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THE CAPSTONE



By Leon Henderson, Jr.

In 1933, a Black architect, Louis Fry, in association with another Black architect, Albert Cassell, designed the magnificent and imposing Founders Library and main gates that enclose the quadrangle known to us [students] as the "Yard."

If asked, both Mr. Fry and Mr. Cassell could define the term capstone. It is frequently used in the architectural profession.

If asked, the members of the class of 1989 could also define the term capstone — it is frequently used to describe Howard University. A capstone is a coping stone or crowning point, thus it becomes a critical element within a system.

As we reflect on our years at Howard and fondly recall that critical first year, we vividly remember establishing new friendships, learning to exist within a competitive academic and social environment, becoming familiar with the Yard, Valley, Punchout, Quad and other places frequented by the Howard Community *and*, most of all, reinforcing the discipline and motivation necessary to excel as scholars and future professionals within our respective communities. In subsequent years we began to establish a higher level of political, cultural and socioeconomic awareness through participation in protests, rallies, lectures and numerous campus and community activities and organizations.

We began to identify and appreciate our cultural and historic significance through programs sponsored by our student organizations.

We began to appreciate the unique cultural individuality that exists only at Howard University.

This Capstone has truly been a critical element within the pattern of our lives.

As an architecture student, I was educated in the design of places for the enrichment of the human spirit. The term



design may also be defined as a particular purpose held by an individual or group. Thus, we must realize that design exists at the highest and lowest levels of human endeavor.

As we leave Howard University, we must bear in mind our responsibility to be effective social designers within our society.

We have a responsibility to all of the men and women who preceded our coming to this day and who paved the way for our success . . . from the great kings, queens, scholars and warriors of ancient Africa through the dark period of slavery from which we draw strength, endurance and courage, to the many among us today who supported our education through their encouragement, prayers, and income.

We have a responsibility to all who will depend on our leadership in the betterment of human kind.

We have a responsibility, also, to support Howard University, the wellspring of our success.

If Gwendolyn Brooks were here, she might phrase that responsibility by saying:

We are each other's harvest.

We are each other's business.

We are each other's magnitude and bond.

If we are to be effective social designers, our voices must rise against the recent "wilding" in Central Park that left a productive young woman in a coma, as well as against the brutal events of Howard Beach and the everyday humiliation of Black life in Soweto.

President Cheek, in 1980, during the 113th opening convocation, your theme was "Undoing the Yoke of Bondage in America." The strength of your message is reflected in its closing paragraphs:

"Our institution is in the business of not only educating but also of liberating, not only of discovering but also, of reconstructing. We are alone in the business of undoing the yoke of bondage.

"We make no apology for doing what our times and circumstances compel us to do. For the First Emancipation was the burden of the white man, and that is why it remained only a proclamation. But the Second Emancipation is the burden of the Black man, and that is why it must be made a reality.

"And I ask you, if we do not assume this burden, then who will?"

I charge all of the members of this academic community with reading that statement. It should be the catalyst for who we are, where we go and how we get there. It should be our conscience! [Wish granted! See page 56.]

Fellow graduates, if we are to be effective social designers we must set the example and be above the small mindedness that pervades our society.

We have a historical responsibility to do so. *Howard University can be assured that we will do so.* □