

# THE INSTITUTIONAL DECLINE OF FAMILY, RELIGION, GOVERNMENT AND ECONOMY: THE INCREASED IMPORTANCE OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN PRESERVING AMERICAN VALUES

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As transmitters of important values, social institutions are inherent mechanisms that shape and mold the essential character of any culture. American society places tremendous importance on equality, opportunity, freedom and democracy. It is argued that the ability of family, religion, government, and America's economic structure to promote these ideals has diminished. This elevates the importance of public education, particularly higher education, in producing an educated citizenry and serving American society as the primary purveyor of America's most salient features – self governance, constitutional advocacy, and egalitarianism. Yet, this investigation delineates the vulnerability of higher education to corporate despotism. It is reasoned that if commercialization becomes the prevailing trend in higher education, the quest for money will overshadow the importance of higher education to serve American society as the ultimate conduit for pluralistic and democratic nourishment.

## THE NATURE AND PURPOSE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Social institutions are cultural imperatives, functional prerequisites, the underpinnings that hold any society together. As transmitters of values, social institutions are inherent mechanisms that shape and mold the essential character of any culture. It follows that our colleges and universities, as social institutions, should transmit those values supporting democratic activity. In addition to preparing young men and women for careers, our institutions of higher learning should endeavor to produce an educated egalitarian citizenry.

This notion that public education is a catalyst for promoting democratic ideals permeates the literature (Dewey, 1916; Giroux, 1993; Goodlad, Mantle-Bromley & Goodlad, 2004; Gutmann, 1987; Roosevelt, 1930). In 1938, the Educational Policies Commission of the National Education Association (NEA) developed a statement of aims known as the *Purposes of Education in American Democracy*. The central purpose promoted by NEA appeared to be a balanced education with a distinctive emphasis on character, citizenship, and democracy. The Albert Shanker Institute, endowed by the American Federation of Teachers, published *Education for Democracy: A Statement of Principles* (1987), a shared endeavor by a diverse group

of distinguished Americans from labor, public policy, government, education, and business. The document focused on encouraging educators to instill in America's youth a deep attachment to democratic values. American government also promotes democracy through education as is evidenced by public declaration on the official U.S. Department of State's Bureau of International Information Programs (2005) website where it states:

Every society transmits its habits of mind, social norms, culture, and ideals from one generation to the next. There is a direct connection between education and democratic values: in democratic societies, educational content and practice support habits of democratic governance. This education transmission process is vital in a democracy because effective democracies are dynamic, evolving forms of government that demand independent thinking by the citizenry. Democratic norms and practices should be taught in order for people to understand and appreciate their opportunities and responsibilities as free citizens.

In theory, democracy establishes the groundwork for pluralism – a multitude of interests embodying the beliefs and values of society – because of its elementary focus on shared responsibility. Because widespread participation is a funda-

mental mechanism in democracy and pluralism, no group or class is favored significantly over others. A democratic and pluralistic framework is a model of society designed to elevate the importance of the public good and negate the excesses of elitism en route to encouraging mutual accord.

Yet, given the current state of world affairs – war, terrorism, religious disagreements, economic disparity, population growth, and competition for natural resources – one must wonder whether diverse groups, at any level, can ever hope to live together in harmony. In the spirit of hope and optimism, however, disagreements can be minimized and consensus achieved when public education is accentuated. Because of its focus on diversity, synthesis, reconciliation, introspection and discussion, public education, particularly higher education, can serve as mediator and consensus builder. As a principal purveyor of egalitarian principles, public higher education is the necessary foundation in launching or maintaining a healthy, functioning pluralistic democracy.

#### **FAMILY, RELIGION, GOVERNMENT AND ECONOMY – INSTITUTIONAL DECLINE**

In theory, all social institutions are interrelated and collectively channel behavior in culturally prescribed ways. Each social institution patterns the norms, values, and role expectations necessary to preserve the stability and maintenance of the system. Yet, while undeniably necessary and interconnected, certain institutions in contemporary society are often outmoded and impassive to the accelerated cultural transformations created by changing attitudes, increased anxiety, the information age, technological expansion, population shifts, global interdependence, and a shrinking world. If public higher education is portrayed as the nucleus for preserving the practices of democracy, then reasonable explanations must be advanced for why other social institutions are deemed less effective.

The *family* is the basic unit of all societies. The family, however, is a disconnected and unstable institution. Modern nuclear families are much less versatile than was the traditional family. Tasks once assumed by extended kin, democratic and

pluralistic in nature, are now performed by outside agencies. In fact, couples – married, divorced, or remarried – are increasingly apt to rely on professionals for guidance in rearing their offspring. This phenomenon is evidenced by the unlimited online parenting advice available on the internet.

Single-parent households have increased along with the frequency of divorce (Roberts, 2004). Intuition and observation are sufficient to postulate that poverty, welfare, drug abuse, alcoholism, cohabitation, remarriage, alternative lifestyles, two-income earner households, family violence, teenage pregnancy, and America's infatuation with quick fixes, convenience, and medically prescribed solutions are all contributing to the impairment of contemporary families to effectively serve as functional transmitters of pluralistic morals and values. In short, contemporary American families are characterized as highly complex, diverse, and ambiguous (Hertz & Marshall, 2001). It might be hypothesized that social tribulations are overpowering the family, thus culture is influencing the family, not vice versa. At present time, American families appear to be more like receptacles than transmitters.

Like American families, *religion* is also multifarious and cryptic. Religion comes in many colors and flavors, and regardless of pious peculiarities, the wholesale institution generally claims to encourage morality, love, peace, and forgiveness. Yet, such manifestations are not readily apparent in the chronology of human activity. The world has witnessed countless acts of unrestrained bigotry, intolerance, genocide, and reprisal because of religious differences. Religiously motivated aggression has been an overpowering constant in the history of humankind (Abanes, 1996; Ellis, 1997; Juergensmeyer, 2000; Kakar, 1995; Langer, 1948).

Religious conflicts are often rooted in the need to dominate. In American society, that need appears manifested in the enormous revitalization of acute fundamentalism as a prevalent feature in America's religious landscape (Carpenter, 1999; Carter, 2005). In his recent book entitled *Our Endangered Values: America's Moral Crisis* (2005), former President Jimmy Carter provides an un-

complicated assessment of the dangers associated with the “disturbing trend” toward fundamentalism in contemporary American culture. Based on experiences in his personal and political life, he refers to fundamentalists as militant against any challenge to their beliefs and are “often angry and sometimes resort to verbal or even physical abuse against those who interfere with the implementation of their agenda” (p. 34). Carter characterizes fundamentalism as rigid, dominating, and exclusive. To ignore the influence of fundamentalism on America’s cultural milieu, particularly in regards to the transmission of important societal values, would be intellectually shortsighted and neglectful.

The fundamental shortcoming of the burgeoning amalgamation of right wing fundamentalists is the unrelenting belief that its appraisal of human activity is infallible and all other interpretations are 100% wrong. This profile of American fundamentalism is alarming and certainly antithetical to the constitutional guarantees of religious freedom, equality, and individual liberty. The narrow-minded beliefs and dogmatic practices of fundamentalism are echoed by Randall Terry, founder of Operation Rescue, in the following passage:

I want you to just let a wave of intolerance wash over you. I want you to let a wave of hatred wash over you. Yes hate is good... Our goal is a Christian nation. We have a Biblical duty, we are called by God, to conquer this country. We don’t want equal time. We don’t want pluralism.

For Terry and other like-minded evangelical fundamentalists, the role of religion is to promote human laws consistent with their interpretation of God’s laws. In other words, they want to impose a theocracy, the rule of a state by God, on the United States. It is imperative that any culture recognize that theocracy and democracy are bipolar ideologies. A theocracy is a government ruled by divine authority, or most disturbingly, those claiming to represent divine authority, whereas a democracy is based on human sovereignty. It is the latter that makes American democracy unique – people are the ultimate authority. As a social institution, religion, generally speaking, has failed to promote human governance, peace, and democratization. This line of inquiry suggests that religion,

while endorsing theocratic rule, is capable of undermining democracy.

It is difficult to discuss the role of American *government* as a social institution, in its present form, without remaining on the topic of religion. Both institutions are inextricably intertwined in modern-day historical context because of the escalating influence of the fundamentalist movement. Religion, more specifically, right wing fundamentalism is usurping governmental accountability. According to former President Jimmy Carter regarding his interpretation of America’s endangered values, “it is the unprecedented combined impact of fundamentalism in religion and politics that has helped to create the deep and increasingly disturbing divisions among our people” (Carter, 2005, p. 101).

Government, perhaps more so than other social institutions, should transmit those values consistent with its body politic, in this case, democracy. Yet, with the increasing presence of fundamentalist voices in the political arena, “theocratic issues” are being accentuated. In the 2004 presidential election, for example, the American people narrowly elected President George W. Bush for a second term based on “moral values.” Though a host of other ominous issues required national attention and debate, including the Iraq War, social security, health care, and a failing economy, moral values, heavily emphasized in Bush’s campaign, took center stage as the most compelling issue swaying American voters.

Moral values, of course, are not the exclusive domain of religious conservatism. The difference, however, is that religious fundamentalists have effectively pursued their theocratic agenda through elected officials, governmental appointees, media, legislatures, courts, and a massive denominational infrastructure. The effectiveness of religious conservatives to define “morality” for an entire nation is an undeniable manifestation in America’s new millennium. In their crusade to define morality, particularly through increased political representation and insistent networking, which includes the promotion of judicial appointees on the nation’s highest legal courts, they are succeeding in reconfiguring the role of American government and, subsequently, democratic principles.

Adding to the growing influence of fundamentalism in governmental affairs is the overwhelming realization that America's history of democracy, certainly one of our greatest stories, appears to be relatively misunderstood and subjective. As a matter of clarity, history is the recording of facts and historiography is the selection and interpretation of facts. Discussions regarding the underlying beliefs manifested in the construction of the *U.S. Constitution* and the *Bill of Rights* appear to be of the latter persuasion. In other words, the actual meanings of our most cherished documents are a matter of interpretation. This is evidenced by the surplus of constitutionality cases reviewed by the Supreme Court.

Regardless of personal bias, the Constitution makes no mention of God, only the Creator who endowed upon us "certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness" while providing the capacity to institute governments to protect these rights (Morrison, 1965). The ensuing constitutional principle ensuring religious freedom and the protection that government cannot promote religion is the separation of church and state. The First Amendment reads, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof..." Our founders endeavored to create a human-centered government where true freedom of conscience and religious liberty were protected.

Furthermore, often ignored in discussions regarding the inauguration of America's democratic government is the subtle revelation that Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson and Thomas Paine were deists while George Washington and James Madison, neither taking much interest in religion, also leaned toward deism (Allen, 2005). Deism, in short, proclaims that God created the world, but denies supernatural intervention because God also created a scientific universe whereby the world operates by natural and self-sustaining laws (Paine, 2004). In short, Deism posits a firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence, but people are the ultimate authority in directing their own destinies. The legitimacy of government, then, is based on the God-given right to representative rule. This revelation might be

better appreciated by contemplating the aphorism in Homer's epic *Odyssey* when Athena, the Goddess of War, says to Telemachus, the son of Odysseus directly before he sails off to search for his lost father, "the Gods will not do for men what men must do for themselves."

It should be recognizable that early founders were resolute about preventing abusive power and agenda-setting by any one group, particularly any religious sect. Without this protection, Americans would not be truly a democratic, free people. It is alarming that religious fundamentalists are threatening to tear down that wall of separation between church and state. At risk is the fundamental mechanism of transmitting important democratic values to its citizenry. We are a step closer to accepting theological beliefs as part of government's agenda. This repercussion is exactly what our founders tried to protect us against.

The infiltration of government by religious fundamentalism represents a dangerous deviation in our nation's value system. Eroding public confidence in American government, however, adds significantly to this debilitation. Sadly, America's political establishment stimulates mistrust as is evidenced by what mainstream media refers to as the "culture of corruption" emanating from our nation's capitol. A select short list of contemporary controversial issues include: Iraq War, Energy Policy Task Force, government secrecy, Halliburton, former House Majority leader Tom DeLay and GOP lobbyist Jack Abramoff scandals.

Corruption poses a serious threat to honest government and the promotion of democratic values. Washington's welcome mat for potential offenders is manifested through the tolerance of an estimated 33,000 registered lobbyists; each representing special interest groups (McKenzie, 2006). Alas, the lobby community has become more dominant than Washington's lawmaker alliance and the taxpayers (people) have little voice in Congress. Suffice to say, corruption undermines the legitimacy of government and the transmission of important pluralistic and democratic values such as trust, equality, tolerance, justice, and freedom.

America's new millennium *economy* appears to be tormented by the same drawbacks as government – decreasing public confidence, cor-

ruption, and greed. The public's doubt about the integrity of big business (Bernstein, 2000; Carter, 2005) and the abundance of evidence disclosing the proclivity of corporate corruption is impossible to ignore (Chomsky, 2003; Grossman, 1998; Korten, 1996; Nace, 2003; Washburn, 2005). The political culture of corruption is not mere hysteria being propagated by the liberal bastions. In addition to the indiscretions discussed in relation to government, following examples corroborate the allegations from an economic perspective:

- The income gap between rich and poor is increasing; prices for health care, housing, tuition, utilities, gas and food have soared beyond normal rates of inflation; the Bush Administration tax cuts shifted the overall tax burden to the middle class from the wealthiest Americans; family debt is rising (Crenshaw, 2003; Strobe, 2004).
- The ratio of average CEO pay to the average pay of a production worker is 431-to-1, up from 301-to-1 in 2003 (Sahadi, 2005).
- The profits of the top 200 corporations grew 362.4 percent between 1983-1999. Of the 100 largest economies in the world, 51 are corporations. Forty-four of the U.S. corporations on the top 200 list did not pay the full standard 35 percent corporate tax rate during the period 1996-1998. Seven of the firms (Texaco, Chevron, Enron, PepsiCo, Worldcom, McKesson, General Motors) paid less than zero in federal income taxes in 1998 (Anderson & Cavanagh, 2000).
- The top 200 transnational corporations enjoy greater combined annual revenue than the total income of 4.5 billion people, more than four-fifths of the world's population. Transnational corporations share of the world gross product increased from 17 percent in mid 1960s to 33 percent in mid 1990s (Derber, 2000).
- The number of corporations with registered lobbyists is up 58 percent in six years. Lobbyist money spent during this period rose from \$1.5 to \$2.1 billion (Boaz, 2006).
- The outsourcing of American jobs is expected to grow from 400,000 in 2004 to 3.3 million by 2015 (Brainard & Litan, 2004).
- CEOs at corporations that outsource the most US jobs are rewarded with bigger paychecks; average CEO compensation at the 50 firms outsourcing the most service jobs increased by 46 percent in 2003, compared to a 9 percent average increase for all CEO (Anderson, Cavanagh, Hartman, Klinger & Chan, 2004).

The wealthiest of Americans and corporations appear to be the recipients of current economic policies. The reason for outsourcing jobs, for example, is uncomplicated – *corporations benefit by paying significantly lower wages and fewer taxes*, thus providing optimal environments to exploit profits. Outsourcing is clearly a demonstration of corporate favoritism, but it is a very long stretch to convince an already cynical public that sending American jobs (paychecks) offshore is good for the homeland.

It appears as though America's economy, as a social institution, belongs not to the public, but to corporations. It is not a democratic imperative, but rather a repressive impediment. The public's participation in shaping economic policy has significantly diminished with the rise of privileged control. Corporate supremacy is not only evident in the nation's economic policy, but reverberates through other social institutions as well (Anderson & Cavanagh, 2000; Hartmann, 2002; Nace, 2003). Market dominance in all aspects of American life is realized through political campaign donations and enormous lobbying efforts which result in huge subsidies, tax-breaks, incentives, and unfettered control of policy-making. As revealed in Tom Hartmann's book *Unequal Protection: The Rise of Corporate Dominance and Theft of Human Rights* (2002), as the result of an 1886 Supreme Court decision, corporations are legally afforded the same rights, guarantees, and protections entitled to humans by the Bill of Rights. Hartmann describes the disastrous results of such a decision, especially in regards to the dilution of human rights, and refers to "corporate personhood" as distinctly contrary to our Founders intent. The definitive and ill-fated outcome of corporate dominance is the usurping of democracy. Self-governance is an unalienable right and government should serve the interests of the people, not corporations. When legislation is manufactured to maximize profit at

the expense of democratic ideals -- human rights, equality, and social justice -- the voices of corporations drown out the voices and needs of everyday American citizens.

Similar sentiments are expressed by Molly Ivins and Lou DuBose in their book *Bushwhacked: Life in George W. Bush's America* (2003). Based on their research and analysis of the laws and policies implemented by the Bush Administration, they conclude:

...government no longer works for most of the people of this country. It works for big corporations, it works for big campaign donors, but it works less and less for "average" Americans...A government of big corporations has thousand of ramifications for the people, few of them good. As the acolytes of large corporations increasingly take over the various regulatory agencies that are supposed to keep corporate power in check -- a process now so far advanced its faintly comical -- the results veer between infuriating and frightening (p. xii).

The market's efficacy of transmitting values to support a thriving democracy is shaped by its ability to promote economic parity and its capacity to nurture personal initiative to realize human potential. In its current state, America's economic market is institutionally incapable of facilitating the ontological vocation of men and women to become more fully human because it has been manipulated to serve the profiteers. And sadly, democracy, as a humanist and liberating praxis, is undermined by corruption and greed.

### **PUBLIC HIGHER EDUCATION IS THE CORNERSTONE OF AMERICA'S VALUE SYSTEM**

With the diminishing capacity of other social institutions to serve the nation as purveyors of pluralism and democratic ideals, all points converge at that inextricable revelation that public education, particularly higher education, is critical in transmitting those values considered important in the effective functioning of a democracy. Because of its microcosmic and efferent nature, public higher education is the cornerstone of America's value system. It is America's most identifiable and indispensable steward for formal learning

in the habits of ingenuousness, self-examination, and dialogue.

Unlike religion, family, economic institutions, or political affiliations, education is designed to liberate thought so as to create participating citizens who think for themselves. Public higher education is a microcosm of cultural diversity whereby individuals from different familial, religious, economic and political perspectives gather to interact with each other under the umbrella of community -- it is the entirety of global life in miniature. In as such, we must recognize the function of public higher education to foster a culture of democracy and establish the appropriate groundwork for a pluralistic state.

### **THE CHANGING NATURE OF HIGHER EDUCATION**

As the cornerstone of America's value system, our colleges and universities should do more than groom young men and women for careers. Our institutions of higher learning should also produce an educated citizenry and promote America's most salient features -- self governance and constitutional advocacy. Yet, today's universities, like other social institutions, have evolved into multifaceted organizations with complex connections to government, business, and the community (Shapiro, 2005). It is the connection to business which is igniting concerns about the fundamental purpose of higher learning. It is the potential links to business that makes public education vulnerable to the same distortions experienced by other social institutions.

We teach our children to learn from their mistakes. That same advice should also apply to societal and institutional life. Considering our discussions regarding the corruption of America's regulatory agencies -- government and economy -- by repressive influences, it would seem wise and vigilant to carefully scrutinize such potentially prejudiced partnerships in the future. A good amount of trepidation should be the response to corporate and educational interfacing, especially when history reveals the increased probability of corruption when profit is the primary motivator for agenda-setting. Yet, as we look closely at recent developments in education, particularly higher

education, we are witnessing the hasty formation of education and business alliances with little or no dialogue about potential consequences. Though there are those who stand adamantly opposed to such developments, their voices are the minority. A minority voice, regrettably, will be unable to halt the impending educational metamorphosis most do not want to visualize or think about. With a sense of indescribable desperation, educational institutions are turning to the corporate world to assist them with their financial dilemmas.

### PRIVATIZATION

The current politicization of education has elevated the achievement of economic dominance as the premier goal of schooling. The basic force behind this paradigm shift is privatization, a global movement whereby the responsibility for producing public services is transferred from government bureaucrats to private managers. Central to this agenda is the attempt to convert education from a public good, benefiting all citizens, to a private good designed to expand the profits of investors.

With the unyielding expansion of the corporate-backed thrust toward globalization, the private sector is demanding access to higher education. The primary reason multi-national corporations are seeking to construct bridges between them and education is that the latter represents a \$600 billion market (Buchen, 1999). Funding cuts and rollbacks make universities vulnerable to the allure of non-state revenue sources. A host of corporations have invaded college campuses offering lucrative contracts, secret and undisclosed private donations, and extensive funding for academic research. This discourse is not meant to disparage potentially rewarding and healthy relationships between business and education, but when corporate enticements and donations become requisites for dismantling public ownership and influencing the direction of academic programs, higher education is as susceptible to the corruption that other American institutions have already succumbed.

As an article of commerce, higher education would be turned over to those who can afford to pay based on current market prices. Higher tuition rates and slashed state appropriations, a form of privatization that fuels the perceived need for

private sector assistance, already denied at least 250,000 prospective students access to college in the 2003-2004 fiscal year (Arnone, 2004). The prospect that such numbers will continue to grow as privatization expands its control over university operations is beyond frightening. According to the President of Auburn University, William F. Walker, the fact that many state governments have inflicted deeper cuts on higher education than on other programs demonstrates a deficit of political will to maintain affordable public universities (Walker, 2003). If access and opportunity are democratic, exclusion and obstructionism (privatization) are the antithesis.

In her benchmark investigation, based on extensive interviews and original research, Jennifer Washburn provides a painstaking and overdue analysis of the deteriorating state of American higher education titled *University Inc.: The Corporate Corruption of Higher Education* (2005). Her primary thesis is that commercial interests have transformed every aspect of university life. Consequently, the search for truth has been distorted due to an insatiable attack on impartial inquiry. Conflict of interest appears to be an acceptable casualty in university environments. Washburn's book is filled with inexhaustible and discriminating examples depicting the varying forms of the commercialized academy. Some of those revelations are as follows:

- The birth of the Market-Model University; a growing dependence by universities to negotiate corporate contracts which benefit the private sector
- The increased participation of universities in the military-industrial complex
- Disinterested inquiry is at risk; the erosion of open scientific culture in favor of the proprietary corporate culture
- Increased corporate influence and financial support and the conflicts of interest regarding ownership of data, results, discovery, and knowledge
- The university as business; putting profits first and public interest last
- The revaluation of faculty expectations: emphasizing research as patentable commercial ends; turning over teaching responsibilities to

part-time, adjunct faculty; star professors are those bring in large external grants; teaching prowess is no longer a meritorious or highly regarded quality

- The fundamental essence of university life is becoming and insatiable quest for dollars

The latter point, the quest for dollars, is our primary point of distress and the decisive source for all other shortcomings. When profit becomes the primary motive for action, the core of the affected entity becomes diseased. Inevitably, the essence of education will be lost because its elementary purpose will be replaced with a commercialized interpretation. Education will stop being about students, democratic living, civic participation and ontological vocations. It will become about ever-increasing revenue production and profit. According to Robert Jensen at the University of Texas, by law and tradition, corporations exist for one reason only: to maximize profit. Neither history nor logic gives any reason to think that profit-maximizing leads to meaningful democracy. Corporations are undemocratic internally and usually hostile to democracy externally (Jensen, 2002). Jensen further states that at its core, democracy is about spreading power as widely as possible, while corporate capitalism is about concentrating power.

Corporate intervention is a significant threat to the time honored democratic traditions of faculty governance and academic freedom. Since the time when the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) issued its first statement of institutional governance in 1920 and its first statement of academic freedom in 1940, the heart and soul of university life has revolved around the opportunity for faculty to be primary participants in controlling academic affairs, working conditions, due process, faculty status, and scholarly merit. The underlying premise for such involvement is that teachers are the utmost experts in these matters. Let us be reminded that it was faculty, not administrators, who most acutely perceived the toxic effect that a business mind-set could have on academic life in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Washburn, 2005). In defense of untainted intellectual inquiry, many university scholars publicly rebuked commercial imperatives during the early part of the 1900s. The number of professors

being arbitrarily dismissed because they challenged the excessive industrial influence over academia or for their political views was the precursor to the eventual creation of the AAUP in 1915. University faculty need safeguards, not adequately provided by the Constitution, that protects them from intimidation or loss of employment when they challenge existing authority.

According to the AAUP's 1994 statement *On the Relationship of Faculty Governance to Academic Freedom*, these two principles are closely connected, arguably inextricably linked. It is under this condition, the two principles reinforcing each other, where institutions of higher education will be best served, and, most importantly, will in turn best serve society at large. It does not require an exaggerated imagination mindset to project the retributions that may occur if commercial interests are allowed a more authoritative role in university governance and academic design. Faculty governance and academic freedom are principles that lend themselves completely to the ideals of democracy and pluralism whereby external control, particularly by an infinitesimal quantity of elite and wealthy individuals, is best characterized as a form of corporate despotism. The quest for money will not only denature American universities, but will eventually undo us all.

If privatization becomes the prevailing principle of future higher education funding models, corporate takeover and control is inevitable. Rather than consider private sector solutions to contemporary funding problems, higher education officials, faculty, lawmakers, and other civic-minded participants should focus their collective energies advocating full financial investiture in support of democracy and public guardianship. We must relentlessly argue for educational accessibility and affordability in support of the public good. The argument that privatization is necessary to offset eroding state appropriations is weak when proper perspective is applied – America is the most powerful and wealthiest nation in the world. Education, from this standpoint combined with its role as a social institution, is a cultural, political, economic, and democratic obligation. It should be a matter of highest priority. The commercialization of higher education is threatening the altruistic



function of colleges and universities and making it difficult for them to fulfill their historic purpose – to serve American society as the ultimate conduit for democratic and pluralistic nourishment. For better or worse, according to Woodruff D. Smith, a professor of history and past Dean of Liberal Arts at the University of Massachusetts Boston, American higher education, the American public sphere, and American democracy rise and fall together (Smith, 2003).

In a democracy, the source of all authority, the legitimate basis of power, is the people. Turning public higher education over to private investors is antithetical to fundamental precepts of democracy. It is time to take democracy seriously. It is time to understand the mutually dependent relationship between democracy and higher education. As we see our other social institutions succumb to despotic influences, let us not allow public higher education to suffer the same fate. Let us not relinquish ownership of what may be our last surviving bastion of democratic and pluralistic principles. Control of higher education must remain in the hands of the people.

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