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# *The Undergraduate Library*





Photography by Marvin T. Jones



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# The Undergraduate Library: 'A Place With Inner Life'

By Abdulkadir N. Said

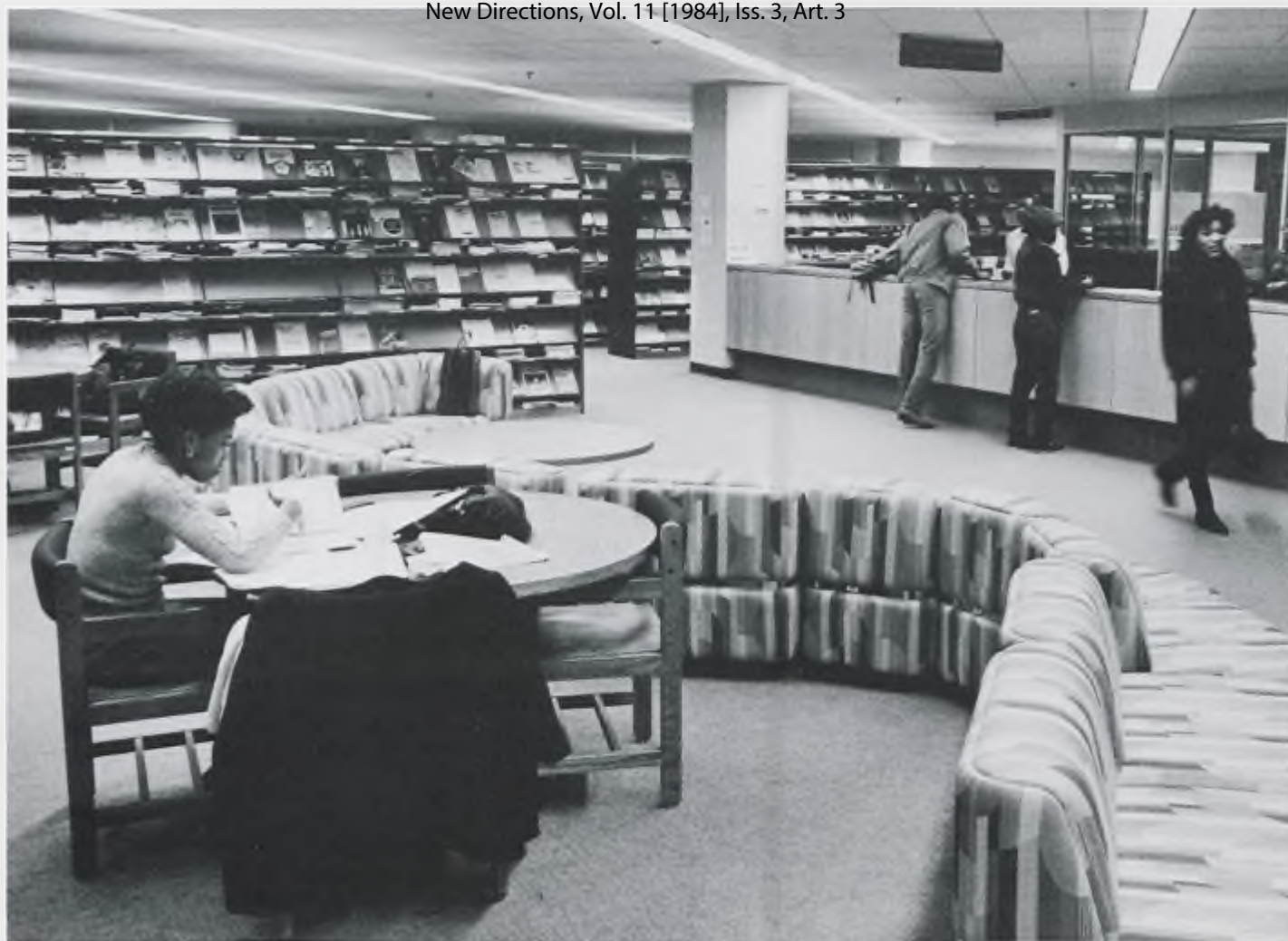
## Chapter One

**I**t is by education I learn to do by choice, what other men do by the constraint of fear, so said Aristotle. This observation by the Greek philosopher has indeed stood the test of time, from generation to generation.

If education liberates the mind from the yoke of ignorance by opening up new vistas and expanding one's horizon, books play a key role in this liberation.

Henry Rogers, the English essayist of the last century, had this to say about the place of books in shaping the mind and advancing the race—any race:

*Upon books the collective education of the race depends; they are the sole instruments of registering, perpetuating, and transmitting thought.*



There you have it, “registering, perpetuating, and transmitting thought” — through the classroom and, indeed, the library.

Libraries these days have become increasingly sophisticated in the diverse nature of services they offer. Computers and electronic wares of various design and shape have become a part of their landscape. Modern technology and inventions have caught up — and rightly so — with the traditional hall of learning. Life couldn’t be better for today’s undergraduates, especially those at Howard University where a new Undergraduate Library was dedicated in September.

By all accounts, the \$7.4 million facility is ahead of its time in design and efficiency and in meeting — in a wholesome way — the library needs of the undergraduate student at the university.

“What is so different about this place?” you ask.

It is a modern facility that was designed and built around the growing needs of to-





day's undergraduate, tomorrow's graduate student, and the professional of the future. It is "not just your ordinary library," according to a line in a flyer distributed by the personnel, "but a place with an inner life. Truly, a total environment."

"What kind of an environment?" you ask.

**A**s you enter Howard's Undergraduate Library, through the large glass doors, past the information/security desk, and into the spacious main hallway, you soon discover that you are in a new world, a world that invites you to explore more.

Once you have entered the main concourse, your involvement with books, periodicals, electronic files, microform-

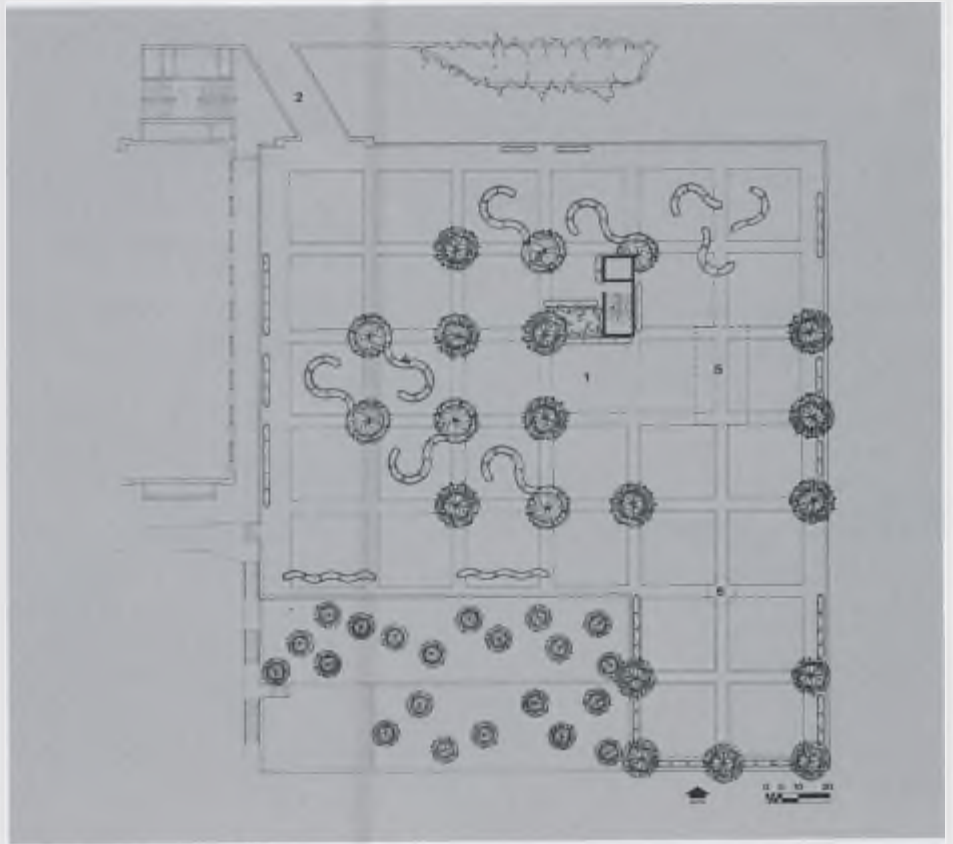
microfiche, and COMs — computer output microfilm — can begin. Indeed, you have entered a truly comfortable environment, with sofas, chairs and desks — for undisturbed study and learning. And wall-to-wall books.

No other undergraduate facility in the Washington area matches Howard's new library, according to Doris Mitchell, acting assistant director of the Undergraduate Library. A first hand inspection would prove her correct.

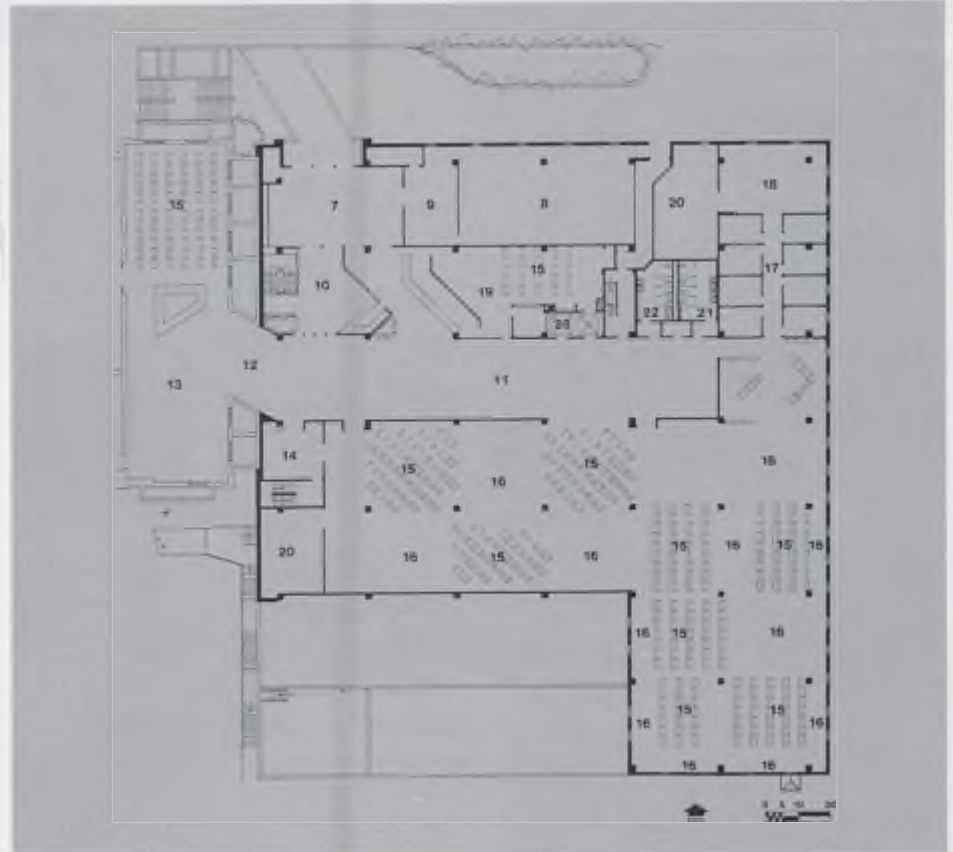
"We are far ahead in terms of meeting the needs of the student . . . our staff is service oriented; we provide tours and lectures on the use of the library," she noted, as she listed the library hours: Monday-Thursday, 8 a.m.-midnight. Friday, 8 a.m.-9 p.m. Saturday, 9 a.m.-8 p.m. Sunday, noon-10 p.m.

First time visitors may need guidance from the staff to fully benefit from the array of electronic aids at the disposal of library users, and for direction to specific areas of interest.

**Plaza**—for reading outdoors or other pastimes.



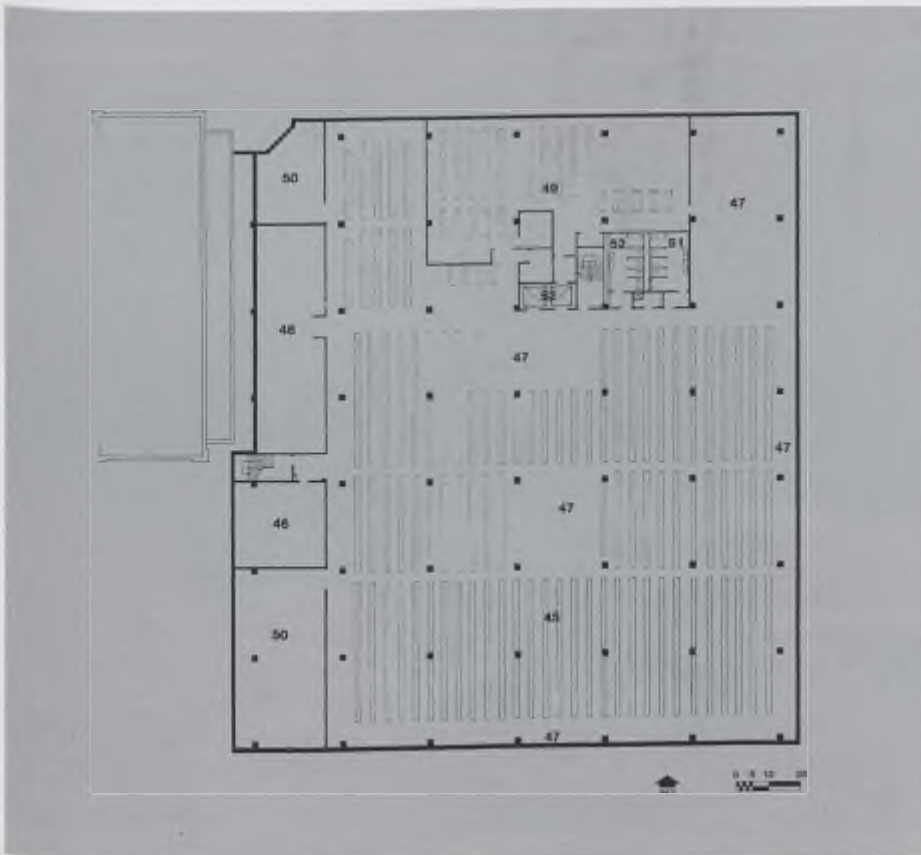
**Level 1**—contains a reference room, circulation desk, a lecture room, reading room, reserved book collection, group study rooms, a large smoking lounge, main entrance/concourse.





**Sublevel 1**—contains a media center with audio-visual equipment, phonograph record collection, listening/viewing areas for films, slides and records, photoreproduction facilities, a book selection room for faculty, and reference room.

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**Sublevel 2**—contains more than one million microform materials, reading areas for microform, serials collections, typing room.





Unlike other libraries on campus, the seating at the new facility is interspersed with stacks to make the material more easily accessible. Currently, there are 100,000 volumes and more than 2000 serial titles stored within the facility's tri-level area of 90,000 square feet.

**L**evel One houses a reference room, reading room, circulation desk, lecture room and the main entrance. Sublevel One houses a media center, photoreproduction area, listening/viewing rooms for films, slides and records, a book selection room for the exclusive use of the faculty, and a conference room. Sublevel Two, the bottom level, houses bound and other serial collections as well as microform materials.

The Undergraduate Library is the newest addition to the university's grow-





ing main campus. It stands adjacent to Founders Library and extends eastward to Fourth Street. It is designed to seat 779 in study areas, and an additional 178 in meeting rooms. Both the Fine Arts Library and the Science and Technology Library are now part of the new system.

Caping its three levels, two-thirds of which are underground, is what the architects of the facility describe as an outdoor living plaza, suitable for reading outdoors or other pastimes of the undergraduate student.

With its 100,000 volumes, 2200 serial titles and microform collection of more than one million—and with space for additional 300,000 volumes—the Undergraduate Library is, indeed, a worthy and handsome addition to the campus.

Some of the new features or additions include the following:

- Electronic card catalogues.
- Media center, for audio visual assistance and projection capability.

- Large lecture hall that can accommodate up to 150 persons.

- Group meeting rooms for up to 15 persons.

- A conference room for the university community.

- Lounge/relaxation areas at strategic locations.

- Lighted individual study carrels.

- Group study rooms with blackboards, chairs and tables.

- Smoking lounge with special ventilation system.

- Typing center with coin-operated typewriters and additional space for students with their own typewriters.

"It is good indeed that Howard University has had the resources to provide a new facility that meets the needs of its students and in this way reflects the university's concern for the advancement of undergraduate education," noted William A. Banner, graduate professor of philosophy, in his remarks at the dedication of the Undergraduate Library.

The Undergraduate Library was designed by the architectural firm of Robert J. Nash & Associates. Kora and Williams Corporation handled the construction. The interior design was done by Jumanne Design, Incorporated. □



## In Search of Knowledge

By William A. Banner

*"I read Uncle Tom's Cabin and A Tale of Two Cities over and over again; in this way, in fact, I read just about everything I could get my hands on. . ."*

James Baldwin—*Notes of a Native Son*



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## Chapter Two

**I**t stirs the mind and arouses the spirit to think of the part that libraries and reading rooms have played in "sharpening the intellect" and "satisfying the soul" of those who have come under the fascination of books. One thinks of Henry David Thoreau, being unimpressed with the course of studies at Harvard and taking refuge in the library, believing that it was the best that Harvard had to offer to a student; of Albert Einstein, reading on his own at the Swiss Federal Polytechnic School (at Zurich) the original literature of physics in the writings of Kirchhoff, Hertz, Maxwell, and Mach; of Thomas Wolfe, at the University of North Carolina, carrying armfuls of books to his room for weekend reading while his friends were playing

poker; and of James Baldwin, reading in the 42nd Street Library and elsewhere in New York.

These are famous persons and they make up only a part of the full picture. To mention these individuals is not to ignore or to dismiss the great company of plain persons whose lives and careers have been shaped by the books that they have found time to read, often under an inner compulsion that is difficult to explain.

The impulse to know, to read, and to discuss what has been read is the particular human demand that lies behind the creation and preservation of libraries. A library is first a collection of books and other materials for reading or reference. It takes its character and reputation from the quality and range of books it offers to those in search of knowledge.

Much has been said and written in recent times about the spoken word and the written word as distinct and compet-



ing devices in the transmission of information and ideas and in the preservation of human memory. Clearly the spoken word has its own authenticity and power, as we are well aware when we recall things said to us or heard by us in conversation or at a public meeting.

The sound of the human voice carries overtones of conviction and emphasis and subtlety of thought in the direct communication between a speaker and his audience. The written or printed word is not greater than the spoken word in its power to convey what is meant to pass on from generation to generation all that is worth preserving in human experience.

The written or printed word (as also the recorded voice) has the particular advantage of what can be set forth in many copies, with each copy having an independent existence and accessibility in the same place or in separate places. Thus the same text can be made available to many persons at the same time

and it can pass anonymously from person to person, from place to place, from generation to generation, and—through translation—from culture to culture.

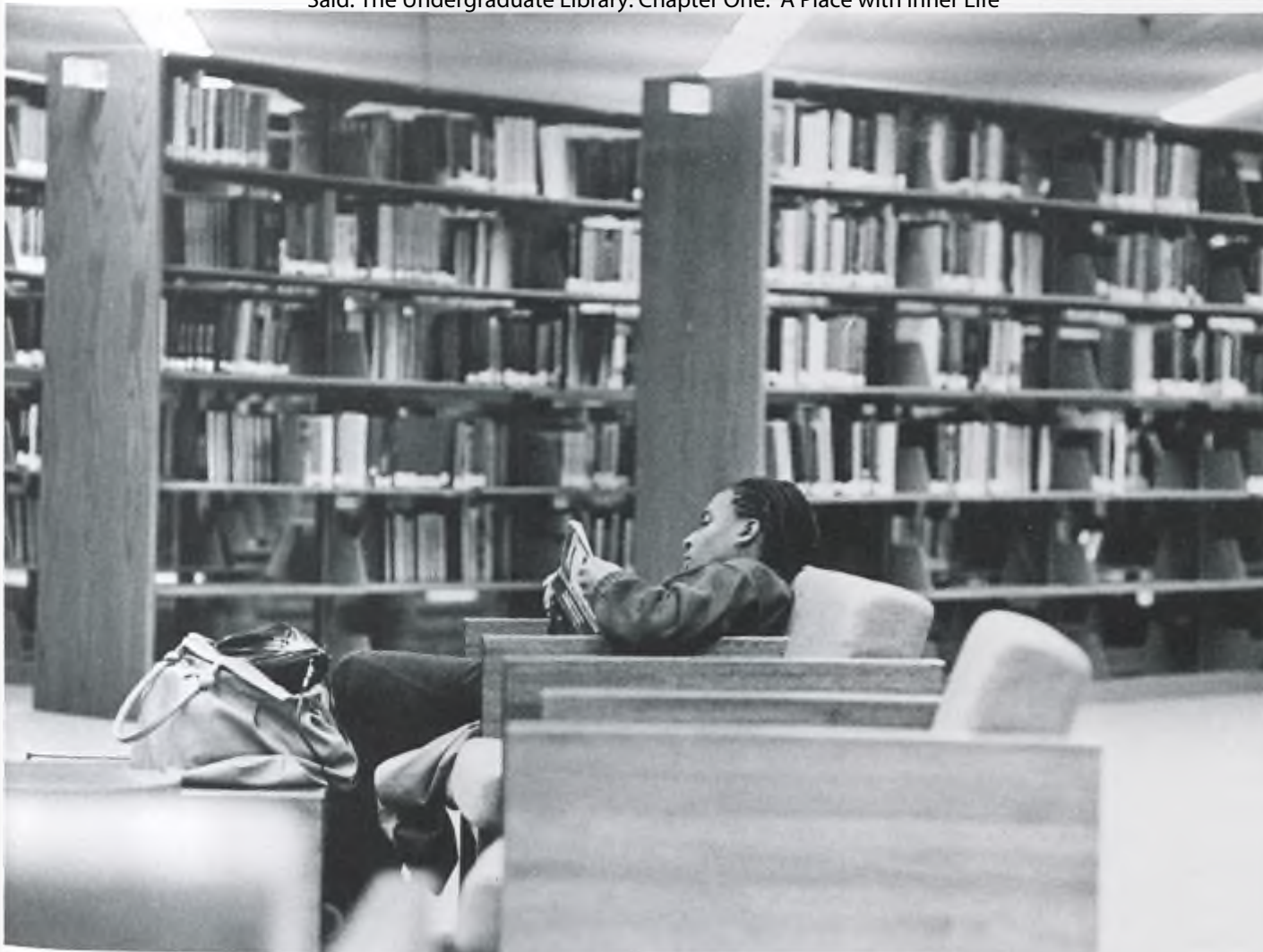
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book or pamphlet, as a physical thing, can become the temporary or permanent possession of an unlimited number of persons, to be read and reread as time and circumstance permit. In this way there is generated a "reading public" that crosses every social division, providing for every expression of thought access to individuals in all conditions of life.

The wide range of literacy is part of the meaning of democracy as the view that all persons have a right to all good things. There is the obligation in a democracy to

book or pamphlet, as a physical thing, can become the temporary or permanent possession of





promote literacy without snobbery or false pretension of any sort.

The very idea of a rational and orderly social life is the securing, and placing, of good things within easy access of the members of a community. Accordingly, the idea of a library is the safekeeping of and the providing of easy access to the books, manuscripts, pamphlets, and journals that have become its property.

For a long time, it was believed that the safekeeping of books simply prevented the easy access to these books. Librarians through the centuries have devised ways, some quite ingenious, to keep their books safe and, as far as possible, out of reach.

In the late mediaeval period, the following regulation was laid down by the Chancellor at Oxford University:

*Since in the course of time the great number of students using the library is in many ways harmful to the books . . . the University has ordered and decreed that only*

*graduates and people in religious orders who have studied philosophy eight years shall study in the library of the University . . . (These persons) ought to take an oath . . . not to inflict any harm on (the books) by tearing out or ruining layers or single pages . . .*

We have come a long way from the restrictions and prohibitions of mediaeval Oxford to the open stacks and other amenities of Howard University's Undergraduate Library.

The undergraduate is the primary university student, and upon the quality of undergraduate performance rest both the [ambition] and the success of the more advanced university programs. That the undergraduate must not be ignored or slighted in the allocation of university resources was signified in 1949 with the opening of the Lamont Library at Harvard University, the first such facility designed entirely for the benefit and comfort of undergraduates. The three major objectives

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of the Lamont Library were stated in 1949 by the university librarian, Keyes Metcalf, as follows:

- to concentrate as far as practicable the library service for undergraduates in a central location;
- to make the books readily available to the students;
- to encourage general and recreational reading as well as collateral reading.

These are reasonable and perhaps obvious objectives that would doubtless be proposed by or would be acceptable to the librarian or to the library committee of any university.

It is good indeed that Howard University has had the resources to provide a new facility that meets the needs of its students and in this way reflects the university's concern for the advancement of undergraduate education.

There is much to be done. But much has been accomplished here in [117] years. The first library of the university was apparently a small room in the first

building in which instruction was offered. With donations of books and gifts of money, from both private and public sources, the library resources have grown through the years to holdings at present in excess of 1,250,000 volumes. Special materials for both reading and research have come through the acquisition of important private papers and collections. As programs of instruction have been introduced or expanded, branch and departmental libraries have been established within one library system. The undergraduate library is the new part of this expanding system.

The new building's subdued elegance and appropriateness of design elicit a deep aesthetic response and a sure appreciation of the bearing of the science and art of architecture upon the realization of human purpose. □

The above was excerpted from remarks by William A. Banner, graduate professor of philosophy at the dedication of the Undergraduate Library, September 23, 1983.



*. . . A worthy and  
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