History and Analysis of Lafayette College's Institutional Policies on Student Sexual Behavior, 1960-1975

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The 1960's and 70's were a time of immense change throughout the country, especially in terms of societal opinion on sexual behaviors and sexual agency. As the base of much of the political activism and ideology during this period, American institutions of higher education were especially affected by the changing times. By understanding Lafayette College as a small microcosm of private higher education, struggling to keep pace with the rapidly changing cultural norms of the country, the prominent discourse on sexual agency that was occurring can be more fully evaluated. Examination and analysis of Lafayette's institutional policies during this time period reveal cultural changes in attitudes towards sexual behaviors and moral regulation. While at the beginning of the sixties, the social lives of students at Lafayette were dictated by a highly regulated and moralistic sexual policy enforced by the institution, within a span of roughly fifteen years, institutional regulatory policy on sexual behavior had all but disappeared. Furthermore, the once extensive discourse faded and opponents of relative sexual agency of students had become silent.

Prior to the 1970s at Lafayette, institutional policy on all social behavior was maintained in the "Social Code" and detailed in the "Freshman Handbook" given to each new student. Although the code also regulated behaviors such as alcohol use and social gatherings, the most extensive and controversial aspect of this code related to female guest visitation, and implicitly, the sexual behaviors of students. As Lafayette was an all-male school until 1970, dates from local women's colleges such as Cedar Crest and Centenary Colleges were brought to the campus for "party weekends." The social code not only rigidly regulated what times and in what locations of residence areas female guests were allowed to be entertained but also was the center of Lafayette's discussion of student sexual morality.

Between the first influential change at the beginning of decade and its de facto abolition in 1969, the social code was repeatedly debated and altered. Prior to this time period, female guests were only allowed to visit during a set number of hours, never allowed above the first floor of a living group (either a fraternity house or "social dorms" where the majority of upperclassmen lived), and when female guests were present, at least 3 chaperones were required. The beginning of the decade saw the first important change to the social code which allowed female guests to be in common areas above the first floors of living groups between the hours of 4 and 7 PM on several specific "party" weekends of the semester. Despite the fact that female guests were still not allowed in private bedrooms, open doors to upper floors were required, and all previous rules regarding chaperones applied, this amendment to the code was the first step in the liberalization of the code.

Throughout the next few years, students expressed their fierce opposition to the code through discussions in *The Lafayette*, public forums and protests. Despite their strong advocacy for freer restrictions regarding chaperones, open door requirements, and private bedrooms as acceptable entertainment areas, only expanded visitation hours were granted by the College. By 1967, however, another set of revisions were made that more clearly defined and slightly expanded acceptable entertaining areas. The true significance of these revisions, however, lay in the added preamble of the code that emphasized the dynamic quality of the social code and created a Code of Conduct Administrative Board. This board consisted of elected students who were responsible for helping the Dean of the College in the enforcement and development of College policy and marked a monumental step in the influence of students in College decision making.

While the changes of 1967 were seen as at least a partial victory, students quickly began to advocate for the removal of the policy completely. Finally, in the fall of 1969, the social code was altered so that each living group could decide their own regulations, so long as said regulations observed state and federal law and respected the privacy of all students. In essence, Lafayette parietal hours were dissolved and the social code was extinct. In the Fall of 1970, the first class of female students, all housed in New Hall (now Ruef Hall), voted their on their own set of living regulations which included no curfew, unlimited sign outs and male visitation at all hours (as long as the male student was accompanied by a female resident) ("Daring Coeds Vote Autonomy 1). While proposals for coed dorms were made in Student Council as early as March 1971, it was in fall 1973 that Watson Hall became Lafayette's first coed dormitory (Spitzer 1). Within a period of less than 15 years, Lafayette College policy had moved from a prohibition of any private, unsupervised contact between members of the opposite sexes to allowing men and women to live side by side on a daily basis.

While the social code provides a clear history of Lafayette's regulatory and disciplinary record, the interviews and speeches made by College leaders of this time help to expand upon the reasoning and discourse that shaped the changing of this institutional policy. While the discourse on student sexual behavior and agency included various faculty members (McGarrah 4), college clergy ("A Christian Sexual Ethic" 1; Sabey 2) and an expansive array of college-sponsored lecturers (Kuzsma and Leir 1, "Third Morality Assembly On The Legal Aspects Of The Code" 1), two of the most vocal and influential commentators on the sexual morality of students were President K. Roald Bergethon, (President of the College from 1958-1978) and Charles C. Cole, Jr. (Dean of the College from 1958-1970, Provost 1967-1970).

As Dean of the College, Charles C. Cole was extensively involved with not only the discussion and implementation of changes to the college social code, but also the code's enforcement. In an article in the February 1964 edition of Lafayette's *Alumnus* Magazine, Cole expressed his opinion that much of the student agitation over the social code was part of the rebellion that every generation has against authority (De Bold 4). Furthermore, he stated that many of the students arguing for changes were "simply express(ing) an adolescent negativeness." Cole's attitudes and beliefs on the subject also became apparent through his immediate role in the disciplinary procedures of the college. In 1961, in an effort to prevent future disciplinary problems and with the support of President Bergethon, Cole sought to remove the number of sofas at Inter-Fraternity Balls after incidents of "petting and necking" at previous balls (Weaver 1). Following a disciplinary incident in 1965, Cole released a statement for the college when a fraternity was suspended for one year over the presence of a female guest residing in the fraternity house for 5 days ("College Closes DKE House" 1). Although the fraternity's leaders argued that they had been under the assumption that the female guest was recently married to the member she was staying with and therefore the fraternity was not in violation of College policy, Cole nevertheless supported the disciplinary decision. He defended the suspension on the grounds that the standards of conduct of the college such as the ones violated in the incident were present to "protect long-term interests of individuals."

As leader of the college, President Bergethon was actively vocal about the social responsibility, morality, and sexual behavior of Lafayette students in the early to mid sixties. In an interview with *The Lafayette* in May 1960, President Bergethon explained his belief on the College's role in the morality and sexual behavior of students (Hyman and Smith 1). He stated that as many college students were not as responsible as was commonly assumed, the College

must provide guidance and "this guidance must be in part through regulations, even restrictions." Furthermore, Dr. Bergethon spoke on the high sexual drive of male college students, the "tragedies" that can result from premarital sex, and how parents often hold the institution at fault when these tragedies occur. Similarly, at an open forum regarding changes in the social code proposed by students, Bergethon emphasized the necessity of the current code's rigidity because of the college's obligation of "student moral development" (Willner 1).

Perhaps Dr. Bergethon's most explicit and assertive statements on student sexual behavior, however, came in a February 1964 speech at the mandatory weekly convocation in Colton Chapel ("Bergethon Attacks Sex As Private Affair" 1). In this speech, Bergethon responded to an article that had appeared in the last edition on *The Lafayette* entitled "Legislating Morality" which argued that private sexual acts should not be of public concern. Bergethon disputed this reasoning, stating "the college cannot look on the sexual act as a private affair with no consequences for the public." He went on to the list supposed dangers of "extra marital relations" such as unwanted marriages, unplanned pregnancies, venereal diseases, and personal suffering for those involved with the sexual act. Even beyond these specific dangers, Bergethon asserted that sexual behaviors help to form attitudes and affect the choices of others. The entire speech, while leading to a substantial amount of student backlash in *The Lafayette*, was picked up by the Associated Press and reported in newspapers in both PA and NJ.

While extremely outspoken at the beginning of the decade, many of the leaders of the college seemed to fall silent on the topic of student sexual behaviors by the late sixties. Moral declarations and defenses of strict college policies were no longer made by Lafayette administrators or faculty, or at least publically noted to the same extent. Even with the approaching influx of female students for the first time in Lafayette's history, much of the

discussion voiced by institutional leaders focused on pragmatic rather than social concerns, such as where to house the new students or what the male to female student ratio should be. When speaking about the new coeds that would soon walk onto campus, dialogue centered not around the social regulation of the now coed student body but rather around the expanded financial security and the increase in the intellectual caliber and academic reputation of the school that coeducation promised. With parietal hours a college reality just two years earlier, Dean of Student Residence Phillip Schroeder speculated at an open forum in April 1970 that the future female dormitory would not be "an over-restrictive environment" (Shedwick 1). Furthermore, when asked by a student about the future of coed dorms, Schroeder said that the college was currently looking into the possibility. While the debate encompassing the social code, visiting hours, and sexual morality had been one of, if not the most, heated points of contention within the Lafayette community at the beginning of the sixties, by the early seventies, institutional policy had essentially vanished and the same College leaders remained silent on these topics.

While the changes in college policy outlined are not surprising within themselves, the rapidly short amount of time within which they occurred is somewhat astounding. Furthermore, the administration of the college remained relatively stable, excluding changes in leadership as significantly influential causes behind the shift. When examining how a large and conservative institution changed so dramatically at such a rapid speed, the powerful influences of both the discussion/implementation of coeducation and the College's gradual abandonment of a policy of *in loco parentis* become apparent.

1. Coeducation

The serious discussion of whether Lafayette should become coeducational began as early as 1967, as it became increasingly apparent that the desire to attend single sex colleges had

severely waned in the population of prospective students. Cultural opinions on education were rapidly changing and single-sex institutions began to seem "old-fashioned or backward" (Miller-Bernal and Poulson 11). After years of intense discussion among students, faculty, administrators, and alumni, Lafayette's Board of Trustees voted in favor of coeducation in June 1969 and Lafayette's first female students were welcomed in the fall of 1970. The adoption of coeducation brought on a vast array of changes, both expected and unexpected, to the culture of the institution. Perhaps most important of these consequences included the decreased emphasis of sexuality within male/female relationships and a fundamentally transformed institutional view of women.

One of the fundamental and most predicted impacts resulting from this coeducation had actually been one of the most popular arguments used by proponents of Lafayette coeducation: having women on campus on a full time basis would transform the relationships between men and women at the college. A common opinion voiced by many students prior to coeducation was that the social and romantic realities of the early to mid sixties contributed to women being seen most pervasively as either sexual objects or social status symbols (Steinmann 1; Leir 5). Since Lafayette men only interacted with women in a public setting for a set number of hours on a few weekends a semester, only superficial (and often sexually centered) relationships were able to be made ("A Reason Why" 2). Although full social integration of female students took significant time, in general, many students reported a more relaxed and "natural" atmosphere regarding relationships between the sexes early in Lafayette coeducation (Falk 3; Baran 1). Both at Lafayette and other schools adopting coeducation, it was reported that the novelty that the opposite sex had for students previously quickly wore off (Miller-Bernal and Poulson 121). Importantly, as a whole, opposite sex relationships became at least somewhat less sexualized as

platonic relationships formed in a way not possible before. Students began to know one another not only as future spouses and sexual partners but as friends and classmates (Miller-Bernal and Poulson 229). As it became apparent that non-sexual relationships were possible between male and female students, at least some of the former rigid regulations of opposite sex interactions became unnecessary.

Another major result of coeducation at Lafayette, that perhaps was not expected in the same way as changing interpersonal relationships, was the way in which women were viewed by the institution. As many of the public remarks made by leaders of the College in the early sixties made clear, the sexual desires of Lafayette men, and consequently unsupervised interaction with women, were considered to be potentially morally hazardous (Hyman and Scott 1). Furthermore, prior to the serious consideration and implementation of coeducation, the social code of Lafayette sought not only to shape and enforce the morality of its male students but also to protect then women who were visiting. For the previous few decades, the sexual activity and alcohol use of students was an increasing concern for administrators of colleges across the country. At many all male colleges this perceived growing problem led to a growing belief that the institutions should take responsibility for women who visited their students (Miller-Bernal and Poulson 157). In essence, the social code of the early sixties was a set of regulations that aimed to both protect vulnerable female guests and restrict the opportunities for sexual temptation in male students.

By the late sixties, however, the college's view on the possible role of women in the Lafayette community changed. At many of the all-male colleges considering coeducation, one of the major proposed benefits was that coeducation would make male students more socially responsible (Miller-Bernal and Poulson 159). At Lafayette specifically, one faculty member

suggested coeducation as "a way-out" of the problem of the rowdy student behavior (McGarrah 3). It was also believed by many college administrators that coeducation would increase the intellectual engagement of current male students and the campus community altogether (Miller-Bernal and Poulson 177). When speaking on the possibility of coeducation in December 1967, President Bergethon suggested that mixing the sexes might have a "stabilizing effect" and even improve the manners and dress of Lafayette men ("President On Coordinate College" 2). Whereas the presence of women had previously been viewed as possibly detrimental to the moral wellbeing of male students, they now were seen as bringing an element of moderation and civilization to the community (Miller-Bernal and Poulson 177). Within a period of a few years, women had gone from being viewed on an institutional level either as a population that needed protection or as potentially threatening the moral development of Lafayette men to a group of intelligent coeds, able to hold their own in and out of the classroom. As with the significant amount of other colleges that went coed at about the same time as Lafayette, the "women at (Lafayette) were now the women *of* (Lafayette) (Miller-Bernal and Poulson 175).

2. In Loco Parentis

Although the introduction of coeducation had widespread cultural effects on the sexual culture at Lafayette, the College's movement away from a policy of *in loco parentis* had an at least an equally large effect on regulatory policy on sexual behavior as well. In a 1966 Letter to the Editor in *The Lafayette*, college chaplain F. Peter Sabey summarized the mentality of the student body that was pushing the drive against current College policy succinctly when he stated "the students are not only willing but also demanding to assume a much greater share of the responsibility for their behavior" (Sabey 2). Both at Lafayette and at colleges across the nation,

students' increasingly began demand to be treated as adults and subsequently, many college policies based upon *in loco parentis* were changed (Miller-Bernal and Poulson 11).

While this time period was not the first time in which students (both at Lafayette and in higher education more broadly) called for major changes in institutional sexual regulations, the strategies first employed by political activism movements of the time (such as sit-ins, voter registration drives and marches) made these student demands more successful than they had ever been previously (Miller-Bernal and Poulson 10). Students came to believe that it was not just spoken requests but direct action that was needed (Lefkowitz Horowitz 231). Leaders of political activism on campuses across the United States called for all students to "break through their privatism and political apathy" in order to cause the changes that they hoped to see (Lefkowitz Horowitz 62). At Lafayette, students had used these popular activist methods to voice opinion on national social issues such as the Vietnam War, free speech, the Women's Liberation movement and racial inequalities ("Activism Marks Student Strike" 1; "Council Committee Proposes Boycott" 1; Murphy 1). It followed naturally that these same strategies that had previously been successful in uniting the student body for national social change would then also be used to protest College policies deemed out of touch or inappropriate.

When examining the discourse surrounding this policy at Lafayette, it becomes clear that rather than revolving around the morality of sexual acts, the discussion was one of sexual agency. Arguments made by students were, on the whole, not debating the morality of sexual behavior in itself but rather about questioning who should be able to determine whether students were engaging in these behaviors ("Legislative Impotence 8). In the discourse of student opposition, terms such as maturity and paternalism were used often and as early as 1961, protesters had taken up the slogan "Treat Us Like Men; Times Have Changed, So Must The

Code" (Steinmann 1). A 1966 open letter from the Student Committee on the Revision of the Social Code made sure to emphasize that the proposed code did not ask for "license, but for freedom accompanied with responsibility" ("Open Letter" 1). Similarly, an editorial written in *The Lafayette* in November 1968 articulated that students were not advocating for "free fornication" but rather a merely level of social responsibility (Leir 5).

Eventually, the activism and opposition of students to the social code led to many of the changes that the students had sought. By 1968, the student handbook now included a "Statement on Rights and Responsibilities of Students" in addition to the code of conduct. This statement outlined the rights of students in disciplinary procedures (a major change from the previous policy of full discretion of punishment by the Dean of the College) and reaffirmed students' rights to free speech on campus. Furthermore, the language of College policy was significantly altered so that it reflected a shift in the social responsibility of student behavior. While the student handbook of 1964 stated that it was necessary for the College to enforce certain regulations "for the protection and the welfare of its members," the corresponding section within the 1968 handbook affirmed that the responsibility of creating and enforcing rules rested "upon all members of the academic community: students, faulty, and administrative officers." Even further progress in this institutional policy shift became apparent after the Dean of Students Herman Kissiah commented that the changes to the social code of 1969 reflected that social responsibility for the actions and morality of students was now put on the students themselves ("Kissiah Outlines Plan" 3).

The 1960s and early 1970s were a time of incredible change in the way that Lafayette College viewed the sexual agency and morality of its students. Throughout this time, the discourse surrounding these topics went from hotly contested to relatively silent. National

cultural trends including a push for coeducation and increasing push against moral restrictions had serious repercussions on the Lafayette College community.

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