



The Conscience of the University, and Other Essays

Harry Hunt Ransom

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In 1982, a century after the laying of the cornerstone of its first building, the University of Texas was ranked by the New York Times among the best in the nation. No one had more to do with that extraordinary achievement than Harry Hunt Ransom. From 1935 to his death in 1976, he served the University in positions ranging from instructor in English to chancellor of The University of Texas System. In the fifties, sixties, and seventies, he held a succession of administrative posts requiring him to face a myriad of perplexing problems. Among the critical issues calling for analysis and decision in those years were the post-Sputnik pressure for greater emphasis on science and technology, the student revolts during the 1960s, and the defection of growing numbers of university faculty to industry and government.


Harry Hunt Ransom did not merely respond to the problems of the times. He had his own large ambitions for the University of Texas, in particular the improvement of student programs, the development of a vigorous faculty, and—the achievement for which he is best remembered—the building of a world-renowned library.

He was concerned with the role of the university in society, what the university should do and do well, and what it should not do. Always he viewed these matters in broad perspective, and his approach to them was far-sighted and deeply philosophical.

As dean, vice-president, president, and chancellor, Ransom wrote and spoke often on these and other important subjects. Aside from the books that he wrote and edited, he left a prodigious amount of material, some of which had been published in various journals and some of which had been delivered as lectures and addresses and never made available in printed form.

For the last twenty-five years of Ransom's life his wife, Hazel, was his closest companion and confidant. At the urging of Harry's friends, colleagues, and admirers, she undertook the task of sifting through her late husband's papers in an effort to organize and preserve some of the important contributions he had made to the thought and planning that were so instrumental in shaping the University of Texas and higher education in general. In these essays we see the force of reasoning and grace of style for which Ransom was so widely admired. It was he who reminded us that books last longer than buildings. This is a book of lasting importance that Harry Ransom himself might have given us had he lived longer.

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