He

Helen Epstein is the author of "Children of the Holocaust" and "Music Talks." She lives in Cambridge, Mass.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY PAULA M. LERNER/WOODFIN CAMP

the Charles



is said to be the country's highest-paid university president and one who controls his institution to a unique degree. In the 18 years of his presidency, he has appointed nearly 90 percent of B.U.'s current faculty and acquired, in his estimate, about 45 percent of B.U.'s current real estate holdings. He reads most tenure and promotion files himself, often grilling candidates for hours on everything from their private lives to their political beliefs.

There are close to 300,000 college students in the Boston area, and Silber is the most vocal of the 60 or so local college presidents in prescribing what an undergraduate education should comprise. Silber supports "the classical tradition of learning" and traces the decline of American higher education to Dec. 2, 1964, when students occupied a building at the University of California at Berkeley and ushered in the campus movements of the 1960's.

He uses his office to propound his academic opinions ("There is not any area of American intellectual life more debased than the social sciences"); his vociferous anti-Communism ("A university that promotes the doctrine of moral equivalence" between the United States and the Soviet Union "repudiates the conditions for its very existence"), and his moral beliefs ("Hedonism, which is essentially the program of the typical student today, is not a system of values that will give any meaning to life").

The president's office is open from 8 A.M. to 8 P.M. every weekday; its staff of 15 is organized in shifts to accommodate Silber's 80- to 100-hour work week. In addition to running B.U., Silber maintains an active life as a Kant scholar and keeps a high profile as a public speaker. He argues his views on everything from student loan programs (he favors them) to United States foreign policy (he's pro-Israel, for a strong defense) in dozens of newspaper pieces each year and maintains a correspondence with anyone who writes to him. He keeps a meticulous record of his activities, tape-recording many meetings, some telephone conversations, all public appearances and interviews. (Our series of interviews was taped by both of us and transcribed by his office.)

Even admirers say John Silber is an acquired taste. "When he first started," says Henry A. Kissinger, who worked with Silber on the National Bipartisan Commission on Central America, "my only question was if I killed him, would it be consid-



ered murder or justifiable homicide? He is very fierce in his convictions. He takes no prisoners. I swore I'd kill him and then, as the weeks went by, I grew extremely fond of him."

His supporters believe Silber will yet be "called" to public service and compare him to such extraordinary men as Winston Churchill, George Patton and Socrates. They say he is the rare leader with an "institutional imagination," a philosopher who applies classical thought to contemporary situations the way a rabbi uses the Talmud and, in private life, a "soft touch" who protects those who need protection and gives away a large part of his income.

His adversaries point out that American education is in such desperate straits that Americans will listen to anyone who is perceived as a successful educator, but that no man who treats human beings the way John Silber does should be called an educator. They compare his tactics to those of Joseph Stalin, even Hitler, and deride his university as "the Paraguay of education." They say he is a moralist who has demoralized his institution, a thug who has destroyed — not saved — Boston University. Most of the people — B.U. students and faculty, former faculty, former trustees — interviewed for this article, even those with nothing critical to say, wished to remain anonymous for fear of reprisals.

Meeting the president is understandably something of an anticlimax after this billing. He is a short, unremarkable man of 62, who, in his habitual suit and tie, might be taken for a Washington bureaucrat. It is only when he begins talking impatiently

into our two tape recorders — in an elocutionary English punctuated by outbursts of a raw, L.B.J.-like vernacular — that one understands why Phyllis Curtin, dean of B.U.'s School for the Arts, has described him as "a man of more colors" than anyone she knows.

BORN IN SAN ANTONIO to a Texan schoolteacher and a German immigrant architect, Silber was taught to believe unquestioningly in God, obey authority, relish debate, revere the arts. His father, whom he adored, was a product of Kaiser Wilhelm's Germany: he laid down the rules till Silber left home at 20 to marry.

The elder Silber took time to explore the local Spanish missions with his children but, as John Silber recalls, also forbade them such things as organizing a street-corner jug band because they "were not musicians" and would "disgrace the family" — a rule that Silber now finds perfectly appropriate.

He was a small, intellectually avid child, who was, he says, 5 years old when he realized that he had a withered right arm. Early on, Silber learned that the bone of his stub was harder than a fist, and his willingness to use it in fights earned him the nickname "One-Arm Pete."

In Silber's account, the Depression hit him harder than his birth defect. His father refused to give up architecture despite a lack of clients and his mother supported the family by teaching grammar school. He re-

members wearing "inadequate clothes and shoes" and hitch-hiking to Sunday school to save bus fare. The experience left Silber with an anger about poverty and contempt for subsequent generations of "self-indulgent, ill-bred kids," sorority girls and tenured professors, among others.

Education, for him, was religious before it was secular. He attended a Presbyterian Sunday school before entering grammar school, beginning a "contest with God," as he puts it, that lasted well into his 20's. "There are certain things about Judaism and Christianity in stark contrast to other religions," he says, "and one is that God did not decide to be on the side of the strong, but on the side of the just and the good. To know what was required to be a good person or a just person seemed to me the fundamental question that a person ought to ask. You can't have any guarantee of happiness, you can't have any guarantee of financial success — even as a small child I observed those contingencies. It seemed to me that what was to some extent within the individual's control is the moral quality of his life."

Silber is quick to deride "Elmer Gantry" fundamentalism, but what he calls "religious literacy" is so basic to his understanding of education that, as (Continued on Page 64)

Far left: In 1979, clerical staff, librarians and other workers went on strike. When professors honored the picket line, Silber sought their dismissal — unsuccessfully.

Left: Silber talks with students. "It was my job," he says, "to try to introduce some of the discipline and some of the idealism their parents had neglected."

Below: Howard Zinn, a noted historian and B.U. professor for 24 years, has often been the target of Silber's displeasure.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY PAULA M. LERNER/WOODFIN CAMP

'IT WAS MY DESTINY TO BE A COLLEGE PRESIDENT AT A TIME WHEN PEOPLE HAD TO DEAL WITH A VERY BADLY BRED GENERATION OF STUDENTS.'

SILBER

Continued from Page 29

an ethics professor, he would quiz his students on central points in the Bible and church history before they studied Christianity — to illustrate their "ignorance." He himself had always been at the top of his class. He started college at 16, choosing Trinity University in San Antonio, because it was cheap and he could live at home. Torn between music, sculpture, philosophy, German and religion, he graduated *summa cum laude* in June 1947 with a triple major and double minor. A month later, he married Kathryn Underwood, a fellow student, and went east to Yale to study for the ministry.

For a year, the young couple rented a room. Kathryn Silber worked while her husband studied theology, helped with expenses by singing in a synagogue choir and interned as assistant to a Baptist minister who invited him to assess his sermons. Within a few months, the minister resigned and the 21-year-old

took over. Both Silbers, however, disliked the conventions of pastoral life and John Silber felt his ministry did not give him "the intellectual and spiritual freedom" he needed. The following September found the couple in Austin, with John at the University of Texas Law School.

Once again, Silber did well and, once again, he dropped out. He decided to return to Yale, get a doctorate in philosophy and teach. Philosophy, he says, "gave one the opportunity of searching for meaning without being committed to any answer in advance." He was made an assistant professor before he had completed his dissertation (on the ethics of Immanuel Kant). A few months later he was promised rapid advancement at the University of Texas, then in the process of upgrading its faculty. "I could just see the ivy growing on me," Silber says. "It may be temperament. It may have been the pioneer stock asserting itself through the

genes. There is just a very high level of risk-taking, that is part of my makeup." The Silbers, who then had two of their eventual seven children, once again moved back to Austin.

The University of Texas was the second-largest industry in the state. Nine Regents appointed by the Governor controlled a multimillion-dollar budget and kept an eye on who was hired. Their style was regal macho, and it was aped by the university administrators. "They bluster, they swagger and they draw a line in the sand," says one University of Texas veteran now at Boston University. "They don't shoot you in the back; they shoot you right in the face." Silber thrived there.

By all accounts, he was a charismatic, exacting teacher, whose students adored or hated him, or both. He gave novel assignments — one sent his philosophy students into the worst slums of their hometowns over Christmas break to interview tenants and landlords — and he graded hard. That first year about a third of his students failed or made a D, most of the rest received C's, and a

handful made A's and B's, a paradigm he urges on B.U. professors today. His method, he says, was "Socratic"; others have characterized it as instruction by humiliation.

"Anyone caught unprepared in Silber's class was simply thrown out," Betty Flowers, who is now a professor at U.T., recalled. "Once a young man excused himself on the grounds that he couldn't afford the textbook, Silber stopped the questioning, reached into his wallet, and threw some bills at the boy. The class was absolutely silent, waiting, until the boy reached down around him and gathered up the bills."

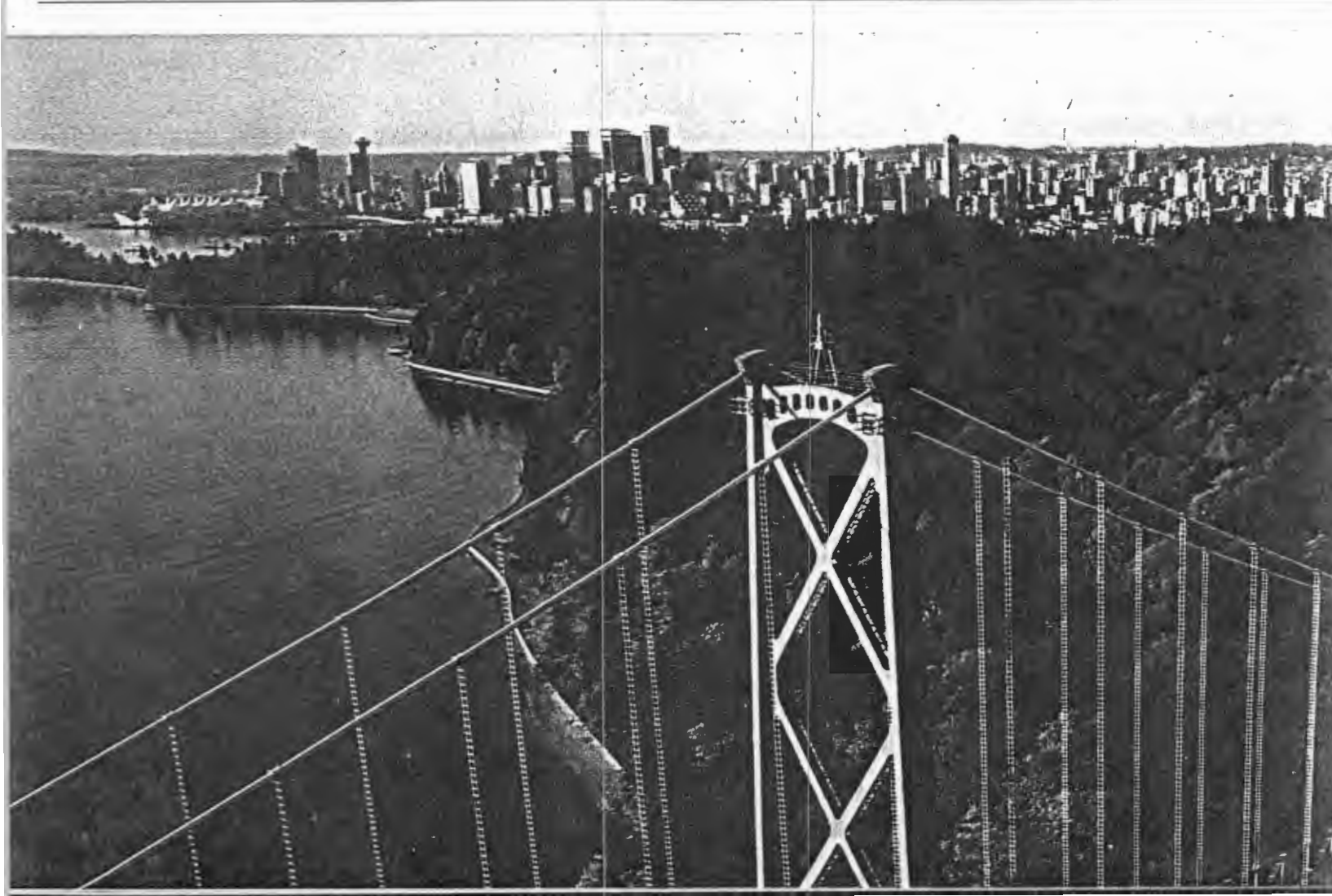
He was a faculty activist. His stands on integration (for) and capital punishment (against) attracted statewide publicity and a coterie of U.T. colleagues including the literary critic Roger W. Shattuck, the classicist William A. Arrowsmith, the writer Keith Botsford and the historian (now president of Brown University) Vartan Gregorian, all of whom have remained close friends.

But Silber also made enemies. Some were students and colleagues who saw him

as a power-hungry sadist. Others were Regents unforgiving of professors whose politics "embarrassed" their institution. Silber, who had three children by this time, found his salary frozen and his future at U.T. in doubt. Then, in 1959, his first scholarly articles were published and he won a Fulbright to the University of Bonn.

SILBER'S ENCOUNTER with Germany was seminal. He was impressed by the elite, hierarchical German university; he met refugees from Communist countries and felt the first stirrings of what would become a passionate anti-Communism; he learned that his father's family had been Jewish and that his father's sister had been gassed at Auschwitz.

"The thing that came most as a shock to me," he recalls today, "was that my father — who was dead by then — had said nothing to me about it. I realized that one opportunity the United States had offered him was the opportunity of no longer being Jewish. And I thought: I'll be damned — maybe it is in the genes. Maybe that's why I've always



had this affinity to Judaism." (Silber, though, views himself as the son of two Christian parents; any other view, he says, accepts "Nazi racial categories.")

He returned to Austin a year later, anxious to improve his department. Though not an obvious candidate for chairman, he told rivals he was going after the job and he got it. Five years later, he became dean.

Silber was known as a reformer. He attacked entrenched senior faculty as "deadwood," and instituted a policy of "creative migration" for those he wished gone. He replaced 22 department heads in less than two and a half years. Silber says he was careful to observe U.T.'s rules of loyalty to superiors (i.e. Regents), but he acquired a personal following and he opposed a key Regents objective: to encourage U.T.'s ever-increasing enrollment (then 35,000). Several members of the Board of Regents owned real estate around campus, thereby profiting from the growing number of students, and resented Silber for pointing out their conflict of interest. Silber was warned that Regents chair-

man Frank C. Erwin planned to dismiss him, but stood his ground. "Once you start bailing out," he says, "the plane is gone."

On a July day in 1970, when students and faculty were gone, Erwin told Silber he would be asked to resign as dean that afternoon. Supporters organized 7,000 signatures for his reinstatement, but, as Silber discovered, "students and faculty are not controlling constituencies." He was 44 years old and the future he had imagined as U.T. president was gone. He had already interviewed for the presidency of several other institutions when he got a call from Boston University.

BOSTON HAD MADE headlines alongside Columbia and Cornell in the late 60's as a center of student unrest. Otherwise, the institution lacked definition — academic, physical, financial. Established in 1839 as a Methodist seminary, B.U. had grown into a loose confederation of schools situated on two ugly campuses beside the Charles River. The college was everyone's "safety school," a perpetual



PAULA M. LERNER/WOODFIN CAMP

A contemplative Silber, in full academic regalia, at one of his many public appearances. This one was in honor of the philosopher Paul Weiss, founder of the Metaphysical Society of America.

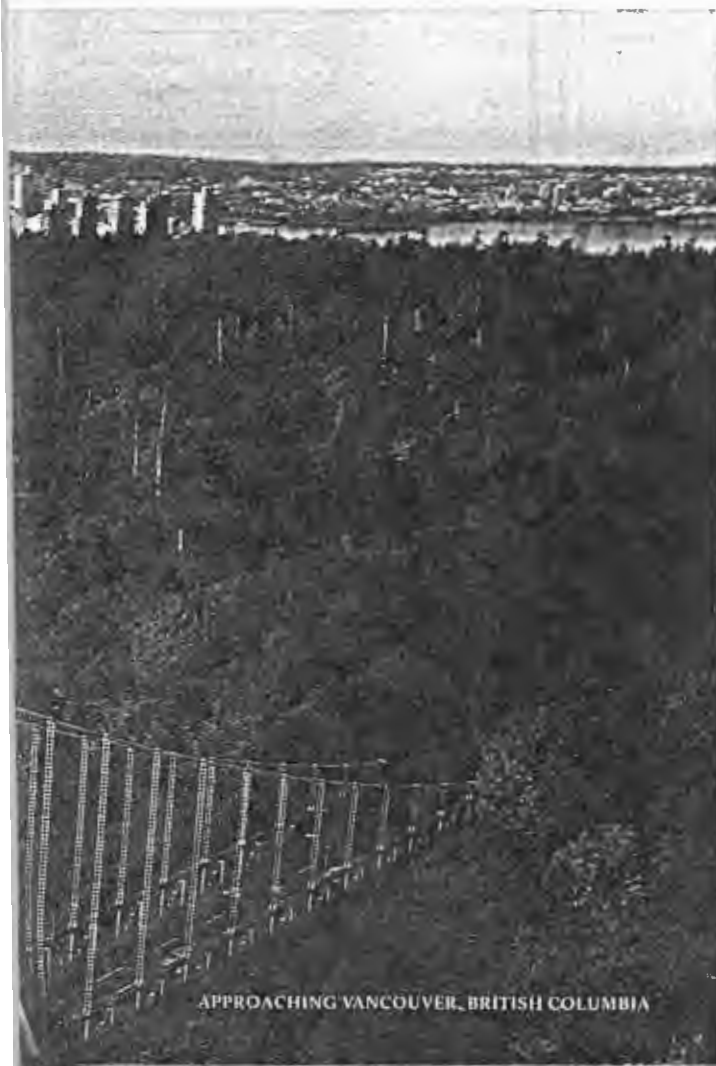
fifth or sixth choice after nearby M.I.T., Harvard, Wellesley, Brandeis and Tufts. B.U.'s endowment was a paltry \$18 million — \$3 million of which, according to Silber, was kept in accounts not

bearing interest. The payroll was financed almost entirely by student tuition.

"The patient is already on the operating table and could be moribund," Silber told the B.U. search committee dur-

ing the recruitment process; he was the "surgeon" who could save it. His strategy would be "excellence" — by upgrading the faculty, he would attract sponsored re-

(Continued on Page 74)



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SILBER

Continued from Page 65

search, better students and national visibility. He had done it in Texas. If he took the job, the trustees would have to guarantee him freedom to invest \$1.5 million of B.U.'s money for the hiring of 30 "first-rate" new professors. Silber was hired.

He started work in January of 1971. He forged connections with state legislators, with Mayor Kevin H. White, (now one of the university's "star" professors) and with Senator Edward Kennedy, who would later help B.U. obtain millions of dollars in Federal grants.

Nine months into his new job, Silber discovered that he faced an \$8.8 million operating deficit. He immediately froze all salaries and asked all deans and directors to make drastic cuts in their budgets. Even so, he went on hiring — a high-risk choice that cost him dearly in faculty support. His friend Roger Shattuck, who recently gave up a cozy chair at the University of Virginia to teach at B.U., says that Silber is "not the kind of person who

changes his style. He's judgmental, and he doesn't pull his punches with anyone. Most people, when they're in a position of power, put on velvet gloves and mute their song."

Silber sang his song incessantly, claiming that "a vision of excellence, a secular kingdom of God in which individuals fulfill themselves through education and useful public service" is essential to society. Many faculty members had initially supported his "vision of excellence."

But when Silber began to evaluate them; when he announced that the rank of associate professor would henceforth require a "national reputation" and that of full professor "an international reputation"; when he talked about clearing out the "deadwood" to make room for the "first-rate"; when some of the "first-rate" turned out to be old friends from Texas, Silber found himself in bitter conflict with a tightly knit faculty which did not regard itself as needing surgery.

B.U., with its low tuition

and easy admissions policy, was then the closest thing to a public university in Boston. The critic and ex-B.U. (now Harvard) English professor Helen Vendler had studied literature there and remembers an unusually friendly faculty, with no bias against women. She recalls that "about a third of the faculty were between 50 and 65 years old when Silber came in. They had been teaching large classes and eight courses a year — the burden of the university workload. These were the people he called 'deadwood.' He showed no respect for their lifelong commitment to teaching; he said they should leave."

Other professors, like the historian Howard Zinn, disputed Silber's criteria for excellence. Some critics resented Silber's recruitment of such high-salaried "stars" as Elie Wiesel at the expense of "bread-and-butter" faculty. (Next fall, Saul Bellow will be teaching one class a week and giving a series of public lectures for a reported \$55,000.) Others just resented him. Jon Westling, now B.U. executive vice president, who joined the school in 1974 because he wished to work for Silber, is convinced that "what made him hated was

the idea of change itself. I could see faculty appointments, a sense of direction, a punishing schedule, someone standing up in public for the idea that there is nothing inherently undemocratic in making judgments."

S.M. Miller, a sociologist who retired from B.U. last December, arrived there in 1973. He still recalls with amazement the reception that Silber held for new faculty: "It was his tone. My impression was that he thought the new faculty were the enemy and that he was the only intelligent person left in the universe."

Miller's specialty is social policy. He had wide contacts with leaders in government, industry and education but had not heard anyone like Silber before. He says that he had also never seen an institution so poorly administered. "B.U. feels like a royal court of an absolute monarch. He has his favorites, his loves and his hates. One's fate seems to depend on the monarch's moods and prejudices. The monarch does not delegate; I felt that I lived in Kafka's castle as played by the Marx brothers."

THE ONCE-UNNOTICED university became a staple of the local press.

In 1972, the president's just-renovated house was gutted by fire. Silber, who lost almost all of his family's personal possessions, is convinced it was arson by campus opponents.

A lifelong believer in strong civilian control of the military, Silber had quickly moved to reinstate R.O.T.C. When Marine Corps and Navy recruiters came to campus, anti-war activists were convinced he had invited them as a provocation. Demonstrators blocked buildings. The president called the police. "One thing you'd better remember about the police," he recalls telling students through a bullhorn. "I happen to be an intellectual, but the police are not intellectuals and when you make some canine or Oedipal reference to their parent, they will resent it and you may find that you get physically abused by them."

He said that demonstrators should emulate Martin Luther King by accepting the penalty of the law "lovingly," and that those demonstrators who were worried about Israel should be thankful that the Sixth Fleet was, "as the Jewish lawyer said in the 'Caine Mutiny,' keeping

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NO BROKERS

grandma out of the soap dish" — remarks that enraged a population far larger than anti-war protesters.

I told Silber that several B.U. professors had told me he had frozen their salaries for political reasons. Silber noted several faculty opponents whose salaries he had raised. I mentioned Howard Zinn, whose salary after 24 years was \$41,000 (after two arbitrations), compared to an average of \$53,616 for his division.

"You're damn right he has not received raises," Silber exploded, "because he's not worth a damn. Read what the best historians have said about his books — somebody is supposed to be rewarded for that crap? I know what an incompetent teacher he is. He's had classes in which he's given virtually all A's and B's and returned paper after paper with virtually no comments on them. He's the enemy of scholarship, of truth, of civility and decency in a university. And \$41,000? That puts him about \$14,000 ahead of the average Amer-

ican!" (Professor Zinn says, "Silber always likes to control definitions of 'best.' My last book was nominated for the American Book Award, and has gone through 15 printings. For the past several years, 400 students have signed up for my course and Silber refused to give me any teaching assistants.")

In 1975, B.U. faculty voted to unionize. Silber refused to recognize the union. In 1976, 10 of the 15 deans and several hundred faculty members called for his resignation. The board of trustees supported the president. Dissenters resigned or were not reappointed.

During 1978 and 1979, the newly organized faculty union, the clerical workers, the librarians and the buildings-and-grounds workers all went on strike. When five tenured B.U. professors refused to cross the clerical workers' picket line, the administration initiated termination proceedings against them. In response, several hundred academics across the country signed a petition calling

'Are you seeking out the best professors,' Silber demands of students, 'or taking the easiest courses you can find?'

Silber's action inimical to "the integrity of academic freedom everywhere" and questioning his "fitness to remain as president of Boston University." The B.U. faculty voted overwhelmingly for his removal. The board of trustees backed Silber again.

During the politically somnolent 1980's, with many of his opponents gone, Silber has

kept his institution in the press. He has stopped students from building shanties and flying "Divest" banners to protest South African policies of apartheid. Most recently, he imposed pre-60's visitation rules at the dormitories.

In 1989, people who have watched Boston University are struck by change. The university's faculty attracted \$110 million in sponsored research this year, compared to about \$15 million in 1971. Students receive \$57 million in B.U. financial aid, compared to \$8.3 million in 1971. The campus is no longer ugly and a B.U. degree now carries some cachet. Among the commencement speakers, expected on May 21 are two Presidents: François Mitterrand and George Bush.

Some of Silber's decisions about how to allocate the university's resources have been erratic. Right now, he's riding out the consequences of a \$50 million investment in a small biotechnology firm, Seragen Inc., that not only has shown no prospect of a return in the near future, but

would go out of business without the university's support. ("It comes down to this," said one administrator. "We've got a \$1.25 million-a-month biotech habit, and there's no way we can kick it.")

Still, experts on higher education such as David Riesman, as well as many college presidents, have expressed great admiration for Silber's achievements and Silber has difficulty understanding why so many people at B.U. do not.

"The abuse I received from the faculty hurt me deeply, because I was working like hell for the faculty," he says. "I kept their salaries ahead of the rate of inflation; I wouldn't take a raise for myself. After 1976, I decided that's the last time I would turn down a raise. If we can't get any respect, if we can't get any affection from this job, then I'll at least just pick up a paycheck. I now know that it was my destiny to be a college president at a time when people had to deal with a very badly bred generation of stu-

(Continued on Page 87)

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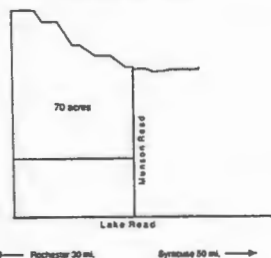


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SILBER

Continued from Page 76

dents. Their upbringing was terrible and it was my job to try to introduce some of the discipline and some of the idealism their parents had neglected."

ON A RECENT EVENING, I watched the president address about 400 students. His performance, billed as "How to Get the Most Out of the University," was quintessential Silber. He talked up B.U.'s outstanding faculty. He said that a university education was "a do-it-yourself project," and asked, "Are you seeking out the best professors or taking the easiest courses you can find?" He offered to make public the grade-point average of all faculty. He urged students to attend university cultural events instead of ruining their ears with rock music, wasting their money in nightclubs and watching too much television. ("How many times can you watch 'Casa blanca' for God's sake?") He

asked students to report any professor who did not show up for an appointment during office hours, "because you have a right to that." Then he took questions.

"I might be unused to your mode of conversation I guess," said one young man, "but I'm kind of shocked at the disdain you have for our common culture. Is it the university which should decide what is worthy of a person, culturally or intellectually, to live their lives? Or should the university be the open place where the student is given every choice to choose what is worthy of their attention?"

The students applauded.

"Are you confused into believing that what I have suggested tonight as the best way for you to use your time is in any way a university requirement?" replied Silber. "The university is quite open to your wasting your time."

The questions were crisp and well-prepared. "I don't think there's one person in this room who hasn't had a prob-

lem getting into a class they needed or having a class so huge you couldn't deal with it," complained a pre-law student. "We have a class called 'The History of Moral Philosophy.' It's a requirement. . . . It hasn't been offered in two years. There was an enrollment limit of 40 and there are currently double that number in the class. There are people on the window sills, on the floors."

"Why don't they move it into another room?" asked Silber.

"It's not so much the room; you can't even have a discussion," replied the student.

"Well, let me tell you something," said Silber, "I could teach a class this size . . . and we would have plenty of classroom discussion because unless the student body was vastly better informed than I believe this student body to be, they would be wise to listen to what a better-informed person had to say rather than pontificate from the depths of their ignorance."

"O.K.," said the student. "We're supposed to get to know our professors, you said. It's our right to know our professors. But when you have classes that are up-

wards of 200 and 300 students every semester, it's very difficult."

"Every course? That's not true."

The student, who had come prepared with course numbers, names and class totals (she was off by one semester in regard to the last time the philosophy course had been offered), stood her ground, remaining cool through a mini-tutorial from Silber on the folly of majoring in political science when what she needed was a customized program "combining English history (concentrating on Henry II and the development of English common law), a good deal of literature and a good deal of philosophy. . . ."

She listened attentively and later explained that, as a future lawyer, she had learned a lot from Silber, but that "you can't really argue with him about something you're very emotionally invested in because you'll get hurt." Several other students made similar comments. None wanted to be identified by name.

THAT NIGHT, SILBER HAD alluded to his wish to institute "moral education" in the

Chelsea schools. "If you don't really grasp the distinction between right and power, you're not going to make any headway teaching ethics to anybody on how to become a better person," he said. "These are insights that are developed in children 3 to 5 years of age through a proper educational system. It's pretty hard to do in the United States today, in a culture where there is no common ethos, where you are going to make half the community angry with anything you try to teach."

Given the chance, how would you institute moral education in Chelsea? I asked him later. Silber replied with a story about a past president of the University of Oklahoma who wrote a book in which he laid out all his plans for the university. "The people who would have been adversely affected by them were waiting and wiped him out in less than a year," Silber says. He, on the other hand, will "fight by the rules of Stonewall Jackson," he continued. "Every night I will camp my army at the crossroad and my enemy will know I am there but not which of four directions I am going in the morning." ■



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