

From “Liberal Professions” to “Lucrative Professions”: Bowdoin College, Stanford University, and the Civic Functions of Higher Education

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Background/Context: *Over the past three decades, Americans’ conception of higher education has shifted from a public good to a private one. Wary of colleges and universities’ increasing commodification, proponents of higher education’s civic engagement have responded with a reform agenda that, they argue, reflects an earlier era during which colleges and universities enthusiastically embraced wide-ranging public purposes. Using Bowdoin College and Stanford University as cases, this study investigates: (1) whether such an era ever existed, (2) how colleges and universities articulated and enacted their civic functions, (3) whether students’ reasons for pursuing higher education aligned with institutional priorities, and (4) how, if at all, those priorities influenced graduates’ career trajectories.*

Purpose/Objective: *Although their curricular programs differed greatly, Bowdoin College (founded in 1794) and Stanford University (established in 1885) sought to “qualify” students for “direct usefulness” in life. Nevertheless, these two institutions adopted contrasting civic functions, with Bowdoin officials emphasizing graduates’ “peculiar obligations” to exert their talents “for the public good” while Stanford University’s founders asserted that the “object” of their university was “to qualify its students for personal success.” What led to this shift in higher education’s central purpose?*

Research Design: *Historical analysis of two cases—Bowdoin College and Stanford University—during their founding decades.*

Conclusions/Recommendations: *This study contends that during the early national period, America’s social ethos was infused by preferences and attitudes that rewarded civic virtue*

and a commitment to the public good—what political theorists and historians have come to collectively call “republicanism.” By the late 19th century, however, political, economic, and social forces, including the rise of commercialism and the development of an urban, industrial, class-stratified society, refashioned this ethos into one that emphasized citizens’ personal advancement at least as much as the common good. As a result, colleges and universities’ institutional priorities, as well as students’ reasons for engaging in higher learning, changed over time.

Over the past three decades, Americans’ conception of higher education has shifted from a public good to a private one.¹ Wary of colleges and universities’ increasing commodification, proponents of higher education’s civic engagement have responded with a reform agenda that, they argue, reflects colleges and universities’ historic civic functions (Hartley & Hollander, 2005). Employing language such as “renewing the civic mission of the American research university,” advocates of the “engaged academy” hark back to an era during which institutions of higher education enthusiastically embraced wide-ranging public purposes (Checkoway, 2001). Did such an era ever exist, however? If so, how did colleges and universities articulate their civic functions? In what ways did they enact them? Did students’ reasons for pursuing higher education align with institutional priorities? And how, if at all, did those priorities influence graduates’ career trajectories?

This study is drawn from a larger project in which I examine the civic functions of a wide variety of colleges and universities located in a range of geographic regions throughout the United States between 1794 and the present. For this essay, I have chosen to use Bowdoin College and Stanford University as cases for several reasons. First, the institutions were established during two distinct and well-established time periods in U.S. history: the early national period and the Progressive Era. Choosing institutions founded during these two periods allows me to compare and contrast the experiences of the institutions’ founders, leaders, and students, as well as identify changes in those experiences over time. Second, the institutions are drawn from two of the four largest mainline groups of colleges and universities as determined by enrolled students’ characteristics. Third, they were established in two of the United States’ primary geographic regions. Bowdoin, founded in New England, was all male and served primarily White students from a range of socioeconomic backgrounds (although it also graduated Black men), while Stanford, founded in the West, was coeducational, open to all races, and as a tuition-free institution attracted a significant number of working class students. Fourth, although Bowdoin received direct financial support from

governmental sources when established, neither institution was compelled by legislative obligation to serve the needs of local or state constituencies. Nevertheless, Bowdoin College and Stanford University should not be considered representative of other colleges and universities established during their respective time periods; they are intended to be illustrative only. Still, thoughtfully chosen case studies can and should inform our understanding of change over time in the history of American higher education. For the purposes of this study, then, Bowdoin College and Stanford University provide exceptional cases.

Inaugurated during the early national period in U.S. history, Bowdoin's first president, the Reverend Joseph McKeen, interpreted his college's central purpose as promoting the "common good" rather than "private advantage." In practice, Bowdoin prepared students to serve the District of Maine by becoming members of the "liberal professions"—ministers, doctors, lawyers, educators, and public servants. Opening the doors of their university during the Progressive Era, Leland and Jane Lathrop Stanford desired for their institution to "promote the public welfare by exercising an influence on behalf of humanity and civilization" ("Stanford University," 1971). Both they and Stanford University's first president, David Starr Jordan, considered this objective best achieved through a "conception of education as 'training for usefulness in life'" (as quoted in Jordan, 1922, pp. 354, 413, 485).

Although their curricular programs differed greatly, Bowdoin and Stanford were both established as institutions through which students would "qualify" for "direct usefulness"; that is to say, although neither Bowdoin nor Stanford's early leaders anticipated students making meaningful contributions to the common good while engaged in higher learning, they believed that graduates who acquired a higher education were uniquely responsible for bettering society through their life pursuits. Nevertheless, these two institutions, established almost a century apart and thousands of miles from one another, adopted contrasting civic functions. Whereas McKeen expressed Bowdoin College's commitment to the common good when he claimed that "every man who has been aided by a public institution to acquire an education and to qualify himself for usefulness, is under peculiar obligations to exert his talents for the public good," Jane and Leland Stanford asserted that although the "purpose" of their university was "to promote the public welfare" its "object" was "to qualify students for personal success," suggesting the degree to which personal advancement had become a primary motivator in higher education by the late 19th century (Bowdoin College Archives, 1807; "Stanford University," 1971).

What led to such a change in higher education's central purpose? This

study contends that the social ethos guiding colleges and universities' institutional priorities, as well as students' reasons for engaging in higher learning, changed between 1794 (the year of Bowdoin's founding) and 1885 (the year Stanford was established), resulting in a modification of what we might today call higher education's institutional mission. According to political scientist and philosopher Joshua Cohen, a social ethos comprises "socially widespread preferences and attitudes about the kinds of rewards it is acceptable to insist on, and associated with those preferences and attitudes, a sense about the ways of life that are attractive, exciting, good, worthy of pursuit" (Cohen, 2002, p. 365). Considered in those terms, America's social ethos during the early national period was infused by preferences and attitudes that rewarded civic virtue and a commitment to the public good—what political theorists and historians have come to collectively call "republicanism."² Over the course of the century, however, political, economic and social forces, including the rise of commercialism and the development of an urban, industrial, class-stratified society, refashioned this ethos into one that emphasized citizens' personal advancement at least as much as the common good.

Inspiration for this study comes primarily from three sources. First, historian Robert Church has urged increased inquiry into higher education's historic civic functions. In a published conversation entitled "Renegotiating the Historical Narrative: The Case of American Higher Education," Church writes, "College and university rhetoric and mission statements are replete with commitments to community service, but histories of higher education have not explored very carefully how, and to what effect, institutions have fulfilled those promises" (Church, 2004, p. 586). This essay responds to Church's assertion. Second, historian Linda Eisenmann has encouraged scholars to consider contemporary issues when framing inquiries into the history of higher education. Although, as Eisenmann makes clear, historians should never "let their scholarship be guided by purely utilitarian ends, choosing topics only for their contemporary relevance," she recommends that scholars contribute directly to discussions on issues central to contemporary colleges and universities, including "mission, student retention, remediation, marketing, and organizational context" (Eisenmann, 2004, pp. 9-10). In keeping with Eisenmann's proposal, I hope for this study to contribute to the current dialogue occurring on many campuses regarding higher education's civic responsibility.

Finally, I have conducted this research out of a desire to clarify the history of colleges and universities' civic functions for those who are undertaking the important work of fostering civic engagement in higher

education. A supporter of many of these efforts, I believe such undertakings will gain legitimacy and promote lasting change only if proponents have an accurate understanding of both their historic and contemporary contexts. In recent years, for instance, advocates of the “engaged academy” have formed national coalitions, such as Campus Compact, to promote institutional reforms, and have drawn on the resources of public-private partnerships, such as the Corporation for National and Community Service, for financial support.³ Although not in complete agreement in defining higher education’s public purposes, these advocates have developed a general consensus around the activities they believe foster civic engagement, including community-based research, service-learning programs, volunteer opportunities, and colleges and universities behaving as responsible “institutional citizens” within their locales (Bringle & Hatcher, 2000; Colby et al., 2003; Hartley & Hollander, 2005; Ward, 2003). Acknowledging the good intentions behind these efforts, prominent scholars and social critics nevertheless argue that undergraduates increasingly perceive higher education as a consumer good (Barber, 2007; Washburn, 2005; Fallows & Ganeshanathan, 2004). As a high school student recently profiled in the *New York Times* observed in relation to her college and career aspirations, “It’s, like, a really big deal to go into a lucrative profession so that you can provide for your kids, and they can grow up in a place like the place where you grew up” (Rimer, 2007). If, as contemporary observers suggest, current undergraduates share this perception of higher education as a private good through which they might reap personal benefit by becoming members of “lucrative professions,” then college and university students’ historic conception of higher learning as a public good through which they might contribute to society through their participation in the “liberal professions” has undergone a historic transformation.⁴

Whether colleges and universities continue on a trajectory of commodification in the 21st century depends not only on reformers’ efforts to identify alternative visions of higher learning that take civic engagement as their central concern but, as this study suggests, on the ways that proponents of the engaged academy design and implement reform strategies in relation to America’s prevailing social ethos.⁵ If advocates of higher education’s public purposes desire to affect long-term institutional change, they must reconsider the historical framework through which they presently interpret their advocacy. Rather than resuscitating higher education’s historic civic functions as examples on which current reforms might be modeled, proponents should consider the extent to which a contemporary social ethos of personal gain makes such models untenable. The central challenge confronting those who advocate for

higher education's civic functions in the 21st century, then, is not determining how colleges and universities might promote the common good in an era characterized by an emphasis on the public sphere, but rather how colleges and universities might promote the common good in an era characterized by a social ethos in which the public sphere is, at best, struggling not to be subsumed by private advantage.

"A SMALL COLLEGE IN MAINE"

Between its opening in 1802 and the end of the Civil War, Bowdoin College acquired a remarkably distinguished record. In just 25 years, the all-male institution graduated future President of the United States Franklin Pierce, acclaimed poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, celebrated novelist Nathaniel Hawthorne, and John Brown Russwurm—the third African American to receive a college degree in the United States and cofounder of the country's first Black newspaper, *Freedom's Journal*. In 1852, Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain received his Bowdoin degree. Teaching logic, natural theology, rhetoric, and modern languages at the college before joining the Union Army in 1862, Chamberlain became a Civil War hero at the Battle of Gettysburg and later received Robert E. Lee's surrender at Appomattox Court House. He would eventually serve as Bowdoin's president and governor of Maine.⁶

At the beginning of the 19th century, however, Bowdoin College had yet to achieve any real distinction other than its own founding. Located in the town of Brunswick, in a noncontiguous part of the state of Massachusetts known as the District of Maine, the college's establishment was an exercise in delay. As historian Charles Calhoun notes, as early as 1788 local elites campaigned to establish a regional center of higher learning rather than send their sons south to Boston (to Harvard College) or southwest to Hanover (to Dartmouth College; Calhoun, 1993, pp. 3-6). Still, political, financial, and logistical challenges delayed establishing the institution until June 24, 1794, when Governor Samuel Adams signed an act chartering a college for the purpose of promoting "Virtue and Piety and the Knowledge of such of the Languages and of the Useful and Liberal Arts and Sciences" as determined by the institution's sponsors.⁷ Having received substantial financial support from James Bowdoin III in memory of his father, the institution's sponsors agreed to name the college for James Bowdoin II, a member of the colonial elite who had served as governor of the Massachusetts Commonwealth between 1785 and 1787. Another eight years passed, however, before the new college's governing boards raised the funds necessary to construct a facility and employ the personnel necessary to open to students.

Bowdoin College's establishment provides an excellent illustration of what historian David Potts (1971) has described as "localism" in 19th century American college building. Although Bowdoin's founding was predominately a Congregationalist undertaking, the institution's early history was characterized by local and regional more than denominational support (Potts, 1971, p. 369). Only when financial difficulties threatened the college's existence and local sources of revenue became insufficient did officials more closely align Bowdoin College with Congregationalism. As with Potts's study of New England's Baptist colleges, Bowdoin's drift towards denominationalism occurred towards the middle of the 19th century, 40 years after the college's opening. During its early decades, Bowdoin was, as Potts wrote of his own case studies, "closely tied with the local, cultural, and economic ambitions of citizens, parents, and students" (Potts, 1971, pp. 368-369).

The Reverend Joseph McKeen offered a forthright expression of Bowdoin College's local character during his inauguration in September 1802. A Massachusetts minister who taught school for eight years following his graduation from Dartmouth College, McKeen was in his early 40s when Bowdoin's governing boards recruited him to serve as the college's first president.⁸ Assuming leadership of an institution comprised of one faculty member, eight students, and a single academic building, McKeen used his inaugural address to assure residents that they would reap significant benefits from having established a "literary institution" in Maine (Calhoun, 1993, pp. 30-31; Hatch, 1927, pp. 16-22). He also offered a concise interpretation of the college's founding. "That the inhabitants of this district may have of their own sons to fill the liberal professions among them," McKeen pronounced, "and particularly to instruct them in the principles and practice of our holy religion, is doubtless the object of this institution" (Bowdoin College Archives, 1802).⁹

Identifying students' preparation for the ministry as one of Bowdoin College's founding objectives, McKeen also claimed that educating students for the "liberal professions," including medicine, teaching, law, and statesmanship, was central to the college's mission.¹⁰ Yet his primary interest was not in students' occupational advancement. As McKeen was undoubtedly aware, practicing the "liberal professions" did not require a college degree in the early 19th century. Instead, McKeen emphasized students' acceptance of the social obligation he believed they incurred upon receiving a higher education. "It ought always be remembered," McKeen continued:

that literary institutions are founded and endowed for the common good, and not for the private advantage of those who resort

to them for education. It is not that they may be enabled to pass through life in an easy or reputable manner, but that their mental powers may be cultivated and improved for the benefit of society. If it be true, that no man should live to himself, we may safely assert, that every man who has been aided by a public institution to acquire an education and to qualify himself for usefulness, is under peculiar obligations to exert his talents for the public good. (Bowdoin College Archives, 1802)

In emphasizing graduates' responsibility to promote the "common good," McKeen hardly proposed a new role for the American college. Instead, he drew on a widely shared social ethos that assigned priority to social responsibility over individuals' self indulgence (Bowen et al., 2005, p. 19). Numerous scholars have noted how revolutionary leaders such as Thomas Jefferson (who was serving in his first term of office as U.S. president at the time of McKeen's inauguration) conceived of educational institutions as central to ensuring the republic's survival. As historian Julie Reuben writes, Jefferson and others believed that grammar schools and colleges would produce "a virtuous citizenry, actively engaged in public affairs and willing to place the common good ahead of self interest"—a form of civic mindedness that political theorists and historians have come refer to as "republicanism" (Kaestle, 1983; Perkin, 1984; Reuben, 2005, p. 2; Tyack, 2003). Indeed, "No phrase except 'liberty,'" according to Gordon S. Wood, "was invoked more often by the revolutionaries than the 'public good.' It expressed the colonists' deepest hatreds of the old order and their most visionary hopes for the new day." (Wood, 1969, pp. 53-65).

Predating contemporary distinctions between public and private colleges and universities, McKeen's identification of Bowdoin as a "public institution" suggested the degree to which he conceived of the college as existing to serve society by producing intellectually enlightened and morally disciplined graduates. His view was shared by many during the era, such as John Witherspoon, who in 1772 insisted that graduates of the College of New Jersey (later Princeton University) "apply their talents to the service of the public and the good of mankind" (as quoted in Thelin, 2004, p. 26) as well as the authors of the 1828 Yale Report who, according to historian Jurgen Herbst,

believed it their duty to inoculate their graduates against the insidious influences of a creeping commercialism, a reckless individualism, and a rampant desire for self-promotion and aggrandizement. For the country's future professional leader-

ship to succumb to the drive for exploitation of America's riches, and, in such materialistic abandon, to forget all thought of commonwealth and nation appeared to Yale's faculty an abandonment of duty. It was the college's task to prevent such treason. (Herbst, 2004, p. 222)

Although frequently achieving social stature through their life pursuits, college graduates were nevertheless expected to subordinate their personal desires to make tangible contributions to the republic (Rudolph, 1990, pp. 58-59).

Through his address, McKeen asserted a broad institutional mission—advancing the “common good”—while identifying a tangible mechanism through which to achieve this goal: graduates' participation in the liberal professions. How did Bowdoin College students respond to McKeen's assertion? Assembling detailed, career-line studies of Bowdoin's early graduates is difficult. However, substantial documentary evidence exists to suggest that a large majority of the college's undergraduates did, in fact, meet McKeen's expectations (*General Catalogue*, 1894). Of the 12 graduates of the class of 1810, for instance, 5 became ministers (3 after having served as school teachers); 4 became lawyers (1 after having served as a school teacher and another later serving as a Maine state legislator); 1 became a physician; 1 became a soldier (and later editor, civil servant, and philanthropist); and 1 worked in his family's mercantile business (Page, 1852). Similarly, of the five members of the class of 1813, three became lawyers (one eventually serving as Maine state attorney general and another serving as a Maine state senator, U.S. congressman, U.S. attorney for the District of Maine, and mayor of Portland, Maine); one became a school principal; and one became a merchant (*General Catalogue*, 1894, p. 28).

Did alumni, however, willingly embrace the civic obligations their alma mater ascribed to them or did they simply fulfill social responsibilities en route to personal success? There is good reason to believe that Bowdoin College students eagerly pursued increased social status. As historian David Allmendinger has demonstrated, many students attending New England colleges in antebellum America were poor, relying on charity and employment to pay their tuition, room, and board. As younger sons of farmers who typically practiced primogeniture, many college students rightly believed that higher education, although not a prerequisite for career success, would provide an advantage in establishing themselves in a liberal profession. It is important to note that none of these professions promised significant financial gain. Through occupational mobility, however, graduates of extremely limited means could escape their potential

future as landless hired hands, city laborers, or clerks and achieve a degree of fiscal stability and social stature otherwise unattainable (Allmendinger, 1957).

Students attending Bowdoin College in 1829 offer a convincing example of Allmendinger's findings. Of the 114 students enrolled at Bowdoin in that year, over half were poor. Of the 64 students who relied on financial support from sources other than their families or benefactors, 43 acquired grants from the college after providing documentation of their indigence, 6 received financial support from the American Education Society (an organization that provided scholarships to young men interested in becoming ministers), and 45 supported themselves by "keeping school" during the winter; in other words, they taught at rural grammar schools over winter break, occasionally taking leaves of absence during the academic term to continue their work.¹¹ In fact, so many Bowdoin students taught school to support their studies that in 1834 they formed the "Teachers' Association of Bowdoin College," the purpose of which they stated as "the mutual improvement of the members in their vocation, as teachers."¹² Further evidence of student indigence appeared 10 years earlier, when Bowdoin College undergraduates formed one of New England's first college "boarding clubs" in an effort to reduce the cost associated with taking meals on campus. Governed by the students themselves, this cooperative enterprise resulted in significant savings, with students purchasing meat and produce directly from local farmers and sharing the labor associated with cooking and cleaning (Allmendinger, 1957, p. 86).

Undoubtedly, then, a significant proportion of Bowdoin students believed that higher education afforded greater access to occupational success than they otherwise would have had. It would be a mistake, however, to assume that this belief was incompatible with students' acceptance of the civic obligations ascribed to them by the college. Rather, documentary evidence produced by Bowdoin students suggests that many were extremely concerned that they become "useful" citizens and serve the public good through their life pursuits.

Moses Parker Cleaveland attended Bowdoin in the mid-1820s, graduating in 1827 and eventually serving as a physician in New Hampshire. During his time at college, Cleaveland kept a diary of essays called "Dissertations and Sunday Pieces" through which he expressed his desire to become "eminent" and achieve distinction in his occupational endeavors. He believed, however, that one's eminence relied upon being a "valuable member of society." Reflecting on education's primary goals, for instance, Cleaveland wrote:

To promote the happiness of man, and to render him a valuable member of society by the discharge of all his social and religious duties are the great objects of Education.... The advantages of a public education are seen in the exercise, which it gives to the faculties of the mind, and the habits, which it has a tendency to produce. (Cleaveland, 1825, October 26)

Similarly, in an August 1826 essay on the importance of clarity in writing when expressing oneself, Cleaveland remarked on the relationship between being “serviceable” to society and earning public esteem. He wrote:

The man who wishes to become serviceable to his country and to society, whether it be in a public or private character, whether in writing or speaking, must in his writings unite pleasure with instruction. By doing so he may become eminent and acquire influence and gain both public attention and esteem. (Cleaveland, 1826)

Finally, although Cleaveland undoubtedly hoped to obtain distinction through his life pursuits, he identified a clear difference between achieving eminence and acquiring wealth. In keeping with the social ethos of his day, Cleaveland understood that the social status associated with one’s “usefulness” to society was neither dependent on nor did it guarantee material wealth—an understanding that he made explicit in this entry on the virtue of moderation in one’s life:

How much preferable is it then to be moderate in our desires for promotion, and content to be governed by the laws of our land. Others are seeking for immense wealth, and are not satisfied with a competence, which is more likely to ensure happiness in this world. The feelings of the rich are excited to such a degree, that they do not enjoy what they possess, and they are so avaricious that they will not contribute to the support, much less the comfort, of a worthy citizen. (Cleaveland, 1825, July 25)

The importance Cleaveland repeatedly attached to an individual’s “value,” “service,” and “usefulness” to society appears throughout many of the surviving diaries from Bowdoin’s early decades, including that written by George F. Talbot. A class of 1837 graduate, Talbot consistently wrote of his plans to make a meaningful contribution to society. On his birthday in 1836, for instance, he reflected on the worldly distractions competing for

his attention while emphasizing his desire to “pursue some real good.” “Amidst the din of contending passions and the outbreaks of unsatisfied desires,” Talbot wrote, “consciousness lifts up his voice and calls us to forsake the pursuits which cannot give real happiness ... and pursue some real good, some lasting substantial record” (Talbot, 1936, January 16).

Throughout his time at Bowdoin, and especially as graduation approached, Talbot continued to ponder his life’s pursuits as well as the responsibilities he incurred by receiving a college education. “I began a boy at home, a home from which I had never been absent,” Talbot wrote towards the middle of his senior year,

since then I have passed into a somewhat higher situation and have experienced all the joys and sorrows, pleasures and responsibilities of college life, and at its close I find myself almost ready to leave these scenes, and enter upon the still more active duties of busy life. Increase of knowledge brings increase of responsibilities, and the higher we rise the more is expected of us the more we expect of ourselves. (Talbot, 1836, November 27)

Following his graduation, Talbot similarly reflected on the previous phases of his life, including the “usefulness” for which he sought to prepare himself while at college:

My college life has transpired and I find myself in one sense thrown upon the wide world.... This then I may consider an era in my life, and a period when plans are formed and steps are taken which exert a great influence upon the succeeding life. One such era I have already had, a time when my character took a turn from the careless thoughtlessness of boyhood to the more heedful period of youth. Then I first began to think and study myself and lay at least in my own mind the designs whose completion I have since partly realized. Then too, my studies hitherto pursued with no ultimate object and no motive other than the gratification of my own feelings ... I began to consider with regard to a definite object to improve my character and prepare for future usefulness. (Talbot, 1837)

As with many of his classmates, Talbot eventually met McKeen’s expectation that he “exert his talents for the public good.” Becoming a lawyer in Maine’s Washington County, Talbot served as U.S. district attorney for the State of Maine and U.S. solicitor of the treasury (*General Catalogue*, 1950).

Students' reflections on higher learning's public purposes typically aligned with Bowdoin College's institutional mission to promote the common good. A product of the prevailing social ethos, this alignment was perhaps most complete for students who planned to enter the ministry—a vocation that afforded minimal opportunity for the acquisition of material wealth but relatively high social stature. As the diaries suggest, students made no distinction between serving God and serving society (most considered the role of minister, by definition, to be one of social value and usefulness). Bowdoin College, however, did not grant divinity degrees. Why, then, would students who hoped to enter the ministry enroll?

Bowdoin College graduate John Marsh Mitchell provides a revealing example. An impoverished student from Norway, Maine, Mitchell began his studies at Bowdoin in 1839. Although he taught school in nearby Freeport, received scholarships from the American Education Society, and was employed sawing wood for the college, a lack of financial resources consistently threatened Mitchell's enrollment. Yet Bowdoin offered Mitchell an extraordinary opportunity to prepare for usefulness, one that he acknowledged upon his arrival in Brunswick. Rooming with an equally impoverished "chum" in college housing, Mitchell observed at the end of his first day at Bowdoin:

We then sat down to supper in our own room, for we are compelled by poverty to live it at little expense as is possible. After supper we engaged in studying until about nine o'clock, and after a short time was spent in reading and in conversation we retired to rest for the first time as members of college within these consecrated walls; and I was about to say, would that it might be the last time, but no, rather let me be content to remain and endeavour by the grace of God to prepare myself for usefulness, and so to improve the talents entrusted to me that I may at the last great day hear the welcome sentence pronounced to me "come ye blessed of my father, enter into the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." (Mitchell, 1839)

Beginning a successful teaching career while still enrolled, Mitchell moved to Alabama following his graduation in 1843 and taught for another six years. Eventually receiving a divinity degree from the College of William and Mary, Mitchell spent almost 25 years as a minister in Alabama and Georgia before eventually returning to Maine (*General Catalogue*, 1950).

In *The Pursuit of Knowledge Under Difficulties*, Joseph Kett describes the

rise of a culture of self-education during the early 18th century, as well as the growing popularity of “useful” knowledge in antebellum America. “In the context of eighteenth century assumptions,” Kett writes:

colleges could best serve the public by turning callow youth into leaders of public life. Yet the effect of colleges on public life was by no means restricted to offices held, discoveries made, sermons preached, causes pleaded, or patients cured by their graduates, for collegians absorbed from their student years, and especially from the student literary societies, a culture of self-education and mutual improvement that they projected into their later lives and habitats. In the eighteenth century the ideal of liberal education was bound intimately to that of self-education, both in the general sense that a liberal education included the acquisition of qualities of character, for example, the habit of placing civic duty above self-interest, and also of many subjects—history, the law of nations, modern polemics, and modern poetry—that rarely formed part of the collegiate curriculum. (Kett, 1994, pp. 14-15)

Paralleling Kett’s emphasis on students’ self-education and acceptance of civic duty, historian J. M. Opal’s study of the teaching of “emulation” as “a new formula for a distinct kind of personal change” in the early national period helps explain why Bowdoin students such as Moses Parker Cleaveland were so concerned with achieving “public attention and esteem” through their usefulness to society (Opal, 2004). Identifying emulation as a “latent social trait” as well as a “new cultural goal,” Opal describes the ways in which northern academy students were encouraged to emulate or “match *and surpass* someone else in esteem and honor” (Opal, 2004, p. 447, italics in the original). “Emulation rested on admiration for great deeds and figures,” writes Opal, “That was ambition, early national style” (Opal, 2004, p. 469). Opal’s analysis concludes that emulation “rested on preeminence among peers and within the grand republic, rather than on control of land and dependents; it rested in ‘distinction,’ instead of ‘independence’” (Opal, 2004, p. 469).

As Kett and Opal suggest, Bowdoin College students who were engaged in higher learning during the early decades of the 19th century were frequently predisposed toward self-improvement and acquiring the capacity to apply knowledge in contributing to the common good through their vocations. Acknowledging their desire for occupational advancement, students sought social status not as an end in itself but as a result of their civic service and usefulness to society. That institutions of higher

education such as Bowdoin promoted this behavior as the ideal for their graduates is hardly surprising, for it fit well with the prevailing social ethos.

As the century progressed, however, “the insidious influences of a creeping commercialism,” to borrow from Jurgen Herbst’s (2004) analysis of the 1828 Yale Report, refashioned America’s prevailing social ethos into one that emphasized social status as achieved through material wealth. Indeed, as historian Jack Lane notes, the Yale Report can be considered a response to the early commercialization of American society. Interpreting the report as a “neorepublican” document, Lane argues that republicanism was on the wane in America even during the early national period. “Even as the revolutionaries and postrevolutionaries expounded republicanism,” Lane writes, “historical forces were reshaping American culture and drastically altering the concept.... After the founding of the new nation, expanded economic development in commerce and industry ... seemed to depend on personal drive and ambition for its survival” (Lane, 1987, pp. 325-338). If Lane is correct, it is hardly surprising to find at least some graduates from Bowdoin College’s first decades becoming merchants rather than engaging in a liberal profession.

Nevertheless, the rise of commercialism in the United States was, as Herbst characterizes it, “creeping” rather than sudden. Although the development of an urban, industrial, class-stratified society in America was persistent, it was also incremental, with the “republican” factory system of Lowell, Massachusetts, not giving way to the “jungle” of Chicago’s meatpacking plants until later in the century. By 1885, however, when Leland and Jane Lathrop Stanford established their university, the social ethos of republicanism had, indeed, undergone an important shift, resulting in their founding an institution of higher education that privileged students’ personal advancement at least as much as their contributions to the common good.

STANFORD UNIVERSITY

In early 1884, Leland Stanford Junior, the 15-year-old son of Leland and Jane Lathrop Stanford, died of typhoid fever after traveling with his parents for several weeks throughout the Mediterranean (Tutorow, 1971, pp. 216-217). Grief-stricken by the loss of their only heir, the Stanfords established a memorial university in his name, granting a \$30 million endowment to the institution that was remarkable both because of its size—it was the largest gift in the history of higher education up to that time—and because it represented the fortune that one man could accumulate as a result of changes to the nation’s political economy during the second

half of the 19th century (Tutorow, 2004, pp. 701-741).

Born into a prosperous farming family in the town of Watervliet, New York, in 1824, Leland Stanford was encouraged by his father to enter a liberal profession. He succeeded in his academic studies, completed an apprenticeship in an Albany law firm, and eventually took advantage of Americans' westward migration by establishing a legal practice in Port Washington, Wisconsin. Following his marriage to Jane Elizabeth Lathrop in 1850, Stanford sought greater financial opportunities further west, where his brothers had begun a successful business during the California gold rush. Opening a general store catering to miners in Cold Springs, California, Leland Stanford moved to the state capital of Sacramento in 1855, where he established a series of highly profitable mercantile enterprises (Tutorow, 2004).

Using his newfound wealth and influence, Stanford helped organize the state's Republican Party (California having become a state as part of the Compromise of 1850) and was elected governor in 1861—a position that afforded him authority in maintaining California as part of the Union during the Civil War (Clark, 1931, p. 71; Tutorow, 1971, p. 57-60). It was also during this time that Stanford became involved with the projects that earned him his greatest fortune, the Pacific Railroad Convention (dedicated to extending the system of railroads in California) and the Pacific Railroad Company (dedicated to building a transcontinental railroad). Along with Collis Huntington, Charles Crocker, and Mark Hopkins, Stanford became one of the "big four" railroad tycoons responsible for the construction of the western section of the transcontinental system. On May 10, 1869, Stanford drove the golden spike that joined the Union Pacific to the Central Pacific at Promontory Point, Utah (Lewis, 1959). Having achieved wealth and fame (as well as notoriety) from his association with the railroads, Leland Stanford's political career reached its pinnacle in 1885 when California voters elected him to the U.S. Senate (Clark, 1931, pp. 452, 456-457; Elliott, 1937, p. 6; Tutorow, 1971, p. 254).

Through his commercial achievements, political acumen, and drive to obtain the personal advancement and social status that increasingly accompanied material wealth in American society, Leland Stanford personified many of the political, economic, and social changes that occurred in the United States between Bowdoin College's founding in 1794 and Stanford University's establishment in 1885. Scholars have demonstrated how financial opportunities generated by the opening and exploitation of the American West, the role of mechanization in the development of mass production, the emergence of a consumer society, the development of the railroads, the mass migration of Americans from

rural to urban areas, and a dramatic increase in the stratification of national wealth all had profound effects on the United States' political and economic systems over the course of the 19th century. As historian Alan Trachtenberg has observed, however, these changes also influenced American culture and society, including individuals' perception of their own identities within that society. In his celebrated work, *The Incorporation of America*, for instance, Trachtenberg writes:

Historians have long recognized that changes in business organization were associated with other historical developments such as the rise of the metropolis, a revolution in transportation and communications, and the processes of secularization, bureaucratization, and professionalization. Hardly any realm of American life remained untouched: politics, education, family life, literature, the arts.... Of course, the influence of corporate life on thought and expression is more difficult to identify, though no less significant. And any account of that influence must include subtle shifts in the meaning of prevalent ideas, ideas regarding the identity of the individual, the relation between public and private realms, and the character of the nation. (Trachtenberg, 1982, p. 5)

Trachtenberg's description of the "subtle shifts in the meaning of prevalent ideas" offers insight into the reasons why America's prevailing social ethos became increasingly refashioned from one that defined success in terms of an individual's contribution to the common good during the early national period to one that held personal advancement as an equally legitimate indicator of one's accomplishments during the Progressive Era. Given this shift, it is hardly surprising that Trachtenberg identifies Leland Stanford as one of the "men of business" who "seemed the epitome" of the Gilded Age (Trachtenberg, 1982, p. 80).

During his tenure in the U.S. Senate, which lasted until his death in 1893, Stanford voted along generally Progressive Republican lines. Although opposing the Interstate Commerce Act (which effectively regulated railroads), Stanford supported a series of progressive bills and embraced many of the progressive reforms being implemented in higher education at the time.¹³ Prior to founding their university, for instance, the Stanfords consulted a number of progressive university administrators, including Harvard University President Charles W. Eliot, Massachusetts Institute of Technology President Francis A. Walker, Johns Hopkins University President Daniel Coit Gilman, and Cornell University President Andrew White. Of these, White was by far the most influential

(Veysey, 1965, p. 69). Preaching Ezra Cornell's decree that his institution would be one "where any person could find instruction in any study," White implemented a modernized academic program at Cornell that included science, engineering, and agriculture and successfully lobbied the U.S. Congress for Morrill Act funding, leading Cornell to become New York's land-grant university (Thelin, 2004, pp. 117-118).¹⁴ As a result, Cornell developed into a private institution dedicated to serving the public good, a model that Leland and Jane Stanford adopted (Jordan, 1915, p. 7).

In *The Emergence of the American University*, Laurence Veysey identified service—what he termed "utility"—as higher education's distinguishing characteristic during the Progressive Era.¹⁵ Although utility encompassed a variety of reforms, according to Veysey, they generally fell into two categories: "democratic" and "vocational" (Veysey, 1965, pp. 60-64). Democracy in higher education included such policies as equal access to higher learning (regardless of students' social class, ethnic origin, or gender), equality of the disciplines (with technical fields sharing the same status as traditional fields of study), and the wide diffusion of knowledge throughout society. Vocational reformers, meanwhile, believed America to be "a scene of vocational ambition" and identified occupational preparation as higher education's central objective.

When "The Cornell Colony at Palo Alto," as Stanford University was known, opened in 1891, it demonstrated utility's democratic as well as vocational characteristics (Elliott, 1892). Stanford was tuition free (making it more affordable to working class students than the nearby University of California, Berkeley) and generally accepting of students who had not attended prestigious college preparatory schools (Jordan, 1892). The university admitted both women and men and was open to all races and ethnicities (Douglass, 2000; Elliott, 1937; Kimball, 1905; Swett, 1911). Moreover, Stanford University President David Starr Jordan (a Cornell graduate whom the Stanfords hired on White's recommendation) embraced the notion of utility (Jordan, 1922, p. 690). Like Bowdoin College's Joseph McKeen, Jordan believed that college graduates incurred a responsibility to advance the common good through their life pursuits (Scott, 2006, p. 25). "The higher education means the higher sacrifice," Jordan declared in his 1896 commencement address to Stanford's second graduating class, "That you are taught to know is simply that you may do.... You shall seek your place to work, as your basis for helpfulness" (Jordan, 1896, p. 12).

According to biographer Edward McNall Burns, Jordan's educational philosophy revolved around his conception of a democratic republic as one in which "the government was guided by and responsive to an

intelligent public opinion.” “A people would have as good a government as their intelligence and civic-mindedness deserved, and no better,” Burns wrote of Jordan’s beliefs:

To create the intelligent public opinion which alone would make genuine democracy possible Jordan believed was the peculiar mission of the universities. In large part it would be a long-range process.... But there were also certain ways in which higher education would contribute to making democracy effective here and now. It would distribute among the masses a steadily increasing proportion of educated citizens whose duty it would be to exert their influence toward raising the level of public thinking. They would help to make and sustain wise laws and ‘stand for good, for right living and right acting in the community.’ They would also function as sensitive barometers to detect any lowered pressure of civic responsibility and to warn the citizens of approaching storms (Burns, 1953, pp. 171-172).

Of course as Jordan was aware, the university’s modernized academic program, which included disciplinary specialization, technical training, professional schools, pure science, and applied research, contrasted dramatically with the classical curriculum offered in the early 19th century at colleges such as Bowdoin.¹⁶ For progressive educators, however, this was a difference in means rather than ends. Stanford University existed to “fit the graduate for some useful purpose,” as the institution’s founding grant dictated, and Jordan argued this could be accomplished through the study of philosophy as well as engineering, literature as well as ichthyology (Jordan’s field of expertise; “Stanford University,” 1971; Burns, 1953, p. 155-157). “Those who have called a college education unpractical,” Jordan wrote in *The Sequoia*, a Stanford student publication that was part editorial page and part literary journal, “have in mind the college education of twenty to fifty years ago, the traditional course of study which we have inherited from Oxford and Cambridge.” He continued:

These English schools were avowedly for the training of clergymen and gentlemen, and our American colleges were patterned after them. For many years all other vocations of life were outside the scope of what was called Higher Education. Now this condition is rapidly changing. It is the business of the American university to give the best possible training in any direction of intellectual effort. There is no honorable calling in life that

cannot be made a learned profession. There is none which should be permanently outside the scope of the university (Jordan, 1893, pp. 112-113).

Believing that a higher education obliged graduates to contribute to society regardless of the course of study they pursued, Jordan expected political scientists to eliminate corruption in city governments, physicians to improve public health, engineers to enhance the quality of life in municipalities, and public school teachers to educate students for competent citizenship (Jordan, 1893, pp. 112-113). Many Stanford faculty members shared his belief. In a 1910 commencement address at the University of the Pacific, for instance, Stanford Physiology Department Chairman Oliver P. Jenkins described “the true degree conferred by the college and its responsibilities” (Stanford University Archives, 1910, p. 10). Acknowledging disagreement as to the “relative value” of varying curricular programs, Jenkins nevertheless asserted that all institutions of higher learning held students’ preparation for service as their “fundamental aim”:

The overpowering need of service and the great rewards of life and gratitude that such service brings, point the way to the trained graduate toward the best fields for his future career. But more than that, the overwhelming cry for help places the heaviest of responsibilities on him who is trained to render the aid....

So with the college graduate who has received the true degree, he must face the fact that the degree carries with it the greatest of responsibilities. He is a coward and worthy of scorn if, on hearing the cry for help from his fellow men, he ignores it and takes his equipment to some pleasant nook and uses his training and powers lone for the gratification of his own cultivated tastes. He does worse still if he makes use of the revelation the university gives him simply to further on his private ambition and gains. (Stanford University Archives, 1910, pp. 14-16)

There is little reason to doubt the earnestness of Jenkins’s declarations, which echo the obligations that Joseph McKeen assigned to Bowdoin College graduates in 1802. Yet as David Starr Jordan observed, times had changed since the early 1800s. Although scientific and technological advances had increased the number of liberal professions from which students could choose, the industrial age altered America’s political economy, giving rise to a significantly stratified society. Aware of these

developments, Stanford's early graduates emphasized their belief that higher education provided a significant advantage in an increasingly competitive job market while also providing a means through which to attain material wealth.

Student-authored university publications, as well as diaries, journals, and letters home, reveal that among the reasons students enrolled at Stanford in its early years, financial advancement was central. In commenting on the number of poor students attending the university in 1893, for instance, the editors of the student newspaper, the *Daily Palo Alto*, wrote:

It should be the earnest desire of every student in the University to encourage and to aid fellow students who by their own efforts are paying their way through college. All of us are students together, with one general aim—to better our present condition in life by acquiring the best education from the liberal opportunities within our reach. (Editorial, 1893, p. 2)

Similarly, the editors of *The Sequoia* described the professional benefits they believed students, especially women, received from attending Stanford. "Higher education," they observed,

is becoming less and less of a luxury. Competition in professional life of every kind, whether it be school-teaching or medicine, is driving professional men and women farther each year toward adequate preparation. A college education to-day gives a teacher a better choice of positions than she would have without it. Tomorrow it may be a necessary qualification without which she could get no position. ("Editorial," 1895, p. 98)

Finally, some students, such as class of 1900 graduate Frederick Jewel Perry, explicitly described the financial return they expected to receive from their investment in higher education. Perry, whose father's early death caused his family financial hardship, frequently wrote home about his university experience and hopes for the future. Three months prior to his graduation, for instance, he warned his mother:

You must not pitch your hopes too high in expecting me to command a \$75 a month position at the first rattle out of the box. This is not an age of miracles. Remember—though I am (or shall be then) a college graduate—with all that means—I shall be an inexperienced greenhorn and full of University theory. But time

will tell, though. And someday I'll be drawing down a salary that will compensate for all the expense incurred in securing what few enjoy and none can take away—a university education. (Stanford University Archives, 1896-1900)

A retrospective compiled 30 years following the graduation of Stanford University's class of 1896 provides a valuable record of alumni's occupational choices. Of the original 176 class members who entered Stanford as freshmen in 1892, 131 were men and 45 were women. Of those, 52 chose teaching as their first occupation following graduation (30 women and 22 men), 31 became attorneys (men), 18 became physicians (3 women, 15 men), 15 became engineers (men), 15 chose business (men), 10 became professors (1 woman, 9 men), 7 chose writing or journalism (3 women, 4 men), 5 became ranchers or farmers (men), 3 became librarians (women), 2 each chose science, the military, and municipal utilities (men), 1 chose accounting, 1 architecture, and 1 mining (men), and 5 served as homemakers (women). Six graduates died before beginning their careers.¹⁷ Moreover, by 1926 many of these graduates had moved onto second careers, with 17 becoming professors (1 woman, 16 men), 16 becoming elected or appointed public servants (men), 11 becoming school principals or superintendents (3 women, 8 men), 11 moving into business (men), 6 becoming editors (2 women, 4 men), 4 moving into municipal utilities (men), 2 becoming ranchers (men), and 13 becoming homemakers (women; of the 45 female class members, 27 had been or were married 30 years later).¹⁸

As with Leland and Jane Stanford following their son's death, at least some of these graduates planned on using the wealth and social status they acquired during their careers to contribute to the public good. Perhaps one of Stanford's most celebrated alumni, Herbert Hoover, best exemplified this intention. His parents having died when he was a boy, Hoover arrived in Palo Alto at the age of 17 with an extremely modest inheritance and a limited secondary school education. Struggling with the university's entrance exams, he nevertheless demonstrated an intensity and determination that impressed Stanford mathematics professor Joseph Swain. Admitted to the university's first graduating class, Hoover "listened and was thrilled," according to biographer George Nash, when Leland Stanford announced on opening day that the university was to "fit" students for a "useful career" while contributing to "the general welfare of humanity" (Nash, 1983, p. 28).

Intending to pursue a lucrative engineering career, Hoover sought out renowned geologist and future Stanford University president John Casper Branner as his advisor. To finance the cost of books, room, and

board, Hoover worked as Branner's office assistant and, during the summers, served as an assistant to the United States Geological Survey as well as the Geological Survey of Arkansas (Nash, 1983, pp. 29-32). Nash observes that Hoover benefited greatly from his Stanford experience. "It had reinforced, in secular terms, the lessons of his Quaker relatives," writes Nash, "that one should live productively, that life is meant for accomplishment, that one ought to do 'conscientious work.'" Nash also writes that David Starr Jordan's commencement address, which affirmed those lessons, had an "enduring impact" on Hoover. "The highest value of tradition lies in the making of it," Jordan proclaimed in his speech. "The noblest wealth is the wealth of promise.... In helpfulness alone, can wealth or power find consecration" (as quoted in Nash, 1983, p. 40).

In his memoirs, however, Hoover recalled that along with the satisfaction of graduating from Stanford came the "sinking realization" that a "new era" was opening for him, one he confronted "with only \$40 in cash" (Hoover, 1951, p. 24). Securing employment with a San Francisco engineering firm, Hoover began inspecting mines throughout the American West. During this period, he also established himself as professional mining engineer, publishing a series of essays in journals such as *Mining and Scientific Press* and *Engineering and Mining Journal* (Hoover, 1951, p. 26). Eventually recommended for a position as an inspecting engineer with a British firm, Hoover traveled to Australia, where he became superintendent of a profitable mine, and then on to China, where he was charged with surveying existing mines and negotiating a series of agreements with representatives of the Chinese government (Nash, 1983). As Hoover's expertise grew, so did his social stature. He married Stanford graduate Lou Henry, was influential in elevating the status of the mining profession, espoused politically progressive positions on labor unions and laissez faire capitalism, and became a Stanford University trustee (Nash, 1983, pp. 486-490).¹⁹

Historian Edwin Layton, Jr. has identified the many ways that Herbert Hoover personified the engineer as a member of a broad-based social reform movement. In his work, *The Revolt of the Engineers: Social Responsibility and the American Engineering Profession*, Layton describes how engineering's evolution included the development of a professional identity through which progressive engineers conceived of themselves as "agents of social progress" who could apply "engineering knowledge and methods" to answer many persistent social problems of both urban and rural life in America (Layton, 1971). Serving as "an effective leader who could knit together the diverse strands of the engineers' thinking and combine them in a practical program of social action," Hoover, accord-

ing to Layton, “combined technical excellence, professional dedication, and eminent public service in a highly personal blend” (Layton, 1971, p. 179). Hoover’s success, however, also resulted in his amassing substantial wealth. By 1914, he was, as George Nash writes, a “modest” millionaire (Nash, 1983, p. 570).

The year 1914 also proved a turning point in Hoover’s life. When Germany invaded neutral Belgium on August 4 and Great Britain responded by declaring war against Germany, Hoover, who happened to be in London, quickly helped establish the “American Citizens’ Relief Committee” to assist stranded Americans in returning safely to the United States. By October, Hoover had helped to found the Commission for Relief in Belgium (CRB; Burner, 1979, pp. 73-75). “For years,” historian David Burner writes, “Hoover had been remarking to visitors from Stanford that he wished to embark on some great public service for America” (Burner, 1979, p. 74). The Belgian crisis provided Hoover with that opportunity. When German troops invaded Belgium, they claimed the small nation’s foodstuffs for themselves, leaving Belgians to starve.²⁰ Hoover’s mission, through the CRB, was nothing less than feeding the entire civilian population of an occupied nation in wartime. “People do not lie down and die of sheer starvation,” Hoover later observed of the humanitarian crisis,

they don’t have a chance. They lose resistance to contagious disease, which does the rest. In practical effect, two of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse—Famine and Pestilence—are synonymous. However, we quickly got the worst of these disasters remedied (Hoover, 1951, p. 172).

The CRB was, according to David Burner,

the first recorded moment in history in which a group of humanitarians contained on such a scale the civilian suffering brought about by war. In previous wars as much as a third of belligerent populations had died of famine; the relief work done under Herbert Hoover saved hundreds of thousands of lives. (Burner, 1979, pp. 74-75).

Hoover called the relief effort, “The greatest job Americans have undertaken in the cause of humanity” (as quoted in Burner, 1979, p. 74). The CRB, however, also placed Hoover directly in the international spotlight. When the United States declared war against the Axis powers, President Woodrow Wilson established the position of U.S. Food

Administrator and offered Hoover the post (his work, in part, led to the establishment of the U.S. Food Administration in 1918). When the war ended, Wilson asked Hoover to lead U.S. humanitarian relief and reconstruction efforts in Europe, the history of which Hoover recorded in his four-volume work *An American Epic* (Hoover, 1959-1964). Americans and Europeans credited Hoover with feeding tens of millions of people throughout the war and postwar eras, from Belgium in the west to the USSR in the east (Burner, 1979). It is perhaps not surprising, therefore, that Hoover's rise in American political circles was meteoric. Both Democrats and Republicans identified him as a possible candidate for the 1920 U.S. presidential election, while independent progressives aggressively supported his candidacy (Best, 1975). Choosing not to run, Hoover declared his affiliation with the Republican Party and accepted the position of Secretary of Commerce in the Warren G. Harding administration.²¹ In 1928, Americans elected Herbert Hoover President of the United States.

CONCLUSION

Leland and Jane Stanford would undoubtedly have been pleased that their fortune provided for Herbert Hoover's higher education. A young man from modest origins who obtained personal success by acquiring significant material wealth through his occupational pursuits, Hoover eventually dedicated his life to public service. In this regard, Hoover fulfilled Stanford University's "purpose" of promoting the public welfare as well as its "object" of qualifying students for personal success. What the Stanfords would think of 21st century students' approach to higher education, however, is less clear. The Association of American Colleges and Universities, for instance, recently conducted a series of focus groups with college-bound high school students, as well as college juniors and seniors, in an effort to gauge their understanding of the purpose of higher learning. Identifying "preparation for personal success" as the college and university outcome students most valued, the researchers confirmed a trend that was evident as early as the latter part of the 19th century. Personal success, as defined by the acquisition of material wealth through preparing for and obtaining a lucrative profession, has become students' central priority.

A second finding, however, that the research team characterized as "most alarming," was indeed disconcerting. The researchers noted that students ranked "civic responsibility" as a college education's *least* important outcome and that they demonstrated *little if any* interest in a course of study that would prepare them to contribute to society as well as

engage in occupational pursuits. “Today’s students,” the research team concluded,

understand that college is important to their success in the work force, but they do not recognize its role in preparing them as citizens, community participants, and thoughtful people. They do not expect college to enable them to better understand the wider world; they view college as a private rather than a public good. (Schneider & Humphreys, 2003, B20)

In an effort to confront undergraduates’ apathy toward higher education’s civic functions, proponents have fostered a movement to promote colleges and universities’ public purposes. Organizations such as The National Forum on Higher Education for the Public Good gather college and university faculty and administrators, community leaders, and state higher education officials in an effort to significantly increase “awareness, understanding, commitment, and action relative to the public service role of higher education in the United States” (<http://www.thenationalforum.org/>). Respected educators such as Thomas Ehrlich (currently a Senior Scholar at The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching) advocate for higher education’s civic responsibilities through their scholarship (Colby et al. 2003, 2007; Ehrlich, 2000).²² And tens of millions of dollars in financial support from the U.S. Department of Education as well as private foundations fund national initiatives designed to promote higher education’s public purposes, such as “Faculty for the Engaged Campus,” a project administered by the Community-Campus Partnerships for Health in collaboration with the University of Minnesota and the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill (<http://depts.washington.edu/ccph/faculty-engaged.html>).

Advocates of colleges and universities’ civic responsibilities frequently cite historical precedent to support and justify these programs, which they perceive as collectively representing a counterweight to students’ treatment of higher education as a private good. In a recent work entitled *Dewey’s Dream: Universities and Democracies in an Age of Education Reform*, for instance, Lee Benson, Ira Harkavy, and John Puckett contend that higher education is currently “in the early stages of its third revolution” and that the University of Pennsylvania’s involvement with West Philadelphia’s public schools is an example of the kind of civic engagement John Dewey envisioned for the university (Benson, Harkavy, & Puckett, 2007). What Benson, Harkavy, Puckett, and many other proponents of higher education’s civic functions frequently fail to acknowledge, however, is the strikingly different social, political, and economic

context in which their advocacy currently takes place.

Early in the 19th century, a social ethos that defined personal success by an individual's demonstrated commitment to the public good strongly influenced the development of higher education institutions, such as Bowdoin College, as well as the vocational choices that college graduates made when they hoped to become, in the words of Bowdoin's Moses Parker Cleaveland, "serviceable" to their "country and to society." And why would they not have? Students would have been acting in socially atypical ways had they enrolled in an institution of higher education for primarily personal gain (Cohen, 2002, p. 365). Yet changes in America's political economy over the course of the century led to the refashioning of this social ethos into one that, while maintaining a commitment to civic ideals, privileged graduates' personal advancement through the acquisition of wealth.

At the beginning of the 21st century, a social ethos of private advantage, which defines personal success solely in terms of material wealth, has fostered and legitimized undergraduates' conception of higher education as a consumer good through which one prepares for employment in a "lucrative" rather than a "liberal" profession. For the proponents of higher education's civic functions, then, the absence of a social ethos that takes contributing to the public good as a central concern poses a significant impediment. As this study has attempted to demonstrate, history can offer a valuable perspective on current efforts to foster civic mindedness on college and university campuses. However, as the cases of Bowdoin College and Stanford University suggest, if higher education is to become a genuine contributor to America's civic life, it behooves educators to identify innovative strategies that directly confront and combat students' assumptions regarding higher education's private purposes—assumptions that have been forged in the fire of a social ethos that assigns priority to self-interest at all costs. Without such innovations, it seems unlikely that few long-lasting changes will occur.

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Notes

1. For evidence of this shift, see Schneider and Humphreys (2005), B20.
2. For a historiography of republicanism in the early national period, see Shalhope (1982).
3. See <http://www.compact.org/> ; <http://www.nationalservice.org/>
4. On the ways that institutions of higher education are currently accelerating this trend, see Engell and Dangerfield (2005) and Gould (2003).
5. For one proposed “action-oriented strategy,” see Benson and Harkavy (2002).
6. On Bowdoin’s history, see Calhoun (1993), Cleaveland (1882), Hatch (1927), Whiteside (1970), and Helmreich (1982).
7. For the Charter and Laws of Bowdoin College, see Calhoun (1993), Appendix I & II, 265–273.
8. For McKeen’s personal history, see *General Catalogue* (1894), especially chapter three.
9. McKeen’s description is one that could easily have been applied to many of the small New England colleges at the time.
10. On the “liberal professions” for which New England colleges educated students in the early 19th century, see Bowen, Kurzweil, and Tobin (2005, p. 15), Herbst (2004, p. 227), Thelin (2004, p. 69), and Allmendinger (1957, p. 18).
11. Twenty-eight students, or one-quarter of Bowdoin’s student body in 1829, relied on more than one of these forms of financial support, indicating their extremely limited means (Allmendinger, 1957, p. 12).
12. For a description of the Teachers’ Association of Bowdoin College, see Packard (1838, pp. 33-34). Many thanks to Bill Reese for alerting me to this organization.
13. This legislation included the Blair Education Bill, which proposed \$77 million in federal aid over eight years to address the problem of illiteracy (Jordan, 1922. p. 485). Also see Burns (1953, p. 159).
14. On the history of the Morrill Act, see Johnson (1981).
15. Frederick Rudolph, in his equally influential history of higher education, drew a similar conclusion. Citing Lyman Abbott, Rudolph (1962) wrote, “Abbott decided that the best way to understand the American university was to contrast it with its English and German prototypes. The English university, he concluded revolved around culture, the production of gentleman aristocrats. The German university found its life not so much in culture as such but in scholarship, in erudition, in the production of scholars. The American university ... he saw as a place where the emphasis was placed neither on culture not scholarship but on service, on the preparation of young American for active lives of service” (p. 356).
16. On the rise of the research university, see Geiger (1986).
17. “Homemaker,” a term used in the retrospective, indicates women who did not work outside of the home.
18. Of the 176 initial class members, 137 were still living 30 years later. Of those, 118 provided statements to the retrospective’s editor (although not all of those graduated in 1896; Comstock, 1926).
19. On Hoover’s progressivism, see Joan Hoff Wilson (1975).
20. The war also prevented Belgians from importing much of the 70% of the food they consumed.

21. On Hoover's work during this period, see Hawley (1974).
22. Prior to arriving at Carnegie, Ehrlich was Distinguished University Scholar at California State University, president of Indiana University, provost of the University of Pennsylvania, and dean of the Stanford University Law School.

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