

THE STUDENT HOUSES

— The last chance to observe the old order?

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The atmosphere that has confined rivalry between the Houses in recent years to organized competitions, semi-subtle political machinations, and private conversations has also resulted in a lack of open criticism. Although everyone is eager to point up the separate identity of each House, few are willing to proceed to concrete descriptions. With three new Houses in the works, this may be the last chance to observe the old order.

Life at Caltech centers about the four Student Houses. (The official "four Student Houses and Throop Club" is a diplomatic fiction that extends little beyond the structures of interhouse government.) Sharing some of the characteristics of fraternities, dormitories, and eating clubs, the Houses share little else. Meals are served from a central kitchen, but each House has its own physical appearance, symbols, traditions, behaviors and attitudes.

Though the Houses were established at Caltech in the early thirties, it was not until after World War II, and a period of general reorganization, that each House became interested in some particular element of its pre-war tradition and proceeded to develop this element into a full-fledged basic principle. Social evolution has carried things to the point where now the character of each House — from campaign issues to off-campus behavior — is influenced by a single fundamental concept.

Blacker

The least restrictive of House fundamentals is Blacker's "individualism." Its main purpose is to rule against any action even remotely akin to social pressure. In this way, the individual is assured of expression, and the advantages thereof may be enjoyed by all. Unfortunately, the desire to be different often finds expression before one's individuality has

developed. As a result, Blacker is uniformly non-conformist, exerting a militant social pressure to stamp out all other social pressures. Instead of producing a greater concentration of creative persons, this environment is inclined to inhibit their appearance and growth. Thus, when a worthwhile person does turn up in Blacker, he must be a truly capable individual to have pushed his way through the confused clutter of common Blacker men.

To the other Houses, Blacker represents a homogeneous group of Nebbish-like creatures, all looking somewhat alike (usually barefoot and unshaven) and seldom doing anything of note. By design, Blacker is not a House. It is just a group of guys who happen to live together.

Reform movements have never made significant gains in Blacker. Its leaders have always found enough "House spirit" to hold things together in spite of the conflict with basic doctrine. But many are the times when a little more unity would have been enough to put Blacker on top. And last year's revolt and consequent banishment of Hell Alley may have shaken foundations sufficiently to cause an overall reappraisal. The other Houses will concede that Blacker has the greatest amount of untapped potential. So, if an internal policy change is in the offing, this may really be the year to "look out for Blacker."

Ricketts

For as long as any of them have been at Tech, members of the other Houses have been predicting the decline of Ricketts. As soon as the first trophy leaves, spectators begin to gather to witness the fall. But the mild skid is usually followed by an overwhelming comeback that sends the crowds reeling home to cry in their beer and ask, "How do they do it?"

Two interconnected ideals enable Ricketts to attract bright and shiny young frosh to the Land of Millikan's Pot. The first is the basic idea of the "Ricketts Rowdy." The second is the guarded tra-

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Blacker individual.

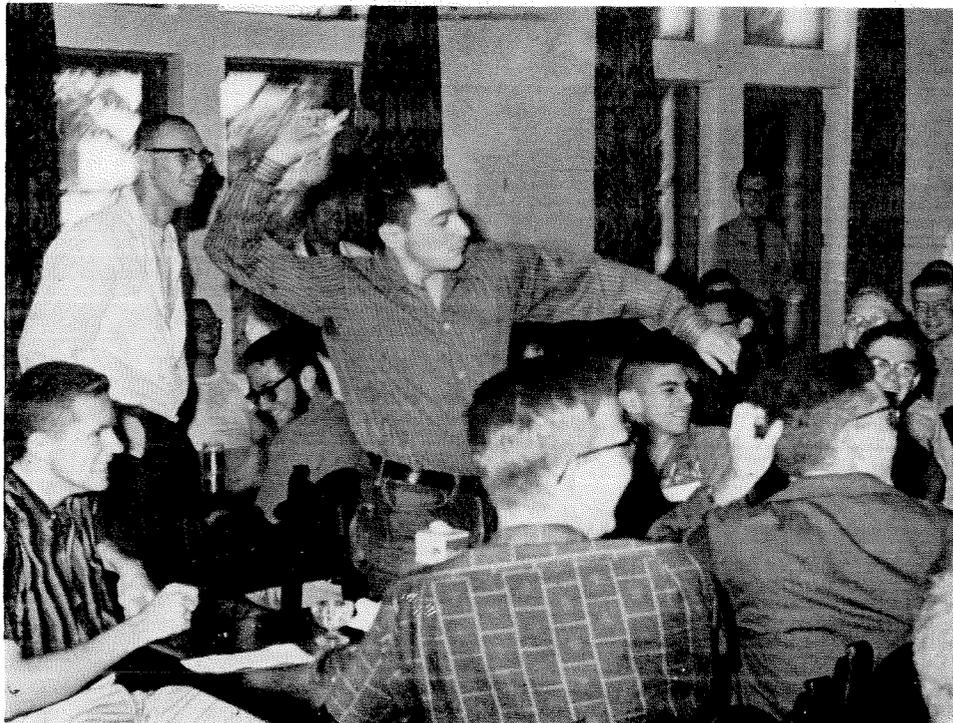
dition of "The House of Politicians." These phrases embody two cherished aims of almost every new college student — and particularly of new Techmen.

High school seniors enter college filled with visions of college pranks, gleaned from the reminiscences of parents and teachers, and the pages of the *Saturday Evening Post*. And the lad who comes to Tech is especially ready to be Joe College after having had to be a good boy in high school.

Then there is the political prospect. The new Techman was either president and/or chairman of everything in his school — or else he was little noticed outside of the Chess Club. Both types come to Tech with ideas of easy political conquests at a school where most people are too busy studying to run for anything. So much for science-fiction.

The "rowdy" feeling is adaptable to many forms and varying degrees, and is therefore easy to live with. But the politics angle is a constant source of friction. A large portion of Ricketts House is thoroughly uninterested in politics, and the constant emphasis on same leaves them cold. Defeated candidates make up another large portion of the House.

Although less sharply defined now, the three social strata of Ricketts House are just as important as when they formed a few years ago. The Outs are such a large minority that they take pride in their status and strive to remain "out of it" at all costs. The Ins, on the other hand, find it all the more necessary to be in things if they are to maintain any feeling of confidence in the face of the exuberant spirit displayed by the Outs. The third group, known as the Straw Hat Set, consists of rebels dissatisfied with the cheap contrivances of the Ins, yet too proud to be "out of it." So they go in for carefully chosen



Fleming diners.

activities in a most devoted manner, and remain out of things not up to their standards. The members of this group no longer wear their straw hats, but their superior nature is still to be detected.

Let no one say Ricketts is divided; outside competition is sufficient to keep the three groups united and strong. But if the other Houses could conceivably ignore Ricketts for a time, the spectators would really be treated to a spectacle; Ricketts is not split — but the strain gages are being worked overtime.

Dabney

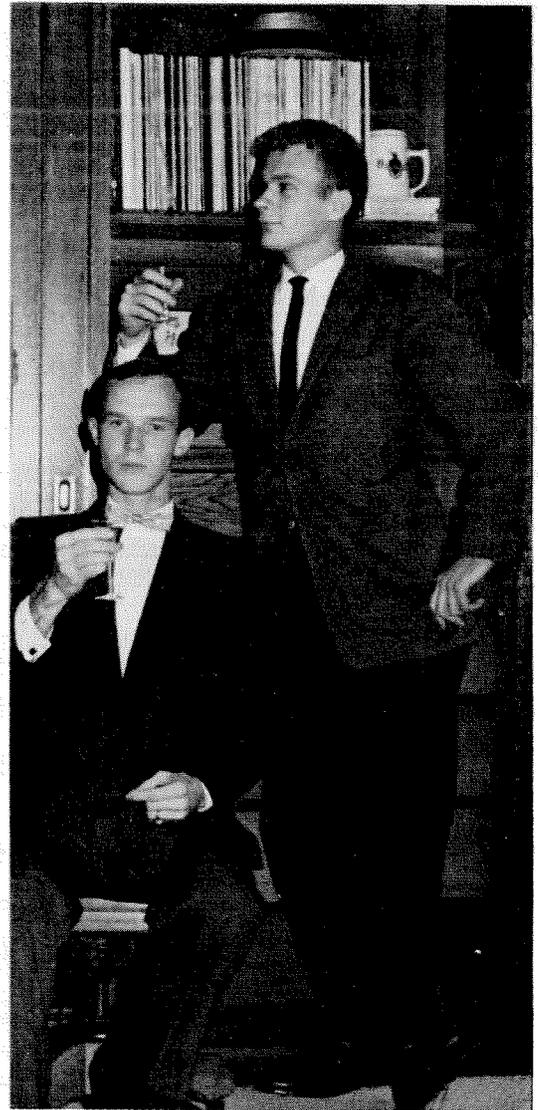
Members of Dabney have frequently seemed somewhat aloof to the men in the other Houses. This is because Dabney men are often preoccupied with internal issues. Their most common controversy is the abstract principle that is Dabney's tradition: "Dabney is the House of Gentlemen."

The range of opinion on this type of ideal is extreme. The crux of the controversy is where to draw the line between acceptable social conduct and having a good time. Darbs don't like to be labeled prudes, yet they are determined to display a degree of courtesy that is higher than the Caltech norm.

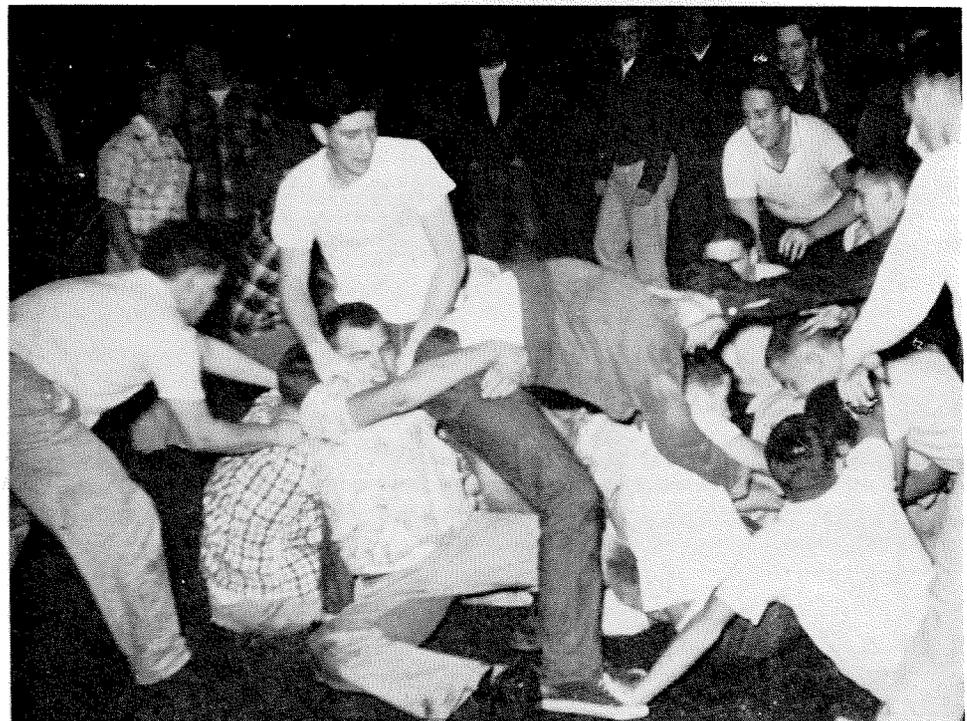
The issue is further confused by a slight feeling of inferiority, brought on by the fact that Dabney is smaller than the other Houses by 20 to 25 members. Feeling an extra need to guarantee House unity, members try to maintain a greater than normal number of contacts within the House, and the usual group formation along lines of common interests is consequently diluted.

This hyper-desire for unity is behind the effort to

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Dabney gentlemen.



Ricketts rowdies.

keep domestic problems inside the confines of House meetings. The entire House acts as one large lobby, and a concerted effort is made to achieve unanimity on any issue even before it is brought to a vote.

It is as though the members fear that any sign of disagreement would be sufficient to split the House beyond repair. Parliamentary procedure is followed to the letter, yet is hardly needed. A House meeting in Dabney is one of the more useless gatherings on campus, yet nowhere else is there such an abundance of railroad-sensitive voters. The result is a House of unparalleled unity that is too busy with discussion of policy to find time to apply its findings.

Capable as it is in other fields of endeavor, Dabney tends to be childish about its attempts at gentlemanly behavior. With a lesser emphasis on the pica-yunish elements of Emily Post, and a more positive attempt at common courtesy as dictated by common sense, Dabney might closer approach its ideal.

Fleming

With the founding of three additional Houses next fall, the nature of each of the existing four will tend to become established in its present form. Assuming that the average House would like to be on top of the heap every so often, this could be the year that showed whether Fleming would ever make it.

Even before the war, Fleming was identified by the big bohunk type — beer-drinking, ruckus-raising, proud of slovenly living, sacrilegious activities, and fast eating. Fleming's one and only claim to fame was

in being Caltech's "Jock House." But since the war, the athletic Techman has ceased to be a bohunk. The Varsity Rating Trophy is the last trophy on Fleming's mantelpiece — and *it* may even leave soon. Fleming is still the "Jock House" — it's just that all the campus athletes live in other Houses.

Phlegms now pursue their art of slovenly living with a strong bent toward obscenity. Needless to say, few new frosh find this type of atmosphere inviting. Each year produces its inevitable crop of Fleming frosh who are dissatisfied with their house assignment — and who thus help to further the cynicism that is already so rampant in the House. So the vicious circle continues.

Some of the most cultured members of the student body, as well as some of the most effective campus leaders, have lived in Fleming. But, so far, they have been unable or unwilling to reshape the House.

Caltech students have not relished the reputation the Institute has gained through the actions of various members of Fleming House. And their contrived excuses for such actions (*viz.*, those displayed on last spring's Economy Run and Glee Club Tour) only cloud the problem and antagonize the home front.

Members of other Houses were involved in these incidents, to be sure. But when Fleming House takes significant action against such behavior, Caltech's "great unwashed" will be defenseless. When members of Fleming can bring their parents or wives to dinner without advance warning, and not be afraid of embarrassment, a milestone will have been reached.

— *Doug Shakel '60*

SOME COMPARABLE ASPECTS OF THE HOUSES

	Blacker	Dabney	Fleming	Ricketts	Throop
House color	Blue	Green	Red (House coats are black)	Maroon (Brown when maroon is hard to get)	Yellow (or whatever is left)
Symbol on House coat	Script "B"	Coat of Arms	Coat of Arms	Coat of Arms	(No House coat)
Associated with	(Maybe that blue stripe around their courtyard)	Green elephant	Kloke's	Millikan's Pot	Wives and kids
Consider themselves	Individuals	Gentlemen	Jocks	Rowdies	Off-campus
Are considered	(Unprintable)	Prudes	Slobs	ASCIT also-rans	Out of it
Social character	Faculty tea	Party-party	Beer blast	Apache dance	Occasional
Intrahouse competitions	Fur-lined athletic garment	Auerbach trophy Coe trophy	Brass spittoon	Brake drum Skill games	?