

Brown's Trump surrender shatters a dream | Will Bunch Newsletter

 

The Philadelphia Inquirer

[SIGN IN](#)

sportsbook.fanduel.com

OPINION

**Brown's Trump surrender
shatters a dream | Will Bunch
Newsletter**

Plus, about those 'Trump accomplishments'

by Will Bunch | Columnist

Published Aug. 5, 2025, 11:17 a.m. ET

Can you feel it in the air tonight? The long hot summer of 2025 isn't officially over, yet the mercury seemed to drop the instant that the Phillies acquired the electrifying, 103-mph-throwing closer [Jhoan Duran](#) from the Minnesota Twins up north. When Duran entered his first game for the Phils on Friday night, to [an over-the-top production](#) that [dimmed all the lights](#) at Citizens Bank Park for spider graphics and blaring Latin music, it gave an entire city the chills. It felt like October.

Attending Brown was a dream. Its Trump capitulation? A wake-up call

The first time I ever heard of [Brown University](#), I couldn't imagine anyone would actually want to go there. I was a sports-crazed middle-schooler in the early 1970s, and my hometown paper ran a weekly college-football column called The Bottom 10. Week after week, Brown — woefully inept and located in Providence, Rhode Island, as I eventually figured out — was the butt of jokes as the worst of the worst.

Fortunately, two things happened. The football team got slightly better, and by high school I came to understand that **Brown's progressive ideas** about what made for a world-class education might be a good fit, if they'd have me. I'd like to say it was their brilliant roster of professors that clinched it, but in reality I fell for Brown during a 12th-grade visit on an unseasonably-warm Saturday in March, as Frisbees flew across fresh grass on the Wriston Quad and the Allman Brothers' "**Jessica**" blasted from someone's massive speakers.

And, since we're being honest, also the rejection letter from Harvard that came a month later.

I could probably fill this column with four years worth of boring stories of glory days — our team's two victories in the all-night trivia contests conducted on the static-ridden campus AM radio station, or defying the campus police as a DJ by playing the Isley Brothers' "[Shout](#)" when they tried to close our out-of-control, strobe-lit Sixties Party. But for everyone's sake, let's leave that kind of nostalgia at this paragraph.

I should mention some less sexy and more relevant things that happened to me between September 1977 and May 1981. Now that the haze of 2 a.m. nights putting out the [Brown Daily Herald](#) and 4 a.m. jaunts to [Haven Brothers](#) has lifted, I understand how much I got out of [Brown's then-New Curriculum](#) (now, the Open Curriculum) that 1969 student activists had fought for, to ensure their successors got a diverse and liberal (in the classical, not political, sense) education.

That's how a late boomer inspired by the anti-war protesters who'd come before me ended up in a seminar class called "Military Influence in America" taught by a retired colonel, and later in a poli-sci class taught by [the former No. 3 man in the CIA](#). Brown allowed students to take any class pass/fail in those days, to encourage students to broaden their wings. I took courses nicknamed "Econ for Poets" and "Notions of Oceans," and tiny neurons of knowledge remain decades later when I write about the evils of [unfettered capitalism](#), or the threat of [climate change](#).

I didn't go to class for my career. That's what the Herald and summer internships were for. I wanted to read the great books, and develop an appreciation for things I'd known nothing about, like modern art. Learning facts was less important than learning to think — so hopefully I wouldn't stop thinking once I turned 23. I wasn't alone. In 1969, a whopping 83% of nationwide incoming college freshmen told UCLA researchers their purpose in going to college was “to develop a meaningful philosophy of life.” At Brown in the 1970s, that number might have been higher.

After I graduated, Brown changed just like the [Hemingway-born cliché](#), gradually and then suddenly. It wasn't so much the arrival of Eurotrash that Vanity Fair alleged in [a notorious 1998 article](#). The liberal curriculum largely remained, but the spirit of 1969 felt increasingly buried under a mound of money. As an institution, Brown tweaked its focus more toward big-name, big dollar research in programs like [a bulked-up School of Engineering](#). More [hedge-fund alums](#) started bringing a Wall Street attitude to the board of trustees. As job prep trumped that whole “meaningful philosophy of life” thing, [preprofessionalism](#) and career-trajectory clubs proliferated.

With so much ambition on the line, Brown became too big to fail.