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**ABSTRACT**

For the first 200 years of American higher education, the baccalaureate program was shaped by the authority of tradition, seldom challenged, and easily accommodating new learning and changing social conditions. After the Civil War, the authority of tradition was undermined by emerging professional academicians, trained in particular bodies of knowledge, and dedicated to a style of "scientific" learning. By World War II, tradition, professional academicians, and society shared authority over what went on in higher education. Since World War II, the accelerating democratization of higher education has created in students a new authority over their course of study. The evolution of the American college through these phases is traced in this paper. An analysis is presented of periods of American education, such as the beginnings of small provincial colleges in the eastern United States in the early 1800s, the growth of private and public universities in the late nineteenth century, and the development toward providing mass education immediately after World War II. Complex social changes that transformed secondary schools, colleges, and universities from their inception to the present are discussed in light of their influence on the thinking, attitudes, and aspirations of communities, students, teachers, and the government. (JD)

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EDUCATIONAL EXCELLENCE: THE SECONDARY  
SCHOOL--COLLEGE CONNECTION AND OTHER MATTERS:  
AN HISTORICAL ASSESSMENT

by

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Prepared for

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I

Even before we were in graduate school the professional historians of my generation were warned against hypothetical or conjectural history. "If" was a word and concept that we were to avoid at the risk of contaminating our sense of history with what had not happened. After all, wasn't what happened difficult enough to get a hold on?

The tantalizing lure of "if" nonetheless has caught more than one historian for awhile and even, contrary to our teachings, informed our sense of the past. Suppose that His Majesty's ministers had been more imaginative and sensitive in their response to the grievances of the American colonies. Or, would the history of the American people conceivably have been the same if the Mayflower instead of landing at Plymouth Rock had sailed into San Diego Bay? If Lincoln had lived, if Wilson had not suffered from a stroke or been a Presbyterian, if the momentum of the Kennedy administration, symbolized by the Peace Corps, had not been cut short ... If. If. If ....

Those of us who are exercised about the needs of higher education and who are concerned with the quality of learning and teaching in our colleges and universities should not be misled by our good intentions into believing that history is on our side. Think of the "ifs" that inform our dismal past! If Thomas Jefferson's elaborate plan for a coherent system of education in Virginia had been enacted ... If Benjamin Franklin's and Benjamin Rush's comparable systems for Pennsylvania had developed as they proposed ... If the great national university envisioned by George Washington, John Adams, and their successors had paralleled the growth of other agencies of government ... If the Morrill Federal Land Grant Act of 1862 had been at the time of its

enactment, a bold entry on the part of the national government into a concern for the educational needs of the country instead of a more or less convenient way of disposing of federal lands ... If the G.I. Bill of Rights in its educational provisions had been inspired by a deeply felt belief in the benefits of higher education for society instead of a profound fear of the prospect of great numbers of unemployed war veterans ...

Tradition supports neglect, confirms the accidental rather than the intentional as a force in shaping higher education in the United States, and argues that senseless rivalry and the vicissitudes of existence have had more to do with the patterns of institutional development than have cooperation and planning. Why didn't excellence in higher education become in the past a central concern of the nation? What have been the impediments to a cohesive sense of society in the American past, and how has that lack of cohesiveness spelled itself out in the lives of our colleges and universities? Why has an inflated sense of individualism taken precedence over the requirements of community and what price have we paid for neglecting the resources that are essential to the health of society? What are the myths and the illusions that encourage the easy posture that there is no relationship between the security of a free people and the vitality of the institutions that nurture their intellectual, moral, and aesthetic resources? Why has eighteenth-century federalism been allowed to get in the way of twentieth-century national effectiveness?

I do not suggest that those questions are going to be answered here, but I would argue that implicit in them are some inklings, some suggestions, of the enormity of the challenge that presents itself to anyone who would have this country confront head on the question: What are the missions of higher

education in a free society and how can those missions best be fulfilled in the United States? I sometimes hear references to the American system of higher education, although it is a phrase that, while evoking a sense of comfort and reassurance, actually cloaks the reality that there is no American system of higher education. Indeed, it is the very absence of system, the awkwardness with which the various parts--private and public, old and new, state and local, liberal and vocational, undergraduate and professional--hold together (if indeed they do), as well as the chaotic absence of any widely accepted authoritative pattern of articulation between secondary education and higher education--it is these evidences of disarray that remind us of the Herculean task that confronts the National Commission on Excellence in Education. You may know what President Reagan had in mind when you were appointed to the Commission. History will never know.

Do you suppose that the Association of American Colleges would be launching a project that aims to define the meaning of the baccalaureate degree if there were an American system of higher education? No, of course not, and it will not help matters to pretend that there is, for one great national responsibility--in the absence of a system--is to rationalize what there is, to make coherent what stubbornly refuses to mesh, and to use the resources of the national government in such ways that assure that the non-system that we do have nurtures the talents, sensitivities, and imagination that are essential to our intellectual and moral strength.

At the same time let it be understood that although we pay a high price for the irrationality of our non-system of higher education, its strengths are to be cherished and would surely be threatened and dissipated if instead of what we do have we had a large unitary national system. As Burton R. Clark

has pointed out; our non-system, in contrast to English and European models, is defined by its "huge size, ... its dispersion of control, variety of institutional forms, ... extensive student choice and high faculty mobility." These characteristics constitute a structure of sorts that is especially capable of delivering mass higher education even as it is responsive to a combination of challenging cultural and technological demands peculiar to the last quarter of the twentieth century.

It seems to me to be important to acknowledge that the fragile strength of higher education in the United States lies in the very irrationality of the enterprise, in the uncertainties and ambiguities that frustrate the reformers and utopians among us, and in the absence of any authority in the national government to act in any overpowering way on or for higher education. These aspects of American higher education are both a consequence of and a cause of our great adaptability to diverse needs, our great variety of institutions responsive to a multitude of individual aspirations, our great flexibility, and the greater effectiveness that flows from patterns of dispersed control. Thus far, as Burton Clark has suggested, we have achieved and maintained in American higher education a precarious balance between the demands of differentiation and unification, between the dispersion of purpose and authority and its integration. That balance is precious, and although it may now be out of whack by virtue of the national government's current reticence to perform a necessary and responsible tutelary and supportive role, it could just as readily be endangered by an overzealous national ministry.

Is there any measure of historical reassurance in the past? I would suppose so, or what is this paper doing here? In the history of American higher education, surely one of the periods of excellence occurred in the middle

decades of the nineteenth century when college going was defined by self-contained small colleges of sure moral purpose, held together by an underpaid and dedicated faculty and enjoyed by boisterous but ambitious young men intent on making something of themselves. When Mark Hopkins unknowingly launched himself into the mythology of American higher education with his inaugural address as president of Williams College in 1836, he spelled out the criteria for judging such colleges: "Opportunities and inducements for physical exercise, a healthy situation, fine scenery, proper books, a suitable example on the part of instructors, companions of correct and studious habits, and above all, a good religious influence." Not quite as an afterthought, he included classroom instruction, which he looked upon as less important because while his longer list of criteria molded moral character, instruction merely formed the intellect.

In many ways, looking back as we can from a century and a half of material and intellectual progress, we can fault those little provincial colleges, but to the degree that they held to the priorities and purposes spelled out by Hopkins, to that degree they delivered a quality education at a very low price. With only experience and tradition to guide them, all over the country governing boards of trustees were managing similar enterprises delivering more or less the same educational experience. Efforts to move higher education in other directions were on the whole thwarted and premature, but experimentation was not prohibited and diversity and flexibility were not wholly absent. The American college was evolving, in substance and style, as a creature of the society it served: it would not be rushed.

If I were to attempt a graph of the American experience with higher education, such as those that chart the rise and fall of the Dow Jones averages,

I think that I would find two other plateaus of excellence, one in the late nineteenth century when an explosion of learning, the elective curriculum, and dynamic growth led to the development, often out of onetime small colleges, of great private and public universities; and the other, in the years immediately after World War II when a coming together of disparate factors and developments directed colleges and universities toward providing mass education even as greater numbers permitted a selectivity in admissions that encouraged higher intellectual standards and expectations. Among these developments were the quickening of American intellectual life by the flight of scholars and artists from Nazi Europe, the coming of age of a generation of highly able and highly motivated descendants of late nineteenth-century Jewish immigrant stock, a similar movement into mainstream American life by the nineteenth-century Catholic immigrations from Ireland and Italy, the G.I. Bill of Rights, and a vigorous economy.

While these three periods may have excellence in common, clearly each period presents us with convincing evidence of the diversity of institutional style and purpose that has met the higher educational needs and expectations of the American people. Beside those magnificently internally coordinated provincial colleges we must also place those dismal fundamentalist colleges that were as hostile to life as they were to learning. And while the elective curriculum, professional scholars, and a great deal of money imparted zest and achievement to the late nineteenth century university, fear of the very same ingredients drove a host of colleges into a self-satisfied stupor from which they were a long time recovering. Also, whatever it was that was happening to our colleges and universities in the 1960's and early 1970's, we are already in a position to post, along with the gains, some sense of the





losses in institutional cohesion and identity, of the surfacing of tensions and demands that have unsettled and to some extent sidetracked the academy. But to be aware of all this is also to recognize the relationship between unsupervised diversity and dispersed control and what we mean when we think and talk about higher education in the United States.

Just as there are high points and low points and even shadows in my historical chart, it is of course possible for the history of any particular institution to defy the charts, to have its own experience with strength and weakness, and to make its own significant contribution to the dynamics of American higher education. Certainly as I review the history of particular institutions I am struck less by how they may fit into my graph than I am by how important has been the availability of leadership appropriate to the moment and how productive of flexibility and innovation has been the American tradition of independent governing boards responsible to collegiate and university corporations. Permitted and encouraged by their boards of trustees to strike out in new directions, charismatic leaders created quality institutions out of Antioch, Reed and Swarthmore. Our non-system of higher education was as a result invigorated and at the same time validated.

What can be learned from scattered experiences out of the past? What cautions, what warnings, does the past have for those who would boldly define the problems and identify the barriers to excellence in the educational enterprise? What kinds of developments unexpectedly imparted vigor and strength to American higher education? How easily was it endangered even by its friends? President Conant of Harvard and President Hutchins of Chicago were absolutely certain that the educational provisions of the G.I. Bill would be subversive of quality in American higher education. When Frank Aydelotte of Swarthmore

proclaimed in 1928 that "the race for numbers is over, and ... the race for quality has begun," some may actually have mistakenly believed that American higher education could be American higher education without a responsibility to both numbers and quality. Who, watching the University of Kansas student body demonstrating in 1941 for a Monday holiday to celebrate a football victory, could have anticipated that twenty-four years later students would take over the chancellor's office in protest against university-sanctioned racial discrimination? Who could have planned that notable improvement in student behavior?

What can we learn from the brave leadership of Josiah Quincy at Harvard during the Jacksonian era, when a concern for academic excellence was abused as aristocratic? Quincy refused to succumb to the open enrollment trade school collegiate model proposed by others, especially hostile Democrats in the General Court, and, in invigorating the college with a university potential, he took Harvard, in the words of his biographer, from "the brink of despair {to} ... the threshold of greatness." One does not have to accept the full arrogance of Howard Mumford Jones's brief summary of American history--"Take the Harvard 'elite' out of the history of America, and tell me, what have you left?"--one does not have to accept this bit of conceit from Cambridge in order to recognize that in the quest for balance in American higher education quality has forever been at war with populism, practicality, and operational utility.

What guidance can be drawn from the analyses of the emergence of the American university provided us in 1965 by Laurence Veysey of the University of California at Santa Cruz? Veysey's account is probably the most influential interpretation that we have of the conditions that gave shape to the

American university and to the conflicting values and emphases that sought expression within its walls. Veysey focused on the process by which universities began to redefine the nature of higher education in the United States. Just as there were no universities in the United States before the Civil War, regardless of what they called themselves, by 1900 there were at least a dozen institutions that were lending themselves to a definition of an American-style university that, while incorporating characteristics of both English and continental models, was unique.

Between 1865 and 1890 disputes and conflicts and differences of emphasis within the developing academic community revolved around not simply whether the university would crowd out the college but what kind of university would shoulder the burdens of higher learning in a rapidly growing industrial society. Professor Veysey identified four warring philosophies that competed for ascendancy: piety and discipline, utility, research, and liberal culture. The outcome of that competition gave us our non-system of higher education.

The first of these philosophies was more or less abandoned to the colleges, although in older institutions stretching toward university status the piety-discipline axis had its adherents. Essentially, however, the university in the United States, as nowhere else, chose to accommodate all the philosophies, combining service with research, utility with liberal culture. If by 1890 this accommodation had been reached at the dozen or so universities that became the institutions that would set directions and standards, thereafter administrators shifted their attention to organization and control, shaping a university structure that made room for a developing gulf between students and faculty, the rise of administrative bureaucracies, academic hierarchies, and academic freedom. The result was the American university as it is now under-

stood and experienced--an incoherent structure that contains and supports scholars, schools of innkeeping, football players, and even its alienated critics. And while the use of Clark Kerr's happy term, multiversity, may make one segment of American higher education more comprehensible, it does not necessarily make it more sane. Particularly since the multiversity comes in at least two versions--private and public, and shares the responsibility for American higher education with liberal arts colleges, teachers colleges, community colleges, and innumerable other institutions engaged in post-secondary learning.

Today, when some of us argue that the future health of higher education is necessarily a function of a whole range of government policies affecting financial support, student and faculty recruitment, and research, it may be useful to be reminded that President Eliot of Harvard sometimes talked as if the quality of the Harvard educational experience depended on the university's independence from the state and from any denominational connection. While it is true that politically oriented boards of regents and narrowly fundamentalist religious bodies have been demonstrably subversive of all kinds of excellence in institutions of higher learning, there is no necessary connection between the state and low quality and between religion and low quality, just as there is no necessary assurance of high quality in institutions whose so-called independence is subsidized by wealthy benefactors and alumni. No, the truth of the matter is that all colleges and universities are beholden to a variety of publics, are chartered for a public purpose, and are free to achieve quality only as their resources, their intentions and imagination, and their leadership allow them to.



On the other hand, it would of course be comforting to be able to demonstrate that government support of higher education, both state and federal, has been inspired by a conscious concern for its vitality, but, as George Rainsford's history of the federal role in support of higher education in the nineteenth century clearly shows, this simply is not so. Moreover, most federal support has only incidentally been concerned with education. Higher education may have benefited from government generosity, but Congress has been a patron as if by accident--it has really been intent on pursuing such diverse objectives as the sale of public lands, the settlement of new states, the internal unity of the Republican Party, the demands of such powerful special interest groups as the farmers, and in recent years "beating the Russians."

If government patronage has often in the past been accidental and incidental and therefore erratic and unreliable, more recently American higher education has also found its energies and resources taxed by the demands of new self-conscious constituencies. Government long ago learned to use higher education for its purposes, without paying great attention to the consequences for higher education itself, but something new entered the experience of colleges and universities when they became the battleground for the aspirations of assertive interest groups. There is something quite marvelous about the realization that a third of the student body and a quarter of the faculty at Yale today are Jewish, just three decades since William F. Buckley was berating his alma mater, in God and Man at Yale, for failing to indoctrinate its students with Christianity. Yet, there is something saddening about the parting shots with which the retiring Jewish chaplain at Yale in 1980 gave expression to a sort of manifesto of Jewish rights and claims at Yale.

Institutions are delicate. They are fragile. They achieve and maintain excellence in mysterious ways. That excellence is more easily destroyed than

created. Can a university president clarify his university's mission and strengthen its capacity to achieve while dissipating his energies in controversy on the inside with both his athletic department and his resident rabbi and defending the enterprise from right-wing extremists and religious fundamentalists on the outside? I am sure that there is a limit beyond which both a first-rate institution and an able administrator cannot be stretched without damage to both, but I am not aware of any evidence that would allow us to predict an abatement in the use and misuse to which militants of various persuasions--religious, racial, sexual, and political--are intent on subjecting American higher education.

We should not, however, underestimate the extent to which the health of American higher education today rests on the conquest of anti-Semitism as an integral aspect of the style of leading American colleges and universities and on how that salutary condition came about. There has been a revolution in college admissions and in the history of anti-Semitism in American higher education, and that revolution is central to an understanding of the health of the contemporary American college and university, particularly since it antedates the intrusion of government into admissions and hiring practices.

The so-called Eastern "Big Three" may not matter much in football anymore, but for a very long time, and with justification, Harvard, Yale, and Princeton have been trendsetting influences not only on the private institutions but on all kinds of colleges and universities seeking guidance toward excellence. Dr. Marcia Synnott of the University of South Carolina, with the complete cooperation of the universities themselves, in 1979 gave us a detailed documented account of how Harvard, Yale, and Princeton established quotas for Jewish students and, in their first really serious experience with selective

admissions, from the 1920's into the late 1940's, preserved themselves as bastions of a white Anglo-Saxon Protestant elite. But her story does not stop there, for those same universities, in subsequent decades, were transformed by a number of interacting developments into increasingly diverse and pluralistic institutions.

While each university moved toward effective discrimination against Jewish applicants in its own style (Harvard under a strong president, Yale under a strong faculty, and Princeton under a strong governing board), all succeeded in arriving at what was thought to be a comfortable policy of denying access to qualified Jews. (Of course, where applicable, the policy also restricted entry by Blacks, Catholics, women, homosexuals, and others considered unlikely candidates for the elite positions for which these universities prepared.)

Harvard, Yale, Princeton, and the institutions that followed their lead or were comforted in their own discrimination by the august company they kept, were prompted to carry out their policy of discrimination at a time when they were dependent on the financial support of a snobbish elite and when they had not yet altogether made up their minds how quite to establish the priority of intellectual purpose over social considerations. The changes in society that transformed the universities in the 1950's and 1960's were complex, uninvited, and insistent, and how these universities responded was a test of their vitality and imagination as well as a test of their readiness to embrace dynamic social change.

They passed the tests, and while I cannot here quickly tell you why, it is probably true that the very attributes that allowed them to live comfortably with their anti-Semitism early in this century prohibited them from pursuing the same policies later in the century. What were these attributes? An ear

to the ground, and a sense of where the important ground lay. A flexibility not so much about what is good, true, and beautiful but about how much of the good, true, and beautiful is palatable to those on whom one depends for essential support. And a somewhat delayed response to the main intellectual and social currents in the society being served: institutions of higher education are forever having to catch up; they are not accustomed to leaping ahead; they are barometric. But we are concerned with excellence and I suppose that I am saying that we would not even be talking about excellence at Harvard, Yale, and Princeton if anti-Semitism still prevailed there, just as we cannot look for guidance to the best in American higher education where anti-Semitism is still ensconced and where Jewish students and faculty are uncomfortable or unwelcome.

Does it occur to you to substitute "able but handicapped," "talented but homosexual," and "promising but black and unprepared" for "qualified but Jewish" in this consideration of anti-Semitism as a sorry moment in the history of American higher education? I hope so. For if that history tells us anything, it is that when its leaders and caretakers have been most effective and responsible there has been no conflict between access and quality, no debilitating tension between the college and university as an instrument of social and economic mobility and the college and university as an institution for training and certifying a supply of bright and able leaders.

Elsewhere in the Western world where there are systems of higher education this balance, this creative tension, has not been achieved. Surely the first requirement of a national policy for higher education is to support that balance, feed those tensions, and maintain the diversity and flexibility that are the fortunate historical fallout of our non-system.



That is why what the national government does or does not do is so tremendously important. It can throw higher education out of balance, it can encourage the monopoly of higher education by one segment at the expense of the benefits of diversity, it can tip the balance of authority and influence to one of higher education's interest groups--business, government, students, faculty, benefactors--to the exclusion of the others. And it can wield this influence as much by what it doesn't do as by what it does. We have reached a time of such sophistication and complexity in modern society that it simply will not do for the national government to retire from the scene while piously sending out the message to all the various institutional components of the higher education enterprise: "Go to it!" That may do for IBM and ATT. It is an altogether inappropriate policy for the intellectual, moral, and aesthetic resources and foundations of this nation. The National Commission on Excellence in Education is a reminder of the responsibilities of the national government to higher education and of the supportive and tutelary role that only it can fill.

## II

The National Commission on Excellence in Education is required by its mandate essentially to define and foster the levels of academic excellence appropriate to life in the United States as it can be expected to be in the twenty-first century. Whatever the degree of activity and influence that may issue from the Commission, its very existence argues that thought must be given to the demands and expectations of society as they will impinge on the colleges and universities of the United States in the future.

My responsibility is less awesome, in no way predictive or prescriptive. I want simply to draw a bit on history, to offer some sense of the conditions that supported quality in the past and that delivered from the colleges and universities graduates who helped to do the world's work and responded for better or worse to the needs of society.

I locate the first period of excellence in American higher education in the middle decades of the nineteenth century, in the years perhaps between 1830 and 1860 when a number of conditions conspired to allow a common understanding of what a college education was all about. Henry Smith Pritchett, first president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, in his annual report for 1907 enumerated the considerations that he believed entered into judging the excellence of a college's performance:

...The quality of teaching... ; the range of subjects taught... ; the equipment which enables the college adequately to fulfill its scope; the character of the tests by which students are passed from one class to another; and finally the entire training which the college requires of its students before it dismisses them with its degrees.

And then he added, "Each one of these conditions is directly affected by the kind of students admitted to the college." Pritchett was involved in estab-

lishing standards of admission in the interest of injecting some degree of unity in American education, but a further importance of his remark is the focus it places on who goes to college. For the nature of American higher education in the end depends on the young men and women who go to college, why they go, and what expectations they and society hold for the consequences of their going.

Nathaniel Hawthorne, attending the Williams College commencement exercises of 1838, allows us a glimpse of the kinds of students who were populating our colleges in those decades before the Civil War. He jotted into his notebook observations on some of the Williams students he saw there, but he might just as well have been in upstate New York, Ohio, Illinois, or at one of the country colleges of the South: "Country graduates--rough, brown-featured, schoolmaster looking, half-bumpkin, half-scholar figures, in black, ill-cut broadcloth; their manners quite spoilt by what little of the gentleman there was in them.... A rough hewn, heavy set of fellows from the hills and woods in this neighborhood; great, unpolished bumpkins, who had grown up as farmer-boys."

In Hawthorne's "great unpolished bumpkins" we are invited--no, required--to recognize the aspiring college youth of myth, the youngster spared from the drudgery of the farm by unusual ambition, ill health, or the devotion of a supportive family or a combination of these and other factors, nominated by self or family or village pastor to set himself apart from the vast majority of his contemporaries by going to college and becoming a leader. The excellence of his education is documented by the degree to which it allowed him to fulfill his own and society's expectations. Of the twenty-three graduating seniors who fell under the observation of Hawthorne in 1838 ten practiced law,

nine became clergymen, five were school principals, three were editors. Others practiced medicine and engaged in manufacturing, merchandising, and the marketing of anthracite coal. At least nine held elective office, including membership in the state legislatures of Massachusetts, New York, and Illinois, or were appointed to high judicial positions. One was editor of the Chicago Tribune for many years; another became a leading travel writer of his generation. "Great, unpolished bumpkins, who had grown up as farmer-boys."

The quality of these young men's education is only in part tested by their subsequent careers. It is also necessary to question whether the institutional arrangements were as good as society's resources would allow, whether the formal course of study reflected the existing state of learning, and whether the total collegiate experience was conducive to the development of traits of mind and character that would in fact enhance their potential as leaders.

Since very few young men and hardly any young women went to college in those days, it is useful to ask what society expected of those who did, particularly since it was possible to be a doctor or a lawyer or a clergyman without going to college at all. What lay at the end of the road for the college graduates who entered the professions, as a majority of them did, were positions of respect and leadership not only in the professions but in their communities. Secondary schools recruited their teaching staffs from young college graduates who were usually only tarrying on their way to careers in the professions. Colleges recruited their professors from men who had tasted the law or ministry or medicine and had decided for one reason or another that a college professorship was more to their liking.

And while this process of developing colleges as seedbeds for society's leaders began in the Colonial period, the process continued and was magnified as the country moved Westward. The college founding that first spread New England influence into the West was inspired by a pessimistic fear of barbarism and was later fueled by an evangelical religious fervor and denominational rivalry that derived from more optimistic and democratic impulses. The connections between colleges and leaders and social stability, as well as the connection between colleges and individual ambition, were uppermost in the minds of the pioneer settlers of western communities who erected colleges often before there was any apparent or immediate need for them.

In effect, the colleges were accessible to all young white males who aspired to the roles that society had designated as essential to social order. Colleges sprouted as geographical conditions dictated, as denominational rivalry required, and as fear of the barbaric influences of an undeveloped environment encouraged. In addition, costs were low, financial assistance was generous, tuition bills were often uncollected. If the price was in the end paid by the professors and their families, they knew what they were doing--providing the social glue and the responsible leadership for a young nation experimenting with republican government and democratic politics.

In a sense there were more colleges than could be handsomely supported but probably not many more than were necessary to give vitality to the Jeffersonian ideal of educational accessibility. It must be remembered that the era with which we are concerned antedated the development of the academic disciplines and professional academicians; was just becoming aware of the challenge of an undeveloped continent to the potentialities of applied science; and regarded traditional ethical and religious values as beyond chal-

lenge. Given these conditions, large resources symbolized by libraries and laboratories were not necessary. As far as equipment and staffing were concerned, on the whole the colleges were as good as they needed to be.

Some institutions were stultifying, some literally became lost in the backwash of material advance, and others found themselves geographically misplaced. All were essentially provincial in orientation: even Harvard, where intellectual sights were raised by an environment congenial to religious heterodoxy, enrolled an essentially narrow class of Bostonians. There were no national institutions. In the 1850's both the University of Michigan and New York University urged Mark Hopkins to become their president; their governing boards fantasized making their universities either a Williams of the West or a Williams of the city. Similar aspirations duplicated Yale College and the College of New Jersey elsewhere in the West and South, places where a traditional but evolving curriculum, a sound religious environment, and a singular sense of purpose--the training up of a corps of leaders--gave focus and clarity to the collegiate experience.

While the course of study inherited by the colleges of the pre-Civil War period was overwhelmingly concentrated in the Latin, Greek, and mathematics that were synonymous with culture, it is a mistake to think of the period as lacking in encouragement to new learning and receptivity to new disciplines. The old subjects dominated, but new subjects crept into the curriculum or found a congenial place in the extracurriculum that students erected as a criticism of the formal course of study and as an expression of their capacity to pursue education beyond the classroom.

The history of the liberal arts curriculum is a record of accretion and adjustment, of the accommodation of new knowledge and new values to both

continuing and changing purpose. How does a liberal art announce itself and get into the curriculum? Let chemistry be a case in point. In 1802 Yale appointed Benjamin Silliman professor of chemistry, geology, and mineralogy, and made a term of chemistry a requirement of the senior year. This was seven years after Princeton appointed the first professor of chemistry in an American college and some time before Silliman himself had ever seen a chemical experiment performed, let alone performed one himself. Silliman went down to Princeton to find out how to be a chemistry professor, and a few years after he returned to Yale, Chester Dewey went down to New Haven from Williamstown to find out, in turn, how to become a chemistry professor at Williams. A new liberal art was in the making.

Other subjects that would one day be central to the liberal course of study--English literature, history, art--were nurtured by student literary societies and clubs, generally with the encouragement of the colleges which were happy to encourage students to pursue learning on their own. Natural history collections, museums of archeological and scientific interest, the rudiments of art collections were often the work of students. Still other subjects, such as the modern languages, while only grudgingly incorporated in the curriculum, acknowledged the incessant role of the outside world in defining the appropriateness of the course of study. Occasionally, as in the experience of Lafayette College with Professor Francis A. March, a whole new field of study was launched simply because of the determination and imagination of a single professor: March was apparently the first American professor to teach Paradise Lost and Julius Caesar as if they could be used as instruments for learning something about thought, criticism, and aesthetics. A potential subject such as mineralogy waited in the wings of most colleges

until the publication of James Dwight Dana's System of Mineralogy allowed it to be exported from Yale in 1837.

While the nature of the course of study and graduation requirements depended therefore on such variables as the publication of appropriate texts, the imagination of pioneering professors, and the appearance of new knowledge and new social needs, the college preparation of the students themselves was probably the single most limiting influence in defining the college course. Yet, a progressive upward movement of standards in the years under consideration allowed President James B. Angell of Michigan to conclude that between 1800 and 1870 the equivalent of two years of what had once been considered college work had been pushed down into the schools. Given the absence of system in the educational arrangements in college preparation, this was a notable achievement.

A student might arrive at college by a variety of roads--prepared by a resident tutor in the South or a local clergyman in the North, in a private day school or a Latin grammar school, in the preparatory departments of the colleges themselves, or increasingly in the years before the Civil War in multipurpose academies that provided a terminal general education as well as college preparation. This diversity of preparation was a challenge to the college curriculum? It set limits on what it could be and also created demands for what it had to be.

The academy movement, for instance, generated an increase in the numbers seeking a college education, but in exposing their students to such non-traditional but eminently useful studies as English, the modern languages, surveying, and bookkeeping, the academies created a collegiate clientele that showed signs of not being satisfied with the traditional course of study.



Diversity in college preparation also encouraged a wide age range and therefore degrees of maturity and different levels of expectation in regard to the course of study: of Hawthorne's "country bumpkins," one entered college at the age of 12, another at the age of 21 (both distinguished themselves as editors and gained entry to the Dictionary of American Biography).

Where a college did not run its own preparatory department, a device for catching students young and funneling them into the college in various stages of preparation, evidence supports the impression that students well prepared by local clergymen or grammar schools usually skipped the freshman year and entered as sophomores. The New England colleges in particular were full of students who finished the course in less than four years; elsewhere integral preparatory schools allowed students to take programs that were ambiguous in definition.

In 1829 the freshman class at Harvard was drawn from the usual mixed preparation: 36 percent from academies, 26 percent from private proprietary schools, 21 percent from Latin grammar schools, 10 percent from private tutors, and 5 percent from college preparatory departments of other colleges. The mix varied from college to college, and from section to section, but the meaning for the curriculum was almost everywhere the same: a freshman year that was often repetitive and often of secondary school level; a course of study that could not rely on any standards either imposed from outside or agreed upon within what was at best only an amorphous academic community. College authorities, defining their own course of study, learned to restrain their expectations in deference to the preparation of the students who came their way.

All this being so, how did the colleges--not all of them, for sure--manage to shove two years of what had been college work in 1800 down into the

schools? How were standards raised and social goals fulfilled even while too many colleges were being built, given the resources and the available students? Certainly one source was the determination of the old established eastern institutions--Harvard, Yale, Princeton--to provide the cutting edge for new learning and to provide room for it by raising their admissions requirements. The first new admissions requirement in American higher education, beyond the traditional Latin and Greek, was arithmetic, which was required as an admissions subject by Yale in 1745. In 1819 Princeton required that candidates for admission be "well acquainted" with English grammar. Geometry became an entrance subject at Harvard in 1844 and Yale in 1856. Ancient history was established by both Harvard and Michigan as an entrance requirement in 1847.

For two reasons the old colleges exerted a powerful influence in raising standards. The newer colleges, in leadership, faculty, and purpose, were their offspring. The evangelical impulse emanating from Yale and Princeton carried educational standards into the South and West. The governing boards of the new colleges were studded with graduates of Yale, Princeton, Amherst, Bowdoin, and Williams. And the old Eastern institutions also often influenced by default: with a few notable exceptions, including Michigan, where New England influence was strong, state legislatures were friendlier to elementary schooling than to higher education. The failure of states to develop and support strong state institutions left the matter of standards to rivals spawned by the denominations and, in the case of the best of them, prepared to take their cues from the East.

The colleges of this first era of excellence judged themselves by the quality of their graduates as human beings. They knew that very few people went to college, that it was possible to be elected to high office by appealing

to the passions rather than the intelligence of the people, and that a great deal of money could be made and was being made by ambitious and often crude young men who, spurning both a secondary and collegiate education, were eager to transform the natural resources of an unexploited continent into personal fortunes. But just because all that was so, the colleges saw their particular function as cautionary, diluting, admonishing: they regarded themselves as preparing the clergymen, the judges, the teachers, the men who occupied the best houses in town, for carrying the burdens of community leadership.

If the exit standards varied from college to college, there was no question about whether Harvard or Yale or Princeton was the place to look for guidance. If state institutions were neglected, the numerous little denominational colleges provided an expanding country with determined echoes of the East. If the course of study was being challenged, as it surely was, by those who would make it more relevant and practical, there was a great deal of evidence that new subjects and extracurricular enthusiasms repudiated any suggestion that the colleges were standing still. If the arrangements that passed as a "system" of collegiate preparation could at best be described as chaotic, the colleges were doing as well, with entrance standards and graduation requirements, as that chaos permitted them. It was no blemish on their record that Abraham Lincoln had not gone to college: in the cabinet that took office with him the two most important positions, secretary of state and secretary of the treasury, were held by graduates of Union and Dartmouth.

### III

James B. Angell, the great president of the University of Michigan who did so much to differentiate the American state university from the small liberal arts colleges that defined the essence of American higher education before the

Civil War, took stock at the end of the century. As he surveyed the academic landscape, he was pleased with the changes of the past fifty years. The course of study was on the move, being subjected to variety, intrusions of new learning, and growth. The common curriculum that enabled a college in Iowa or Michigan or North Carolina to speak the same language (and its graduates to share a common learning) was gone: libraries, laboratories, seminars, imaginative reorderings of old and new disciplines were invigorating higher education with the excitement of new challenges and opportunities.

The watchful discipline of the in loco parentis tradition had been replaced by a friendlier laissez-faire that, while sometimes bordering on indifference, announced a new climate of freedom. The day of the teacher as moral guide, idealized in the careers of Hopkins of Williams, Nott of Union, and Wayland of Brown, was over; they had been replaced by trained professionals prepared to guide the young into the labyrinths of their academic specialties. The colleges no longer appealed only to that limited clientele headed for leadership in the professions; college-going had become a threshold for those also destined for careers in business and finance. The male domination of higher education had been broken: coeducation and colleges for women ushered women off the pedestal and out of the kitchen into a world of new opportunities. Intercollegiate athletics had transformed colleges and universities in ways that were not yet fully understood.

Graduate schools of arts and sciences, offering advanced scholarly work in academic disciplines that did not even exist in the era of the colleges, were changing colleges into universities and creating the new generations of college professors. The connections between higher education and the public had been greatly enlarged; a new sympathetic interest in higher education had

developed on the farm, in the factory, and in the market place as a consequence of the growing perception that there were available in the colleges and universities bodies of knowledge that could be applied to doing the world's work more effectively and profitably. And finally, Angell noted, there had developed a new articulation between the work of the schools and the work of the colleges, a recognition of the dependency of one on the other, and a sense that system and order in the standards, curricula, and policies of both were necessary in order to create some rationale for the American educational effort.

The disorder and disarray that had overtaken American higher education during the half century of change that Angell contemplated with satisfaction cannot be overstated. All that excitement and accelerating change, all that variety and movement, fed by the dynamic and optimistic style of a self-confident industrial society, make the earlier era of small colleges seem like the ultimate in system and order.

But even in that earlier time there were signs of the troubles ahead. The widely accepted primacy of Latin and Greek had enabled the colleges to maintain the B.A. degree as the badge of a cultivated person. But the advances in theoretical science and the challenge of the American continent to applied science created needs and demands that could not be ignored. Harvard and Yale solved the problem by creating separate scientific schools and by awarding new degrees, Harvard the B.S. degree in 1851 and Yale the Ph.B. degree in 1852.

The Harvard and Yale arrangements that set the pattern for the science schools that multiplied in the 1850's and 1860's placed applied science outside the circle of respectability, but the tactics of the friends of the B.A. degree

were self-defeating. Soon a great wave of industrial philanthropy was of such dimensions that it could dictate its own terms: Lehigh University was created in 1865 as a scientific and technical college, Lafayette College was transformed in 1866 by the addition of a school of engineering that awarded the B.S. degree. In the 1850's the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute stopped being a high school and began performing like a scientific college. Engineering made its way into the undergraduate course at Dartmouth, the University of Michigan, and Brown before 1855. The University of Rochester, founded in 1850, offered a choice of the B.A. or the B.S. degree from the beginning. Illinois College, Denison, the University of North Carolina, New York University, and Wesleyan reorganized their values and their course of study in the 1850's to offer a course without classics leading to the B.S. degree. In 1858 the first degree awarded by the State University of Iowa was a B.S. degree. In the 1860's at least twenty-five institutions adopted the three-year parallel B.S. scientific program as a device for expressing their willingness to do what society expected of them.

Responding to a clientele that recognized the usefulness of applied science and the new subjects in advancing their personal fortunes, and likewise acceding to that clientele's distaste for the classics, the colleges created combinations of courses in which science, modern languages, and English were substituted for Latin and Greek. The bachelor of philosophy (Ph.B.) degree was introduced by Brown in 1850; Wesleyan awarded the first B.S. degree for its scientific course in 1838. These two degrees, along with the bachelor of literature (B.Litt.), were the instruments for preserving the B.A. degree from confusion with all those variations of the course of study that did not meet general expectations of what a sound classical education was supposed to be.

The movement of a great number of vocational programs into the undergraduate curriculum created a wave of alphabet combinations that would not be equaled until the era of the New Deal government agencies. In a period of curricular innovation and breakdown the invention of degrees accelerated. The B. Sci. Ag. was first awarded in 1860; in the 1870's the B. Home Ec. was awarded to women graduates of the land-grant institutions in Iowa, Illinois, and Kansas; Adrian College in Michigan awarded the first B. Mus. in 1873. In 1896 Ohio State University offered programs that led to fifteen degrees--three in the arts, six in engineering and related fields of technology, two in agriculture, and five in various other vocational programs.

The new degree programs were symbolic of the curricular rearrangements that accompanied the unleashing of great intellectual and social energies in the post-Civil War period. These energies came to be identified with Charles William Eliot at Harvard, Andrew D. White and Ezra Cornell at Cornell, and Daniel Coit Gilman at Johns Hopkins. Eliot developed the idea of a wholly elective undergraduate curriculum as an instrument for moving Harvard, with the cooperation of students, faculty, and benefactors, toward university status, a higher level of scholarship, more applied science. White at Cornell translated Ezra Cornell's intention to "found an institution where any person can find instruction in any study" into a staggering demonstration of the university in the public service. At Johns Hopkins Gilman created a university whose focus was on advanced scholarship of a kind heretofore associated with the German universities. The impact on American higher education of Eliot, White, and Gilman was revolutionary. Henceforth, as Professor Veysey made abundantly clear in his account of the emerging university, American higher education would be beset by tensions that inhered in the conflicts between

traditional prescription and free electives, between the theoretical and practical, between humanism and public need, between scholarship and utility, between culture and the world's work, between piety and intellect.

As bewildering and as exasperating as the conditions of higher education must have been to tidy minds, those years when American higher education wrestled with all the exciting challenges contained in the careers of Eliot, White, and Gilman must be viewed as years of excellence. For regardless of much that was embarrassingly single-minded in its vocationalism or meretricious in its effort to appeal to a variety of eager publics, higher education in these years for the first time seized upon intellectual excellence as a primary purpose. At Johns Hopkins it was the purpose; at Cornell it was one of several purposes; at Harvard it became a purpose that encouraged higher admissions standards, a more scholarly faculty, and new hurdles for admissions to the professional schools. But everywhere intellect was shoving aside or challenging the piety, indifference, and rigidity that had held back or not recognized the force of the energies that were being released by new academic philosophies. Soon, their Ph.D. degrees fairly earned, products of the new graduate schools of arts and sciences would swarm across the land, transforming the tone and life of hundreds of colleges by bringing to old subjects and new the commitment of trained intellects.

For the processes of college admission, the maintenance and clarification of standards, for a sense of what a college education or a secondary school preparation indeed was, the thrust toward intellectual rigor and institutional variety was all but disastrous. The diversity in collegiate degree programs and corresponding admission requirements led to the exasperated remark of the principal of Phillips Andover Academy in 1885: "Out of over forty boys



for college next year we have over twenty senior classes!" That, however, was but a small part of the problem. By 1900 the predominant form of secondary education in the United States was the public high school, a negligible source of the college population in the earlier era. By the 1880's, partly as the result of the leadership of state universities seeking ways to develop reliable sources of qualified students, state networks of public high schools had been developed, linking the elementary schools of the state with the public universities. By 1890 enrollments in public high schools surpassed that of the surviving antebellum academies, which were in the process of precipitous decline. The growth of the public high school increased the potential number of college students, but the high school intruded new uncertainties into the nature of secondary schooling in the United States. It was strongest in the cities, and thus rural populations were educationally deprived. It was stronger where state universities seized the initiative in rationalizing state systems of education, it was weakest in the financially depressed South. Its educational mission was muddled by the assumption that it must prepare for the traditional classical college course as well as provide terminal training in new subjects and vocational programs for students not going on to college. It competed for students with private schools, old and new, and with the integral preparatory schools of colleges and universities. In 1889 of approximately 400 institutions of higher education in the United States only 65 lacked an on-campus preparatory division.

Toward the end of the nineteenth century and early in the twentieth century efforts to bring order out of the disarray of secondary education, the lack of uniformity in admissions standards, and the tenuous relationship between the schools and colleges led to a number of notable efforts to rational-

ize American education. In the absence of any national authority in a position either to impose or monitor standards, the task before the various committees, commissions, foundations, and boards that sought to bring some order out of chaos was all but impossible. Nonetheless, the Report of the Committee of Ten on Secondary School Studies, launched by the National Education Association in 1892, became "a standard by which schools evaluated their own policies" on curriculum and it provided the philosophic underpinnings by which non-classical school programs achieved an equivalency for college admission with the classical course. Under the lead of the University of Michigan, many state universities developed systems of certification, by which high schools meeting the university's curricular standards were accredited as certified sources of college students. Certification was often accompanied by steadily elevating admissions requirements intended to spur the high schools to higher levels of work. In various sections of the country, as in the role of Vanderbilt University in the creation of the Southern Association of Schools and Colleges, strong universities provided leadership in founding regional associations concerned with standards and school-college relationships. The founding of the College Entrance Examination Board in 1901 was an effort to standardize admission credits, but its influence was limited to a select group of Eastern universities and colleges and private schools that assumed the burden of being the most demanding and in the process became the standard bearers of American higher education.

Too many conflicting purposes were enmeshed in the admissions problem to allow for any clear solution. Each college and university chose the method or methods that it thought best served its purposes and allowed it to enroll a class. Eliot's purposes at Harvard--to use higher standards of admission

as a means of achieving university status--were of no use to colleges lacking university ambitions. Harvard's later adoption of options and groups of subjects appropriate for admission was a function of the university's commitment to the concept of student freedom in course election, a concept that was in no sense universally admired. When Stanford University in 1902 accepted woodworking, forge work, and machine shop work in partial fulfillment of admission to candidacy for the B.A. degree, it made a conscious decision to be responsive to the interests of western democracy. When small New England colleges held tenaciously to their Latin requirements longer than their public rivals, they chose to select their students from a narrower clientele.

The idea of a uniform universally recognized undergraduate course of study was dying along with the old curriculum. School and college associations of subject matter teachers, even the creation in 1908 of the Carnegie unit (one of four courses carried five days a week during the secondary school year), could only temper but not stem the disarray that had overtaken the college curriculum.

The ambitious decision of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching to provide every American college professor with a pension was beyond its resources but its good intentions had the happy consequences of requiring it to define what constituted a college worthy of its attention. The Carnegie Foundation found itself confronted with the necessity of classifying the colleges of the United States, defining the standards by which they should be judged, determining which were excellent and which inferior. Officers and trustees of the foundation reduced the size of their problem at the outset by eliminating state institutions as well as private institutions with denominational affiliation on the reasonable grounds that the foundation's resources

were not unlimited and that the states and the churches should look after their own. In deciding what a college was (after the elimination of these two categories), the foundation found forty-five and published its list in June 1906.

To make that magic list a college had to require fourteen units of high school credit for admission, each unit signifying five recitations a week throughout the year in one subject. The "Carnegie Unit" was on its way. In addition, to be defined as a college, an institution was required to have six professors fully employed in college and university work, a course of four full years in liberal arts and sciences, and an endowment of at least \$200,000.

Without so much as a word about the curriculum, the Carnegie Foundation nonetheless narrowed the definition of a college and established standards by which the college course of study could be distinguished from the secondary school. Its list of forty-five institutions--expanded to fifty-two by the end of the first year--was misleading in its omission of the strong state institutions and leading private institutions with denominational affiliation. Geographically the list was an expression of historical developments: Because it was limited to private institutions, it was heavily weighted among New England and mid-Atlantic colleges and universities; because its standards were likely to be an achievement of age or wealth or both, only one institution was from the South and only one from the West Coast. The technical institutions included were those whose commitment to pure science supported their programs in applied science. Colleges outside the East were the old institutions of New England derivation where the sensibilities and practices of the East were held in respect. The women's colleges were those that had most succeeded in being like men's colleges.

Implicit in its selection was encouragement to colleges and universities that had been courageous in establishing admission standards, more faithful than many of their contemporaries to the traditions of liberal learning, and most responsive to a heightened sense of importance for intellectual values. Curricular disarray was not eliminated by the Carnegie Foundation's first venture into educational philanthropy, but the foundation's list did single out where the leadership for reorganization and reform would come from and where standards, order, and coherence would have a chance if they were going to have it anywhere.

Yet, it is easy enough to argue another position. Intellectual purpose was in the ascendancy; so were football and the entire array of athletic overemphasis. For the first time young men and women could be altogether comfortable with scholarly ambitions on an American college campus; the colleges were also beginning to appeal to those for whom the label was more important than the contents. At the best institutions admissions requirements were moving upward; in 1909 of the then sixty-four institutions on the Carnegie Foundation's list of the educationally excellent, one-third admitted more than half of their students with conditions--among them, Harvard, Yale, Princeton, and Columbia; in 1912 fewer than a half of the then 331,000 students enrolled in 807 colleges and universities had fully met admission requirements. Common expectations as to appropriate admissions subjects were developed by the best institutions; but in 1922 over 100 subjects were acceptable as passports from secondary school to matriculation in an American college or university.

To take this other position, however, is to ignore the realities of American life, the changing political and social patterns that were giving the Carnegie Foundation's list of superior institutions an opportunity to grapple

with the challenges of a new definition of academic excellence. Henceforth diversity rather than standardization would define American higher education--diversity in purpose, expectations, and quality. This very diversity was in the process of underwriting the possibility of excellence: it permitted those institutions that were so inclined to make the effort to define themselves as the best.

#### IV.

Among the concluding chapters of the second volume of his distinguished history of Yale College, Professor George Wilson Pierson included an interpretation of "Shifting Conditions of Admission" on the eve of World War II. His assessment was essentially an extended lament, a catalogue of events and tendencies that undermined quality. If his history of Yale was in fact the history of a great university moving toward excellence, it was also a history in which excellence was achieved always against great odds. The expectations and pressures of an increasingly democratic society were at war with standards and with traditions that were to some degree aristocratic in origin.

Thus, the shifting conditions of which he wrote militated against a level of excellence of which American higher education was capable. The spread of universal education in the twentieth century required attention to interests, abilities, and expectations that were located outside the tidy narrow focus of the old colleges. The best colleges, let alone their weak sisters, could not agree on standards, one reason being the extent to which they were caught up in the competitive compulsions of American life. A shift in the center of gravity in American education to the city, the West, to the lower and lower middle classes, and to vocationalism registered a decline in the authority

of New England, of old families and old colleges and old purposes in the conduct of American higher education. "Now," he observed, "the ignorant many were coming out for their letters."

Laws against child labor filled the educational pool with the uninitiated; laws that extended the school-leaving age pushed along the educational ladder great numbers for whom the adventure of education was a bore and a mystery. Immigrants and their offspring "who because of their humble origins knew nothing of the liberal arts or regarded them as aristocratic" intruded a powerful demand for practicality, immediacy, and technical competency into the curriculum of the schools and, therefore, of the colleges and universities that were sensitive to political forces. High schools, subject to no authority higher than politicians in the state capitals, by 1930 had taken over deciding what students should study. The College Entrance Examination Board symbolized excellence, but it lacked authority and failed to receive the full cooperation of the best institutions. The spectacle of Harvard, Yale, and Princeton competing for the same athletically able or socially prominent students in the late nineteenth century was later repeated as their reach for national prominence included competition for western students: admissions standards suffered. And then came the Great Depression, the unleashing of injurious pedagogical theory from followers of John Dewey and authorities in the professional schools of education--all contributing to an environment hostile to the maintenance of standards. In 1932 Yale, in order to fill its freshman dormitories, lowered its standards. In 1933 Harvard received 1,297 applications for admission and enrolled 1,113 freshmen. The struggle of the best institutions to maintain standards is implicit in these conditions. In the years before World War II selectivity in admissions was a function only of

bias and discrimination. Otherwise, the doors were wide open to students of varying degrees of ability and preparation. Indeed, in all but a very few institutions, if any, the doors were open right up until the opening day of college each fall.

The difficulties that beset college and school people who yearned for even higher levels of academic excellence may have been intensified by the conditions described in Professor Pierson's lament, but their problem was more fundamental. Schools and colleges had been burdened by society with so many conflicting purposes that the achievement of academic excellence necessarily had to battle its way among competing and often superior and contradictory claims. The American school has not been without its critics and its detractors--no literature enlivened by the presence of Tom Sawyer, Huckleberry Finn, and Holden Caulfield can be interpreted as a celebration of the American school. On the other hand, the faith of the American people in education, while perhaps unwarranted, has been so fundamental that Lyndon Johnson could get away with saying: "The answer for all our national problems comes down to one single word--education." In effect, therefore, formal education has been expected to do and be everything: an agency of social control, a source of leaders and a winnower of winners from losers, an instrument for confirming the present and taming the young; but also an agency responsive to the aspirations of the young, sensitive to its role in transforming the lives of countless individuals and thereby providing a dynamic transforming thrust to society itself.

In the end, our schools and colleges also assumed a central place in democratic political philosophy. For if a democratic society was to be protected from tyranny, if a wise and honest public service was to be created,



if talent was to be drawn from the people at large, if the ethnic and religious diversity of the country was to be diluted by a developing sense of patriotism, all these challenges would have to be met by the country's educational enterprise. No one understood all this better than Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, Benjamin Rush, and their contemporaries, but Horace Mann, first secretary of the Massachusetts Board of Education, a generation later was given the opportunity to act out their educational philosophy.

The common school was not Horace Mann's invention, but during his tenure on the Board from 1837 to 1848, he dramatized the need for a systematic collective approach to the education of the young. The label "common school" grew out of a recognition of the extent to which the school he helped to develop was indeed popular in its availability, its instruction, and its support. Mann and others, in Massachusetts and elsewhere, laid the foundations of what became the American public school system with a wide network of elementary schools available without cost to all children, providing a common instruction, supported and controlled by the community. The American high school and community college are essentially extensions of the common school, and the philosophy that gave shape to the state universities and land-grant colleges derived in part from similar impulses.

The appearance of the common school in the United States in the 1820's and 1830's, and its vigorous growth thereafter, must be recognized as a considerably delayed venture into a democratic system of education. The delay can be explained, but not without having to recognize how long the American experiment with political democracy was allowed to progress without a supporting system of democratic education. The people of the United States simply lacked the desire for cohesiveness, the regard for history, the social sense

required to elaborate an educational scheme to match their political scheme. The Constitution of the United States is an awesome document, a remarkable display of political wisdom; its failure to provide for a system of education consistent with the demands that a free society would place upon its citizens was no accidental oversight. The Constitution itself carried the people politically beyond where their experience and imagination took them.

Before an appropriate educational system was possible, ignorance and common sense--both capable of sustenance without schools--would have to be proven dangerous or inadequate. The private free enterprise schools would have to prove unresponsive to changing social conditions, and the church-related schools would have to be recognized as representing a threat of division to a people engaged in the perilous enterprise of making a nation. A successful attack would have to be launched on the persisting and wide-spread belief in the legitimacy of social hierarchy. And something would have to be done to overcome the hostility to free schools that was implicit in the American's romantic attachment to self-reliance, his property, and his developing myth of the self-made man. Or, to be more precise, this whole structure of attitudes and conditions constituting a barrier to the development of a system of public education would have to be in some places weakened, in some bypassed, in others accommodated. In the end, we have managed to have our system of public education, the common school from kindergarten to doctorate, and still hold on to our divisive parochial institutions and sustain an impressive number of elitist schools on all levels.

Massachusetts led the way in the achievement of a system of public education, but others followed. By 1850 every state had created a fund for the support of public education and all but Arkansas had granted to towns taxing

power in support of free schools. In 1852 Massachusetts required the school attendance of all children; in 1918 Mississippi became the last state to make the same requirement. And while many children were not in school at all, 3,354,000, or 14% of the total white population of the country, were enrolled in some public institution in 1850. By 1971 over one quarter of the entire population of the country or approximately 55,000,000 Americans were engaged full-time in the nation's public educational enterprise as students, teachers, or administrators; another 7,000,000 were similarly engaged in the private sector. If Lyndon Johnson was wrong about education being the answer to all the nation's problems, clearly it was at least providing insurance against unemployment.

And it was feeding the mythology that Horace Mann and others launched as an instrument of faith and support for the common school. For the vast American educational enterprise engages so many people today because we have believed that our public school system is the basis of social harmony and democratic political wisdom; we have attributed to the schools the upward social mobility of each new generation of immigrant children and their children and their children's children; we have seen the schools as a great neutral bulwark against crime and immorality, an all-American alternative to the special claims and divisive roles of private and parochial schools. In this view, the American school is America in miniature--a society of equals learning the tasks and the tone of the democratic way, achieving unity out of diversity, harmony out of potential discord. The American school becomes that most engaging paradox--a mechanism of social control and liberation, an instrument for teaching men and women their place and for liberating them from the place they find themselves in.

Appropriately the commitment of resources to education has been large. The statistics are impressive. In 1890 only 6.7 percent of the 14-17 age group was attending an American high school; the percentage in high school today surpasses 90. Half of the age group 18-21 is in college. But the test of a school is not how many are exposed to it but how well it carries out the burdens that society places upon it. Has the American school achieved social harmony? Has it been a significant instrument of social mobility? Has it been a source of political wisdom? Has it been a bulwark against crime and immorality? Has it earned the enthusiastic support of the people or been given only their grudging support? Has it achieved high levels of intellectual quality and academic excellence? Can it do and be everything?

Questions such as these cannot be answered with the kind of almost certainty with which statistics can be quoted to answer other kinds of questions. But there are ways that such questions can be approached productively, for if they cannot really be answered precisely, much that is otherwise inexplicable about the past becomes clearer in the face of such questions.

A measure of the real sentiment of American society toward education has been the historically despised schoolteacher, taunted if a schoolmaster and scorned if a school marm, underpaid if not unpaid, something of a social pariah expected to keep his and her distance from life and society as the price of marginal employment. Keeping them company is the absent-minded professor, a repository of humane values and a seeker of truth, but nonetheless out of touch with reality and not to be trusted by the robust and energetic. The United States, if nothing else, is a country that has paid for what it wants and rewarded those it admires. The impoverishment, economically and psychologically, of schoolteachers and professors as a class, is surely a

function of the society's distrust of intellectual values, but it also suggests how lacking in ultimate seriousness has been our commitment to education. A people who would rather have new cars than great teachers and good schools cannot be accused of really believing that the future is made in school, whatever their mythology says. Here too, then, is another influence on our schools and colleges.

We asked too much of our schools and colleges if we expected them also to deliver intellectual excellence. Benjamin Franklin and Abraham Lincoln would not choose to be so celebrated and regarded, but they are magnificent symbols of what can happen to young men who did not go to school at all. The heroes of nineteenth century American economic growth—a barely literate Commodore Vanderbilt, a John D. Rockefeller taught by his father to cheat at cards the better to make his way in the world, a self-taught Andrew Carnegie—made clear enough what happened to ambitious young men who knew no Greek and Latin, who had been spared disquisitions on moral philosophy, and who understood that money could purchase in the United States what learning could not.

By the time that the offspring of the Vanderbilts and Rockefellers and the rest were going to college learning was only a part of what it was all about. Even as the professors were becoming more serious about learning, an increasing number of students were being admitted to colleges and universities in pursuit of other goals. Under these conditions, as Professor Pierson noted, academic excellence was increasingly beyond reach.

After World War II, however, more by accident than by design, schools and colleges entered into a period unparalleled in the past and unprecedented for its concern with intellectual rigor and academic excellence. For the first time it was possible, indeed inescapable, for a significant number of colleges

and universities to regard themselves as intellectually committed and to admit appropriate student bodies. Ironically, the G.I. Bill of Rights, which sent thousands of students off to college who in the past would have not gone beyond the high school, was a boon to excellence as well as to numbers. For, by expanding the opportunity for higher education beyond traditional sources of class and place, it opened the way to recognizing and encouraging talent that in other times had been denied formal training.

Of course, other factors were at work: the demonstration in the war itself that the college-educated, in addition to having the best of it in rewards and creature comforts, possessed the self-confidence, imagination, and competence that their positions called for; the collapse of anti-Semitism in hiring and in admissions, ushering into many colleges and universities an intellectual ethos previously denied entry; recognition that a world grown complex and challenging beyond imagination required the application of trained intelligence as never before. Aptitude, achievement, and psychological testing was widely used to sort out the most promising, and the consequences are still a matter of debate: what is most significant is that colleges and universities, under the pressure of applications, found themselves selective and necessarily elevating intellectual qualities to primary consideration in admissions. However else it may be construed, the community college movement must also be recognized as a device for protecting the intellectual strengths of other segments of state systems of higher education while being responsive to popular demand.

Not many institutions were in a position to choose between fielding a Rose Bowl team or supporting an academic staff of Nobel Prize winners, but in the years after World War II intellectual excellence was seized upon as a

feasible goal and an honorable commitment by the best institutions in all sections of the country. In this undertaking they were initially encouraged by that generation of veterans that stormed the colleges and universities after 1946, too old to engage in much of the nonsense that colleges had come to be about, so intent on making up for lost time and on putting the world back together that they quickly agreed that the appropriate posture for a college student was guided by intellectual seriousness. A vibrant economy helped, for it graduated great numbers of Americans into the middle class, moved them into suburbs, created new high schools eager to establish themselves as instruments of personal ambition and achievement. For many young men and women, the first in their families to take the step beyond high school, going to a "good" college was just as important as going to college at all. Their ambition fueled the advanced placement courses in the high schools, created sophisticated guidance counseling, and forced on the leading institutions a significant shift away from their traditional sources of students. In important ways higher education was not only negotiating a new lease on academic excellence but as well it was also becoming national in its outlook.

## V.

For the first two hundred years of American higher education the baccalaureate program was shaped by the authority of tradition, seldom challenged and easily accommodating new learning and changing social conditions. The degree--there was only one, the B.A.--was a passport to the learned professions; most of the world's work was happily and effectively done by people who had not gone to college.

The authority of tradition was undermined in the nineteenth century, particularly after the Civil War, by the emerging professional academicians,

holders of the Ph.D. degree who were trained to be responsible to a particular body of knowledge, a discipline (English, history, biology), and to a particular style of learning that came to be regarded as "scientific." The impact of their growing authority on the traditional course of study was immense: not only did many new disciplines and subjects find their way into the course of study but the concept of a wholly elective course of study was advanced as an instrument for facilitating the new subjects.

In the meantime, of course, a dynamic industrial society created new demands for technical skills, demands that were translated into formal bodies of knowledge that emerged in hundreds of new degree programs that challenged the supremacy of the B.A. degree, whatever its changing content. By World War II tradition, the professional academicians, and society itself shared authority over what was going on in our colleges and universities. What was going on was almost anything, and it went on in the name of the baccalaureate degree.

Since World War II the accelerating democratization of higher education--increased access, tremendous numbers--has created in students a new and commanding authority over the course of study. Students vote with their course selections: their interests, their choices, have increasingly helped to shape what has been taught, why, and how. The consequence of this dispersal of authority over the curriculum is the clumsy disarray, the loss of integrity in the baccalaureate degree, the uncertainty over the locus of responsibility that to some extent has called the National Commission on Excellence in Education into existence. Its mission in a sense is to assess the damage done to the baccalaureate degree by the often conflicting and shared authorities, in school and college, that have supplanted tradition and to recommend ways



in which academic excellence can be sustained in an often hostile and indifferent environment.

Against great odds, in at least three periods American higher education has achieved in a significant number of institutions a respectable condition of academic excellence. The requirements of excellence have of course changed from generation to generation, and most institutions have failed to meet the standards of quality set by their most demanding critics. Yet, there are no villains in this history, no tyrants, just many well-intentioned Americans doing their own thing, too often in the absence of much needed direction, cooperation, and a shared concern for the national consequences.

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\* There are occasional sections of the paper in hand adapted from these previously published works.