

SOCIAL FACTORS DETERMINING TRENDS IN WESTERN COLLEGES

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This report summarizes some of the points in a study of western colleges concerning the social conditions which account for their founding, their waxing and waning, their deaths. Begun in 1936, by an educationist trained in history and social science, and a research social psychologist, the materials so grow in bulk as to make analysis increasingly tedious and fascinating. Studies of social trends and attitudes had existed, studies of single colleges or single college problems; to put all this into meaningful patterns is the current task.

Why was each college founded, why did it die? (unable to find lists of defunct institutions, we had to begin to construct one *de novo*!) What patterns of colleges grow, what patterns decline, and what social trends dominate each decade of change? This is the task at which we are trying some preliminary spade-work. A few too-much-compressed instances follow:

Motivation in Personal and Corporate Ego-projection.—Colleges, our data indicate, primarily reflect ambitions for prestige, power, and growth; reflect beliefs so strongly held that one doubts not that all men must come to believe so too; reflect the faith that to get the mass of men to believe as you do or center their activity where you are, the best way is to train up the young (who will become leaders) to look up to your belief or your place. College foundations are the attempt to capture the future. Hence they are resistant to disaster and death beyond most human projects; they are super-kinetic with the vigor of sublime faith (or fanaticism). The ambitious man, the ambitious community, the proselytizing sect all find the college a way to indelibly mark the future through its leaders with their work, a way to gain deathlessness, ego-fulfilment. If modesty or sophistication should inhibit so bold a position, the same result follows—one must struggle to protect the future from capture by one's rivals—men, towns, or sects!

The typical college foundation combines the drive of a man, a place, and a belief, to a place in the sun; the summation of the three makes rashness and courage one, makes effort almost superhuman, makes for utter devotion like that to the state in wartime. Struggle and casualties, defeat and disaster result, but also victories and heroes for future generations to sing.

Social Trends and College Trends.—Why, from decade to decade of 1800-1920, does one type of college wax and another wane? What social changes occur alongside the change in higher education? Some examples: In urban-rural rivalry, the balance of power shifts, accordingly resources and leadership, accordingly those college patterns that are attached to each party. For 1830 and 1930 let us say then and now. Then young students, typically theological, must be kept away from the raw temptations of cities, then the rural college loudly boasted its advantage. Now, specific training for upper-level occupation is done (or overdone?) and enrollment piles up in mammoth urban giants. (For Presbyterians, little Franklin then, now metropolitan Western Reserve and Pittsburg.)

Land policy changes, thus changing the speed and type of settlement; patterns of college and academy follow. (Consider Oxford and Miami; Oberlin and Knox.) Land policy, as well as Andrew Jackson, can spread "democratic ways of feeling;" and a more democratic policy with widely diffused places of training follows. The Federalist officeholder in silk stockings (one of "the best people") is supplanted by the Jacksonian man-of-the-people, rotating in office. Soon public opinion emphasizes the spread of institutions rather than restriction to get higher standards; the denominational policy of one-college-to-a-state weakens, and every academy-with-ambitions calls itself college or university, every conference or synod considers founding an institution of its own. The Methodists, without colleges at 1830, in a decade or two (I

quote) "spray colleges over the map," and most of them live.

With the spread of democratic feeling every occupational group, religious group, racial group, even that minority, women, demand their institutional chance at higher education, a place in the sun for their children. Manual-labor schemes make more possible education for sons of poor workmen and small farmers, and old-line colleges training ministerial candidates fall in line; farmers' high schools and colleges, normal schools, mechanics' institutes, courses without classical language or with science multiply. New schools appear in sects, previously of the humble folk, who believe in a clergy "called of God, not made in factories," the expensive, long training in college and theological seminary.

Technology, Transportation, and Trade.

—First the pack animal, then flat boat, Conestoga wagon, canal, steamboat, railroad, interurban, and now the motor vehicle move people and goods to the West. Study the map of college foundations. First on and near the rivers (Oxford, Marietta, Miami; Vincennes and Hanover; Alton and St. Louis); then along the staked-out lines that became the National Road (Ohio Wesleyan, DePauw, Illinois Wesleyan, Illinois Normal, Indiana, Ohio State—state capitals marched the same northward route); then the lake ports and their hinterlands (Western Reserve, Ann Arbor, Beloit, Northwestern); then the railroad routes (and the college which was earlier located a dozen miles off the route must die, move, or merge). Today intersections of main auto and rail routes seem best places for a college to grow—this includes the major cities automatically.

Dependent on this shift from Ohio River to Erie Canal and Great Lakes is the shift in dominance among groups of colleges. The earlier strong colleges tend to be on the river. Franklin yields to Reserve, Oberlin, Wooster; Hanover to Wabash; Blackburn to Chicago University; McKendree to Northwestern in enrollment and resources despite the prestige of age. The Episcopalians transfer from near Cincinnati northward to Gambier; Farmers' College, near Cincinnati, loses out to Columbus as the Land Grant location.

Dependent on changing best-routes-for-trade is the rise and fall of the commercial empire of the trading cities. Cincinnati falls behind Cleveland; Louisville, St. Louis and Alton behind Chicago; in countless lesser trading centers conflicting ambitions win, or lose. Where people no longer come to trade, they tend no longer to send their children to school. College expansion follows the wealth and prestige piled up at the victorious centers.

Changes in Control.—Early small educational units, largely dominated by a devoted or forceful man, yield to those controlled by small area, community, or sectarian groupings, finally to mammoth units representing the whole force of a state or a metropolis; the major leaders of commerce or government can say yea or nay to questions of basic policy, since they only can capture the huge sums required; internal control passes from a small faculty group (almost all ordained men who also sit in Council, Synod, or Conference) to imposing Boards of lay trustees, leaders of business in rising metropolitan centers. Presidents, first, are individuals and orators, and exemplify the virtues of the clergy; later, skilful administrators and harmonizers of complex institutions with the virtues of the captains of modern industry. In the same generations, the organization of business and government has changed in the same direction that college organization has.

Colleges conform to the principles controlling their constituencies. One pattern appears in the college of 1830 whose future depends on gifts (and wise men) from the East; another pattern in those rooted in the grass roots at home; high standards and permanence through endowments is the slogan of one party; democratic accessibility of opportunity and mushrooming enrollments of any sort of student is the slogan of the other. The debates of the Whigs and the Democrats are echoed in college history.

Other trends can be but mentioned. What divides the community splits and multiplies colleges. Denominations splitting into sects means a college in the area for each sub-group (from a Plan of Union college comes a Congregational and a Presbyterian institution; then an Old, a New, a United, a Cumberland, are all needed by Presbyterians. Free Will

Baptist college duplicates Baptist college, and so on. When theology becomes less divisive than slavery, pro-slavery and anti-slavery groups must each have a college. If this college will admit no women, found another that will, then the first group will start a woman's institution in self-protection. New social values, new occupations aspiring toward professional status, new sciences and arts

and languages create widened college offerings, and also new colleges. As the community looks to new sources for its leadership new channels to train leaders are created too. As wealth (and hopes of wealth) wax, the volume and places of higher education follow upward. College trends and patterns seem to float on the tide of changing community values and trends.
