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Honor and Dishonor at Mr. Jefferson's University: The Antebellum Years

Jennings L. Wagoner, Jr.

It is a gracious and trusting tradition that allows the president of this Society considerable latitude in selecting a subject for this annual address. I hope I have not violated that trust by proposing to discuss a topic that, by its title, may convey marks of a parochial and narrowly conceived (if not contrived) theme. For a southerner to talk on the southern past is perhaps bad enough; but for one who teaches at the University of Virginia to dare focus on that same institution runs the risk of exceeding all bounds of courtesy and custom, to say nothing of decent historical conventions and canons of scholarship. Still, begging your indulgence, I shall seek to explore with you some possible linkages between cultural ideals and youthful conduct that gave a special cast to student life and identity in antebellum Virginia.

I

My interest in the topic of "Honor and Dishonor at Mr. Jefferson's University"—which could well be subtitled "Saints, Sinners, and Scoundrels"—stems only in part from my current association with the University of Virginia. Indeed, all students of the history of higher education in the United States are challenged to give special consideration to Thomas Jefferson's bold experiment in Charlottesville. At a time when the dominant currents in American higher education were flowing along channels most publicly charted by Jeremiah Day and his colleagues at Yale, Thomas Jefferson proposed an institution novel in many respects. Jefferson, of

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Jennings L. Wagoner, Jr.
President, History of Education Society
1985

course, was not alone in his efforts to introduce changes or reforms in American higher education in the first quarter of the nineteenth century. In contrast to Richard Hofstadter's depiction of the antebellum period as the "age of the great retrogression," Frederick Rudolph a quarter of a century ago (and Freeman Butts even earlier) noted that "in the 1820s dissatisfaction became a movement," if indeed in many cases only an abortive one.¹ Current scholarship rejects the stereotypical view of the period as recent studies have underscored the minor chords of diversity and innovation that were sounded amidst the major themes of conformity and conservatism that characterized many collegiate institutions in the antebellum era.

Even so, we are compelled to recognize the University of Virginia as an exceptional venture in higher education reform in the 1820s. The University of Virginia, referred to paternalistically by Jefferson as "the hobby of my old age" and "the last act of usefulness I can render my country," was indeed a maverick institution.² John Brubacher and Willis Rudy may have exaggerated only a little when they asserted that the University of Virginia was "America's first real state university."³ In terms of chronology, of course, Virginia, chartered in 1819, was a later creation than the state universities of Georgia, North Carolina, Vermont, and some other institutions like Blount College in Tennessee that in time evolved into state universities. But Virginia, although later in time of founding, was truly in advance of the others in terms of institutional characteristics that gave it a distinctive flavor. Jefferson, apostle of the Enlightenment as he was, dedicated the institution to the pursuit of truth, wherever it may lead, and to the toleration of any error, "so long as reason is left free to combat it."⁴ The University of Virginia was to maintain a wall of separation between church and state by having no professor of divinity and by having no affiliation with any religious body. Compulsory chapel and required attendance at Sunday services, customary practices at other colleges and even state universities, had no sanction at Virginia. Moreover, Jefferson's commitment to freedom led him to

¹ Richard Hofstadter and Walter P. Metzger, *The Development of Academic Freedom in the United States* (New York, 1961), 209-21; Frederick Rudolph, *The American College and University: A History* (New York, 1962), 113; R. Freeman Butts, *The College Charts Its Course: Historical Conceptions and Current Proposals* (New York, 1939).

² Thomas Jefferson to Judge Spencer Roande, 9 Mar. 1821, *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. Paul L. Ford, 10 vols. (New York, 1892-1899), 10:189.

³ John S. Brubacher and Willis Rudy, *Higher Education in Transition: A History of American Colleges and Universities, 1636-1976* (New York, 1976), 142.

⁴ Jefferson to William Roscoe, 27 Dec. 1820, *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. Andrew A. Lipscomb and Albert Ellery Bergh, 20 vols. (Washington, D.C., 1903-1904), 15:303.

design a curriculum that encompassed not only the classics but “all the branches of science deemed useful at this day and in this country. . . .”⁵ Students were to be allowed choice in the selection of studies, and professors, with partial restraints on the professor of law and government, were given complete freedom in the selection of texts and the direction of their lectures.⁶

To pursue the working out in practice of any one of these novel designs in collegiate education is a fascinating journey into the mind of Jefferson and the problems inherent in the institutionalization of ideas. However, in this essay, I would direct our attention to one specific ideal, the gentleman's code of honor, and the fusion—and confusion—of that ideal with the realities of adolescent life and the special dynamics of an agrarian social order marked by class and caste distinctions. Until recent years, the concept of “the Southern Gentleman” has been too easily caricatured and shrouded with the romance of the Cavalier legend to be taken seriously by scholars. But recent studies by Bertram Wyatt-Brown and Edward L. Ayers, among others, have persuasively demonstrated that attention to the ethics sanctioned by the concept of honor can add significantly not only to our understanding of genteel behavior but can serve as well to illuminate the darker and cruder side of life in the antebellum South.⁷

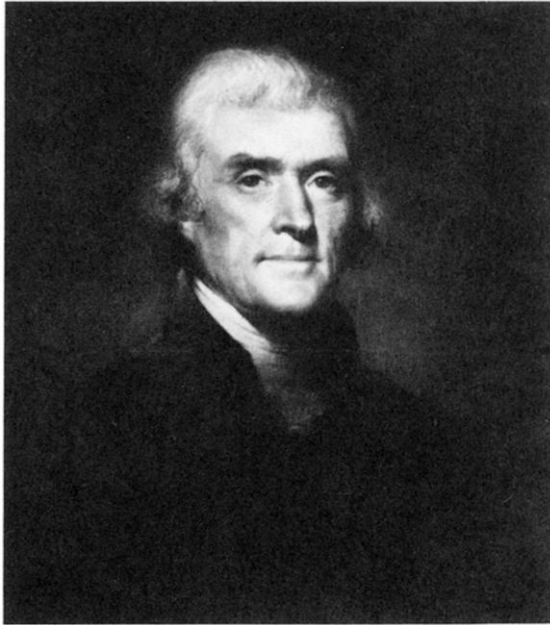
Honor is a term not easily defined and one more easily misunderstood than understood in our urban, industrialized, atomistic society. Modern psychology as well as the pressures of existence and achievement in a capitalistic society emphasize individualism, not community, “doing

⁵ Jefferson to Littleton Waller Tazewell, 5 Jan. 1805, *Thomas Jefferson, Writings*, ed. Merrill D. Peterson (New York, 1984), 1151.

⁶ Jefferson's antipathy to the doctrines of Federalism and his lingering bitterness from earlier struggles with Alexander Hamilton and John Marshall culminated in a resolve to keep Federalist political views from contaminating the minds of Virginia students. In an effort to insure that students of law and government at Virginia would be exposed to “proper” political ideas, the Visitors of the university agreed to prescribe certain texts, i.e., John Locke's *Second Treatise on Government*, Algernon Sydney's *Discourses on Government*, the Federalist papers, the Declaration of Independence, and James Madison's Virginia Resolutions of 1798. At Madison's suggestion, George Washington's “Farewell Address” was added to the list. See Leonard W. Levy, *Jefferson and Civil Liberties: The Darker Side* (Cambridge, Mass., 1963), 151-57.

Standard sources on Jefferson's ideas concerning the University of Virginia include Philip A. Bruce, *History of the University of Virginia, 1819-1919: The Lengthened Shadow of One Man* (New York, 1920); Herbert Baxter Adams, *Thomas Jefferson and the University of Virginia* (Washington, D.C., 1888); and John S. Patton, *Jefferson, Cabell, and the University of Virginia* (New York, 1906). See also Dumas Malone, *Jefferson and His Time* (Boston, 1981), vol. 6, *The Sage of Monticello*, 417-18.

⁷ See Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (New York, 1982); and Edward L. Ayers, *Vengeance and Justice: Crime and Punishment in the 19th-Century American South* (New York, 1984).



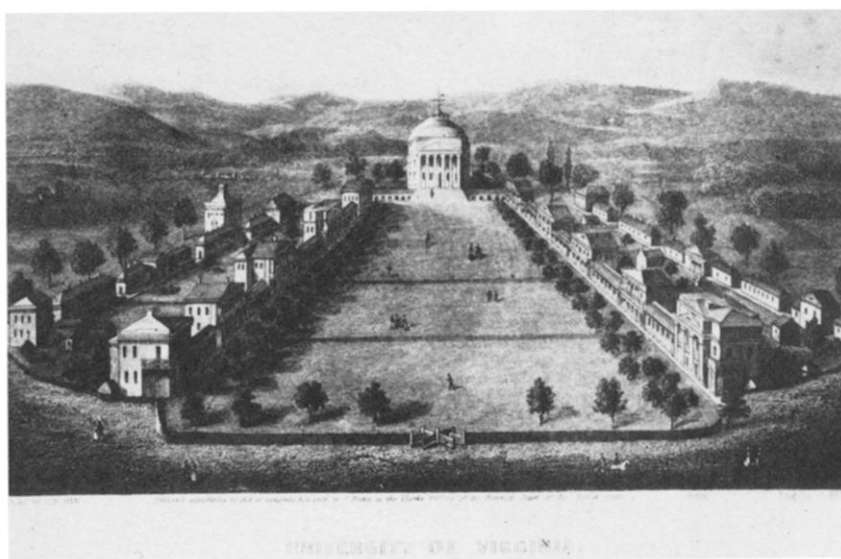
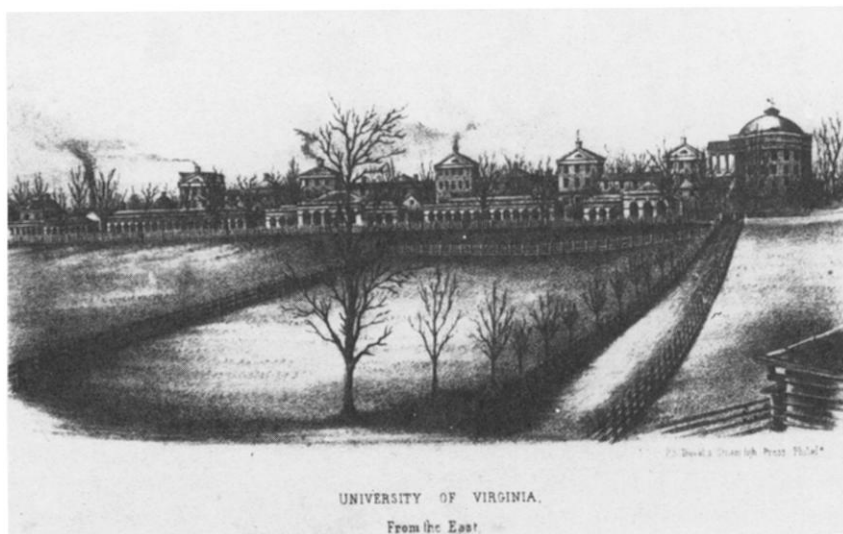
Thomas Jefferson. Portrait by Rembrandt Peale, 1800. The White House Collection. Courtesy of University of Virginia Library.

your own thing,” not respect for traditions and custom. In traditional societies, however—and the antebellum South must be approached in that context—ethics and behavior are determined by and circumscribed by community mores. In a general sense, then, honor refers essentially to an accepted code of conduct by which judgments of behavior are ratified by community consensus. Honor is characterized by “an overweening concern with the opinions of others”; one’s sense of self-worth and identity are inseparable from one’s reputation in a culture of honor.⁸ The anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu asserts that for those within the circle of honor, “the being and truth about a person are identical with the being and truth that others acknowledge in him.”⁹

My colleague Edward Ayers has emphasized in his recent study of crime and punishment in the nineteenth-century American South that honor did not reside only within the planter class; “Southern white men among all classes believed themselves ‘honorable’ men and acted on that belief.” Yet, as Ayers and others have also noted, the demands of the

⁸ Ayers, *Vengeance and Justice*, 19.

⁹ Pierre Bourdieu, “The Sentiment of Honor in Kabyle Society,” in *Honor and Shame: The Values of Mediterranean Society*, ed. Jean G. Peristiany (London, 1966), 212.



University of Virginia from East, about 1850, Duval lithograph, and view from the South, 1856, Bohn engraving. Courtesy of Manuscripts Department, University of Virginia Library.

southern honor culture did not create one temperament, one personality, or a single mode of response to real or imagined affronts to one's honor. Among the more established families of the gentry ranks, a sense of noblesse oblige and disciplined rectitude might mark the path of honor. Among that same class, as well as within the lower orders, however, violence and insolence could also be spawned by the presumed dictates of honor.¹⁰

Bertram Wyatt-Brown has helped to sharpen our understanding of southern honor by distinguishing between two closely related, symbiotic manifestations of the ethic. Wyatt-Brown has argued that while a general culture of "primal" honor encircled all white classes in the antebellum South, some members of the southern aristocracy adhered to a more specialized and refined concept of honor, that of "gentility." Gentility coupled moral uprightness with high social position. Among the slaveholding gentry of colonial and antebellum Virginia, there existed a sustained and self-conscious effort to perpetuate the culture of the English aristocracy.¹¹ Subtle marks of status—manners, proper forms and topics of speech, tastes in clothing styles and home furnishings—were among evidences of class and social standing that mattered enough to be consciously passed on from one generation to the next in the "better" southern families and to be sought after hungrily by new claimants to gentry status.¹²

However subtle and artificial some characteristics of gentility were, three components demand special note. In the first instance, sociability reigned as the supreme grace of the southern gentry. Sociability encompassed much more than the accustomed demands of southern hospitality. It included skill in conversation and games, an affable and gregarious spirit, and the display of masculinity. Northern men of culture, whose ideal of gentility emphasized dignity, reason, sobriety, and caution, were on occasion both repelled by and attracted to the more generous and expressive life-style of Southern planters.¹³ Henry Adams's description of his Virginia classmates at Harvard in the 1850s pointedly captured the ambivalent attitude of northern gentry toward their southern counterparts. Adams thought the Virginians "as little fitted" for the demands of intellectual rigor "as Sioux Indians to a treadmill," but admitted that they enlivened campus life. His description of William Henry Fitzhugh

¹⁰ Ayers, *Vengeance and Justice*, 19; Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 61, 114.

¹¹ See, for example, Bernard Bailyn, "Politics and Social Structure in Virginia," *Shaping Southern Society: The Colonial Experience*, ed. T. H. Breen (New York, 1976), 200-201.

¹² See Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, chap. 4.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 96 and passim; see also Stow Persons, *The Decline of Gentility* (New York, 1973).

Lee ("Rooney") emphasized several dimensions of the image of sociability that were marks of planter gentility. Saying that Rooney Lee "had no mind; he had temperament," Adams also described him as "tall, largely built, handsome, genial, with liberal Virginian openness towards all he liked."¹⁴ The *arete* of the southern man of honor rested upon his agreeable appearance as well as his pleasant and manly personality.

Inherent in Adams's description of Rooney Lee was a commentary on a second ingredient of southern gentility, education or learning. Rooney Lee notwithstanding, members of the southern gentry valued learning, especially classical literature. Few, however, either in Jefferson's generation or especially in those that followed, were as dedicated and sincere in their pursuit of knowledge as was the Sage of Monticello. As Wyatt-Brown commented when describing the formidable list of authors Jefferson recommended to his nephew, Peter Carr, the young Virginian probably found the advice "more depressing than inspirational."¹⁵ Jefferson may well have represented an ideal unattainable by most, but still the lure of learning formed a part of gentry culture.

For most southern gentry, however, a veneer of learning would suffice. The South Carolina essayist William J. Grayson had his priorities straight in southern terms when he wrote that "The end of education is to improve the manners, morals, and the mind of the Student."¹⁶ Those southerners of the antebellum period who attempted to put improvement of the mind first could easily find themselves removed and isolated from even their peers in the planter class. Still, southern romance with traditional ethics and virtue, fondness for classical allusions in social as well as political discourse, and respect for learning when balanced with other traits of honor all attest to its importance as a mark of gentility.

Southern gentry shared a third element of honor with their northern brethren, but here again the order of priorities between northern and southern gentry differed significantly. Christian piety, with its associated moral barometer driven by a sense of conscience and guilt, became fixed in the minds and souls of the Yankee gentry much earlier and much more deeply than in those of the inhabitants of the South. Not until late in the antebellum period did evangelical Christianity severely alter the dominant characteristics that defined the ideal southern gentleman. The anticlerical tradition associated with Jefferson and other southern gentry under the spell of the rationalism of the Enlightenment, coupled with planter re-

¹⁴ Henry Adams, *The Education of Henry Adams: An Autobiography* (Boston, 1918), 56-59.

¹⁵ Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 94.

¹⁶ William J. Grayson as quoted in *ibid.*, 92.

sistance to church power and patronage, served to limit the status of ministers and diminish the appeal of the church in much of southern society. According to Wyatt-Brown, only a fifth to a third of all southern whites before the Civil War were churchgoers.¹⁷

Patterns of church attendance and gentry suspicion of Anglican and later evangelical ministers should not be taken to imply that religion played no part in the shaping of the southern concept of honor. As Elizabeth and Eugene Genovese have stressed, in the lives of common and rural folk especially, Christianity and Christian institutions (which included old field schools, academies, and Sunday Schools as well as congregational worship) played an important role in disseminating social and religious values among antebellum southerners. In contrast to northern practice, christenings, weddings, and funerals were more commonly performed in southern homes than in churches; thus in the South “the household and the church divided institutional responsibility for Christian practices and ceremonies.”¹⁸ Christian precepts were deemed important, and there did exist pious gentry as well as yeomen (and slaves) who were guided in their conduct by scriptural advice and promptings of conscience. But in terms of the southern gentry code throughout most of the antebellum period, the secular components of honor tended to weigh more heavily than did the teachings of the New Testament.

Here again Jefferson serves as a model, however elevated, of the gentry attitude toward ethics. Referring to Jesus as perhaps the greatest teacher of morals the world has known, Jefferson again advised his nephew, Peter Carr, to study the classics as well as the scriptures as guides to right living. Jefferson counseled further:

Give up money, give up fame, give up science, give [up] the earth itself and all it contains rather than do an immoral act. And never suppose that in any possible situation or under any circumstances that it is best for you to do a dishonourable thing however slightly so it may appear to you. Whenever you are to do a thing tho' it can never be known but to yourself, ask yourself how you would act were all the world looking at you, and act accordingly.¹⁹

As with his uncle's advice regarding disciplined study of the classics, Carr no doubt felt Jefferson's prescription much too demanding, yet it is significant to note in this instance that Jefferson's measure for good conduct was the voice of community approval, not God's judgment. To

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, xviii.

¹⁸ Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene D. Genovese, “The Old South Considered as a Religious Society,” *National Humanities Center Newsletter*, 6 (Summer 1985): 1-6.

¹⁹ Jefferson to Peter Carr, 19 Aug. 1785, *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. Julian P. Boyd, 21 vols. (Princeton, N.J., 1950-), 8:406. Cf. Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 99.

Jefferson and later southern gentry, "quiet conscience" and "private esteem" could not be disassociated from "public honour."²⁰

Sociability, learning, and piety—in descending order of importance—thus formed the framework for judging "honorableness" among the southern gentry. But, as suggested earlier, the bounds of honor went beyond the gentry class. Self-respect to the descendants of Yankee Puritans may have rested upon conscience or conformity to an inner voice, but to antebellum southerners of all ranks, self-respect was inseparable from reputation or the judgment of others. Those who lacked honor lacked reputation. Their penalty was shame, not a guilty conscience, for "to those whose god is honor, disgrace alone is a sin."²¹

In a perceptive essay detailing patterns of discipline in five mid-Atlantic colleges, Phyllis Vine emphasized that in the eighteenth century, honor and shame were the prevailing modes of maintaining order and encouraging genteel behavior in that region of the country. Vine, along with David Allmendinger and others, points out, however, that by the close of the eighteenth century discipline sanctioned by the concepts of honor and shame was giving way in northern colleges to appeals to self-control.²² Public censure or praise was becoming victim of an increasingly diversified student population and to wider acceptance of legal and Christian (that is to say restrained, inward-looking, and conscience-driven) reinforcers of conduct. That shift in public as well as collegiate sensibilities in the North would not find its parallel in the South until much later in the century. If once there had been a moral perspective that embraced both North and South, a culture of honor that rested upon public approval or disapproval, then by the early antebellum period that regional kinship was broken. While northern conventions changed, southern mores remained imbedded in traditions earlier transplanted and nurtured by English and northern European forebearers.²³

²⁰ Jefferson to Carr, 6 Aug. 1788, *Papers of Jefferson*, ed. Boyd, 13:470. Cf. Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 100. That Jefferson could indeed feel the pangs of conscience and contemplate God's judgment is pointedly suggested in his musings on the injustice of slavery and his statement: "Indeed I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just: that his justice cannot sleep for ever. . . ." Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, ed. William Peden (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1954), 163.

²¹ Daniel J. Boorstin, *The Americans: The National Experience* (New York, 1965), 211.

²² See Phyllis Vine, "Preparation for Republicanism: Honor and Shame in the Eighteenth-Century College," in *Regulated Children/Liberated Children: Education in Psychohistorical Perspective*, ed. Barbara Finkelstein (New York, 1979), 44-62; David F. Allmendinger, Jr., *Paupers and Scholars: The Transformation of Student Life in Nineteenth-Century New England* (New York, 1975), esp. chap. 7; and Steven J. Novak, *The Rights of Youth: American Colleges and Student Revolt, 1798-1815* (Cambridge, Mass., 1977).

²³ Cf. Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 19; and Ayers, *Vengeance and Justice*, 19-20.

With these perspectives in mind, we can now turn our attention to the role of honor and dishonor in the scenarios sketched by the saints, sinners, and scoundrels at the University of Virginia during the antebellum period. Perhaps this deeper examination of student conduct in relation to the concept of honor will enable us to move beyond some of the more conventional assumptions that currently exist in the literature and, more importantly, will underscore the institutional diversity that existed in the antebellum era. It may well be, as one observer noted, that Virginia students were "a set of pretty wild fellows," but perhaps there is more to be said than that.²⁴

II

Honor as understood by Jefferson and as it became manifested in the actions of students at his university grew from the same southern soil. However, the concept of honor bore fruit of a different variety in the mind of the aged founder of the University of Virginia from that in the minds of many of the young sons of "Southern gentlemen" who ventured there, some to study, others perhaps less inclined toward that collegiate purpose.

In creating his university, Jefferson had hoped to provide an intellectual and moral environment that would bring out the best, not the worst, habits and conduct on the part of the students. His plan for an academical village in which professors and students would live and study in close proximity was a deliberate effort to encourage rapport and respect among the members of the university community. His insistence that only the ablest professors should fill the chairs at his university led him beyond the borders of the United States in engaging his initial corps of professors. Five of the original eight professors at the University of Virginia were European. George Long, a fellow at Trinity College, Cambridge, was only twenty-five when he was chosen to be the first professor of ancient languages at the university. Thomas H. Key, a Master of Arts from Trinity College, was engaged to teach mathematics. Dr. Robley Dunglison, who had studied medicine in London and Germany, filled the chair of anatomy and medicine. Key and Dunglison were both twenty-six. Charles Bonnycastle, who became the first professor of natural philosophy at the age of thirty-three had studied at the Royal Military Academy, where his father was a member of the faculty. George Blaeterman, of German descent, was hired to teach modern languages. His

²⁴ Henry Barnard as quoted by Joseph F. Kett, *Rites of Passage: Adolescence in America 1790 to the Present* (New York, 1977), 54. Kett provides a succinct review and critique of major historical explanations for student disorder, 54-59.

more advanced age, thirty-seven, earned him the not always affectionately applied nickname of "Old Blaet." Along with a trio of Americans—John Emmet in chemistry, George Tucker in moral philosophy, and John T. Lomax in law—Jefferson's corps of professors, "full of youth, talent, and energy," set out to give students the capacity to be ethical, moral, and democratic rather than to instill in them the dictates of Christian piety and morals.²⁵ However, the youthfulness of some of the professors and their apparent lack of solicitude for the personal bearing and society of the students rather quickly provoked friction not unlike that which fueled the wars between the students and the tutors at colonial colleges.²⁶ Equally significant, the professors' position of authority, their more serious and scholarly orientation, and the ethical code they embraced generated numerous "clashes of honor" between the faculty and the students.

Jefferson had established the university upon the principle of freedom, for students as well as the faculty. In doing so, Jefferson was aware of the risks involved, especially in the realm of student conduct. In a letter to Thomas Cooper, several years before the university opened, Jefferson voiced his concern in this manner:

The article of discipline is the most difficult in American education. Premature ideas of independence, too little repressed by parents, beget a spirit of insubordination, which is the great obstacle to science with us, and a principle cause of its decay since the revolution. I look to it with dismay in our institution, as a breaker ahead, which I am far from being confident we shall be able to weather.²⁷

Jefferson endeavored to gather information from colleges and universities in both Europe and America regarding their policies toward student discipline. He studied the rules of Harvard and numerous other colleges in an effort to learn how other institutions weathered the seas of student rowdiness. As much as he was concerned about the deportment of any large body of young men brought together over an extended period of time, he nonetheless decided to chart a liberal course. The long lists of rules and regulations and specified fines and penalties so common at other colleges were not allowed to set the tone for the University of Virginia. Adopting a posture in some ways more in keeping with changing

²⁵ Joseph C. Cabell to Jefferson, 25 May 1825, *Early History of the University of Virginia as Contained in the Letters of Thomas Jefferson and Joseph C. Cabell*, ed. Nathaniel F. Cabell (Richmond, 1856), 354; Charles Coleman Wall, Jr., "Students and Student Life at the University of Virginia, 1825 to 1861" (Ph.D. diss., University of Virginia, 1978), 6.

²⁶ See, for example, Kathryn McDaniel Moore, "The War with the Tutors: Student-Faculty Conflict at Harvard and Yale, 1745-1771," *History of Education Quarterly* 18 (Summer 1978): 115-27.

²⁷ Jefferson to Thomas Cooper, 2 Nov. 1822, *Crusade against Ignorance: Thomas Jefferson on Education*, ed. Gordon C. Lee (New York, 1961), 79-80.

northern attitudes than with traditional southern “honor” values, Jefferson rejected fear as a way of dealing with the young. Jefferson stated in the report detailing his plans for the university:

The human character is susceptible of other incitements to correct conduct, more worthy of employ, and of better effect [than fear]. Pride of character, laudable ambition, and moral dispositions are innate correctives of the indiscretions of that lively age; and when strengthened by habitual appeal and exercise, have a happier effect on future character than the degrading motive of *fear*. Hardening them to disgrace, to corporal punishments, and servile humiliations cannot be the best process for producing erect character. The affectionate deportment between father and son offers in truth the best example for that of tutor and pupil. . . .²⁸

Jefferson was still reaching for this ideal familial relationship when he informed his granddaughter in the summer of 1825 that the university officials “studiously avoid too much government” and treat the students “as men and gentlemen, under the guidance mainly of their own discretion. They so consider themselves,” he added, “and make it their pride to acquire that character for their institution.”²⁹

Such sentiments cannot be easily discounted. After all, Jefferson and his peers on the Board of Visitors—James Madison, James Monroe, and Senator Joseph Cabell, among other notables—were men of high ideals and noble purpose and expected the same from students supposedly drawn from the finest southern families. In an effort to encourage Virginia students to assume a sense of responsibility and maturity in matters of conduct, the Visitors had placed the reins of discipline in the students’ own hands. Not the Board of Visitors or the faculty, but a student-run Board of Censors was to exist as the principal judicial body. Should sin or scandal dare emerge, this student court was to sit in judgment in all but extreme cases of misconduct.³⁰

In addition to establishing a form of student self-government and minimizing regulations, Jefferson and the Visitors institutionalized a principle jealously respected by men of honor, that is, that a gentleman’s word is to be taken as his bond, and further, that no man should be

²⁸ [Thomas Jefferson], “Report of the Rockfish Gap Commission Appointed to Fix the Site of the University of Virginia,” 4 Aug. 1818, in *Theories of Education in Early America, 1655-1819*, ed. Wilson Smith (Indianapolis, 1973), 334.

²⁹ Jefferson to Ellen Randolph Coolidge, 27 Aug. 1825, *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. Lipscomb and Bergh (Washington, D.C., 1903), 18:341.

³⁰ “Riotous, disorderly, intemperate, or indecent conduct,” fighting, or giving or accepting a challenge to a duel were among offenses that could warrant immediate suspension or expulsion by action of the faculty. *Enactments by the Rector and Visitors of the University of Virginia* (Charlottesville, 1825), 8-9.

compelled to inform on another. The 1825 *Enactments of the University* thus stated: "When testimony is required from a student, it shall be voluntary, and not on oath. And the obligation to give it shall be left to his own sense of right."³¹ Jefferson's belief in the inalienable rights of man was paralleled by his faith in man's innate moral sense. The sanctity of a gentleman's word was certainly a fundamental precept in the southern code of honor. However, equally certain is the fact that many who laid claim to the title of "gentleman," at the University of Virginia as elsewhere in the South, were much more in tune with the dispositions and prejudices of their culture than with the rationalistic or theistic stirrings of an inner voice.

In many respects, the students who enrolled at the University of Virginia were not measurably different from what Jefferson had expected. Unlike their counterparts at Harvard, Princeton, and many other northern colleges, antebellum students at Virginia were remarkably homogeneous in terms of geographic origin, social class, and age. From the opening of the university in 1825 through the end of the Civil War, virtually every student came from Virginia or other southern states. Many non-Virginians who attended the university were sons of families that had emigrated from the Old Dominion to other southern states in the 1830 to 1860 period. While only 8 percent of the students at South Carolina College came from outside that state in the period from 1805 to 1862, 41 percent of those attending the University of Virginia from 1826 to 1847 were from southern states other than Virginia.³²

Also in contrast with profiles of northern college students in the antebellum era, students at Virginia were typically sons of fairly well-established planters or of professional men or merchants living in cities. The University of Virginia was the most expensive as well as the most prominent college in the South and its students were drawn from the upper class of the region.³³ Recent research by Charles Wall has documented the fact that the overwhelming majority of Virginia students, both in-state and out-of-state and from urban as well as rural homes,

³¹ *Ibid.*, 10.

³² Wall, "Student Life at U. Va.," 44.

³³ Throughout the 1825 to 1860 period Virginia students paid \$75 a session for tuition. Comparable figures for other colleges in the 1830s and 1840s include Harvard, \$71; South Carolina, \$50; and Yale, Princeton, and Alabama, \$40. Total expenses for Virginia students (including room, board, supplies, and personal expenses as well as tuition) reached into and above the \$400 level, roughly twice the amount estimated to be the annual cost of an education in the 1840s at Yale, Princeton, and Harvard. See Wall, "Student Life at U. Va.," 66-67; and Ernest P. Earnest, *Academic Procession: An Informal History of the American College, 1636 to 1953* (Indianapolis, 1953); and Allmendinger, *Paupers and Scholars*, 50-51.

came from the slave-owning class.³⁴ Thus, at a time when many young men from middle and lower economic classes were joining the student ranks at many northern colleges, the Virginia student population more closely resembled that of Oxford, described by Lawrence Stone as consisting of "sons of well-to-do gentry, clergy, professionals, and businessmen."³⁵ Predominant in numbers and influence, these sons of privilege set the tone that determined the prevailing attitudes and life-style of the student culture at the university. Students of more humble origins or more pietistic demeanor apparently were responsive to warnings that they should stay clear of the "godless university" that catered to "rich men's sons."³⁶

The age distribution of Virginia students further identifies them as a wealthy and privileged group. Since the University of Virginia was designed to serve as a graduate or professional school (as well as a college) and students were expected to have attended or graduated from other colleges before entering Virginia, the average age at matriculation was several years higher than at other colleges of the period. However, research by Wall has shown that Virginia students were remarkably homogeneous in age, indicating a steady progression through the preparatory schools, academies, and colleges before entering the university. Unlike a significant percentage of New England students of the same period, it was a rare student at Virginia who postponed or interrupted his collegiate studies to tend school or engage in some other occupation in order to earn money for college expenses. Although after the mid-1840s state scholarships were created for deserving students from each of the state's thirty-two senatorial districts, the established character of the institution remained essentially constant during the antebellum period.³⁷

Certainly some of the gentry students who attended the University of Virginia were serious and scholarly in disposition. Student letters, diaries, and autobiographies reveal that some students pursued their studies with resolve and commitment. For those who aspired to a diploma,

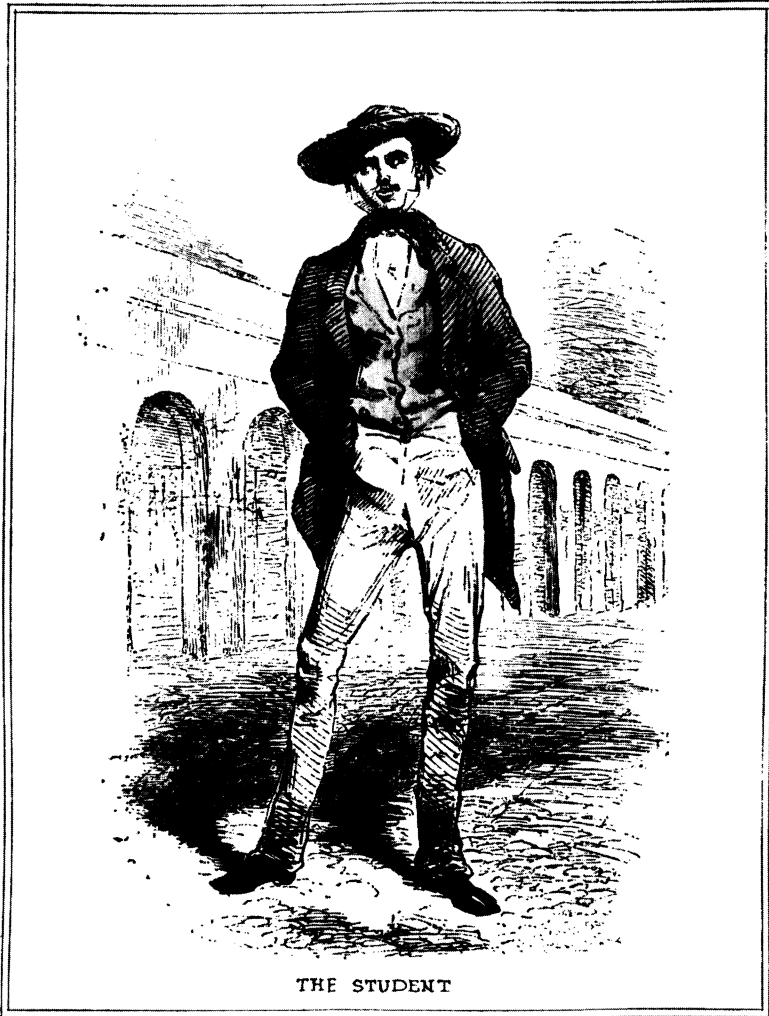
³⁴ Wall, "Student Life at U. Va.," 44-49.

³⁵ See *ibid.*, 35; and Lawrence Stone, "The Size and Composition of the Oxford Student Body, 1850-1910," in *The University in Society*, ed. Lawrence Stone, 2 vols. (Princeton, N. J., 1974), 1:74.

³⁶ On the infidel image of Jefferson and the University of Virginia see Merrill D. Peterson, *The Jeffersonian Image in the American Mind* (New York, 1962), 127-29.

³⁷ Wall, "Student Life at U. Va.," 49-54. Apparently without exaggeration a student wrote his father in 1853 that "many state [scholarship] students here are *heirs to estates of considerable value.*" Wall contends that a number of the scholarship students were sons of Virginia gentry who had met with financial setbacks or failures or were temporarily short of available cash for college expenses. See *ibid.*, 64; and Edward St. George Cooke to John R. Cooke, 11 Dec. 1853, Edward St. George Cooke Collection, Accession no. 2974, Manuscripts Department, University of Virginia Library.

SKETCHED NOVEMBER 1853 AT
THE UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA.



THE STUDENT

It gives me great pleasure to say that, although the vivacity of these blooded colts at the University frequently leads them into all sorts of deviltries and excesses, they have almost invariably the manners of gentlemen. P. C. 1853

Sketch of student by Porte Crayon, 1853. Courtesy of Manuscripts Department, University of Virginia Library.

demanding examinations had to be passed with distinction. Apparently typical of those students who took their studies seriously was Albert Howell of Tennessee, who, reflecting upon the previous session's law examinations in which only thirteen out of over sixty aspirants passed, commented that "It is reduced to a certainty that if a fellow graduate, he is compelled to study, even then his case is rather doubtful if his luck be bad." Another diligent student in the 1850s observed with no hint of irony: "I think it is the last place in the world for a lazy man to try to enjoy himself."³⁸

Not all students, however, were prepared by temperament or prior education to accept the academic demands and the associated freedom of the university. The majority of students in the antebellum period attended the university for only one session and only a small percentage earned the title of "Graduate" from one of the schools, let alone the demanding Master of Arts degree that was instituted in 1832.³⁹ Between 1825 and 1874, 55 percent of the students lasted only one session; only 11 percent enrolled for three years.⁴⁰ While the elective system and the rigorous examinations motivated serious students, the emphasis on self-discipline discouraged those not so inclined. Many, perhaps most of the students at the University of Virginia during the antebellum period came to the institution less out of a desire to advance in scholarly terms than to advance or secure their position in social terms. Merely attending the University of Virginia in the company of other southern gentlemen improved one's standing as a member of the elite of southern society. As a consequence, "men of leisure" constituted a very real and markedly disruptive segment of the university population.⁴¹

³⁸ Albert Howell to George W. Keese, 13 Nov. 1851, and Albert H. Snead to Howell, 30 Nov. 1856, as quoted in Wall, "Student Life at U. Va.," 57.

³⁹ The University of Virginia did not offer customary academic degrees at the time of its founding except for the degree of Doctor of Medicine. Rather, a student who could pass a rigorous examination in one or more of the schools of the university could qualify for a diploma that declared him to be a "Graduate of the University of Virginia." Jefferson intended that the diploma signify advanced or graduate level accomplishment. The Master of Arts degree was instituted in 1832 and was bestowed upon any student who earned diplomas in ancient languages, mathematics, natural philosophy, chemistry, and moral philosophy. The Bachelor of Laws degree was introduced in 1840 and by 1848 the university admitted to the necessity of establishing the Bachelor of Arts degree. See Bruce, *History*, 2:135-40; and Patton, *Jefferson, Cabell, and the University*, 326-31.

⁴⁰ Wall, "Student Life at U. Va.," 55.

⁴¹ The University of Virginia's social appeal as a "finishing school" was noted by its description as "the *ne plus ultra*—the overtopping climacteric of a polite education" in "The University: Its Character and Wants," *Southern Literacy Messenger*, 23 (Sept. 1856): 241.

III

Both in spite of and because of the idealistic—and honorable—plane on which the University of Virginia was established, disorder marked the university almost from the very beginning. Just as God found that He had little time to relax after His great act of creation, so too did Jefferson find serpents in his Eden. Virginia students, most of whom were accustomed to the free country life of the plantation, were disdainful of restraints or restrictions not imposed by parental right. Impressed by a code of honor that, when distorted, exalted privilege over responsibility and haughtiness over humility, some students rather quickly turned the university into what one officer described as a state of “insubordination, lawlessness, and riot.”⁴²

Jefferson himself soon lamented what he termed a few “vicious irregularities” that occurred during the first few months after the university opened.⁴³ The students, whose own sense of honor compelled them to reject complicity with authorities against members of their own community, were not pressed to serve on the student court, the Board of Censors, to judge the troublemakers. The professors, lacking authority and out of respect for Jefferson’s wishes, were reluctant to act, although probably all agreed with Professor Duglison who later called Jefferson’s scheme for student self-government a “fanciful” idea.⁴⁴ Within six months, however, even Jefferson was moved to confess that “stricter provisions are necessary for the preservation of order . . . [and] coercion must be resorted to, where confidence has been disappointed.”⁴⁵ With the collapse of Jefferson’s plan for student self-government crumbled also one of his most cherished convictions. Disillusioned, he encouraged the Board of Visitors to appeal to the General Assembly for authority to tighten regulations within the university. In the years that followed, the faculty and Visitors multiplied the rules as the students multiplied their offenses.

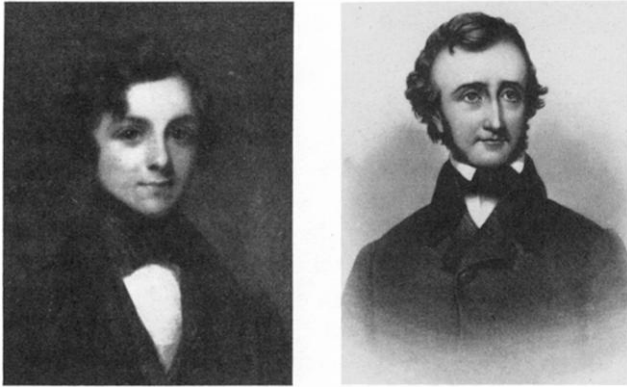
Disorder at the University of Virginia during its early years took many forms. Most occurrences were of the minor sort and perhaps could be excused or at least explained by the youthfulness of the students, their understandable boredom with the tedium of study, the large degree of freedom that continued to exist within the bounds of the university’s elective system and policies that left students’ academic progress up to

⁴² The description is that of librarian William Wertenbaker as quoted in Bruce, *History*, 2:263.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 317.

⁴⁴ Robley Duglison, “The Autobiographical Ana of Robley Duglison, M.D.,” in *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, ed. Samuel X. Radbill, vol. 53, part 8 (1963), 29-30; cf. Wall, “Student Life at U. Va.,” 149.

⁴⁵ Jefferson as quoted in Bruce, *History*, 2:264-65.



Two portraits of Edgar Allan Poe, who attended University of Virginia in 1826. On the left, Poe at age 19, Inman portrait. On the right, Poe probably in his late twenties, Sartain engraving. Courtesy of Manuscripts Department, University of Virginia Library.

their own initiative, and perhaps even as a reflection of the Biblical adage that, on occasion, “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”

To many self-styled Virginia gentlemen, however, neither God’s glory nor His precepts seemed as compelling as the requirements of southern honor. Products of a culture that emphasized forms of entertainment and festivities that were frowned upon in more religious or moral quarters, students at Virginia pursued pastimes at home and at the university that included partying, drinking, dancing, smoking, card playing and gambling, horse riding and racing, and occasionally cock fighting. Jefferson recognized and appreciated some of the attributes of sociability inherent in the gentry life-style, and had made provision for lessons in music and dancing as well as instruction in such manly arts as fencing, boxing, gymnastics, and military training. However, in pursuing these and some other amusements not provided for in the university regulations, Virginia students on occasion turned the Grounds into a distorted replica of plantation social life, thus creating an environment quite at odds with the scholarly and culturally ennobling aspirations of the founder.

Commentaries on student life and gentlemanly conduct in such southern periodicals as the *Southern Quarterly Review* and the *Southern Literary Messenger* sometimes condoned or winked at many of the social pleasures that competed with academic values. For example, Benjamin Blake Minor, editor of the *Southern Literary Messenger* and former Virginia student in the 1830s, expressed smug amusement upon printing an essay by another former Virginia student that extolled the fun and excitement of a drinking party.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Jo of Mississippi (pseud.), “My First Frolic in College,” *Southern Literary Messenger*, 11 (Feb. 1845): 109-12; see Wall, “Student Life at U. Va.,” 76-77.

Student letters and diaries provide ample evidence of the students' attitude that drinking was a normal and expected social ingredient of the collegiate experience.⁴⁷ Even so, Professor William B. Rogers was probably correct when he noted in 1842 that "ninety-nine hundredths of our troubles spring from drink."⁴⁸

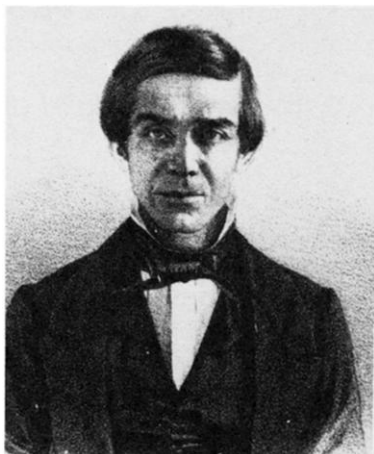
While Jefferson and other officers of the university would not likely have expressed great displeasure at temperate or moderate drinking, the excessive drinking and partying of Virginia students often led to more serious incidents. The *Minutes of the Faculty* are sprinkled liberally with notations of misconduct that often originated in drinking or partying episodes. "Noisemaking," apparently a favorite nocturnal student pastime, was often fueled by an earlier round of drinking. Students at Virginia as at virtually every college found that ringing the college bell and blowing tin horns proved to be surefire ways to torment professors and their families, especially when such serenades were conducted late at night and were accompanied by boisterous singing and yelling. At Virginia the students soon discovered that the covered arcades produced magnificent echoes and when horns and yelling did not prove sufficiently irritating to the professors, the dragging of iron wagon fenders down the brick pavement was certain to bring results. Firecrackers and homemade bombs placed on door stoops and windowsills also caused faculty families to spend many sleepless nights in their chambers.

Virginia students were fond of guns, and although university regulations prohibited guns in the precincts, students smuggled them in regularly. The pop of a firecracker was a puny disturbance compared to the report of pistols and rifles, and the calm of many nights was broken by gunshots from various corners of the Lawn. In October, 1831, the *Faculty Minutes* contain entries such as: "Last night, there were several pistol shots on the Lawn"; "Last night about eleven o'clock two guns were fired off on the Eastern Range"; "Last night, a pistol was fired out of a dormitory window."⁴⁹ Such entries continued to appear in the *Minutes* for many years and in some instances, as in November, 1836, the shooting episodes were well orchestrated. On that occasion, the reports of as many as eight muskets were simultaneously heard coming from the Lawn, and when the chairman of the faculty ran toward that group, they scattered and another group situated at another position picked up the action. The

⁴⁷ See, for example, Ronald B. Head, ed., "The Student Diary of Charles Ellis, Jr., Mar. 10-June 25, 1835," *The Magazine of Albemarle County History* 35 and 36 (1978): 30 and passim.

⁴⁸ William B. Rogers to Henry Rogers, 5 Feb. 1842, as quoted in Wall, "Student Life at U. Va.," 78.

⁴⁹ Bruce, *History*, 2:270.



Gessner Harrison, Professor of Ancient Languages, flogged by students in the 1830s. P. S. Duval lithograph. Courtesy of Manuscripts Department, University of Virginia Library.

discouraged chairman of the faculty reported in the *Minutes* in 1836, “nothing can enable us to detect offenses of this kind committed by a combination of students but a system of espionage, to which no gentleman can submit.”⁵⁰

If Virginia professors felt restrained by their concept of gentlemanly conduct, students often tended to be more selective in their affirmation of the gentleman’s code, especially in their dealings with professors and other adults. Students were quick to invoke the gentleman’s code of honor when it suited *their* purposes. Not only did they refuse to inform on their classmates, they quickly took offense if servants, professors, townspeople, or fellow students were perceived to have offended their honor. Some carried concealed pistols, others knives, and challenges to duels were sometimes rashly issued and foolishly accepted, university regulations and state law notwithstanding. In 1838, a few months after one student received a dangerous stab wound, another was found to be concealing a bowie knife. When a member of the faculty asked why he felt it necessary to carry such a weapon, the student replied that it might be needed “if a man insults me and refuses to give me honorable satisfaction.”⁵¹

“Honorable satisfaction” was the excuse given in 1830 by a student who struck a professor when the latter refused to offer an apology for what the student considered an insulting rebuke. The student was promptly expelled, but his friends assembled in the Rotunda and passed a resolution justifying the assault as a matter of honor. Several years later this same professor, then serving as chairman of the faculty, was confronted by

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid., 295; see also Wall, “Student Life at U. Va.,” 91-95.

two other students, one of whom had just been expelled and the other suspended for actions the chairman allegedly had labeled as “disgraceful.” In defense not of their earlier actions but rather in response to the affront to their reputation, the students challenged the professor to fight, an offer the professor refused on religious grounds. In frustration over damaged honor unreclaimed, the students “collared” and shook the professor and called him a coward. When the professor then called this act “disgraceful,” one held him while the other began flogging him with a horsewhip. According to another professor’s testimony, at least a hundred students had gathered round, but no serious attempt was made to interfere until the professor was whipped from behind while being held—a dishonorable act that could not be ignored.⁵²

If we began this excursion into the early annals of student conduct at the University of Virginia in search of a few sinners, we have now clearly moved into the realm of what might appear to be the actions of scoundrels. Jefferson was spared most of the scenes just described, but he lived long enough to see his idealistic theory of student honor badly tarnished. Before he died in the summer of 1826, he had witnessed not only the eruption of some “vicious irregularities,” but had to face the consequences of the first of what proved to be a series of riots or rebellions at the university.

The first student rebellion was sparked in the fall of 1825. After dark a band of fourteen students, some of whom were intoxicated, gathered on the Lawn disguised as Indians. Their nighttime revelry took on a more serious tone when one shouted out, “Damn the European professors.” That all was not well between the students and some of the European professors had been made abundantly clear the night before when some unknown scoundrel had tossed a bottle of foul liquid, apparently of human origin, through the window of Professor Long’s sitting room while guests were present.⁵³

The intervention of two professors this second evening turned what might have ended as just another night of noisemaking into an honor clash between students and faculty. Anxious to put an end to the “rioting,” Professors Emmet and Tucker seized a student in an attempt to identify him. Responding to his cry for help, other students poured from their rooms to save their comrade who, as they latter contended, had been dishonorably attacked by two men at once. The professors managed to

⁵² Bruce, *History*, 2:293; Wall, “Student Life at U. Va.,” 104-7.

⁵³ *Faculty Minutes*, I, Oct. 1-5, 1825; Henry Tutwiler, *Early Years of the University of Virginia* (Charlottesville, 1882), 3-14; Bruce, *History*, 2:298-301; Wall, “Student Life at U. Va.,” 155-58.

reach safety from the sticks and stones but not the verbal abuses hurled at them by the supposedly outraged students. The next day, instead of showing contrition for their scandalous conduct, a student delegation presented the faculty with a resolution signed by sixty-five students that blamed the professors for starting the incident and that flatly rejected a faculty directive calling upon the students to identify the major offenders.

Two of the European professors, Long and Key, immediately offered their resignations in disgust, even before completing a full year of service on the Virginia faculty. "We have lost all confidence in the signers of this remonstrance," they said, "and we cannot and will not meet them again."⁵⁴ The remainder of the faculty adopted a resolution informing the Board of Visitors that if order were not restored, they too would resign en masse. The board, at the time meeting at Monticello, came down to the university in hopes of averting a crisis.

In one of the most dramatic moments in University of Virginia history, three former presidents of the United States—Jefferson, Madison, and Monroe—along with other distinguished members of the Board of Visitors, convened a special session of the board, faculty, and students in the Rotunda. Then eighty-two years old, Jefferson opened the meeting by declaring that it was one of the most painful events of his life. Soon overcome with emotion, the rector had to yield the floor to another Visitor, Chapman Johnson, who persuaded the guilty students to spare innocent students and the university itself by confessing their guilt. In this instance, the students did respond. Among those who came forward was a nephew of Jefferson, whose appearance in that situation agitated the elder statesman in a way he could not disguise. One witness recorded in his diary, "the shock which Mr. Jefferson felt when he, for the first time, discovered that the efforts of the last ten years of his life had been foiled by one of his family, was more than his own patience could endure, and he could not forebear using, for the first time, the language of indignation and reproach."⁵⁵ The ringleaders in this episode, including the student who had thrown the bottle of urine through Professor Long's window, were expelled, and others involved were given lesser punishments. Although the Visitors did not revoke their earlier promise of not compelling students to testify against others involuntarily, Jefferson later urged students to abandon the practice of protecting those who stirred

⁵⁴ Bruce, *History*, 2:144-49, 299. Professors Long and Key did not in fact resign in this instance, but their action did signal a decided strain between them and the other professors as well as the students. Key left the University of Virginia after two years and Long after three, both to become professors in the newly established University of London. See also Malone, *The Sage of Monticello*, 485.

⁵⁵ Robley Dunglison, "Diary," as quoted in Novak, *The Rights of Youth*, 127.

disorder within the university.⁵⁶ The university, he said, should be made safe for "those it is preparing for virtue and usefulness."⁵⁷

For two decades following Jefferson's death in 1826, "virtuous" students and university authorities had to contend with recurring rounds of disorder, riot, and open rebellion.⁵⁸ The specific events that sparked direct challenges of honor between the students and university authorities are of less importance than the posture often assumed by the "offended" students. Although not infrequently exaggerated, student declarations that their honor as gentlemen had been called into question or their rights as citizens abridged by the faculty on several occasions turned minor episodes into affairs that threatened to close the university. In 1836 and again in 1845 order was restored at the university only after the militia was called in. In this last major antebellum rebellion, classes were suspended for a week before two hundred militiamen brought calm to the university. Forty students were expelled or suspended following the restoration of order, but over eighty others voluntarily withdrew, apparently in a sincere if futile protest against the entry of the militia into the "sanctuary" of the university and as an expression of their disfavor with the Visitors for not accepting their belated pledge to end the riot if the military invasion were called off.⁵⁹

In spite of the seriousness of the 1845 rebellion, student conduct at Virginia actually had begun to improve by the mid-1840s, but only after matters had gotten worse. One of the darkest episodes in the annals of the University of Virginia occurred in November of 1840 when, attempting to unmask one of several students who were stalking about the Grounds firing pistols, Professor John Davis was shot. Professor Davis lingered for several days before dying. The student body, shocked by the gravity of this fateful act, readily assisted in identifying the guilty student, who, after his arrest, was granted bail and escaped from the state.⁶⁰

The murder of Professor Davis was one of several events that introduced a new, but certainly not consistent, mood of seriousness into the

⁵⁶ Except for a brief period of deviation during the 1832-33 session, this principle remained inviolate, thus making the detection and disciplining of offenders a trying task. Wall, "Student Life at U. Va.," 187.

⁵⁷ Jefferson as quoted in Bruce, *History*, 2:300-301.

⁵⁸ In addition to countless minor disturbances and clashes, serious rebellions occurred in 1825, 1832, 1833, 1836, and 1845. See Wall, "Student Life at U. Va.," chap. 6.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 213-14.

⁶⁰ The accused student, Joseph Semmes, is reported by Bruce to have later "perished miserably in Texas." However, the *Semi-Centennial Catalogue* lists Semmes as a suicide in his home state of Georgia. Bruce, *History*, 2:311; *Students of the University of Virginia: A Semi-Centennial Catalogue with Brief Biographical Sketches*, ed. Schele de Vere (Baltimore, 1878).

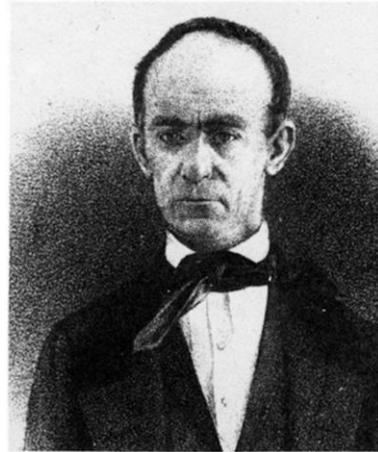
university community. Perhaps most significant in terms of improved student-faculty relations at the university was the adoption in 1842 of the honor system. The honor system was an outgrowth of a minor incident in 1841 in which students who had been arrested for drunk and disorderly conduct in a tavern were allowed to remain as students upon their written pledge, cosigned by three fellow students, that they would henceforth abide by university regulations. The three sureties for each student promised that they would report any violations committed by the reinstated students. The written pledges of the offending students and their sureties fashioned a subtle and ingenious use of the students' belief in honor. The integrity of their vow now made it honorable, not dishonorable, to report on the misbehavior of those who had pledged their word. The honor system and written pledge adopted the following year, which applied at first only to honesty in examinations but was later expanded to cover lying and stealing as well, institutionalized this refurbished approach to the gentleman's code of honor.⁶¹

The faculty as well as the students reflected a change in attitude in the university community in the 1840s. Several of the more vexing disciplinary rules that had been instituted following Jefferson's death were removed. Notable also is the fact that several new appointments to the faculty were instrumental in forming improved relationships with the students. Five of six new professors who joined the faculty in the early years of the 1840s were Americans; two, John Minor and Henry St. George Tucker, were Virginians well versed in the reciprocity of manners expected between gentlemen. The appointment in 1845 of William Holmes McGuffey to the faculty as professor of moral philosophy brought to the university one who proved to be quite successful in advancing the temperance movement and religious sentiment within the university community.

More difficult to document but also at work was a process in which the ideal of gentility itself was being modified by the growth of evangelical Christianity in the South as well as within the University of Virginia proper. Although one contributor to a southern literary magazine in the 1840s charged that Jefferson had "done more to injure religion than any person who ever lived in [the United States]," there had always been students and professors at the university who were professing and practicing Christians (and at least a few Jews).⁶² During the 1830s students voluntarily contributed toward the support of a university chaplain, and a Bible society was active on the Grounds during the same period. By

⁶¹ Wall, "Student Life at U. Va.," 248-65.

⁶² J.T.C., "Mr. Rives Address," *Southern Literary Messenger* 9 (Sept. 1847): 575.



William Holmes McGuffey, Professor of Moral Philosophy. P. S. Duval lithograph. Courtesy of Manuscripts Division, University of Virginia Library.

the 1840s and 1850s, however, religious interest appeared to quicken at the university. Soon after the arrival of Professor McGuffey, voluntary early morning prayers were instituted and became a regular feature of university life. In 1858 University of Virginia students organized the first collegiate chapter of the Young Men's Christian Association. While it is impossible to determine with any degree of precision the influence of Christianity on the attitudes and values of Virginia students, the revival enthusiasm at work among Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians, and other denominations in the South, the growth of the temperance movement, and the increasingly vocal condemnation by ministers and others of dueling and related evils of the honor culture appear to have had an effect in encouraging moderation of the exuberant and often exaggerated requirements of the southern code of honor among students at the University of Virginia as well as at other colleges in the region.⁶³

These concluding comments should not be taken to imply that after the 1840s saintly students imbued with the principles of Christian gentility overcame the sinners and scoundrels who exaggerated the honor precepts of the planter gentry. Discord and disorder continued to surface within the university, albeit with less frequency and drama, in the decades that followed. Indeed, looking beyond the boundaries of the university and the state, it might well be argued that it was the region's abiding faith in the traditional demands of honor, rooted in a society whose values were determined by the realities of class and caste, that compelled thousands of southern students and alumni finally to engage in the most horrible honor clash of all, the Civil War.

⁶³ See Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 100-105.