

# FROM COMPREHENSIVE HIGH SCHOOL TO COMMUNITY COLLEGE: POLITICS, MARKETS, AND THE EVOLUTION OF EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY

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## ABSTRACT

This paper provides an overview of the historical role of the community college within the structure of American education. The community college is best understood as the new version of the comprehensive high school. The same contradictory mixture of democratic and market purposes that spurred the rapid growth of the high school helped to produce the expansion of the community college, but also left it with an ambiguous identity and a questionable record of effectiveness. The community college has emerged as the latest and lowest form of higher education. It is the last in a series of tertiary institutions created to serve the vocational needs of a changing economy and the growing demand for educational credentials. Although its predecessors quickly evolved into full-service universities, the community college has retained its junior status and its vocational function. The result is a distinctively American educational institution that is broadly accessible and programmatically comprehensive while promoting starkly stratified social outcomes.

**Research in Sociology of Education and Socialization,**

**Volume 9, pages 203-240.**

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**ISBN: 1-55938-095-4**

*the public junior college will become the characteristic educational institution of the United States, just as the public high school has been up to now.*

—Robert M. Hutchins (1936a)

When the president of the University of Chicago made this prediction in 1936, the public junior college was a growing but still minor presence in the American educational scene. By the 1970s, however, it had indeed become the characteristic educational institution in the United States. The public high school had held this position for half a century by dint of both its rapid ascent and its distinctive form. Between 1890 and 1940, enrollments at American public high schools doubled every ten years, rising from 203,000 to 4,399,000, and the proportion of 14-17 year olds enrolled rose from 3.6 percent to 62.4 percent (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1975, Series H424; Collins 1979, Table 1.1). During this same period, the high school developed a comprehensive structure in which a widely differentiated array of programs was offered to a heterogeneous mix of students under one roof. Both its inclusiveness and its comprehensiveness made this educational institution distinctively American.

The public junior college has followed the high school model closely and it attained a similar institutional status in a much shorter time than its prototype. After an uncertain beginning at the turn of the century, it gradually adopted the same consumer-oriented comprehensive form as the high school, an identity that was confirmed 50 years later by the new label "community college."<sup>1</sup> After mid-century the pace quickened as degree-credit enrollment quadrupled in just 15 years, rising from 1.0 million to 4.3 million between 1965 and 1980 (National Center for Educational Statistics 1987, Table 102). During this same period, the community college share of higher education enrollment rose from 17.5 percent to 35.8 percent (National Center for Educational Statistics 1987, Table 102), expanding the size of overall college enrollment to the point where the proportion of recent high school graduates who attended college reached 51.1 percent (U.S. Bureau of Census 1987, Table 233).

The similarities between the community college and the high school extend beyond their parallel histories to their parallel current status. Both institutions presently suffer from the twin maladies of a confused identity and an uncertain future. Both have been imbued with contradictory purposes, as powerful constituencies have pressed each institution to pursue sharply differentiated and mutually incompatible goals. The result for each has been an erratic compromise path that serves none of the goals effectively and leaves each school open to charges of failure and demands for radical reform. The high school has come under heavy attack in the 1980s, and the community college, while not yet the subject of such a volume of abuse, is showing the early signs of concern generated by a leveling off of enrollments. The present confused condition of these two characteristically American educational institutions reflects in many ways the larger problems of American education in the late

twentieth century. To understand the relationship between the two is to understand something important about how the current educational situation in the United States developed and where it might be headed.

Surprisingly, for such a significant institution, the community college has attracted very little serious historical attention.<sup>2</sup> In this paper, based largely on secondary sources, I do not attempt to fill this gap. Instead, my aim is to try to provide a general sketch of key issues in the historical sociology of the community college, which I intend to accomplish by means of a comparison with two other educational institutions. My argument, in essence, is that the community college is both the *new high school* and the *last college*.

On the one hand, the community college is best understood as the new comprehensive high school of the late twentieth century. As already suggested, it embodies both the successes and the failures that characterize the historical development of the high school. The same contradictory mixture of public and private purposes that spurred the rapid growth of the high school has helped to produce the extraordinary expansion of the community college. Yet these same contradictory purposes lead the latter to reproduce the former's ambiguous image and potential for failure. For better and worse, the community college seems to be replaying the history of the high school, though this time events seem to be rushing by on fast forward.

On the other hand, the community college also shows every indication of playing a rather different role, that of the last of the colleges. It is the last in two different senses of the word—because it is both the latest and the lowest. It is the latest in the series of new collegiate forms that have been created to promote the social goals of political and economic development and then transformed to serve the private goal of individual status attainment. The land grant college edged away from its practical social mission and climbed the educational status ladder toward the more prestigious academic curriculum and university organizational form, largely in response to pressure from students seeking access to upward mobility. This left room at the bottom for the teachers college, which then succumbed to the same pressure and turned itself into a pale version of the university. This in turn left room for the last in the series, the community college, to provide opportunity for a new wave of status seekers. Yet, unlike its predecessors, the community college was confined to the lowest rung on the ladder by strong forces that wanted to see it remain a two-year institution and continue to play its practical vocational role, preventing it from following the same trajectory of institutional mobility that had served its predecessors so well. This barrier to institutional mobility has brought serious social consequences by reducing the chances for community college students to achieve individual social mobility. In this sense, then, the community college is best understood as replaying the history of American higher education, but with mobility prospects placed on permanent pause.

One way of combining these alternative visions of the community college is to think about the college as the old comprehensive high school in a new collegiate form, afflicted with both the traditional contradictions that emerged in the history of the former and the novel restrictions that emerged in the history of the latter. What links these histories are the contradictory concerns for political equality, social efficiency and social mobility, which helped shape the path followed by all three levels of educational institution—high school, community college and university.

### THE NEW HIGH SCHOOL

In one sense, the public junior college originated quite literally as a simple extension of the public high school. As late as the 1930s, 85 percent of these new institutions of higher education were physically located in a high school building (Hutchins 1936a, p. 454). In California and other states where the public junior college developed earliest, it was most often founded and controlled by the local school district and thus housing it initially in the high school made good sense. In this way, as in so many others, the history of the junior college paralleled that of its predecessor. During the nineteenth century, most high schools occupied space in the local grammar school, and as a result there was no clear organizational distinction between a high school and an enhanced grammar school.<sup>3</sup>

Like the high school, the public junior college developed as an extension of the level of schooling below it. And like its predecessor, it also followed a course of development marked by contradictory purposes.

#### Politics Versus Markets: The High School<sup>4</sup>

The American public high school bears the marks of the tensions that have characterized the society within which it developed, a society that is both democratic and capitalist.<sup>5</sup> On the one hand, it had its origins in the same *political* purposes that motivated the founders of the common school. The rapid growth of market capitalism in the first half of the nineteenth century stirred up a powerful current of possessive individualism that Whig reformers saw as a substantial threat to the preservation of republican community and Protestant morality. A rise in the opportunity for the pursuit of private gain, and in the legitimacy of this pursuit, promised to undercut the civic virtue and public morality that formed the classic prerequisites for a successful republic. In an effort to respond to this threat without shutting off the wealth-creating capitalist engine, reformers created a variety of new institutions. The most comprehensive and durable of these was the common school, which was designed as a place that would draw together students from all social classes

and imbue them with a shared vision of responsible citizenship and public service. The result would be to help recreate the republican community in the face of growing class divisions and self-interested commercial pursuits, and thus help save political equality from the ravages of economic inequality.

The founders of the high school saw it as a natural extension of the common school, serving the same goals. For example, when the former president of the school board addressed the alumni of Philadelphia's Central High School in 1859, he described the purpose of the school (which he helped found) with a paroxysm of republican rhetoric:

It is the School of the Republic,—it is emphatically the School of the People—founded by the people—maintained by the people—educating the people—controlled by the people—responsible, under God, to none but the people. Such as the purest spirit of Republican Equality—such as the truest philanthropy would have it—such is it (Dunlap 1859, p. 15).

And when a former state superintendent of schools toured the same school shortly after it opened, he noted with satisfaction that its curriculum strongly supported this political mission:

The course of instruction is in every way calculated to attach [students] to the institutions of our country, to fill their minds with a devotion to our republican government, and inspire them with a laudable ambition to become useful and eminent citizens of the community in which they live (Philadelphia Board of Controllers 1842-1843, p. 56).

At the same time that it served as a republican hedge against capitalist encroachments, the public high school also took on the characteristics of a *market* institution. One way it came to play a market role was by becoming established as an important gateway to *social mobility*<sup>6</sup>—offering individuals the opportunity to compete for badges of merit (educational credentials) that offered a legitimate form of privileged access to desirable social positions. Unlike the elementary school, the high school was highly selective, unrepresentative, and consumer-sensitive. Very few students actually attended high school during the nineteenth century—as late as 1890, high school students still accounted for only 1.6 percent of all elementary and secondary enrollments (National Center for Educational Statistics 1987, Table 28)—and only a small proportion of these succeeded in graduating. Thus, while access to high school was formally open, the experience was anything but common (Cohen 1984). Most families simply could not afford to lose the earnings of teenagers while they attended high school, and even those who wanted to attend had to pass an examination in order to gain admission. As a result, the early high school had a clientele that was tiny and disproportionately upper middle class, and its market position—especially in the larger cities, where there was typically only one institution for the entire population—was extraordinarily strong.

In a market society, therefore, where social stratification was seen as the natural outcome of interpersonal competition, the most attractive thing about the early high school was not its promise of republican socialization but its offer of preferential social selection. And the secret of its ability to carry through on this offer was its very uncommon-ness, the fact that, unlike the common school, it carried a cachet born of market scarcity. Gradually the new institution became an integral part of the process by which its middle-class constituency socially and culturally formed itself.

The problem was that in a democratic society it proved politically impossible for officials to limit access to this valuable cultural commodity for very long. The market exclusiveness that made the high school attractive to its clientele contradicted the political inclusiveness that gave the common schools their legitimacy. The result was growing pressure to expand the opportunity to attend high school, which in the 1800s led to a strong surge in secondary enrollments that continued for the next 50 years. This development constituted a victory for the democratic political aims of the high school, but it posed a problem from the perspective of social mobility, because wider access threatened to dilute the exchange value of high school credentials for its traditional middle-class clientele.

At this point, the high school began to assume a second and very different kind of market role, one that was based less on individual concerns for social mobility than on collective concerns for *social efficiency* (see note 6). At the end of the nineteenth century, business leaders, politicians and educators started to talk openly about the problem of how high schools could best serve the needs of the economy. They argued that the country's hopes for economic growth rested on the ability of schools to provide students with the differentiated skill-training required by an increasingly specialized and stratified occupational structure.

Caught in the midst of these contradictory purposes—political equality, social mobility, and social efficiency—educators arranged a compromise solution for the high school by introducing curriculum tracks at the same time that they opened the doors to new students. Four tracks developed during the first two decades of the twentieth century, each leading to its own particular social outcome: academic (leading to college and the professions), commercial (leading to white collar business positions), mechanical (leading to engineering), and industrial (leading to the factory). For a time it appeared that these tracks would be located within different schools, but the undemocratic implications of such a rigidly stratified system led eventually to the formation of that characteristically American institution, the comprehensive high school. This provided access to secondary education for everyone within a single school but also provided for a sharply stratified set of educational experiences under that one roof. The result was an institution that tried simultaneously to serve both political democracy and capitalist markets—allowing for inclusive

enrollment, exclusive credentials (as the lower tracks drained off the flood of new students and thus protected the upper track from a potential devaluation of its credentials), and efficient allocation of personnel.<sup>7</sup>

For the rest of this century, the high school has held onto the compromise model evolved during the Progressive era. The results of this compromise are mixed, as suggested by the title of Cohen and Neufeld's 1981 article, "The Failure of High Schools and the Progress of Education." The comprehensiveness and accessibility of the high school represent a major political victory, but one that is undermined by its highly undemocratic stratification of educational experiences and occupational outcomes. This stratified form of education helps protect the market value of academic high school credentials, and thus the high school's differential usefulness for middle-class status attainment, but that value has been watered down by the rising tide of new students that fill the high school and then go on to fill the university as well.<sup>8</sup> The net effect of these contradictory pressures is to produce an institution in stasis, which seems to be a failure at realizing either of its historic goals.

#### Politics Versus Markets: The Community College

The public junior college first appeared at the turn of the century, at the point where the high school assumed the compromise structure that it has kept to the present day. Shaped by the same contradictory impulses toward democratic equality and market differentiation that formed the basis of this compromise, the new institution followed a developmental path that recapitulated many themes from the history of the high school. Like the Progressive-era high school, it sought both to promote inclusiveness and to protect exclusiveness, simultaneously providing for greater opportunity and greater stratification. Over the course of the twentieth century, the public junior college accumulated a series of four distinct social functions that derived from this underlying mix of purposes: the academic-transfer function, the vocational-terminal function, the general education function, and the community-adult education function. In the process, it developed a new composite identity—the community college—which embodied this confusing array of functions and left unresolved the longstanding struggle over the central aims of American education.

These four functions are an expression of how the leaders of the public junior college have construed the evolving mixture of purposes that have characterized this institution.<sup>9</sup> I have chosen to use these functions instead of my own analytical categories, politics and markets, in order to make my discussion more compatible with the existing community college literature. Although the fit is by no means perfect, the general education and adult-community education functions largely (but by no means exclusively) serve political purposes,

whereas the academic-transfer and vocational-terminal functions primarily serve the market purposes of social mobility and social efficiency.

In this section, I analyze the history of the public junior college from the perspective of these four successive functions and show how the struggle for its institutional identity paralleled the enduring tensions within the high school.

#### *Academic-Transfer Function (1890s)*

The original impetus for the public junior college came from a series of midwestern university presidents who saw the need for such an institution to guard the gates of the university from a potential flood of students. As early as 1851, Henry P. Tappan (who was named president of the University of Michigan a year later) argued that if the United States were ever going to produce a true German-style university, it would have to purify itself by removing collegiate instruction to another location. He argued that the contemporary American and English "college in distinction from a university is an elementary and preparatory school" (Tappan [1851] 1986, p. 26), whereas a full-fledged university should be devoted solely to research and the pursuit of advanced learning. "In Germany," he stated, "the Gymnasia are really the Colleges" (p. 26), and thus what American higher education needed was its own version of the gymnasium to prepare students for the university and save the latter from this lowly duty. In his 1869 inaugural address, the president of the University of Minnesota, William W. Folwell, picked up the same theme:

How immense the gain . . . if a youth could remain at the high school or academy, residing in his home, until he had reached a point, say, somewhere near the end of the sophomore year, there to go over all of those studies which as a boy he ought to study under tutors and governors! Then let the boy, grown up to be a man, emigrate to the university, there to enter upon the work of a man (quoted in Thornton 1960, p. 46).

It was not until the end of the century that anyone succeeded in creating this kind of intermediate educational institution. In 1892, President William Rainey Harper separated the four undergraduate years at the University of Chicago into two halves, first calling them the "academic college" and the "university college" and then four years later changing the names to "junior" and "senior" colleges (Thornton 1960, p. 46). In an address to the National Educational Association in 1900 he argued that junior colleges should be created in large numbers, both by converting many small colleges into two year institutions and by extending high school into six year institutions. The benefits of such a change would be substantial, for "the money now wasted in doing the higher work superficially could be used to do the lower work more thoroughly," and "the student who was not really fitted by nature to take up the higher work could stop naturally and honorably at the end of the sophomore year" (Harper [1900] 1986, pp. 57-58). At Harper's urging, the city of Joliet, Illinois founded



Joliet Junior College in 1901 as an extension of the local high school, making it probably the first independent public junior college (or at least the earliest that is still in existence) (Palinchak 1973, p. 27; Zwerling 1976, p. 47). Others followed suit—in Minnesota, Missouri, Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas, and especially California—so that by 1915 there were 19 such institutions and by 1921 the number had risen to 70 (Brick 1963, Table 1).

With the enthusiastic support of Stanford President David Starr Jordan and University of California Dean Alexis F. Lange, California quickly took the lead in the development of public junior colleges. In 1907 the state legislature authorized high schools to add two years of postgraduate instruction onto their normal four-year course and later granted permission for these extensions to be called junior colleges. Then in 1921 it authorized the establishment of independent junior college districts, and within five years the number of public junior colleges in the state had risen to 31, with 16 attached to high schools, 6 connected to state colleges, and 9 with independent status (Palinchak 1973, p. 79; Tyler 1969, p. 158). By 1929, 17 states had passed laws providing public support for junior colleges (Levine 1986, p. 175) and the number of such institutions nationally had grown to 178 (Brick 1963, Table 1).

In light of the history of American secondary and higher education (and the political and market pressures that shaped this history), it is not surprising that the leaders of America's universities initiated the junior college movement and that they did so at the start of the twentieth century. For one thing, they had good reason to want to buffer themselves from the glut of late nineteenth-century institutions that called themselves colleges. In 1880 the United States had the largest number of colleges per million population that it has ever had before or since (Collins 1979, Table 5.2), and at the same time it had more students attending college than were attending high school (National Center for Educational Statistics 1987, Tables 28 and 100). Under these unfavorable market conditions, most colleges found themselves competing with high schools for students. In such undistinguished company, the universities had a powerful incentive to promote a clearly differentiated hierarchy of schools, in which each level would screen students for the next higher level. Thus, during the 1890s the National Education Association's Committee of Ten established guidelines for a college preparatory high school curriculum and its Committee on College Entrance Requirements proposed a standard system for measuring high school credits (which evolved into the Carnegie unit) (Krug 1964). As a result of these and other efforts by university presidents, a hierarchy did begin to take shape at the turn of the century—leading from grammar school to high school to college to graduate and professional school. The junior college was simply a further elaboration of this emerging pattern of structural differentiation within American education, creating an additional level between the high school and the university.

In addition, universities were responding (perhaps a bit prematurely) to the sharp increase in high school enrollments that began in 1880 and seemed likely to continue indefinitely. If it proved politically impossible to bar open access to secondary education, how could higher education resist the pressure from a growing number of high school graduates seeking admission to the university? The junior college seemed to provide an answer. The University of Chicago's James R. Angell argued in a 1915 article on "The Junior-College Movement in Our High Schools,"

Where . . . the press of undergraduate students is so great as seriously to embarrass the facilities of the institution (this is the case in many of the large state institutions as well as in some of those under private endowment), it is not unnatural that a welcoming hand should be held out to any movement which promises to lessen the number of these undergraduates (p. 292).

Later in the same article he put the case more bluntly: "there is a good deal of evidence to indicate that anything which would serve to discourage some of our applicants for college entrance from actual attendance on the institution would be enormously in the interest of all concerned" (Angell 1915, p. 294). Berkeley's Lange reinforced this argument by asserting the pressing need for "the University to reduce its 'swollen fortune' in freshman and sophomores by actively promoting their distribution among federated colleges, normal schools, and the six-year high schools that are to be and will be" (quoted in Thornton 1960, p. 48).

This growth in demand for access to college began to materialize in the 1920s, bringing about two significant developments: individual colleges started to restrict the number of students admitted and junior college enrollments began to increase sharply (Levine 1986; Wechsler 1977). From the perspective of universities early in this century, therefore, the function of the junior college was to protect their market position by draining off excess demand. It could provide students with a general academic education, preparing the most worthy for pursuit of advanced study at the university while screening out (in Harper's words) "the student who was not really fitted by nature to take the higher work." Thus the public junior college at its inception bore the marks of the same compromise between access and differentiation that characterized the birth of the comprehensive high school. Like the high school, the junior college satisfied the democratic demand for expanded educational opportunity while protecting the exchange value of elite educational credentials and promoting the efficient allocation of students into the job structure. Just as the high school funneled newcomers into the newly created lower track curricula, the university sought to channel the lower-middle-class and skilled-working-class students who were beginning to graduate from high school into the newly created lower track in higher education, the junior college. The net result in both cases was "to lessen

the number” of students in the upper track and thus preserve the relative scarcity of the credentials offered by preparatory programs within the high school and by advanced programs of study in the university.<sup>10</sup>

The public junior college, therefore, first appeared in significant numbers shortly after the comprehensive high school, and it emerged from the same contradictory impulses that led to the creation of the latter. Like the transformed high school, it reflected a compromise between the demands of democratic politics (promoting political and social equality) and capitalist markets (promoting social efficiency and individual mobility) that was expressed as a combination of expanded access and enhanced educational stratification. The early promoters of the junior college saw it as a new level in the pyramid of American education, which was located between the high school and the university, providing an outlet for the graduates of the former and a buffer for the elite position of the latter. The dream of these founders was for the junior college—either as a separate organization or as an extension of the high school—to become institutionalized in this role so that the university could abandon its first two years entirely, producing a progression through the educational levels that would move students from elementary to junior high to senior high to junior college to university (in the form 6-3-3-2-2; or perhaps, in an upgraded high school variant, 6-4-4-2) (Palinchak 1973, pp. 43-45; Brick 1963, pp. 79-87). The ultimate failure of this dream is best understood in light of the additional functions that were loaded on the public junior college during the course of the twentieth century.

#### *Vocational-Terminal Function (1920s)*

The same circumstances that brought about the creation of the public junior college as an academic-transfer institution also quickly led proponents of the new college to add a second function—providing terminal vocational programs for those students who proved unfit for promotion to the university. In the absence of such programs, these educators asserted, the students who did not transfer would be left with an education that prepared them for an eventuality that did not materialize. Thus the junior college needed to focus its attention on meeting the special needs of these terminal students. As a result, as one observer noted, “No topic received greater attention and more agreement among the community-junior college national spokesmen during the 1920s and 1930s than the importance of terminal education in the junior college” (Goodwin 1973, pp. 140-141). Dean Lange took an early lead in advocating this role for the new school, and like later proponents he defined it as more important than the transfer role. In 1917 he declared:

The junior college cannot make preparation for the University its excuse for being. Its courses of instruction and training are to be culminal rather than basal . . . The junior

college will function adequately only if its first concern is with those who will go no farther, if it meets local needs efficiently, if it enables thousands and tens of thousands to round out their general education, if it turns an increasing number into vocations for which training has not hitherto been afforded by our school system (quoted in Thornton 1960, p. 51).

Once again the junior college mirrored the high school, for it was also in 1917 that concern about secondary vocational education reached a high point, as the U.S. Congress passed the Smith-Hughes Act providing funds for high school vocational programs; and it was only one year later that the Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education announced that vocational training was one of the "cardinal principles" of high school education (Krug 1964). However, junior college leaders wanted vocational training within these institutions to provide preparation for higher level positions than the vocational programs in high school. One speaker at the 1928 meeting of the American Association of Junior Colleges (AAJC)<sup>11</sup> spelled out the special aims and characteristics of vocational training at junior colleges in terms of what he and other spokesmen liked to call "semi-professional" occupations:

More than all . . . it is necessary to set up a series of courses which have been designated as terminal in character. Various phrases have been used to describe the content of these courses. One name with reference to them has been that these courses are semi-professional. It is certain that these courses must be above the level of routine and handicraft vocational courses that are given in high school. These students will undoubtedly enter vocations that have a great deal of routine work in them. This routine, however, will be above the manipulative level. Perhaps it can be said that the thing that will characterize the semi-professional courses will be that they will prepare students to live on the level of intellectual routine rather than manipulative routine. Junior engineers in architects' and engineers' offices will be examples. The nursing profession is another. People who enter these vocational fields will be the masters of certain definite bodies of technique and will be expected to use intelligence of a rather high order in their work. They are distinctly below the highly professional specialization that takes place on the university level (quoted in Goodwin 1973, p. 157).

Both the high school and the junior colleges in the 1920s and 1930s were heavily influenced by a discourse of social efficiency. Although they both promoted vocational programs in part as a way to provide students with expanded opportunity (appealing to aspirations for political equality and social mobility), they both also dealt explicitly with the differential social outcomes that awaited students in the different tracks within each institution. Like the high school, the junior college was designed to prepare students in the top track for positions in upper management and the professions via the university and to prepare students in the terminal-vocational tracks for less elevated positions in the occupational hierarchy. However, while high school vocational programs were supposed to get

students ready for skilled manual work, junior college vocational programs were supposed to get them ready for middle-level positions in which they would perform routine forms of white-collar work. In order to fill the latter positions with well-trained workers, the junior college would have to keep turning out a large number of graduates from its terminal programs.

But, unfortunately, junior college students often had other ideas. A large majority of the students saw the junior college as a convenient and inexpensive (often tuition-free) way to acquire two years of college credits and then transfer to a four-year institution. Apparently unswayed by the attractions of the semi-professions, they dauntlessly pursued a bachelor's degree as the entree to the good life. Levine (1986) provides a vivid account of the middle class "culture of aspiration" that emerged between the two world wars and which reformed this class around a model of socialization and status attainment that increasingly required a four-year college education. Pursuing a B.A. became a part of what it meant to be middle class in America, and thus for working-class and middle-class students to abandon this pursuit, by enrolling in a terminal program at a junior college, was to give up on the hope of upward mobility.<sup>12</sup> This situation left junior college leaders thoroughly distraught. Walter Crosby Eels, a Stanford professor who later became executive director of the AAJC, expressed alarm over the problem at the association's 1929 meeting:

It will be most unfortunate if the junior college becomes so successful as a popularizing agency that it makes all of its students plan on full university courses. Probably the proportion of those continuing should be nearer fifty than ninety per cent. This report of ninety per cent is a distinct danger signal ahead (quoted in Goodwin 1973, p. 106).

During the 1920s and 1930s there emerged a noticeable gap between the social efficiency aims of junior college leaders and the mobility orientation of the students, faculty, and administrators of the individual junior colleges, as the national leaders pushed terminal education and the others continued to focus on transfer programs. Surveys of junior colleges revealed that the proportion of total course offerings devoted to terminal courses grew only modestly in spite of all the pressure in this direction from the national leadership, rising from 17.5 percent in 1917 to 28.0 percent in 1921 and 33.0 percent in 1930, and then leveling off at 32.0 percent in 1947 (Thornton 1960, p. 51). When Leonard Koos examined the catalogues of 23 public junior colleges in 1923, he found that 22 stressed college preparation in their statements of purpose while only 12 even mentioned vocational training (Koos 1924, I, Table 5). A similar review done in 1930 found that the transfer function was emphasized more than the terminal function in two-thirds of the 343 catalogues examined (Levine 1986, p. 178).

Both political and market pressures have made the local leadership of public junior colleges wary of pushing vocationalism too hard. As publicly supported

organizations with voluntary attendance, these colleges have had to depend on the community for both funding and enrollments. The messages they have received from these sources have been mixed. Government and business have often promoted a social efficiency goal (which led the junior colleges to emphasize vocational training), while the consumer preferences of the local constituency have often stressed the goal of social opportunity (which led the colleges to emphasize transfer to the university). Thus in order to maintain political support and sustain enrollments, public junior colleges have been compelled to be quite sensitive to the continuing significance of these colleges as local mechanisms for achieving upward mobility, even if this has meant backing off on the training of semi-professionals (Levine 1986, pp. 180-181).

*General Education Function (1940s)*

The academic-transfer and vocational-terminal programs define the polarities of function that have characterized both the American high school and the public junior college during the course of the twentieth century. Writers about the junior college have agreed on the nature of its bifurcated goals even though they disagree about the consequences of this split. Those who see these colleges as agents for reproducing social inequality argue that this combination of aims serves to draw students in with the false promise of upward mobility and then "cools them out" by blunting their aspirations and diverting them into vocational programs. From this point of view, transfer programs provide a cover of legitimacy for the college's real task, which is to channel working-class students back into working-class jobs (Karabel 1972, 1986; Pincus 1980, 1986; Zwerling, 1976). However, those who see community colleges as agents of meritocratic opportunity argue that this combination of functions is essential in order to provide students with the possibility of acquiring the training necessary to perform in the widest possible range of occupational roles. From this point of view, a broad mix of courses provides the community college with a comprehensiveness of function that allows it to realize the promise claimed but never achieved by the early high school and early land-grant college—to serve as an all-purpose "people's college" (Palinchak 1973; Cohen and Brawer 1982; Diekoff 1950; President's Commission on Higher Education 1947).

It is important to understand that these polar functions both serve market purposes. Programs in both tracks are seen as mechanisms for gaining preferential access to a good job; both define schooling as an adjunct to the occupational structure; and both represent a divergence from the political and moral aims that motivated the founders of the high school. The primary difference between the two is merely in the level of job for which one's educational credentials can be exchanged. Moreover, the tension that the pair of functions introduces into education is over the relatively narrow issue of

which market goal should be stressed—individual mobility or social efficiency, creating opportunities or filling slots.

The other two functions for the public junior college that emerged over the course of the twentieth century, general education and adult-community education, are interesting because they represent at least a partial break from the market-centered functions that defined the institution's core concerns during this period. Both suggest the possibility that this college might evolve away from its market role and acquire a more community-centered place for itself in the educational environment, potentially playing down the creation of human and cultural capital and playing up the production of social, political and personal competencies.

A concern about "general education" has been prominent in the rhetoric of the public junior college throughout its history, but the term has carried two quite different meanings. By one construction, it is seen as an important adjunct to vocational education, which helps to round out the social efficiency of this form of training. The basic argument from this perspective is that vocational students need more than narrowly-defined job skills in order to be effective workers and good citizens. In addition to vocational techniques, they need training in morality, civic responsibility and cultural awareness. The discussion of this function by junior college leaders is strongly reminiscent of the arguments raised by industrialists in the 1840s who wrote to Horace Mann about the usefulness of common school education in training factory workers. In their letters, these men stressed not job skills (which common schooling did not provide) but the salutary occupational effects of education more generally. As one of them put it, "I have found the best educated, to be the most profitable help." The reason for this occupational superiority, he asserted, was that "I have uniformly found the better educated as a class possessing a higher and better state of morals, more orderly and respectful in their deportment, and more ready to comply with the wholesome and necessary regulations of an establishment" (Mann 1842, pp. 93, 94).

Nicholas Ricciardi, California Commissioner of Vocational Education and later a junior college president, echoed these sentiments 85 years later. In 1927 he wrote about the need for general education as an adjunct to vocational training.

Industry is realizing more and more clearly that the heart and the hand function best when the heart is right; and character building makes the heart right.

Industry wants well-trained workers of character. The chief concern of the schools is to train young people so that they may develop into efficient workers and citizens of character. Industry and the schools, therefore, should join hands to establish the kind of training program which will accomplish the ends which they have in common (quoted in Goodwin 1973, p. 121).

In remarks before the 1940 AAJC convention Ricciardi quoted approvingly from another vocational education advocate who made the point more graphically:

I can teach a person to become an efficient locksmith, but whether or not he becomes a socially useful citizen depends on what we give him besides the skill and technical knowledge required to make or repair locks; whether he goes out to repair a lock or to pick it will depend on his social understanding (quoted in Goodwin 1973, p. 122).

The link between vocational and general education was indissoluble in the minds of leaders such as these. As one commentator put it,

Although community-junior college national spokesmen continued to make verbal distinctions between social-civic and vocational aspects of terminal education, they did not really think that there was any basic difference between training a student to be a good citizen and training him to be a good worker (Goodwin 1973, p. 142).

Yet the junior college literature also contains another vision of general education that was unalloyed with vocationalism. This vision harks back to the broad concerns with civic virtue and moral education, which were prominent in the common school movement and which were part of an effort to protect the republic from markets rather than simply to train docile workers. Although the discussion of general education among junior college people did not become prominent until the 1930s and 1940s, this broad construction of the subject was visible from the beginning of the junior college movement. The transfer curriculum itself was seen as providing a general liberal arts education preparatory to the specialized studies a student would encounter in the university. James Angell concluded his essay on the junior college movement with the claim that the development of this institution should "disseminate in the commonwealth more widely than ever before the desire for sound learning whose perfect fruit is sanity of judgment and sobriety of citizenship" (Angell 1915, p. 302). Robert Hutchins developed this theme in his 1936 essays on the junior college, in which he argued that the primary purpose of this institution should be to provide a broad spectrum of the population with "a good general education" that was quite distinct from job preparation (Hutchins 1936a, 1936b, p. 602), while of course protecting the university from having to play this role.

A number of prominent leaders of the junior college movement expressed strong support for the view that a junior college education should amount to more than narrow preparation for the university or the workplace. This view extended beyond the normal confines of an argument for the liberal arts over vocationalism, an argument that within the junior college was subsumed in the debate over transfer versus terminal programs. The rhetoric defined a much broader, more inclusive and less traditional educational role for the junior



college than as a purveyor of the humanities. For example, in 1941, Walter Crosby Ellis, AAJC executive director during World War II, stated the case as follows:

Increasingly is there need for young people to be prepared better for civic responsibility, social understanding, home duties and responsibilities, law observance, and devotion to democracy. At a time when the democratic way of life and of government is on trial as never before, it is essential to have a well-educated and intelligent citizenry. Educated leadership is not sufficient. Educated fellowship is also essential. On the whole the university tends to select and educate young people of superior native ability and intelligence. In a democracy, however, the vote of the citizen of moderate or inferior native ability counts quite as much in the ballot box as the vote of the genius (quoted in Goodwin 1973, p. 110).

The political arguments for general education in the public junior college attained a prominent place in the 1947 report by President Truman's Commission on Higher Education. This report made a strong case for the rapid expansion of what it referred to as the "community college," arguing that "The time has come to make education through the fourteenth grade available in the same way that high school education is now available" (President's Commission on Higher Education 1947, I, p. 37). A key element of the charge given to this expanding sector of higher education was to carry on the important work of spreading general education. In bold-face type, the report put it this way, using rhetoric that sounds remarkably similar to that found in the Life Adjustment movement that was then the rage in American high schools:

Today's college graduate may have gained technical or professional training in one field of work or another, but is only incidentally, if at all, made ready for performing his duties as a man, a parent, and a citizen. Too often he is "educated" in that he has acquired competence in some particular occupation, yet falls short of that human wholeness and civic conscience which the cooperative activities of citizenship require . . .

The crucial task of higher education today, therefore, is to provide a unified general education for American youth. Colleges must find the right relationship between specialized training on the one hand, aiming at a thousand different careers, and the transmission of a common cultural heritage toward a common citizenship, on the other (President's Commission on Higher Education 1947, I, pp. 48-49).

#### *Adult-Community Education Function (1960s)*

With a helpful boost from the Truman Commission, it became increasingly common during the 1950s to refer to public junior colleges as "community colleges." The growth of the fourth function, adult and community education, served to reinforce this trend because this function cast the college in the role

of an all-purpose institution devoted to service to the community. By 1960 all of the pieces of the contemporary community college were in place. This latest incarnation of the public junior college came to be defined as a publicly subsidized and locally controlled post-secondary educational institution with open admissions, low-cost tuition and a bulging catalogue offering an extraordinary range of courses and other services pitched at every conceivable segment of the community. Compared to the other three functions, adult and community education is thoroughly heterogeneous. One defining characteristic of this function is that it represents a marked shift away from the transfer curriculum, because many of these new courses are not taken for degree credit. Many offerings are not even courses but take the form of college-sponsored community activities.

As was the case with general education, however, adult and community education at the community college displays a mixed relationship to the market. On the one hand, many of these offerings are courses, seminars, workshops and lectures aimed at providing continuing on-the-job vocational training for a wide variety of occupational groups. Whether it is a real estate agent seeking a cram course for a licensing exam, a computer programmer requiring an introduction to Pascal, or an employee of a school for the deaf who needs training in sign language, the local community college is willing and able to provide what is needed. In general, courses in this category are offered for degree credit even if students who take them are frequently unconcerned about pursuing degrees.

On the other hand, many of these offerings are entirely disconnected from instrumental market concerns. Adults in the community may take a course in aerobic dance or color photography or European history or remedial English just because of personal interest or an urge for self-improvement, and not with the idea of accumulating credits for a degree or cashing in on the educational experience to obtain a promotion. Like courses in continuing vocational education, these courses may or may not carry college credit. Statistics on community college enrollments, including those cited elsewhere in this paper, are normally limited to those students taking courses for degree credit. This plus the informal character of community education offerings makes it difficult to estimate enrollments in this area accurately, but these enrollments have certainly been booming. One source estimates that noncredit enrollments in community college amounted to about 4.0 million in 1980 (Cohen and Brawer 1982, p. 259) while degree-credit enrollments totaled 4.3 million.

While both traditional transfer and vocational community college students are on average older and attend part time more often than other college students, adult and community education students are even more likely to demonstrate these characteristics. They are not using the college for the time-honored purpose of acquiring a degree in order to gain entry to a particular occupation. Instead, they are using it as either a support institution for their

present job or as a place to pursue personal enrichment and community activity. Both purposes tend to draw older people who already hold full-time jobs. This added adult- and community-education function, therefore, has radically increased both the size and the heterogeneity of the student body at the community college.

Again, note the parallel to the high school, where adult and community education courses offered at night and on weekends have also become a big business in recent years, representing a natural outgrowth of its longstanding role as a broad institution serving community needs. Like the high school, the community college has come to assume a broad social service role in the community. Thus during its relatively short history, the community college has quickly taken on four major functions—college preparation, vocational training, general education, and adult and community education—that have expressed the same mix of sociopolitical and market purposes that shaped the history of the old people's college, the American high school, during its much longer institutional existence. The end result is a complex comprehensive institution that, like the high school, has many of the characteristics of a huge shopping mall (Powell, Farrar and Cohen 1985). Like shoppers in a mall, community college students are given access to a wide range of educational commodities in a setting that combines elements of democracy and commerce. Just as the mall serves as both a community center (providing a public space for social interaction, recreation, information and even political rallies) and a marketplace, the community college provides opportunities for community enrichment and individual status attainment.

## THE LAST COLLEGE

The community college has in many ways recapitulated the history of the high school, but there is a limit to this parallel. The key difference is that the community college has never been able to achieve the thoroughgoing comprehensiveness attained by the high school. True, the educational purposes, course offerings and student bodies of the two institutions are marked by a similar degree of heterogeneity;<sup>13</sup> however, there are two factors that have prevented the community college from taking on the full role of the comprehensive high school, and both have to do with the fact that attendance there is voluntary.

First, unlike the original version, the new high school lacks the legal sanction to compel students to take its classes, and therefore its student body does not represent the same cross section of the community. Second, unlike the high school, the community college has not succeeded in establishing for itself an exclusive rung on the educational ladder. There is little that the community college offers that cannot be acquired somewhere else. It provides access to

the university, but students can always choose to bypass this step by entering a four-year institution of higher education directly from high school, and most of them do. Vocational training is available in high schools, proprietary schools, county-level intermediate units and on the job. General education and adult-community education are offered in a wide range of settings including high schools, universities, community organizations, continuing education centers, places of employment and commercial seminars.

Lacking the high school's authority to treat nonattendance as truancy and also lacking its exclusive control over access to desirable educational products, the community college does not benefit from the same legal and market pressures that compel high school students to attend. This absence of compulsion makes the community college more like a shopping mall than the high school is, because it must be particularly sensitive to shifting demand in the market—forced to find ways to attract a wide range of consumers who can always choose to go somewhere else or stay at home. The result is an unselective school that is highly dependent on student self-selection (Clark 1960). A pure creature of the market, the community college achieves comprehensiveness only to the extent that it succeeds in its entrepreneurial effort to attract as many different kinds of customers as possible. The early high school was also such a creature, but it evolved into an institution whose comprehensiveness was guaranteed and survival assured by compulsory attendance.<sup>14</sup> In contrast, the community college, like an aging shopping mall, must constantly hustle to keep from being outflanked and outclassed by the competition. In this free-wheeling and uncertain environment, competitive failure could mean either a radically altered structure of students and programs or simple extinction.

Viewed from this perspective, the community college looks less like the new comprehensive high school than like the latest form of college. As Trow (1988) points out, the American college and university are unique among the world's institutions of higher education in their vulnerability and responsiveness to the market. The history of higher education in the United States is a story of entrepreneurial institutions that took advantage of every market opportunity and eagerly serviced every possible segment of consumer demand in order to ensure their own survival and enhance their standing in the status hierarchy. In this sense, the community college has merely been following in a path of institutional mobility that was carved out of the wilderness by the first American colleges (spurred on by the personal mobility aspirations of the educational consumer) and then worn smooth by their many successors. The problems that the latest of the colleges encountered along the way have been the result of its position at the end of a very long procession.

## College Expansion—Protected Markets and Institutional Mobility

The pattern of expansion in American higher education has always been to create a new form of college to deal with each new wave of college enrollments. First came a group of private colleges, many of them founded before the revolution, but with a rapid growth in numbers throughout the next century; then, in the nineteenth century, came a series of state universities; these were followed by a number of secondary public land-grant colleges and universities in each state;<sup>15</sup> early in the twentieth century, the growth industry in higher education was teachers' colleges; and finally, in the 1960s, the community college took over that role.

The new colleges in this educational succession have usually been at a competitive disadvantage. The older schools have held most of the strong cards. Relative to newcomers, the first college founded in a given market area had a loyal constituency, an established reputation, stable sources of public and private funding (including a solid endowment), credentials with a proven exchange value, a set of alumni occupying powerful positions, and a strong association with the social elite (who were most likely to attend college when no one else was). The result of these advantages is that the older colleges were more likely than the newer schools to have the edge in political and economic power, social reputation, ability to enhance status, faculty quality, student selectivity, student academic ability and social class.<sup>16</sup> A recent reputational ranking of American national universities provides some insight into the impact of age of founding on college status ("America's Best Colleges" 1988, p. c12). The oldest universities dominate the list. Of the top 25 universities, 15 are private institutions including 13 out of the top 15. Only one university on the list was founded in the twentieth century (UCLA), while 19 were founded before the end of the Civil War and seven were founded before 1800 (*World Almanac* 1987, pp. 234-250).

The colleges that emerged in the later waves of expansion—land grant schools, teachers' colleges and community colleges—were thus left to occupy the lower tiers of this stratified system of higher education. The colleges from the first two waves used their superior influence to protect themselves from the growing number of students pursuing postsecondary education by introducing new institutions at each spurt in enrollments. The problem they confronted was the same one that faced the early high school. The exchange value of a college's credentials is a function of their relative scarcity in the credentials market. Thus the demand for these credentials is likely to be highest—and the institution's prestige most elevated—when access is most restricted. For a school to provide its students with the competitive advantage they seek in the pursuit of social status, it must keep enrollment from expanding too rapidly. Yet from the point of view of democratic politics, such a policy has proven to be unacceptably elitist, threatening to undermine the school's

legitimacy. Private colleges were partially buffered from this problem, but public colleges were politically unable to ignore it. Creating new forms of higher education instead of expanding the old ones was a way to meet the political demand for access to college while protecting the market position of existing colleges.<sup>17</sup>

At each stage of expansion, the new colleges and universities had a number of characteristics that marked them off from their predecessors. First, of course, they were more accessible to the kind of students who never attended the older colleges. But in addition, beginning with the land-grant college and continuing through to the community college, the expansion schools were generally assigned to play a more practical-vocational function than those that preceded them.<sup>18</sup> The new type of college, while drawing off increasing enrollments, was not supposed to provide direct competition with existing colleges for their traditional constituency. This meant not only creating new colleges but also making sure that they were functionally differentiated from the old ones. The resulting system of higher education would then be able to play a social efficiency role, allocating differentially trained graduates to positions in a stratified job structure.

The emergence of the land-grant college provides the best early example of this process. The private and public colleges and universities that were founded before the Civil War tended to adopt a fairly traditional educational role. They provided a standard academic undergraduate education as a preparation for students who sought to enter the professions, a role that served the aspirations of their upper-middle-class constituents nicely. But the Morrill Act of 1862 mandated an explicitly practical and vocational purpose of the new land-grant colleges, one that was justified by a mixture of human capital theory and democratic theory. The idea was that these colleges were good investments for the country because they would provide it with an enhanced set of agricultural and mechanical skills that would spur economic development and because they would simultaneously provide opportunities for higher education to a broader spectrum of the population. These purposes were spelled out clearly in the Act, which required that the proceeds from each state's land grant should be used for

the endowment, support, and maintenance of at least one college where the leading object shall be without excluding other scientific and classical studies, and including military tactics, to teach such branches of learning as are related to agriculture and the mechanic arts, in such manner as the legislatures of the States may respectively prescribe, in order to promote the liberal and practical education of the industrial classes in the several pursuits and professions in life (quoted in Eddy 1957, p. 33).

These land-grant funds were used to endow existing state universities, to found such universities in states that had none, and to launch new secondary

state colleges in states that already had a university. These schools generally reflected the concerns for practicality and accessibility embedded in the law, but this was most obvious in the case of the latter category. State universities (especially those that existed before the act) came to adopt an all-purpose curriculum stretching from liberal to practical education, from professional to vocational training, while the second-tier land grant schools tended to take a more narrowly "A and M" approach from the start. Initially, this meant that private colleges and the liberal programs in older state universities remained comfortably buffered from the new students enrolling in the new lower track in higher education—the clearly differentiated practical programs and colleges.

What happened in the late nineteenth century, however, was a powerful trend within American higher education toward adoption of the German university model, with its stress on graduate and professional education and on faculty research (Veysey 1965; Rudolph 1962). This university model provided a sharp contrast to the land-grant model, which threatened to widen the gap between the two new tracks in higher education. While the former stressed research and advanced academic study, the latter tended to stress teaching and vocational skill training. As was true in the differentiated high school curriculum that emerged at the same time, the upper track focused on providing students with a credential with a high exchange value, while the lower track aimed at providing them with an education distinctive for its use value.

In a society that is imbued with the values of democratic opportunity and upward mobility, it is hardly surprising that students and educators proved reluctant to settle for a lower track college program when the upper track offered access to the most attractive social positions. As a result, land-grant colleges and universities, urged on by the market pressure from ambitious students, embarked on a campaign of institutional mobility in pursuit of the new university ideal. This meant shifting the emphasis from practical-vocational to academic-professional education and from undergraduate instruction to graduate research. The change occurred unevenly and it took time, but the results were dramatic. By 1955, for example, most land-grant schools had become full-fledged universities, enrolling 20 percent of all students in higher education but granting nearly 40 percent of all doctoral degrees (Zwerling 1976, p. 56).

As land-grant colleges climbed the hierarchy of higher education, the vocational education that had been central to their original mission fell increasingly into the hands of the expanding comprehensive high school and junior college. But at the turn of the century a new wave of colleges emerged to meet another growing practical need, the production of schoolteachers. State teachers' colleges, many of them outgrowths of old secondary-level normal schools, appeared in large numbers. Like the land-grant schools, their initial mandate was to stick to a narrow vocational goal. But the state teachers' college found itself subject to the same market pressures that faced its predecessor,

as students began to demand that these schools provide an opportunity for a liberal education whose exchange value was higher in the status attainment market than a teaching certificate (Herbst, 1989; Levine 1986). Gradually during the twentieth century these schools evolved into state liberal arts colleges, and by the 1970s most had been transformed into regional state universities.

This brief look at the impact of market pressures on the development of higher education presents a picture of an institution at odds with itself. Older colleges have consistently sought to confine increases in college enrollment within new institutions that are defined by a narrowly practical mission. As agencies of social efficiency and stratified mobility opportunities, new institutions were supposed to prepare the new students for lower level social positions and thus protect the status of older colleges as the exclusive gateway to the better social positions. However, the lower-track colleges resisted this assignment and actively modeled themselves after the upper-track institutions, seeking and achieving university status. One result was the rise of a plethora of multipurpose universities and a shift from vocationalism to liberal arts. Another result was the emergence of a new hierarchy of higher education based less on the practical-liberal distinction and more on the differentiated exchange value of university credentials. Furthermore, the market advantages enjoyed by the institutions that were founded earliest tended to place them at the top of this structure, with each new wave of expansion institutions deployed at successively lower strata. In short, with colleges succumbing to political pressure for wider access and consumer pressure for a kind of credential that would enhance the chances for social mobility, the structuring principle of American higher education evolved from social efficiency to stratified credentialing.

#### Junior College Expansion—An Undefined Market and Blocked Mobility

Representing the last wave of college expansion, the community college at the end of twentieth century finds itself on the bottom rung of the status hierarchy in higher education. Like those that protected it, this new college has been assigned a narrowly defined vocational mission. But, as its predecessors discovered, consumer pressure has not favored the fulfillment of this mission. In a society where status is distributed to a significant degree based on the exchange value of educational credentials, a college offering a degree with use value (skill training)—providing access only to the less attractive forms of routine white collar work—is at a severe competitive disadvantage. Such a college in fact serves to block student mobility chances. Historically, the credentials market has provided a partial solution to this problem by allowing students to get a boost up the social ladder by riding on the back of an upwardly mobile college.



As the last in a long discussion of colleges, however, the community college faces two problems that restrict its ability to follow the path of institutional mobility forged by its predecessors. One, as I have discussed earlier, is its failure to establish for itself an exclusive position in the educational progression leading from primary school to secondary school, college and graduate school. Unable to capitalize on its ambiguous identity as both extended high school and junior college, the community college never succeeded in defining itself as the prime route for making the transition from high school to the university, but instead remained as a lower-track alternative route. The other problem is that it fell victim to the mobility experience of its predecessors, as legislators and business leaders refused to allow it to pursue the same path toward isomorphism with the university. Seeking to preserve its vocational mission within the socially efficient division of educational labor, public and private officials have generally been able to block institutional mobility for the public junior college and its community-college heir by denying it the right to award the all-important bachelor's degree, thus freezing it in a permanently junior status within higher education. My aim in this section is to explore the process, unique in the history of higher education, by which the community college has been pressed to retain its vocational role in spite of consumer resistance, and to examine the negative implications of this effort for community college students.

As we have seen, the rhetoric of the leaders of the public junior college movement has strongly supported an emphasis on its vocational function. Once the early leaders of the movement—university presidents who were primarily interested in the screening function of the new college—gave way to the next generation in the 1920s, vocationalism became the dominant motif in the speeches and literature emanating from the upper levels of the AAJC. This effort was frequently a frustrating one for these men because individual colleges persisted in offering programs that were primarily aimed at preparing students for transfer to the university. Student demand for this service coupled with the market sensitivity of entrepreneurial junior college leaders<sup>19</sup> encouraged these schools to resist a full commitment to vocational principles. While one form of market pressure did push these local leaders into a partial involvement with vocationalism, as the skill demands of local businesses encouraged the creation of a variety of specially tailored training programs, these programs remained in a minority position for a long time.

Efforts at the national and state level, however, were more successful in creating an ideological climate that favored a vocational role for the junior college and establishing a permanently subordinate status for this institution that would freeze it in that role. The Carnegie Foundation was one national organization that played an important role in shaping the discourse on vocationalism.

The 1932 Carnegie panel of educational experts . . . asserted that a public junior college that emphasized its university preparatory function rather than its terminal vocational function was undemocratic. The team recited the litany of complaints against ambitious local educational entrepreneurs and parents and students. It sharply criticized local districts for their slavish imitation of "expensive, higher-type schools" (Levine 1986, p. 182).

Another was the Truman Commission, whose 1947 report on higher education encouraged the expansion of the community college as an agent of both vocational and general education (President's Commission on Higher Education 1947). Thirteen years later the Eisenhower Commission proposed that the community college should take on half of all college enrollments and that it should see terminal vocational training as its primary function (Zwerling 1976, p. 63). Then in 1970 another Carnegie report on higher education argued the case for preserving the junior status of the community college in order to maintain its vocational function:

The Commission believes that public two-year community colleges should be actively discouraged by state planning and financial policies from becoming four-year institutions, as has happened in some cases . . .

There is . . . concern that, if two-year colleges become four-year colleges, they will place emphasis on occupational programs and thus leave an unmet need in the local community (Carnegie Commission on Higher Education 1970, pp. 15-16).

Two federal laws helped reinforce the vocational role of the community college. The Vocational Education Act of 1963 and the Higher Education Act of 1972 broke new ground by providing federal funding for vocational education at the postsecondary level, money that had previously been granted only to secondary schools. The money was specifically directed toward community colleges, with the second act explicitly "excluding any program to prepare individuals for employment in occupations . . . to be generally considered professional or which require a baccalaureate or advanced degree" (quoted in Karabel 1972, p. 545). These laws formalized the status of the community college as the vocational track in American higher education.

Two states also played a leading part in trying to fix the function and status of the community college. Early on, California set up a three-level system of higher education consisting of community colleges at the bottom, the California State University (CSU) campuses in the middle, and the University of California (UC) system at the top. The state's Master Plan, adopted in 1960, established a structure of differential access that granted high school graduates open access to community colleges but restricted admission to CSU to the top third of the class and limited admission to UC to the top eighth (Zwerling 1976, pp. 68-69). In 1948 New York established a stratified state university system in which community colleges would play the familiar role of absorbing the bulk of the projected increase in enrollments and would serve primarily a

vocational-terminal function (Martorana 1969; Zwerling 1976, p. 71). The state Regents argued that the community college offered "distinctive services" and as a result, "existing two-year colleges should not be converted to four-year baccalaureate college status as an approach to the expansion of college programs in any region of the state" (quoted in Palinchak 1973, pp. 96-97).

Over the opposition of these national leaders and state authorities, some junior colleges did succeed in making the transition from two-year to four-year status. Detroit Junior College, for example, emerged as an extension of Detroit High School in 1917, then became a four-year school called the College of the City of Detroit in 1923, and evolved into Wayne State University ten years later (Hanawalt 1968). More recently, one study found that between 1953 and 1964, 72 junior colleges became senior colleges. However, only 11 of these were public institutions; the rest were private or religiously affiliated. These last two categories of colleges had increasing trouble competing with the rapidly expanding publicly supported schools, and they developed into or merged into four-year schools simply to survive. Also, because they were not subject to public authority, they were free to pursue institutional mobility in spite of opposition from public officials (Palinchak 1973, pp. 94-95). As one commentator sadly notes, such a change tends to shift the focus away from vocationalism: "When a junior college acquires senior college status, its perspective becomes narrower and emphasis shifts to the academic program as being of primary importance" (Palinchak 1973, p. 95).

Not only have community colleges for the most part retained their junior status, but in recent years they have also enjoyed a sudden increase in vocational enrollments. According to Pincus (1986), the proportion of community college students receiving vocational degrees rose from 45 percent in 1970 to 71 percent in the 1980s. Karabel (1986) reports that between 1970 and the mid 1980s, the proportion of community college students enrolled in vocational programs increased from one-third to two-thirds. Meanwhile, the proportion that transferred with junior standing to a four-year college fell to less than five percent,<sup>20</sup> and the transfers that did occur were more likely to be into the less prestigious strata of higher education (regional state universities). This decline in transfer rate occurred in spite of a simultaneous increase in the average class rank of students entering community colleges. In 1970, half of the entering full-time students were in the top half of their high school classes, while in 1982 the proportion had risen to three-quarters, with 20 percent of the students coming from the top quarter (Bernstein 1986). One conclusion that can be drawn from these figures is that the efforts by social-efficiency minded leaders to keep the community college in its place have finally taken hold. Increasingly, students who are looking for a bachelor's degree are bypassing the community college and entering directly into a four-year program, which means that most of those who enter the community college are now already resigned to taking a position within the routine white collar work of the "semiprofessions."

Karabel (1986) argues that the impact of this situation on community college students is uniformly negative. They find themselves locked into the lower track of higher education, which reduces their probability of ever receiving a B.A., and which puts them at a disadvantage in competition for jobs and pay (even when compared with persons with the same number of years of education). There is a growing body of literature that supports this view of the community college as an agent of social reproduction rather than a pathway to opportunity.<sup>21</sup> Dougherty (1987) has done a careful review of the evidence about the effect of community colleges on the status-attainment prospects of their students who aspire to a bachelor's degree. He concludes that, even after controlling for a number of student characteristics, community college students are less likely to earn a B.A. and be hired for a high level job than those who enroll directly into four-year schools because of a three-stage process of accelerated attrition.<sup>22</sup> Community college students are more likely to drop out than four-year students in the first two years of college; they have more difficulty gaining admission to the junior class of a four-year college than does a student who is already enrolled in the latter; and they have a higher dropout rate in their junior and senior years than those who were admitted to a four-year school in the first place.

Scholars have identified a number of factors that promote the attenuated educational attainment of community college students, including:

- a lack of deep involvement by students in community college life as a result of commuter status;
- a student culture that is antiacademic;
- low expectations for student performance by faculty;
- the vocational orientation of community colleges and the downplaying of the transfer option, reinforced by counseling;
- an institutional emphasis on achievement, cognitive skills, and norm-referenced objective tests (as opposed the greater emphasis on nurturing, exploration, and criterion-referenced essay tests in four-year colleges);
- the difficulty of adjusting to a change in schools;
- the preference of four-year schools for their own lower-division students over transfers and the reduced opportunities for financial aid offered to the latter;
- loss of credits in the process of transfer;
- higher academic standards in the four-year colleges;
- and the cultural and psychological stresses that attend social mobility in general.<sup>23</sup>

This evidence suggests that the community college, unlike any previous form of American higher education, has been forced to carry out the land-grant mission of vocational-terminal education. As the last new form of college in

a long queue, the community college has not been allowed to imitate the university as its predecessors were (not even the weak imitation adopted by former teachers' colleges), but has been kept in a junior status playing out a lower-track educational role. The consequences for its students have been to "cool them out," scaling down their aspirations for social mobility and fitting them into the less attractive and rewarding positions in the lower-middle range of the occupational structure. Therefore, in spite of the powerful consumer demand for college credentials that will promote upward mobility, political and business leaders have insisted that the community college continue to act as an agent of social efficiency, thereby blocking these mobility prospects.

## CONCLUSION

An analysis of the historical development and current role of the American community college appears to support the view expressed by such scholars as Karabel, Pincus and Zwerling that, in spite of "false promises" to provide equal opportunity, the primary function of this institution is to promote the reproduction of social inequality. As the evidence at the end of the last section suggests, this conclusion is at least partially justified. But I would like to cast the problem of the community college in a somewhat different light by arguing that the key issue is this: The community college has largely failed to carry out its promises because, in characteristically American fashion, it has promised to produce two contradictory kinds of outcomes. On the one hand, it has presented itself as the most democratic of educational institutions, opening its doors to virtually every adult within commuting distance and offering to serve as the medium for fulfilling a wide range of social and political needs in the community. On the other hand, it has also presented itself as the ultimate market institution, providing training in a wide variety of job skills required by the local economy and offering to serve as the medium for fulfilling the personal aspirations of everyone who seeks to attain a higher position in the existing social structure.

The tension between the demands of democratic politics and capitalist markets is evident in all American educational institutions, but in the case of the community college this tension seems particularly open to public view. On a daily basis, Americans must construct their lives, not "under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances . . . transmitted from the past" (Marx [1869] 1963, p. 15), which include a political structure grounded in equality and a socioeconomic structure grounded in inequality. In the course of trying to make their way in the midst of that historical inheritance, these actors form themselves into social classes, and the peculiar character of the community college is just one result of this class-formation process. Drawing on the discourse of democracy, the members of the less-advantaged classes have

sought to use the community college as a mechanism for making American society more egalitarian; because of the political power of this discourse, these efforts have taken hold within the new institution. At the same time, however, the more privileged classes have sought to use the community college as a way to meet the needs of the existing economic structure, and these efforts too have taken root within it.

At the institutional level, the ideological goals that define the universe of the community college are a concern for political equality and a concern for social efficiency. Between them is a third goal, social mobility, which combines elements of both positions in a discourse that accepts the permanence of social inequality as long as everyone has an equal opportunity to attain a privileged position within it. This social mobility goal is politically charged but market based; it sees the community college as providing individuals with the position they have earned through educational achievement rather than the one they were assigned out of concern for social efficiency. The history of the community college suggests that the tension between politics and markets has played itself out in two rather different ways—as a broad-based struggle for institutional control between democratic and capitalist goals, and as a more narrowly-defined struggle over the nature of its market-based goals between the demand for social mobility and the demand for social efficiency. The latter struggle has been the most visible, as policymakers have sought to impose vocationalism on the community college in the name of social efficiency, while students have sought to use the school as a transfer point in the pursuit of upward mobility. The result is that the community college has not been terribly successful in accomplishing either its vocational or its transfer function. Let us look at the nature of these failures more closely.

Vocational training has been much in favor among community college leaders for most of this century, but students have shown a remarkable ability to contain their enthusiasm for these programs. Until the past decade, they have shown a consistent and strong preference for the transfer option, choosing to look on the new form of college as an inexpensive, accessible and convenient way to pursue an old goal—the attainment of higher social status through the acquisition of a bachelor's degree. Even the recent rise of vocational enrollments seems to reflect less a growing student demand for vocational skill training than the cumulative impact of a variety of social, political, cultural, educational and market pressures that have made the community college a less credible and attractive means of acquiring a B.A. The expansion of public colleges and their ascent to university status has made it easier and more attractive for students who seek a B.A. to enter directly into a four-year institution, especially given the extra problems that confront students trying to follow the transfer route. In addition, credential inflation in the 1980s has reduced the value of this degree, leading to a leveling off of college enrollments and further reducing the incentive to transfer. Therefore, the increase in

vocational enrollments seems to be a result of a reduction in more attractive alternatives rather than a consequence of an increase in the return on vocational training (Bernstein 1986; Pincus 1986).

Although the failure of the vocational function occurred in spite of the best efforts of policymakers (public officials, businesspeople and community college leaders), the failure of the transfer function was, as I have shown, in part the result of a deliberate campaign orchestrated by these same individuals. Over the years, most community college students enrolled in degree-credit programs have expressed an initial intent to transfer to a four-year college, but then an array of pressures have encouraged most of them to switch to a vocational program or drop out. As a result, the community college has not succeeded very well in either of its original approaches to preparing students for the job market. Students found that the college's offer of an entree into the semiprofessions was one that they could easily refuse and that the offer of transfer to the university was one that the college was both unwilling and increasingly unable to carry out.

However, this focus on the failure of the community college as a market institution, which is at the heart of the social reproduction critique, ignores an important lesson learned from the history of the high school. For the high school has also come under heavy fire in recent years because of its failure to provide students with either skill training or credentials that have sufficient credibility to grant these students privileged access to good jobs. As a market institution, the high school too is a failure. Yet, as Cohen and Neufeld (1981) have pointed out, the high school failed in the market role because of its great success in the political role. Providing access to secondary education for the entire population within the walls of a single comprehensive school was a remarkable achievement for an institution that was founded in large part as an expression of democratic principles and a mechanism for promoting republican community. Although partially adapted to market goals by the introduction of educational stratification, this political accomplishment nonetheless had the effect of undermining much of the exclusiveness that had formed the basis for its early market success. Open access reduced the exchange value of its educational credentials and left the high school in a position where it was no longer able to deliver on its promise to provide graduates with a competitive advantage in the pursuit of social status.

Historically, the community college has also embodied a complex mixture of goals. Like the high school, its inability to carry out either of its market functions effectively is understandable largely in light of its accessibility to the widest possible range of the population and its democratic effort to provide programs to meet every conceivable community need. These outcomes are a sign that the community college has achieved considerable success in meeting its political aims. However, from the perspective of marketability, they are a sign that the community college has been forced to adopt a loser's strategy.

The way for a college to provide students with an edge in the race for status attainment is to give them credentials that have a high exchange value. And, as the history of American higher education shows, this can be accomplished by a college that adopts the university model, emphasizes research, focuses on transmitting abstract academic knowledge and restricts admissions. Because of its responsiveness to the goals of both democratic access and social efficiency, the community college has been unable to do any of these things. Instead, it has retained its junior status within higher education, emphasized teaching, focused on the transmission of practical-vocational knowledge, and left admissions wide open.

One solution to the problem of marketability, for each type of school, would be to adapt gracefully to the situation by abandoning both market roles as a lost cause. This would mean self-consciously assuming a role as an inclusive educational institution with a clear mandate to model democratic values and prepare students for participation in a democratic society. Such a change would require the community college to turn its back on both of its oldest and most prominent market functions, university access and vocational training, and instead emphasize the more recent and still subordinate functions of providing general education and community education. To concentrate on the latter would serve important social, political and cultural needs in the community. However, this solution would be quite difficult for the community college to pursue (as compared to the high school) for two reasons—its market position and its claim to legitimacy.

Because it lacks both an exclusive location in the graded structure of American education and the political authority to require attendance, the community college is completely dependent on the voluntary enrollment of students. As a result of this relatively weak position in the market, it (more than the high school) has to be extremely sensitive to the shifting tides of consumer demand. In this society, where schooling is seen as a mechanism for getting a good job, the community college would be likely to lose the majority of its degree-credit enrollments if it disbanded its vocational and transfer programs. Students interested in obtaining vocational and bachelor's degrees in order to impress an employer would drop out, leaving the college with only those students who had an intrinsic interest in the courses they were taking. While this would be a pleasure for the teachers who still had jobs, it would lead to a radical down-sizing and restructuring of the institution. Given the consumer and business pressures on the community college to continue playing its market role and also the college's organizational incentive to survive and grow, this shift in purposes seems unlikely.

The other problem with a democratic solution to the failure of the community college as a market institution is that it would threaten the college's legitimacy. A key part of the social significance of both the high school and the community college is that they keep alive a belief in the possibility of



achieving social mobility and in the existence of a meritocratic distribution of social rewards. To disband the transfer function and focus on vocational training would deny community college students the hope of getting ahead and freeze them in a lower educational track heading inevitably away from the more desirable social positions. The result would be to strip the college of its mantle of legitimacy as the locus of social opportunity, leaving it with the identity of a school for those who aren't worthy of advancement (providing an ironic twist to the once proud title, "poor man's college"). To abandon both the transfer and vocational functions would leave the college with a respectable (though smaller) role as a community-service institution operating independently of the market. But this move would pose serious problems for the legitimacy of American institutions more generally. If the most accessible and socially representative institution of higher education withdraws from the status-attainment process, how are the lower classes in American society supposed to get the opportunity to demonstrate their merit and achieve status?

Like the high school, the community college seems to be caught in a bind that was constructed historically, as it sought to accomplish the contradictory aims of promoting political equality and market inequality within a single institution. Unable to achieve either of these goals very effectively, it is also unable to abandon either of them. Neither policymakers nor its own students seem willing to allow it to focus on the pursuit of a more coherent and internally consistent set of outcomes. Both have a stake in preserving its ambiguous identity even though the social, political and fiscal costs of this effort are high. As a consequence, the community college may well keep muddling along in something like its current form, continuing to make grand promises and to produce disappointing results.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I would like to thank the following colleagues for their helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper: David Cohen, Michael Sedlak, Robert Church, Cleo Cherryholmes and Eliot Singer. I owe a special debt to David Hogan for his stimulating insights and fruitful suggestions.

## NOTES

1. In this paper I will be using the terms "public junior college" and "community college" interchangeably. The former is the original name given to this institution at the start of the twentieth century, while the latter is the name that came to be applied to it after World War II.

2. The standard histories of higher education largely tend to ignore the public junior college, restricting themselves to a brief discussion or a few passing references. For example, see Brubacher and Rudy (1968, pp. 258-67), Rudolph (1962, pp. 351, 443, 463, 476, 487) and Veysey (1965, p. 338). The closest thing to a good book-length critical evaluation of junior college history can be

found in an interesting monograph by Goodwin (1973) on the history of junior college ideology (available only as an ERIC document). Other useful general sources include Diener's (1986) collection of historical documents, Brick's (1963) uncritical history of the American Association of Junior Colleges, and Palinchak's (1973) unfocused and chaotically organized account of the "evolution of the community college." However, the most widespread and accessible historical information is buried within books or articles intended as general overviews of the junior college as an institution. In this category of source, only a few authors attempt a serious historical analysis: Karabel (1972) provides a good brief review of the history of vocational-terminal education in junior colleges; Zwierling (1976) offers an interesting though less rigorous evaluation of the same subject; Levine (1986) includes an excellent chapter on the junior college between world wars; and Dougherty (1988) gives an informative account of the process of community college expansion.

The rest of these historical fragments appear in works whose primary purpose is to promote the community college movement. Examples include: Thornton (1960), Fields (1962), Cohen and Brawer (1982), Bogue (1950), Yarrington (1969) and Eels (1931, 1941). As avid boosters, these authors use history to legitimize the institution and mobilize support for its future expansion. They have contributed to a large uncritical literature on community colleges, now enshrined in its own ERIC database and dominated by the movement's leaders. Such men as Doak S. Campbell, Walter C. Eels, Jesse P. Bogue, Edmund J. Gleazer (all at one time executive directors of the American Association of Junior Colleges) and Arthur M. Cohen (head of the ERIC Clearinghouse for Junior Colleges) have produced the books on the junior college that are most often cited in the literature and most often carried on library shelves. In short, the junior college is a subject that desperately needs scholarly historical attention.

3. The first comprehensive survey of U.S. high schools revealed that these schools contained twice as many elementary students as they had high school students (U.S. Bureau of Education 1893-1894, Tables 1 and 19).

4. The discussion of the historical development of the American public high school in this section is drawn from my recent extended analysis of the subject (Labaree 1988), which, in turn, owes a heavy debt to Cohen and Neufeld (1981), Kaestle (1983), and Krug (1964).

5. This tension is explored in a number of recent scholarly analyses. Among the best is a book by Bowles and Gintis (1986), which focuses on the significance of this tension for social theory, and one by Carnoy and Levin (1985), which focuses on its implications for education.

6. I am grateful to David Hogan for helping me reconceptualize the market role of the high school and community college by suggesting that this role has consisted of two distinct components—social mobility and social efficiency.

7. Hogan (this volume) makes a similar argument to this. He notes that, after the turn of the century, a compromise between "majoritarian" and "meritocratic" pressures produced the comprehensive high school with its distinctive structure of "stratified credentialing."

8. The best basic analyses of problems of supply and demand in the market for educational credentials (and of the inherent tendency toward inflation in the value of these credentials) are found in Boudon (1974), Collins (1979) and Thurow (1972).

9. Among writers on the subject (who, as I discussed in an earlier footnote, are primarily drawn from the ranks of community college leaders), there is universal agreement about the importance of the academic-transfer and vocational-terminal functions. They generally recognize the other two functions, general education and community-adult education, as well and see them as arising after the first two. However, depending on the source, these new functions may be identified by different labels, combined into a single category, or separated into three or more identifiable functions. For example, Goodwin (1973) notes the rise of citizenship and general education goals after the Second World War; Palinchak (1973) describes this change as a shift toward community service; Tillery and Deegan (1985) describe the third function as part of the "community college" phase and the fourth as part of the "comprehensive community college" phase; Cross (1985) calls the general education goal an "integrated" focus and defines

two additional functions, "comprehensive" and "remedial;" and Cohen and Brawer (1982) see a total of five functions, which they call "collegiate," "career," "general," "community," and "compensatory."

10. The public junior college promoted tracking in another sense as well. Not only was it institutionally defined as the lower track of higher education, but it also contained within it two curricular tracks that paralleled the high school—academic-transfer and vocational-terminal. I develop this point in the following section.

11. This group has since been renamed the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges.

12. Karabel (1972) has characterized this tension between students and junior college leaders over vocational education as a form of "submerged class conflict."

13. Obviously, the community college displays considerably more age variation.

14. It is possible to overstate this difference. High schools can only compel attendance to age 16 and they cannot compel motivated compliance on the part of those who do attend. Thus, in order to function with any effectiveness, the high school, too, must seek to please the educational consumer.

15. These waves of expansion are not as neatly defined as this abbreviated categorization might suggest. In many states the previously existing state university later became the land-grant school, while in others the land grant formed the basis for founding a state university. The land-grant stage identified here is intended to represent the increase in enrollments and shift in purpose that affected higher education as a consequence of the land-grant phenomenon.

16. Notable exceptions to this pattern, including such instantly successful latecomers as the University of Chicago and Stanford University, can be explained as the result of extraordinary financial backing and local market conditions.

17. This pattern of growth kept the supply of higher education and the demand for it in relative balance until the 1920s and 1930s, when elite schools began restricting admissions.

18. Zwerling (1976, p. 61) identifies this tendency as an example of what he calls "Zwerling's Law: As the rate of enrollment-increase in any educational system becomes geometric, a second vocational education track emerges."

19. Dougherty (1988) provides a discussion of the entrepreneurial character of community college administrators.

20. There is a problem in estimating transfer rates because of a question about what constitutes the appropriate population to use as a base for such an estimate. Palmer (1986) reports on one California study, which shows that the transfer rate is three percent for all community college students; 17 percent for full-time, college-age students; and 71 percent for first-time, full-time, college-age students who stated an initial intent to transfer.

21. Prominent examples drawn from this literature include: Karabel, 1972, 1974 1986; Pincus, 1980; Zwerling, 1976; Grubb, 1984; Grubb and Lazerson, 1975; and a collection of essays edited by Zwerling, 1986.

22. He likens these successive rounds of elimination to the process of "tournament mobility" that Rosenbaum (1978) found in high schools.

23. The best recent review of the research about factors affecting the attrition of community is found in Dougherty (1987), from which most of these factors were drawn. Other sources used include Bernstein (1986) and London (1986).

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