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Because Ideas Have Consequences

An Open Letter to *Imprimis* Readers

Donald R. Mossey, '51

Chairman, Hillsdale College Board of Trustees



Donald R. Mossey

Wallace Heckman, of the class of 1874, in his 1885 Hillsdale College Commencement address, claimed that “high-souled men and women, who from schools like this, lend dignity to common life, are this land’s best security.” Heckman also commended the faculty for having “built this school by building into it the best work of their best days, wrought with their hands and by plain tastes and habits of life.” Over 100 years later, Hillsdale’s purpose has not changed. The principled commitment to excellence remains, as do a distinguished faculty, talented students, a dedicated staff, loyal alumni and friends, and continuous fidelity to an admirable mission.

Like most of you, my hopes for Hillsdale remain steadfast. As you probably know by now, George Roche, Hillsdale’s president for the past 28 years, has retired, and Hillsdale must choose a new leader. Such transitions are always difficult. Yet, throughout its history Hillsdale has always stood for principled independence. Those from all walks of life and perspectives who believe in and support the institution understand its legacy. Enduring ideals still guide us. As supporters, we have a responsibility—now more vital than ever—to advance the College’s mission.

Hillsdale College is recognized for its academic excellence by virtually every educational survey in America. Next year, nearly half our student body will be from the top ten percent of its high-school class. We have planned, completed and, with private donations, funded a decade-long series of building projects unmatched by any other school our size. The quality of our faculty, the number of scholarships, and the growth of our endowment serve as three more indicators of Hillsdale’s careful financial stewardship.

I am a veteran of the U.S. Navy and can best explain the job before us in Navy terms: the ship awaits a new captain. But the vessel itself, its purpose and its resources remain intact and focused. Hillsdale is directed by a dedicated crew that possesses the know-how and commitment to stay the charted course. Be assured that no one is underestimating the magnitude of the task. We forge ahead confident that Hillsdale’s independence and teaching mission are sound.

With significant prayer and acts of courage, Hillsdale’s message will continue to represent the ideals we cherish. I hope you will extend your patience and understanding as we move forward.

On behalf of the entire board of trustees, I ask for your support as Dr. Robert Blackstock begins his service as Hillsdale’s acting president and CEO. The trustees and faculty endorse Bob’s leadership, honed and proven by 23 years of worthy and able service.



Donald R. Mossey
Chairman, Hillsdale College Board of Trustees

Also in this issue:

Robert W. Blackstock, Acting President and CEO, Hillsdale College,
“The Hillsdale I Know”
& Edited Reprints of Essays from the February 1997 *Imprimis*

The Hillsdale I Know

Robert W. Blackstock
Acting President and CEO, Hillsdale College



Robert W. Blackstock

I was 24 years old at the time of my introduction to Hillsdale. Not only did my students teach me a great deal about the integrity of the classroom and the fullness of what it means to be a teacher, but also the many alumni and benefactors whom I consider friends talked to me about the inspiration they drew from the school's larger message. Trust and honor based on mutual agreement direct all of us in our work on Hillsdale's behalf. Hillsdale is comprised of 450 employees, 1,150 students, and 930,000 *Imprimis* subscribers. I have been humbled and made grateful as I have encountered these ever-increasing blessings in my life and the life of the College.

Friends of Hillsdale make their journey, some literally and some figuratively, to campus and the ideals the school represents on a variety of paths. Many of you have come to know us through referrals from other *Imprimis* readers. Others have met one of our graduates, while many meet faculty or staff through admissions or our policy forums. Students and Hillsdale graduates, of course, know us most fully through the demands of studies and the joys of campus life. By and large, the school's 156 years of independence bind us all in this common endeavor, an endeavor of friendships formed around common ideas.

That endeavor is why I came to Hillsdale some 23 years ago and why Jackie, my wife of 20 years, and I have chosen to build our lives here. The College represented a vision for the future that resonated with what I believed was my own mission in life as a husband, father, and professor. I had the help of many who were senior to me in time and tenure. I was given the privilege of watching my students grasp and test the theory and ideals of law and justice. I had the chance to stand in front of groups of young people and state unabashedly that law and justice are inseparable from moral integrity.

Whenever time permitted, I read about the College's history, its mission, and the succession of courageous leaders who maintained its vision. An innovative school since its founding in 1844, Hillsdale offered a demanding liberal arts course of study to any student who qualified academically. The aims are as straightforward now as they were then. In large measure, that is why we are awarding nearly \$9 million in scholarships and loans to our students this year. Our doors are open to any who exhibit the will, the courage and the talent to benefit from a Hillsdale education. The school's heritage, based upon the Biblical and Western traditions, represents a solid foundation for its ongoing educational mission. I still marvel at the way the College redrafted its core curriculum in the 1990s without one nod to political correctness or moral relativism. With steady confidence and congenial cooperation, my colleagues rose to the occasion out of respect for their academic disciplines, their students, and the College's unifying purpose: to prepare moral, thinking individuals worthy of the freedoms and responsibilities that our civilization affords.

Throughout the school's history, one can find galvanizing moments that threatened its future. From the Civil War to the World Wars to serious financial limitations in the 1950s to threats from bureaucratic intrusion in the 1960s and 1970s, Hillsdale's right to self-governance has never gone unchallenged. You may know the story as well as I do. Through a progression of presidents and trustees, faculty and alumni, our academic heritage has been the responsibility of faculty members like those whose edited essay reprints follow this letter.

I have grown and matured with the College these past 23 years, as have the many others who have been privileged to live and labor with this wonderful community. As we go about our weekly, daily, and hourly work, we do so believing that life is built on trust and faith. Jackie and I now have our three children, our busy home, our country church, and friends in all parts of the country.

I welcome your goodwill as well as your critical assessments. The obstacles currently before everyone associated with the College are challenging. I also ask for your prayers and guidance. In return, we remain grateful for your unwavering regard for Hillsdale College.

Robert W. Blackstock

Robert W. Blackstock
Acting President and CEO, Hillsdale College

CHARACTER COUNTS

John Coonradt
Dean of Men



It isn't easy these days for students to be decent and responsible, or to even agree upon what those words mean in our troubled modern world. Pop culture, peer pressure, and increasingly lax educational standards make ladylike and gentlemanly behavior unattractive at best. What is "good" and what is "cool" are often seen as opposites. To make matters worse, liberal "feel-good" parenting dogmas have made many traditional and time-proven parenting and teaching practices passé, if not criminal.

Grung and "in-your-face" attitudes are all the rage. We are constantly bombarded with the degenerate and arrogant behavior and attitudes that are so popular today. We get it from Hollywood, television, advertising, and big-time sports. The ubiquitous message is that arrogance, aggression, and avarice pave the easy road to success and personal gratification.

That is why Hillsdale College's example is so different and so important. Here, student conduct is measured and governed by tried and true concepts of respect, civility, collegiality, and personal accountability. We refuse to follow recent fads attempting to reinvent behavioral standards in the name of trendy, politically correct, and politically charged theories and buzzwords. We continue to embrace the basic standards of social conduct and decorum that have served us well through the years. We embrace the moral standards that preceded the liberal cultural revolution that still champions big government and "it-takes-a-village" nostrums. We reinforce the idea that students are not only responsible for what they do, but also for what they fail to do.

What makes Hillsdale College students truly remarkable is the fact that the vast majority understand and appreciate these high expectations. There is ample latitude and opportunity for enjoying popular culture at Hillsdale, but student conduct has a more reasonable personality than that which can be found on many campuses. Most students come here with a well-developed understanding and appreciation for responsible behavior, and they quickly set the tone on the campus. While they—or anyone, for that matter—can act out of character and make foolish mistakes, Hillsdale students are generally mature and willing to be held accountable for their actions.

I am a big sports fan, and I often see the most powerful example of this maturity and accountability on the playing field. Our athletes not only display keen competitiveness but exemplary

sportsmanship. Hillsdale teams are famous, or in some cases infamous, for being tough and disciplined opponents. But there is no fighting, taunting or immature "victory" celebrations during or after competition. We are truly blessed by students with exceptional character and ability. They make Hillsdale not only a great place to be but a beacon of hope for the future. ▲

STORIES AND THE "CULTURE STORY"

John Willson
Salvatori Professor
of History and
Traditional Values



College students learn wisdom, virtue, courage and the other attributes of morally self-responsible citizens largely by studying what they have inherited from those who pursued these things in the past. This includes both *what* our forefathers learned (and failed to learn) and *how* they learned. A major premise of Hillsdale's curriculum is that they learned much from hearing, reading, and telling stories.

We are convinced that students are no longer taught "who they are," as the novelist Andrew Lytle put it. Before they can begin to comprehend non-Western cultures, they must first understand their own. Given the state of American education in general, this requires a major act of restoration. Two courses cannot accomplish it, but they can lay a foundation. In the sophomore year, all Hillsdale students must choose courses from other important disciplines housed in the division of social sciences: economics, business, accounting, political science, psychology, and sociology. Focused and refined, the culture study continues at that level.

It should be noted here that academic divisions at Hillsdale are not meant to represent discrete branches of knowledge. A division is merely a convenient way of organizing the faculty for administrative purposes. Hillsdale is a *collegium*, a university and not a multiversity. The intellectual coherence we seek is college-wide, not divisional. Deans of divisions function much like department chairpersons at larger schools.

We require all students to study political science, economics, psychology, and sociology (at a minimum, two of the four). Social science at Hillsdale assumes that truth exists and is worth pursuing; that reason applied to human affairs can lead to objective principles about human nature and society. With Aristotle, we start with science as respect for common sense, and we ascend from common sense through reason. We reject social science as a rationalist enterprise to con-

struct social reality, which always leads to relativism and ideology. Homer's epics and the Old Testament portray fully functioning societies that do not rest upon scientific knowledge or defer to the authority of science. Our social science students confront first principles and the permanent things in the great literature of politics and society.

About a third of all Hillsdale graduates major in one or another of the programs in business administration or accounting. In many schools, business is set apart from the liberal arts, treated as "professional" or "practical" in a way the liberal arts are not. While it is true that business courses, and especially accounting courses, point students toward the "more tangible goals" in their future, at Hillsdale they are also a vital part of our understanding of the liberal arts. They are majors in a liberal arts college, not part of a separate business college or curriculum. Faculty are chosen for their broad learning and commitment to the mission of Hillsdale College, rather than for narrow research expertise in finance or marketing. Concern for "wisdom, courage, virtue, and more tangible goals" is just as evident as in the other social sciences. The stories they teach are often case studies and are as challenging and as dramatic as the stories of ancient heroes.

As a teacher of what is often considered one of the most "irrelevant" subjects in the liberal arts (history), I have been fascinated for many years by how real the culture story eventually becomes for our graduates.

Almost a year ago I received a message via the miracle of electronic mail from Manokotak, Alaska. It was from a 1987 Hillsdale graduate who had been my advisee and student. In his message, he reminded me, "I was not one of your top students," but learned "more than my transcripts showed." He added that while in college he was often "confused by the social mix" and sometimes felt out of place, but he was "always aware of the value of the education" Hillsdale provided.

He returned to his native Alaska after graduation, and wound up teaching in rural high schools. A classroom incident prompted him to write. Trying to figure out how to explain the American westward movement to a group of 14 Yup'ik Eskimo students, he came across Frederick Jackson Turner's classic essay, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," which he had read in my "American Heritage" course. His students were "intrigued" by it, and by the fact that it was from one of his college classes. He went on to tell them about his experience learning history at Hillsdale and how the love his professors showed for the field was one of the main reasons he became a teacher. To me, he concluded, "The way you spoke of American history was as a great story that just needed unraveling."

That unexpected message from a distant place and a distant past moved me to tears. And it should serve as a metaphor for everything we do. ▲

THE PREPARED MIND

*Francis X. Steiner
Dean of Natural
Sciences and Professor
of Biology*



"In the field of observation, chance favors the prepared mind."—Louis Pasteur

These remarks, which are attributed to one of the greatest microbiologists of all time, lay the conceptual framework not just for a scientific education but for a true liberal arts education. You might be surprised at hearing that from a dyed-in-the-wool microbiologist, but in my 14th year at Hillsdale, I am confident this is truly what our college is all about.

We believe that science is a vital "way of knowing" about the universe. The courses we offer emphasize the philosophy of science, which helps students understand the process of scientific reasoning and empirical inquiry based on observation and verification by experimentation. We do not subscribe to the view that science and religion are incompatible. History is filled with countless examples of how they have worked together to provide humanity with untold blessings. We have a decidedly theistic science faculty at Hillsdale that believes, along with Galileo, "The Bible tells us how to get to Heaven, but science tells us how the heavens go."

We also believe that science is an integral part of the liberal arts. Historically, the liberal arts were the higher arts, which among the Romans only freemen (*liberi*) were permitted to pursue. In the Middle Ages, the liberal arts consisted of seven branches of learning that belonged to one of two groups: the *trivium* (grammar, rhetoric, and logic) or the *quadrivium* (arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy). Briefly, what are the natural sciences at Hillsdale today? Biology considers the basis and phenomena of all life. Chemistry focuses on the composition of substances and the results of their interactions. Physics deals with matter, motion, energy, and the structure of the world. Closely allied to the natural sciences is mathematics, which examines relationships between space and quantity and offers symbols, abstract constructs, and patterns of logic. The computer sciences are a more recent but equally fascinating addition to this diverse collection of disciplines.

Since coming to Hillsdale, I have come to appreciate the fact that all three academic divisions—the humanities, the social sciences, and the

natural sciences—share more similarities than differences. No division stands by itself. Each has an outstanding teaching faculty, and the lack of a “publish-or-perish” environment enables professors to concentrate on students, not on their vitae. The natural sciences are particularly blessed with great facilities and “research-friendly” courses that allow for a great deal of experimentation and creativity. Other obvious attributes are small classes, frequent guest lecturers, and, in many cases, state-of-the-art equipment. However, the most important benefits of the education offered at Hillsdale are our professors’ constant interaction with students and the sound academic preparation that these students receive.

In the natural sciences, our professors introduce advanced research techniques at the undergraduate level. Serious interest, even among non-science majors, can often be sparked in this way. For example, we teach freshmen in survey courses to do “agarose gel electrophoresis” and analyze their own DNA fingerprint. In upper-level junior and senior courses, we encourage students to undertake ambitious projects that range from studying the effects of electromagnetic fields on melatonin production to studying the amount of metal alloy contamination in superconductor materials using powder X-ray diffractometry. Many of these projects are so successful that the students in charge are invited to present their results at scientific meetings.

In the natural sciences, we try to communicate the “how” and “why,” not just “what” we know. We want students to think, investigate, and discover for themselves. We also want them working side by side with us in the lab. For most of us, the lab is our favorite place to be, so you could say that we aren’t just teaching; we are doing what comes naturally. ▲

UNDERSTANDING MAN AND SOCIETY

Thomas J. Burke, Jr.
Dean of Humanities and
Professor of Philosophy
and Religion



The humanities division of Hillsdale College is comprised of seven departments: English, classics, modern languages, philosophy and religion, music, art, and theatre and speech. Each of these departments provides knowledge and skills central to a sound liberal arts education. We offer students an education predicated on the assumption of man’s intrinsic and unique capacity for good and evil, nobility and baseness. The ancients saw mankind as just beneath the gods in ability and power, possessing a nature exalted above all other creatures; a rational being capable of discerning his place within the universe and creating a society of just and honorable citizens.

No single factor in ancient culture displays this more poignantly than Greek tragedy, in which the fall of the exalted is so injurious that it shatters any remnant of pride. In like manner, the Hebrews saw man “a little lower than the angels,” crowned with glory and honor and having dominion over the works of God’s hands (Psalm 8). The Hebrew counterpart to Greek tragedy—man’s fall into sin—is, therefore, all the more tragic, cataclysmic, and wicked. This common, if not identical, vision of humanity as the flawed pinnacle of creation has driven art, literature, religion, and philosophy for the past three millennia, inspiring, provoking, disturbing, and directing the development of culture.

The great literature of Western civilization is clearly fundamental to an adequate understanding of who we are and what we should and can be, and Hillsdale College has recognized this fact by establishing a year-long “Rhetoric and Great Books” course as part of students’ inauguration into the liberal arts. Learning to read and understand their literary heritage creates the proper foundation for all later learning. Further enrichment is provided through linguistic and cultural studies of ancient and modern languages and civilizations. To study Greek, Latin, German, French, Spanish, and other languages and cultures is to gain not only new skills but also open new windows on new worlds.

Art, music, theatre and speech do the same. It is on the stage, in the concert hall, and through creations of clay, wood, metal, marble, stone, and paint that some of society’s most sensitive and insightful members have given emotional as well as intellectual expression to the ideals that motivate and inspire Western civilization. It is through the fine arts that the ideals and values a people hold precious come to life. The artist gives living form to beliefs and thereby holds a mirror up to the community, enabling it to see what appears when those beliefs become incarnate through the deeds of flesh and blood human beings—or what emerges when they are disdained or disregarded. Beauty gives form to body, and body gives life to form as the fine arts explore both the grandeur and the tragedy of life.

It is in the areas of philosophy and religion that the ideas expressed in literature, languages, and the fine arts find their formal expression and undergo logical analysis. Hillsdale’s department of philosophy and religion provides a curriculum which enables students to learn about, think through, analyze, criticize, and develop the great systems of theology and philosophy that have dominated Western societies and driven culture and politics alike. Students are compelled to come to grips with questions concerning truth, aesthetics, and the moral imagination.

The humanities division, then, is that place where Hillsdale students study and learn about their world and themselves through the examination and contemplation of art, literature, theatre, and the great religious and philosophical traditions of the West. ▲

PATHS TOWARD TRUTH

*Thomas Conner
Dean of Social Sciences
and Associate Professor
of History*



What sets the Hillsdale College faculty apart is its dedication to fostering the intellectual growth of students and to designing and presenting a curriculum that lights paths toward truth in both the oldest and the newest ways. Our academic program is often characterized as “traditional,” and its devotion to time-honored understandings of what constitutes an educated person makes it so. But, the faculty is equally dedicated to bringing before our students the most up-to-date ideas and knowledge from a wide variety of disciplines.

The various talents of the Hillsdale faculty are remarkable. Our professors come from the finest graduate programs in the world. Many of them are publishing scholars and acknowledged experts in their fields. But the quality that defines our faculty more than any other is dedication to teaching and advising. This is evident in innumerable ways. The degree to which our faculty devotes time and talent to teaching—inside and outside the classroom—is extraordinary.

One of the best things I can report about my personal experience at Hillsdale is that I have had the freedom to do practically everything in teaching that I ever dreamed of doing—from offering courses on the subjects I feel most passionately about in Western history to convincing skeptical students that those subjects are relevant and meaningful. In my capacity as an advisor, I have also had the opportunity to help many students make important decisions and learn to cope with the various challenges of young adulthood.

During nearly 16 years on the Hillsdale faculty, in addition to a rich array of traditional classroom experiences, I have climbed Alpine mountains, chipped pieces off the Berlin Wall, walked somberly among the crosses of the U.S. cemetery at Omaha Beach, strolled through Red Square in Moscow, and toured some of the great museums of Europe with my students. I am sure that my colleagues agree that the teaching environment here encourages us to reach students in the most creative and dynamic ways and to put a genuinely personal mark on our relationship with them.

Indeed, this is something that has set Hillsdale College apart since its founding. ▲

THE HIGHEST THINGS

*CarolAnn Barker
Vice President for
Student Affairs and
Dean of Women*



Some who don't know Hillsdale College and its philosophy ask, “Why, if you don't believe in government control, do you believe in rules that limit?” Our answer is that we incorporate certain policies and guidelines because “every right is married to a duty, every freedom owns a corresponding responsibility, and there cannot be a genuine freedom unless there exists also genuine order in the moral realm and the social realm.” That philosophy has been the bedrock of our institution and the guiding light of our Student Affairs division at Hillsdale College.

Traditional principles have fallen out of favor and in many instances have completely disappeared in practice. Many colleges and universities now want to avoid any stand for absolutes. They reject outright the three basic tenets of Student Affairs at Hillsdale College:

- a college should have a genuine family-like atmosphere with caring, older adults;
- one of the most important lessons we can teach students is that actions have consequences, and one must develop the character to accept responsibility for both;
- and only the life lived according to the teachings of a Supreme Being is the life worth living.

Most colleges have also rejected the old concept of *in loco parentis*, “in the parents' place.” Housemothers, housefathers, and other older adult supervisors have been stripped of authority or, more often than not, eliminated. A major newspaper reports that it is now possible for a typical college student to go about his daily campus routine without encountering a single adult beyond the age of 24 except for an occasional professor in a classroom (and even then he is more likely to come into contact with young teaching assistants).

In the 1960s and 1970s, students demanded, “Make school relevant—give us the real world!” Yet how realistic is an environment with no rules and regulations and no older adults? Of course, it is natural for students to push for unrestricted freedoms, but do they expect them to be granted fully? Rule-free dorms can be personal nightmares: bodily assault; rampant theft; strangers

roaming the halls; unwilling witness to sexual acts; no quiet time for study or sleep; drunken students.

In the hundreds of pages of student affairs literature that come across my desk each year, I read legal advice such as, "Our beginning point is a recognition that the modern American college is not an insurer of its students. Whatever may have been its responsibility in an earlier era, the authoritarian role of today's college administration has been notably diluted in recent decades." Or: "A college desiring to promote alcohol safety should be careful that its actions do not expose the institution to liability for failure to prevent an individual drinking incident." Translated: If we take no responsibility for guiding our students and create no sanctions for unacceptable behavior, we are actually safer under some laws. But, in the next breath, that same literature warns that the courts hold us ultimately responsible for students' well-being.

So do we drop our "family philosophy" and take our chances with the court system? Or do we continue to go against the tide because of our long-held principles? Do we write obscure and ambiguous rules to escape the legal snares? Or are we forthright in our expectations? Hillsdale's drug rule is: "Use, possession, or distribution of any amount of a controlled substance (drugs), except as permitted by law, will result in suspension for the semester. A second violation of this code section may result in expulsion." The rule is direct and unambiguous. Hillsdale College attempts to travel the high road—the *moral road*—in aiding students in the transition from youth to adulthood. We do not take the place of family, we emulate it. We act as caring, loving faculty and administrators while insisting that our students be morally, academically, and socially responsible.

Evidence of this responsibility and leadership can be seen in the Women's Council's work at the Salvation Army food pantry, in the Kappa Kappa Gamma sorority's weekly volunteering at a local senior citizen's center, in InterVarsity Christian Fellowship's Sunday School teaching, and in the Delta Tau Delta fraternity's elementary school playground supervising. Hillsdale students volunteered nearly 17,000 hours of community service for the 1998-99 school year alone.

We also continue to believe in and actively defend the second tenet of Student Affairs: Actions, just like ideas, have consequences. We teach our students to realize the enormous rewards of civil, courteous interactions: clean, quiet, residences that are a haven as well as a home away from home; a graffiti-free, litter-free, and safe campus; a student body that has the freedom to pursue academic excellence and campus activities within a consistent framework of rights and responsibilities.

Certainly, some students complain about our rules and charge us with being "out of sync" with

the times. Others present good ideas for change. It is our duty in Student Affairs to listen, to respond, to say "yes" and to say "no" when appropriate, to stand on principle, even when it may be unpopular. Directing by example and thoughtfulness should always be our goal.

The third tenet of Student Affairs at Hillsdale College is that the spiritual dimension of life is essential to the welfare of our students and requires due respect, care, and nurturing. It is interesting to note how this dimension is regarded in two recent books explaining the preferred stance of most other institutions. In *New Futures for Student Affairs*, only one-and-a-half pages are devoted to naming three psychologists who have done extensive work on the spiritual dimension needed in a college student's life. In checking that same book's subject index, I found no indexing for "spirituality," "religion," or "God" with a capital "G." There were, however, 66 citations for "Students and AIDS." In a 660-page tome called *Student Services: A Handbook for the Profession*, the spiritual element is negligible. The Supreme Being is ignored as a major part of an individual's life.

Hillsdale is not a church-affiliated college. We do not represent any denomination, but we are an institution that has never forgotten its Judeo-Christian roots. Those roots are fed by thousands of years of faith. We begin each faculty and student federation meeting and each official campus ceremony with prayer. We offer majors in religion and philosophy and Christian studies. We allow student religious organizations to meet on campus. Our students and faculty represent many faiths, including Hebrew, Muslim, and Christian; we not only respect their religious freedom but we encourage it to flourish.

The great British social observer and writer G. K. Chesterton once said, "The tremendous examination of existence will not be based on whether we have been to college, but on whether we seriously, yet in good humor, confronted in our lives the highest things." With humility, I say to you, we at Hillsdale College consider the sons and daughters who have been entrusted to us for a short while as most worthy of the highest things. ▲

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