

My Howard University Semester

by BARBARA E. BEACH '65

LAST semester I studied at Howard University as an exchange student. Howard is a Negro school located in Washington, D. C., with about 8,000 students. The student body at Howard is much more heterogeneous than is our student body at Bucknell, for many reasons. There are many foreign students at Howard. In fact, Howard has the largest proportion of foreign students within its total student body of all the colleges and universities in the United States. Most of the foreign students are from Africa, the Virgin Islands, and India.

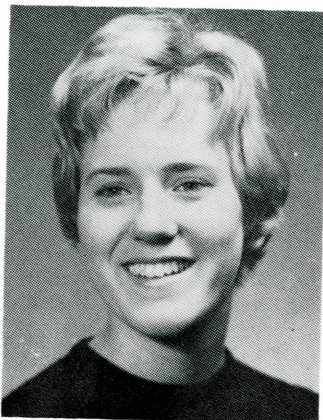
There is much diversity among the American students at Howard also. Because Howard is supported by the federal government its tuition is very low. Consequently students' economic backgrounds vary widely. Students come to Howard from all parts of the country. This factor contributes to diversity among Negroes particularly, since racial attitudes vary so greatly in different parts of our country. Because Howard is located in Washington, many students live in the city and commute to school. Also many students have jobs in the city, and work while attending school. A considerable number of students at Howard did not come to college directly from high school. They are older and have had wider experiences than the average college student.

Howard has graduate schools in almost every field. It has a medical school, dental school, school of pharmacy, religion, fine arts, engineering and architecture, law, social work, and most of the liberal arts. Each of these schools has a fairly large number of students.

A Warm Welcome

I went to Howard on an exchange program between Bucknell and Howard. Before I went I had had very little contact with any Negroes. I have always lived in white neighborhoods and attended white schools. All my life I have been exposed to the stories and beliefs about Negroes which are so prevalent in white societies. I never believed these stories, yet I felt that constant exposure to them could not help but influence my attitude toward Negroes. I felt uncomfortable with this attitude, but because I knew so few Negroes personally, I felt unable to avoid it. Therefore, when I heard about the Bucknell-Howard exchange program, I decided to apply. The purpose of the program is to provide contact between the races, and in this way break down some of the misconceptions about each other which are fostered by segregation.

At Howard I was welcomed warmly and sincerely. Everyone was very friendly and many people made a special



effort to get to know me. Often when I mention this people think that the Howard students were friendly to me because I was white and they wanted to impress me. I do think that the fact that I was white was partly the cause of people's friendliness. However I am certain that they were not trying to impress me. Most people I know at Howard have too much self-respect to think of acting differently for my benefit. Rather, although no one ever told me, I have the feeling that the mere fact that I had come to Howard made people feel kindly toward me, and so they made an effort to show me their kind feelings. No one tried to impress me, nor did anyone make me feel uncomfortable because I was different. If anyone I knew felt any bitterness about our racial problems, it was never directed toward me.

No one was embarrassed to talk about the racial situation (except me, at first). The race problem was not a main topic of conversation, but neither was it avoided or ignored. People were realistic and relatively unemotional about the subject. They treated it as a fact of life which must be faced and adjusted to. They know that many places they go people will not be happy to have them, or will consider them outsiders. They must consider, when planning a career, whether there are opportunities for Negroes in the field of their interest. Their choice of a home where they will be welcome is limited. Often travel is inconvenient because service in restaurants, motels and service stations is limited to whites. The Civil Rights bill has changed much of this, however. Concerning the Civil Rights bill, people at Howard are moderately optimistic but also quite realistic. They consider it more as a step in the right direction than as a cure. People are generally in favor of the goal of the current civil rights movement, but they do not support every group which is a part of the movement. Most of my Negro friends are strongly opposed to radical groups, such as the Black Muslims.

SNCC (Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee) is present on Howard's campus, although the Administration has not granted it University sponsorship. Its members are active, but only a small number of students belong. Many others are not interested or do not approve of the organization.

Interest in Civil Rights

In general, there is a moderate interest in the civil rights movement at Howard. There was some active student and university support of the Civil Rights bill, which was on the floor of Congress while I was at Howard. Our dormitory sponsored a letter-writing campaign, and members of another group on campus visited their senators in support of the bill.

People at Howard had strong feelings for the late President Kennedy. They had respect for him as president, and affection for him as a person. Many girls have pictures of him in their rooms. He will be remembered there for a long time.

(Continued Inside Back Cover)