

# The William Heirens Case at the University of Chicago



## How Controversy Catalyzes Policy Change

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### Introduction

In 1946 the University of Chicago received abundant and unwanted publicity when an undergraduate, William Heirens, was charged with a series of salacious and homicidal crimes. While the university released no official statement, an investigation into the files of Robert Maynard Hutchins, university president, reveals passionate discussions about the implications of the Heirens case for the university in the postwar period. I will study how the University of Chicago reacted in a time of intense media scrutiny and pressure, and more generally how the crisis catalyzed policy changes in student life and community relations at the institution. In the process, I will also examine how the controversy surrounding the shortcomings of President Hutchins's policy of admitting high-school sophomores into the College and Chancellor Lawrence A. Kimpton's later urban renewal plans coincided with a reevaluation of the doctrine of *in loco parentis* as a guiding principle for intervening in the lives of students and the broader university community.<sup>1</sup>

1. From 1945 to 1961 the trustees changed the title of the head of the university from "president" to "chancellor." "History of the Office," *Office of the President*, accessed July 14, 2015, <https://president.uchicago.edu/directories/full/history-of-the-office>.

## William Heirens—Crimes and Conviction

On June 26, 1946, seventeen-year-old University of Chicago student William Heirens was arrested while breaking into an apartment in Chicago's Rogers Park neighborhood on the North Side. As he scuffled with the landlady, an unarmed off-duty traffic cop, returning from the beach with his family, passed by. He grabbed three clay flowerpots and hit Heirens over the head so hard that his skull fractured. While he was held, unconscious, in Bridewell Hospital, the case against Heirens grew. Police searched his room at the University of Chicago and found a brown leather suitcase, filled with valuables ranging from a two-inch-wide diamond brooch to twenty-four US war bonds. They also found a handmade scrapbook of pictures of Nazis: Hitler, Goering, Goebbels, and Schacht.<sup>2</sup>

Chicago news in 1946 was mostly celebratory: veterans had come home from World War Two and the economy was looking up. But the end of the war required news reporters to look elsewhere for headlines. Crime stories provided new sensational material.<sup>3</sup> Some cases, though, lacked a key lurid detail, such as the kidnapping of child, necessary to propel them to the front page. One such case was the murder of Josephine Alice Ross, forty-five, a twice-divorced widow, who was found naked with a dress and stockings tied around her neck on June 5, 1945. Despite its gory details, the case was local, not national, news, and was sequestered to page ten of the *Chicago Daily Tribune*.<sup>4</sup> Her throat had been slit and the wound sealed shut with adhesive tape, the bathtub was

2. "Expect Arrest to Solve Score of Burglaries," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, June 28, 1946, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/177296590?accountid=14657>.

3. Wayne Klatt, *Chicago Journalism: A History* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2009), 184.

4. "Widow Is Found Slain in Home; Suitor Quizzed," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, June 6, 1945, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/177201229?accountid=14657>.

bloody, and the body had been washed. The tape and washing were signs of remorse, detectives guessed, so the investigation focused on those close to her. The janitor at Ross's apartment told police that a dark-haired, well-dressed man left the building by the fire escape around the time of the murder. But police focused on her many suitors, one an ex-con and another was a man she had been dating.<sup>5</sup>

More attractive to the papers was the "Mad Lipstick Killer," who scrawled in red lipstick on the wall of the crime scene: "For heAVens SAKe, cAtch me BeFore I Kill more. I cannot control myself [*sic*]." The victim, Frances Brown, thirty-three, was another attractive divorcée. On December 11, 1945, she was shot in the head and stabbed in the throat. Her body was left slumped over her bathtub. A "dark, short, stocky and nervous" man was seen leaving her residential hotel around 4 a.m. on the night of the murder. He wore a dark coat and a dark hat. A police captain proclaimed: "Whoever the killer was, he's a maniac, and we must get him."<sup>6</sup> The lipstick message rocketed the case to the front page.<sup>7</sup> Numerous suspects were held for questioning, but none of the leads panned out, and the story faded from the spotlight.<sup>8</sup>

The next month, the Brown story was replaced by the murder of Suzanne Degnan.<sup>9</sup> The blonde, blue-eyed six year old was taken from her bedroom on January 7, 1946, and a ransom note had been left on the floor. The note, written on a ripped triangular piece of grease- and

5. *Ibid.*

6. "Hunt Mad 'Lipstick Killer,'" *Chicago Daily Tribune*, December 11, 1945, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/177183805?accountid=14657>.

7. Klatt, *Chicago Journalism*, 184.

8. "Poet Suspect in Murder of Former WAVE," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, December 16, 1945, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/177072957?accountid=14657>.

9. "Kidnapped Girl Found Slain; Dismembered, Hid in Sewer," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, January 8, 1946, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/177135539?accountid=14657>.

dirt-stained paper, read: "GeT \$20,000 Reddy & wAITe foR WoRd. do NoT NoTify FBI oR Police. Bills IN 5's & 10's [*sic*]." And on the back of the note: "BuRN This FoR heR SAfTY [*sic*]"<sup>10</sup>

She wasn't safe: before nightfall, police found parts of her dismembered body in the sewers.<sup>11</sup> The Degnan story monopolized the Chicago papers and made headlines across the country. The police received 5,250 tips from all over the world and followed up on 3,153, to no avail. The note left clues to the identity of the killer. It was grease stained (the killer must be a mechanic!); the words were misspelled and a comma was reversed (the killer is uneducated!); the ampersand was reversed as in a treble clef (the killer is a musician!); Degnan was dismembered with surgical precision (the killer was a doctor! A butcher!) But no killer was found.

Police interviewed more than eight hundred suspects and administered one hundred seventy lie detector tests. The crime lab compared seven thousand sets of handwriting with the note found at the scene. No less than four men confessed to the crime, but no arrests had been made. Police tortured the sixty-five-year-old janitor of the Degnan building for two days, but he wouldn't confess. (He later successfully sued the Chicago police for police brutality.<sup>12</sup>) At the time of Heirens's arrest for burglary in June 1946, a forty-two-year-old Arizona man had just confessed to the Degnan murder.<sup>13</sup> The mayor, Edward Kelly, dubbed the slaying "even too horrible for a maniac."<sup>14</sup> This murder shocked the

10. "Hunt Mad 'Lipstick Killer'."

11. "Kidnapped Girl Found Slain."

12. "\$20,000 Paid Verburghs in Degnan Case," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 21, 1948, <http://archives.chicagotribune.com/1948/02/21/page/1/article/20-000-paid-verburghs-in-degnan-case>.

13. For the most complete account of the Heirens case, including full transcripts of interviews with the Heirens family and detectives, see Lucy Freeman, *Before I Kill More* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1955), 76.

14. "Kidnapped Girl Found Slain."

city,<sup>15</sup> and detectives “were certain that they were searching for a mad killer, one who reveled in the sensational.” The public demanded justice: one letter written to the *Tribune* offered five hundred dollars (about five thousand eight hundred dollars in 2011 dollars) for the “arrest, conviction, and execution” of Degnan’s killer.<sup>16</sup>

Kidnapping for ransom had gained notoriety in the late-nineteenth century with the 1874 abduction and murder of Charley Ross, known as “the lost boy.”<sup>17</sup> Public fear of kidnapping for ransom rose again in the 1930s when Charles Lindbergh Jr. was taken from his crib in 1932 and killed in a botched attempt at extortion.<sup>18</sup> It took the notorious Chicago case of Nathan Leopold Jr. and Richard Loeb in 1924 to recast kidnapers as more psychologically dangerous than ordinary criminals. While searching for the killer of fourteen-year-old Hyde Park resident Robert Franks, the Chicago police questioned every accused child molester or homosexual in the neighborhood, but their efforts were in vain.<sup>19</sup> The killers were two brilliant, wealthy students: Leopold had entered the University of Chicago shortly before his sixteenth birthday. Loeb, too, was a child prodigy: he graduated from the university’s high school at age fourteen, matriculated at the university one year later,<sup>20</sup> and then entered the University of Michigan law school. Their elite social class

15. Klatt, *Chicago Journalism*, 184.

16. “2 Rewards Offered for ‘Execution’ of Girl’s Kidnap-Slayer,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, January 8, 1946, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/177223191?accountid=14657>.

17. Paula S. Fass, *Kidnapped: Child Abduction in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

18. *Ibid.*

19. Hal Higdon, *Leopold and Loeb: The Crime of the Century* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 51.

20. Simon Baaz, “Leopold and Loeb’s Criminal Minds,” *Smithsonian*, August 2008, <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/history-archaeology/criminal-minds.html>.

sensationalized their crime and raised disturbing questions about the kind of person capable of committing crimes against children: the existence of homicidal pathology that escapes the predictable categories and is hidden in plain sight. No longer could crime be equated with greedy lowlifes. The ransom note had been a diversion to obscure their identity and was not the motivation behind the crime. Instead, having read Nietzsche they considered themselves *Übermenschen*, capable of committing the perfect crime.<sup>21</sup>

Two decades later the search for Degnan's killer would awaken the same fears in Chicago as the search for Franks's killers.<sup>22</sup> The Degnan murder, too, was not motivated by greed, because she had been killed before the note was found. The *New York Times*, in a front-page story, reported that detectives were worried that "a sex maniac, rather than a ransom seeker, might have kidnapped the girl."<sup>23</sup> The fingerprints of another University of Chicago student, William Heirens, were matched to the prints found on the Degnan ransom note, three days after his arrest for burglary.<sup>24</sup> By June 30, 1946, he was linked to the murders of Josephine Ross and Frances Brown. Using interrogation techniques developed during the war, police administered a spinal tap without anesthetic and injected Heirens, without his consent, with sodium pentathol, believed to act as a truth serum, in hopes of gaining a confession.

21. Fass, *Kidnapped*, 143.

22. Lloyd Wendt, *Chicago Tribune: The Rise of a Great American Newspaper* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1979), 766.

23. "Find Head, Parts of Torso of Kidnapped Chicago Girl," *New York Times*, January 8, 1946, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/107646136?accountid=14657>.

24. Sergeant Thomas Laffey matched the finger prints first by hand. He found seven points of similarity and then sent the prints to the FBI for confirmation, which he received from J. Edgar Hoover, the head of the FBI. "Suspected Heirens' Victims Slain in Similar Brutality," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, July 16, 1946, <http://archives.chicagotribune.com/1946/07/16/page/5/article/suspected-heirens-victims-slain-in-similar-brutality>.

A media circus followed. George Wright, a veteran reporter detailed Heirens's confession over forty-six columns of the *Chicago Daily Tribune*.<sup>25</sup> It was a sensational but fictional story, printed before Heirens had confessed.<sup>26</sup> Citing "unimpeachable sources," Wright told how Heirens had watched Degnan undress through the window, labeled him a pedophile, and explained the lipstick note as resulting from Heirens's satisfaction at doing "daring" things. Wright diagnosed Heirens as having "the most inexplicable split personality that men trained in dealing with criminals have ever encountered. When he was William Heirens, the youth was affable, pleasant, intelligent, thoughtful, studious, and even religious. He played normally with other boys. He had no abnormal sexual habits. He was never involved in a sex crime."<sup>27</sup> Wright attempted to make sense of the senseless crimes with an overwrought Jekyll and Hyde scenario: "As George Murman he robbed, killed, swung like an ape on fire escapes, stole for the sheer pleasure of stealing. He didn't need the money and virtually never sold any of the things he stole."<sup>28</sup> The fabricated confession was printed as truth, and other newspapers publishing it again and again.

Heirens at first agreed to write an official confession on July 17, the day after Wright's story, but to the chagrin of the lawyers paid for by Heirens's parents, the prosecution, and the press he refused to confess

25. George Wright, "How Heirens Slew 3: Degnan, Brown, and Ross Murder Stories!" *Chicago Daily Tribune*, July 16, 1946, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/177257409?accountid=14657>.

26. "Tribune Scores 4 Great Beats in Degnan Case," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, August 7, 1946, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/177415735?accountid=14657>.

27. Wright, "How Heirens Slew 3."

28. *Ibid.*



on that day.<sup>29</sup> The press was hooked: they would profile the story 157 times in the ten weeks following his arrest.<sup>30</sup> Heirens's lawyers assured him that without a confession, he would be put to death. He confessed to all three murders on August 7, pled guilty on September 4, and was sentenced to three consecutive life sentences on September 4.<sup>31</sup> Of the confession, Heirens would later say, "I confessed to live."<sup>32</sup>

Unlike Leopold and Loeb, Heirens wasn't a megalomaniac or even brilliant. Heirens was the eldest of two sons, born to working-class parents and raised on the North Side. His father ran a flower shop and worked part time for the city, cutting grass. His mother was a homemaker. Since the age of twelve, he had been arrested twice for burglary and was sent to two correctional schools.<sup>33</sup> How had Heirens managed to enroll at the University of Chicago? It was a combination of chance and Hutchins's unique admissions policy to admit gifted high-school sophomores, which Heirens heard of from a friend at St. Bede's Academy. Reporters searched for areas of abnormality, but all reports came up the same. Heirens was generally well liked and a typical student—maybe a little shy, but surely nothing out of the ordinary at the University of Chicago.<sup>34</sup> His mother wondered, "maybe that's his trouble, maybe

29. Freeman, *Before I Kill More*, 46.

30. William T. Rasmussen, *Corroborating Evidence II* (Santa Fe: Sunstone, 2005).

31. George Wright, "Heirens Gets 3 Life Terms to Serve at Least 61 Yrs," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, September 6, 1946, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/177321997?accountid=14657>.

32. Douglas Martin, "William Heirens, the 'Lipstick Killer,' Dies at 83," *New York Times*, March 7, 2012, [http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/07/us/william-heirens-the-lipstick-killer-dies-at-83.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/07/us/william-heirens-the-lipstick-killer-dies-at-83.html?_r=0).

33. Freeman, *Before I Kill More*, 49.

34. "Pals at U. of C. Amazed; 'Everyone Liked Him,'" *Chicago Times*, newspaper clipping, June 29, 1946, box 1, folder 5, William Heirens Case, Special

he's too bright."<sup>35</sup> But that didn't seem likely. Heirens was a below-average student and barely passed his university entrance exams.<sup>36</sup>

## History of *In Loco Parentis*

The doctrine of *in loco parentis* (Latin for "in the place of the parent") was first applied to education in 1765 by William Blackstone: "[The father] may also delegate part of his parental authority, during his life, to the tutor or schoolmaster, of his child; who is then *in loco parentis* and has such a portion of the power of the parent committed to his charge."<sup>37</sup> This doctrine was practiced in nineteenth-century English schools, which were private and at which attendance was not compulsory. Therefore, the schools only had the authority given to them by the parent.<sup>38</sup> The validity of *in loco parentis* was often called into question in the courts, starting with *Regina v. Hopley* (1860) in which a schoolmaster beat a boy to death. The teacher was held liable for manslaughter, but the British court decision upheld *in loco parentis*, concluding that "by the law of England, a parent or schoolmaster (who for this purpose represents the parent and has the parental authority delegated to him) may for the purpose of correcting what is evil in the child inflict moderate and

Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

35. "'Billy Normal' Mom Says," *Chicago Times*, newspaper clipping, June 29, 1946, box 1, folder 5, William Heirens Case, SCRC.

36. Robert M. Strozier to Lawrence A. Kimpton Re. Heirens Case, report, July 8, 1946, box 102, folder 4, University of Chicago, Office of the President, Hutchins Administration, SCRC.

37. William Blackstone, *Commentaries on the Laws of England in Four Books, with an Analysis of the Work*, 19th ed. (London: S. Sweet, 1836).

38. John C. Hogan and Mortimer D. Schwartz, "In Loco Parentis in the United States 1765–1985," *Journal of Legal History* 260, no. 1 (1987): 260–274.

reasonable corporal punishment.”<sup>39</sup> In this case and those that followed in England the question was whether a teacher could corporally discipline a student.

*In loco parentis* gained popularity in America, where schooling was compulsory. In America the cases before the court extended *in loco parentis* to apply to teachers in order to protect students. In 1939 the New York Court of Appeals wrote: “At recess periods, not less than in the classroom, a teacher owes it to his charges to exercise such care as a parent of ordinary prudence would observe in comparable circumstances.”<sup>40</sup> This decision came to be known as “the prudent parent standard” and would be applied in many subsequent cases in American schools. But these decisions applied to grade school, not higher education.<sup>41</sup>

The proper role of a university and its faculty in the lives of students and in the community is a complex question. The doctrine of *in loco parentis* has been one prominent side of the argument. *In loco parentis* was first applied to higher education in *Gott v. Berea College* (1913) in which the court determined that “college authorities stand *in loco parentis* concerning the physical and moral welfare, and mental training of the pupils, and we are unable to see why to that end they may not make any rules or regulations for the government or betterment of their pupils that a parent could for the same purpose. Whether the rules or regulations are wise, or their aims worthy, is a matter left solely to the discretion of

39. Ibid, 260–274.

40. Ibid, 260–274.

41. In the 1970s *in loco parentis* was used to justify governmental searches and seizures and received much backlash from the courts and the schools; the doctrine has subsequently been dismissed by some as being “no longer a viable concept in American compulsory education... today it has become like ‘an empty vessel’ into which adult perceptions and prejudices are poured.” For discussion of the “best interests” standard cf., Hillary Rodham, “Children Under the Law,” *Harvard Educational Review* 43, no. 4 (December 1973): 513, doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17763/haer.43.4.e14676283875773k>.

the authorities, or parents as the case may be.”<sup>42</sup> The application of *in loco parentis* gave college administrators license to establish rules that applied to both extracurricular and academic programs, and the doctrine was largely embraced by institutions across the country. In practice, this influence meant that universities played an overbearing role on the nonacademic lives of their students—imposing strict rules meant to “build character.”<sup>43</sup> *In loco parentis* would continue to influence the policies of American universities through the 1960s until the case of *Dixon v. Alabama* (1961), which ruled that Alabama State College had violated students’ due process rights when it expelled a group of African American students for participating in a demonstration.<sup>44</sup>

The University of Chicago, however, had a history of rejecting a parental role. William Rainey Harper, the first university president, stated: “If parental authority has been rightly exercised, the young man or the young woman at the age of eighteen ought to be free, within the limitations of conventional life, to do what seems proper, in so far as it does not conflict with the general sentiment of the particular community to which they have now given adherence... the college professor to-day is not an officer *in loco parentis*.”<sup>45</sup> Harper modeled the relationship between professor and student on fraternal lines, with the latter a younger brother, creating a university community that was “a family of brothers.”<sup>46</sup> Hutchins, too, rejected any parental role for the university. An alumnus

42. *Gott v. Berea College*, 156 Ky, 376, 161 S.W. 204 (1913).

43. Philip Lee, “The Curious Life of *In Loco Parentis* in American Universities,” *Higher Education in Review* 8 (2011): 65–90.

44. *Ibid.*, 71.

45. William Rainey Harper, “The College Officer and the College Student,” in *College Life, Its Conditions and Problems: A Selection of Essays for Use in College Writing Courses*, ed. Maurice Garland Fulton (New York: Macmillan, 1914), 184.

46. *Ibid.*

recalled orientation week: "Of course I remember President Hutchins's welcoming speech. He told us, among other things, that he assumed we had been properly brought up and that the university would not act *in loco parentis*. He also confirmed the fact that we were not required to attend class but reminded us that we were paying the princely sum of \$200 a year in tuition and should not be wasting it."<sup>47</sup>

## Hutchins's New Plan

Heirens had entered the University of Chicago at age sixteen in 1945—a time of flux for higher education that included debate about *in loco parentis*. Since the end of World War Two the average age of the student body had increased. The needs of returned GIs and other older students were different from those of the typical eighteen to twenty-two year old. But at the University of Chicago the admission of high school students and incoming war veterans created an even more dramatic variation in age among the student body. The university was in a constant state of reform under Robert Maynard Hutchins. Hutchins assumed the presidency in 1929 as a brilliant but unpredictable thirty year old, whose energy and passionate decisions were often favorably compared to university founder William Rainey Harper. World War Two also had a large impact on the University of Chicago. In addition to the whole campus preparing for total war, the student body had shrunk: the enrollment of male undergraduates decreased from 1,561 in 1941 to 658 in 1943.<sup>48</sup> This enrollment crisis enabled Hutchins to implement a plan that he had been

47. Isadore Richlin, "O Week Reorientation," *University of Chicago Magazine*, June 2001, <http://magazine.uchicago.edu/0106/departments/letters-week.html>.

48. John W. Boyer, "Judson's War and Hutchins's Peace: The University of Chicago and War in the Twentieth Century," in *Occasional Papers on Higher Education*, vol. 12 (Chicago: The College of the University of Chicago, 2003), 69, [https://college.uchicago.edu/sites/college.uchicago.edu/files/attachments/Boyer\\_OccasionalPapers\\_V12.pdf](https://college.uchicago.edu/sites/college.uchicago.edu/files/attachments/Boyer_OccasionalPapers_V12.pdf).

pushing for almost ten years—he invited high school sophomores to enroll in the College if they met certain entrance requirements.<sup>49</sup>

The plan mirrored Hutchins's own accelerated achievements. He entered Oberlin College at age sixteen, spent three years in ambulance service for the American and Italian armies during World War One, and received a bachelors degree from Yale University at age twenty-two. He taught high school, served as secretary of Yale, graduated from law school, earned a full professorship, was appointed dean of the Yale Law School, and chosen as president of the University of Chicago, all before he turned twenty-nine.<sup>50</sup>

Hutchins is one of the university's most influential and well-remembered presidents, and he accomplished much, given that his presidency took place during the Great Depression and World War Two. He gave sixty-four public addresses in his first year as president and was often interviewed on the radio and in newspapers. He spent years on the "New Plan," which he hoped would change not only the College at the University of Chicago but undergraduate education nationwide. He eliminated grades and requirements, implementing instead a series of general education classes and comprehensive exams. Of his plan, he said, "the purpose of the university is nothing less than to procure a moral, intellectual, and spiritual revolution throughout the world."<sup>51</sup>

At the time of Heirens's arrest, Hutchins was promoting his "6-4-4" system, which shaved two years off grade school, giving students a six-year

49. Harold S. Wechsler, *Access to Success in the Urban High School the Middle College Movement* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2001).

50. Mary Ann Dzuback, *Robert M. Hutchins: Portrait of an Educator* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991). William Rainey Harper, the first president of the University of Chicago, was also a child prodigy. He started taking college-level classes at age eight. At age fourteen he graduated from college and continued postgraduate studies at Yale University.

51. "Robert Maynard Hutchins, 1929–1951," *Office of the President*, accessed April 8, 2012, <https://president.uchicago.edu/directory/robert-maynard-hutchins>.

elementary school, four-year high school, and four-year college, thus reducing a student's education from sixteen to fourteen years. Hutchins believed that most high schools failed to prepare students for the rigors of college. His 6-4-4 program "would offer the utmost resistance to shock in the form of peace or depression, because it is realistic, coherent, and logical. It is only by basic reorganization that education can meet the reoccurring problems which it confronts."<sup>52</sup> But the Heirens case appeared to refute the confident Hutchins and to represent what could go wrong when people too young are invited to enroll in college.

## Scrutiny of Heirens's Admission

William Heirens had completed the university's application satisfactorily and passed the standard entrance examination, but retrospectively his admission sparked outrage. On August 8, 1946, the day after Heirens's confession, an anonymous alumnus wrote to the *Chicago Daily Tribune*:

Now that thousands of GI's are unable to gain admission to various colleges because of overcrowding it is interesting to note that William Heirens, despite his known criminal background, was admitted as a student at the University of Chicago... as an alumnus... my face has been very red since the days of the murderous Loeb-Leopold pair, but now I am becoming reconciled to what seems to be a policy of the university to admit precocious students regardless of what their background may be..... ain't education wonderful!<sup>53</sup>

52. Robert M. Hutchins, "A Plan to Meet 'The Crisis in Education'; Hutchins Proposes a 'Basic Reorganization' Cutting the Years in School from 16 to 14," *New York Times*, June 9, 1946.

53. *Chicago Daily Tribune*, news clipping, August 8, 1946, box 102, folder 4, University of Chicago, Office of the President, Hutchins Administration, SCRC.

A phone message from an alumnus from the class of 1940 named Mr. Siegal suggested that the university “release a statement regarding the Heirens case. He feels the university should be defended at this point.”<sup>54</sup> This public critique was nothing new. After Heirens’s link to the Degnan murder, Harold H. Swift, an important and vocal University of Chicago trustee who had recently completed a twenty-seven-year term as chairman of the board, sent a handwritten note on July 5: “So many people are saying ‘the university will take anyone—and the screwier the better’... as I see it, the university is being held to account by many people. A proper statement is our best chance at minimizing damage.”<sup>55</sup>

This public scrutiny initiated an exchange of letters among university administrators. Hutchins was on leave at the *Encyclopædia Britannica*. Lawrence A. Kimpton, who had served as dean of students and dean of faculties, was acting as chancellor in Hutchins’s absence. In 1951 he would be named as Hutchins’s successor.<sup>56</sup> Kimpton, Richard M. Stozier, the current dean of students, and Swift exchanged letters about the role of the university in Heirens’s crimes. In response to the request for a statement from the alumnus, Mr. Siegal, Kimpton, in a display of frustration, wrote “good god,” but subsequently crossed the words out, responding instead with a brief, dismissive typed note.<sup>57</sup> He thought it best to release no official statement, but internally, he, Stozier, and Swift worked for

54. Harold H. Swift to Lawrence A. Kimpton, letter, August 12, 1946, box 102, folder 4, University of Chicago, Office of the President, Hutchins Administration, SCRC.

55. Harold H. Swift to Lawrence A. Kimpton, note, July 5, 1946, box 102, folder 4, University of Chicago, Office of the President, Hutchins Administration, SCRC.

56. “Lawrence A. Kimpton, 1910–1977,” *The Presidents of the University of Chicago: A Centennial View*, accessed December 8, 2011, [http://www.lib.uchicago.edu/projects/centcat/centcats/pres/presch06\\_01.html](http://www.lib.uchicago.edu/projects/centcat/centcats/pres/presch06_01.html).

57. Lawrence A. Kimpton, note, undated, box 102, folder 4, University of Chicago, Office of the President, Hutchins Administration, SCRC.



change. Kimpton, Strozier, and Swift examined college admissions to determine how the university could prevent the admission of another Heirens. On July 8, just two weeks after Heirens's arrest and before he confessed, Strozier had already written three reports to Kimpton to clarify the university's role. These reports would be presented in the next Board of Trustees' meeting, if requested, on July 20.

Strozier summarized Heirens's admission record in one of his reports. Heirens's St. Bede's Academy grades were "good, although not brilliant."<sup>58</sup> He had earned As, Bs, some Cs, and failed third-year English, but he was on the honor roll and received a conduct award. He listed his academic interests as mathematics and physics and his extracurricular interests included radio club, assistant to the physical-education instructor, and secretary of the science club. He had a coin collection. St. Bede's principal, the Reverend James Laurer, recommended Heirens, who "worked independently, has well defined objectives, and his reputation for integrity is good... he has been a good citizen of the school, is well balanced emotionally... there have been no factors of home conditions which have affected his school work." He noted that Heirens had "a relative who had attended the University of Chicago for six years." Dorothy Dunaway, a university entrance counselor, "rated him as average in personality, well-poised, and courteous... his taste in dress is very good." Strozier reported that in his first year in the College his instructors were "generally satisfied with him, although he was not an outstanding student... there is nothing to indicate that he was not a normal student, that his attitude was not good, and that he was not thoroughly acceptable in the classroom." The report suggested that the university had followed procedure and admitted Heirens properly.

58. Robert M. Strozier to Lawrence A. Kimpton Re: Heirens Case, report, July 16, 1946, box 102, folder 4, University of Chicago, Office of the President, Hutchins Administration, SCRC. Note: All quotes in this paragraph are from this report.

On the same day, Strozier wrote another report to Kimpton, "Observations on the procedures for admitting and supervising students in light of the Heirens case," which outlined the admissions policy, and how it was followed during Heirens's application.<sup>59</sup> First, was the interview by the entrance counselor: "Mr. Heirens was interviewed and passed easily the rather personal examination that is given." Next came the prep school recommendation of "character and personality traits," as well as academic record: "Mr. Heirens attended St. Bede's Academy and received the unqualified recommendation of the school principal of that school." Third, Strozier discussed Hutchins's Plan. Usually, young students like Heirens were supervised by faculty or older graduate students; each house has a head resident who, along with assistants, were in daily contact with the resident students: "During the Winter Quarter Mr. Heirens was in residence in Snell Hall, which was under the general supervision of Mr. Jacob Van Staaveren. It is worthy of comment, however, that Mr. Heirens would have been placed in Burton-Judson Court instead of Snell Hall had it not been for the fact that the elder Mr. Heirens asked that his son be placed in Snell." Housing was the one area in which standard admission procedure differed for Heirens. He was not placed in a dormitory designed to foster the young high school-aged first years; instead he was placed in a dorm room with an older war veteran. The report continues: while athletics and activities were available for students, "Mr. Heirens took no active and outstanding part in the activities of the campus although he was understood to have been a rather regular attendant at the Calvert Club, the Catholic young people's organization on campus. He was, however, the athletic type and did participate in various activities, including the school dancing classes." Fifth and finally, Strozier discussed the academic advising program

59. Robert M. Strozier to Lawrence A. Kimpton re. "Observations on the procedures for admitting and supervising students in light of the Heirens case," report, July 16, 1946, box 102, folder 4, University of Chicago, Office of the President, Hutchins Administration, SCRC. Note: All quotes in this paragraph are from this report.

designed to support student academics: "Mr. Heirens was a reasonably good student, although not brilliant. He did take advantage of the counseling program and was interviewed on several occasions by various members of the College faculty. Nothing unusual was found in his general demeanor nor in his attitude towards his academic work and the university in general." Strozier concluded that the "adoption of the college plan has presented a challenge to the University in meeting the needs of the very young student. While the steps that have been taken already are in the right direction, there is a general recognition that much more must be done in the orientation of the young College student to his new surroundings."<sup>60</sup> Because Heirens had been placed in the incorrect dormitory, student housing would be an area of focus for the administrators. Kimpton, Strozier, and Swift began to discuss new rules, regulations, and policies for student life.

## Student Life—The Great Responsibility

On July 16, the same day that the *Tribune* published the sensational false confession, Strozier wrote to Kimpton to inform him of changes being made in student life.<sup>61</sup> He wrote that the Board of Trustees had elected to extend the "traditional orientation week into orientation quarter, that is, spending more time during the fall quarter in aiding the college students to make their adjustments." In addition, the house system would be expanded: "Efforts are being made to have even more of the younger faculty members serve in the capacity of head residents in the houses." Student activities, too, were expanded, "with the hope that, without in any way diverting the energy and attention of the students away from the academic program, emphasis on the academic and extra-

60. Ibid.

61. Robert M. Strozier to Lawrence A. Kimpton, letter, July 16, 1946, box 102, folder 4, University of Chicago, Office of the President, Hutchins Administration, SCRC. Note: All quotes in this paragraph are from this letter.

curricular activities might go hand in hand to mutual advantage.”

On July 25 Swift wrote Kimpton to inform him of changes to the formal application process to “prevent any recurrence of this case... we cannot ignore this problem of its prevention.”<sup>62</sup> One measure of prevention was adding, a “direct question” to the admission application.<sup>63</sup> This suggestion was written into the formal application on August 31: “Have you ever been in conflict with legal authorities?”<sup>64</sup> That question, Swift suggested, and Strozier agreed, should be posed both to the student and to the high school principal. This decision was put into practice on September 5.<sup>65</sup> In addition, Kimpton suggested obtaining references from “other sources than those recommended by the application,” because he suspected that “we would find the applicant smart enough to put down names of people who would endorse him.” Finally, the administration asked the Chicago Crime Commission to investigate any case involving a student.<sup>66</sup>

The Chicago press documented these changes and others for the “youngsters” admitted by the Hutchins Plan. The *Chicago Daily Tribune* announced the “Ban Dolls & Bottles in Chicago U Dorms as Heirens

62. Harold H. Swift to Lawrence A. Kimpton, letter, July 25, 1946, box 102, folder 4, University of Chicago, Office of the President, Hutchins Administration, SCRC.

63. *Ibid.*

64. Admission Questionnaire, no date, box 6, folder 6, University of Chicago, Office of the President, Hutchins Administration, SCRC.

65. Harold H. Swift to Lawrence A. Kimpton, letter, September 5, 1946, box 6, folder 6, University of Chicago, Office of the President, Hutchins Administration, SCRC.

66. *Ibid.* In 1919 a group of businessmen founded the Chicago Crime Commission to monitor law enforcement practices and procedures; the commission had been critical of the police, and had relied on University of Chicago support and research. Robert H. Gault, “The Chicago Crime Commission,” *Journal of the American Institute of Criminal Law and Criminology* 10, no. 1 (May 1919): 8–12.

Kickback.”<sup>67</sup> A curfew was instated, as well as rules banning alcohol and dorm visits from the opposite gender.<sup>68</sup> Always sensational, the *Chicago Times* classified the pre-Heirens housing policy as a “dorm sexy party”;<sup>69</sup> more reasonably, a student said it was “a dormitory with actually no restrictions. There was no one watching.”<sup>70</sup> In the wake of the Heirens case, people began to watch. Alumni, trustees, and administrators took a greater interest in student life at the University of Chicago.

In November of 1949 Strozier read a report, the “Evolution of Rules and Regulations in the Residence Halls of the University of Chicago: 1934–1949,” at the second meeting of the Committee on Student Interests of the Board of Trustees of the University of Chicago.<sup>71</sup> It documented the evolution of dormitory rules, beginning with the first recorded memorandum for regulatory change from 1944, which discussed hours for women’s dorms. The report addressed the criticisms in the press; it acknowledged that the years between 1945 and 1947 were “experimental periods for the enforcement and refinement of the regulations.” But there *were* rules, and in the autumn of 1945 the university had published and circulated a pamphlet which contained a prohibition against first and second years drinking alcohol in the dorms. Students would be separated

67. “Ban Dolls & Bottles in Chicago U Dorms as Heirens Kickback,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, newspaper clipping, September 9, 1946, box 1, folder 5. William Heirens Case, SCRC.

68. “Heirens Case Ends Laxity at U. of C.,” *Chicago Times*, newspaper clipping, September 9, 1946, box 1, folder 5. William Heirens Case, SCRC.

69. “Heirens Reveals Dorm Sex Party,” *Chicago Times*, newspaper clipping, September 4, 1946, box 1, folder 5. William Heirens Case, SCRC.

70. *Ibid.*

71. Evolution of Rules and Regulations in the Residence Halls of the University of Chicago: 1934–1949, report, November 17, 1949, box 70, folder 7, University of Chicago, Office of the President, Hutchins Administration, SCRC. Note: All quotes in this paragraph are from this report.

by age. After the Heirens case, however, "these rules were enforced, interpreted and adjusted." Instead of housing students from the ages of fourteen to forty-five together, the older students would be located in the dormitories of their academic divisions and the age range within the College houses would be fourteen to nineteen. Also, "all College students under the age of 18 must live in the dormitory system unless they are residing with their parents at home." The report does not mention Heirens, but it contains allusions to elements of his case. The rules "[were] not only general rules of conduct, but also dealt with the subject of possession of firearms in House units" and "permission for overnight leave from dormitory dwelling," which might have prevented Heirens's actions. When Heirens moved on campus the university was largely a commuter campus; with this report the administration was learning through trial and error of the consequences of past laxity about students in residence.

Other universities had relied on *in loco parentis* from the start, imposing and enforcing strict social rules regarding curfews, restricting speech, and limiting socialization. For example, the Hampton Institute, a historically black college in Virginia, notably expelled students in the late nineteenth century for "bad work habits and 'weakness of character.'"<sup>72</sup> As universities across the country began to turn away from *in loco parentis* in the 1940s, the University of Chicago instituted policies built upon that doctrine. In the dorms, staff members were appointed in order to "supervise and guide the students [and] constantly offer personal counsel to students and enforce the University's regulations affecting students. [They were to] draw from the various services provided by the University such as the Counseling Center, Student Health and the Dean's Office. The staff also works closely with the parents of students through personal contact or written communication."<sup>73</sup>

72. Lee, "Life of *In Loco Parentis*," 65–90.

73. Evolution of Rules and Regulations in the Residence Halls of the University of Chicago: 1934–1949, report, November 17, 1949, box 70, folder 7, University of Chicago, Office of the President, Hutchins Administration, SCRC.

These rules addressed the failure of the house system to help students such as Heirens. The housing staff would meet and discuss common problems, recognizing that “regulations of this nature are never completely written; unique situations always arise.”<sup>74</sup> Self-government within the dorms was established to encourage students to engage with their housemates, and the dorms received a house fund for “various social and recreational activities.”<sup>75</sup> Committees were established, a dormitory-wide Council and the Dormitory System Planning Committee, that prioritized multiple aspects of dormitory life and engaged the administration house oversight. Supervision extended to off-campus housing; Strozier suggested a vigorous check of off-campus apartments and suggested requiring all College students to live in dormitories.<sup>76</sup> Policy changes in student housing gave students less freedom but more supervision and support.

The Heirens case and the university’s reaction exposed a serious weakness in the Hutchins system and precipitated an embrace of the once rejected *in loco parentis*. The university acknowledged that these decisions were paternalistic. A 1949 document, “On the Philosophy of the Residence Program,” stated that “the College has not only special objectives, but it attempts to achieve them by special methods, which are based in part on the assumption that it knows better than the student what is best for him. It therefore says to him, ‘we will prescribe your studies and allocate the greater part of your waking time for four years.’ The college assumes a great responsibility.”<sup>77</sup>

74. Committee on Student Interests, report, November 17, 1949, box 70, folder 7, University of Chicago, Office of the President, Hutchins Administration, SCRC.

75. Ibid.

76. Ibid.

77. On the Philosophy of the Residence Program: 1934–1949, report, November 17, 1949, box 70, folder 7, University of Chicago, Office of the President, Hutchins Administration, SCRC.

Outside observers also encouraged the university to realize its “great responsibility.” Throughout 1946 the university received passionate letters in the wake of the Heirens case, such as Charles E. Rogers’s July 28 letter to Hutchins and Marshall Field III. (Field’s great grandfather had helped found the University of Chicago, and he was the founder of the *Chicago Sun* and a university trustee.) The letter emphasized the naïvete of the Hutchins administration and demanded that the university make sure that the Heirens incident would not be repeated:

I am sure that hundreds of thousands of persons are convinced there is some connection between his being a University of Chicago student and his criminal acts... Does the University of Chicago accept any responsibility for the behavior of its students? Does it screen its students? Has it facilities for protecting members of the university community from the harm that its occasionally maladjusted and dangerously antisocial student may do?<sup>78</sup>

Dismayed at the apathy he saw in Hyde Park, he pointed to a friend who was attacked on campus:

He was “rolled” by some burly adolescents. They blacked his eye, knocked him down and then began JUMPING UP AND DOWN ON HIS PRONE BODY... My friend is a veteran... he never came so near loosing his life out there as he did right here at one of Chicago’s busiest street corners.<sup>79</sup>

78. Charles E. Rogers to Robert Hutchins and Marshall Field III, letter, July 28, 1946, box 102, folder 4, University of Chicago, Office of the President, Hutchins Administration, SCRC.

79. *Ibid.*



He closed with a call to action (emphasis added):

Here is an unexpected opportunity for the press to dramatize what little we already know about the social factors which produce the Heirenses of the world and of Chicago in particular. *Heirens is the best news peg for awakening social consciousness that has come to the press for many years.* Here at the University of Chicago is the best corps of social scientists in the world... There is a certain irony about the existence of these great men of social science at the University of Chicago and the environment in which they work.<sup>80</sup>

## The University and the Community, the 1940s and 1950s

The 1946 letter did coincide with a more widespread “awakening of social consciousness” on campus, given that urban renewal followed shortly after the Heirens case. The case of William Heirens challenged the university to think not only about relations with its students, for the case rippled out to raise questions about campus and community and the role of a university in society more broadly.

While there has been much research on the causes of urban renewal and its impact on the community, I believe attention to the Heirens case and its aftermath contributes something new. The public scrutiny and internal changes happening at the time of the case helped to produce the attitudes that began urban renewal. The same spirit of self-examination and reevaluation of the university’s role in nonacademic life that is present in the decisions surrounding the Heirens case is also present in the rhetoric and logic behind urban renewal. Just as the university began to subscribe to the *in loco parentis* doctrine of supervising students, it took a similarly paternal role in fostering the neighborhood.

80. Ibid.

After the war, the neighborhoods surrounding the university were seen as rapidly deteriorating, which drove away prospective students and faculty and concerned alumni and trustees. African Americans were moving from the "Black Belt" of the South Side into Englewood, Woodlawn, Kenwood, and Hyde Park, increasing racial tensions. Crime was on the rise, and faculty members were moving out of the neighborhood.<sup>81</sup> The *Chicago Daily Tribune* proclaimed: "These are critical times for The University of Chicago, one of the world's greatest centers of learning. The next few years will tell whether its star is to flicker and fade into mediocrity, or continue lighting the way to the Parnassian heights where the muses dwell." The article point out "three main problems. [The university] needs more money, more students, and most of all, improvements stabilizing of the neighborhood in which it lives. A university whose scientists have measured the speed of light, ushered in the atomic age, and studied galaxies thousands of light years from earth suddenly has found its neighborhood in danger of being engulfed by slums."<sup>82</sup>

In 1946 the Chicago Crime Commission released a report detailing the "vice, gambling, liquor sales to minors, vulgarity, obscenity, prostitution, venereal infection, and crooked vice games" that engulfed the stretch of east 63rd Street filled with honky-tonk taverns.<sup>83</sup> This "vice area" was comprised of eighty-three taverns, liquor stores, and nightclubs.

81. John W. Boyer, *Three Views of Continuity & Change at the University of Chicago* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 12.

82. Chesly Manly, "U. of Chicago Opens Critical Fight for Life: Three Vital Problems Confront Officials," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, August 1, 1954, <http://archives.chicagotribune.com/1954/08/01/page/7/article/u-of-chicago-opens-critical-fight-for-life>.

83. Ward Walker, "Vice Rampant, Citizens Cry; Sue to Stop It," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, October 5, 1946, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/177293428?accountid=14657>.

The Woodlawn Community Association, founded in 1935, circulated a petition to remove the businesses and achieved five thousand six hundred signatures. The group was backed by sixteen church groups, thirty-two civic and education groups, and the University of Chicago.<sup>84</sup> Hyde Park's historic status as a wealthy, white, suburban enclave had quickly changed. Within a few years, Woodlawn would be ranked as having the highest rates of violent crime in Chicago.<sup>85</sup>

Tensions between the university and the neighborhood would continue throughout the 1950s. Boyer describes the situation in postwar Hyde Park as a "virtual meltdown of the neighborhood surrounding the university in the later 1940s and early 1950s, which made Chicago seem an unsafe and inhospitable destination for high school students, whether they were sixteen or eighteen."<sup>86</sup> When Hutchins resigned in 1951 and was succeeded by Kimpton, "the situation was "desperate"<sup>87</sup> and the neighborhood "blighted."<sup>88</sup> By 1953 the College had fallen from its peak enrollment by half and now enrolled fewer than one thousand four hundred students. (The enrollment would not return to pre-1940s numbers until the mid-1980s.<sup>89</sup>) Edward H. Levi, dean of

84. Walker, "Vice Rampant."

85. Boyer, *Three Views*, 12. It is important to note that crime tends not to be reported as often in more dangerous neighborhoods, so Woodlawn had the highest crime rate of the neighborhoods safe enough to foster crime reporting.

86. Boyer, *Three Views*, 16.

87. Dorothy V. Jones, *Harold Swift and the Higher Learning* (Chicago: University of Chicago Library, 1985), 10.

88. "Urban Renewal for Whom?" *Daily Defender*, May 26, 1958, <http://search.proquest.com.proxy.uchicago.edu/docview/493622225?accountid=14657>.

89. John W. Boyer, "'The Kind of University that We Desire to Become': Student Housing and the Educational Mission of the University of Chicago," in *Occasional Papers on Higher Education*, vol. 18 (Chicago: The College of the University of Chicago, October 28, 2008), accessed April 1, 2015, <https://college>

the Law School, who would later become the president of the university and the US attorney general under Gerald R. Ford, charged universities with a community responsibility: "Like the University of Chicago, encircled by increasingly decayed neighborhoods plagued with crime, juvenile delinquency and filth, we must join in a concerted effort to rehabilitate our neighbors."<sup>90</sup>

Hence, in the aftermath of the Heirens case, the university began to examine itself on two levels: the responsibility for the individuals it admitted and the responsibility for larger social problems plaguing the surrounding community. In the former the danger came from inside the campus, but that case also served as an opportunity for the university to examine its role in the community. In reaction to the spotlight on the deteriorating neighborhood, which began to threaten the university's status as a leader in American higher education, the university embarked on a series of redevelopment and neighborhood-management plans. The pressure for change came both from within the university (admissions officers, the Board of Trustees, and faculty recruiters) and from outside (alumni and prospective students' families).

## Civil Rights and Student Movements, the 1960s and 1970s

The logic behind urban renewal has parallels to *in loco parentis*; both actions define a broader role for the university to play in the lives of students and the neighborhood. The University of Chicago assumed the role of urban planner, implementing a vision that was "the most ambitious agenda of urban redevelopment of any university to that

[.uchicago.edu/sites/college.uchicago.edu/files/attachments/Boyer\\_Occasional\\_Papers\\_V18.pdf](http://.uchicago.edu/sites/college.uchicago.edu/files/attachments/Boyer_Occasional_Papers_V18.pdf).

90. Edward H. Levi, "The University and the Modern Condition," in *Points of View: Talks on Education* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 20.

time.”<sup>91</sup> Kimpton used his position as the university chancellor to make urban planning decisions outside of campus. He proceeded to change traffic patterns and building sizes and engaged in “broad community landscaping” in order to establish “a homogeneous, economic, middle class or better level within the community.”<sup>92</sup>

But some residents saw urban renewal as a thinly veiled plan to drive African Americans out of Hyde Park. The *Chicago Defender*, an African American newspaper based on Chicago’s South Side, called urban renewal “a well conceived scheme to clear Negroes out of the Hyde Park area so that the University of Chicago and a privileged class of rich patrons might have an exclusive community of their own.”<sup>93</sup> In addition to these racist motivations, the *Defender* also alleged that many of the supporters of urban renewal stood to profit financially from the plan: “[The university’s] financiers, real estate dealers... stood to gain much by the transaction.”<sup>94</sup> The African American community continued to protest against urban renewal, which drew national attention as Martin Luther King Jr. led a protest in 1966.<sup>95</sup>

Despite opposition, Kimpton, William Spencer, chairman of the Chicago Plan Commission, and Julian H. Levi, executive director of the South East Chicago Commission (SECC) and brother of Edward H. Levi, worked together to change the university and neighborhood. Kimpton imposed much-needed budget cuts. (The university had been

91. LaDale Winling, “Students and the Second Ghetto: Federal Legislation, Urban Politics, and Campus Planning at the University of Chicago,” *Journal of Planning History* 10, no. 1 (February 2011): 59–86.

92. Ibid.

93. “Urban Renewal for Whom?”

94. Ibid.

95. “King to Speak,” *Hyde Park Herald*, January 26, 1966; and “Rally Speakers Protest Decision,” *Hyde Park Herald*, February 9, 1966, <http://nl.newsbank.com/nl-search/we/Archives>.

operating at a yearly deficit of over one million during Hutchins' presidency.) He expanded the endowment through a large fund-raising campaign, oversaw the construction of fifteen new campus buildings, and increased faculty salaries by 30 percent. Kimpton created and headed the SECC, which coordinated urban renewal projects including removal and rehabilitation of more than 20 percent of the buildings throughout Hyde Park and Kenwood.<sup>96</sup> Kimpton took a central role in Hyde Park development; he "oversaw the allocation of federal, state, local and private funds to projects aimed at improving housing, infrastructure, and safety in the Hyde Park area."<sup>97</sup> Using eminent domain rights, the university acquired "slum" property and demolished buildings.<sup>98</sup>

Some observers found the university's pursuit of urban renewal consistent with the civilizing mission of education associated with the university's first president: "Chicago has made its greatest contribution to civilization by adding to the accumulated wisdom and promoting the welfare of mankind. In this highest purpose of a university, it has fulfilled the dream of its first president, William Rainey Harper."<sup>99</sup> This perceived civilizing mission extended to Kimpton hiring a retired high school superintendent to do missionary work in neighborhood high schools by improving the moral character of the youth.<sup>100</sup> Whether a success or failure, the University of Chicago's actions in postwar Chicago and its

96. "Guide to the University of Chicago Office of the President, Kimpton Administration Records, 1892–1960," *University of Chicago Library*, accessed April 2, 2012, <https://www.lib.uchicago.edu/e/scrcl/findingaids/view.php?eadid=ICU.SPCL.OFCPRESKIMPTON>.

97. *Ibid.*

98. Manley, "U. of Chicago Opens Critical Fight."

99. *Ibid.*

100. *Ibid.*

program of urban renewal changed the role of universities in the community.<sup>101</sup>

As universities took a more central role in society with initiatives such as urban renewal, they, in turn, gained more political and cultural clout.<sup>102</sup> From the 1940s through the late 1950s the federal government and universities worked together on important collaborations such as the Navy's training programs and the Manhattan Project. In fact, Kimpton originally came to Chicago as chief administrative officer of the Metallurgical Laboratory, which was part of the Manhattan Project.<sup>103</sup> In exchange for funds from the federal government universities became research partners on government projects. The government also created scholarships and funded laboratory facilities that promoted math, science, and engineering in order to maintain America's status in the Cold War space race.<sup>104</sup> The president of the University of California, Clark Kerr, dubbed universities "instruments of national purpose," claiming that "what the railroads did for the second half of the last century and the automobile did for the first half of this century may be done for the second half of this century by the knowledge industry: that is, to serve as the focal point for national growth. And the university is at the center of the knowledge process."<sup>105</sup> The collaboration between universities and the federal government was integral to urban renewal.

101. Winling, "Students and the Second Ghetto," 59–86.

102. Ibid. Winling states that universities "had become integral parts of the postwar liberal consensus."

103. "Guide to the University of Chicago Office of the President, Kimpton Administration Records, 1892–1960," *University of Chicago Library*, Accessed April 2, 2012, <https://www.lib.uchicago.edu/e/src/findingaids/view.php?eadid=ICU.SPCL.OFCPRESKIMPTON>.

104. Winling, "Students and the Second Ghetto," 59–86.

105. Clark Kerr, *The Uses of the University* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1963), 66.

This collaboration was written into law as coalitions from the University of Chicago successfully lobbied to Congress for Section 418 of the Housing Act of 1959, which tied universities to urban renewal redevelopment by granting a two-to-one federal match for university contributions “near to and consistent with an approved urban renewal plan.”<sup>106</sup>

But as the role of the university in surrounding neighborhoods increased, it faced backlash from students. In the 1950s students began to rebel against the university’s constricting policies concerning dormitories and activities. Students spoke out in protest against all elements of *in loco parentis*. The atmosphere of unrest swelled in the sixties, as students grew increasingly frustrated with the administration’s housing and disciplinary processes, which students characterized as paternalistic, condescending, and racist. These local protests were part of a national social trend away from the *in loco parentis* philosophy of education to a recognition of students’ independence, as well as a legal recognition of their constitutional rights in the courts.<sup>107</sup> By 1968 over half the incoming freshman class joined Students for a Democratic Society.<sup>108</sup> Students occupied the central administration building three times in the 1960s.<sup>109</sup> The first occupation was in response to the university’s off-campus rental policies, taken up during urban renewal. In 1962 the Committee on Racial Equality organized a sit-in of thirty students

106. Winling, “Students and the Second Ghetto,” 59–86.

107. Lee, “Life of *In Loco Parentis*,” 65–90.

108. Monica Mercado and Katherine Turk, “Postwar Student Movements,” *On Equal Terms: Educating Women at the University of Chicago*, 2009, accessed April 8, 2012, <http://www.lib.uchicago.edu/e/webexhibits/OnEqualTerms/PostwarStudentMovements.html>.

109. The University of Chicago has a long and interesting history of student activism that I will not attempt to summarize in this paper. A good place to start further research is “University of Chicago—Student Activism, 1960s,” *The University of Chicago Library*, <http://www.lib.uchicago.edu/e/src/collections/subject/activism.html>.



outside the office of the university president, George W. Beadle. This protest was peaceful on both sides: protesters met with administrators before the sit in, obtaining permission, and were even offered free cafeteria lunches. After two weeks, President Beadle ordered an investigation into the students' claim, and the protesters left the building.<sup>110</sup>

With national protests came national discussion about *in loco parentis*. Civil rights and antiwar consciousnesses raised Americans' concerns about their government. Critical students looked to their own micro-governments, the college governance procedures. Protests came to college campuses, and with these protests came violence and disruption. A coalition of university associations led by the American Association of University Professors released the "Joint Statement of Rights and Freedoms of Students," designed to start a new era of student-institution relations.<sup>111</sup> The statement defined the role of the university as less that of a parent, who, under *in loco parentis* would have total control and direction over a student's intellectual and moral development, and more as an assistant and encourager in these areas. To reach these ends, almost all *in loco parentis* rules were eliminated from extracurricular matters in universities across the country. The doctrine of *in loco parentis* went out of fashion and was seen as anachronistic by the end of the 1960s.<sup>112</sup> But when it came to legal matters, both students and institutions preferred to retain the spirit of *in loco parentis* and take care of legal matters, such as drug use and civil disobedience, within the university "family," protecting students from outside law enforcement authorities.<sup>113</sup>

110. Diary of the Sit-Ins, 1962, box 128, file 5, folder 12, University of Chicago, Office of the President, Beadle Administration, SCRC.

111. Hogan and Schwartz. "In Loco Parentis in the United States," 260–274.

112. *Ibid.*

113. *Ibid.*

## Conclusion

The University of Chicago continued to reassess its responsibility toward its students. The Hutchins Plan of early admission ended two years after Hutchins left the university. In 1953 Kimpton attributed the decision to reluctance on the part of high school principals to let go of their brightest pupils, but there were certainly other factors. In retrospect, the Hutchins Plan has been described by Harold Wechsler as “the Chicago experiment... frequently discussed, if not always understood.”<sup>114</sup> Yet I believe that the internal correspondence surrounding the Heirens case suggest another interpretation. The ending of high school-age admissions was a logical response to an experience of what can go terribly wrong when high school students are thrown into a college environment.

The Heirens case is now mostly forgotten, but some of the policies adopted in the wake of his arrest and conviction live on. I acknowledged on my application to the College that I had never been charged with a crime. I lived my first year under close supervision and guidance by residence heads and assistants. These policies, catalyzed by the Heirens crisis, endure. So, too, has the university’s willingness to self-examination. Take for example the recent cancellation of a talk by Condoleezza Rice when faced with a planned “un-welcoming” protest by members of the Occupy Chicago movement.<sup>115</sup> Blogs exploded, pointing fingers at everyone involved—at the university and Rice for being cowardly and at Occupy Chicago for stifling intellectual discourse. The university released statements about freedom of speech and the right for self-expression, and President Zimmer discussed the cancellation in an

114. Wechsler, *Access to Success*.

115. Chuck Sudo, “Condoleezza Rice Talk at U of C Postponed. Occupy Chicago Celebrates,” *Chicagoist*, November 15, 2011, [http://chicagoist.com/2011/11/15/condoleezza\\_rice\\_talk\\_at\\_u\\_of\\_c\\_post.php](http://chicagoist.com/2011/11/15/condoleezza_rice_talk_at_u_of_c_post.php).

open forum with students.<sup>116</sup> A legacy of William Heirens? Not entirely, of course. But the university's soul-searching continues as the administration engages with students today.

## A Note on the Subject, William Heirens

William Heirens died on March 6, 2012, in prison in Dixon, Illinois. He was one of the longest serving inmates in the United States and the first prisoner to receive a college degree in jail. His case had been reviewed and denied by parole boards twenty-eight times.<sup>117</sup> He has many supporters who believed him innocent, a victim of police and press malfeasance. Doubts about his conviction center around handwriting analysis on the notes at the crime scenes, fingerprint analysis, and emerging evidence about the prevalence of false confessions, especially those given by teenagers.<sup>118</sup> Dolores Kennedy of the Center on Wrongful Convictions at Northwestern University considers Heirens unquestionably innocent.<sup>119</sup> However, because of the strong support of his conviction by Suzanne Degnan's sister and the sheer age of the case—much evidence has been lost and the people involved dead—the challenges to his conviction remained mostly theoretical.

116. Patrick Fitz, "Students Grill Zimmer on Harper Court, Rice Talk," *Chicago Maroon*, November 18, 2011, <http://chicagomaroon.com/2011/11/18/students-grill-zimmer-on-harper-court-rice>.

117. Martin, "William Heirens Dies."

118. False confessions are one of the leading causes of wrongful conviction, especially among youth. See "New Study Finds False Confessions More Likely among Juveniles," *Innocence Project*, October 22, 2013, accessed April 1, 2015, <http://www.innocenceproject.org/news-events-exonerations/new-study-finds-false-confessions-more-likely-among-juveniles>.

119. Dolores Kennedy, *William Heirens: His Day in Court* (Los Angeles: Bonus Books, 1991).

## Methods and Sources

My research relied heavily on primary sources, namely the wealth of information available in the University of Chicago Library's Special Collections Research Center, which I refer to in footnotes with the abbreviation SCRC. Some of the correspondences were undated and unsigned, but for the most part I found the records well organized. Because I examined papers, specifically those of Robert Maynard Hutchins, oftentimes correspondence was one sided. In addition to the archived newspapers in Special Collections, I used the ProQuest database of historical newspapers. Of the major Chicago newspapers, this database only includes the *Chicago Daily Tribune*, so I cite the *Tribune* heavily. I reviewed the *Chicago Maroon*, the university's student newspaper, on microfilm and the *Hyde Park Herald's* online archive, but these local sources, interestingly, did not mention the Heirens case, though both papers were active at the time and their records available. My secondary sources include research by John W. Boyer, dean of the College, other scholarship on Hutchins and the University of Chicago, and popular studies about true crime.

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