

Columbia University
in the City of New York

NEW YORK 27, N. Y.

PRESIDENT'S ROOM

June 27, 1949

Dear Amon:

I have just finished talking to you on the telephone and am rewriting the letter that was almost ready for dispatch to you. I shall try to outline briefly some of the concrete problems which I, as President of this University, face from day to day. Possibly our good friend Sid and others may find some interest in them.

As I told you, I am not seeking from you direct financial help for Columbia. I am well aware of, and heartily endorse, the many altruistic ventures that have engaged your attention and of the splendid purposes you have had in mind in establishing the Amon Carter Foundation. Moreover, my particular philosophy of democracy insists upon local and community responsibility as the basis for successful political and social organization. I would be the last to urge the neglect of local problems.

On the other hand, I think that none of us can forget that there must be established and maintained a common understanding of the American system, common appreciation of its values and common devotion to its fundamental purposes. Otherwise, the result would be the loss of national cohesion, and we would begin to fall apart so badly as to give excuse to a dictatorial-minded group or individual to attempt a seizure of power. Consequently, when I talk in terms of national objectives, I know you will not interpret my statements to mean that I minimize the problems of Texas (or of Kansas).

For many years, and particularly during and immediately after the war, I became greatly concerned with what seemed to me to be a progressive change in basic thinking--possibly I mean aspirations--in our country. The ambitions of our pioneering ancestors, as I understand them, were to secure opportunity for social, economic and political betterment under a system that insured individual freedom and complete equality before the law, with no domination by governmental bodies other than that necessary to make certain that liberty did not degenerate into license. In other words, that no individual, while insisting upon his own rights, should trespass upon equal rights of others. Now, many of us seem to want only a powerful and beneficent central government which will insure us nice jobs during our active years, and a comfortable old age when we're too old to work.

It is quite clear that great changes in our economic and industrial life have forced government to intervene more intimately in our daily lives than was the case a century ago. Great concentrations of labor in large cities have become absolutely dependent for the necessities of life upon continuity of employment; great farming regions have become dependent upon the products of industry and upon the continued purchasing ability of our urban centers. Neither group, nor any of the individuals in it, is capable of producing a livelihood out of its own efforts alone. Government cannot ignore the grave consequences of general unemployment; it cannot permit the economic stability of the nation to be subject to the capricious whim of a few men--no matter who they may be. Each of us depends for his daily sustenance upon the efficient operation of communication networks, of railroads, airplanes, etc. In other words, man is no longer a largely self-dependent organism. The conditions of our life make us interdependent and this circumstance has encouraged all of those who naturally lean toward paternalism in government to insist that only through collectivism, with centralized control of all our affairs, can justice, equity and efficiency be maintained.

You and I agree that this type of thinking is completely false. But we must also agree that it has an appeal, and that it can be made to appear quite logical, particularly in those times when our economic system undergoes a "recession." Moreover, the need for constant revision and adaptation in methods and procedures, encourages encroachment upon fundamentals.

There are all shades and varieties of this encroachment upon the foundations of our system. Part of the attack is deliberately made, probably by people who hope to rise to positions of power on the doctrine of collectivism or statism. Such persons have no regard whatsoever for the good of the country but their attack can easily be detected and countered unless we go completely asleep. But there are other individuals who are essentially humanitarian and altruistic in purpose even though they are fuzzy-minded in their thinking. They believe themselves to be "liberals" and in many instances they work unceasingly and devotedly in the promotion of ideas which, if adopted in our country, would merely advance us one more step toward total socialism, just beyond which lies total dictatorship. The problem of our day and time is how to distinguish between all those things that government must now do in order to perpetuate and maintain freedom for all--freedom from economic as well as political slavery--while, on the other hand, we combat remorselessly all those paternalistic and collectivistic ideas which, if adopted, will accomplish the gradual lessening of our individual rights and opportunities and finally the collapse of self-government.

It used to be our simple belief that a day's livelihood, recreation, entertainment and family happiness were earned by a day's sweat and toil. This simple belief seems to have disappeared. Along with it

has gone much of our pride in accomplishment, particularly the accomplishments of artisan, the tradesman and the laborer. When I was a kid I used to hear neighborhood gab fests in terms of "How do you suppose Mrs. X gets her sheets so white? Possibly she boils them so much that they will soon wear out. We will have to ask her!" Implicit in this kind of homely conversation was pride in doing a job well, even if it was only the family laundry. Sometimes it seems that that kind of pride—that kind of dignity—has been lost in a trend toward an attitude that the government owes us a living because we were born.

This is the kind of thing that must be repudiated everywhere. Universities are great centers of research, of investigation, of free thinking. They are conventions of learned men, but to my mind they are meaningless unless they have underlying purposes that transcend mere discovery and imparting of knowledge. They cannot fulfill their mission if they concentrate their efforts only on the material betterment of their graduates. They must be aware of what the human soul craves, socially, politically and economically.

In our case, at least, we find that individual freedom, all the basic rights of free speech, worship, self-government are the very core of all our deepest desires and aspirations. The universities must, therefore, point the way to perpetuation of these and be alert in warning us against all the insidious ways in which freedom can be lost. I do not mean to say that universities should be dogmatic, nor that they should be intolerant of opposition. On the contrary, I believe that they are all the better and the stronger for healthy argument, and, if our system is as correct in its basic principles and purposes, as you and I believe, it can well stand the most pitiless and searching examination—even by enemies. But if the things that we fear as threats to our venerated system are trends brought about by faulty leadership, by shallow thinking, and by sheer neglect, it seems to me that only through education, led by our great and outstanding universities, are we going to get back on the right track.

My own belief is that Columbia University has an outstanding faculty, capable of taking the lead in the study and analysis, from a national viewpoint, of these great social, political and economic problems. I do not mean that other institutions will not be performing equally valid and useful service. But Columbia is singularly free from real or fancied ties to any group, class, section or dogma. It has a high reputation for academic excellence. By using its prestige to lead the way to clear thinking, we will be doing something effective to perpetuate our basic ideals for practice by our grandchildren.

It is in this light that I should like my friends to think of Columbia and of the work to which I am personally dedicated. In order to make progress, much is needed. Some of these needs are represented in great scholars, teachers, etc. Other needs are to make it financially possible for outstanding students from all over the United States to

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come and meet with this great faculty. This means many more scholarships than we now have. Students must study in suitable edifices, equipped with the necessary material things to make instruction feasible.

All this means money in very considerable amounts. Most universities are existing today on deficit financing. I suppose that every university in the land can instantly tick off a number of great projects essential to continued and broad progress along the line which I have indicated, the total cost running into many millions. One, in which I am tremendously concerned, is the establishment here of a Nutritional Center. I have been over the thing time and again. To do it right we need 20 million dollars for building, equipment and endowed faculty. I am convinced that through its establishment all of the great disciplines and great scholars of this University can be devoted to the solving of one of the real problems of today. We have only begun to scratch the surface of what nutrition can do in the promotion of health, enhancement of productive capacity of agricultural lands and in lessening those economic tensions that gradually build into wars and make it more and more difficult for individual freedom to survive in the world.

It is of these ideas and of these hopes for Columbia and our country that I wish you would sometimes talk to our friends in Texas. I personally think that the most magnificent kind of family memorial that any man of wealth could leave behind him would be an edifice or series of scholarships in a great university such as Columbia. These could be named after a Family, a State or both.

The moral and intellectual strength of Columbia is a great power for good in this country. Every year thousands of its graduates go back to their homes all over the nation. Thirty-five hundred of them go annually into the teaching profession. To make sure that they are properly equipped, we need material things--money. This University could use, economically, effectively and immediately, at least 50 million dollars for necessary buildings and equipments, to say nothing of the large sums needed for endowment of teaching staffs. This is not to expand the University in numbers of students. That we do not want to do. We need the money only to give to the students we now have the best in education and understanding.

Forgive this long-winded exposition. Your first reaction will be that I have left nothing for us to talk about when we meet next winter. I assure you that you are wrong. I have not even scratched the surface of what I believe can be done toward the accomplishment of those things in which you and I so earnestly believe and which should be given our attention and support in the great universities of which I consider Columbia one of the foremost.

Please convey my greetings to Mrs. Carter and with warmest regards to you.

Sincerely,

Mr. Amon Carter
Fort Worth Star-Telegram
Fort Worth, Texas

W. S. S.

