



reseñas educativas (Spanish)
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Doom, Gloom, and the Misunderstanding of Higher Education: An Essay Review

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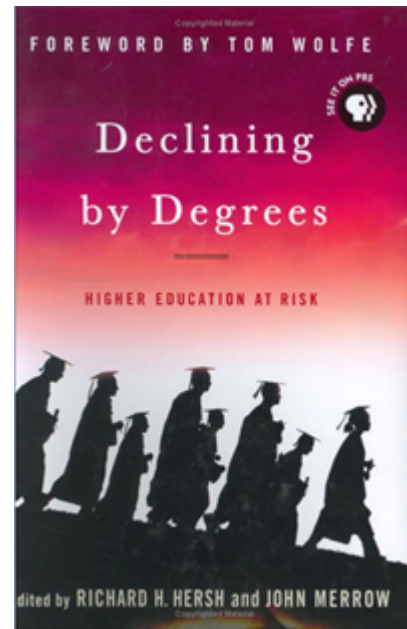
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This book is a companion piece to a PBS two hour broadcast of the same name, which is available on DVD and VHS. PBS also offers Web site support for both works at <<http://www.decliningbydegrees.org/>>. You can get a sense of the tone of the book by skimming through reader reviews at the PBS site above. They all sing the same hymn to deplore the state of higher education in America, finding that the fault lies with administrators, coaches, faculty, students, and even the parents of the students. Since the underlying politics of the anthology are liberal rather than conservative, there is not much hand-wringing over the loss of American values in the vein of what *Slate* magazine calls our "bookmaker of virtues," Bill Bennett <<http://www.slate.com/id/2082526/>>. Instead, the authors find fault with regulation, or the lack of it, and ultimately with commercial, Utilitarian values that threaten to define higher education as just another consumer service. Among the fifteen contributors to the anthology, not one has a good word to say about American higher education, although they do hope that "the crown jewel of our system" of education will be "restored to its former glory" (p. 9). It is important to note that not one of



the authors has a background in science, engineering, or technology. The book is a jeremiad in which each author competes with the others to offer sermons of gloom and doom. I expected Bill Moyers to have written the introduction, but the editors got Tom Wolfe to jot a few paragraphs in a foreword to complain that Harvard seniors dress "like nine-year-olds" in "flip-flops, shorts, jeans, creaseless khakis" (pp. ix-x).

The video has more overt unity provided by Richard Hersh, one of the editors of the book and the former president of Hobart and William Smith Colleges. Without explaining any more history, Hersh traces what he calls a social contract for higher education to the G.I. Bill that sent a few million servicemen to college. This, in turn, led to good jobs and a middleclass lifestyle. The *contract*—a strange metaphor to choose in expressing a liberal outlook on higher education—had little to do with education as such. Hersh makes clear the value of higher education to the American public in saying that it came to be seen as the doorway to a middle class life and this is really what the book is about. Hersh, then, writes that beginning in the Reagan administration of the 1980s, the argument began to be made that since college graduates earned a million dollars more over a lifetime, they should pay for higher education themselves. We now begin to see the politics underlying the book and video. The editors and most contributors believe that higher education is a social benefit worthy of public support and their argument is with the tenets of capitalism which construe all values as property or private possessions.

The introduction to the book is wooden providing statistics to say that about "3,400 institutions" of higher education employ "about 3 million people" in "about a \$250 billion enterprise" (p. 1). The editors state the theme that the contributors to the volume seek to illustrate: "We found an insidious erosion of quality that we now believe places this nation at risk" (p. 2). They end their introduction by saying they hope "to sound an alert and encourage a national conversation about higher education" as though this isn't carried on by publications like *The Chronicle of Higher Education* and the *Education Review* (p. 9). Of course, what they mean is a conversation to their liking in which their counsel is prominent in guiding a kind of revivalism centering on higher education as sacred.

I review most of the chapters below.

1. "The Media" by Gene I. Maeroff.

A professor at Columbia University, Maeroff is the author of *A Classroom of One: How Online Learning is Changing Our Schools and Colleges* (2003)

<<http://edrev.asu.edu/reviews/rev251.htm>>. A review of an earlier work by Maeroff, *Altered Destinies: Making Life Better for Schoolchildren in Need* (1999), can also be found at *Education Review* <<http://edrev.asu.edu/reviews/rev85.htm>>. Maeroff has a dozen other books offering studies of the public schools. Finding problems in the public schools is his business or profession. Here he complains that newspaper editors should "appreciate the need for sustained specialization in the coverage of higher education" (p. 19). Because most reporters do not know enough about how higher education works, "Americans remain relatively uniformed about the state of quality in the academy" (p. 21). Even if newspaper

editors followed Maeroff's advice, there would still be problems because, writes Maeroff, "Commercial television, the source of news for most Americans, is addicted to the trivial and the inconsequential" (pp. 16-17).

Maeroff offers two illustrations of how the news media fail to report accurately what is happening in higher education: "The news media convey the impression that nearly every college costs a potentate's fortune and that most institutions are so selective that only super-students need apply" (p. 13). According to the College Board, "Average tuition and fees in the 2003-2004 academic year were \$4,694 at four-year public institutions and \$1,905 at community colleges." Costs in both categories were a thousand dollars less in the West. "As for admissions," Maeroff reports that "only 8 percent of all four-year institutions accept fewer than 50 percent of their applicants" (p.14). All of this is important because Maeroff believes that the news media "can exert power in ways that serve the public interest beyond and above the capabilities of almost any other institutions—except perhaps enlightened government" (p. 21).

Maeroff's piece illustrates two tacit themes shared by the contributors. They almost all complain about failures in someone else's profession, a profession in which they are amateurs. Since they lack the credentials and authority to help control the profession that they complain about, they work themselves up into a pose of moral hauteur or disdain to demand outside regulation. Why does Maeroff get so worked up about journalism? Since he cannot control higher education policy, his hope—like many other authors in the anthology—is for a public clamor to support regulation by "enlightened government."

We also see the political poles becoming visible in Maeroff's idealistic notions about the press and how it has a duty to inform the public, which might then have a greater voice in "how quality manifests itself in higher education" (p. 21). Of course, Americans all subscribe to this democratic belief in varying degrees, but the advocacy here is self-serving since this is Maeroff's business. His many books are an effort to inform the public about education policy, which he—like every other author in the anthology—considers to be a quasi-religious and highly moral duty. But the information is never neutral; it is inevitably advocacy when it is not outright preaching. If the consuming public disregards the counsel offered by these various experts and chooses, for example, to enroll at the University of Phoenix, what then? Of course, the sky will fall and in the meantime we need more regulation to prevent for-profit universities from collecting Pell Grant money. One of the authors ends her article threatening, "If we do not take the time to address these issues collectively, we will be jeopardizing not only the well-being of our nation but also the future of our children and, indeed, of our planet" (p. 206).

2. "Where the Public Stands on Higher Education Reform" by Deborah Wadsworth.

A former president of Public Agenda for eighteen years, Wadsworth worries that the job market will increasingly make higher education more essential; but with "decreasing revenues and an onslaught of both greater numbers of students and more nontraditional students," higher education will become less available (p. 35)

<<http://www.publicagenda.org/aboutpa/aboutpa.cfm>>. She worries that inside academe, "experts focus on the quality of education being delivered," while outside, "the public concentrates on the price tag associated with it" (p. 36). She predicts that for the public, "Problems with access and affordability are likely to be the galvanizing issues" in the near future (p. 37).

These trends would seem to most affect community colleges. In Arizona, for example, "Enrollment in the 278,000-student [Phoenix] Maricopa Community Colleges could reach as many as 400,000 students in the next decade" (Ryman, 2005). Instead of addressing this issue for community colleges, Wadsworth has her own concerns that begin at the opposite end with elite private schools that focus "on a form of competition" for "institutional prestige and revenues." She believes this should logically identify such schools for public criticism, but "Not only is there no call for reform [...] there appears to be widespread celebration of an institution people think of as a world-class act" (p. 24). Strangely, she complains that while the public holds "their local K-12 public schools responsible for failures," they give "higher education a free pass" by imagining that the faults lie with the "students themselves as responsible for their inability to keep up with the work." Wadsworth quotes a survey in which "A minuscule 10 percent blamed the colleges for not doing more to help students" (p. 29). The video illustrates that many students "sleepwalk" and plagiarize their way through classes doing nothing but partying until they finally complain about not being challenged.

Wadsworth expresses what almost all the other contributors want: more stringent standards and regulation to control what others do. But for Wadsworth this argues for the opposite of what she wants: greater access, which is to say, lower costs. She claims, "the public regards the opportunity to go to college as a virtual right." She quotes a study to say that "91 percent of the public think that 'every high-school student who wants a four-year college education should have the opportunity to gain one'" (p. 30). Apparently she did not read Maeroff who claims that access, or the cost of a college education, is not the formidable obstacle "that the media lead the public to believe" (p. 14). In the video, Hersh makes the point that education has been second only to health care in increasing its price in recent years. Wadsworth says the "concern about access is much more pervasive within the black community than in the public overall" and that this community dropped its estimation of how well colleges in their state were doing from 64% to 35%. Wadsworth thinks "the connection between the increasing concern over access and positive evaluations of higher education is obvious." Apparently she is no longer thinking of the Ivy League where the assumption is the reverse: that you get what you pay for. To make sure we don't miss the point, she writes, "Indeed, this was the single most dramatic change noted by Public Agenda on any question asked over a three year period" (p. 34).

Like others, Wadsworth is content to point out the problem for someone else to solve. She says universities "must consider the public's concerns and priorities and find a way to address both the goals of increasing quality and ensuring access." By "ensuring access" she means reducing tuition. I imagine that like others in this collection, she would assume that "increasing quality" can be done by academic assessment and more regulation.

3. "College Admissions" by James Fallows.

A writer for *Atlantic Monthly*, Fallows is initially concerned about the media's fascination with admissions at elite schools, which, he says, involve "only a few dozen" schools; "at most 10 to 15 percent" of applicants "are involved in competition for these few selective schools" (p. 39). Some of those applicants are helped by IvyWise, a kind of public relations service that offers to help high school students gain entrance to Ivy League schools. I couldn't find a current rate sheet for services at the Web site <http://www.ivywise.com/Site_map.htm>, but David Kirp, a contributor to *Declining by Degrees*, mentions a fee of \$29,000 for preparing student clients (Kirp, p. 28). According to Fallows, the "platinum package" is now \$33,000. For those of us who think twice about the fee, the Web site generously advises us that "There are some excellent low cost universities like University of California-Berkeley, which costs \$16,580 per year for out-of-state students" <http://www.ivywise.com/Parents_facts.htm>.

Fallows echoes Wadsworth in suggesting the focus on admissions to elite schools fosters the notion that getting into such schools provides a ticket "to financial security and economic status," rather than an opportunity to gain an excellent education (p. 44). Finally, Fallows reveals his concern that in "the next five or six years [we] will see a big surge in demand for college enrollment" that "will be overwhelmingly Hispanic." He provides these statistics to suggest that "higher education has been particularly unsuccessful with Hispanic American and black students": "One in seven Hispanic Americans has a college degree, compared with one in two Asian Americans, one in three white Americans, and one in five black Americans" (p. 45). Like the first two contributors, Fallows doesn't notice the problem between trying to serve or service exploding numbers of *customers* and preserving traditional standards of excellence in education. Like others, he believes the answer can be found in fixing the machine called higher education. Fallows suggests that the dust stirred up by such works as Allan Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind*, about excellence in education (at least in the humanities), has settled on a concern for elite branding. Instead of arguing about what should be included in an elite education, we assume that the Ivy League should know. As a non-academic, Fallows apparently doesn't recognize what is involved in his suggestion that we return to the question of "how to do a better job of measuring real education quality, rather than using selectivity and prestige as crude, often destructive proxies" (p. 46). The video suggests that the problem, at least at the University of Arizona, is that professors are poor teachers and the solution lies in sending them back to school for teacher training so they can better entertain bored customer/students.

4. "Unexamined Assumptions about Quality" by Jay Mathews.

Mathews, a reporter for the *Washington Post*, writes, "Sadly, one would be wise to question Princeton—and probably every other institution of higher education—when it comes to statements about educational goals and outcomes" (pp.47-8). Here we have the reverse of Maeroff. Mathews is a journalist who wishes to dictate higher education policy. The flaw in Mathews's thinking is the supposition that there are educational standards and pedagogy that exist in the abstract or ideally instead of as the result of talent and skilled practice. Naturally,

Mathews cannot point to a college that offers a better education than Princeton. His argument suggests that those involved in higher education are lazy or fakes or un-American. He relies on a spurious report issued by The American Council of Trustees and Alumni to say that schools like UC-Berkeley, Cornell, and the University of Wisconsin are failing; they “earned Fs by requiring only one out of seven subjects” that the right wing Council thinks should be required (p. 54). Despite Mathews’s footnote to try to convince us that the ACTA has some academic legitimacy, it is clear that it is a right wing political organization. For example, The Center for Media and Democracy describes another ACTA study that declared “criticism of the Bush administration’s war on Afghanistan on campuses across the country was tantamount to negligence in ‘defending civilization’ and proof that ‘our universities are failing America’” <www.sourcewatch.org>.

So, American higher education is failing and the fix, according to Mathews, is regulation by political ideology. Mathews complains that “Most defenses of higher education use the same criteria—they have respected professors and brilliant students and do well in the rankings, even if there are not any systematic surveys of what they are actually teaching” (pp. 55-6). What Mathews wants is “systematic surveys” or regulation to allow some quasi-government bureaucracy to control higher education. I doubt that it would do much good to remind Mathews that the Renaissance university arose to offer an alternative to such ideological control by the church.

5. "Liberal Education: Slip-Sliding Away" by Carol G. Schneider.

It may help to know that Schneider spent ten years at the University of Chicago. David Kirp quotes its one-time president, Robert Maynard Hutchins’ description: “It’s not a very good university ... it’s only the best there is” (Kirp, p. 33). Ironically, the University of Chicago was also notorious for leading the correspondence schools scams of the 1920s and 1930s. David Noble describes “Hutchins, the renowned champion of classical education,” writing a letter to refuse to refund money to a correspondence student (Noble, 2002, p. 12). Schneider inherits this American version of class conflict in higher education. She is worried about the hoards who are looking for higher education and settle for a community college or the University of Phoenix. She says, “75 percent of high school graduates already pursue some form of post-secondary education within two years of graduation” (p. 61). But she worries that as a college diploma comes to replace the high school diploma as a minimal educational standard for employment, “will we decide to offer ‘elite’ education to some students while providing a narrower preparation—what policymakers now call ‘workforce development’—to others? (p. 64). The economic answer may seem obvious, but we should not too quickly conclude that distance education is cheap. A 2002 article in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* claimed “The total tuition for an M.B.A. from Phoenix Online is about \$25,000 [...] whereas Georgia State charges in-state students a total tuition of \$10,500 for a full-time M.B.A. degree” (Olsen). University of Phoenix tuition is currently \$460 per credit hour for undergraduate programs in technology and business. Undergraduate tuition at my school (Northern Arizona University) is less than half that for state residents (\$216 per hour) and \$332 per hour for out-of-state students studying at a distance.

Schneider is interested in what students get for their money. She explains what is fairly obvious by now: for-profit schools do not “provide a liberal education, nor do any employ many faculty with a strong foundation in the liberal arts and sciences. Instead, these career colleges offer professional programs only: business, accounting, finance, technology, and the like.” She is also concerned that “they make no pretense at advancing scholarship or even of sustaining a full-time faculty” (p. 67). Schneider admits that “the so-called liberal arts colleges [...] today educate fewer than 5 percent of all college students” and, of course, she wants far more students in AAC&U schools (Association of American Colleges and Universities; p. 73). Schneider is the president of the AAC&U and is naturally a spokesperson for its agenda, which borders on the quixotic in asking, for example, to “Hold every college and university responsible for focusing the entire educational program—students, faculty, and staff alike—on the important aims of liberal education” (p. 75). As a goal or mission statement this is fairly innocuous because we understand that it is a laudable ideal. We also understand that it is tilting at windmills to suggest that “Campuses will have to make far-reaching and even dramatic changes to their established practices” and will do so “when the public learns to insist that liberal education is the best and most practical preparation for every American” (p. 76).

6. "Six Challenges to the American University" by Vartan Gregorian.

Gregorian, former president of Brown University, thunders that "The university has not come eight centuries to evolve, almost overnight, into a Home Depot of courseware." The irony is that many think this wasn't caused by evolution; the movement was led by Gregorian, who also identifies the forces that are at work. His six challenges are:

- The information glut that doubles information every five years (p. 79).
- The curriculum crisis (p. 80).
- The commercialization of research (p. 82).
- Part-time faculty (p. 83).
- Eroding quality, especially in schools of education (p. 86).
- Distance learning (p. 88).

Not to be outdone by the other Jeremiahs, Gregorian claims that "Failure to answer these challenges will [...] threaten our democratic republic" (p. 78). Gregorian finds "the growth of part-time faculty nationwide has been phenomenal, nearly doubling between 1970 and 1995, from 22 percent of the faculty to 41 percent" (p. 41). Other studies suggest a worse picture in which graduate students teach a third of the classes, adjuncts teach a third, and tenure track faculty teach a third (Johnson, 2003). Moreover, "Adjuncts are getting dumped for things tenure-track scholars do with impunity—teaching controversial material, fighting grade changes, organizing unions." Gregorian reports that between 1990 and 1995, half of the 7,598 new PhDs in English and foreign-languages failed to find full employment (p. 85). Gregorian sums up by saying "the challenge posed by the trend of part-time faculty is the erosion of quality in institutions of higher education," but Gregorian has no suggestions on how this *challenge* might be met.

It is rather surprising that the president of the prestigious Brown University would be concerned about schools of education. But Gregorian also identifies the curriculum as a crisis, which many would say Brown University helped produce in the 1970s by allowing undergraduates to take any classes that caught their interest with pass-fail grades. David Kirp says, "The new regime was promoted with tireless avidity by Vartan Gregorian, a president with a genius for generating publicity and picking donors' pockets." Success was announced—where else?—on a tee shirt slogan that said: "Harvard University [...] Rejected by Brown" (Kirp, 2003, p. 23). So, Gregorian reports on someone else's failure; on "one dismal" study of schools of education that "estimated that of every 600 students who enter a four-year teaching program, only 180 complete it, only 72 become teachers, and only about 40 are still in the classroom several years later" (p. 87).

Gregorian worries that "If universities evolve from faculty-centered organizations to market-driven enterprises" the traditional university will cease to exist (p. 90). He is astute in recognizing how distance education and the associated wiring of the university for computer networks contribute to this shift of control. I am currently struggling with WebCT's Vista program, which makes these trends increasingly clear. In comparison with Campus Edition, the other WebCT (soon to be Blackboard) Course Management Software (CMS) program, Vista seems to be marketed for administrative rather than teaching concerns. At our school it is being integrated with PeopleSoft, which means that as an instructor I cannot control student access to *my* course, nor change anonymous FERPA students to give them some identity in a course. After developing and teaching courses in Vista, it seems apparent to me that the teacher is expected to be an adjunct who facilitates what a designer creates. Gregorian quotes someone else to make the point that "these discussions are for the most part happening outside of the faculty, among legislatures, college presidents and administrators" (p. 93). And whose fault is this? Most of my colleagues want nothing to do with online instruction because it is technically difficult and they continue to look down their noses at what they consider to be academic fraud. But when they retire or move, their budget lines are reallocated to support more compliant adjuncts and support staff. The result is that tenured faculty are complicit in giving away their jobs.

7. "Beyond Markets and Individuals" by Howard Gardner.

The ironies in this collection abound. For example, Gardner offers a framing quote from Robert Maynard Hutchins: "When an institution determines to do something in order to get money, it must lose its soul" (p. 97). I suppose a PBS publication is the place for such bombast, but I assume we still live in a capitalist society. Gardner complains that "younger Americans are unable to think of the occupational realm except in market terms. It is as if the market model has become the triumphant meme, the dominant metaphor, of our time" (p. 100). Didn't this fundamentally occur in 1776 when the founding fathers embraced the tenets of the Enlightenment and of the radical Utilitarian understanding of man against the legacy of colonial religion?

Gardner explains that a hundred years ago, "Schools saw themselves as institutions with a religious mission and a limited canon of offerings." He reports the obvious, that "Today

most colleges have given up a religious orientation," leaving us "with a disquieting situation" in which values are those of the market place (p. 105). Isn't this what we are fighting for in Iraq? For secular and inclusive values in place of religious and sectarian values?

Gardner's thinking seems to be a throwback to the 1960s. He asks us to imagine "planning a college from scratch, with unlimited endowment, no knowledge of student desires, but a commitment to good work; how might one proceed?" (p. 108). With unlimited money and no concern for student needs, I suppose the answer is that it doesn't much matter since it will be an ideological project. Gardner has faith that his idealized school will pursue "knowledge for its own sake, for the sake of curiosity, or for broadening one's own perspective" and writes "institutions have endured on the basis of charity or communal support or sheer faith even when they have failed the most obvious dictates of the bottom line" (pp. 108-9). Gardner doesn't quite explain how this is possible, but ends by suggesting that we look at the Goodwork Project <<http://www.goodworkproject.org/about.htm>>. When I do that the first thing I notice is a list of 17 funding agents. You can read more about the history of this and the earlier Project Zero at Harvard at <<http://www.pz.harvard.edu/History/TenYears.htm>>. "Point 4: The Maturing of PZ (1993-2003)" claims that "PZ has always been self-supporting. In the 1960s and 1970s support came chiefly from the federal government (NSF, NIH)." Is this really self-supporting? It seems more like welfare to subsist on Federal grants for twenty years.

In a footnote to his essay, Gardner identifies a motley collection of schools that he says are "justifiably admired for their excellence." These include DeAnza Community College, Morehouse College, Princeton, and, of all places, The University of Phoenix! (p. 112). Instead of explaining what these schools might have in common, Gardner says the project sought "to identify individuals who best exemplified the excellence of the institution" (p. 112). This seems to be the *fix* for Gardner, to identify virtuous individuals: "individual educators should strive to identify teachers and mentors who epitomize the beliefs and actions that they most admire" (pp. 110-111).

8. "This Little Student Went to Market" by David L. Kirp.

Having already relied on Kirp's *Shakespeare, Einstein, and the Bottom Line* for insight on issues in *Declining by Degrees*, it may be obvious that I find his essay to be one of the few in this collection that is trenchant in thinking about the problems faced by higher education <<http://edrev.asu.edu/reviews/rev302.htm>>. Instead of blue sky, Kirp begins by acknowledging that "Dollars have always greased the wheels of high education; were it otherwise, the term 'legacy' would not have a meaning specific to universities" (p. 113). Kirp illustrates the shift in American values by citing these statistics:

During the past thirty years, the percentage of freshmen who expect their college years will bring them better jobs has quadrupled, from 20 to 80 percent. Meanwhile, those who anticipate that college will help them develop a philosophy of living plummeted by precisely the same extent—from 80 to 20 percent. (p. 116)

Kirp suggests that many colleges are *progressive* in getting students ready to enjoy an affluent life-style: “At Michigan State, lucky students can watch big-screen TV while lounging among the therapeutic bubble jets in their dorm rooms.” At the University of Cincinnati a master chef creates gourmet menus. “Babson College has vegan and sushi stations and a full-time person preparing specialty coffees” (p. 118). Meanwhile, even at the snooty University of Chicago, “nearly two-thirds of classes are taught by graduate students and adjunct instructors” (pp. 125-6). The upshot, says Kirp, is that “elite schools seem to do a better job of certifying top students than educating them” (p. 126). Rather than offering a jeremiad to insist what must be done to restore traditional values in higher education, Kirp backhandedly refers to cultural icons like Donald Trump, asking: “Is there anyone with sufficient stature to persuade the public that, at their best, institutions of higher learning offer something of such great value that the enterprise is worth subsidizing, even in the face of market pressures?” There is no one like John Kennedy to offer the moon, and consequently higher education slides ever closer to becoming “just another business.” If it is to avoid this fate, Kirp asks, “who is to advance it—and if not now, then when?” (p. 128).

9. "College Lite" by Murray Sperber.

A retired Indiana University English professor, Sperber’s piece is interesting for its honesty and lack of moral dudgeon. Sperber offers a personal view of developments in higher education from the time of Sputnik (1957) until today. In part, spurred on to graduate Cold Warriors in the sciences, universities were “expanding by 10 to 15 percent every year” in the early 1960s (p. 133). In the next decade, “We went from the academic equivalent of the Roaring Twenties to the Great Depression without realizing it” (p. 136). Sperber believes that “the current system institutionalizes” the neglect of undergraduate education. Faculty “believe that they must spend most of their time doing research,” while undergraduates “prefer to pass their time having fun.” Consequently, there is what Sperber calls “a mutual nonaggression pact” in which each side agrees not to bother the other (p. 138).

Sperber implies that higher education was corrupted by the Pentagon, which needed research science to win the Cold War. This corruption was most apparent in turning professors into researchers so that teaching became a secondary product of research. Teaching at flagship universities came to mean preparing the next generation of researchers. Sperber proposes a solution that would divorce higher education from research. He wants universities to “divide their graduate programs into research training and undergraduate teaching tracks.” Haven’t we already largely done this? A subplot in the video compares a Denver community college adjunct professor who makes \$30,000, a University of Arizona political science professor who complains about making only \$65,000, and *suits* who assume professors make \$100,000 while fulminating about coaches who make millions.

Part of the problem stems from calling what we publish in the humanities “research.” What we publish is not research done on the model used in the physical sciences. What we do resembles what studio artists do more than what physicists or molecular geneticists do. The grass is always greener in some other department and Sperber seems to wish that he had left the English department for the school of education. He reports that “In my final years at

Indiana, I found that I was mainly teaching critical skills—how to make sense of databases and how to order and use the material from them” (p. 143). It still sounds like his goal is to train students to do research, but Sperber calls it “‘process learning,’ whereas lecturing usually ends up as ‘product learning.’” He confesses to helping erode the quality of higher educational instruction “by ingesting the research model at Berkeley and then living so many years of my faculty life in its thrall” (p. 143).

We know the differences in salary between professors of computer science, business, and English. Sperber suggests that those in English would be happy to “have fewer graduate courses,” and to “return to teaching three or even four courses a semester” for less money. “Just as pilots in the airline industry have learned to give up very cushy jobs for reasonable work at decent pay, faculty members might do the same” (p. 142). I wonder if Sperber knows that University of Phoenix instructors make \$1,000 for teaching a three hour class in which they are also concerned to foster critical thinking skills?

10. "America's Modern Peculiar Institution" by Frank Deford.

A sportswriter, Deford agrees with Derek Bok, the long-time Harvard president, who flatly asserted, “Educational institutions have absolutely no business operating farm systems for the benefit of the National Football League and the National Basketball Association” (Bok, 2003, p. 125). In his book, Bok complained mightily about the inability of university presidents to control sports programs that many alumni, boosters, and legislators find to be the most fun part of their state’s flagship university. Bok laments that “It was not inevitable that America should become the only nation where universities use their students to present athletic spectacles for profit at the cost of compromising academic standards” (p. 103). Bok may cry crocodile tears for semi-professional athletes, but Deford suggests the damage. He quotes a *New York Times* op-ed article to say “there are about 70,000 black doctors and lawyers in this country and only 1,400 professional black athletes.” Nonetheless, “too many black boys continue to hold to the belief that their best career path lies with sports.” The video illustrates one such hopeful basketball player at the University of Arizona who confessed that he spent 80% of his time as an athlete and 20% of his time as a student. Deford cites a study to say, “an incredible 43 percent of high school African American athletes still believe they will make the pros” (p. 152).

What’s to be done? Deford says “B-TS [Big-Time Sports] is our modern peculiar institution.” The term *peculiar institution* was used by antebellum Southerners to characterize slavery. Deford suggests a kind of national slavery, at least among men, to sports. The athletes themselves “have come to form a mandarin class, where they play by different rules.” It is American culture itself that has made B-TS universities “our modern peculiar institution and it is simply too entrenched in Americana for us to ever rearrange it, let alone to diminish it” (p. 153).

11. "Disconnects Between Students & Their Colleges" by Arthur Levine.

Levine, president of Teachers College at Columbia University, is precise about what he calls disconnects. Like churches, colleges are often chosen for convenience. Students “want their colleges nearby and offering classes during the most convenient times for them, preferably twenty-four hours a day. They want easy accessible parking, no lines, and a helpful, polite, and efficient staff” (p. 158). They are consumers who expect to buy a service and the model institution for this is probably the University of Phoenix, which “offers students three out of four of the features they are asking for: service, convenience, and quality instruction” (p. 159).

The second disconnect is foreshadowed by the first; students want to be immediately involved rather than patiently learn what faculty want to teach them.” Levine suggests that we may do better to first teach specialty courses in a student’s major and then teach general education courses (p. 160). Rather than explain how that might be done, Levine uses italics to emphasize, “*It is the mission of the university to teach its students, not the other way around.*” I am not quite sure what “the other way around” would be, but no matter, Levine sprints off to unpack another inference from today’s consumer/student preferences. Students are, Levine says, “more concerned with their differences than their commonalities.” Instead of aspiring to a profession and making themselves over to fit its requirements, student/consumers are sensitive to “the characteristics that made them unique or different: race, gender, geography, sexual orientation, ethnicity, and religion” (p. 161).

Levine says “campuses also are growing more segregated, voluntarily.” His illustrations might be better called Balkanization. “In the cafeteria, sides are literally assigned—one side white, one black, one Asian” (p.162). “The fourth change seen is a growing sense of victimization among college students,” the feeling that somehow “others are profiting at their expense” (p.163). These traits seem to argue for nothing so much as infantilization, even though the average age of college students is now a decade older than the 18-22 year old stereotype.

Rather than predicting the demise of higher education, or the planet, Levine recognizes multiple education models. He starts by recognizing “the notion of faculty as customers” (p. 163). His model is again research and the expectation that “student quality follows faculty excellence.” Among students, many “ask for a stripped-down version” and often cobble together a degree by attending a half-dozen convenient schools, while other consumer/students want “a full-service institution with all the bells and whistles, ranging from psychological counseling to vegan cuisine in the dining room” (p. 164). Levine ends by suggesting that higher education is simply another consumer service in which “students may show their displeasure with their feet, choosing alternatives to traditional higher education,” if they can’t buy what they want. Ironically, Levine offers a letter at the Teachers College Web site <<http://www.tc.columbia.edu/abouttc/>> that argues against changing the name of the school because “the name summons a powerful historical legacy.” He says, “Our work at Teachers College today, as it was yesterday, is to create the programs, carry out the research and develop the models that will guide educators and the institutions they serve.”

This sounds conservative, but a close reading suggests the same metaphor apparent in his essay, that education is a market commodity defined by consumer taste.

12. "Leaving the Newcomers Behind" by Roberto Suro and Richard Fry.

Both authors are researchers at the Pew Hispanic Center <<http://pewhispanic.org/>>. Predictably, they begin with the same cry, "America has a serious problem on its hands" (p. 169). This time it is because Hispanic students are more likely to go to community colleges (p.175) and are more likely to be employed full time: 19% versus 14% for Anglo students (p. 179). "Hispanic undergraduates are worse off. Indeed, they are nearly twice as likely as whites to have children or elderly dependents." And, "Almost half of Hispanic four-year students reside with their parents, compared to less than one-fifth of their white peers" (p. 180). Apparently, the apocryphal *somebody* is suppose to study this demographic data to design a Hispanic tract for higher education. If *someone* doesn't do this, the authors warn that higher education will become one of "the great barriers in our social structure" (p. 182).

Like the other authors in the anthology, Suro and Fry's views are predictable. What else could we expect from a Washington, D.C. *center* except the announcement that "America has a serious problem" that the center will naturally help solve for enough money to be *self-supporting*. The views from San Antonio, Albuquerque, and Phoenix are less calculated. The sky is not falling.

The last three articles make anemic and predictable complaints about what higher education "ought to do." Leon Botstein, president of Bard College, makes the most interesting but vague point, complaining about what he calls "a growing epistemological divide in the country between those who accept the premises of rationality shared by the Enlightenment and the Founding Fathers and those who have put their faith in a religious piety that they presume should govern our daily lives." Rather than name names, starting with President Bush, Botstein simply fulminates about how "neither democracy nor the university is compatible with the sort of theology that has experienced a dramatic revival all over the world and in the United States" (p. 225).

I agree with Botstein that the university arose in Renaissance Europe to offer a different view from that of the church, one based on science and on the recovery of pagan Greek civilization. The social role and evolution of the university is, of course, malleable and is shaped by specific decisions, policies, and values. But *Declining by Degrees* is misleading in suggesting that the various authors have clear insight into the problems of higher education and decisive solutions to offer. There is a tacit rhetorical formula at work in which each author assumes the role of healer or preacher to sell snake oil. This tacit promise or deal is also evident in the video, which doesn't offer policy or direction but gravitas, which is the next thing to piety. It sells the notion that American society must invest far more money and concern in education rather than competing sectors or cultures such as the church, the military, healthcare, or the marketplace. The book has none of the bite of PBS's *Frontline*. Each set-piece in the anthology begins with an identification of egregious problems and ends

by predicting gloom unless we admit our sins and renew our covenant with old time higher education.

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