

Last January student revolt came to Swarthmore. Blacks occupied the Admissions office and confusion enveloped the campus.

by PAUL GOOD

The Swarthmore College campus has passed through a melancholy season, a long winter of discontent. But now spring is come to the elm-lined walks. The trees—fleshed with green—and Swarthmore perennials—girls like buds, boys like saplings—assert their preeminence over the wintry seasons of Man and Nature. The view from the window of the president's office in Parrish Hall is one that delighted Dr. Courtney C. Smith for the 15 years he was president of Swarthmore, and it is one that he will not see again.

On the morning of Thursday, Jan. 16, this year, Dr. Smith walked up the paths from his home to Parrish Hall, a tall, free-striding figure quietly well-clad in Ivy League tweeds. There was a crisis on campus. Black students had been occupying the Admissions office in Parrish for eight days, demanding increased black enrollment and a black "presence" in the administration. It was by now a familiar national story. But the Quaker college outside Philadelphia had never been so shaken in its 105-year existence.

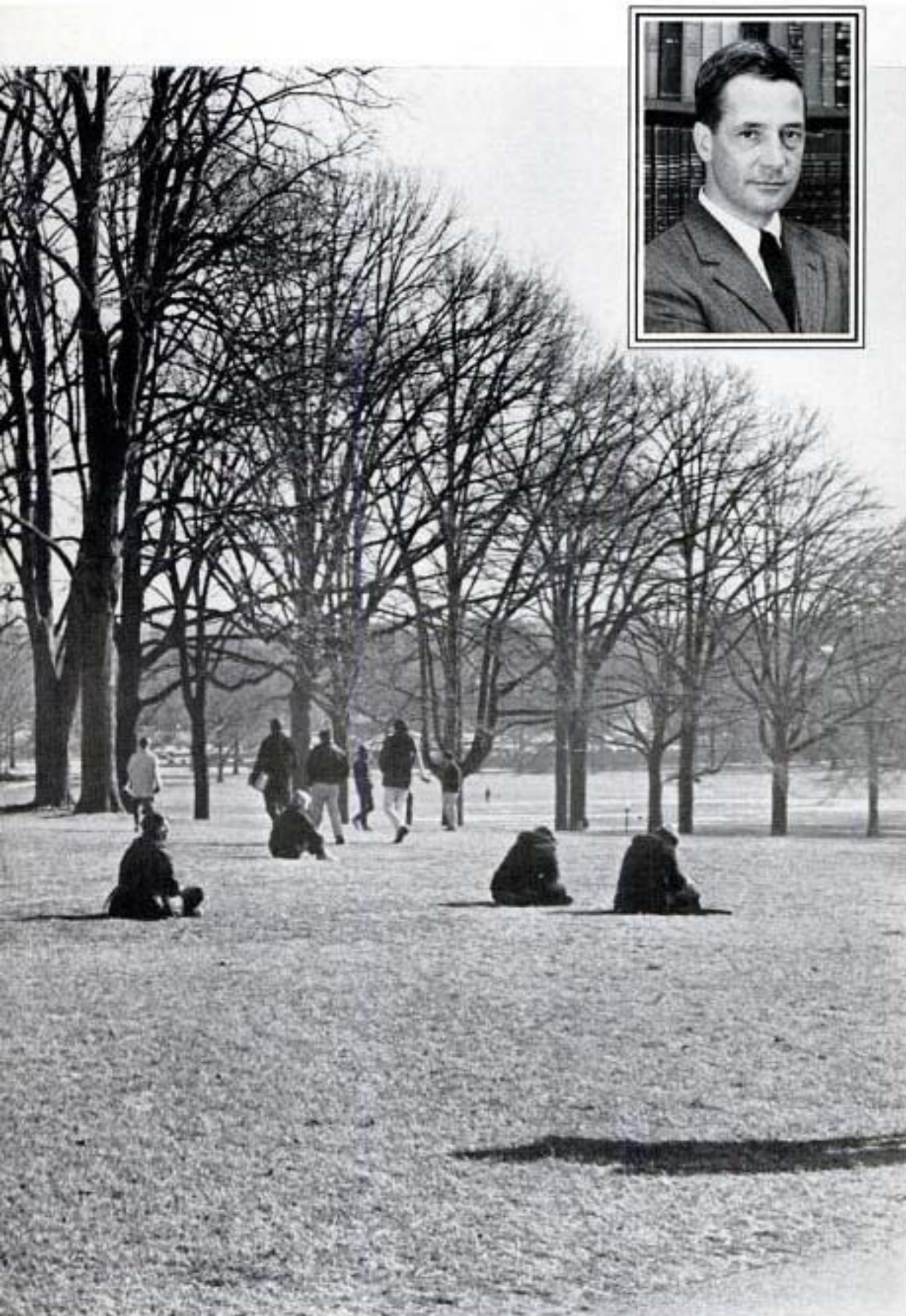
The 52-year-old president bore heavy emotional burdens as he hurried toward a meeting on the crisis which now seemed close to being resolved. There had been many meetings, late into many nights, and his face—an intelligently handsome face, the gaze level and lucid—showed the strain. Courtney Smith's health had always been excellent, but before he reached Parrish, where black paper hung by demonstrators covered some Admissions windows, he felt a spasm in his chest. By the time he climbed a flight of stairs to his office, he was dying of a heart attack. The college physician was called and began counting Dr. Smith's pulse, and as the count was about to reach 20, the Swarthmore president died.

Word spread, and despite the January cold young men and women came singly to sit on the broad lawns outside Parrish, seeking solace in meditation. The students had called their president by his first name and most had idolized him. Now, bundled in winter cloth-



Requiem for

Then suddenly the college president was dead, and in the cold sunlight blacks and whites sat silently in mourning



ing, their faces rapt, they looked like some Northern sect of holy men and women, performing a mystic rite to winter.

Five hours after the death, the members of the Swarthmore Afro-American Students Society (SAAS) abandoned the Admissions office but not their protest. They had cleaned up the litter from eight days of occupation and the office was undamaged, the files untouched. But there was wreckage—a rubble of broken illusions and shattered trust.

"We sincerely believe," said the SAAS statement, "that the death of any human being, whether he be the good president of a college, or a black person trapped in our country's ghettos, is a tragedy."

To many familiar with Dr. Smith's career, "good" only began to describe him. His intellectual credentials were impeccable—Phi Beta Kappa at Harvard, Rhodes Scholar at Oxford, assistant professor of English at Princeton—and he had honed Swarthmore's reputation for academic excellence to such a brilliant edge that the small college (1,029 enrollment) was considered by many at least the undergraduate equal of Harvard and Stanford.

Dr. Smith's personal principles combined an old-fashioned morality with a lofty liberal ethic that made him contest McCarthyite assaults on academic freedom in the '50s when most college presidents were maintaining a timid silence. That same ethic made Courtney Smith an integrationist, and under his presidency Negro enrollment at Swarthmore rose from virtually nothing to 47 blacks—5% of the student body.

The anguish at his death reflected the value people placed on him in life. Alumna Janet V. Koch wrote to the *Washington Post*: "So the militants have lynched a good and valuable man. Yes, let us say 'lynched' loudly and clearly: it means the arbitrary administration of drumhead punishment to an innocent person. I could weep with rage and grief."

A *New York Times* editorialist handed down his pronouncement: "The death of Dr. Courtney C. Smith . . . in the face of disruptive action by a small group clamoring for more black power, appallingly underscores the price extorted by these policies of excess."

The *Times's* assumption of a

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Courtney Smith

cause-effect relationship between SASS and the death was repeated in many newspapers. But the *Times* did not see fit to print as news the statement of the Swarthmore Student Council: "The entire college community deeply mourns the death of our President, Courtney Smith. There is no question in our minds of blame or guilt; there is room only for sorrow, not for bitterness."

The Student Council had rejected a simplistic, vindictive response to the death of Courtney Smith. He would have been proud of that reaction, a practice of his preachments. And he would have favored an effort to comprehend the essence of his tragedy, since it goes beyond the death of a man to the life of a nation and its institutions. The tragedy of Courtney Smith is a peculiarly American tragedy, devoid of villains, full of good intentions, ultimately disastrous. Perhaps it is the American tragedy.

Two days before Christmas, 1968, Courtney Smith had the first intimations that his well-ordered world might be coming apart. He received a letter from SASS which began:

"Merry Christmas! Enclosed are the 'clarified' SASS demands you requested some time ago. If you fail to issue a clear, unequivocal public acceptance of these non-negotiable demands by noon, Tuesday, January 7, 1969, the black students and SASS will be forced to do whatever is necessary to obtain acceptance of same."

The demands called for a markedly increased black enrollment which would include so-called "risk" students who were to be provided with support programs. SASS also wanted a black assistant dean of admissions and a black counselor appointed—subject to its review—who would enhance "black perspective" on campus.

The tone of the letter and its mocking greeting seemed out of place on a campus accustomed to the genteel Quaker practice of governance by consensus, and Prof. J. Roland Pennock, chairman of the Swarthmore political science department for more than twenty-five years, has this to say of President Smith's reaction: "He was confronted with non-negotiable demands and rhetoric that did great offense to him. . . . This hurt him bitterly. But he never let himself be moved to anger despite the affront to his standards of civility."

A reasonable man tries to understand the grievance behind a

hurt done to him, and understanding the present necessarily involves the past; to overlook the history of men and nations is to try to comprehend a tragedy without viewing its first act. Courtney Smith's sense of continuity and of debt to the past was strong. Standing there at his office window, the SASS letter in hand, looking out at the ivy cold on the stone tower of the meeting hall and at the winter-gaunt elms, he may well have reflected that other men had planted those elms as a legacy to the present even as the roots of the school reached back to past concepts of excellence and order. Why should that continuum suddenly be threatened in his time of stewardship? The answer he sought lay in the history of the school and in his own history—and in the history of America, written in black and white.

Swarthmore College was founded the year before the Civil War ended, above the verdant banks of a creek ungraciously named Crum. The founders were Quakers of abolitionist persuasion. They believed in the Quakerly ideal that an individual should seek truth and apply whatever truth he finds. (For

the next 80 years, however, this truth-seeking mandate did not lead to the admission of a single Negro student.)

The college prospered and in 1921 began its Great Leap into academic elitism under President Frank Aydelotte, who said he did not care if Swarthmore were 20 years behind the times socially so long as it was 20 years ahead intellectually. A system of seminars was developed that demanded the very best young scholars; only one out of five applicants was accepted and high school valedictorians were a dime a dozen. Intellect kicked and quivered inside the womb of Mother Swarthmore, and she gave forth such graduates as Educator Clark Kerr, '32, and Economist Kermit Gordon, '38.

"Ideas were not part of the 'real world,' a world which existed somewhere beyond the railroad tracks and the Crum meadow," recalls Harriet Shorr Baguskas, '60. "The real world was actuality, facts. Time enough for facts, we knew. Ideas were fabulous and Swarthmore was their kingdom."

There were incursions of reality into the kingdom. The Depression intruded and Swarthmore profes-

sors voluntarily cut salaries 10% to provide funds for needy applicants. In 1933 liberal girl students abolished sororities (a few fraternities still remain today). A few years later the campus bought an ambulance for the Loyalists in Spain and sent it chugging off from Parrish Hall.

But Swarthmore remained generally at ease with the status quo, as Dr. Smith eventually would be at ease with Swarthmore. As the years passed, the college accumulated assets of \$50 million, and it currently enjoys a \$6 million annual income. (A recent survey indicates that nearly 40% of the students' families earned more than \$20,000 a year and that half the fathers had postgraduate degrees.) The insulation of money and education helped to develop a community style on campus—a style that was high-minded, inquiring, industrious and a trifle bloodless. The poet W. H. Auden taught there in the early '40s and recorded this impression in a poem called *A Healthy Spot*:

*They're nice—one would never
dream of going over
Any contract of theirs with a
magnifying
Glass, or of locking up one's let-
ters—also
Kind and efficient—one gets
what one asks for.
Just what is wrong then, that,
living among them,
One is constantly struck by the
number of
Happy marriages and unhappy
people?
They attend all the lectures on
Post-War Problems,
For they do mind, they honestly
want to help; yet,
As they notice the earth in their
morning papers,
What sense do they make of its
folly and horror
Who have never, one is con-
vinced, felt a sudden
Desire to torture the cat or do
a strip-tease
In a public place? . . . **

What sense did they make of the fact that all the coeds picking daffodils in a Crum meadow springtime rite were white, all the school janitors black? It was only in the '40s that a few hand-picked Negroes were admitted; and when Courtney Smith became president in 1953, the campus reflected the tokenism that white America tacitly accepted as the nation's Way of Life. The country was on the eve of the Supreme Court schools' decision, and wellsprings of social unrest were everywhere being tapped. Yet in his inaugural

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A well-ordered world was coming apart

SASS Vice Chairman Don Mizell reads statement in Parrish Hall



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COLLEGE REQUIEM

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address President Smith plainly articulated his beliefs concerning the role of a college in relation to society at large. It was a belief he held as long as he lived and it is central to an understanding of his tragedy.

"I personally find it more helpful," he said, "in thinking of what 'education' should be, to focus on the individual student rather than on the society in which he is to live, though the society must appear somewhere in the background of the picture."

Swarthmore's new president carried among his credentials a special experience that established his dedication to a liberal perspective, an experience unexpected in a man raised in the small Iowa town of Winterset and thereafter insulated in white academia. As a Navy lieutenant (j.g.) during World War II, Dr. Smith had been assigned to represent the interests of Negro sailors at the Pensacola, Fla. training station and he had fought successfully to get them a gymnasium and their own beach facilities. His widow, Betty, the mother of their son and two daughters, recalls: "For two and a half years, he lived their life. He felt every insult, every hurt to his poor lads. He tried desperately to help them. And he had great respect for the leading citizens of Pensacola. He would supply whites with justification for the things they, in their hearts, really wanted to do. 'This is unfair, this is unjust, these are the circumstances,' he would say. And in the end they would say, 'We will do everything we can to help you.'"

The Pensacola City Council cited Courtney Smith for his efforts. One may surely conjecture what constituted good race relations to the city fathers of segregationist Pensacola. Or if the experiences of Lieutenant Smith defending his "poor lads" influenced, a quarter century later, the posture of President Smith faced with demanding black students.

In the same year that he came to Swarthmore, Dr. Smith was named American secretary of the Rhodes Scholarships, charged with choosing the state committees that annually select 32 young Americans to attend Oxford. The scholarships are open to all races and they are awarded on a basis of academic excellence along with such other criteria as overcoming obstacles to achieve character. In 1907, an American Negro, Alain Locke, received a Rhodes. There were no other American black scholars between 1907 and 1953, when Dr. Smith became secretary—nor for nine years after.

"Numbers and dates of black

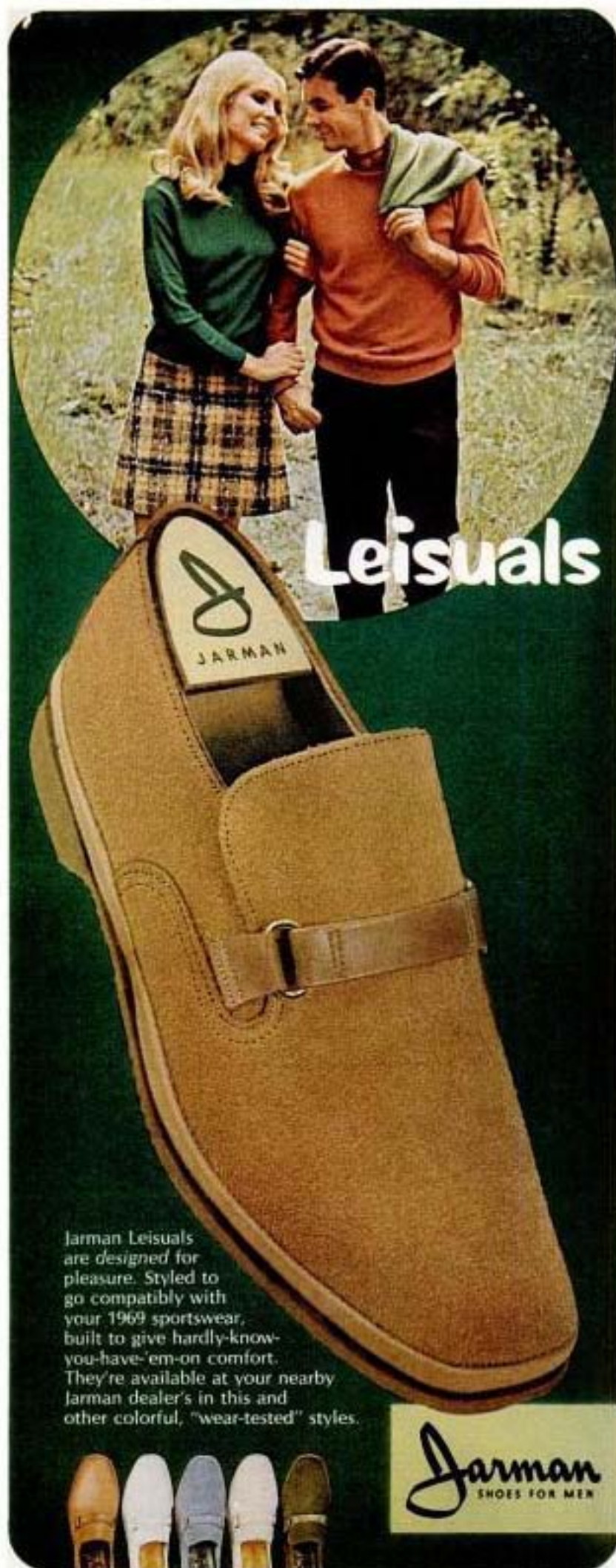
Rhodes Scholars are misleading," according to Gilmore Stott, who worked closely with Dr. Smith in the dual capacities of Swarthmore administrator and Rhodes assistant. "I know that during that time there were several near misses. Courtney always wanted to pick the best man. His experience in race relations went all the way back to the last war. He believed in the power of reason and he didn't think reason had any color."

What Courtney Smith did think was that education was an almost holy truth and that Swarthmore was its temple, resounding to hymns of reason. He ate lunches at his desk, worked late, rarely took vacations, and his dedication was admired by Swarthmore alumni and friends. In 1964 they responded magnanimously to a \$10 million Centennial fund drive, oversubscribing by \$2 million. Six new buildings rose, including a \$3.2 million library and a \$1.3 million dining hall. That the fund-raising brochure, with its photos of college life illustrating "Swarthmore's heritage and its meaning for a new century," contained no dark faces was a fact that passed unnoticed.

During the first 10 years of Dr. Smith's presidency, only 20 Negroes were enrolled. But society was edging up from the "background of the picture." In the 1964 Centennial year, the college received a \$275,000 grant from the Rockefeller Foundation to spur black enrollment. It would appear that the mind of Courtney Smith, so sensitive to injustice in the abstract, was untroubled by Swarthmore's sense of priority: the college would raise \$1.3 million for a dining hall, but would wait for foundation money before intensifying black enrollment. History had conditioned his attitudes, perhaps, even as it had conditioned the attitudes of lesser administrators the country over: Swarthmore (or X College) had, after all, done as much for Negroes as most—and racism, after all, was a campus problem but not the problem. To blacks, of course, the reverse was true. Nobody had done enough, and it was the problem, as Northern unrest and demonstrations throughout the South made clear. But President Smith was equally clear—in the immediate wake of Birmingham, St. Augustine and Selma—on what the college role in relation to society should be. For the December 1965 *Alumni Bulletin*, he expanded his 1953 inaugural theme.

"Something of the activist spirit is doubtless right in our present

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time," he wrote. "But not all the people who sustain segregation are evil. They are ignorant (which should be a concern of social justice) or frightened (which should be a concern of social justice) or complacent (which should be a concern of social justice), but they are seldom evil. And they have minds and hearts that can be reached if we are willing to do something more than carry a placard or mutter, 'Off with their heads.' . . . a college's job, drawing on the contribution of men of intellect and integrity and conscience and good will, is to determine what is social justice, and to help students develop the capacity to determine in subsequent years what is social justice. . . . A college, in short, is the matrix of social justice. It is not, in and of itself, the direct instrument of social justice."

So here was Courtney Smith's declaration of faith in what his college should be: a citadel of wisdom on the darkling plain of society, sending wise, brave and true men and women out through the sally ports each graduation to do battle against ignorance and evil. The Swarthmore graduate, through good works and example, would lay down a patina of excellence on a society whose underside admittedly was unexcellent. This kind of faith was shared by many reasonable white Americans who despised racism but, inside the sanctuary of their own white skin, could not condone socially disruptive tactics in the struggle for right. It was the kind of faith that was second nature to an American who had never been turned away from a service station restroom while his son watched, or been put off by a real estate broker, or been stopped and frisked arbitrarily by a policeman.

But out on the alarm-swept plain of society, black people had been encountering frightening realities and felt their survival in doubt. They sought respite from the chaos of 350 years in America, a chance to overcome humiliation and demonstrate their own excellence. They had observed that the opinions of good white men did little to change black realities; they had come to discover that black action—civil disobedience, carrying a placard, even muttering or shouting "Off with their heads!"—sometimes produced results. Their view of evil was intimate, not abstract, and their conclusions were those of the former slave Frederick Douglass. "Those who profess to favor freedom and yet depreciate agitation," Douglass wrote a hundred years ago, "are men who want crops without plowing up the

ground, they want rain without thunder and lightning. . . . Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will."

Philosophies were in conflict, and by last spring the first tremors of racial unrest had rattled the Swarthmore campus. Blacks—like blacks on campuses and in ghettos the country over—were challenging President Smith's integrationist ethic and embracing the oneness of blackness. Hair was growing out naturally, interracial dating—which only a few years before had been the campus groove—was frowned on. Swarthmore's Afro-American Students Society was displeased about many things. There were few black courses and only one full-time black professor, Asmarom Legesse, who came from Ethiopia. (A black lecturer from the University of Rochester visited Swarthmore one day a week to teach a course in economics.) Blacks—5% of the student body—felt physically swamped and psychologically dubious about the motives of President Smith in having them on campus at all. A black spokesman would write in the student newspaper, *The Phoenix*:

"SASS sees the 'integrationist ethic' as Swarthmore saying, 'We want black students so that we can see how the other half lives. The college hopes that social contact with blacks will abate the racism and prejudice of whites.' By contrast, Swarthmore should place top priority on giving talented young blacks both the competence and the race pride with which to fill the service and leadership vacuum in their own black communities."

President Smith was concerned. Until now, the peppering of the campus had been going nicely, he felt. And comparatively, Swarthmore, 5% black, was doing better than most of her counterparts—3.5% at Harvard, 1.9% at Stanford, 1.7% at the University of Pennsylvania and 0.7% at M.I.T. The existing pool of black talent (as measured by scores on the SATs, the Scholastic Aptitude Tests for college admittance) was shallow and competition, for black students fierce. Like athletic department bird dogs scouting a hotshot quarterback, competing recruiters for belatedly integrating colleges bumped into each other in airports, mumbled evasive excuses for their presence, and scurried off to sign some black sleeper.

When Admissions Dean Fred Hargadon reported that only eight blacks would be entering Swarthmore in the fall of 1968, down

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from a high of 19 four years earlier, President Smith ordered the dean to make a study for the faculty's Admissions Policy Committee. For the first time, Smith singled out race for attention in his annual report, conceding the appearance of black separatism. "There were moments of edginess on these matters during the year," he wrote, "reminding us that our only immunity at Swarthmore adheres in the lively continuance of our community's reasonableness."

On Thursday, Jan. 9 of this year, the Swarthmore immunity ran out. Shortly after noon, SASS chairman Clinton Etheridge led a group of black students into the Admissions office, charging that their Christmas demands had not been met. There was no violence. White administrators left on request and the doors were padlocked behind them. Confrontation had come to a campus of consensus and President Smith had one more week of life.

It was a week that one coed, an English lit major, described as the "best of times, the worst of times." Students and faculty plunged into a series of meetings that continued day and night, a loquacious demonstration of Swarthmore's innate capacity for verbalizing its concern. But in the exciting swirl of debate, the comings and goings of would-be negotiators, President Smith was strangely isolated. He had always kept aloof from the faculty to guard against suspicion of favoritism; he had always kept students at a firm arm's length. Now, in a vulnerable moment, the president found himself alone with his idealism. Having made the initial decision that police would not be called onto the campus, he waited for the faculty and students to assert themselves in the tradition of the Quaker dialogue to which he was devoted.

On the whole, President Smith felt he could depend on his faculty to represent him. But about the students he was ambivalent. Between him and them was a gap of age and style that had brought grief to numerous American campuses, to countless American homes. Like any proud father, he loved the students' brainy enthusiasms but fretted over their judgments. (He jokingly defined them as "short circuits who think they are live wires.") He had been troubled by their participation in civil rights demonstrations, and when they voted to devote an intercollegiate conference to a study of poverty, he discouraged the idea. Courtney Smith shared the anguish of the young but not their sense of urgency, and he saw in

the hurly-burly, push-and-shove of activism a deterrent to learning, an impediment to character development.

While President Smith awaited student reaction to the occupation of the Admissions office that Thursday, one student in particular filled his thoughts: Clinton Etheridge, the 20-year-old chairman of SASS. Etheridge, who came from New York City, was serious, soft-spoken and, like virtually everybody at Swarthmore, relentlessly articulate.

"Courtney always felt that he [Etheridge] had great potential," Mrs. Smith recalls. "Even during the trouble, I remember how pleased he was when Clint's writing in public statements kept improving."

The fact that Etheridge also admired the president only makes more ironic their inability to find a common wavelength. "The condition of black student life in a college like this is something white liberals can't grasp," Etheridge says. "They automatically think they understand the racial scene, but they don't. White men like Courtney—a very good guy—are molding your mind from above, making all decisions from a life style that isn't yours. We need the protection of numbers that Admissions can provide if we're going to keep our black entity intact. When government studies tell you that we're moving toward two societies, what's the point in adopting the integrationist ethic? The world outside is and always has been segregated."

"We felt Swarthmore could be in the vanguard of both social and academic excellence. Swarthmore could play a role in cultivating black brainpower. And not by lowering standards. Look, you can always get a good rap here: the kids are bright and we have a commitment to that atmosphere. But there are a lot of agile black minds going to waste out there for lack of a little college support. Courtney was hung up on academic excellence. But we need a redefinition of it. We need some realistic humanism here."

All but three of 47 campus blacks eventually rallied to the side of SASS. One who did not is Diane Batts, 21. She also was a favorite of President Smith, a doctor's daughter from Philadelphia who worked with Swarthmore's Upward Bound program helping local black high school students prepare for college.

"A few people in SASS formulate policy and impose it on others," she says. "They don't let people think for themselves, browbeating



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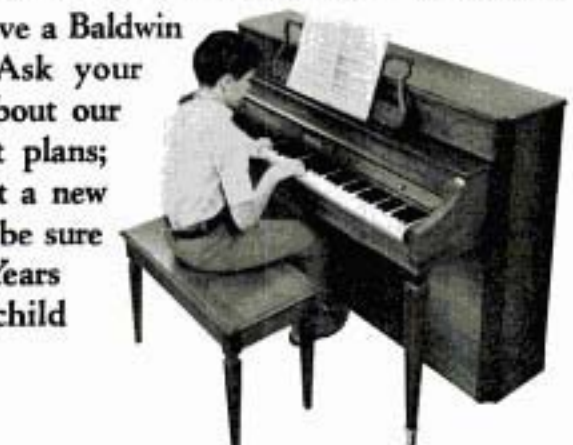
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them and calling them 'Tom' and 'honky.' I'm just not willing to subordinate my individuality for the common thinking. You make an implicit commitment to education when you choose Swarthmore. SASS disregards the fact that it's intellectually tougher here. They say there should be just as many blacks as at a state college, whether or not they qualify. That's reverse paternalism. At the same time, some of them tell cute black chicks: Don't date white! Then they do it. I get cynical."

Though he may have derived some comfort from Miss Batts's views, Dr. Smith, a Quaker by adoption, was uneasy about the activist attitude of another white Quaker, John Braxton, 20 (currently the Student Council president). A year before, Braxton's Quakerliness had impelled him to defy the U.S. military and State Department and sail with other Quakers bearing medical supplies to both North and South Vietnam.

"I don't feel SASS exhausted all channels before sitting in," Braxton says. "But I don't think you ever do. They had exhausted enough so that they were justified—although I objected to padlocking the door, which was symbolic of

force. Neither Courtney nor anyone else in the administration was prejudiced in any strict sense. But they didn't have any real understanding of black, either. Some, like Courtney, had worked so hard to become liberals, and all of a sudden to have people turn around and become separatists, they just couldn't hack it, that's all."

Just couldn't hack it. The verdict is blunt as only youth knows how to be. And so was the verdict of the student body. Before he went to bed that Thursday night, Courtney Smith learned that his students had voted to endorse all the SASS demands.

Easy indictments of others and comforting self-analysis were not Courtney Smith's way; trying to sleep that night, he must have faced his dilemma. To think *if only SASS had waited a month or so* would not be enough for him. The thought had to be carried out to its logical conclusion: *if only Swarthmore had not waited a hundred years*. Other anomalies would be more difficult to handle:

Swarthmore must maintain its standards by rigorously insisting on certain scores for each entering student. Somewhere past each percentile is a requirement

called *commitment to society*. The Swarthmore way, the only rational way, is to count to 10 before taking action that is disruptive. We have counted to 10, and ten hundred, and ten thousand. We have run out of breath to count. A reasonable man, who has been a lieutenant at Pensacola, who has read so much about race, thought so much about race, surely can have the insights of a black man when dealing with racial crisis. *Black is a certain experience. Living it, you understand it; but trying to understand it from the white outside you rarely touch more than the edges. So let black deal with black, a relationship it understands and which you have helped to create.*

Whatever his thoughts that night, when President Smith settled in at his desk the next morning he was preoccupied with a worry beyond race. The previous night's vote had signified not only approval of SASS but an assertion of Student Power. Made restive by a general frustrating inability to control their destinies, students had been inspiring campus protest over issues trivial and significant from San Francisco State to Notre Dame to Howard. It was true that Swarthmore students, strung out on in-

tellect, were more docile than most. But they were high on the kick of youthful self-realization sweeping America, and Courtney Smith was afraid that their resentments, real or imaginary, but fueled by the race issue, might generate a head of steam that would blow off in some nonracial quarter.

Not that the Swarthmore campus was excessively restrictive. "Arcadia-on-the-Crum," as the irreverent called it, did not lack for contemporary innovations. Though rules once said that Swarthmore boys and girls "shall not coast together upon the same sled," there were now *de facto* safe places—certain off-campus houses—where boys and girls studied and slept together, and pot was readily available. Only two years before, students had even been encouraged to participate in a massive, self-searching critique of their school. (What those students who later so vigorously supported SASS were thinking about during the critique is a mystery; nowhere in the 461 pages that were published during the fall of 1967 is there an indication that race presented a problem. It is not even mentioned.)

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COLLEGE REQUIEM

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But the critique was not an issue now. What was the issue was summed up in another report inside President Smith's briefcase, a document that was the catalyst in the Swarthmore crisis presently concentrated in the Admissions office on the floor beneath him. It was the report on Negro enrollment he had requested from Admissions Dean Hargadon. Racially, things had gone downhill since the report's release in mid-October, and President Smith was still baffled, even annoyed, by student reaction to it and to the dean. It seemed to him a very proper report and Dean Hargadon was obviously an excellent man. The rangy, athletic son of a blue-collar worker in suburban Philadelphia, Hargadon had grown up in a biracial neighborhood and squeezed through college on the GI Bill. President Smith felt him uniquely qualified to treat the Negro question and Dean Hargadon agreed.

"I became a liberal, in the classic sense, in college," he says. "And since I went to racially integrated primary schools, I think I have a

good understanding of race. I don't have the same inclination for self-flagellation over racial problems that so many liberals have. I think the report was O.K. and so did Courtney. But SASS and I—we were two ships passing in the night on this."

To vary the metaphor, they were two ships on a collision course. Preparing his report, Dean Hargadon had proceeded full steam ahead, talking to some Negro students "in the halls" but not to Swarthmore's lone black professor, Asmarom Legesse. There was nobody black to consult on the Admissions Policy Committee. There was nobody else black to consult on campus—except the janitors. (One veteran janitor interviewed after the tragedy said: "Courtney Smith was one of the nicest men I ever met in my life. Never too busy to stop and chat. Still, the trouble is with white people who have never lived black telling us what is good for us. I think it's a damn shame that in America you must resort to militancy to get things done.") The report that resulted from Dean Har-

gadon spoke for itself, but it said different things to black and white.

President Smith understood better than most the context of the report. He knew that poverty and racism had teamed to provide the vast majority of black secondary school graduates with inferior educations, leaving most of them not academically up to the prevailing white standards for college admission, as defined by the Scholastic Aptitude Tests. These tests take on a mythic significance, although they are only supposed to be a guide to student potential. Eight hundred is a perfect score on the verbal portion of the test and President Smith was quietly proud of the fact that half of Swarthmore's student body scores a breathtaking 700 or over. Even the Swarthmore blacks recruited with Rockefeller money had tested above 500, bedrock for acceptance.

Dean Hargadon's report had offered a logical presentation of the difficulties of Negro enrollment. But the dean's first statistical table focused on family structure, on how many Swarthmore blacks

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Magill Walk leads to Parrish Hall, where President Smith had his office



came from one-parent homes (he offered no tables comparing black broken homes to white), and he compared his findings with those of the Moynihan report on *The Negro Family*, a document resented by militant and moderate Negroes alike, and noted the coinciding figures. Because of the small number of blacks on campus, other tables made it possible to pinpoint—and embarrass—individuals, and the report departed from pure fact-finding to make critical references to SASS. Though he worried whether Swarthmore could preserve its “integrity and genius” by accepting risk students, Dean Hargadon had the wit and good grace to recall Novelist Peter de Vries’ comment on elite schools: “Of course they graduate the best—it’s all they’ll take. . . . They will give you an education the way the banks will give you money—provided you can prove to their satisfaction that you don’t need it.”

Courtney Smith could smile at that. And he could embrace the white logic of the report. But the ensuing discord was repugnant to him. SASS denounced the report, and the Student Council voted overwhelmingly to back SASS. Dean Hargadon accused the council of making “grandiose and grandstand declarations,” and in language not usual on a campus given to nice-Nellyisms, declared publicly: “So you have been had.”

President Smith stood squarely behind his dean. He wrote to Hargadon: “I want to underline my dismay at the inappropriateness and lack of justification in SASS’s remarks that concerned you and your work in admissions, including Negro admissions. I count on your knowing that I regard your work at Swarthmore as one of the great strengths of the college.”

Courtney Smith had laid himself on the line for the report. But he had a history of backing the decisions of his appointees. Now, with the Admissions office occupied for the second day, did he have any second thoughts? Apparently not. It appears that he was unwilling, or unable, to rethink his liberal position. He knew that he had been good and he assumed that he must be right. There was other experience available, but significantly—for a man who cherished open-mindedness—he did not avail himself of it. In 1962, President Smith had brought John Hoy, Dean Hargadon’s predecessor, to be the school’s first full-time dean of admissions, instructing him to lay the groundwork for an enrollment program which led to Swarthmore’s eventual “5% black.” In 1964 Hoy went on to Wesleyan University in Connecticut, also

a school of academic excellence.

“We corresponded all through the crisis,” Hoy says, “but about other matters. Courtney never asked my advice. He was a very saintly guy, but this had something to do with his tragedy. The Swarthmore style was more Courtney Smith than the other way around and he could not change himself. It takes an excessive, an extraordinary commitment to enroll significant numbers of blacks. Here at Wesleyan, for example, we enrolled 32 Negroes last year with an SAT verbal median 176 points below the total student median. But we didn’t get hung up on SATs. We’d take a bright black kid who was at the top of his class in Jackson, Miss. Top might mean a 450 SAT. But he had the drive, in many ways was already a man, to have battled to get as far as he did in a poor educational system. So far—knock wood—our black academic attrition is about the same as white.” A pause. “Courtney was confronted with something out of control—SASS. It was a shattering experience for him. Figuratively, that was what broke his heart. He had stretched his heart to the limit and it broke.”

On the weekend of Jan. 11 and 12, the third and fourth days of the Admissions office occupation, efforts to resolve the crisis were nothing less than feverish. The faculty had begun Occupation Week with a simple resolution condemning failure to use rational procedures. Now it was shooting out resolutions calling for an Ad Hoc Black Admissions Committee, am-

nesty for demonstrators, revamping of admissions procedures, and appointment of black administrators. Dean of Men Robert Barr, while condemning the occupation tactics, said it was “absolutely correct” that SASS had made the faculty stir itself. If the movement seemed precipitous to President Smith—and given his deliberate nature it surely did—he kept it to himself. But there were some things that his sense of fairness could not suffer in silence.

The Swarthmore biweekly, *The Phoenix*, became a daily during the crisis and it had been doing a fine professional job of full and fair coverage. But the press from the outer world, brimming with bias, was another story. Anguished editorialists, skimming the complex issues, wrung their hands over rebellious black youth. Alumnus Drew Pearson—whose sister was a Swarthmore dean—reported that Clinton Etheridge would flunk out and would blame it on racial discrimination. Pearson also charged that a nonstudent, Sam Jordan Jr., a black militant recently convicted by a Lancaster, Pa. court of carrying incendiary materials, was directing “revolutionary activities” at Swarthmore. Courtney Smith, harried though he was, could not tolerate that sort of thing.

“Speaking for a community that has been trying to resolve a very complex human problem . . .” he said, the article was “inaccurate in a number of respects and thus

obscures the depth and seriousness of concern that all at Swarthmore feel for this problem.”

On Monday, Jan. 13, President Smith appeared before the entire student body for the last time to speak in support of the faculty recommendations. He appealed to SASS for a spirit of mutual trust, also warning that direct action would not be tolerated in any future campus dispute. And then the mask of the presidency slipped and for a moment he was just another man disillusioned with the way life had turned out. “We have lost something precious at Swarthmore,” he said, “the feeling that force and disruptiveness are just not our way.”

The days began to run together now. The president was working late, too late, and at six or seven in the evening his secretary, Mrs. Pierre Decrouez, would say: Do you need anything more? And he would answer: Only time. But there is never as much time left as men suppose.

Courtney Smith had long identified with an Anglo-Saxon poem called *The Seafarer*, the narration of a veteran sailor whose life has been spent in struggle, riding out storms, impelled by a sense of duty and buoyed by faith in God. The poem was on his mind later that week when he talked with senior Nancy Bekavac, a straight-A scholar from a modest Pennsylvania background who was his kind of student. Nancy had captained a victorious Swarthmore team on the College Bowl television quiz and, though opposed to the tactics of SASS, she had voted with other students to use the TV winnings—which eventually totaled \$19,500—to implement a black admissions program. Meeting President Smith outside Parrish Hall, she asked how he felt and he replied, “I think of the Seafarer, Nancy, with the waves breaking over him, who still insists that’s where he wants to be.”

By Thursday, Jan. 16, the shore was in sight—black students and the administration seemed close to accord. Reconstruction would be difficult; the Swarthmore mold had been shattered and it could never be reassembled precisely as it had been. But as the president began the morning walk from his home to Parrish, his liberal’s faith in reason operating through time was strong. And then, suddenly, his time ended.

An antique clock in President Smith’s office, gift of the Class of ’99, ran down that afternoon. The clock still stands on the window ledge, motionless. It has not begun to count the new, uncertain time ahead. No one has had the heart to wind it.

‘We have lost something precious’



Courtney Smith at Swarthmore's 1968 commencement exercises