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ABSTRACT

Lax grading standards, declining test scores, opposition to collective bargaining legislation, the trend toward job-related majors, the end of the open admissions policy at the City University of New York--these and other issues recently appearing in the news media reflect a loss of public confidence in the value of higher education. This loss of confidence constitutes a break with the most fundamental of American values, the belief in the path of upward mobility through education. Young people have been sold the idea that the value of higher education is principally an economic one. They need an explanation of the true values of the education experience: higher intellectual development, occupational and professional training, the development of research capability and objective inquiry, and the cultivation of the questioning mind and a breadth of spirit. Educators cannot be complacent as confidence in universal education declines and access to higher education diminishes. They must retain and regenerate their beliefs in their own abilities as educators, and guard against weaknesses in the profession that give legitimate cause to questions about its professionalism. (RT)

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Stuart Marsee

THE STATE OF HIGHER EDUCATION - 1976

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND USERS OF THE ERIC SYSTEM

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INTRODUCTION:

GENERALLY, IN MY STATE OF THE COLLEGE ADDRESS, I ATTEMPT TO BRING FOCUS UPON THOSE EVENTS OR TRENDS--EITHER LOCAL, STATE-WIDE, OR NATIONAL--THAT HAVE SIGNIFICANCE FOR HIGHER EDUCATION AND, MORE SPECIFICALLY, FOR EL CAMINO COLLEGE;

TODAY THE FOCUS OF MY COMMENTS WILL BE ON THE TOO OFTEN STATED ATTITUDE THAT HAS PREVAILED DURING THE PAST YEAR. THAT IS, THAT AMERICAN YOUTH IS OVER-EDUCATED FOR THE NEEDS OF TODAY'S SOCIETY; ALSO, EMPHASIS WILL BE DIRECTED TO SOME OF THE MAJOR AREAS OF PUBLIC CONCERN THAT HAVE CAST SHADOWS UPON THE EFFICACY OF HIGHER EDUCATION,

IN AN ARTICLE APPEARING IN PARENTS' MAGAZINE, JOHN GARDNER STATED: "WHEN THIS ... NATION WAS FOUNDED, THERE WAS A HOLY ROMAN EMPEROR. VENICE WAS A REPUBLIC, FRANCE WAS RULED BY A KING, CHINA BY AN EMPEROR, RUSSIA BY AN EMPRESS, JAPAN BY A SHOGUN; GREAT BRITAIN WAS A MONARCHY, TEMPERED BY THE BAREST BEGINNINGS OF DEMOCRACY. ALL THESE REGIMES--AND SCORES OF OTHERS-- HAVE PASSED INTO HISTORY. THE ONLY GOVERNMENT AMONG TODAY'S WORLD POWERS THAT STANDS ESSENTIALLY UNCHANGED IS THE FEDERAL UNION PUT TOGETHER IN THE 1780'S BY THIRTEEN STATES ON THE EAST COAST OF NORTH AMERICA."

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WHY HAS THE UNITED STATES SURVIVED THESE PAST 200 YEARS WHEN ALL OTHERS HAVE FADED AWAY? IT HAS SURVIVED LARGELY BECAUSE THE AMERICAN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE EDUCATION SYSTEM HAS FOSTERED THE PRINCIPLE OF LEADERSHIP BASED UPON ABILITY AND TALENT, RATHER THAN UPON RANK AND FAMILY STATUS. THOMAS JEFFERSON CALLED FOR THE EDUCATION OF "YOUTH AND TALENT" WITHOUT REGARD FOR THEIR SOCIAL STATUS AS "THE KEystone OF THE ARCH OF OUR GOVERNMENT."

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN WROTE THAT "NOTHING IS MORE IMPORTANT FOR THE PUBLIC WEAL THAN TO FIRM AND TRAIN UP YOUTH IN WISDOM AND VIRTUE." EVEN IN OUR NATION'S BEGINNING, THE BELIEF WAS EVIDENT IN THE IMPORTANCE OF LEARNING TO A DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY.

BY SIGNING THE LAND-GRANT COLLEGE LEGISLATION IN 1862, LINCOLN SET AMERICA ON ITS COURSE OF HIGHER EDUCATION, NOT ONLY FOR THE FEW BUT FOR THE MANY, WELDING AGRICULTURE, INDUSTRY, THE SCIENCES AND OTHER SEGMENTS OF A DEVELOPING SOCIETY INTO A NEW KIND OF HIGHER EDUCATION.

LOSS OF CONFIDENCE IN THE COLLEGE

ONE OF THE INSIDIOUS REALITIES OF THE PAST YEAR HAS BEEN THE WELL-PUBLICIZED QUESTIONING AS TO WHETHER THE BENEFITS OF HIGHER EDUCATION ARE NOT OUTWEIGHED BY ITS COSTS AND BURDENS. SUCH REASONING IS LIKE SAYING, "IF THE COST OF EDUCATION CONTINUES TO RISE, EDUCATION WILL SOON BECOME AS EXPENSIVE AS IGNORANCE."

SOME OF THE DOUBTS APPEAR TO BE WELL INFORMED AND WELL INTENTIONED. OTHERS SEEM VINDICTIVE AND PREJUDICED. REGARDLESS OF THE NATURE OF THE SKEPTICISM, THE IMPACT ON PUBLIC CONFIDENCE MUST NOT BE IGNORED. THE ACADEMIC COMMUNITY HAS BEEN CHALLENGED TO CONTINUE TO GAIN AND TO HOLD THE PUBLIC'S CONFIDENCE AS NEVER BEFORE.

I HAVE EXPRESSED MY CONCERN BEFORE THIS GROUP MANY TIMES REGARDING THE "SHAKY" FISCAL POSITION OF HIGHER EDUCATION. THE MOST COMPREHENSIVE NATIONAL STUDY TO DATE HAS RECENTLY BEEN MADE BY THE NEW JERSEY COMMISSION ON FINANCING POST SECONDARY EDUCATION. NEARLY 75% OF ALL AMERICAN COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES (2,163 INSTITUTIONS) WERE SURVEYED AND EVALUATED, ACCORDING TO 16 FINANCIAL INDICATORS. EACH WAS GIVEN ONE OF FIVE RATINGS: HEALTHY, RELATIVELY HEALTHY, AVERAGE, RELATIVELY UNHEALTHY AND UNHEALTHY.

THE NEWS IS BOTH GOOD AND BAD. THE BAD NEWS IS THAT ONLY 25% OF THE COLLEGES WERE FOUND TO BE HEALTHY, AND NEARLY HALF (49.2%) WERE JUDGED EITHER UNHEALTHY OR RELATIVELY UNHEALTHY.

THE GOOD NEWS IS THAT THE PUBLIC COMMUNITY COLLEGES ARE IN THE BEST CONDITION (ALMOST 70% IN THE HEALTHY CATEGORIES) FOLLOWED BY THE MAJOR RESEARCH UNIVERSITIES (47.1%) AND FOUR-YEAR LIBERAL ARTS COLLEGES (ONLY 11.7%).

AT ALL LEVELS HIGHER EDUCATION NEEDS POSITIVE SUPPORT FROM EVERY AVAILABLE AVENUE--MOST OF ALL FROM INFORMED PEOPLE SUCH AS YOURSELVES

LOSS OF PUBLIC FAITH IN HIGHER EDUCATION IS "NOTHING SHORT OF A NATIONAL TRAGEDY," STATED ALAN PIFER, PRESIDENT OF THE CARNEGIE CORPORATION OF NEW YORK IN THE FOUNDATION'S 1975 ANNUAL REPORT. HE WENT ON TO STATE THAT IT STANDS TO REASON THAT THE INDEFINITE EXPANSION OF THE NUMBERS OF DEGREES AWARDED THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY WOULD SOONER OR LATER BRING A DECLINE IN MONETARY VALUE OF THE DEGREE.

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DR. PIFER SAYS ONE CANNOT BLAME YOUNG PEOPLE FOR BELIEVING THAT THE VALUE OF GOING TO COLLEGE IS PRINCIPALLY MEASURED IN ECONOMIC TERMS. AFTER ALL, COLLEGE ATTENDANCE HAS OFTEN BEEN SOLD TO THEM ON THIS SELFISH AND TAWDRY RATIONALE.

NOT THAT THERE SHOULDN'T BE A FINANCIAL REWARD FOR PERSONAL INVESTMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION BUT, RATHER, WE HAVE FAILED TO PROVIDE AN EXPLANATION OF THE TRUE VALUE OF THE EDUCATION EXPERIENCE TO YOUNG PEOPLE.

EDUCATION FUNCTIONS INCLUDE HIGHER INTELLECTUAL DEVELOPMENT, OCCUPATIONAL AND PROFESSIONAL TRAINING, THE DEVELOPMENT OF RESEARCH CAPABILITY AND OBJECTIVE INQUIRY AND, HOPEFULLY, THE CULTIVATION IN STUDENTS OF THE QUESTIONING MIND AND A BREADTH OF SPIRIT. THESE ARE THE FUNCTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION THAT HAVE MADE POSSIBLE THE CELEBRATION OF OUR BICENTENNIAL. THESE ARE THE CONCEPTS THAT MUST BE SUPPORTED, IF WE ARE TO HAVE A TRICENTENNIAL.

SIGNS OF THE TIMES

WRITING IN THE MARCH 20, 1976 ISSUE OF THE SATURDAY REVIEW, FRED M. HECHINGER, A MEMBER OF THE EDITORIAL BOARD OF THE NEW YORK TIMES AND FORMER EDUCATION EDITOR OF THAT NEWSPAPER, DECLARED THAT "AMERICA IS IN A HEADLONG RETREAT FROM ITS COMMITMENT TO EDUCATION... THIS RETREAT OUGHT TO BE THE MOST PERTINENT ISSUE IN ANY EXAMINATION OF THE COUNTRY'S CONDITION IN ITS BICENTENNIAL YEAR. AT STAKE IS NOTHING LESS THAN THE SURVIVAL OF AMERICAN/DEMOCRACY."

WHAT ARE, AND WHAT HAVE BEEN, SOME OF THE ISSUES THAT HAVE CAUSED A FEELING OF SKEPTICISM ON THE PART OF THE CITIZEN AS ONE VIEWS EDUCATION? A REVIEW OF SOME OF THE NEWS ARTICLES WHICH HAVE APPEARED DURING THE LAST YEAR WILL HIGHLIGHT SOME OF THE ISSUES THAT HAVE CAUSED WORRY. SOME OF THE CONCERNS ARE BEING FACED IN A VERY POSITIVE WAY BY COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES, INCLUDING EL CAMINO COLLEGE. YOU CAN ANSWER, AS WELL AS I, WHERE WE ARE IN RELATIONSHIP TO THE FOLLOWING ISSUES HIGHLIGHTED IN THE PRESS. THESE QUOTATIONS, WHICH I AM ABOUT TO MENTION, ARE TAKEN OUT OF CONTEXT, BUT THE ISSUES ARE REAL AND THEY ARE WORTHY OF CAREFUL CONSIDERATION BY EVERYONE IN THIS THEATER.

1. U. S. NEWS AND WORLD REPORT--DECEMBER 1, 1975-- PAGE 28

"MOVE UNDERWAY TO TOUGHEN GRADING IN NATION'S COLLEGES."

"A MAJOR ASSAULT IS BEING MOUNTED BY THE NATION'S COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES AGAINST LAXITY IN GRADING THAT IS SHOWERING A'S AND B'S ON HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF UNDESERVING STUDENTS.

"ON ONE CAMPUS AFTER ANOTHER, EDUCATORS ARE LOOKING FOR WAYS OF STIFFENING STANDARDS OF CLASSROOM WORK. RECENT EXPERIMENTS IN PLAYING DOWN THE IMPORTANCE OF GRADES-- INCLUDING THE PASS-FAIL IDEA--ARE BEING SCUTTLED."

"STAFF MEMBERS...GOING FROM CAMPUS TO CAMPUS...FOUND A WIDE-SPREAD DEMAND FOR HARD GRADING. STUDENTS SAY THEY WANT TO KNOW WHERE THEY STAND IN SCHOOL--AND SO DO THEIR PARENTS... GRADUATE SCHOOLS NEED GRADES TO SCREEN...APPLICANTS, AND THE BUSINESS WORLD...RELIES ON GRADES IN HIRING COLLEGE GRADUATES."

2. SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE, "LABOR TOLD OF DIM OUTLOOK FOR PUBLIC EMPLOYEES RIGHTS BILL." AUGUST 26, 1976 - PAGE 8.

"THE POLITICAL TIDES ARE RUNNING HEAVILY AGAINST LEGISLATION GIVING PUBLIC EMPLOYEES THE RIGHT TO COLLECTIVE BARGAINING AND STRIKES, STATE OFFICIALS TOLD AN AFL-CIO CONFERENCE..."

"THE PUBLIC MUST BE CONVINCED THAT COLLECTIVE BARGAINING WON'T LEAD TO FURTHER INCREASES IN PROPERTY TAXES,"

LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR MERVIN DYMALLY BLUNTLY TOLD 250 LABOR LEADERS.

DYMALLY'S OTHER CRITICISM WAS OF PUBLIC STATEMENTS BY UNION LEADERS AGAINST ATTEMPTS TO ELIMINATE OUTMODED GOVERNMENT AGENCIES THROUGH A SO-CALLED "SUNSET LAW."

"YOU HAVE TO END STATEMENTS THAT SOUND LIKE TAXPAYERS EXIST ONLY FOR THE BENEFIT OF PUBLIC EMPLOYEES," HE ADVISED,

STATE SENATOR RALPH DILLS (DEMOCRAT, COMPTON), A LEADING SPONSOR OF PUBLIC EMPLOYEES BARGAINING BILLS, CONCURRED THAT THE PROSPECTS ARE GETTING WORSE INSTEAD OF BETTER.

HE CITED A TROUBLING COUNTER-TREND IN LOCAL LAWS THAT REQUIRE THE FIRING OF PUBLIC EMPLOYEES THAT STRIKE, THAT NULLIFY TERMS NEGOTIATED DURING STRIKES, OR THAT REFER PAY AND OTHER ISSUES TO APPROVAL BY THE VOTERS.

DILLS ALSO WARNED THE PUBLIC EMPLOYEE UNION LEADERS THAT THEY HAVE A STAKE IN COMBATTING NO-GROWTH LEGISLATION WHICH, IN STIFLING PUBLIC DEVELOPMENT, WILL REDUCE THE PEOPLE'S ABILITY TO SUPPORT PUBLIC SERVICES. I HAVE SOME THOUGHTS ON THIS SUBJECT TO BE SHARED WITH YOU AT A LATER DATE.

3. U.S. NEWS AND WORLD REPORT, DECEMBER 15, 1976, "COURSES THAT LEAD TO JOBS TAKING OVER ON CAMPUS,"

"MASSIVE SHIFTS ARE TAKING PLACE IN THE CAREER CHOICES OF COLLEGE STUDENTS--AND THE GUIDANCE THEY ARE GETTING FROM INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER LEARNING."

"COURSES IN BUSINESS, ENGINEERING AND AGRICULTURE ARE BOOMING--AND STUDENT INTEREST IN TEACHER-TRAINING, BLACK STUDIES AND SOCIAL STUDIES ARE FALLING OFF SHARPLY."

THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF STATE COLLEGES INDICATES THE FOLLOWING COURSES ARE GAINING IN POPULARITY--ACCOUNTING, AGRICULTURE, BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION, ECONOMICS, ENGINEERING, GEOLOGY, HEALTH AND MEDICAL SERVICES, JOURNALISM, MUSIC AND ART. COURSES LOSING IN POPULARITY ARE BLACK STUDIES, CHEMISTRY, EDUCATION, ENGLISH, FOREIGN LANGUAGES, HISTORY, LITERATURE, MATHEMATICS AND PSYCHOLOGY."

4. NATIONAL OBSERVER, "THE ERA OF LIMITS." NOVEMBER 29, 1975

"THE NOVEMBER 29 NATIONAL OBSERVER FEATURES AN INTERVIEW WITH CALIFORNIA'S JERRY BROWN UNDER THE HEADING OF "THE ERA OF LIMITS." HIS COMMENTS ON CONTINUING EDUCATION INCLUDE: "I THINK WE OUGHT TO IMPOSE USER FEES ON THOSE ABLE TO PAY IT. IT'S ONE THING TO GIVE FREE EDUCATION TO PEOPLE FROM 1 TO 25. IT'S QUITE ANOTHER TO SAY WE'LL GIVE LIFELONG EDUCATION TO PEOPLE 25 TO 80 ON EVERY SUBJECT UNDER THE SUN."

5. U. S. NEWS & WORLD REPORT, THOSE DROPPING TEST SCORES--" NOVEMBER 24, 1975, PAGE 33.

"SCIENCE, MATH AND NOW WRITING--IN EACH FIELD STUDENT SCORES

ARE DOWN... A SEEMINGLY ENDLESS PROCESSION OF POOR SCORES REPORTED BY NATIONAL TESTING AGENCIES IS RAISING FRESH DOUBTS ABOUT THE KIND OF EDUCATION UNITED STATES YOUNGSTERS ARE GETTING IN TODAY'S PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

6. TIME, "CROSSROADS AT CUNY" - DECEMBER 29, 1975

"IN RECENT YEARS... CITY COLLEGE AND THE 19 OTHER INSTITUTIONS THAT MAKE UP THE TUITION-FREE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK (CUNY) HAVE FOUND IT INCREASINGLY DIFFICULT TO KEEP UP THEIR STANDARDS. REASON: A 1969 RULING THAT OPENED THE DOORS OF THE UNIVERSITY TO ANY STUDENT HOLDING A HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA FROM NEW YORK CITY'S SCHOOL SYSTEM, WHICH GRADUATES MANY FUNCTIONAL ILLITERATES... "LAST DECEMBER THE NEW YORK BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION VOTED TO REQUIRE CUNY APPLICANTS TO PASS AN ENTRANCE REQUIREMENT--AN EIGHTH-GRADE LEVEL IN BOTH READING AND MATH.

TECHNICALLY, THE BOARD'S ACTION WAS TAKEN FOR ECONOMIC RATHER THAN ACADEMIC REASONS. OVER THE NEXT FOUR YEARS THE NEW POLICY WILL DISQUALIFY AN ESTIMATED 10,000 STUDENTS PER YEAR, SAVING NEW YORK ABOUT \$16 MILLION ANNUALLY. THE REACTION BY STUDENTS AND OTHERS WAS FURIOUS. A CUNY SOCIOLOGIST RELEASED A REPORT SHOWING THAT MOST OF THOSE BARRED WOULD BE MINORITY STUDENTS. AUTHOR ALFRED KAZEN, A PROFESSOR AT CUNY'S HUNTER COLLEGE STATED, "IT IS A REVOLT AGAINST THE MASSES..."

"ANOTHER CUNY GRADUATE, HARVARD SOCIOLOGIST, NATHAN GLAZER, SAID; "IT SEEMS A HIGHLY REASONABLE NOTION THAT A COLLEGE FRESHMAN BE ABLE TO READ AND WRITE AT THE EIGHTH-GRADE LEVEL."

CONCLUSION:

THERE ARE MANY FORCES AT WORK WHICH AFFECT PUBLIC HIGHER EDUCATION IN AMERICA. THERE ALWAYS HAVE BEEN. IT WOULD APPEAR THIS IS NO TIME FOR OUR COMPLACENCY REGARDING THE IMPORTANCE OF THE PLACE OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE AMERICAN FUTURE. WE CANNOT TOLERATE A DECLINING CONFIDENCE IN UNIVERSAL EDUCATION AND DIMINISHING ACCESS TO HIGHER LEARNING. WE MUST BE VIGILANT AGAINST WEAKNESSES IN OUR PROFESSION THAT GIVE LEGITIMATE CAUSE TO QUESTION OUR PROFESSIONALISM. AN EROSION IN THE PATH OF UPWARD MOBILITY CONSTITUTES A BREAK WITH THE MOST FUNDAMENTAL OF AMERICAN IDEALS. IT WOULD BE THE END OF THE OPPORTUNITY THAT WAS ENVISIONED BY THOMAS JEFFERSON WHEN HE CALLED FOR A NEW ARISTOCRACY OF TALENT TO REPLACE THE OLD ARISTOCRACY OF INHERITED POWER.

WE MUST RETAIN AND REGENERATE OUR BELIEFS IN OUR ABILITIES AS EDUCATORS. EVEN MORE IMPORTANT, WE MUST CONTINUE TO PERFORM AT SUCH A LEVEL THAT OUR PROFESSIONALISM IS ABOVE REPROACH. THE INCENTIVE TO DO SO IS ELEMENTAL: TO PERPETUATE AMERICAN DEMOCRACY!

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LOS ANGELES

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