

FROM SPUTNIK TO THE SPELLINGS COMMISSION: THE RHETORIC OF
HIGHER EDUCATION REFORM

by

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated with love and utmost gratitude to:

Roxanne Mountford, whose early encouragement and mentorship helped launch me upon this voyage;

Tom Miller, whose expansive vision and faith in my scholarship buoyed me through;

My parents, Dale and Alice Ann Johnson, who provided me with the gift of a liberal education;

My uncle and aunt, Karl and Carla Strandberg, my earliest and most enduring academic role models; and

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ABSTRACT

In July 1946, Harry S. Truman formed the first-ever presidential commission on higher education. Since that time, reports by commissioned panels of experts calling for reforms to postsecondary education have proliferated. The Spellings Commission on the Future of Higher Education provides yet the most recent high-profile example of how reformists may shift their sights—and their rhetorical strategies—from primary to postsecondary education. Yet, little examination has been made of how such reports harness the persuasive power of rhetoric to advance their agendas for reform.

In *From Sputnik to the Spellings Commission*, Daylanne Markwardt bridges this gap by bringing tools of rhetorical criticism to bear on the contemporary rhetoric of higher education reform. Drawing upon rhetorical and linguistic theories, she demonstrates how two key metaphors—the first, framing higher education as a means of national defense, the second, likening it to a business or industry—have radically altered the way postsecondary education has been perceived and valued in the U.S. over the past 60 years. She also explores how a number of major ideological appeals have been used to legitimize actions and policies that have brought about sweeping changes to institutions of higher learning since the Cold War. Based upon Jürgen Habermas’s theory of technological rationality, she argues that commission reports have instilled a measurement-oriented, bottom line-driven mindset, whereby the results of postsecondary learning have been reduced to those which are readily quantifiable and its worth calculated almost entirely in economic terms.

As a codified response to a recurrent social situation, commission reports like those analyzed in this dissertation constitute a unique genre of reform rhetoric. Yet, they also effectively restrict women, persons of color, and other marginalized groups from the dialog surrounding higher education reform, thereby sustaining a hegemony of values asserted largely by representatives of dominant religious, political, and business interests. The author concludes that the conventions and limitations of this genre must be challenged, and the ideologies now associated with higher education rearticulated, if the humanities are to maintain their place within the evolving American university.

CHAPTER 1

A COMMISSION IS BORN:

ON THE RHETORIC OF HIGHER EDUCATION REFORM

Commission, n.

Etymology: < French *commission*, < Latin *commissiōn-em*, n. of action < *committ-ĕre*, to commit v., entrust, etc.

1. a. Authoritative charge or direction to act in a prescribed manner; order, command, instruction....
2. a. Authority committed or entrusted to anyone; esp. delegated authority to act in some specified capacity, to carry out an investigation or negotiation, perform judicial functions, take charge of an office, etc. (Said to be that of the authorizing person, and also of the person authorized.)
b. spec. To give (a person) a commission for a rank in the army or navy. Obs.
3. a. A warrant or instrument conferring such authority....

Commission, v.

Etymology: < commission n., perhaps after French commissioner, or medieval Latin *commissiōnāre*.

1. a. trans. To furnish with a commission or legal warrant; to empower by a commission....
2. To give authority to act; to empower, authorize; to entrust with an office or duty.
3. To send on a mission, dispatch.
4. To give a commission or order to (a person) for a particular piece of work.... (“Commission”)

In July 1946, Harry S. Truman formed the first-ever presidential commission on higher education, charging it with “an examination of the functions of higher education in our democracy and of the means by which they can best be performed” (U.S. President’s n.p.). The commission was composed, as Truman wrote, of “outstanding civic and educational leaders” (U.S. President’s n.p.). Its report, issued in December 1947, warned with apocalyptic fervor that U.S. higher education needed to “come decisively to grips

with the world-wide crisis of mankind” (U.S. President’s 6). To that end, it recommended a radical transformation of America’s colleges and universities. Nothing less was demanded than a “fuller realization of democracy,” a greater level of “international understanding and cooperation,” and a solution to virtually all “social problems” (U.S. President’s 8, 14, 20). This was a tall order indeed. But the commission expressed every confidence: “It can be done” (U.S. President’s 22).

Since that time, reports by commissioned panels of experts calling for reforms to postsecondary education in this country have proliferated. In a 1973 article, “Four Decades of Education Commissions,” former Chairman of the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education Clark Kerr noted that commission reports had “been increasing almost logarithmically since the 1940s” (4). He reckoned that some 18 commission reports had been published since the initial Truman document, not to mention 21 individual reports on special topics that his own organization had released over that timespan (4). Still, that was a mere hint of what would follow. In 1983, the landmark report *A Nation at Risk* warned that “the educational foundations of our society [were] presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity” (5). Fueled by furor over “Why Johnny Can’t Write,” some 260 new commissions on education were formed in the following year alone (Sheils 58, Garman and Holland 101). More recently, blue-ribbon commissions formed by such influential groups as the U.S. Department of Education, the National Governors Association, and the Carnegie Foundation have been “widely credited with having instigated and shaped successive waves of educational reform,” according to education scholars Rick Ginsberg and David Plank (5). Commissions have attacked college and

university education in much the same way that they have schools from kindergarten through high school (Berliner and Biddle 36). The Spellings Commission on the Future of Higher Education provides yet the most recent high-profile example of how reformists may shift their sights—and their rhetorical strategies—from primary to postsecondary education.

Groups like the Spellings Commission rely heavily on persuasive rhetoric to advance their agendas for education reform. They “shape conversations within which new policies and practices are posited,” as education scholars Noreen Garman and Patricia Holland observe. They are “at best an invitation for professionals to engage in discourse concerning the renewal of their practice” (Garman and Holland 101). At worst, they perpetuate what David Berliner and Bruce Biddle, authors of *The Manufactured Crisis*, call a “Big Lie” about higher education’s decline (9). They create a false sense of crisis by invoking widely held beliefs, prejudices, and myths about what American higher education *should* be and whom it *should* benefit. British education scholars Richard Edwards, Kathy Nicoll, and Nicky Solomon emphasize the rhetorical nature of texts propagated by such groups in their book *Rhetoric and Educational Discourse*.¹ “Policy, practice and research are not simply neutral statements of facts,” they contend, “but are attempts to persuade in some shape or form” (3). They also note the influence that

¹ Despite the title of their book, however, it should be noted that Edwards, Nicoll, and Solomon are scholars of education, not rhetoric, and actually approach their subject largely from the standpoint of discourse analysis. In their opening chapter, they write of rhetorical theory as though it were relatively new to them and to their readers. They also focus on educational policy discourse within the UK and other EU nations, whereas this dissertation analyzes presidential commission reports and other uniquely American forms of reform rhetoric.

poststructuralist theory and the so-called “linguistic turn” within the social sciences have had in drawing scholarly attention to the legitimizing functions of such discourse (2).

Reflecting this trend, scholars have made strides in exposing many of the belief systems that underpin recent efforts at higher education reform. For example, cultural critics Stanley Aronowitz and Henry Giroux have argued that neoconservatives, by emphasizing habit in the curriculum over students’ conscious control of learning, have “renounced the critical intent of education” (8). Economists Clive Belfield and Henry Levin contend that libertarian reformers have relied on the “ideological appeal of privatization,” including appeals to limited government intervention and freedom of choice, to bolster their arguments for market competition in higher education (56). And critical education scholars E. Wayne Ross and Rich Gibson maintain that neoliberalism has driven attempts to “reduce educational costs, often through economies of scale” and to create “curriculum standards... where the state defines the knowledge to be taught” (4). Similarly, many scholars have explored how metaphors serve a rhetorical function within educational discourse by veiling ideological appeals and normalizing particular constructions of “the real.” Edwards, Nicoll, and Solomon examine the ways in which metaphors operate as part of “linguistic code” within the discourse of educational policy to mobilize insider groups and influence policymaking (29, 24). They also observe how terminology from other domains of experience has increasingly been applied to higher education, thus reshaping perceptions and expectations of higher learning. In particular, they note how metaphors from the realms of management and quality assurance now permeate educational discourse. Yet, this is hardly a recent development. As early as

1964, Clark Kerr wrote of the “multiversity,” a kind of conglomerate of academic, technocratic, and industrial interests, and in 1990, he examined the “privatization” of American higher education across several dimensions, including “ownership,” managerial “control,” and public or private “financing” (“The Uses of,” “The American Mixture” 1). Along the same lines, communication scholar Roy Schwartzman has explored the transference of vocabulary from the Total Quality Management movement of the 1980s to the discursive realm of education, resulting in what he calls the “mangled managerial metaphor [of] students as customers” (3). However, none of these scholars has explored in any depth how such metaphors operate rhetorically in calls for higher education reform, nor have scholars of rhetoric attended closely to this issue.

In the following pages, I attempt to fill this gap by bringing tools of rhetorical criticism, particularly metaphor and ideological criticism, to bear on the contemporary rhetoric of higher education reform. As communication scholar Philip Wander explains, “ideological criticism joined with rhetorical theory is prepared to critique rhetoric legitimizing actions, policies, and silences relevant to the great issues of our time” (199). In this vein, I draw upon theories advanced by both rhetoricians and linguists to demonstrate how two key metaphors—the first, framing higher education as a means of national defense; the second, likening it to a business or industry—have radically altered the way postsecondary education has been perceived and valued in the U.S. over the past sixty years. I argue that defense and business have served as powerful structural metaphors in shaping views and expectations of higher education and that these, in turn, have shaped policymaking and practice, leading to the so-called “militarization” and

“marketization” of higher education. In addition, I draw upon ideological theory and criticism to explore how a number of major ideological appeals have been used to legitimize actions and policies that have brought about sweeping changes to institutions of higher learning since the Cold War. In this regard, I focus particularly on how conservative calls for reform have appealed to their audiences’ acceptance of such hegemonic belief systems as capitalism, neoliberalism, and neoconservatism and, in so doing, have silenced or subsumed competing belief systems, often working to the detriment of the higher education system they purport to benefit. As a scholar whose future livelihood depends on the perpetuation of rhetoric and writing instruction within postsecondary institutions, I acknowledge my vested interest in sustaining the values associated with broadly based liberal or general education, against which many of these reform measures militate. However, I also believe that relegating large swaths of students to institutions which focus solely on vocational preparation without the meaning and context provided by broader-based learning only perpetuates the kind of two-tier educational system and unjust class divisions that theorists like John Dewey and Antonio Gramsci have warned against.²

Because the scope of this project is potentially so broad, I use the Spellings Commission Report as the endpoint of my analysis and trace the strands of metaphorical and ideological influence that lead to it—from the beginning of the Cold War through the Sputnik era, the Reagan era, and beyond. My analysis focuses primarily upon the rhetoric of *commission reports* on higher education reform. However, this is in itself a

² See, e.g., Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 293-305, and Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 26-43.

broad and somewhat amorphous category. Scholars who have examined the work of so-called “commissions” tend to use that term interchangeably with others, such as “task force,” “committee,” or “advisory panel,” and often in conjunction with the term “blue-ribbon,” to connote that these groups are made up of especially distinguished or specially selected “experts.”³ For my purposes, I include groups whose features and functions accord with the various definitions of “commission” presented at the beginning of this chapter: groups who are given “an authoritative charge or direction” to study and report on matters relating to higher education, those “committed” to undertake such a charge, those “entrusted” with such an “office or duty,” those “sent on a mission” or “dispatched” for such purposes, or merely those who have received an “order” for such work (“Commission”). In addition, I consider those whose hand in higher education reform is often hidden by the commission designation—that is, those who *do* the commissioning—as well as those whose voices often go unheard because of their *lack* of such designation. My analysis centers on three landmark reports published from the Cold War era onward: the Truman Commission’s *Higher Education for American Democracy*; the Commission on Excellence in Education’s *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*; and the Spellings Commission Report, *A Test of Leadership: Charting the Future of Higher Education*. However, I also briefly analyze additional commission reports, speeches, legislation, media reports, and other artifacts from the period to show how the rhetorical constructions of higher education that were advanced through the landmark

³ For example, in their edited collection, *Commissions, Reports, Reforms, and Educational Policy*, Rick Ginsberg and David Plank include essays discussing the work of such groups as the Carnegie *Forum* on Education and the Economy, the business-led *Committee* for Economic Development, and the 1983 presidential *Task Force* on Excellence. All these groups are gathered under the umbrella of “commissions.”

reports have circulated and evolved within the wider discourse on higher education reform. The end-goals of my analysis are threefold: first, to reveal the hidden intentions, or what Kenneth Burke calls the “motives,” behind the contemporary rhetoric of higher education reform; second, to expose the flaws and vulnerabilities of this rhetoric in order to pinpoint where there may be room for greater dialogue or counterargument; and finally, to identify strategies to better defend our institutions and our disciplines against damaging rhetorical attacks now and in the future.

As the so-called “national dialogue” of the Spellings Commission has revealed, those representing academic interests within colleges and universities have often been excluded from, or have failed to engage in, discussions of reforms that directly affect them or what goes on in their classrooms. Indeed, David Conley, a noted professor of educational policy and leadership, observes that “most discussions of higher education’s relationship to school reform begin and end with the observation that there doesn’t appear to be much of a relationship” (309). Consequences of this have been especially apparent in the field of composition, where public pronouncements have been made and public policies enacted that have led, over strenuous objections from many in the field, to the imposition of ill-conceived learning outcomes, accountability standards, and assessment methods, as well as to draconian cuts in writing program budgets and course offerings. The City University of New York (CUNY), for example, eliminated basic writing courses from its four-year campuses because a mayoral task force in 1999 found its placement tests to have “an unacceptably low predictive value for student success in college” (Gleason 490). Similarly, the California State University (CSU) system was forced to

drastically reduce its basic writing courses as a result of external policy decisions. A 2007 report by the California Legislative Analyst's Office stated, "The lack of rigorous post-assessment procedures and the inadequacy of reporting requirements prevents the Legislature and the public from easily or meaningfully evaluating if CSU is in fact helping unprepared students obtain the skills they need to succeed academically." More recently, colleges and universities across the country have yielded to pressure from the Spellings Commission to adopt so-called systems of accountability that track "student learning gains" in areas of critical thinking and writing. At the University of Arizona, implementation of a Voluntary System of Accountability (VSA), which will make public a wide array of survey and assessment data, is currently underway.⁴ Its potential impacts on writing curriculum and instruction can only be imagined.

In recognition of such external threats, the National Council on the Teaching of English (NCTE) has become more politically engaged over the past decade, forging stronger ties with national and state organizations that may influence English and composition instruction and vigorously lobbying against reform efforts that may do further damage (Herrington). At the same time, many composition scholars have called for greater attention to proposals for higher education reform. For instance, J.S. Dunn and Michael Williamson, recipients of a Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) Research Initiative grant, have argued that because such national organizations as the National Governors Association, the Education Commission of the States, and the State Higher Education Executive Officers "exert considerable

⁴ For further information about the VSA, see the Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities-sponsored Website at <http://www.voluntarysystem.org/index.cfm>.

influence over budgeting and resource allocation in higher education, if not curriculum and pedagogy directly,” it is vital that those in composition studies better understand the implications of these groups’ proposed reforms. Composition scholar Anne Herrington has likewise called for greater attention to higher education reform, especially to the language in which it is promoted. She notes that the Spellings Commission Report arose from a history of similar texts and has presented her preliminary analysis of what she calls “discourses of accountability” and “discourses of assessment,” arguing that “we need more discourse studies of this kind.” My work is intended to address these needs.

My dissertation serves similar needs within the field of rhetoric—responding to calls from rhetoric scholars to unveil what is hidden beneath discourses of power and to represent the interests of those who may not have access to this elite discourse. When rhetorical criticism took its so-called “ideological turn” in the 1980s and ‘90s, several rhetoricians contended that criticism’s very purpose was to uncover what is covert in texts. Raymie McKerrow states, for instance, that “a critical rhetoric serves a demystifying function by demonstrating silent and often non-deliberate ways in which rhetoric conceals as much as it reveals through its relationship with power/knowledge” (92). Similarly, A. Susan Owen and Peter Ehrenhaus write that “critical analysis can reveal the processes by which social consensus is created and crystallizes, and by which social control and social integration are consolidated” (170). My analysis aims to achieve precisely these ends by demonstrating how the contemporary rhetoric of higher education reform deliberately obscures its motivations behind abstruse language and uses the persuasive force of ideology and metaphor to build consensus. Moreover, I attempt to

function as what Wander calls the “third persona” (“The Third” 216), revealing how marginalized populations are often disserved by the current rhetoric of higher education reform, and as what speech communication scholar Celeste Michelle Condit terms the “empathic critic,” identifying common ground among opposing parties as well as possibilities for compromise (189).

Thus, my dissertation contributes to the field of rhetoric and composition in at least three distinct ways: first, by clarifying the implications of the rhetoric of higher education reform and identifying what Sharon Crowley calls “openings,” where more productive dialogue about reforms that affect instruction in rhetoric and composition may occur; second, by applying metaphor and ideological analysis to a corpus of texts that have not previously been analyzed, thereby adding to the body of rhetorical criticism and theory; and third, by helping to reveal how reform rhetoric may undermine values of intellectual freedom, civic humanism, and egalitarian liberalism that not only many of us in rhetoric and composition but also many in the broader higher education community perceive as central to our mission. While calls for educational reform have often contended that our nation is at risk, what is ultimately at risk, I believe, is a broadly based, critically-oriented form of higher education and equitable access to it. Carol Schneider, president of the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AACU), warns that higher education as we have known it is quickly “slip-sliding away” (68). “In the current policy and political environment,” she says, “the very concept of a strong liberal education is slipping off the nation’s radar screen” (72). Further, as higher education scholars Sheila Slaughter and Gary Rhoades argue, U.S. higher education is

currently undergoing “a shift from a public good knowledge/learning regime to an academic capitalist knowledge/learning regime” (8). That is, what was once viewed as a way to prepare citizens to participate in democracy and uphold the public good is now becoming merely a means for private advancement. But it does not have to be so. Slaughter and Rhoades add that the shift is not “inexorable”; it “could be resisted” (1). By undertaking this analysis, I hope to provide a basis for such resistance.

Of Reforms and Reports: Some Early Precedents

Before we look to the present and future of higher education reform, though, it is useful to glance back at its past to understand how issues that currently dominate discussions of higher education reform have come to the fore and how forms of rhetoric on which this dissertation focuses have gained traction. It is not an exaggeration to say that higher education reform in this country is as old as higher education itself. From the initial founding of colleges in the American colonies, there have been those who have questioned their purposes and practices. As Thomas P. Miller reminds us, evangelical reformers were challenging “the authority of the established clergy and the colleges that educated them” even before the American Revolution (“The Formation” 270). Indeed, religious dissent was a primary impetus for establishment of America’s first college, Harvard, for Puritan mercantilists decried the requirement to swear Anglican allegiance to gain their sons’ admittance to Oxford or Cambridge (Thelin 24). In turn, denominational and doctrinal tensions between reform-minded Puritans and existing

institutions led to the founding of Yale,⁵ Princeton,⁶ and a number of other colonial colleges (Lucas, *American* 105-06; T. Miller, “The Formation” 270). From these early seeds of dissension stemmed many of the fundamental ideological conflicts that prevail in the rhetoric of higher education reform to this day.

Among these were conflicts over the basic aims of higher education and whom it should serve. For example, while Harvard was, according to its charter, dedicated to “raise up a literate and pious clergy,” it was also entrusted with “the task of preparing men of refinement and culture, those destined to positions of responsibility and leadership in society” (Lucas, *American* 104). This did not preclude leadership in politics or other “learned professions” (Lucas, *American* 105, 112; Thelin 27). Other colonial colleges embraced still broader purposes. A founder of Princeton proposed to make its “plan of Education as extensive as...Circumstances will permit” (qtd. in Leitch), and the provost of the College of Philadelphia declared its goal to be instruction in all “branches of *useful* knowledge” (qtd. in Lucas, *American* 106, italics mine). The early colleges, spurred by challenges to their initially tight sectarian control over their governing boards and student bodies, also embraced wider audiences. While the official denomination of King’s College in New York was Episcopalian, for instance, rival Protestants were not barred from attendance (Lucas, *American* 107). At the same time, a Princeton trustee expressed the relatively pluralistic philosophy that “persons of all persuasions are to have free access to the Honours & Privileges of the College” (Leitch). Competition from newly founded colleges forced even the old guard at Harvard and Yale to liberalize their

⁵ Originally the Collegiate School in Connecticut

⁶ Originally the College of New Jersey

admissions policies and appoint trustees and overseers from minority sects. Writes historian Christopher Lucas, “The practice amounted to a tacit recognition among schoolmen everywhere that within a pluralistic society, there were no realistic alternatives to policies of conciliation and accommodation” (*American* 107). Yet, despite greater sectarian tolerance among such “schoolmen,” women were still excluded from their ranks.

From this early tension between sectarianism and tolerance arose a conflict which still persists in higher education today—that between elitism and openness, now often framed as “excellence vs. access.” As education scholar Franklin Parker confirms, “The education dilemma between serving exclusive elites or diverse mass needs is historic” (3). Historian John Thelin explains that there was tension between these polarities even during the colonial period, for while colleges of the era primarily educated the progeny of wealthy families, particularly those of the clergy and professional classes, they also invested “much discretionary time and resources into trying to impart to their privileged sons a sense of responsibility and public service” (26). Lucas goes further in emphasizing that colonial colleges were “never the monopoly of a single exclusive caste” (*American* 108). While most of the early admittees were members of the elite, some less well-heeled students were also accepted, he says, and even when colleges began to restrict college admittance due to rising costs during the 18th century, a limited number of “charity” scholarships were still made available to poorer students (Lucas, *American*

108).⁷ As a result, many worried that “learning would become cheap and too common” (qtd. in Lucas, *American* 108). However, such elitism was countered by the likes of Benjamin Franklin, who, in his 1749 *Proposals Relating to the Education of Youth in Pennsylvania*, advocated for a practical and commercially relevant curriculum designed to prepare youth of all classes “to enter the World, zealously unite, and make all the Interest that can be made to establish them, whether in Business, Offices, Marriages, or any other Thing for their Advantage.”⁸

Reflected in Franklin’s statement is another question that has long persisted in debates over higher education reform: Not only *who* should be taught, but also *what* should be taught? Dating back to the colonial period, there has been ongoing debate over the relative utility of college instruction, or its applicability to *worldly* pursuits. Thomas Miller notes that reform-minded dissenters during the Great Awakening promoted the teaching of “practical skills” in colleges, consistent with their “Puritanical bias against worldly culture and with their practical efforts to gain economic advancement” (“The Formation” 276). While the curriculum of colonial colleges generally emphasized the classical liberal arts, Lucas observes that “secular learning of a decidedly nonclassical character” had begun to take hold by the latter part of the 18th century (*American* 110). During the new national period of the late 18th and early 19th centuries, colleges increasingly provided professional training, especially in such fields as the military,

⁷ It should be noted, though, that even charity scholarships were only made available to a select few during the colonial period, and none to women or persons of color. Thelin notes, for example, that enrollments of women in higher education were miniscule prior to the opening of the earliest women’s colleges in the U.S. during the 1840s and ‘50s (55).

⁸ According to Parker, Franklin also advocated for “enlightened coeducation” in his *Proposals* (3). Yet, there is no evidence within the document to suggest that Franklin meant to admit to his academies “youth” of the female sex.

engineering, science, and agriculture (Thelin 58). Over the decades, the notion of higher education as a means of acquiring marketable skills became a staple of reform rhetoric. In the mid-1800s, a California state superintendent of public instruction asked, “For what *useful occupation* are the graduates of most of our old colleges fit?” and a Georgia newspaper editorial insisted that colleges needed to adapt themselves to “a different age, an age of *practical utility*” (qtd. in Lucas, *American* 136, italics mine). As many educational historians have documented, the pressures of such a “practical” age contributed toward drastic reforms of higher education. Lucas summarizes:

The restructuring of American higher education...in the post-Civil War period was driven by a potent combination of social, political, cultural, and economic factors. Accelerating industrialization and urbanization, combined with the impetus to complete the settlement of a fast-disappearing western frontier, were contributing factors. The development of new scientific and technological knowledge upon which business and industry increasingly relied counted heavily in the equation. (*American* 148)

Yet the influence of business and industry in higher education was, in turn, challenged by progressive reformers, who wanted, according to education scholar Maurice Berube, “to expand democracy [and] counterbalance the rise of unbridled wealth with the new industrialism” (1). Berube contends that the progressive movement in education was not merely a reaction against the growing economic disparity brought about by industrialization; it was also an effort to uphold democratizing principles of education (8-9). It attempted “to strike at poverty, crime and disease; to do everything that government [could] do to make our country better, nobler, purer, and life more worth living,” at least for a rising educated class (Berube 10). The conflict of these lofty ideals with more utilitarian views of higher education thus raised another question that has

permeated discussions of higher education reform ever since: Should college education be, first and foremost, a public good, or should it be primarily a means of private advancement?⁹

Along with debate over this question, the controversy continued to brew over what should be included in the college curriculum. Charles Eliot, in his 1869 inaugural address as president of Harvard, reignited this controversy with his suggestion that “the individual traits of different minds [had] not been attended to” by institutions of higher learning (qtd. in Lucas, *American* 171). He advocated for greater curricular choice—in other words, for an elective system—a proposal which appalled traditionalists who clung to classical conceptions of liberal arts education (Lucas, *American* 172). Still, as the 19th century progressed, more curricular concessions were made. “What was happening across the country,” explains Thelin, “was an increase in access to higher education achieved through some broadening of the curriculum combined with specialization as to clientele” (107). At the same time, colleges were fashioning themselves upon the model of the German research university, forming loose alliances of “schools” and offering both professional and advanced academic degrees. This development fueled yet a further debate among reformists: “Which was more important, . . . teaching or research, undergraduate education or professional graduate training?” (Lucas, *American* 187).

In addition, with the research university becoming the predominant model for higher education in America, there emerged a concern over its role in addressing a range

⁹ A “public good” is taken here to mean one that is non-exclusionary and non-rival, provided freely and equitably to all members of a society, whereas a “private good” allows for individual social and economic advancement on an exclusionary and rivalrous basis. A “public good” should further be distinguished from a “common good,” which implies that a benefit common to *all* people could be conferred. In this sense, goods that are supposedly “common” tend most to advantage dominant societal groups.

of social issues and ills. At the University of Wisconsin and elsewhere, the university service ideal was born. This “coincided nicely with the first stirrings of progressivist reform,” according to Lucas: “Improved schools, honesty in government, more social responsibility in the commercial sphere, a reversal in declining standards of public and private morality were all important elements comprising the progressive agenda. In the battle for renewal and reform, academic institutions were called to play their part” (*American* 181-82). A broadly based program of general education was proposed by many in the progressive movement to counteract the effects of what they viewed as overspecialization and overemphasis on business concerns within the college curriculum. Even so, one leader in the movement, John Dewey, saw no necessary dichotomy between vocational training and his proposed form of general education. In *Democracy and Education*, for example, Dewey questioned the “deep-seated antithesis... between useful labor and education for a life of leisure” and argued that this assumed opposition merely perpetuated class divisions (293). Even “liberal” studies, he contended, are justified by their utility (301). Yet subsequent educational reformers, as discussed in Chapter 2 of this dissertation, found Dewey’s conceptions of liberal education to be, somewhat ironically, not liberal enough.

So the wheel turned round and round. The debates that have driven successive cycles of higher education reform, and do still, are so interrelated that it is hardly possible to tell where one leaves off and another begins; they form a sort of continuous loop. But one constant through the decades has been the calculated use of rhetoric by would-be reformers. Lucas notes that college founders and administrators, as far back as the early

1800s, employed “the loftiest rhetoric imaginable” to advocate for curricular changes, expansions of access, and public support of their institutions (*American* 119). Richard Zemsky, chair of the Learning Alliance for Higher Education at the University of Pennsylvania, confirms, “Much of the story of reform in higher education has been written by the exhorters who have challenged us to do better while at the same time suggesting they know exactly what ‘doing better’ entails” (“The Rise” 22). These exhortations have taken many forms, including public remarks and addresses, newspaper articles and editorials, and scholarly essays and monographs. But they have gained their greatest exposure and influence when they have appeared within the pages of formalized reports issued by commissioned panels of “experts.” Such reports are released, in almost all cases, at historical junctures when previously accepted assumptions about the means and ends of higher education have come under challenge or when debates like those described above have come to a head. The reports generally respond to these perceived “crises” by proposing significant reforms to higher education or by vigorously defending against them. In some cases, they also propose the establishment of systems and standards where previously there were none. In this manner, they play either a conservative or progressive role in effecting institutional change.

Early examples of commission reports on higher education reform include the following:

- *The Yale Report*: This document, prepared by a committee of university fellows in 1827 at the behest of Yale President Jeremiah Day, Connecticut Governor Gideon Tomlinson, and other notables, responded to a proposal that instruction in ancient

Greek and Latin be eliminated from Yale's core curriculum. More broadly, it responded to mounting concern that college instruction should be more utilitarian. Wrote the committee, "From different quarters, we have heard the suggestion that our colleges should be *new-modelled* [sic]; that they are not adapted to the spirits and wants of the age; that they will soon be deserted unless they are better accommodated to the business character of the nation" (300, emphasis in original). Against this charge, the Yale faculty members not only ardently defended teaching of the "dead languages," but they also mounted an eloquent and carefully reasoned defense of the entire liberal arts curriculum. Borrowing metaphors from the fields of masonry and construction, they insisted that a classical course of study lay "the foundation of a thorough education," built "proper symmetry and balance of character," and framed "powers of the mind...in their fairest proportions" (301-03). Following its publication in the *American Journal of Science and Arts* in 1829, the Yale Report became the most widely read and most influential statement on higher education of its era (Lucas, *American* 133).

- *Report of the Committee of Ten*: The National Education Association's (NEA) Committee of Ten, made up of representatives of both secondary and post-secondary education, was charged with surveying the vast range of subjects taught in high schools across the country and attempting to articulate requirements for college entrance (3). Between 1892 and '93, it convened a nationwide series of conferences, divided by curricular area, to obtain counsel on what those

requirements should be.¹⁰ Its final report struck a blow for standardization with its statement that “every subject which is taught at all in a secondary school should be taught in the same way and to the same extent to every pupil so long as he pursues it, no matter what the probable destination of the pupil may be, or at what point his education is to cease” (17). In this sense, it argued for equality of educational opportunity without setting forth a specific college preparatory track (51-52). However, it did recommend establishment of the first standardized college entrance exams as well as some loose entry requirements in several instructional areas. For example, the Conference on English averred that “no student should be admitted to college who shows in his English examination and his other examinations that he is very deficient in ability to write good English” (95).¹¹ Among its rhetorical appeals, the *Report of the Committee of Ten* presented testimony from its hearings as well as detailed evidentiary tables—moves which became common in later commission reports on higher education reform. It also set a precedent in justifying its proposals on the basis of broad national interest, arguing that “close articulation between the secondary schools and the higher institutions would be advantageous alike for the schools, the colleges, and the country” (53). The report was considered at the time “the most important

¹⁰ In this respect, the Committee of Ten appears to have established the convention of holding hearings or roundtables on proposed reforms, which continues to this day. The Spellings Commission Report, for instance, was billed as the product of a “national dialogue” on the future of higher education.

¹¹ Interestingly, the Conference on English resisted some forms of standardization, arguing that college entrance requirements may be “uniform *in kind* throughout the country,” but that “uniformity in amount [of instruction] is certainly not practical and probably not desirable” (93).

educational document ever issued in the United States” (National Education Association III).

- *The Flexner Report*: This is more accurately characterized as a *commissioned* report, for it was written by one man, iconoclastic educator Alexander Flexner, under the aegis of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. Published in 1910, it exposed the inconsistent and often unscrupulous practices of medical schools, many of which were only tangentially affiliated with universities and colleges at the time. Based on extensive study and analysis, Flexner portrayed the disparities between these institutions in dire terms: “There is probably no other country in the world in which there is so great a distance and so fatal a difference between the best, the average, and the worst” (20). To reduce oversupply of medical schools and impose uniform standards on those remaining, Flexner outlined the “proper basis of medical education,” which included licensure and admission standards. Of the latter, he wrote,

It is necessary to install a gatekeeper who will, by critical scrutiny, ascertain the fitness of the applicant: a necessity in the first place by consideration for the candidate, whose time and talents will serve him better in some other vocation, if he be unfit for this; and in the second, by consideration for a public entitled to protection from those whom the very boldness of medical strategy equips with instruments that, tremendously effective for good when rightly used, are all the more for harm if ignorantly or incompetently employed. (22)

Thus, as previous commissions had done, Flexner invoked the public good in support of his proposals to limit access. The strategy apparently worked, for the shuttering of many medical schools and the restructuring of others began apace

(Thelin 149).¹² The Flexner Report not only exemplified how commission(ed) reports were used to bring public attention to reform issues at the turn of the 20th century, but it also reflected the growing influence that private foundations had begun to exert in higher education policymaking (Thelin 148-49).

- *The Harvard Report on General Education*: The report of Harvard's Committee on the Objectives of a General Education in a Free Society, more commonly known as the Harvard "Redbook," once again took up the mantle for a broad-based liberal or general education to defend against increased specialization, fragmentation, and vocationalism in the college curriculum. But the nature and context of its arguments differed sharply from those of the earlier Yale Report. Published in 1945, following a three-year study by members of Harvard's Arts, Sciences, and Education faculties, the Redbook reflected signs of its times: both the growing threat to democratic society posed by totalitarianism and the growth and diversification of the undergraduate student population. Harvard President James Conant emphasized both in the report's introduction, stressing the need for colleges and universities to perpetuate the "liberal and humane tradition... which is essential if our civilization is to be preserved" *and* to undertake "the general education of the great majority of each generation, not the comparatively small minority" (viii). While the committee did grant that some vocational specialization was necessary within the curriculum, it recommended that this be balanced by "a part of the student's whole education which looks first of all to his

¹² Thelin notes, though, that some of these medical schools were having financial difficulties before the Flexner Report was issued, so their closure may not have been entirely attributable to its publication.

life as a responsible human being and citizen” (51). A lack of such “unifying purpose,” it warned, was working “against the good of society by helping to destroy the common ground of training and outlook on which any society depends” (43). Besides evoking this threat, the Redbook played heavily on *ethos*, billing the committee as “men of distinction in specific fields of learning” and as an “impartial jury of laymen determined to find the facts” (v). Its style was also highly metaphoric. For example, it likened the complexity of issues in higher education to “a mathematical problem in which new unknowns are being constantly introduced” or “a house under construction for which the specifications are forever changing” (5-6). Each of these strategies would be adopted by later commissions on higher education reform. In this respect, *The Harvard Report on General Education* laid the groundwork for many reform reports that followed.

Though these are but a few examples, they suggest that certain rhetorical patterns had become commonplace in commission reports on higher education reform by the middle of the 20th century. Commissions were gaining support for their proposals by evoking the threat of national crisis, by appealing to the national interest, and by linking higher education with other familiar masculine domains. They drew upon their commissioned status to provide impetus for their critiques and to imbue their findings with authority. Through repetition of these patterns, certain expectations were established for what such a report should contain, under what circumstances it should be issued, and how it should be arranged. Thus, I will argue in the following section that commission reports had

begun to evolve, by the start of the Cold War and the period on which this dissertation focuses, as a specific *genre* within the rhetoric of higher education reform.

The Rules of Interaction: Commission Reports as Genre

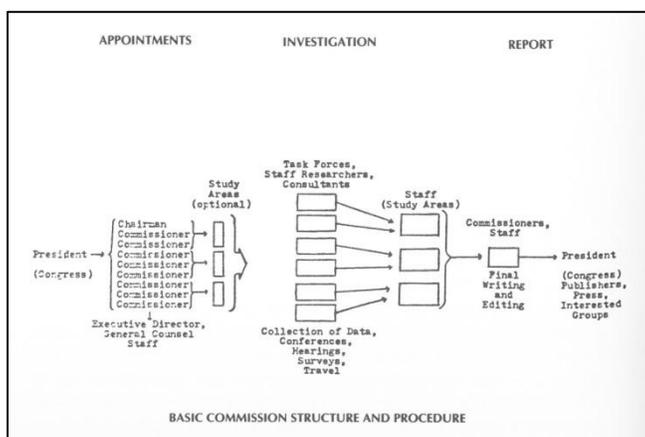
“What we learn when we learn a genre,” writes Carolyn Miller, “is not just a pattern of forms or even a method of achieving our own ends. We learn, more importantly, what ends we may have” (“Genre” 165). As the examples presented above would suggest, by the end of World War II, commissions on higher education had learned what ends they could best achieve in their calls for reform. When debates over the who’s, what’s, or why’s of higher education became especially tense (as in the case of the Yale and Harvard reports), or when some uniformity needed to be imposed on an unruly system (as with the NEA and Flexner reports), these groups naturally looked to others before them to guide their actions and interactions. Over time, the patterns for communicating under such circumstances solidified, becoming a set of what Carolyn Miller calls “rules for symbolic interaction” (“Genre” 163). Expectations dictated that would-be reformers follow this set of protocols. There were only certain ends they apparently *could* have under these circumstances. In creating their reports, then, the commissions found not only a successful formula to follow, but also a socially sanctioned means of communicating. In this respect, their reports represent a form of “typified rhetorical action” (C. Miller, “Genre” 152). Not only do they have substantive, stylistic, and situational elements in common, but they also share a “pragmatic component”—that is, a common social function (C. Miller, “Genre” 164). The latter plays a primary role in

determining if a kind of rhetoric may be considered a genre. According to Miller, “the typified situation, including typifications of participants, underlies typification in rhetoric” (C. Miller, “Genre” 157). Certainly, commissions were, and still are, comprised of similar types of members. They are “outstanding civic and educational leaders,” as Truman said (U.S. President’s n.p.), though they are also generally, and not incidentally, white males. Their reports respond to similar circumstances—similar historical moments or junctures, when established traditions of higher education and new social or cultural demands have come into conflict. They also perform a similar “pragmatic” function, dictating conventions to be followed at such historical moments. Thus, by Carolyn Miller’s standards, commission reports may be considered examples of a genre.

Presidential commissions on higher education must adhere to a particularly strict set of genre conventions. These have been established over hundreds of years, for as historian David Flitner, Jr. explains, commissions have been used as “a tool of the presidency” since the founding of the republic (7). As the presidency evolved, such ad hoc fact-finding groups were increasingly formed to study and report back to the president on matters of pressing concern (Flitner 8). This practice became so entrenched that, as noted political journalist Elizabeth Drew has observed, “the technique of appointing a special presidential commission...to investigate, obfuscate, resolve, defuse, defer, detail, or derail a problem has become as much an instrument of the presidency as the State of the Union Message, the toss of the ball on opening day, or the review of troops in wartime” (45). The chief duty of a presidential commission is the preparation a report; Flitner calls this their “*raison d’etre*” (85). Preparation of this document involves

a number of distinct socially-driven procedures. For example, presidential commissions follow a relatively uniform process in holding their meetings, conducting their investigations, and attempting to build consensus around their recommendations (Flitner 85-89). Compilation and issuance of their reports is also fairly routinized. As Flitner describes, “A commission’s findings are supplemented by recommendations....The combined findings, recommendations, separate statements, staff and consultant reports, and appendices comprise the final report” (97). Once this document is completed and approved by the commission, it is formally presented to the President, then submitted to the National Archives, and finally, published by the U.S. Government Printing Office (Flitner 97-100). Figure 1.1, drawn from Flitner’s extensive study of presidential commissions, diagrams this procedure. The fact that these steps can be so neatly charted attests to the fact that presidential commissions, like all commissions, engage in a form of “typified rhetorical action,” thus conforming to expectations of a genre.

Figure 1.1: Basic Presidential Commission Structure and Procedure



Source: Flitner, David Jr. *The Politics of Presidential Commissions: A Public Policy Perspective*. Dobbs Ferry, NY: Transnational, 1986. 102.

Although the steps for creating their reports are highly routinized, presidential commissions must still make some decisions regarding the audiences their reports will address and the purposes they will serve. They must also agree on matters of content, style, and tone. “These decisions are important,” says Flitner, “in that they may affect reception of the report by those in positions of authority and by the public” (92). Hence, though the commissions do have some rhetorical latitude, their reports must still fulfill a powerful set of social expectations. They may not veer too far from these, or they risk having their reports rejected or ignored. They must also produce a set of recommendations on which most, if not all, of the members agree (Flitner 87). Because of this, most presidential commissions choose to present only broad policy recommendations, not specific strategies for implementation. Terrence Deal, a scholar of organizational leadership, suggests that this lack of action-orientation satisfies yet another expectation of the genre. One might assume that commissions are meant to accomplish tangible results, yet as Deal explains, “their deeper, less obvious agenda takes us back to a more organic, expressive view of the human condition embraced by our distant ancestors” (120). By this token, their meetings, hearings, and reports are but steps in a ceremonial dance. “Ceremonies bond people together in a common experience, make deep values and beliefs accessible, and reaffirm a shared sense of destiny,” Deal says. “They make the world seem understandable and controllable—even though it is really not. They can reshape experience and behavior when nothing else can” (128). In this way, presidential commissions respond to a deeply embedded social need. They give the appearance of doing something without always actually doing it (Ginsberg and Plank x);

they follow rules for *symbolic*, not literal, action. In this respect, too, they fulfill expectations of a rhetorical genre.

Indeed, the movements of commissions are so ritualized that other groups can easily replicate them. This helps to account for the frequent recurrence of commission reports. Longtime presidential advisor Lloyd N. Cutler once observed that “commissions burst on the scene and then pass from view more or less like comets, only to appear again in the same form years and even decades later” (qtd. in Flitner n.p.). The same can be said of commission reports: they appear every so often, run their predictable course, and then mostly pass from view. Some are heralded with great fanfare, while others fizzle with barely a pop. Yet this too reflects their status as part of a genre. We can understand genre, writes Carolyn Miller, “as that aspect of situated communication that is capable of *reproduction*, that can be manifested in more than one situation, more than one concrete space-time” (“Rhetorical Community” 71). The reports that will be analyzed in this dissertation certainly reflect this kind of reproduction. Not only do they respond to recurrent social needs, but they also reproduce the same exigencies and repeat many of the same rhetorical moves or steps.

One move that is nearly universal in these reports is the summoning of a crisis to lend persuasive force to the commission’s statements. Such events provide what Lloyd Bitzer terms a “rhetorical exigency” for commissions—that is, “some specific condition or situation” which ostensibly calls the groups to action and calls forth their recommendations (4). Carolyn Miller explains that “exigence is a set of particular social patterns and expectations that provides a socially objectified motive for addressing

danger, ignorance, separateness” (“Genre” 158). For commissions on higher education reform, this danger may be either inside colleges or outside them; it may be extant or aborning. A genuine crisis—in the form of a threat to our nation, our values, or our lives—provides the rhetorical exigency for some of these groups. Sometimes, the crisis goes unspoken, as when the exclusive right to higher education formerly enjoyed by one group is breached by another, or when a restrictive standard of literacy becomes more widely attainable. However, if no actual crisis exists to serve as such an exigency, commissions are not averse to inventing one. Political scientist Nelson Polsby observes that “there is utility in one common political strategy in America, namely, attempts by sponsors of ready-made alternatives to coerce feelings of urgency among decision-makers, to invent ‘crises’” (168). In other words, if a group already has policy recommendations in mind, it can spur swift action toward their implementation by raising the mere specter of crisis. Ginsberg and Plank confirm that commission reports have historically been viewed as “a standard response to a perceived crisis” (3), while Berliner and Biddle attest that many recent “crises” raised in calls for reform have actually been “manufactured” (2-5). In this respect, the genre becomes “a determinant of rhetorical *kairos*,” as Carolyn Miller states (“Rhetorical Community” 71). Commission reports turn an emergency into an opportunity, a crisis into a call for action. Or, to use Miller’s words, they index “an event to a material condition, turning them into constraints or resources” (“Rhetorical Community” 71).

Another way that commissions adhere to genre expectations within their reports is by capitalizing upon their designations as “commissions.” By definition, commissions are

given an “authoritative charge or direction to act in a prescribed manner.” They possess a “legal warrant” or “order” to undertake their studies and to issue their reports. They are “sent on a mission” or “dispatched” (“Commission”). Thus, their appointment as commissions automatically provides them with the “specific condition or situation” that motivates their actions (Bitzer 4). Commissions on higher education typically “objectify” this exigency by including both their letters of appointment and their letters of transmittal in the opening pages of their reports. This form of symbolic exchange—the letters *to* and *from* the commission—serves not only to establish the exigency of the commission, but also to emphasize its ethos. By virtue of their appointment, members of a commission are “entrusted” or “empowered.” They are “vested” with the authority of one in higher command. Including their authorizing documents emphasizes this ethical standing. In essence, it allows the commissioners to flaunt their credentials. The commission designation authorizes the members to speak out on matters related to higher education reform, and it effectively excludes others from doing so. Women, persons of color, and other marginalized groups generally lack a voice because they are not similarly empowered.

In this respect, the genre of the commission report structures relations of power by designating commission members as rhetorical “agents.” Up to this point, I have argued that commission reports conform to the social and situational criteria for a genre. But, according to communication scholar William Benoit, the rhetorical function of the “agent” is of equal importance in determining a genre’s basis. Drawing on Kenneth Burke’s theory of the dramatic pentad, Benoit argues that genres can spring from any of

the pentadic elements: act, scene, purpose, agency, or agent (181). Following this line of reasoning, the commission members' status as "agents" may further distinguish their reports as a genre. The commission designation itself sets their reports apart because, as rhetorician Sonja Foss says, it is an element "rooted in the situations in which they were generated" and the absence of it would "alter the nature of the artifact" (199). This makes sense, for commission reports would certainly not be the same without their commissions. Not only are commissioners the ones authorized to speak, but they have agency to do so. Or, to use Carolyn Miller's language, they belong to a "rhetorical community" which is both constructed and reconstructed, which allows them to marshal their resources and tell their stories, time and time again ("Rhetorical Community" 74-75).

In addition to establishing their exigency and agency in similar ways, the reports under consideration here have something further in common. Besides their situational and social functions, they also share structural and stylistic features that set them apart as a genre. As noted previously, the reports of presidential commissions follow a similar organizational pattern, but the same can be said of virtually every commission report on higher education reform. Nearly all open with a preface or introduction by the commissioning person or entity, followed by some history or background on the issues to be addressed, then a summary of major recommendations, and finally, more detailed proposals or findings. Most also include appendices with additional charts, notes, or data. In this respect, the reports adhere to the famous genre criterion established by Northrop Frye: "The study of genres is based on analogies in form" (99). Of course, this formal

similarity between commission reports is not surprising given that most any report issued by a private- or public-sector entity follows the same basic pattern. What is surprising, however, is the extent to which the commissions make the same stylistic moves, often repeating the same analogies or metaphors in their reports and sometimes even the same language. One particularly striking instance of this can be seen by comparing the 1973 report of the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education with the 2006 report of the Spellings Commission. In discussing several forces that were ostensibly threatening higher education at the time, the Carnegie Commission poses a series of rhetorical questions: “Will higher education, weighted down by these and other crises, follow the course of the railroad industry?... Will higher education follow a similar course and for much the same reasons?” (7). Three decades later, the Spellings Commission implies that higher learning may succumb to a nearly identical fate: “History is littered with examples of industries that, at their peril, failed to respond to—or even to notice—changes in the world around them, from railroads to steel manufacturers. Without serious self-examination and reform, institutions of higher education risk falling into the same trap” (ix). The resemblance between these two passages seems almost uncanny, although staff writers for the Spellings Commission were likely familiar with the Carnegie report and either consciously or unconsciously emulated it. Even so, the comparison points to the fact that metaphors likening higher education to a business or industry have become increasingly common in commission reports on higher education over the past 60 years. Likewise, metaphors portraying higher education as a form national defense have become commonplace. Chapter Two of this dissertation will explore this metaphoric similarity in

greater detail. Suffice it to say here that the repetition of these particular types of metaphors is yet another feature that distinguishes commission reports as a genre.

Long before situational factors were used to determine the standing of a genre, such stylistic similarities were primary among the considerations. One of the best known theorists of genre, Mikhail Bakhtin, writes that “any style is inseparably related to the utterance and to typical forms of utterances, that is, speech genres” (63). Literary forms are most conducive to expressions of individual style, he explains, whereas “standard forms” such as business or military documents, are much less conducive. In the latter, the expression of style is constrained by the genre. This would help to explain why commission reports, as part of a “standard form,” tend to repeat the same metaphors. As Bakhtin says, style in such a text is merely “an epiphenomenon of the utterance, one of its by-products” (63). In other words, the genre largely determines the stylistic elements, not the individual authors. No wonder, then, that commissions on higher education reform turn repeatedly to the same rhetorical figures; they are driven by the stylistic demands of the report genre. Although, Bakhtin would also contend that they are driven by historical and ideological forces that give rise to their utterances. These “are the drive belts from the history of society to the history of language,” he says (65).

This accords with the view of Karlyn Kohrs Campbell and Kathleen Hall Jamieson that genres arise not merely from stylistic similarities, but rather, are “an amalgam, a constellation of substantive, situational, and stylistic elements” (18). Stylistic features may appear to underpin a particular genre, but those stylistic features are merely an expression of the historical and social circumstances from which the genre arises. In

this respect, a genre may teach us “about the nature of the human communicative response,” they say, “and about the ways in which rhetoric is shaped by prior rhetoric, by verbal conventions in a culture, and by past formulations of ideas and issues” (27). The genre of commission reports on higher education can show us exactly that, I believe. By analyzing these reports, we may see how historical and social forces are at play in their language and, in turn, how their language reflects particular ideologies or world views. Toward this end, I present in the following section a theoretical framework for analyzing the metaphors of commission reports and, in turn, the ideologies that those metaphors reflect.

Metaphor and Ideology in Calls for Reform

In arguing that metaphors reflect ideologies in calls for higher education reform, I am following a long lineage of rhetoricians who have held that metaphors, far more than being a stylistic device, actually reshape the way we think. Though ancient rhetoricians conceived of metaphors primarily as a means for the ornamentation of language, there were suggestions, even in the classical period, that they amounted to more than mere stylistic flourish. Metaphors were classified among the *tropos*, which is sometimes translated from the ancient Greek as “a manner or turning of mind” (“Tropos”), and ancient theorists were clearly aware of the powerful mental and psychological effects that metaphors could have upon an audience. For instance, Plato classified metaphor as a type of *eikôn*, or image, which, as classics scholar E. E. Pender explains, is structurally related to *paradeigmata*, or models, which in turn serve “to aid understanding of difficult or

unfamiliar subjects” (47). Indeed, Plato employed elaborate metaphors in his own writing, such as those of the cave, the line, and the sun in *The Republic*, so that his audience could more readily grasp highly complex or abstract concepts. I contend that the metaphors of higher education as business and defense functioned in much this same manner, enabling audiences of reform rhetoric to more readily grasp the complexities of higher education by relating it to something more familiar, whether a globalized industry or the defense of our country. This heuristic function of metaphors was also emphasized by Aristotle, who noted in *The Rhetoric* that they bring about learning by forcing the hearer to seek a commonality between unlike things: “an acute mind will perceive resemblances even in things far apart” (111.11.1412a-b). Yet Aristotle also stressed the role of metaphor in lending “liveliness” to rhetoric and evoking such feelings as pleasure and surprise (*The Rhetoric* 111.11.1412a-b). Following this same line of reasoning, I claim that metaphors of defense and business serve as a means of engaging not only thought but also emotion in calls for postsecondary education reform. By triggering such feelings as pride, patriotism, and protectiveness, the metaphors lend urgency to reform rhetoric and spur audiences to take or demand swift or sometimes drastic action.

The cognitive theories of metaphor advanced by several 20th-century rhetoricians, most notably those of I.A. Richards and Kenneth Burke, are also useful in examining how higher education came to be conceived in terms of business and defense. Picking up a thread of classical rhetorical theory, Richards asserts that metaphor “fundamentally is a borrowing between and intercourse of *thoughts*. . . . *Thought* is metaphoric, and proceeds by comparison, and the metaphors of language derive therefrom” (94, emphasis in

original). He also proposes the tenor-vehicle model of metaphor, assigning the terms “tenor” and “vehicle” to the constituent parts of a metaphor, using “tenor” to designate “the principal subject” and “vehicle” to distinguish “what it resembles” (96-97). Within the metaphor “higher education is defense,” for example, higher education would be the tenor, whereas defense would be the vehicle. Likewise, in the metaphor “higher education is a business,” business becomes the vehicle, establishing an apparent resemblance between it and postsecondary education. Richards’ theory would further suggest that there is “movement among meanings” between the two—in other words, that through their metaphorical association, higher education actually takes on the meaning of defense or business (48). In a similar vein, Burke contends that metaphor involves the carrying over of meaning from one thing to another. “Metaphor is a device for seeing something *in terms of* something else,” he writes in *A Grammar of Motives*. “It brings out the thisness of a that, or the thatness of a this” (503, emphasis in original). Classifying metaphor among the four master tropes, Burke equates it with perspective—a particular way of looking at a subject, akin to the point of view that one character in a drama might have toward another (*A Grammar* 504). He posits that metaphor, as such, contributes to “a character’s reality” but is necessarily limited; it only represents one possible viewpoint among many (*A Grammar* 504). In this way Burke’s theory of metaphor corresponds with his theory of perspective by incongruity as developed in *Permanence and Change*. One thing is perceived in terms of an incongruous other. Thus, in perceiving higher education as a business or means of defense, we bring together two subjects which are inherently incongruous. We construct what Burke calls a “terministic screen,” which

causes us to “select” certain elements of the subject on which to focus and to “deflect” certain others (*Permanence* 45). This screen reorients, and in many cases disorients, the way we think about various functions of higher education, including the instruction it delivers and the societal role it is meant to serve.

Approaching the metaphors of defense and business from the standpoint of cognitive linguistics, the statements “higher education is defense” and “higher education is a business” would be considered “structural metaphors” because they allow us to conceptualize higher education “in terms of something that we understand more readily” (Lakoff and Johnson 61). In line with Richards and Burke, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson argue that the “essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another” (5). Lakoff and Johnson’s approach to metaphorical entailments, which “can characterize a coherent system of metaphorical concepts and a corresponding coherent system of metaphorical expressions for those concepts,” is useful for examining the ways in which metaphors of defense and business have structured how higher education was thought about as well the actions that have been taken to reform it since the Cold War (9). Such metaphorical entailments, according to Lakoff and Johnson, not only draw attention to similarities between the two things being compared but actually forge *new* similarities. “Metaphors may create realities for us, especially social realities” they write. “A metaphor may thus be a guide for future action” (156). Based on this theory, a metaphor may become a self-fulfilling prophecy, providing the grounds for sweeping policy changes and structural realignments. In relation to a social institution, this can be particularly dangerous, for not only will the institution be thought of in terms

of a metaphor, but it may *become* the metaphor. That is, higher education becomes a form of national defense; it becomes a business or industry, with many of the features and functions thereby entailed.

To investigate how this occurred, I apply to selected commission reports not only the theories of metaphor outlined above, but also the corpus approach to critical metaphor analysis as described by Charteris-Black. Critical metaphor analysis may allow us to challenge the dominant metaphors propagated by the rhetoric of reform and to propose alternative viewpoints that may be not only less limited but less *limiting* to conceptions of higher learning. This approach integrates cognitive-linguistic theories of metaphor with those of critical discourse analysis, viewing neither as sufficient to understanding the persuasive role that metaphor plays in evoking emotional responses or to understanding how metaphors function within specific discourse contexts. According to Charteris-Black, linguistic, cognitive, and pragmatic criteria *all* must be brought to bear in defining metaphor (21). In analyzing how business or defense function as metaphors for higher education, then, linguistic criteria would be used to identify the semantic tension between the two concepts, a tension which is gradually reduced as the metaphors become more and more commonplace, whereas cognitive criteria would serve to demonstrate how the metaphors cause a conceptual or psychological shift from one domain or context of meaning to another. Pragmatic criteria, in turn, expose how the metaphors function rhetorically. As Charteris-Black writes, “A metaphor is an incongruous linguistic representation that has the underlying purpose of influencing opinions and judgments by persuasion; this purpose is often covert and reflects speaker intentions within particular

contexts of use” (21). His approach to critical metaphor analysis proceeds by closely reading metaphors within a large corpus of texts, such as the collection of higher education reform rhetoric I examine here, and then analyzing them in relation to these three definitional criteria. Among its aims, says Charteris-Black, is that of revealing “the covert (and possibly unconscious) intentions of [the] language users” (34). Even more important here, this approach serves a critical function in raising awareness of how metaphor usage may influence social relations and how metaphor choice may be motivated by ideology.

In forging metaphorical linkages between higher education, national defense, and business, writers of reform rhetoric not only effected a shift in the way higher education was conceptualized, but they also linked postsecondary education to a set of ideologies with which it had not been, until then, commonly associated. Since ancient times, education has been the means by which societies preserve and perpetuate their ideas and ideals (Jaeger xiii), and U.S. higher education began in the 1940s to be seen as a means to defend and disseminate a distinctly American set of these. Among these were militarism and American exceptionalism, as noted earlier, as well as classical liberalism, conservatism, and capitalism. The metaphors of higher education as defense or business could transmit such ideologies, for as Charteris-Black explains, metaphors serve to form “a coherent view of reality” and to convey the “inner subjectivity” of the rhetor—that is, what is “unique to their perception of the world” (28, 11). Such metaphors are also highly persuasive because they resonate at a deep and often unconscious emotional level. In essence, metaphors are ideological and, in turn, rhetorical. As I contend, the typified

metaphors of reform rhetoric evoke a specific set of ideologies which resonate with audiences, persuading them to more readily accept a commission's recommendations.

In examining how ideology functions within the rhetoric of higher education reform, it is first necessary to unpack the term "ideology." Over the past 30 years, classical Marxist conceptions of ideology have been challenged as being, first, essentialist in their suggestion that ideologies may be culled out and "purified" and, second, reductive in their attempt to correlate ideologies with specific class interests (Laclau, *Politics and Ideology* 9-11). Addressing these issues, Antonio Gramsci contends that ideologies cannot be essentialized but are instead "articulated," or joined together in complex constellations, and this is accomplished not by individual classes but by larger "collective wills" without a necessary class basis (Laclau and Mouffe 67). Gramsci also describes the function of hegemony, whereby a dominant social group articulates the interests, values, and beliefs of other groups in such a way that those groups effectively consent to their own subordination. These concepts are valuable in examining how commission reports on higher education reform weave together various ideological positions in attempting to advance their agendas and how they subordinate some of these ideological positions to others. Louis Althusser also advances several challenges to classical Marxist theory which may serve as useful theoretical lenses. According to Althusser, ideologies are "systems of representations," not merely figments of "false consciousness," and as such, are evidenced in practices of social action and in language (Hall "Signification," 99, 104). It is this idea which provides the basis for ideological criticism of rhetoric. When we read a rhetorical text, whether a presidential address, a

commission report, or any other, we are reading an expression of ideology, or so the theory goes. In addition, Althusser contends that ideology is perpetuated, or “reproduced,” though various State Apparatuses, including schools, both public and private (97). This provides a useful framework for analyzing how reform rhetoric functions not merely in influencing higher education policy but also in reshaping the institutions themselves.

Building on concepts advanced by both Gramsci and Althusser, Stuart Hall and Ernesto Laclau have developed a full-blown theory of articulation. This theory, Hall says, “is both a way of understanding how ideological elements come, under certain conditions, to cohere together within a discourse, and a way of asking how they do or do not become articulated, at specific conjunctures, to certain political subjects” (qtd. in Grossberg 53). That is, articulation theory allows us to examine how a series of ideologies is yoked together within a particular report on higher education reform and how those ideologies may or may not be aligned with particular political goals or interests. Some of these ideologies may be consistent with one another, while others may be inconsistent or even contradictory, mere fragments in an apparently coherent whole. And it is through articulation, or the piecing together of these fragments, that hegemony may be achieved. Laclau explains, “A class is hegemonic not so much to the extent that it is able to impose a uniform conception of the world on the rest of society, but to the extent that it can articulate different visions of the world in such a way that their potential antagonism is neutralized” (*Politics and Ideology* 161). However, this articulation is only temporary. Says Hall, “It is a linkage which is not necessary, determined, absolute, and

essential for all time” (qtd. in Grossberg 53). This provides for the possibility of disarticulation, or the teasing apart, of these ideologies through analysis as well as their rearticulation through political intervention and struggle. That is the goal of articulation theory. As Jennifer Daryl Slack explains, “we engage the concrete in order to change it, that is, to rearticulate it” (115).

Moving the concept of articulation into the rhetorical realm, several critics have examined how systems or sets of ideology are knitted together to reinforce relations of power and provoke political action. Slack contends, for example, that ideology is “the mechanism that organizes disparate multiple lines of force into a temporarily essentialized system of representation within which we live out those connections as real” (333). In other words, it functions rhetorically to normalize particular views of reality, making them seem incontrovertible and inevitable. Yet, Amy Kimme-Hea explains that by uncovering these systems, we can question these “‘tendencies’ toward ‘common sense’” and “attempt to uncover the social and political forces” that underlie them (42). Similarly, Kenneth Burke theorizes that ideologies function as a form of rhetoric to induce identification and action. Though the term “ideology” originally meant only “the study of ideas in themselves,” Burke says that “it refers now to a system of political or social ideas, framed and propounded for an ulterior purpose” (*A Rhetoric* 88). In this sense, he explains, ideology is employed in an attempt to induce some socio-political choice or action as well as to establish what he calls “identification” or “consubstantiality,” swaying an audience to feel common ground with the rhetor and to join in a unity of ideas (*A Rhetoric* 20-22). This sheds light on how commission reports

articulate different sets of ideology in an effort to win validation for their particular views of higher education and to appeal to their audiences' sense of shared values.

Sharon Crowley's theory of ideologic carries these concepts one step further by describing how articulations of ideology may exert both logical and emotional appeal. Ideologies are typically articulated or joined together at the unconscious level, but when they reach the level of consciousness, they take the form of arguments (Crowley 75). Crowley coins the term "ideologic" to designate these articulations or connections made between ideological positions and which, because of their emotional and historical resonances, exert rhetorical force (75, 61). The more interconnected and cohesive such an ideologic is, the more persuasive it will be. "Beliefs encompassed within densely articulated ideologics resonate more sympathetically," she says, "and with more intensity, than do beliefs operative within ideologics that are less tightly woven" (79). In *Toward a Civil Discourse*, Crowley also demonstrates how disarticulation of tightly interwoven ideologies may reveal opportunities for productive dialogue between widely divided parties. In this respect, her work serves as a model for my own project, which seeks to bring about greater understanding between members of the higher education community, the communities it seeks to serve, and those who would reform it. In particular, I hope my analysis will reveal what has been omitted from the dominant discourse over higher education reform—whose views have been subordinated or subsumed, whose voices have been silenced—and identify openings where those voices and viewpoints may re-enter.

From Sputnik to the Spelling Commission: Chapter Synopsis

In the following pages, I trace the metaphoric and ideological strands that run through the contemporary rhetoric of higher education reform, which I define as spanning from the Cold War period to the current day. To some degree, I proceed thematically, organizing my analysis around major tropes, ideologies, and competing discourse formations that have threaded their way through calls for reform over this period. Yet, I also proceed somewhat chronologically, for the roots of many of these competing ideologies and discourse formations may be found in periods prior to the Cold War and traced historically from there. It is not my intention to write a *history* of higher education reform, though; many of those have already been written. Instead, I maintain focus on the *rhetoric* of higher education reform and demonstrate how it, in turn, contributed to shaping the institution. With this in mind, subsequent chapters of the dissertation are organized as follows:

In “Higher Education as Defense: From the Cold War to the War on Poverty,” I trace how higher education came to be portrayed as a means of national defense—not only militarily but also technologically and economically—in reform rhetoric of the Cold War period. Drawing on metaphor theories of Lakoff and Johnson, Burke, and others, I argue that defense served as a structural metaphor in shaping views and expectations of higher education. The centerpiece of my analysis is the Truman Commission Report, *Higher Education for American Democracy*, which I contend not only cemented the conception of higher education as a means of defense, but also shaped reform rhetoric

and higher education policy through the Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson years, and beyond.

The third chapter, “Higher Education as Business: From Industrialization to the Information Age,” examines how higher education came to be associated with business and industry in reform rhetoric spanning from the establishment of America’s first colleges to their massification and standardization during the industrial period. Based on metaphor and framing theory, I argue that business and industrial metaphors operated as terministic screens in the portrayal and perception of higher education over this period, while also giving rise to a number of metaphoric entailments—most notably, that colleges and universities should prepare students for the workforce, that they should be standardized, and that they should operate with utmost efficiency. I close the chapter by analyzing how the 1983 report *A Nation at Risk* reintroduced the metaphor of higher education as a business, thus ushering in a period of predominantly capitalistic and neoliberal reform rhetoric.

In Chapter 4, “Management, Measurement, and Marketization: The Decade of Reports and Beyond,” I show how metaphors of quality management quickly pervaded reform rhetoric of the so-called decade of reports, 1983 to 1993, and then structured symbolic action in calls for reform over subsequent years, leading to the so-called “marketization” of higher education. Based upon Jürgen Habermas’s theory of technological rationality, I argue that commission reports of this period instilled a measurement-oriented, bottom line-driven mindset, whereby the results of postsecondary learning were reduced to those which were readily quantifiable and its worth calculated

almost entirely in economic terms. Building on the articulation theory advanced by Hall, Laclau, and Mouffe and on Crowley's theory of ideologic, I then demonstrate how many of the ideologies that have threaded their way through previous rhetoric of higher education reform are woven almost inextricably together in the Spellings Commission Report, *A Test of Leadership*, establishing a hegemony of values which has held fast in much of reform rhetoric since.

In the final chapter, "The Countercurrent of Cultural Literacy: Rearticulating a Defense of the Humanities," I examine the major countervailing trend in higher education reform rhetoric of the contemporary era, the attempt to reassert the value of liberal arts education, particularly instruction in the humanities, as a means of conserving the Western intellectual tradition and of promoting "cultural literacy." In response, I argue that any successful defense of the humanities must take into account the long-standing metaphorical associations of higher education with defense and business while also recognizing current movements toward postmodernism and posthumanism. I conclude by arguing that the ideologies now associated with higher education must be rearticulated, and the generic conventions and limitations of commission reports challenged, if the humanities are to sustain a place within a newly constituted American university.

In this final chapter, especially, but also throughout my dissertation, I draw not only on my scholarship in rhetoric and composition but also upon my sixteen years as a public relations practitioner, during which I developed media relations, political advocacy, grassroots mobilization, and public education campaigns on behalf of major corporations and nonprofit organizations. At one point, I helped to develop an advocacy

report on arts education reform for the J. Paul Getty Trust and promoted its agenda through a nationwide series of meetings with educators, policymakers, and the news media. Experiences like this have put me in a unique position, I believe, to expose the rhetorical workings of commission reports and other forms of reform rhetoric. Such experiences have also exposed me to the ways in which powerful institutions manipulate rhetoric to serve their own ends at the expense of those who are less powerful—exposure which has been invaluable to the analysis which follows.

CHAPTER 2
HIGHER EDUCATION AS DEFENSE:
FROM THE COLD WAR TO THE WAR ON POVERTY

Commission reports on higher education reform commonly rely, as I have argued in the previous chapter, on creating a sense of crisis. A crisis which threatens our nation, our values, or our lives may allow commissions to marshal support for their proposals. On the other hand, if no such crisis exists, one may be invented. With the publishing of the first commission report on higher education during the Truman Administration, however, there was no need to invent a crisis. One already loomed large in the national imagination, and that was the supposed threat of communist expansion posed by the Soviet Union and other Eastern Bloc countries. In the immediate aftermath of World War II, the danger not only of military strikes on U.S. soil, but also of ideological strikes against U.S. political and economic interests, weighed heavily on Americans' minds. In seeking Congressional support for defense of Greece and Turkey in 1946, President Truman had decided to tie such aid to a "global battle against communism," as historian Walter LaFeber recounts, and to fire what was characterized as "the opening gun in a campaign to bring people up to the realization that the war [wasn't] over by any means" (qtd. in LaFeber 58). This tactic "'scared hell' out of the American people" (qtd. in LaFeber 59). Consequently, the Truman Doctrine was embraced, and the Cold War, with its alarmist rhetoric, came to dominate American life (LaFeber 55).

This was a war on many fronts: the open market required defense in both Western Europe and China to avoid another Great Depression (or so it was thought); the world

had to be secured against totalitarian and communist threats and again made “safe for democracy” (Wilson); U.S. political alliances needed to be maintained in Latin America and elsewhere to block Soviet domination of the United Nations; and the horrific potentialities of atomic energy, whose specter had been raised by Hiroshima and Nagasaki, needed containment to avoid such catastrophe closer to home. The latter, especially, resulted in a military alignment with U.S. higher education. According to historian Richard Abrams, the advent of nuclear power “had at least as much to do with America’s assumption of hegemonic responsibilities in Western Europe and the Pacific after the war as did deliberate policy choices” (18). And, not surprisingly, given the previous involvement of universities and their laboratories in conducting nuclear research, military and government personnel looked to join forces with university scholars once again to stave off the perceived threat of nuclear annihilation (Abrams 18). According to historian Christopher Lucas, higher education was viewed as a means of “bolstering the nation’s defenses and helping to advance its vital national policy objectives” at the outset of the Cold War (*American* 253). National security considerations during this period also “lent renewed urgency to demands for a skilled, more highly trained work force,” Lucas says (*American* 318). Colleges and universities seemed the natural supplier to meet this demand for more scientifically and technically trained workers to aid in defending U.S. interests both at home and abroad. Hence, higher education came to be linked by way of the crisis of the Cold War to national defense, and the Cold War provided the impetus, or rhetorical exigency, out of which numerous proposals for postsecondary educational reform of the period sprang.

In this chapter I will examine how higher education was portrayed as a means of national defense—not only militarily, but also technologically and economically—in rhetoric of higher education reform of the Cold War period, which spanned from mid-1940's through the late-1980's. By analyzing commission reports, as well as speeches, legislation, and other artifacts from the period, I will show how widespread support for various alterations and expansions to postsecondary education was gained through rhetorical appeals to both militarism and American exceptionalism. The latter, as Sharon Crowley explains, is one of America's mostly deeply held mythologies. It “teaches that Americans must repeatedly fight those designated as ‘other’ in order to renew their sense of identity as a unified people who share a unique destiny. Americans must defeat these strange or supposedly hostile ‘others’ in order to ‘preserve the American way of life,’ as the common-place has it” (Crowley 97). It is a myth, she explains, that packs enormous persuasive punch. When this supposed exceptionalism is threatened, Americans stand ready to defend it, by military force if necessary. American exceptionalism thus goes hand-in-hand with militarism, defined variously as “the belief or desire of a government or people that a country should maintain a strong military capability and be prepared to use it aggressively to defend or promote national interests” and as the “predominance of the armed forces in the administration or policy of the state” (“Militarism,” *New Oxford, American Heritage*). In addition, I will argue that national defense became a powerful metaphor for higher education during the Cold War period, a metaphor which was perpetuated and elaborated in the rhetoric of higher education reform up through the Reagan-era report *A Nation at Risk*. Framing my analysis with the metaphor theories

described in Chapter 1, I will argue that defense served as a structural metaphor in shaping views and expectations of higher education, as a terministic screen in limiting alternative constructions, and as a powerful rhetorical trope in gaining acceptance for significant reforms to higher education by linking it with a specific set of ideologies.

Based on the theory of Lakoff and Johnson, the concept of national defense would have provided a fitting structural metaphor for higher education during the Cold War era because postsecondary education would have been unfamiliar to many, but the concept of national defense would have been widely familiar. Lakoff and Johnson's notion of "metaphorical systematicity" is useful in examining how the metaphor of defense served to highlight certain aspects of higher education while at the same time hiding other aspects that were inconsistent with the metaphor (10). In this respect, the metaphor of defense narrowed the way higher education was conceptualized, emphasizing the ways it could serve the national interest during the Cold War while de-emphasizing other purposes it could serve, such as the perpetuation of humanistic values, the development of individuals, or the improvement of material conditions for women and minoritized groups. In fact, the metaphor of defense reinforced the conception of higher education as a masculine realm, perhaps contributing to the steep drop in women's enrollment during the 1940s and '50s (Thelin 267).

Lakoff and Johnson's approach to metaphorical entailments is useful, too, for examining ways in which the metaphor of defense structured the way higher education was thought about as well the actions that were taken to reform it during this period (9).

The metaphor “higher education is defense” involves, to name but a few, the following entailments:

- Higher education is a weapon to be used in times of conflict.
- Higher education protects the U.S. from its enemies.
- Higher education preserves American values.
- Higher education promulgates ideologies, such as republicanism and liberalism, which undergird American society.
- Higher education defends the U.S. against foreign encroachment.
- Higher education ensures U.S. global competitiveness.
- Higher education maintains America’s role as world leader.
- Higher education enables the U.S. to dominate global markets.
- Higher education upholds America’s political and economic systems.
- American higher education must be the mightiest in the world.

To say that higher education must be the mightiest in the world suggests that it has a role not only in the waging of war, but in the maintenance of peace. Given the nature of the Cold War itself—as a war of words, as an attempt to maintain peace through the mounting of superior weaponry and other deterrents—references to war and peace became virtually interchangeable in rhetoric of the period. Henry Kissinger notes this in an address on U.S. foreign policy he delivered before the Association for Higher Education in 1958: “As geography has shrunk, we have learned that the normalcy of peace and the clearness of aggression was an historical illusion” (1). The two are also intertwined in many presidential addresses of the period, such as in John F. Kennedy’s

entreaty to enemy nations that “both sides begin anew the quest for peace, before the dark powers of destruction unleashed by science engulf all humanity in planned or accidental self-destruction” as well as in Lyndon B. Johnson’s proclamation that “we must be strong enough to win any war, and we must be wise enough to prevent one” (“Inaugural,” “Annual Message”). According to Kenneth Burke, concepts like war and peace operate along a rhetorical continuum, with one inevitably implying the other. In this sense, he explains, “we can treat ‘war,’ as a *special case of peace*” (*Rhetoric* 21, emphasis in original). The metaphor of higher education as defense thus entails the notion that universities and colleges may be instruments of either. They become part of the nation’s arsenal as both weapons for aggression and shields against it. They are linked, as it were, to two sides of the same metaphor.

Such metaphorical entailments, according to Lakoff and Johnson, not only draw attention to similarities between the two things being compared but actually forge *new* similarities. This is precisely what happened to higher education during the Cold War era, as I will argue in the following pages. The metaphor of defense paved the way for policies that actually transformed higher education into a form of national defense. Furthermore, the metaphor of defense allowed commissions to build what Burke calls “consubstantiality,” or a “unity of ideas,” with audiences at whom their reports were directed. With patriotism and nationalistic pride swelling the hearts of Americans following World War II and the need to defend the U.S. against further attacks much on their minds, tying the fortunes of higher education to the national defense was a deft strategy for pushing through desired reforms.

Higher Education and Defense: A Brief History

It would be wrong, of course, to suggest that the linkage between U.S. higher education and defense was entirely new at the outset of the Cold War. According to historian John Thelin, the association was first made in several pieces of legislation passed during the late 19th and early 20th centuries which “consolidated federal interest in such fields as agriculture, military training, and engineering” (135). The Morrill Land-Grant College Act of 1862, for example, prescribed that each state would have “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” (7 USC 301, 1862). Richard Abrams affirms that the relationship between universities and the military began with the first Morrill Act (15). However, he mentions that these beginnings were simply an “afterthought” to the larger intent of the legislation and so went “almost unnoticed” (15-16). Congressman Justin Morrill of Vermont argued for including the reference to “military tactics” in the legislation given the North’s inability to recruit skilled officers at the outbreak of the Civil War, contending that military education on land-grant campuses could prevent such an occurrence in the future. Further, Morrill reasoned that military expertise would be increasingly required as our young nation grew (Abrams 16). The parenthetical nature of the military reference is evident from its subordination within the wording of the legislation. Clearly, the land-grant colleges’ curricular offerings were to be focused primarily on “agriculture and the mechanic arts,” with “military tactics” only mentioned subsequent to “other scientific and classical studies.” The nation’s need for military

expertise did not provide the primary justification for higher education reform that it would eventually during the Cold War. In fact, some historians note that the Morrill Act was not even aimed “at higher education per se” but instead at winning support from western farmers and their representatives for high tariffs on eastern manufactured goods (Anderson 31). Nor did the Act’s provisions for military instruction amount to much due to “widespread misuse of grants” as well as years of “War Department neglect” following its passage (Anderson 31, Abrams 18). Even so, the military reference did help to propel the Morrill Act through Congress after similar legislation had failed or been vetoed previously (National Association 4). Hence, for apparently the first time in U.S. history, the linkage between higher education and military defense served successfully as a rhetorical appeal.

Following the turn of the century, the most notable linkages between higher education and defense were made in the National Defense Acts of 1916 and 1920, which established and authorized ongoing federal support for Reserve Officers’ Training Corps (ROTC) on college and university campuses. Specifically, the 1916 Act charged the President with organizing, “for the purpose of providing a reserve of officers available for military service when needed,” an ROTC in “civil educational institutions ... including State universities and those State institutions that are required to provide instruction in military tactics under the Act of Congress of July 2, 1862 [i.e., the first Morrill Act]” (qtd. in National Association 22-23).. Civilian higher education is clearly juxtaposed with national defense here. However, as Abrams explains, World War I intervened in the process of establishing such a peacetime reserve and scuttled the program almost before

it began. By the war's end, a rhetorical cross-current had emerged which made it difficult for the War Department to further press its case for military training at so-called "civil" institutions (Abrams 19). Responding to the feverish nationalism and resulting suppression of dissent during the Great War, the higher education community had begun advocating for greater academic freedom. The university should stand *apart* from other social institutions, faculty and administrators argued, so that it could freely and ethically explore all policy options (Abrams 19). Although Congress did pass the National Defense Act of 1920, authorizing the establishment of ROTC units at *any* college or high school, Abrams contends that resistance within the higher education community led to diminished collaboration between higher education and the military for the next 20 years (19-20). George Zook notes likewise that the nation's colleges and universities, as proverbial "centers of peacetime activities," were disappointed by the failure to find peaceable methods of resolving international conflict following World War I and thus resisted further military involvement for most of two decades ("How the Colleges" 1).¹³ "Most of them felt that they could make their best contribution to the increasingly critical national situation by going ahead with their regular tasks in the most effective manner possible," he writes. In this, Zook reflects the line of argument that higher education should be separate from national defense, not joined to it ("How the Colleges" 1).

Although military presence did diminish on college and university campuses in the years between World Wars I and II, other ideological influences served to perpetuate

¹³ While faculty and administrators may have resisted military involvement during this period, Thelin notes that students, especially those from East Coast campuses, not only enlisted in large numbers during WWI but lent their support in various other ways as well. For example, "most student yearbooks dedicated elaborate graphics to patriotic descriptions of students devoting themselves to the war effort," and the "'collegiate hero' role" was widely celebrated (Thelin 199, 201).

the metaphorical association between higher education and defense. Principal among these were the theories of progressive education advanced by John Dewey. Although Dewey was prominent in the anti-war movement, his political and educational philosophies implied that education, if made available equitably and aimed at developing “critical, socially engaged intelligence,” could be a powerful weapon in the fight to defend participatory democracy (Fesenstein). The two are linked directly in the title to his 1916 work *Democracy and Education*, in which he states that “a democratic community [must be] more interested than other communities have cause to be in deliberate and systematic education” (100-01). Not only does such education prepare citizens for informed voter participation, he argues, but it also equips them for the rapid social change that characterizes democracy and provides the social cohesiveness necessary to democracy’s maintenance. “A society which is mobile, which is full of channels for the distribution of a change occurring anywhere, must see to it that its members are educated to personal initiative and adaptability,” he writes (*Democracy and Education* 102). Dewey further articulated his conceptions of democracy, individual freedom, and social action in a series of books published between 1920 and 1940. In *The Public and Its Problems*, for example, he defends participatory democracy against such skeptics as Walter Lippmann, who had argued that there was little room for democratic politics in modern societies (Festenstein). Dewey also contends that defense of democracy entails protection of individual freedom against elitist economic interests. In this regard, he denounces the “old individualism” of classical or *lassiez-faire* liberalism in favor of a “new liberalism,” which favors economic intervention to ensure social

justice, or the basic rights of citizens. The “new liberalism” that Dewey espoused also challenged the presumed connection between individual liberty and private property, suggesting that property rights contributed to “unjust inequality” and “less-than-equal liberty” (“Liberalism”). Promoting such ideologies through his books, lectures, and experimental schools, Dewey influenced literally thousands of teachers and educational leaders during the interwar period (“A Brief”). One of these leaders, Newton Edwards, was a founding member of the John Dewey Society and subsequently served as a consultant to the Truman Commission on the first volume of its report (Schrum 293). Given this linkage between Dewey and the Truman Commission, Dewey’s ideas apparently influenced the Commission’s conception of higher education as a means to defend the nation.

No influence was greater in reinforcing the relationship between higher education and defense, though, than the bombing of Pearl Harbor followed by the U.S.’s entry into World War II. Suddenly, the nation was threatened both militarily and ideologically, and the argument that colleges and universities should stand apart from the national defense no longer held such sway. One indicator of this was a statement issued by the American Council on Education in June 1940 titled “Education and the National Defense.” The statement advised that “all the agencies of education must be utilized for the most effective meeting of any national emergency.” Yet, it included the caveat that “adequate consideration must be given to the conservation of educational values, resources, and personnel” and that “emergency programs should not interfere unduly with the regular work of the schools and higher institutions” (qtd. in Zook, “How the Colleges” 1). As

Zook explains, this apparent hedging reflected the ambivalence that many in higher education still felt toward relations with the federal government after the “many mistakes relating to education” that had been made during the First World War (“How the Colleges” 1). Even so, the rhetorical currents had shifted, and in the build-up to Pearl Harbor and its aftermath, higher education was linked more and more explicitly to military defense—not only in government pronouncements, such as President Roosevelt’s 1941 order to create the Office of Scientific Research and Development, which established support for basic research by university scientists (Abrams 20), but also in those of the higher education community itself. “College and university administrators, faculty and students, like other citizens, were dazed at the prospects of destruction of life and property which lay ahead,” writes Zook, “and anxious to know how best they could serve in the common cause” (“How the Colleges” 3). One outcome of this was the issuance of a statement in 1942 by the National Committee on Education and Defense, formed jointly by the American Council on Education and the National Education Association, which read as follows:

In the present supreme national crisis, we pledge to the President of the United States, Commander in Chief of our Nation, the total strength of colleges and universities—our faculties, our students, our administrative organizations, and our physical facilities. The institutions of higher education of the United States are organized for action, and they offer their united power for decisive military victory, and for the ultimate and even more difficult task of establishing a just and lasting peace. (qtd. in Zook, “How the Colleges 3)

Not only did the Committee’s name clearly link education with defense, but the language of its statement makes explicit the extended metaphorical association as well: higher education is positioned as an actual branch of the armed services, possessing “strength”

to be utilized in times of “supreme national crisis,” making a “pledge” to the “Commander in Chief,” and offering its “united power for decisive military victory.” Indeed, the statement is replete with the metaphorical entailments and militaristic appeals that would come to dominate the rhetoric of higher education reform after World War II and reshape priorities and policymaking in that arena for decades to come. The alarm bell had been sounded, America’s exceptionalism was under attack, and even these guardians of higher education, despite their prior resistance, were caught up in the rhetorical swirl.

War often provides the “pragmatic” justification for postsecondary educational reforms (Orkodashvili 7). Yet ironically, it took peacetime to truly cement the relationship between U.S. higher education and national defense in the rhetoric of reform. Several trends and events during and after the Second World War helped to make the metaphorical association between the two increasingly commonplace. The first of these was the profound effect that the war had on college and university enrollments. During the war, enrollments dropped sharply because many college-aged men were drafted or volunteered for military service. According to Lucas, this forced colleges and universities to depend “almost entirely on government subsidies,” the majority of which were tied to military training and research (*American* 252). A number of universities even accepted secret contracts to develop advanced missile technology or chemical and biological weaponry (Abrams 20). This trend toward government funding of scientific and technical research on university campuses accelerated following the war, no doubt strengthening the perceptual association between higher education and national defense. With enactment of the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944, commonly known as the G.I.

Bill, though, college and university enrollments began to burgeon. By the fall of 1945, 88,000 returning veterans had applied for its educational benefits, surpassing all expectations, and by 1946, college enrollments under the Act had exceeded the one-million mark (Thelin 263). Not only did the language of the G.I. Bill explicitly link higher education with the “readjustment” of military personnel, stipulating that “any person who served in the active military or naval service... shall be eligible for and entitled to receive education or training,” including at “business schools and colleges, scientific and technical institutions, colleges, vocational schools, junior colleges, teachers colleges, normal schools, professional schools, [and] universities” (II.VIII.1, 11), but the resultant influx of vets on college and university campuses contributed to the reshaping of the institutions themselves. “The pragmatic, impatient GI collegians shaped curricular enrollments by voting with their feet,” writes Thelin, “opting for courses and majors in such employable fields as business administration and engineering” (266). Interestingly, the standardized testing now loathed by many educators was largely born of the need to test mass numbers of returning veterans for academic admission and placement (Fincher 3). Meanwhile, campuses were dramatically altered with “makeshift dormitories and classrooms springing up everywhere” and science and engineering labs increasingly devoted to government-funded R & D (Lucas, *American* 252-53, Abrams 20).

But the most dramatic shift, relevant to my argument here, was the permanent rhetorical linkage forged between higher education and national defense as a result of the integral and very visible role postsecondary education played in peacetime readjustment. Several scholars document the influence this had in forever altering conceptions of higher

education and its proper place in American society. For example, Thelin states that the “fundamental historic change that set into motion the dramatic expansion of enrollments as well as numerous curricula innovations was that higher education had come to be a major focus of attention in the formulation of public policies at both the state and federal levels” (261), and Abrams writes that “effective peacetime integration of the military’ with the resources of higher education” fed the assumption that higher education had “an obligation to service national security needs” (21). The stage was thus set for use of national defense as the primary structural metaphor for higher education during the Cold War and as a powerful rhetorical justification for further sweeping reforms.

Higher Education for American Democracy: The Truman Commission Report

By the time Harry Truman assumed the presidency in 1945, higher education was already being positioned as both a badge of the nation’s pride and a shield against those who might invade or attack it. “Universities and colleges [were] carrying out their pledge to make their resources fully available in the war effort and to exert themselves in every possible way in the common cause,” states Zook (“How the Colleges” 7). The nation’s postsecondary institutions had demonstrated their value to the nation in numerous ways: in providing technical and scientific know-how needed by the federal government and armed services, in maintaining a critical civilian function on the domestic front, in training large numbers of men and women for military service, and in retraining them for civilian employment during readjustment. Not only this, but as higher education historian Cameron Fincher states, “the cooperation between the military services and

institutions of higher learning” during World War II had revealed “numerous ways in which colleges could improve classroom teaching and perhaps develop a more ‘democratic educational philosophy’” (1-2). It is not surprising, then, that when Truman established his Presidential Commission on Higher Education in July 1946, he assigned it a task that reflected not only his personal convictions about the instrumental nature of higher learning in American society but one that mirrored popular conceptions of the role that colleges and universities could play—in fact, *were* playing—in supporting the “common cause.” Truman charged the Commission with “examining the functions of higher education in our *democracy*” (President’s n.p., emphasis mine). He also implicitly directed its 28 members to investigate whether principles of the G.I. Bill could be carried over into a postwar environment (Thelin 268). With this in mind, Truman appointed to his Commission several outspoken advocates of higher education’s role in providing trained personnel not only for war but for maintenance of peace as well. These included George Zook, who served as chairman and whose pledges of higher education’s support during national emergency have been quoted previously, and J. Donald Kingsley, head of the U.S. Office of War Mobilization and Reconversion’s manpower division, who had helped persuade Truman to form the Commission and was appointed as a representative to it. With Kingsley’s involvement, “Truman signaled that he saw the Commission as a means to press higher education into national service more formally,” explains historian Ethan Schrum (281). Hence, from its very beginnings, the Truman Commission embraced the metaphoric association between national defense and higher education, including the entailment that colleges and universities could supply “manpower,” a word

which combines the idea of human labor or effort with that of strength, often political or military, but also conveys that such power is masculine.

The Truman Commission's report, published in December 1947 in six volumes, was titled *Higher Education for American Democracy*, another entailment conveying the idea that postsecondary education should serve the nation's political interests. The transmittal letter to the President from George Zook emphasized this connection as well: "The Commission members and the staff are grateful," he wrote, "for the opportunity which you have given us to explore so fully the future role of higher education which is so closely identified with the welfare of our country and our world" (President's n.p.). Here it is telling that the identification with "welfare" is expressed in a nonrestrictive clause, implying that it is integral to higher education's meaning, and that such "welfare" is conceived not simply in terms of "our country" but "our world." This same implication carries into the report's opening pages, where the Commission states that "the coming of the atomic age...has underscored the need for education and research for the self-protection of our democracy [and] for demonstrating the merits of our way of life to other people" (2). The "atomic age" is expressed here as the rhetorical exigency lending urgency to a refocusing of higher education's role. The need for international control of atomic weapons would have held strong persuasive appeal for audiences in the aftermath of Hiroshima. And the "need" which higher education could serve is framed as being twofold: first, "self-protection," suggesting that the nation is in danger and requires defense; and second, "demonstrating the merits of our way of life," implying that higher education can win over "other people," that is, those who are different or foreign, by

instilling the superiority of democratic values. Thus, the statement contains appeals to both militarism and American exceptionalism, pitting a unique and unified “us” against a strange and potentially hostile “other.” Educational studies scholar Matthew Hershberg explains that such concepts were central to a “cognitive schema,” which strongly influenced Americans’ thinking during the Cold War:

Americans remained proud of their nation’s ability to dominate and control other nations “in response” to Soviet and communist threats. Thus the cold war helped perpetuate a proud patriotism by uniting the nation against a common enemy, justifying questionable policies in the name of containment, and drawing attention to a Soviet communist antithesis against which America could be proudly compared. (3)

Such “cognitive criteria,” as Charteris-Black would term them, helped reduce the semantic tension that might otherwise have been apparent in the metaphorical association between U.S. higher education and military defense, while also enhancing the “pragmatic” aspect of the metaphor, or its rhetorical sway.

The metaphor of higher education as military defense is expressed, or entailed, in the Truman Commission Report in at least three distinct ways: First, the report suggests that higher education can actually be pressed into military service. For example, it states that “scientific knowledge and technical skills that have made atomic and bacterial warfare possible are the products of education and research, and higher education must share proportionately in the task of forging social and political defenses against obliteration” (8). Universities’ previous involvement in development of weaponry, despite being largely forced upon them, is used here as grounds for inductive reasoning” They participated in this capacity the past, so they are obligated to participate going forward. This logical appeal, coupled with the fear evoked by mention of nuclear and

biological weaponry and the pride in higher education's possession of "scientific knowledge and technical skills" sufficient to enable it to "forge," as out of metal, "social and political defenses," places a strong rhetorical onus. Second, the report emphasizes higher education's function in supplying trained manpower for military as well as civilian purposes. It proposes an analysis of professional needs in such fields as teaching, medicine, and engineering to avoid a "manpower shortage" and the "danger of competition in the recruiting of professional personnel" (81). Likewise, it bemoans the "shortage of manpower" in the natural sciences as "the ultimate obstacle to national progress" (92). "Advancing the frontiers of knowledge through research and the training of research men," the report states, "is still a supreme obligation of the university" and "vital to the health and strength of our national life" (91). The superlatives here, "ultimate" and "supreme," not only position the training of manpower as chief among higher education's priorities, but the imagery of "frontiers" and "progress" brings to mind America's supposed Manifest Destiny, to which any manpower shortage might pose an "obstacle." Third, and perhaps more importantly, the report stresses the role higher education can play in containment of the communist threat and maintenance of peace through international understanding. "American institutions of higher education have an enlarged responsibility for the diffusion of ideas in the world that is emerging," it states. "They will have to help our own citizens as well as other peoples to move from the provincial and insular mind to the international mind" (15).

This latter entailment, especially, reflects President Truman's strategy of containment during the Cold War. The Truman Doctrine, as political scientist Elizabeth

Edwards Spalding explains, included political, economic, and strategic components; “a military facet had to be included ... to foster political and economic viability” (71). For Truman held that “the seeds of totalitarian regimes [were] nurtured by misery and want” and that the U.S., as leader of the free world, needed to keep alive “the hope of [all] people for a better life” (qtd. in Spalding 70-71). The Truman Commission report echoes this same language, stressing that “the issue of a free society versus totalitarianism is still very much with us” and that “the ultimate verdict in this conflict will go to the form of human association and government which best serves the needs and promotes the welfare of the people” (9). The report included among its three major prongs the role of higher education in promoting global leadership and understanding (22). But though it could be construed from this that colleges and universities were meant simply to serve as proponents for international peace, the metaphoric entailment actually aligned them with Truman’s primary tactic for cold war. Further, the report envisaged college graduates as a kind of extended diplomatic corps or army of ambassadors, upholding the pillars of democratic society at home while promulgating American values overseas. Graduates could achieve this, explained the report, by sharing their technical and scientific know-how and serving as exemplars of the American lifestyle (14-19). To fulfill this role, the Commission recommended that college students be given greater opportunity to study international affairs and to prepare for “world citizenship” through exposure to the “rich advantages of cultural diversity” (17). Reflecting the capacity that Lakoff and Johnson ascribe to metaphors of shaping social action, these same ideas gave rise during the Truman era to several acts supporting international exchange programs for university

scholars. These included the Fulbright Act and U.S. Information and Educational Exchange Act, as well as establishment of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).¹⁴

In addition to the metaphoric entailments outlined above, and in keeping with Truman's multifaceted strategy of containment, the Truman Commission Report also recommends roles for higher education in defending U.S. economic and technological competitiveness. For example, the report lays out a detailed plan for support of vocational training, viewing it as complementary to other components of higher education (61).¹⁵ In addition, the Truman Commission advocates for expansion of professional schools to meet critical manpower needs and, even more notably, for establishment of a broader network of community colleges to provide "necessary training on semiprofessional levels" (82). Both these are tied to national economic interests in the report, with the former described as helping to maintain U.S. global competitiveness in fields such as medicine and engineering and the latter lending support by providing training for such vocations as nursing assistants and medical technicians. In this way, the Commission contends, both professional and semi-professional education could keep pace with

¹⁴ George Zook made eloquent pleas for congressional support of such "educational exchange" programs in a series of articles published in the *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* between 1944 and 1949. He states that such programs could serve democratic ends in furthering world understanding, breaking down barriers of nationalism, and exporting a desirable view of the American lifestyle ("Education" 4, 6, 8-9). In advocating support of UNESCO, he waxes especially grandiloquent: "One can also rely on the certainty that information will permeate any Iron Curtain. And one can point with pride to the important beginnings which education broadly conceived has already made to world understanding" ("Education" 9). Although Zook presents education as a means to promote peace, his pleas may have had the unintended consequence of reinforcing the rhetorical linkage between education and wartime defense.

¹⁵ It is worth noting, though, that vocational education ranks only as number ten among the Commission's proposed objectives for general education in colleges and universities, *behind* development of "knowledge and attitudes basic to a satisfying family life" (56). This is quite different from where we might expect workforce education to place on such a list today.

“demands of the twentieth century American economy” (68-69). Similarly, the report portrays support of basic research at colleges and universities as integral to national defense. “America is now on her own in accumulating a stock pile of fundamental scientific knowledge as a basis for technological development,” it says, comparing such knowledge to a national resource, like raw materials or weapons, which is stockpiled in the event of acute shortage (93-94). Indeed, the Commission extends this metaphor, stating that basic and applied research are “important social resources, equal in value to the richest of our national resources” and that attempting to control their discoveries “may be to control in large measure the economic and perhaps the social destiny of a people—or indeed of many peoples” (95). Such bombastic rhetoric ties the fate of our country, of our very world, to the capacity of our scientific and technological developments to overpower those of our enemies. With the potential of atomic annihilation looming in the audience’s mind, this appeal by the Truman Commission was clearly calculated to provoke a sense of fear and dire emergency. And it apparently worked. As one respondent to the report observed after its publication, “we Americans, including the President’s Commission, have allowed ourselves to be stampeded by the atom bomb” (Lynd 58).

More than any other form of defense, though, the Truman Commission portrayed higher education as a means for defending the nation ideologically. Indeed, schools were often portrayed as a front in the ideological battle against communism during the Cold War (Anderson 56). Americans were well aware of the role that education was playing in instilling values of totalitarianism into citizens of the Soviet Union. “There is virtually no

limit to what can be done to remake human nature if you have a monopoly of power over the individual's way of life," wrote Gail Kennedy at the time, noting too that a Russian textbook titled *I Want to Be Like Stalin* had recently been translated (v). To combat this, a form of education needed to be created which would advance democratic principles without similarly restricting the freedom of the individual. The Truman Commission seemed to have precisely this end in mind when it wrote *Education for American Democracy*, asserting that higher education could be used as a mighty shield both to fend off the communist threat and preserve and promulgate American political values. First among its principal goals for higher education, the report asserts that colleges and universities should "bring to all the people of our Nation [e]ducation for a fuller realization of democracy in every phase of living" (8). It states, "Only to the extent that we make our democracy function to improve the physical and mental well-being of our citizens can we hope to see freedom grow, not vanish, from the earth." Thus, "education for democratic living" should become "a primary aim" of higher education, not only in "all classroom teaching" but in "every phase of campus life" (9). Here the association of higher education with democracy functions as a terministic screen, emphasizing a specific goal of college life and curriculum while de-emphasizing any other. The purpose of higher education is thereby narrowed to a single facet of its "character," as Burke would say. In fact, higher education is conflated *with* democracy in its capacity to promote the "mental well-being of our citizens" and to both defend and extend the scope of freedom.

In positioning higher education as a means of ideological defense, the Truman Commission reveals its orientation toward a particular set of liberalistic values that undergird American democracy. This is consistent with the theories of Lakoff, Johnson, Burke, and others that ideology is reflected *by* metaphor and that metaphors can establish a “consubstantiality” of ideas between the rhetor and his audience—that is, a sense of shared values or common ground. “This has the effect of making a particular value system more acceptable because it exists within a socially accepted framework,” explains Charteris-Black (12). In this case, the Truman Commission made its sweeping proposals for higher education reform more acceptable by situating them within a familiar and widely accepted ideological framework. The Commission’s goals “are stated in the expansive mood of nineteenth-century liberalism,” as sociologist Robert Lynd observes (58). Lynd refers here to the so-called “new liberalism” associated with John Dewey, among others. The Truman Commission Report does place particular emphasis on the need for higher education to defend and disseminate liberal values of equality, liberty, and social justice, just as Dewey did. For instance, it contends that “the social role of education in a democratic society is at once to insure equal liberty and equal opportunity to differing individuals and groups” (5). To accomplish this, it proposes reforms that will eradicate “barriers to equal opportunity,” posed by economic as well as racial and gender-based inequality (27-29). Famously, it asserts that fully half of American young people should be enrolled in some form of higher education and that higher education should play a central role in advancing social responsibility and justice (41, 10). This accords with the new liberal premise that government and its institutions must intervene to ensure

liberty. In proposing ways that higher education can defend democracy internationally, the Commission also reveals an orientation toward what Spalding terms “liberal internationalism,” which applies many of these same domestic principles to U.S. foreign policy (9). Truman’s own brand of international liberalism was unique, according to Spalding, in that it “relied on the combined strength of the free nations of the world—led by the United States—to defend and further freedom, promote justice and order, and result in peace of a durable sort” (13). In this, it found unity in diversity—despite differences, the many could become one—and this same theme echoes throughout the Truman Commission Report. “Where there is economic, cultural, or religious tension, we undertake to effect democratic reconciliation,” it states, encompassing with this notion both the domestic and international fronts (2, 8). In espousing this form of liberalism, the Truman Commission further demonstrates its embrace of the ideologies espoused by Dewey. He, likewise, held that democracy was a communal experience but could unify people around common ideals of humanity (Schrum 278-79).

Indeed, the strands of new liberalism, progressivism, and civic humanism which are interwoven in Dewey’s educational theories are all evident in the metaphorical associations of the Truman Commission Report. Consistent with new liberalism and progressivism, Dewey believed in the ability of democratic education to bring about progressive social change. In *Democracy and Education*, he contends that education should play a role in overcoming class divisions and freeing “individual capacity in a progressive growth directed to social aims” (115). The Truman Commission Report reflects this same thinking, maintaining that “the first goal in education for democracy is

the full, rounded, and continuing development of the person” and that “to liberate and perfect the intrinsic powers of every citizen is the central purpose of democracy” (9). In other words, education and democracy should serve a reciprocal function in liberating men and women from barriers that might restrict them from achieving due equality. Yet, Dewey also believed that the individual and society go hand-in-hand. Consistent with the ideology of civic humanism, he held that a primary role of education is to prepare young people for engaged citizenship. This idea, too, runs throughout the Truman Commission Report. For example, the report bemoans the increasing specialization of higher education, complaining that “too often [a student] is ‘educated’ in that he has acquired some particular occupation, yet falls short of that human wholeness and civic conscience which the cooperative activities of citizenship require” (48). The report also picks up a Deweyan theme when it decries the typical division between vocational and general education. “General education is not alien to the needs of the worker,” it says (63). This echoes Dewey’s contention that “industrial occupations have infinitely greater intellectual content and infinitely greater cultural possibilities” than ever before and therefore demand that workers attain broad knowledge to avoid becoming merely “appendages to the machines they operate” (367). The Commission maintains that education for all citizens, at every step of the workforce ladder, is essential in the campaign to defend democracy (62-63). Indeed, Schrum claims that the very conception of democracy on which the Truman Commission Report is based is Deweyan in that it raises the democratic “creed” to the level of religion and discredits any other metaphysical or moral foundation (278, 280). This, Schrum posits, is one reason why the

report, despite its grandiose vision of higher education as defense for American democracy, never truly gained traction.

The report's embrace of Deweyan ideas is certainly one major reason why the Truman Commission's lofty proposals never came to much—at least not directly. By the early 1950s, not only had Dewey himself passed away, but many of his progressive educational theories were also being passed over in the rush to provide more “efficient” vocational training for men demobilizing from military service. Dewey's hopes for engaged democratic participation were increasingly seen as “blindly optimistic” in the post-war years (Festenstein). Moreover, his advocacy of unified “general education” for undergraduates, as opposed to the classical ideals of liberal education, was taken as an affront by more conservative, and arguably elitist, educational leaders. The Commission on Liberal Education of the Association of American Colleges complained, for example, that the Truman Commission Report “not only betray[s] a basic confusion upon what constitutes general education and what liberal education, but will be misinterpreted as an attack upon liberal education as such” (qtd. in Farrell 101). The Truman Commission did hold that undergraduate curricula should be organized along the lines of life problems rather than academic disciplines, explains Schrum (279). This correlates with Dewey's stated belief in a general education which engaged students directly in problem-solving and which avoided disciplinary overspecialization as “abstract and bookish” (*Democracy and Education* 9). Still, advocates of liberal education were not persuaded. Jesuit scholar Allen P. Farrell's response to the Truman Commission Report at the time it was published is representative in this respect. “In the Commission's report the social role [of

higher education] is given primacy,” he writes, “and nowhere does the individual and human character of traditional liberal education gain the attention that it deserves” (101). Faculty and administrators of religious and private liberal arts institutions also protested the report’s recommendations because of its proposals to restrict federal funding only to state universities and colleges—a recommendation in keeping with Dewey’s contention that education should foster “state-consciousness” (qtd. in Schrum 279). Raymond Blaine Fosdick, former president of the Rockefeller Foundation and a Princeton graduate, expressed concern that such restrictive funding would actually work against democratic principles of religious and political freedom: “State colleges and universities have frequently been jeopardized by the arbitrary tactics of those who hold political power. When that time comes the private institutions must be the counteracting agencies to keep the light of freedom burning” (qtd. in Hollinshead 90). Many historians hold that such vocal opposition from advocates of private and religious education effectively rung the death-knell for the Truman Commission Report.

Philo Hutcheson, among many other educational historians, argues that “there is no strong evidence that there were any substantial changes in course or program content” at universities or colleges in response to the report’s recommendations (“The Truman” 110). Still, the Truman Commission Report did set a precedent in tying higher education metaphorically to the national interest, and in this way, served as a “blueprint” for future calls for higher education reform (Thelin 269). More than 500 responses to the report were published in the scholarly and popular press by 1953 (Hutcheson, “The Truman” 109). So its ideas and rhetorical strategies, if not its proposed policies, were catching on.

Indeed, Hutcheson goes so far as to state that “no other report on United States higher education has spawned such enduring debate as has *Higher Education for American Democracy*” and that “the resulting rhetoric had enduring qualities for federal policy and national discussions well into the 1970s” (“The 1947” 101, 91). Many scholars have documented the Truman Commission Report’s lasting legacies, such as the greater inclusion it spurred of African-Americans and women in higher education, its lasting influence on general education as a component of the university curriculum, and its role in stimulating the growth of community colleges.¹⁶ The report is also credited with establishing the federal role in funding higher education (Hutcheson, “The 1947” 94). However, most of these legacies were not realized for at least another decade, for the Eisenhower Administration had other plans for how higher education could best defend our nation during the Cold War.

The Eisenhower Era: Sputnik and Growth of the “Military-Industrial-Educational Complex”

Given Dwight Eisenhower’s background as, first, a revered military hero and, second, the former president of a major university, it might be assumed that his administration would naturally link higher education with national defense, and this was partly the case. The report of his Committee on Education beyond the High School did correlate the two rhetorically, at least in its use of the Cold War as its rationale for higher education reform. Following Truman’s example, Eisenhower appointed his committee in

¹⁶ Hutcheson links passage of the Higher Education Act of 1965, for example, as well as Lyndon Johnson’s call for “full educational opportunity” directly to the Truman Commission Report (“The 1947” 101).

1956 to study perceived problems in public higher education. It was intended as a launching pad for programs stemming out of the first White House Conference in Youth, which he had sponsored a year earlier (Kerr-Tener 474). The committee's report, published in 1957, uses overtly militaristic language to encourage "an active and systematic *attack*" on supposed shortcomings in higher education (Preface n.p.). It proposes a "*revolution* in American education," ostensibly necessitated by a "convergence of *powerful forces*" in the aftermath of World War II, including an "*explosion* of knowledge and population, a *burst* of technological and economic advance, the *outbreak* of ideological *conflict* and the *uprooting* of old political and cultural patterns on a worldwide scale" (1, emphasis mine). The metaphors fire in rapid succession here, portending violent upheaval if immediate reforms are not undertaken. Expansion of higher education is represented as the only means to quell such impending assault. Moreover, the report echoes the Truman Commission's contention that a twofold "crisis" was aborning in higher education: first, in the increased demand among an "exploding" U.S. population, and second, in the increased need for technological sophistication precipitated by the Cold War. "America would be heedless if she closed her eyes to the dramatic strides being taken by the Soviet Union in post-high school education," it states (1). The report thus emphasizes the capacity of higher education to strike back against this Communist aggressor, while also positioning it as the means to ensure the "survival of mankind" (1). In this sense, the report reflects Burke's contention that peace and war operate along a shared rhetorical continuum. It positions higher education both as a means to wage educational war and as the very basis of "world peace" (1).

After establishing its justification for reform in such militaristic terms, though, the report of the President's Committee on Education beyond the High School tends to rely on business-related metaphors to promote its agenda of cost-containment and restricted federal involvement in higher education. It recommends, for instance, that "increased emphasis be given by institutions and States to finding and employing means of interinstitutional and interstate cooperation which will maximize facility utilization" (89). In this way, it suggests that more efficient and collaborative management will solve the ills of higher education, just as they might within a business environment. The business metaphors reflect Eisenhower's well-known fiscal conservatism as well his personal managerial style, which was based on "organization and teamwork" (Sloan 297). Given this, it may appear contradictory that his committee also advocates the doubling of faculty salaries in its report—a costly proposition even then—but it does so in terms which still reflect its business orientation. "The most critical bottleneck to the expansion and improvement of education in the United States is the mounting shortage of excellent teachers.... colleges and universities have found themselves at a growing competitive disadvantage in the professional manpower market" (5). The committee suggests that the supply chain cannot keep up with demand without an infusion of human resources, that postsecondary institutions must vie for talented teachers within a competitive marketplace, and that raw materials are being depleted so rapidly that the enterprise cannot grow or prosper. Hence, it presents the increasing of teacher salaries as a sound investment and means to accommodate growing market demand. These types of metaphors may have come more naturally than defense-related ones to a committee

whose membership included a veritable who's who of American business—among them, Devereux C. Josephs, who chaired the group but was also, at the time, chairman of the board of New York Life. In addition, the metaphors reflect the growing influence of business in government affairs during the 1950s and comprise an effective form of appeal to the report's targeted “lay audience” (Lynd 56, Josephs 172).¹⁷ Ironically, though, the fiscal conservatism stressed by the committee ultimately proved its undoing, for Congress cut its funding before it could finalize its recommendations. Its second interim report was quickly dispatched as its last (Preface n.p.).

This seemed an ignominious end to the work of the second presidential commission on higher education reform. Yet, according to some scholars, the National Defense Education Act (NDEA), passed by Congress in 1958, was a direct outgrowth of both the Truman and Eisenhower Commission reports (see, e.g., Kerr-Tener 474, Fleming 134). Lawrence G. Derthick, who, as Eisenhower's commissioner of education, oversaw development of proposals for the NDEA, affirms that it “drew upon findings of the President's Committee” (25). Even so, the key factor in the Act's *passage* was the

¹⁷ The Eisenhower Committee presents an interesting contrast to the Truman Commission in both its membership composition and its audience orientation. While the Truman Commission was composed entirely of well-known educators, a large number of the Eisenhower Committee's members came from the private sector. As Devereux Josephs self-deprecatingly noted, “We are a committee of thirty-six members, approximately half educators and the other half, I was going to say, educated, but this is presumptuous. Perhaps I had better phrase it more modestly as ‘non-educators’” (171). This may account for why the Eisenhower committee's report was targeted toward a “lay audience,” as reflected in its relative brevity (just over 100 pages, while the Truman Commission's report ran to roughly 400), its accessible language, and even its inclusion of a “work book,” which “contain[ed] provocative material for the layman, some basic statistical data, and some rather broad generally accepted ideas and charts” (Devereux 171). The Eisenhower report thus set a precedent for future *public* reports on higher education reform, most notably, *A Nation at Risk*, which was framed as a letter to the American people. By contrast, the Truman Commission Report's language was highly formal, its research data granular, and its volumes on organizing, staffing, and financing higher education clearly directed toward an audience of higher education administrators and policymakers.

Russian launching of Sputnik. “On October 4, 1957, everything changed,” states political scientist Christopher Duncan, referring to the satellite’s launch date. “Not only did this event exponentially increase the magnitude of the cold war, but it also provided an acute sense of urgency within the ranks of American social and political leadership” (720). Driven by this urgency, policymakers supporting the NDEA’s passage redeployed the metaphor of higher education as defense. After being somewhat subordinated within the Eisenhower Committee Report, the metaphor reemerged with a literal vengeance in Sputnik’s wake, figuring prominently not only in language of the NDEA itself, but also in related remarks and deliberations. According to Elliott Richardson, who later served as U.S. Secretary of Defense, Education, and Welfare, the news of Sputnik’s launch gave those advocating for the NDEA a literal “rocket to hitch their aspirations to” (qtd. in Kerr-Tener 475). Republican Congressman Charles Brownson quipped acerbically that “federal aid to education [had shown] up on the floor of the House in a space suit” (qtd. in Anderson 39). And Eisenhower himself urged linkage of the NDEA’s proposals to defense, observing to HEW Secretary Marion Folsom that “anything you can hook on the defense situation would get by” (qtd. in Kerr-Tener 478).

Sputnik thus constituted the ostensible crisis, as well as the rhetorical exigency, to which the NDEA was harnessed. Arguments for its passage appealed heavily to the ideology of American exceptionalism, capitalizing on widespread anxiety that America was falling behind in a technological race with the Soviet Union and on the widely held conviction that drastic action was necessary to ensure that America would retain its lead.

A statement by Representative Carl E. Elliott at an NDEA field hearing exemplifies this line of argument:

Our very survival depends, I believe, in maintaining the technical superiority of the free world over that of the Communist world, and maintaining that superiority depends largely on our having enough scientific, engineering, and other technical and professional people with enough training of sufficient quality to outthink and outproduce the Russians. (qtd. in Anderson 43)

Such appeals to America's competitiveness or Manifest Destiny were becoming increasingly commonplace in rhetoric aimed at expanding the federal role in education (Anderson 29). Higher education, in particular, was used as a scapegoat to explain why the U.S. had lost its competitive edge, but it was also positioned as the means by which the country could regain and defend that edge. In this respect, the role assigned to postsecondary education in the "space race" was but a further entailment of the metaphor of higher education as defense: higher education was represented as a means to fend off technological threats posed by the Soviets. Further, Congressional approval of the NDEA reflects use of the defense metaphor as a system for evaluating proposals for higher education reform. Charteris-Black argues that metaphors, by governing a rhetor's "response to particular situations and to particular ideas," comprise a "system of evaluation" (11). But metaphors may likewise govern an audience's response to situations and ideas. Given that previous attempts had been made to pass bills similar to the NDEA but all had been defeated, it may be argued that Congress looked upon the 1958 legislation more favorably because it effectively linked higher education to defense of the nation's competitiveness.

Not only the arguments for it, but the NDEA itself metaphorically links higher education with defense. It does so starting with its title, which directly juxtaposes the two, and continuing with Act I, which declares that

The security of the Nation requires the fullest development of the mental resources and technical skills of its young men and women. The present emergency demands that additional and more adequate educational opportunities be made available....This requires programs that will give assurance that no student of ability will be denied an opportunity for higher education because of financial need [and] will correct as rapidly as possible the existing imbalances in our educational programs which have led to an insufficient proportion of our population [being] educated in science, mathematics, and modern foreign languages and trained in technology. (I.101)

Here, alarm bells are sounded with mention of the “present emergency.” Higher education is identified as both the source of the nation’s security crisis as well as the solution to it. Implied inadequacies and “imbalances” in its programs are blamed for the shortage of personnel trained in fields considered crucial to the nation’s defense. The emphasis on math, science, and technology reflects not only the influence of the National Science Foundation (NSF) in the NDEA’s development, but also the widespread reaction at the time against supposed “soft” methods of education, such as Deweyan progressive education and the life adjustment movement led by Charles Prosser (Anderson 41, 43; Hunt 627). The metaphor of higher education as defense thus operates as a terministic screen, directing attention toward certain conceptions of higher education that were deemed “rigorous” and away from others deemed less so. In addition, Act I of the NDEA subordinates references to universal access (“no student of ability will be denied”) and increased financial aid (“because of financial need”) to the larger concern over national security. It states that it “will provide substantial assistance in various forms”—another

vague reference to federal aid—both to individuals and states “in order to insure trained manpower of sufficient quality and quantity to meet the national defense needs of the United States” (I.101). Here, again, it justifies increasing federal support of higher education on the basis of national defense interests, following the rhetorical pattern set by the Morrill and Smith-Hughes Acts (Hunt 628, Anderson 41). And though the NDEA does expressly prohibit “federal control of education” (I.102), it subordinates states’ needs to those of the nation. In this manner, it manages to navigate the longstanding conflict between state or local control of public higher education and increased federal control by seeming to support the former while actually advancing the latter.

This skillful balancing act made the NDEA less objectionable to those who might have opposed it, but it also left a lasting, and not entirely positive, rhetorical legacy. First, the NDEA played on the metaphor of defense to secure an increased federal role in higher education, which has continued since. “The NDEA stands as a testament to coupling of national educational policy with national needs,” writes education scholar Thomas C. Hunt. “It stands as a testament to the... involvement (some would say, an intrusion) of the federal government in the conduct of schooling at all levels in the nation” (628). Opponents at the time of the bill’s passage feared that “categorical aid” provided through the NDEA would reshape higher education policy (Hunt 628), and indeed, it has. Second, the bill’s metaphorical depiction of higher education as a form of defense focused attention on the relevance of “hard” subjects to the national interest, while suggesting that subjects within the arts, social sciences, and humanities were less vital. As many scholars observe, the NDEA is remembered primarily as a bill in support

of math-science education, despite its eventual amendment to include other curricular areas. One result of this has been that federal funding continues to be funneled predominantly toward research in science and defense-related fields, which leaves the humanities in dire financial straits. For example, federal funding for the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) in 2006 represented a mere 3 percent of that provided to the National Science Foundation, and only a small fraction of the NEH funding (13.3 percent) was allocated toward humanities scholarship (Brinkley 1).

In Eisenhower's famous farewell address delivered on January 17, 1961, he warned of higher education's overdependence on federal defense funding:

The free university, historically the fountainhead of free ideas and scientific discovery, has experienced a revolution in the conduct of research. Partly because of the huge costs involved, a government contract becomes virtually a substitute for intellectual curiosity....The prospect of domination of the nation's scholars by Federal employment, project allocations, and the power of money is ever present—and is gravely to be regarded.

While his farewell is best remembered for its warning of the dangers of the “military-industrial complex,” he also clearly warns of a growing “imbalance” in higher education's relation to military defense—an imbalance, ironically, which his committee's report and his support of the NDEA served to perpetuate. Critical education theorist Henry Giroux notes that Eisenhower originally intended to warn of the burgeoning “military-industrial-academic complex” in his farewell address, but deleted “academic” before delivering the address (*University* 14-15). Eisenhower seems now to have been prescient in his prediction of the dangers posed by this overly cozy relationship between military, industry, and academe (Giroux, *University* 14-15; Griffin 282). Yet, as the

present state of higher education reflects, it was a warning that went largely unheeded. The linkage between higher education and defense, both metaphoric and literal, had been too firmly established to be easily severed.

The Kennedy-Johnson Era: Higher Education on the New Frontier

Anxiety over loss of the nation's lead in the "space race" still ran high when John F. Kennedy was elected to the presidency in 1960, and the need to regain that lead still dominated discussions of higher education reform. J. Kenneth Little notes that "the stress of an international struggle for survival" provided the primary "backdrop" for educational planning during the period (192). As evidence of this, we need look only to the addresses made before the general session of the Association for Higher Education in March, 1960. Opening speaker Adolf A. Berle, Jr., a professor of law at Columbia, described the double-edged sword that was then aimed at higher education: "It will be charged that universities of the country, as [the government's] intellectual general staff, failed to prepare the country to take the necessary preventive measures. But at the same time, universities will be expected to supply the ideas, the analysis, the measures, and even the men to meet any current emergency" (3). And Peter F. Drucker, a management professor at NYU at the time, portrayed American higher education as the "cornerstone of free world unity": "the American college and university has become the most effective international force today" (17). As the militaristic language of these statements reflects, the metaphor of higher education as defense, with its multiple entailments, was very much alive; higher education was a "general staff," a "force," a "supply" of Cold War

strategy, as well as a “cornerstone” for peaceful coexistence with the Soviets. Kennedy himself contributed to the metaphor’s prevalence with statements made during his runs for Senate and the presidency. For example, he depicted his presidential opponent, Richard Nixon, as a foe of federal aid to higher education, implying that Nixon had hampered America’s competitiveness in the space race (McAndrews 56).¹⁸ This accusation evoked the ideology of American exceptionalism, suggesting that failure to support postsecondary education was akin to failing to support America herself.

Once elected, Kennedy followed the pattern set by his predecessors in naming a blue ribbon committee to advise him on education matters, although he named his a “Task Force” to imply a sense of “getting things done” (qtd. in McAndrews 56). Chaired by Frederick Hovde, president of Purdue, and dominated by other leaders in higher education, the President-Elect’s Task Force Committee on Education followed through on its mandate, issuing its report in short order and requesting a massive \$9 billion in federal aid to education (Buder 1). Though the report was short, published on a single page in the *New York Times*,¹⁹ it was long on references to higher education as a form of defense. It opens by linking a “first-rate system of schools” to the “national interest” and

¹⁸ Kennedy was off-base in this accusation, however, for Nixon advocated “greatly expanded” support for higher education during his campaign, including subsidized loans and matching grants for construction of college dormitories, classrooms, laboratories, and libraries, as well as a new national scholarship program based on both need and merit (Graham 7).

¹⁹ Although publication of the Kennedy Committee’s report in a national newspaper may merely have been an expedient, it set a precedent for presidential commission reports which was later followed by the Reagan-era Commission on Excellence in Education. In disseminating its report, *A Nation at Risk*, the Reagan Commission billed it as a “Letter to the American People” and had it published in major newspapers across the country. Positioning the American public as its primary audience was not only consistent with Reagan’s conservative rhetorical appeals, downplaying the power of government while playing up the power of the people, but it also marked a complete departure from the rhetorical situation assumed by the Truman Commission Report, which took its audience to be an informed group of education leaders and policymakers.

then narrows in on higher education (“Text” 6). It recommends extending the National Defense Education Act for five years and expanding federal financial aid, among other programs, on the basis that “such actions” will result in “a gain in national strength” (“Text” 6). It also lauds a report by the President’s Science Advisory Committee, whose recommended policies, it says, “will strengthen American science and technology” and “serve to increase...the national defense” (“Text” 6). Thus, the report draws a correlation throughout between shoring up higher education and shoring up the nation’s defenses; “strengthening” is the operative term. Also, like previous presidential reports, it creates a sense of urgency through its references to the “crisis” facing higher education.

“Although college and university enrollments are now at an all-time high,” it warns, “the period of greatest increase in enrollments is immediately ahead.” It calls on Congress to provide “*urgently* needed aid to colleges and universities” and predicts that “the *active* implementation of [its] recommendations will be *enthusiastically* received by all institutions of higher learning in the country” (“Text” 6, italics mine). In this way, its language stresses both urgency and action, heightening the sense of peril if long-term reforms to higher education are not enacted. Although Kennedy was privately critical of the report, deeming its proposals “unrealistic” (Graham 12), it nonetheless perpetuated the metaphor of higher education as defense and set the stage for higher education reform proposals and policymaking to come. Historian Lawrence McAndrews goes so far as to argue that the Hovde Task Force’s report provided the “germ” from which the Higher Education Act of 1965 eventually sprang (180).

Besides Kennedy's Task Force report, several of his addresses before university audiences represent higher education as a form of national defense. His remarks reflect at least three distinct entailments of the metaphor. First, Kennedy represents higher education as the foundation for participatory democracy, thus evoking the ideology of civic humanism. In a 1963 commencement address at San Diego State University, for example, he observes,

No country can possibly move ahead, no free society can possibly be sustained, unless it has an educated citizenry whose quality of mind and heart permit it to take part in the complicated and sophisticated decisions that pour not only upon the President and upon the Congress, but upon all the citizens who service the ultimate power. ("Remarks at San Diego")

Here, Kennedy echoes the Truman Commission's contention that higher education must prepare young people for informed and engaged citizenship, which is construed as a service to the "ultimate power" of democracy. Second, Kennedy was fond of quoting Woodrow Wilson's dictum that "every man sent out from a university should be a man of his Nation, as well as a man of his time" (see, e.g., "Address of the President," "Remarks in Nashville"). In this respect, Kennedy suggests that higher education prepares students to serve as ambassadors for their country, to bear the metaphoric "light" of democracy to the rest of the world. According to Kennedy scholar Michael Meager, JFK saw the Cold War as a chance for his generation to "defend Western liberties against a totalitarian state" (471). This idea is reflected in Kennedy's call to graduates to "render on the community level or on the State level or on the national level or the international level a contribution to the maintenance of freedom and peace and the security of our country and those associated with it in a most critical time" ("Remarks at San Diego"). With this,

Kennedy implies that higher education can protect the U.S. and its allies against Soviet aggression, serving as a means of defense not only from within but without. Third, Kennedy presents higher education as a source of technological defense for the U.S. “This generation does not intend to founder in the backwash of the coming age of space,” he tells an audience at Rice University. “We mean to be a part of it—we mean to lead it.” In this respect, he positions higher education as leading the way both toward and beyond his envisioned New Frontier. Yet, at the same time, he hints at the perils inherent in not achieving that vision—that an entire generation might “founder in a backwash,” a metaphor calculated to suggest that America might lose its solid mooring and be washed away by the tides of technological advancement. Meager contends that Kennedy made great use of fear as a rhetorical strategy to win support for “unpopular, though necessary, programs” (467). In his address at Rice, JFK evokes the fear of losing ground to the Soviets not only to promote sizable expenditures on the U.S. space program but to promote the participation of higher education in the “space race” as well. By evoking fear of the Soviets, he also diverted attention from other domestic issues, such as the burgeoning Civil Rights and women’s rights movements.

The metaphor of higher education as defense played a role in advancing yet another unpopular program under the Kennedy administration: the Higher Education Facilities Act (HEFA) of 1963. Kennedy had encountered repeated obstacles in attempting to push elementary and secondary education bills through Congress, but he finally succeeded in gaining support for federal aid to *higher* education. Most historians attribute this primarily to three factors: first, the more favorable climate that existed in

Congress in 1963; second, the NEA's decision not to oppose the higher education measure as it had the earlier bills; and third, the fact that the higher education bill was not loaded with the baggage—for instance, the funding of teacher's salaries or aid to parochial schools that had dragged down the primary and secondary bills (see, e.g., McAndrews 154-161, Graham 38-50). However, this was also an instance when the metaphor of higher education as defense served as a system of evaluation in gaining Congressional approval. In 1963, the White House Bureau of the Budget had recommended a "fresh approach" to promoting federal aid to higher education, which linked it to "the freedom, social, and economic wellbeing of the Nation" (qtd. in Graham 39). Kennedy used this approach in his 1963 Special Message to Congress on Education, stating that "increasing the quality and availability of education is vital to both our national security and our domestic well being" and that "in the new age of science and space, improved education is essential to give new meaning to our national purpose and power." According to Graham, the House version of the Facilities Act was approved "based on defense and national security needs" and on inclusion of funding for mathematics and modern foreign languages, along with science and engineering—the same fields that had been targeted in the NDEA (50). Hence, the metaphorical linkage between higher education and defense apparently helped win the day just as it had in securing passage of the National Defense Education and Morrill Acts many years earlier. The HEFA was signed into law on December 13, 1963 by Lyndon Johnson, who hailed it as "the most significant education bill passed by Congress in the history of the Republic." Johnson also fittingly linked the Act's passage to the nation's defense when he quoted

Mirabeau Lamar, saying, “The educated mind is the guardian genius of democracy” (“Remarks upon Signing”).

Although Kennedy did not live to see final passage of the Higher Education Facilities Act, he is widely viewed as a transitional figure in histories of U.S. postsecondary education, setting the stage for Johnson’s Great Society programs and for further federal funding and involvement in higher education. McAndrews contends, for example, that Kennedy “cleared the path” for passage of the Higher Education Act of 1965 and helped establish a “liberal hegemony...over the new national dialogue on federal aid to education” (182). Apparently, Kennedy had intended to advance this dialogue even in the address he was scheduled to deliver on the day he was assassinated. “Only an America which has fully educated its citizens is fully capable of tackling the complex problems and perceiving the hidden dangers of the world in which we live,” his planned address read (qtd. in McAndrews 160). These ominous words emphasize the threats and complexities posed by the Cold War, as well as the pivotal role he believed education could play in defending against them.

As president, Lyndon B. Johnson extended Kennedy’s legacy in expanding federal aid to higher education. Yet, in so doing, Johnson relied on a very different entailment of the metaphor of higher education as defense. He represented postsecondary education as a powerful deterrent in the War on Poverty, not, as his predecessors had done, as a weapon in the Cold War. No longer was the Soviet threat the primary focus of Johnson’s rhetoric; instead, he stressed the threat posed to our nation by widespread impoverishment. Further, Johnson portrayed this new war as one that would be fought *by*

and *for* individual citizens. No longer was it a battle of nation against nation; it was a battle *within* our nation. In announcing the War on Poverty in his first State of the Union address, Johnson lists education as foremost among the instruments needed to eradicate impoverishment: “Our chief weapons in a more pinpointed attack will be better schools.” Humanities scholar William McClay observes that “the analogy of war... has been a remarkably common trope of presidents—especially presidents on the left.... [It is] often called upon when liberal ambitions have run into resistance from the American constitutional system, or the American public” (135). Johnson’s analogic use of war is consistent with this account. Much as Roosevelt had done in advancing his New Deal policies, Johnson set up poverty as an enemy and characterized the war on it as a national moral imperative, a war that had to be won regardless of the cost (McClay 137-38). Yet, LBJ’s metaphorical war was to be fought on the domestic front, not on the battlefields of Western civilization that Roosevelt, Kennedy, and other presidents had evoked. In Johnson’s 1964 “Great Society” address, he turns the New Frontier inward, stating, “Today, the frontier of imagination and innovation is inside [our] cities and not beyond their borders.” He depicts the Great Society as being constructed “in the classrooms of America,” as well as in the nation’s cities and countryside, not on some vast ideological battlefield.

This was an entirely new tack in describing higher education as a form of defense. It justified federal aid to higher education not on the basis of broad national or international interests, but in terms of economic advancement for needy individuals. Johnson’s firsthand experience of poverty is thought to have shaped his Great Society

policies on education, and perhaps his personal experience of overcoming poverty through education led him to portray this battle in highly personal terms. For example, in his Special Message on Education to Congress in 1968 (better known as his “Fifth Freedom” address), Johnson boasts of some of his administration’s key programs in support of higher education. But he does so by stressing the benefits to be gained from these programs by individuals. “A *student* who sets his sights on college is more likely than ever before to find help through Federal loans, scholarships, and work-study grants,” he proudly states, and “thousands of parents who in their youth had no chance for higher education can say with certainty, ‘*My child* can go to college’” (italics mine). These statements focus on the advantages of college for a child or student in the singular, not on those for the nation at large. The latter is cast merely as a benevolent provider. This tack carried the emotional appeal of aiding “poor children,” which enabled Johnson to receive more support for higher education programs than previous administrations had been able to garner (McAndrews 179). In addition, it supported the mobilization of federal resources on a permanent, not temporary “crisis,” basis (McAndrews 179). For the War on Poverty would not be won overnight, as Johnson portrayed it; it was a long-term fight against deeply entrenched social and economic forces.

Johnson departed from his predecessor’s tactics not only in his use of the metaphor of defense, but also in his use of commissions or task forces on educational reform. LBJ relied on such groups, just as his predecessors had, to study problems at all levels of education and to assist in formulating policies. Indeed, Michel notes that “presidential commissions produced thousands of pages of reports for President Johnson

detailing new educational policy ideas” (223). However, unlike commissions in previous administrations whose activities and reports were largely public, Johnson’s educational task forces were shrouded in secrecy. “They will operate without publicity,” the President stressed. “[Their purpose] is to come up with ideas, not to sell those ideas to the public” (Cabinet Remarks). LBJ Library Archivist Nancy Kegan Smith lists ten separate task forces that dealt with issues related to higher education during Johnson’s administration, and historian Hugh Davis Graham details these task forces’ proposals and traces their influence to specific pieces of legislation. Figure 2.1 provides the task forces’ names and chairpersons, as well as the dates on which their reports were issued. Still, because their reports were never intended for audiences beyond Johnson and his closest advisors, they do not hold as much rhetorical interest as previous commission reports on higher education reform. LBJ’s speeches, as analyzed above, better illustrate how he wielded the metaphor of higher education as defense. His linkage of higher education to the War on Poverty is also better reflected in the most significant piece of higher education legislation passed during his administration, the Higher Education Act (HEA) of 1965.

Table 2.1: Johnson Administration Task Forces Related to Higher Education

Task Force Name	Chair	Reporting Date
1964 Task Force on Education	John Gardner	14 Nov. 1964
1965 Task Force on Education	Dwight Ink	14. Jun. 1965
1965 Task Force on Education	Francis Keppel	8 Oct. 1965
1965 Task Force on International Education	Dean Rusk	Nov. 1965
1966 Task Force on Education	John Gardner	31 Oct. 1966
1966 Task Force on Education	William Friday	30 Jun. 1967
1967 Task Force on Education	John Gardner	1 Nov. 1967

1967 Task Force on Education of Gifted Persons	Champion Ward	30 Jan. 1968
1968 Task Force on Higher Education and the Administration of Science and Research Programs	Ivan Bennet and Alice Rivlin	Oct. 1968
1968 Task Force on Education	Wilbur Cohen	29 Nov. 1968

Source: Smith, Nancy Kegan. "Presidential Task Force Operation during the Johnson Administration." *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 15.2 (1985): 320-29. Print.

Consistent with Johnson's focus on needy individuals in describing the War on Poverty, the language of the HEA focuses on a "war" being fought on the local front, rather than on the national or international level. The HEA authorized a sweeping array of federal appropriations for higher education, totaling more than \$125 million over the first three years. These included expenditures for improvement of undergraduate education, support for "developing institutions,"²⁰ enhancements to teacher preparation programs, extensions to the National Defense Education Act, and most notably, provision of federal financial assistance to disadvantaged college students through work-study programs, low-interest loans, and so-called "educational opportunity grants" (IV.401a). The name of the latter syllogistically implies that "opportunity" is being provided where previously there was none. Its appropriations were authorized, it says, "for the purpose of assisting the *people* of the United States in the solution of *community* problems" (I.101). By couching its provisions in terms of small-scale "community" concerns and individual "people," the Act's language effectively diverts attention away from the possibility that increased federal aid might also involve increased federal control—a fear

²⁰ The HEA's reference to "developing institutions" was a euphemism used by members of Johnson's 1964 Task Force to connote historically black colleges (Graham 68).

that had scuttled passage of similar legislation previously. Johnson followed this same rhetorical strategy in remarks he made upon signing the Higher Education Act in November 1965. The HEA, he said, “means a way to deeper *personal* fulfillment, greater *personal* productivity, and increased *personal* reward.... But the final decision, the last responsibility, the ultimate control, must, and will, always rest with the *local communities*” (“Remarks at Southwest,” italics mine). Here, Johnson pointedly correlates federal financial support with individual advancement but, at the same time, offers assurance that federal assistance will not override local control. Even the venue of Johnson’s signing of the bill symbolized the personal and local, for Southwest Texas State College was where he himself had risen from poverty through higher education.

Finally, through such skillful rhetorical maneuvering, Johnson was able to shepherd through legislation which provided federal financial assistance for individual college students—an accomplishment which no previous U.S. president had been able to claim. Thelin traces a direct line of influence from the 1947 report, *Higher Education for American Democracy*, to Kennedy’s New Frontier and Johnson’s Great Society education programs (270). While the Truman Commission’s most ambitious proposals were tabled in their time, Johnson succeeded in fulfilling many of them 20 years later, in part through his deft positioning of postsecondary education as a weapon in the War on Poverty. It was a strategy that worked successfully for him, at least until the concerns of his metaphoric war were subsumed by an actual war. In his “Fifth Freedom” address, Johnson still pounds the drum in his War on Poverty and still positions higher education as the primary means of fighting it. “Now we call upon higher education to play a new

and more ambitious role in our social progress, our economic development,” he states. “Increasingly, we look to higher education to provide the key to better employment opportunities and a more rewarding life for our citizens.” Yet, despite such public pronouncements, Johnson seems to have lost sight of this “key” in rhetorical skirmishes over Vietnam. Hugely unpopular, the Vietnam War was nearly all-consuming for him, while colleges and universities, with their student protests and government denunciations, came to be seen as a *source* of domestic problems, not a solution. A biography of William C. Friday, who chaired Johnson’s final secret task force on education, serves to illustrate this point. In May of 1967, the task force had finished drafting its 149-page report, including an ambitious agenda for general aid to postsecondary institutions.²¹ When Johnson called the group to his cabinet room for a briefing, he snapped at Friday, “Well, what have you got to say?” (qtd. in Link 205). The task force members then began to present their proposals but were interrupted when Johnson launched into a “long harangue on the Vietnam War” and thereafter left the room (Link 205). This not only frustrated Friday but also frustrated hope for further reforms to higher education during Johnson’s administration. Political scientist Christopher Duncan explains, “As the Vietnam War heated up and related domestic turmoil ensued, significant attention was diverted away from areas of central concern to Johnson” (721). And so, LBJ’s stretch as the self-proclaimed “education president” sadly

²¹ This report apparently provided the basis for the Educational Opportunity Act of 1968, which Johnson proposed during his “Fifth Freedom” address. It was meant, he said, to dramatically increase direct aid to postsecondary institutions and their neediest students while completely eliminating “race and income as bars to higher learning.” Whereas the former was accomplished by the Act’s eventual passage, the latter was never achieved.

ended, as did his focus on what he once called “the partnership of campus and country” (“Remarks in Providence”).

From Metaphor to Militarization

Although presidential commissions on higher education did push forward significant reforms between 1948 and 1968, their representation of higher education as a means of national defense has had some unintended and ultimately negative consequences. Most obviously, the metaphor of defense has been used to secure increased federal involvement in higher education, an involvement which has been both a blessing and a curse. The federal government now provides a large share of university research funding, funneling it to programs that are seen as being in the national interest. As described earlier in this chapter, this has meant a boom for the sciences and defense-related fields but a relative bust for the arts and humanities. Another outcome of increased federal involvement has been an incremental increase in federal oversight of postsecondary education, and thus a gradual loss of local control. The evolution of the U.S. Department of Education itself, as it grew from a mere office within Health, Education, and Welfare to a Cabinet-level agency, reflects the ever-expanding federal role in higher education over this period. On a more specific level, Lee Anderson contends that the ideological and political perspectives established through development of the National Defense Education Act laid the groundwork for passage of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), with its standardized testing and prescribed, routinized instruction, more than four decades later (5). In Chapter 5, I will argue that the NDEA and the ideologies

associated with it also presaged arguments advanced decades later in the Spellings Commission Report. These arguments posed the threat, though never fully realized, that the U.S. Department of Education would dictate national standards for public postsecondary education, just as it had attempted to do (in large part successfully) for primary and secondary education.

Perhaps less obviously, the metaphoric linkage of higher education to national defense during the Cold War era has come, somewhat ironically, to threaten the status of the university as a public sphere and destabilize its supposed place as a bastion of academic freedom and integrity. The “civic” role of higher education so emphasized in the Truman Commission Report has since been seriously undermined, if not eliminated altogether. Abrams contends, for instance, that the increased role of the military in U.S. higher education has “led the university to accept inducements and constraints that [have] pulled it notably away from its briefly assumed mission as a protected refuge for the dispassionate and critical study of science and society” (15). In turn, intellectual inquiry and research have followed the money, rendering the notion of independent research virtually an anachronism. Scientists have been converted “into policy advocates,” as Abrams writes, and “scholars into entrepreneurs” (28). Henry Giroux devotes an entire chapter of *The University in Chains* to the so-called “militarization” of the academy, contending that Eisenhower’s warnings about the military-industrial-educational complex have indeed come true, partly as a result of government crackdowns on campus unrest that occurred during the late 1960s and early ‘70s (13-24). Giroux concludes, “The militarization of American society suggests more than a crisis in politics. It is also

representative of a fundamental crisis in democracy and the critical educational foundation upon which it rests.... education is increasingly divorced from its prior role in producing critical citizens committed to the public good” (*University* 72). Sharing this viewpoint, comparative literature and women’s studies scholar Sophia McClennen writes that federal legislation passed since 9/11 has “set a precedent for federal intervention in higher education that far exceeds that of the cold war” (67). Her article suggests that any past metaphorical linkage of war *with* higher education has helped to fuel a current war *on* higher education.

In this manner, the metaphor of defense has served to subordinate the democratic values once associated with higher education—the promotion of freedom, equality, and tolerance—to capitalistic values more attuned to the financial advancement of individuals. Whereas Johnson positioned higher education as a means to fight poverty by providing economic opportunity for the disadvantaged, it wasn’t a great stretch to portray college as a source of economic opportunity for the advantaged as well. By focusing on how individuals could reap the rewards of higher education and how higher learning could advance the economic interests of the nation, Johnson inadvertently gave rise to portrayals of higher education as a mechanism for personal gain, not public good, and he inadvertently fed a far more conservative stream of reform proposals that issued from commissions on higher education reform to follow. In this connection, the metaphor of higher education as defense ushered in yet another metaphor which will be explored in the next chapter: that of higher education as a business or industry, as a profit-making center both for the individual who attends and for the private entities which are

increasingly associated with it. If higher education reform showed up in a military uniform or space suit during the Cold War era, it increasingly doffed a business suit in the go-go 1980s and '90s.

CHAPTER 3

HIGHER EDUCATION AS BUSINESS:

FROM INDUSTRIALIZATION TO THE INFORMATION AGE

Although the Cold War dragged on through the Détente and disarmament treaties of the 1970s and '80s, it ceased to provide the impetus it once had for advocacy of higher education reform. Following Vietnam, anti-Communist sentiment no longer ran so deep among Americans as it had during previous decades, nor was the Soviet Union perceived as such a “monolithic” threat (Hirshberg 57-58). Instead, another crisis struck closer to home and supplied the exigency for the commission reports and other reform rhetoric that proliferated during the Reagan era. This crisis was an economic one. By 1970, the stunning expansion that the U.S. economy had undergone following World War II had slowed dramatically. The OPEC oil embargo of 1973 caused energy prices to soar and stock prices to tumble (LaFeber 291-92). “Stagflation” set in as accelerating inflation combined with stagnating business investment and rising unemployment (Conte and Karr). Perhaps worst of all, the United States’ long-standing dominance of world export markets was challenged by companies from Japan and Western Europe, contributing to mounting trade deficits and the growing fear that America had lost its competitive edge (Conte and Karr). Reformers played on this fear to push through a new series of sweeping reforms to U.S. higher education. Again and again, commission reports of the period sounded the same refrain: “A real emergency is upon us” (Task Force 2). “The United States is falling behind competitively” (Business-Higher Education 4). “Our nation is at risk” (United States, National Commission 5).

This crisis of competitiveness was blamed, in turn, on two other perceived crises: a deterioration of quality in U.S. manufacturing and a decline in the excellence of America's schools. A *Fortune* magazine article in December 1980 described the first of these two in calamitous terms: "In the last few months, more and more U.S. executives have awakened to the fact that they are caught in a fateful struggle....The Japanese have made quality the weapon that wins the world's markets" (28). The militaristic language here reflects the rising anxiety of the times: America was fighting an unaccustomed battle against forces apparently superior to its own. The competitive threat posed by the Japanese and other rivals fueled a frantic drive to improve American manufacturing processes, as major companies from Ford to General Electric, AT&T to Boeing, undertook initiatives to reengineer themselves and improve the quality of their products. But demands for quality-improvement were not limited to the factory floor. The problems thought to be facing American industry were linked in the early 1980s to presumed problems in education—a linkage only reinforced by the spate of highly critical commission reports on education issued during the period (Berliner and Biddle 140-41). Borrowing language directly from the business pages, these reports described America's students as falling behind their Japanese and European counterparts and lambasted America's schools for failing to uphold the highest standards (Berliner and Biddle 13). Higher education was not spared in the critical assault. "Allegations that academic standards had dropped precipitously [were] a familiar refrain among observers of the American collegiate scene in the eighties and nineties," writes Christopher Lucas (*American* 310). Some critics claimed that a lack of "selectivity" undermined the

integrity of higher learning, others that faculty and students were not being held sufficiently “accountable,” and still others that a cafeteria-style curriculum offered too many “soft” choices and not enough solid learning (Lucas, *American* 310-12).

Yet reform reports of the period suggested that, like the country’s corporate behemoths, American higher education too could be reengineered. Though declining academic standards were cited as a major cause of the competitive crisis, better quality schools could ostensibly put America back on top by breathing new life into the nation’s beleaguered businesses (Berube 94-95). Universities, in particular, were looked to as a source of the research and development that would enable corporations to meet demands in an increasingly competitive, globalized marketplace (Bok 10-11). This expectation grew, in part, from a shift in government research spending during the period. As the need to maintain military superiority lessened in the waning years of the Cold War, Washington sought ways to restore the nation’s competitiveness by tying university research to the needs of business (Bok 10-11). “The link between national security and the knowledge factory loosened a little,” says historian Jackson Lears. “The private sector and its needs came to the fore” (25). Business leaders, in turn, seized on the crisis of competitiveness to forge closer ties with postsecondary institutions and asserted their management sway. Embracing higher education reform with what Maurice Berube describes as a “messianic fervor,” they preached their newfound “corporate religion” through participation on commissions, roundtables, and university governing boards (Berube 95, Webb 252). Reform rhetoric of the period both reflected and reproduced this

influence, depicting higher education as an ailing business which had ceased to be competitive, but one which could regain dominance if only it would focus on quality.

Indeed, in this chapter I will argue that business and industry provided the primary structural metaphors for higher education in reform rhetoric of the Reagan era onward and that the Reagan-era report, *A Nation at Risk*, marked a critical juncture between depictions of higher education as a form of national defense and those of it as a business or industry. Consistent with Lakoff and Johnson's theory of systematicity, these two depictions "overlapped" in *A Nation at Risk*, providing "two different metaphorical structurings" of higher education (96-97, emphasis in original). But metaphors of business gained prominence in subsequent commission reports because they resonated with the crisis mentality of the era and appealed to the business and political leaders who were increasingly involved in instigating reforms. In this way, *A Nation at Risk* played a pivotal though unintentional role in shifting the tides of higher education reform. While its militaristic rhetoric was intended to return education to the national spotlight and thereby block conservative efforts to reduce federal involvement in higher education, its business metaphors actually provided an opening for far-right and neoliberal factions who sought to give free reign to market forces.

Given the competitive crisis that had gripped the nation, it is not surprising that higher education was portrayed as a business caught in its throes, for, as Lakoff and Johnson explain, "the most fundamental values in a culture will be coherent with the metaphorical structure of the most fundamental concepts in the culture" (22). The desire to win, to defend against all comers, is fundamental to the myth of American

exceptionalism, and such myths tend to exert their greatest force, according to Ernesto Laclau, at times of “dislocation,” when a culture has failed to live up to its own “mythological expectations” (*New Reflections* 142, 63). The U.S. had entered just such a period in the early 1980s, undergoing what President Jimmy Carter had famously called “a crisis of confidence” (“Crisis”). At such times, cultures may engage in ritualized scapegoating as a “means of rearticulating intractable problems” (Crowley 98-99). In blaming higher education for the country’s flagging business fortunes, reformers engaged in this very kind of scapegoating. They made what historian Lawrence Cremin calls “at best a foolish and at worst a crass effort to direct attention away from those truly responsible for doing something about competitiveness and to lay the burden instead on the schools” (102-03). Postsecondary education was portrayed not only as the source of the nation’s problems, but also as a potential savior. Commission reports and other reform rhetoric appealed to the myth of American exceptionalism to justify reforms to higher education which would ostensibly allow the nation to regain its mythical superiority.

Tying higher education to business served yet another function within the rhetoric of higher education reform: it “structured” understanding of an increasingly complex institution in a seemingly coherent and systematic way. Comparing the multiple schools, departments, and programs of a university to the business units and executive offices of a large corporation proved an apt structural metaphor, especially at a time when private sector needs were coming to the fore, because it allowed audiences to view higher education in terms of something they were already familiar with. Yet, as Lakoff and

Johnson point out, a structural metaphor not only reflects similarities between the two things being compared; it generates entailments which “do not exist independent of the metaphor” (Lakoff and Johnson 147-48). Thus, the metaphor of higher education as a commercial enterprise entailed a number of associated ideas:

- Higher education manufactures, sells, or distributes products or services;
- It markets these to its customers in an effort to generate profits;
- It competes for business with similar entities;
- It may be publicly or privately owned;
- It strives to increase value or wealth for its owners;
- It relies upon some form of investment and is, in turn, an investment;
- It is subject to forces of supply and demand;
- Its value may rise or fall within the marketplace;
- Thus, to prosper, it must adapt to market needs.

Although many of these entailments now seem integral to higher education—it is commonplace to speak of higher education as an enterprise, for example, or as an investment—the history in this chapter will show that each of the entailments has arisen independently from the metaphorical association of postsecondary learning with business.

Through the metaphor of business, higher education was further associated in reform rhetoric of the 1980s with the workings of the information economy. Kenneth Burke describes how a “society’s methods of production... promote certain specific patterns of thought,” which are then carried over into other aspects of the culture (*Permanence* 38). Accordingly, as American business was forced to become more

globally competitive and information-oriented, these same “patterns of thought” were transferred to higher education via the rhetoric of reform. Commission reports and other reform rhetoric called upon universities to prepare the labor force for the 21st century, to become more entrepreneurial in the delivery of information, to produce the knowledge necessary to compete in the global economy, and so forth—that is, to enact reforms that were not only supportive of but *reflective of* the nation’s production and distribution systems. Postsecondary learning was thus tied to what Burke terms the “occupational psychosis of the present,” to values which were “capitalist, monetary, individualist, laissez-faire, free market, private enterprise, and the like,” as well as to the “technological psychosis” of the information age (*Permanence* 40-41, 44). At the same time, these psychoses acted as a terministic screens, focusing attention toward the commonalities between higher education and global business but focusing attention *away* from many of its other educational and societal roles. Most importantly, the metaphoric depiction of postsecondary education as a business shifted attention *away* from potentialities encapsulated in the earlier metaphor of defense, including the role that universities and colleges might play in defending democratic values, promoting civil discourse, or providing an equitable education for all.

This turn to depicting higher education as a business was nothing new, however, but a return to something at once older and distinctly modern. In fact, American colleges were first tied to business during the colonial period. Yet this tie grew stronger, both actually and metaphorically, as the country’s first universities were established during the modern industrial period. “Waves of university founding coincided with major economic

depressions, in the 1870s and 1890s” explains Christopher Newfield in his study *Ivy and Industry*. “Trapped in the pursuit of resources in times of stagnating and shrinking economies, universities cast themselves as vehicles of much needed economic recovery” (28). In particular, reformers called upon higher education to support expansion of the industrial economy by preparing students for their increasingly specialized vocational roles. Universities needed not only be organized along businesses lines, they argued, but operated in accordance with modern industrial principles of standardization and efficiency. The linkage between higher education and big business was in turn challenged by progressive educational reformers, who opposed strict vocationalism, and again in reform rhetoric at the outset of the Cold War, when the metaphor of higher education as a business was subordinated to metaphor of defense as discussed in the previous chapter. But the metaphor of business was re-introduced in *A Nation at Risk* in an attempt to yoke reform of higher education to the crisis of competitiveness and needs of the emerging information economy. Based on this cyclical recurrence, I argue that modern concerns with standards and efficiency tend to re-emerge in reform rhetoric at times when the economy is rapidly changing, as during industrialization or de-industrialization, and to be used as grounds for arguments that higher education should adapt accordingly. This historical-rhetorical cycle will be analyzed in the following pages.

Higher Education and Business: A Brief History

As many historians observe, business has been involved in higher education in America since the founding of its first colleges. But the rhetorical association stretches

back at least as far. Harvard was legally designated the nation's first "corporation" (Thelin 1), and the governing boards of early colleges were dominated by businessmen and professionals who exerted their sway (Newfield 21). "Regardless of the insularity of campus life," writes Newfield, "the college did not live apart from business so much as it furnished sites for application of business methods to public ideals" (21). Evidence of this exists in the detailed accounting ledgers, property inventories, and other business records maintained by the early colleges, as well as in texts relating to their formation and operation. A 1704 document titled "Troubles of William and Mary College," for example, details the institution's budgetary woes, recounting how collectors of taxes meant to support the college had grown resentful because "money was directed from their coffers into another channel" and how its president, Mr. Blair, "was demanding and taking his full salary" despite the college being at that stage "no more but a grammar school" (Ingles 647). The document also describes the disgruntlement of some community members over the institution's choice of location: "It fares with the college at this point as with towns—everyone would have one in his own county or neighborhood, and yet the college can be but in one place" (Ingles 647). Such accounts suggest that colleges were engaged, even during colonial times, with management of finances, maintenance of stakeholder relations, and other affairs related to the *business* of higher education.

As noted in Chapter 1, the debate over the utility of college instruction, or its relation to professional pursuits, also dates back to the colonial period. One argument for a more practical form of instruction appears in a 1724 text which pleads for establishment

of a college in colonial Williamsburg based almost entirely upon the benefits for local plantation owners. The college's course of study, says the author, should suit the "Ways, Humours, and Notions" of these prosperous gentlemen, neither causing them undue "Fatigue and Expence [sic]" nor making them "lessen their Crop of Tobacco" (Jones 648-49). The author also anticipates later arguments for dropping Greek and Latin from the classical curriculum, noting that few plantation owners "have Use or Necessity" for such ancient languages (Jones 649). Though arguments for such worldly forms of instruction were somewhat rare during the colonial period, as religious dissent spread with the Great Awakening, they became much more common. A College of New Jersey founder declared in 1746, for example, that the institution should be not only a means of educating clergy but "of raising up men that will be *useful* in other learned professions," while the 1764 charter of the College of Rhode Island stated that it should prepare "men duly qualified for discharging the offices of life with *usefulness* and reputation" (qtd in Lucas, *American* 105-06, italics mine). At the time, such "usefulness" was meant only to include leadership in politics, law, or medicine. Courses in the "useful," or industrial, arts were not added to the college curriculum until the mid-1850s (Lucas *American* 135), and the nation's first business school, Wharton, was not founded until 1881 (Thelin 86). Even so, the idea that a college education should prepare a student for his life's work was firmly planted. (At the time, it was only *his* life's work; *hers* was not considered.) The claim that college should serve as a means of vocational preparation may be the longest-standing commonplace in the rhetoric of higher education reform.

Though colleges were only loosely related to commerce during the colonial period, the 1819 Supreme Court decision in *Trustees of Dartmouth College v. Woodward* laid the legal foundation for characterizing a college as a business. This landmark case centered on whether the New Hampshire legislature could intervene in decisions of Dartmouth's governing board. Chief Justice John Marshall delivered the majority opinion confirming Dartmouth's status as a "private, eleemosynary corporation" and as therefore shielded from the "unprofitable and vexatious interference" of the state (17 U.S. 518). While historians disagree over whether this decision established the distinction we now recognize between "public" and "private" institutions (see, e.g., Thelin 70-73), there appears little doubt that it reinforced the view of a college as a profitable enterprise. First, the ruling defined the college as a "valuable consideration," meaning something of monetary worth (17 U.S. 518). Second, it found the trustees to have "a freehold right" as the college's "legal owners" (17 U.S. 518). Third, it affirmed that a college's ownership could be "conveyed," meaning transferred or sold (17 U.S. 518). And finally, it established that educational and business institutions resembled one another in that both could be publicly or privately held and both managed by their internally appointed boards (Newfield 22). Contrary to these views, the State of New Hampshire argued that it had the right to exercise control over Dartmouth's operations and hold the trustees liable for their actions. In this sense, the case might be considered the first test of a college's accountability (Thelin 73). Even so, its larger significance lies in the many rhetorical linkages it forged between higher education and business. As historians John Brubacher

and Willis Rudy observe, the Dartmouth case legitimized “the existence of a great private sector in American higher education” (59).

Following the Civil War, the financial struggles faced by many postsecondary institutions and the increasing competition among them served to further strengthen the metaphoric connection between higher education and business. New colleges were launched with what historian Frederick Rudolph calls “entrepreneurial zeal” (232). Yet without a sufficient supply of qualified students or a steady source of funding, many fell on hard times or were forced to close (Newfield 25). Those liberal arts colleges that did survive found themselves struggling to maintain enrollments at a time when more practical training was being sought (Lucas, *American* 136). Given the commercial spirit of the day, many observers naturally likened this situation to that of a business with too few customers or an undesirable product to sell. For example, in 1850 Brown President Francis Wayland assessed the state of academe this way: “We have produced an article for which the demand is diminishing. We sell it at less than cost, and the deficiency is made up by charity. We give it away, and still the demand diminishes. Is it not time to inquire whether we cannot furnish an article for which the demand will be, at least, somewhat more remunerative?” (qtd. in Lucas, *American* 137). A few years later, a New York University professor framed the dilemma in similar terms: “To use language which this mercantile community can understand, . . . we have been trying to sell goods for which there is no market” (qtd. in Rudolph 236). These statements reflect the power of metaphor to orient understanding of a multifaceted situation—and even to orient action. If “demand” for liberal arts education was “diminishing,” then one obvious solution was

to “sell” different “goods.” And that is what many colleges of the period did, abandoning or adapting their traditional curricula to include a wider range of professional, technical, or vocational instruction (Lucas. *American* 146). Another solution, if there was “no market,” was to develop *new* markets or expand those that had previously been underserved. Arguably, this way of thinking led to the establishment of many women’s colleges during the period. Not only were these responses to the vast social and economic changes sweeping the country at the time, but they were actions consistent with the metaphor of higher education as a business.

Another event which reinforced the rhetorical connection between higher education and business was the establishment of the land grant colleges in the latter part of the 19th century. As discussed in the previous chapter, the Morrill Act of 1862 helped give rise to the metaphor of higher education as defense, but it lent to the metaphoric linkage with business and industry as well. According the Act’s sponsor, Justin Morrill, the land grant colleges would serve the instructional needs of a new class of students: They would be “accessible to all, but especially to the sons of toil,” and would teach “all the needful science for the practical avocations of life” (qtd. in Parker 273). Its sponsor promised other benefits from the Act as well. “Pass this bill,” he beseeched his fellow congressmen, “and we shall have done something to enable the farmer to raise two blades of grass instead of one; something for every owner of land; something for all who desire to own land; something for cheap scientific education,” and so on (qtd. in Florer 467). In other words, he implied that the land grant colleges would provide an economic boon at virtually every level of society. But he didn’t stop there. A former mercantilist, Morrill

knew how to clinch a sale. He described the colleges as a profitable form of *investment*, one which would increase the value “of the whole landed property of the country” and yield returns “fifty fold greater than any sum which would be abstracted from the Treasury” (qtd. in Florer 465).²² Further, he urged his fellow representatives not to allow America “to become a weak competitor in the most important fields where we meet the world as rivals” (qtd. in Florer 474). The implication here was that the U.S. could ill afford to fall behind European nations in agricultural or industrial production. “If other nations advance, though we but pause,” he warned, “we are distanced” (qtd. in Florer 474). With these remarks, Morrill appears to have been the first politician to argue that reforms to higher education would bolster not only the country’s domestic prosperity but also its international competitiveness. Indeed, his remarks anticipate claims made in *A Nation at Risk* and other reform rhetoric more than 100 years later.

Industrialization and the Rise of the Modern Research University

Although the association between higher education and business was well-established by the latter part of 19th century, no other event or influence sealed the connection between ivy and industry as did the rise of industrialization. Between 1880 and 1910, the burgeoning of “great American universities” went literally hand-in-hand with the rise of big business in the U.S. as such captains of industry as Andrew Carnegie,

²² On the other hand, opponents of the bill warned that the investment value of land scrip made available through the bill could be exploited, as Senator Clement Clay said, by “greedy capitalists” (qtd. in Florer 469). Minnesota Senator Morton Williamson presaged, for example, that the scrip would fall to “a remorseless class of vampires who care little for the common prosperity of the country and still less for the cause of education,” while Kansas Senator James Lane complained that “almost every foot of valuable land” in his state would be placed into “the hands of nonresident speculators” (qtd. in Florer 469).

John D. Rockefeller, and Cornelius Vanderbilt lent their names and fortunes to the building of new institutions (Thelin 111). Higher education was “no less a growth industry during these years than steel or oil,” writes historian Roger Geiger (40). Yet, while leaders of industry were generous in financing monuments to their largesse, they were less charitable in their views of what went on within (Lucas, *American* 150). One particularly vocal critic was Andrew Carnegie, who complained in 1889 testimony before the U.S. Bureau of Education that the traditional college was completely out of touch with the needs of business: “While the college student has been learning a little about the barbarous and petty squabbling of a far distant past, or trying to master languages which are dead, such knowledge as seems adapted for life upon another planet than this as far as business affairs are concerned, the future captain of industry is hotly engaged in the school of experience” (qtd. in U.S. Bureau 1143). Given the scarcity of college graduates in the executive ranks, he could only conclude that “college education as it exists is fatal to success in that domain” (qtd. in U.S. Bureau 1143). With such opprobrium, Carnegie and his fellow industrialists helped to hasten the demise of an outmoded model of higher learning in America, while also giving rise to a new one. In place of the classical curriculum, they supported instruction which would, as Rockefeller put it, “better fit a man for his life’s work” (qtd. in Chernow 309).²³ And when their money talked, others listened. As Lucas notes, “concessions to the demand for more utilitarian learning” were chief among the reforms made to higher education during the industrial period (*American*

²³ With women making up only 5 percent of the U.S. workforce in 1900, it was still assumed to be “his life’s work” (U.S. Census).

151-52). As the economy became more complex, requiring more specialized research and professional expertise, colleges adapted to provide these.

Still, curricular additions were far from the only changes wrought upon colleges and universities by forces of industrialization. Political scientist Clyde Barrow explains that “the needs of monopoly capital were ‘systematically built into the *structure* of higher education’” (61, italics mine). As small colleges evolved into larger, more complex universities with larger enrollments and more varied course offerings, they required some structure to support it all. “Growth fed upon growth, and the answer to the problems of growth—unless it was to be chaos—was organization,” writes Rudolph (417). With business already so involved in higher education, the division of labor then prevalent in private industry seemed the obvious choice (Thelin 112). University of Chicago President William Harper Rainey went so far as to assert that “the great university cannot be run *except* upon a business basis” (qtd. in Newfield 29-30, italics mine). Modeling themselves upon the structure of large corporations, universities and colleges across the country organized various academic departments around a centralized administration. Atop this hierarchy sat the university president, no longer in the president’s “chambers”—a term taken from the old college—but in the president’s “office”—one more reflective of the new (Newfield 29). This “captain of erudition” needed to straddle realms of both academe and business (Veblen 85). He had to be, as Rutherford B. Hayes, then an Ohio State board member, put it, “a great scholar and a great teacher” but likewise “a man of business training, a man of affairs”—in short, “a great administrator” (qtd. in Rudolph 419). In this respect, “administration” itself reflected the confluence of

higher education and business. The presidents and their fellow administrators brought new ways of doing business to colleges and universities: They demanded increased profitability in operations, increased productivity among employees, and increased quantification to measure to it all (Newfield 26-27). “Administration in this sense connoted not simply a style of management, but a state of mind, a form of consciousness,” says Lucas (*American* 200). As such, it emanated throughout the entire framework of the institution, affecting everything it did and everything it was.

One measure of the pervasiveness of this administrative mindset can be found in two key reform texts of the period: economist Thorstein Veblen’s *The Higher Learning in America: A Memorandum on the Conduct of Universities by Business Men*, published in 1918, and University of Chicago President Robert Maynard Hutchins’ like-titled *The Higher Learning in America*, published in 1936. Although Veblen’s satire is Swiftian, it nonetheless captures the degree to which business ideologies held sway over universities and colleges in the so-called “pecuniary era of civilization” (72): “The fact is that businessmen hold the plenary discretion, and that business principles guide them in the affairs of higher learning” (78). Veblen’s play on “plenary” here implies that business leaders not only led the assembly but cast all the votes; his use of “discretion” likewise implies both caution and canniness. With such mockery, Veblen captures both the scope of institutional changes driven by private interests as well as the finer details of how specific groups played their roles. He takes particular delight in lampooning those “strong men” who led institutions of higher learning and the “businesslike expediency” of the board members who exercised their proxy (90, 63). The latter, he writes, “are an aimless

survival from the days of clerical rule,” while the former, are “presumably [men] of businesslike qualities, rather than of scholarly insight” (88). Here, as elsewhere in the book, his matter-of-fact tone belies his sarcasm. By contrast to Veblen, Hutchins is more serious and balanced in his assessment of the “higher learning.” He attributes the “confusion” among universities of his day to several “external conditions,” though he counts the inducements of industrial wealth as first among them (1, 4). “It is sad but true,” he observes, “that when an institution determines to do something in order to get money it must lose its soul, and frequently does not get the money” (4). Though Hutchins is clearly disillusioned by the falling fortunes of industrialization during the 1930s, his book is nonetheless testament to its lasting influence. He holds out but one hope: “If we can secure a real university in this country, . . . it may be that the character of our civilization may slowly change. It may be that we can outgrow the love of money” (119). However, by the time Hutchins was writing, the linkage between higher education and business had so solidified that even the Great Depression couldn’t shake it loose.

Out of this convergence of industry and academe in the early 20th century, two major new variants of the metaphor of higher education as a business emerged. The first was that higher education, like the era’s humming assembly lines, should be standardized. This metaphoric entailment sprang from the adoption of mass production methods by industry over this period as well as from the growing influence of Fordism. Economic historians Steven Tolliday and Jonathan Zeitlin describe Fordism as “a model of economic expansion and technological progress based on mass production: the manufacture of standardized products in huge volumes using special purpose machinery

and unskilled labor” (1-2). As universities themselves began to “mass produce” during the early 1900s—multiplying across the country, spawning larger campuses, and granting access to greater number of students—the ideology of Fordism seemed logically to apply to them as well. Presumably, universities and colleges could be replicated more efficiently if some uniform standards were in place, yet there was one problem: none existed at the time. “There were no ground rules about propriety,” writes Thelin, “nor was there any blueprint for what a ‘university’ ought to include—or omit” (112).

Into this breach stepped two groups bent on bringing some order to higher education: the private educational foundations established by Andrew Carnegie and John D. Rockefeller in the early 1900s and the accrediting and standardizing agencies that grew from expansion of higher education during that same period (Brubacher and Rudy 358-59). Among the latter, the National Conference Committee on Standards (NCCS) became the primary arbiter of college admission requirements (Brubacher and Rudy 359). By virtue of its relation to other agencies, the NCCS’s rhetorical influence was vast. For example, at its 1914 meeting it resolved, among other things, “that consideration be given by colleges to the method of admission by means of a certified school record and comprehensive examinations,” that “associations and commissions which draw up lists of approved schools for the use of colleges hold a conference in the near future,” and that its own president and secretary “be authorized to take the necessary steps for calling such a conference” (National Conference 7). As this example suggests, the NCCS was not satisfied merely to set the standards for entrance, it felt it incumbent upon itself to impose those standards on others.

Similarly, the General Education Board of the Rockefeller Foundation and the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (CFAT) played influential roles in establishing and enforcing standards among postsecondary institutions. The Rockefeller Fund, established in 1902, defined its role as bringing “a greater measure of rationality and standardization to educational reform” (Lucas, *American* 198), while the Carnegie Foundation, chartered in 1906, likewise included in its mission “work in education policy and standards” (Carnegie, “Foundation History”). As previously noted, the CFAT underwrote the 1910 *Flexner Report*, which established standards for schools of medicine across the country, but the Foundation’s 1916 establishment of a retirement fund for college faculty had an even broader influence. By setting a measure of what constituted a college under the program, the CFAT triggered a nationwide rush to conform. “Because institutions of higher education were so anxious to qualify their professors for retirement benefits,” explain Brubacher and Rudy, “this yardstick exerted a powerful influence in standardizing the quality of American higher education” (358). In this manner, the Carnegie Foundation not only brought the homogenizing influence of business into academe, but it introduced one of business’ most coveted perquisites: the promise of a lifetime pension. Too, it held colleges to the same standards as any other “corporate” employer, requiring them to provide “a humane means by which disabled and aged employees may be removed from the service” (Carnegie, “A Comprehensive Plan” 20).

It wasn’t enough that colleges and universities be standardized in the early 20th century, though. In accordance with scientific management principles of the day, it was

thought they should be run with utmost expediency. Thus emerged another major entailment of the metaphor of business: higher education should be efficient. This entailment reflected the growing acceptance within American industry of what is known as Taylorism, a management model predicated upon the time-motion studies of Frederick Taylor, which broke down production processes into individual steps and attempted to improve workers' efficiency at each by imposing strict systemic controls (Newfield 33-34). A 1910 report by industrial engineer Morris L. Cooke, titled *Academic and Industrial Efficiency* and underwritten, not coincidentally, by the CFAT, recommended that this same model be applied to the management of postsecondary institutions. Holding that a college professor was a "producer" like any other, Cooke argued that the faculty member could increase his efficiency either by reducing the number of hours he worked or by spending those hours more profitably (24).²⁴ Cooke then applied this same reasoning to other levels of the institution: "if a system of management can be developed under which the efficiency of any one department can be measured, the same scheme, more or less modified, can probably be applied to other departments, and the result of applying it to all departments will in large measure gauge the efficiency of the entire university or college organization" (4). The logical appeal of his argument is obvious, but it involves one obvious fallacy: the assumption that a college or university truly is analogous to a business.

²⁴ Cooke considered academic tenure to be one of the factors which militated against such efficiency in higher education. "If the same standards of efficiency are to be applied to college teachers as are applied elsewhere," he wrote, "it will mean that when a man has ceased to be efficient he must be retired as he would in any other line of work; or if he no longer performs a given function in an efficient manner, that he be relieved of this function" (23).

Nonetheless, this concept caught on rapidly within academe. According to historian Laurence Veysey, “‘efficiency’ held sway as the most frequently used noun in the rhetoric of university presidents” between 1900 and 1920 (116). A University of New York report on “Education and Efficiency,” published in 1902, exemplifies the term’s broad appeal: “At first thought the word efficiency brings with it the idea of bustling activity, or perhaps of strong, firm-handed mastery. One sees a pragmatic person, sure, swift, accomplishing. Visions of great factories, railways, banks, with captains of industry and Napoleons of finance, come sweeping through the mind” (qtd. in Veysey 117). As these visions suggest, modern scientific principles were captivating to audiences both within and outside academe. They evoked modernism, scientism, rationalism. But what actually came “sweeping” through a cascade of other calls for reform were appeals to efficiency as the pretext for re-organizing institutions, cutting costs, and eliminating duplication. A 1913 report of the National Education Association argued, for example, that “the business management of a system of schools is to be judged by the adequacy of the system of accounting and of reporting which is used, just to the degree that such records are a measure of business efficiency in other lines of human endeavor” (*Report* 5), and a 1920 article by Harvard President A. Lawrence Lowell justified the division between faculty and institutional governing boards on the basis that “each has its own distinctive function, and only confusion and friction result if one of them strives to perform the function of the other” (2780). In both these cases, the authors defend the need for some systemic control (i.e., a governing board, an accounting or reporting system) on the basis of efficiency. Several CFAT reports of the 1920s and ‘30s also

called for greater efficiencies in the operation of statewide systems of higher education (Thelin 239-40).²⁵ In fact, according to comparative education scholar Anthony Welch, there emerged out the industrial period in the U.S. a “cult of efficiency,” which attempted to slash costs in education while also shifting the burden for training workers away from industry and onto the public sector (162). As he observes, this same efficiency-orientation still prompts calls for higher education reform today (157).

Indeed, metaphors of both efficiency and standardization remain commonplaces in the rhetoric of higher education reform. These metaphors are not new, but they are modern, emerging as they did a century ago and becoming central to reform rhetoric in recent decades. Both standards and efficiency were appealed to in presidential commission reports from the Truman through the Johnson eras, and both are still used as the basis for arguments that higher education should be harnessed to global economic interests.²⁶ However, as discussed in the previous chapter, such metaphors of business took a backseat to depictions of higher education as a form of national defense during the first two decades of the Cold War. Higher education was represented over those years as a way for America to defend against threats of totalitarianism and nuclear annihilation, and this proved an effective strategy for pushing through major reforms. Yet, after Johnson assumed the presidency, the focus of reform rhetoric shifted yet again as

²⁵ The Carnegie Foundation’s 1932 report to the State of California, for example, calls for greater “coordination of the several phases of higher education” as a means of clearing up “confusion” among the state’s institutions of higher learning (Carnegie, *State* 21). It also encourages “experimentation for efficiency and economy” (Carnegie, *State* 33). The framework set forth by the CFAT for the separate University of California and California State University systems is one which exists to this day.

²⁶ In fact, Jean-François Lyotard contends that the “logic of maximum performance” continues to drive most *all* decision-making in advanced capitalist societies and that the legitimation of power is still based on “optimizing the system’s performance” (xxiv).

postsecondary education was represented as a way to fight the domestic War on Poverty. This set the stage for higher education to be tied once more to U.S. economic and business interests and set in motion a backlash of conservative reform rhetoric which endeavored to restore quality to postsecondary learning. This backlash gained full force, as I describe in the following sections, with the changing nature of the global economy and the supposed crisis of competitiveness.

From Militarism to Marketization in *A Nation at Risk*

Between the mid-1940s, when business concerns were subordinated to those of national defense in the rhetoric of higher education reform, and the early 1980s, when depictions of higher education as a business rose to prominence once again, major shifts had occurred both in American industry and the global marketplace in which it operated. These shifts were too seismic, and the forces behind them too multidimensional, to describe in any detail here. Suffice to say that two major developments over this period had direct bearing on the metaphoric depiction of higher education in the rhetoric of reform. The first was the transformation of the worldwide economy through the so-called “commodification” of knowledge. In what sociologist Daniel Bell has termed the “post-industrial society” (36), manufacturing declined as the foundation of the U.S. economy, a new, more service-oriented economy emerged, and information itself became a product to be purchased and sold. Jean-François Lyotard explains, “Knowledge in the form of an informational commodity indispensable to productive power [was] already, and [would] continue to be, a major—perhaps *the* major—stake in the worldwide competition for

power” (5, italics in original). For universities and colleges, the implications of this development were staggering. While the knowledge they transmitted had before been characterized as a lowly “article” or “good,” it was now a “raw material” of nearly incalculable worth (Slaughter and Rhoades 15). Clark Kerr expressed this realization in his 1963 preface to *The Uses of the University*: “We are just now perceiving that the university’s invisible product, knowledge, may be the most powerful single element in our culture, reflecting the rise and fall of professions and even of social classes, of regions and even of nations” (xii). During the earlier part of the 20th century, postsecondary institutions’ ability to profit by the knowledge they produced was relatively limited, but in the latter half, their opportunities became much more abundant due in part to the passage in 1980 of the Bayh-Doyle Act, which allowed universities to own and patent discoveries made through their publicly funded research (Bok 10-11). Again, Kerr anticipated the metaphoric moment of this change: the university became “a producer, wholesaler, and retailer of knowledge,” and its faculty, a group of entrepreneurs engaged in “a rat race of business” (*Uses of* 87, 32).

The second major development that altered the metaphoric depiction of higher education was the globalization of the worldwide economy. In the decades following World War II, such industries as steel-making and auto-manufacturing, which had spurred industrialization in the U.S., went into decline as expanded free trade agreements made way for greater overseas competition. “The Fordist era of high wage, mass production, and mass consumption which characterized the industrial countries from 1940 to 1970 [was] over,” explain Sheila Slaughter and Larry Leslie. “The rise of Japan

and other Asian countries destabilized the bipolar world trading patterns that had built prosperity within established industrial countries” (33). As the Pacific Rim and other nations rose within the global market, so American industry’s fortunes fell. Consumers increasingly rejected U.S.-made goods, especially automobiles and electronics, in favor of less expensive and more reliable products manufactured abroad (Main 28). This sparked the crisis described earlier in this chapter and the attempt to leverage higher education as a way to regain America’s economic competitiveness. Accordingly, postsecondary learning was portrayed as a force that would enable America to retake its position atop the global marketplace, and modern methods of standardization and efficiency were again touted as the boost higher education needed to put the nation back on top.

While the economy became more globalized between the mid-1940s and 1980s, higher education underwent some substantial changes of its own. The change that most influenced the depiction of postsecondary education in calls for reform was the dramatic expansion and diversification of student enrollments over this timespan and the impacts these had on both curricula and educational standards. In 1947 the Truman Commission had estimated the number of students enrolled in U.S. colleges and universities at 2,354,000, with only a small fraction of those being women or non-whites (25). But by 1980, enrollments had risen to 12,097,000, with fully 51 percent being women and 16 percent coming from minoritized groups (U.S. Department of Education). In granting access to this larger population of students, U.S. colleges and universities had become, by and large, less selective in their admissions (Lucas, *American* 310). In some cases, as

with the City University of New York in the early 1970s, the doors were thrown wide open regardless of applicants' previous academic records. With this greater openness, postsecondary institutions found it necessary to expand their curricular offerings to make coursework more relevant to the needs of a diverse student body. Programs reflecting differences in race, gender, age, and sexual orientation were added, as were greater numbers of so-called "remedial" courses. "A degree of democratization aimed at opening learning to a wider array of abilities and talents had occurred," states Lucas (*American* 266). This openness grew directly from provisions of the Higher Education Act of 1965 signed by Johnson and, more distantly, from the Truman Commission's 1947 declaration that higher education should be made "equally accessible to all, without regard to race, creed, sex, or national origin" (38).

Yet, to reformers who viewed higher education through the terministic screen of business, this "democratization" took on a different cast: If colleges and universities had become less selective, then admissions must also be less competitive. If some college entrants were less well-prepared than those of previous decades, then standards must be slipping. Views like these sparked a counter-reform movement led largely by the far-right, which demanded that excellence be restored to the nation's colleges and universities (Berliner and Biddle 132-33). The Nixon Administration collaborated with national policy groups like the Committee for Economic Development in the early 1970s to introduce the concept of market forces into higher education and spur competition among institutions (Slaughter and Leslie 44). Around the same time, a "competitiveness coalition" emerged in Congress bent on passing laws to promote partnerships and joint

ventures between universities and corporations (Slaughter and Leslie 45). And, shortly before Ronald Reagan was elected president in 1980, he appointed an Education Policy Advisory Committee whose report blamed the supposed decline in U.S. academic standards on “federal interference that favors unruly minorities, bilingualism, and persons with disabilities; encourages mediocrity; and slights talented students” (Berliner and Biddle 135). In other words, the report depicted educational equity as running directly counter to excellence. It thus perpetuated the long-standing controversy over which should be the highest priority for America’s colleges and universities, while also making apparent the covert racism and ableism which often underpins that debate.

Out of this maelstrom came the provocatively titled *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*. The report was issued by the National Commission on Excellence in Education (NCEE) on April 26, 1983, and billed itself as “An Open Letter to the American People”—a report not only to the U.S. Secretary of Education but to the nation as a whole. The slim blue booklet was made available publicly through the U.S. Government Printing Office, and excerpts were published in daily newspapers across the country. In this respect, it followed the precedent set by President Kennedy’s Task Force Committee on Education, whose streamlined recommendations were published in the *New York Times*, but it deviated radically from that of the Truman Commission, whose *Higher Education for American Democracy* filled six bound volumes and took its audience to be an informed group of education leaders and policymakers. Above all, though, *A Nation at Risk* was distinguished as a public report by virtue of its abbreviated length, visually appealing layout, and easy-to-read language. The

main body of the report runs only 36 pages.²⁷ The writing is straightforward and businesslike; most sentences follow a simple subject-verb-object pattern, and by contrast to the language used in most government documents, active voice predominates over passive. The use of first- and second-person point-of-view also lends to the report's engaging conversational tone. For example, the closing addresses parents and students directly: "To Parents: You know you cannot confidently launch your children into today's world unless they are of a strong character.... To Students: You forfeit your chance for life at its fullest when you withhold your best effort in learning" (35). This lay-orientation was part of a deliberate rhetorical strategy on the part of the NCEE and contributed to the report's enormous popularity and influence. The initial print run was exhausted within one hour of its release, and more than 6 million copies were distributed within the first year (Guthrie and Springer 11).

Although *A Nation at Risk* is popularly thought of as a presidential commission report, it is not in the strict sense, and this had considerable bearing on the rhetorical situation its creators faced. As Terrel H. Bell, Secretary of Education under Ronald Reagan,²⁸ recounts, the report had "a stormy gestation period" and "a difficult birth" ("Reflections" 593). Bell had originally hoped Reagan would charter the NCEE, but that plan was rejected because it would have highlighted federal involvement in education at a

²⁷ A longer version, titled *A Nation at Risk: The Full Account*, was published in March of 1984 and included further exhibits and appendices. Despite the book's title, however, the commissioned research papers and data included were largely presented in abbreviated or executive summary form. Thus, it too appears to be directed more toward a business or lay audience than most previous reform reports.

²⁸ Bell, a moderate Republican, was a professional educator and previously acted as Commissioner of Education under President Richard Nixon. James Guthrie and Matthew Springer observe that Bell was a "puzzling" choice as Reagan's Secretary of Education, but they speculate that he may have been recommended by Casper Weinberger, who was himself "a quiet supporter of public education" and remembered Bell's service under Nixon (10). This implies that Bell's appointment may have been an end-run around Reagan from the start.

time when the president was committed to abolishing the U.S. Department of Education (Bell, “Reflections” 593). Determined to save the Department instead, Bell himself established the Commission on Excellence and appointed its chairman, David Pierpoint Gardner, in August of 1981.²⁹ “In those days, I felt that my main mission on behalf of American education was damage control,” Bell recounts, “and I believed that a major study of the condition of education would focus public attention on our schools and colleges and make it difficult politically to eliminate or significantly diminish the federal role” (“Reflections” 593). His statement here points to the twofold purpose of the commission’s report: first, to raise public awareness of education and, second, to thwart Reagan’s own political agenda.

Members of the NCEE, most of whom were professional educators, apparently shared this dual sense of rhetorical purpose.³⁰ According to Bell, they were united in their desire to rally the nation around educational reform (“Reflections” 593). Yet they had little enthusiasm for the proposals presented by Reagan at their first meeting, including his recommendation that a “resurgence of independent schools” should be encouraged through tax incentives and that any reform should begin by “allowing God back in the classroom” (qtd. in Holton 4). In particular, physicists Glenn Seaborg and Gerald Holton, who took the lead in drafting *A Nation at Risk*, scorned Reagan’s conservative education agenda of vouchers and school prayer (Guthrie and Springer 11). According to

²⁹ Gardner was then president of the University of Utah, but rumors were already circulating that he would become the next president of the University of California system (Bell, *The Thirteenth* 117).

³⁰ The National Commission on Excellence in Education included 15 members who were either educators or involved in education policymaking or administration. Of the remaining members, one came from the corporate sector, one was a state governor, and one was chosen to represent the parental point-of-view. Bell notes that they were a diverse group, including both liberals and conservatives, and all were “strong willed and independent” (*The Thirteenth* 117-18).

progressive educator Theodore Sizer, these writers went so far as to circumvent the president's approval process by replacing early, politically "safe" drafts at the last minute with briefer, bolder ones, which were meant to elicit strong public reaction and thereby make it difficult for Reagan to implement his own education reforms (45). The text of the report does furnish some evidence of this. In the opening, for example, the commission acknowledges a broad statement made by Reagan at its first meeting: "Certainly there are few areas of American life as important to our society, to our families as our schools and colleges" (qtd. in National Commission 6). However, the NCEE scrupulously avoids mention of any of Reagan's other reform principles. It also stresses that "the Federal Government has the primary responsibility to identify the national interest in education" and should "help fund and support efforts to promote and protect that interest" (33), whereas Reagan was determined to limit the federal role. This makes the NCEE apparently the first federally-appointed commission to have issued a report whose reform agenda ran so completely counter to that of a sitting president.

Still, this raises an important question: Why would a commission which so roundly rejected Reagan's stance on education craft a report which so obviously panders to his conservative views on domestic and foreign policy—both the need to maintain strong defense against the Soviet Union and to regain U.S. economic competitiveness? The answer becomes clear when one considers another element of the rhetorical situation. Although Reagan may not have commissioned the report, he was certainly one of its primary audiences. By stressing both military and economic defense, themes on which Reagan had ridden into office, the commission could appeal directly to the president and

his advisors while also galvanizing the public and news media around their cause. This strategy worked brilliantly. When Reagan presented *A Nation at Risk* at a Washington, D.C. press conference on April 26, 1983, commission members stood uncomfortably by as the president ignored the report's actual recommendations while touting his own education agenda. But this only piqued the press corps' interest, resulting in such a deluge of coverage that Reagan was ultimately forced to backpedal on reducing federal aid (Guthrie and Springer 11). As Bell wryly attests, "I heard no more about abolishing the Department of Education" ("Reflections" 593).

Bell had originally hoped for a "Sputnik-like occurrence" which would have rallied the nation around its schools (*The Thirteenth* 115), but the startling rhetoric of *A Nation at Risk* produced much the same effect. One reason for this was the resonance generated by the militaristic appeals of its opening. "The report's stentorian Cold War rhetoric commanded and still commands attention," writes education policy expert Gerald Bracey in his 20th-anniversary assessment of the influence of *A Nation at Risk* (617). The report's title itself sounds alarm bells, evoking memories of events like the bombing of Pearl Harbor and the launch of the Sputnik missile, when Americans feared imminent attack, and predicating upon these the ostensible "imperative" for educational reform. Indeed, the report's opening makes direct reference to the Sputnik launch, stating that the U.S. has "squandered gains in student achievement" made since that event and implying that the nation now faces a comparable level of threat. The report then employs a series of metaphors which compare the nation's decline in educational achievement to a failure of national defense. "If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on

America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war,” it states. “We have dismantled essential support systems.... We have, in effect, been committing an act of unthinking, unilateral educational disarmament” (5). The phrase “unfriendly foreign power” is calculated here to bring to mind the Soviet Union, and references to “dismantled...support systems” and “educational disarmament” the frightening prospect of Soviet nuclear attack. These metaphors echo Reagan’s dire warnings, emphasized only one month before the report’s release in his much-publicized “Star Wars” speech, that reductions to the nation’s defense budget would leave the U.S. vulnerable to Soviet aggression.³¹ “During the past decade and a half,” Reagan had admonished, “the Soviets have built up a massive arsenal of new strategic nuclear weapons—weapons that can strike directly at the United States” (Reagan, “Address”). In addition, the report’s defense-related metaphors tap into the longer-standing “Cold War schema” theorized by Matthew Hirshberg, which is “deeply embedded in the American psyche” and pits the United States, democracy, and freedom against the Soviet Union, communism, and oppression (4-5). By depicting educational excellence as a shield against the U.S.S.R., the *A Nation at Risk* plays upon this conditioned us vs. them mentality, appealing to readers’ fear and swaying them to favor the report’s recommended reforms over the implied alternative of communist incursion.

At the same time that *A Nation at Risk* invokes the Red Menace, though, it also maintains there is another risk to national security, one which provides even greater

³¹ The timing suggests, in fact, that some of Seaborg and Holton’s last-minute revisions may have been made in an attempt to ride the wave of publicity generated by Reagan’s “Star Wars” address. The editorial timeline described by Bell indicates that *A Nation at Risk* was not put to bed until three weeks after Reagan’s speech was delivered (*The Thirteenth* 122).

impetus for educational reform. Beyond suggesting that our enemies may “bomb us off the planet,” *A Nation at Risk* stresses, says Bracey, “that our friends—especially Germany, Japan, and South Korea [will] outsmart us and wrest control of the world economy” (617). The report capitalizes on this worry by reminding readers that these other global powers are catching up with America’s commercial and industrial expertise. “The raw materials of international commerce,” it states, “are today spreading throughout the world as vigorously as miracle drugs, synthetic fertilizers, and blue jeans did earlier” (7). This image of spreading, or moving rapidly through a system like drugs or fertilizer, is calculated to stir anxiety and cause readers to identify with the Commission’s proposal to act swiftly in reforming America’s educational system. The “raw materials” referred to are those of knowledge and information, over which, the report suggests, the U.S. is rapidly losing its monopoly control. When *A Nation at Risk* was issued, the transformation of the economy through forces of globalization and technologization was merely beginning and therefore more worrisome to the American public than it is today. The report cautions that these forces are encroaching on America’s turf—for what could be more quintessentially American than blue jeans?—and summons citizens to protect against economic competition much as previous reports had called upon them to defend against communism.

To defend the nation’s competitiveness, the NCEE calls upon colleges and universities to take the same measures, literally, that businesses at the time were taking: to raise their standards and gauge the quality of their products. Because the NCEE’s initial mandate was to focus on quality, that, or the lack thereof, is naturally what it

spotlighted. Bell had charged the Commission with “assessing the quality of teaching and learning in our Nation’s public and private schools, colleges, and universities” and “comparing American schools and colleges with those of other advanced nations” (National Commission 1). The juxtaposition of these two directives suggests that quality is directly correlated to competitiveness³²—the same correlation being made within American business at the time—and the participial verbs, “assessing” and “comparing,” imply measurement or evaluation against a prevailing standard—in this case, a standard set by other countries. Thus, the rapidly shifting economy of the post-industrial period prompted the same focus on academic standardization that had emerged during the industrial era, only on a global scale. *A Nation at Risk* sets forth standards for “excellence in education” and calls upon institutions to conform, much as standardizing agencies had done during the early part of the 20th century (12). At the institutional level, the report states that a school or college must “[set] high expectations and goals for all learners, then [try] in every possible way to help students reach them” (12). It then details what those goals and expectations should be, including specific course requirements for college admission and minimum scores on standardized tests (27-28). At the societal level, the NCEE defines excellence as “being prepared through the education and skill of its people to respond to the challenges of a rapidly changing world” (12). Here, it clearly correlates the need for higher academic standards to challenges of the emerging information economy. The notion that education should equip workers to deal with

³² Of course, it could be argued that “quality” is being used generically here merely to denote value or excellence. However, its use in relation to competitiveness and best practices throughout *A Nation at Risk* suggests that the word is being used to evoke the increasingly popular ideas of quality management and to appeal to audiences who were embracing those concepts.

evolving technologies is an offshoot of the human capital ideology that arose from industrialization, according to Berliner and Biddle: “Human Capital theorists argued that education should be thought of as ‘investing’ in human resources and that appropriate investments in education can benefit industry and fuel the national economy” (141). Once again, then, the NCEE relies upon an entailment of the metaphor of business with roots in the industrial period to support its arguments for reform.

However, the Commission suggests that it is not enough to establish higher academic standards; institutions’ performance must also be measured against them. Bell notes that one of the NCEE’s major goals was to make a “searching appraisal” of data housed at the Department of Education (*The Thirteenth* 119). Following this directive, the Commission finds America’s colleges and universities to be sorely lacking. It notes, for instance, that “one-fifth of all 4-year public colleges must accept every high school graduate within the state regardless of the program followed or grades” and that even more selective colleges and universities report that their “general level of selectivity [has] declined” (20). In this respect, it echoes conservative complaints of the 1980s that colleges’ and universities’ standards were slipping and their competitiveness declining. Many scholars have criticized the slapdash way in which the NCEE documents its findings and the spuriousness of its data (see, e.g., Bracey 619-21). Still, it set a precedent as the first commission report to bring such performance-based measures to bear on higher education (Goldberg and Renton 25). Further, *A Nation at Risk* demands that educators and elected leaders be held responsible for ensuring the results of reforms (27, 32). It calls upon every participant in the educational system—from superintendents

and principals to state and local officials, from the Federal Government to individual citizens—to assume “responsibility for educational reform” (36).³³ It thus ties its proposals for assessment to accountability, a word which connotes not only answerability but financial accounting. This further entailment of the metaphor of business spurred demands for increased accountability in postsecondary education at both the federal and state levels (Caboni and Adisu 170).

While *A Nation at Risk* relates a decline in national competitiveness to a decline in the standards of American schools, it also correlates the latter to a broader decline in individual standards. It famously bemoans “a rising tide of mediocrity,” for example, and attributes this to a “dimming of *personal* expectations” (5, 11, italics mine). The report implies that our nation’s schools are being flooded by the unmotivated, the unprepared, the unfit. “History is not kind to idlers,” it scolds, implying that some Americans are shirkers or freeloaders (6). Kenneth Burke’s theory of piety and impiety can operate as a valuable frame for analysis here. “Piety is *the sense of what properly goes with what,*” Burke writes, whereas impiety causes one to “*reorganize* one’s orientation” (*Permanence* 74, 80, italics in original). Based on this theory, higher education could be seen as pious, for as Burke says, “where you discern the symptoms of great devotion to any kind of endeavor, you are in the realm of piety” (*Permanence* 83). But when something new or different, something that requires reorientation, is introduced into this realm, the environment becomes tainted with impiety. Unconventional ideas or groups of people who “don’t belong” in higher education are viewed as disrupting the unity of the whole

³³ In TQM parlance, this sequence of internal and external customers would be referred to as a “quality chain” (see, e.g., Cesarotti and Visconti 185).

and therefore must be purged or cleaned away. *A Nation at Risk* reflects these desires for purification and unity with its references to the “shoddiness [which] is too often reflected in our schools and colleges” and to young people who are “coasting through life” (11, 14). These references convey a sense of deep disapproval or disgust and carry racist and classist undertones. This “impious” element, the report suggests, much be purged through a renewed commitment to upholding standards of excellence, to inculcating the “New Basics,” and to reinforcing a “shared vision” and a “common culture” (24, 12, 7). That is, piety—both academic and cultural—must be reestablished.

Beyond reasoning that the same quality standards meant to save America’s businesses will also save its schools, *A Nation at Risk* warns that the failure by either to heed the call for quality improvement will have equally catastrophic results. If higher education doesn’t fulfill its supposed mission of equipping workers for the information age, the report warns it will threaten Americans’ individual and collective economic futures. “The individuals in our society who do not possess the level of skill, literacy, and training essential to this new era will be effectively disenfranchised,” it states, “from the material rewards that accompany competent performance” (7). This hits readers in their own pocketbooks, suggesting that they will be marginalized not only politically but also financially if they fail to keep pace. Moreover, it implies that gaining “material rewards” depends solely upon individual wherewithal, regardless of societal factors, and that “competent performance,” a phrase that connotes workplace appraisal, will be gauged in terms of monetary gain, not academic achievement. The report then points to the economic stakes for the nation as a whole, stating, “Citizens know intuitively what some

of the best economists in the world have shown in their research, that education is one of the chief engines of society's material well-being" (17). Here, the report depicts education mechanistically as an "engine" that powers or drives the economy. It also attempts to normalize its view of reality and induce consubstantiality among its readers by claiming that its correlation between education and material advancement is not only accepted "intuitively" by citizens but validated by the "best economists in the world."

Ideologies and Entailments in *A Nation at Risk*

In linking the goals of higher education to America's struggle for quality and global competitiveness, *A Nation at Risk* overlays metaphors of higher education as a form of national defense with those of it as a business. This accords with Lakoff and Johnson's claim that there may be complex coherences across metaphors. "When two metaphors successfully satisfy two purposes, then overlaps in the purposes will correspond to overlaps in the metaphors," they explain (97). Although each metaphor only partially structures the concept being described, they still share common entailments (Lakoff and Johnson 97). While the metaphor of defense focuses primarily on how higher education may support the nation's military forces or fend off ideological threats, the metaphor of business emphasizes the ways in which colleges and universities may support private sector interests and maintain U.S. standing in the marketplace. Still, both metaphors link higher education to American competitiveness, and both share common entailments, such as the assumption that the U.S. must match, if not surpass, other nations. These two metaphors overlap, sometimes within the same paragraph or sentence

of *A Nation at Risk*, violating typical strictures against using mixed metaphors. One section opens, for instance, “In a world of ever-accelerating competition and change in the conditions of the workplace, of ever-greater danger, and of ever-larger opportunities for those prepared to meet them, educational reform should focus on the goal of creating a Learning Society” (13). The “conditions of the workplace” are directly juxtaposed to the “ever-greater danger,” which is presumably defense-related, and suggests that creation of a “Learning Society” will equip U.S. citizens to deal with both. In outlining “indicators of the risk,” the report also mentions that “business and military leaders complain that they are required to spend billions of dollars on costly remedial education and training programs” (8-9). The implication here is that both the nation’s defenses and business success are hampered by inadequate education. “The risk” refers back to the report’s opening, which portrays the threat facing the U.S. similarly as both economic and military. Further, the overlapping of metaphors of defense and business generates rhetorical force through their respective historical and ideological associations, while also enabling the NCEE to build common ground with multiple audiences. Business leaders would tend to support educational reforms which served business interests, while public-sector leaders might be more concerned with defending democratic values, and either audience would likely respond to allusions to past or present economic or military threats.

A Nation at Risk also evokes the ideologies of globalization, free-market capitalism, and American exceptionalism as a means of appealing to both business and lay audiences. “The world is indeed one global village,” the opening of the report asserts (6), capturing the sense of international cooperation and peaceful co-existence which is

popularly construed as an ideal of globalization (“Globalization”). Yet immediately afterwards, the report makes clear that the “village” it refers to is more accurately a marketplace and that any kinship between nations is overridden by competitiveness. “We live among determined, well-educated and strongly motivated competitors,” it states. “We compete with them for international standing and markets, not only with products but also with the ideas of our laboratories and neighborhood workshops” (6). These statements accord with the view of globalization as a process of worldwide economic liberalization (“Globalization”). The word “standing” implies that the U.S. is ranked among other countries and must therefore vie against them to retain dominance. “Products” are coupled with “ideas,” conveying the growing importance of the information economy; “laboratories” are paired with “workshops,” encompassing both university research and small-scale manufacturing; and “neighborhood” echoes “village,” suggesting family and community, the local as well as the global. In this manner, the NCEE attempts to draw in audiences across the spectrum: from financiers to small business owners, from scientists to soccer moms. Still, it suggests that education is both the differentiator and the common cause among them. “America’s position in the world may once have been reasonably secure with only a few exceptionally well-trained men and women. It is no longer,” the report states ominously (6). To be among those few, to defend America’s preeminence, requires what the NCEE calls an “indispensable investment” in learning, borrowing a commonplace of reform rhetoric (7). *A Nation at Risk* thus maintains that America has a unique destiny which may only be fulfilled if its educational system is reformed—a spurious cause-and-effect correlation, to be sure. It

recounts the ways in which colleges and universities have contributed to the nation's past successes—from providing research and training for America's farmers to supplying the scientists and technicians needed for space exploration—as the grounds for arguing that they will also contribute toward its future triumph (33-34). “We are inheritors of a past that gives us every reason to believe that we will succeed,” it reassures readers, summoning the American “can-do” spirit (34). This inductive reasoning rests upon the assumption that America's Manifest Destiny now spans the globe and that U.S. higher education, if properly reformed, will serve to fulfill it.

To be fair, the NCEE appeals to other ideologies as well, including egalitarian liberalism and educational progressivism, but these are effectively subordinated to values of conservatism and free-market capitalism in their report. In other words, the Commission pays lip service to equity, but it underscores excellence. Education scholar William Pink explains that *A Nation at Risk* and other reform reports of the early 1980s “signal[ed] a shift from a primary concern with issues of social justice...to concerns with economic productivity, international competition, and national security” (125). In particular, Kathryn Borman and Patricia O'Reilly point out that issues of sex equity are virtually ignored relative to the reports' focus on excellence and the market-oriented purposes of education (111). The NCEE does insist that its concerns “go well beyond matters such as industry and commerce” to include “the intellectual, moral, and spiritual strengths of our people which knit together the fabric of our society.” Echoing Dewey, it contends that “a high level of shared education is essential to a free, democratic society, especially in a country that prides itself on pluralism and individual freedom” (7).

However, the phrases “knit together” and “fabric of our society” imply that all Americans are of one skein or cloth, and although the NCEE appeals to democratic values in promoting the cause of “shared education,” the kind of “common culture” it advocates typically involves a rejection of multiculturalism and the subordination of subaltern groups to a dominant norm (7). Further, as whiteness scholar Gregory Jay points out, any “common culture” in the U.S. entails such hegemonic belief systems as consumerism and capitalism (1-2). Relative to these market-oriented ideologies, the Commission quite literally subordinates “pluralism” and “individual freedom” by relegating them to a subordinate clause. As sociologist Peter M. Hall notes, *A Nation at Risk* “repeatedly discusses how education undergirds American prosperity, security, and culture [and] even the ordering of those conditions places the economy first” (144). Similarly, the report subordinates values associated with educational equity to those of capitalism and conservatism in the following passage:

All, regardless of race or class or economic status, are entitled to a fair chance and to the tools for developing their individual powers of mind and spirit to the utmost. This promise means that all children by virtue of their own efforts, competently guided, can hope to attain the mature and informed judgment needed to secure gainful employment and to manage their own lives, thereby serving not only their own interests but also the progress of society itself. (8)

Not only does the NCEE suggest here that securing “gainful employment” is the primary reason for educating citizens, but it also asserts that they should be able to “manage their own lives” without government support, a key tenet of conservatism. The promise of societal progress, as expressed here, also undergirds the hegemony of capitalism (Hooker). Most importantly, though, a bootstrap mentality pervades the passage: all “are

entitled to a fair chance.” Children may attain an education “by virtue of their own efforts.” This assumes there is a level playing field and that all may succeed if they simply put forth sufficient effort. Victor Villanueva argues that this mindset informs a seemingly commonsensical but covertly racist discourse which assumes “that people of color don’t do better because they don’t try harder, that most are content to feed off the State” (651).

This bootstrap mentality points to yet another ideology that *A Nation at Risk* appeals to in promoting its agenda for higher education reform: that of neoliberalism. In tracing the rise of neoliberal education policies, education scholar David Hursh explains that “neoliberalism promotes personal responsibility through individual choice within markets” and construes the individual “as an autonomous entrepreneur who can always take care of his or her own needs” (496). These neoliberal precepts are apparent not only in the NCEE’s statements that all individuals “are entitled to a fair chance” and may succeed “by virtue of their own efforts” (8), but also in the Commission’s attempt to blame the nation’s educational problems, in large part, upon individual shortcomings. As Hall observes, *A Nation at Risk* portrays “the causes of declining student achievement [as] surprisingly characterological—weakness of purpose, confusion of vision, underuse of talent, and loss of leadership” (143). According to education scholar Christine Shea, this emphasis on character is consistent with the conservative school reform policies of the Reagan era, which envisioned schools having to play a greater role in character development because of the breakdown of the traditional nuclear family (19). However, the report asserts that the strength and character of individual Americans is not only

responsible for the “declining trend” in our educational system but also may reverse it (14). It issues a “call to *all* who care about America and its future,” “to concerned citizens *everywhere*” (14, italics mine). Beyond addressing a broad public audience, then, the NCEE suggests that the American people can pull themselves and their educational system up by their own bootstraps. In this manner, *A Nation at Risk* introduces the ideology of neoliberalism into the rhetoric of higher education reform, creating a linkage which carries forward more than 20 years to the Spellings Commission Report. The report thus proves pivotal not only in reasserting the metaphor of higher education as a business but also in articulating a number of ideological positions—conservative, capitalistic, neoliberal—which would reshape both reform rhetoric and higher education itself in the waning decades of the 20th century and the opening of the 21st.

Numerous books and articles have been written examining the legacies of *A Nation at Risk*, and there is no reason to reiterate their many conclusions here. Retrospectives were published upon the report’s first, second, fifth, tenth, and fifteenth anniversaries; twenty years after its issuance, the *Peabody Journal of Education* devoted an entire issue to exploring the report’s continuing implications for higher education; and on its 25-year anniversary, *New York Times* education writer Edward Fiske described *A Nation at Risk* as no less than “a milestone in the history of American education—albeit in ways that its creators never planned, anticipated or even wanted” (A27). This ongoing assessment is itself testament to the report’s lasting influence, and Fiske hints at the ironic role *A Nation at Risk* played in attempting to fend off market-oriented reforms while actually ushering them in. However, he also rightly identifies the two most

important legacies of *A Nation at Risk* as it has shaped reform rhetoric and, in turn, higher education since its release: First, the report “put the *quality* of education on the national political agenda—where it has remained ever since,” and second, it enshrined the idea that “*quality* of schooling is directly linked to economic competitiveness” (Fiske A27, italics mine). I italicize “quality” here for I believe its use in these two instances is not coincidental. The language and concepts of quality that were introduced in *A Nation at Risk* have left their imprint on higher education programs and policymaking ever since. The NCEE signaled a crisis of quality in higher education, and subsequent reports took measures, literally and figuratively, to manage it. The following chapter will explore how the rhetoric of reform symbolically enacted the re-engineering of higher education in the 1990s and 2000s while reinforcing the hegemony of ideologies first articulated in *A Nation at Risk*.

CHAPTER 4

MANAGEMENT, MEASUREMENT, AND MARKETIZATION:

THE DECADE OF REPORTS AND BEYOND

Given that quality management was being widely touted during the 1980s as the means to fend off foreign competition, it was perhaps inevitable that commission reports on higher education should adopt quality as their mantra as well. The rhetoric of higher education reform had, by this time, so normalized the conception of higher education as a business that quality was advanced, and readily accepted, as the obvious solution to its supposed shortcomings. This ready transference from industry to education bears out Anthony Welch's assertion that "correlate notions of business efficiency are assumed rather than problematized in education, as part of an increasing technology of control" (159). From the standpoint of metaphor theory, the structural metaphor had created such "coherence" that even "emergent concepts" related to business were projected onto higher education (Lakoff and Johnson 81). Hence, as American businesses began to manage for quality during this period, higher education was expected to do likewise, and a new set of metaphoric entailments emerged. Consistent with the "core strategies" of quality management, reformers contended that universities and colleges should be more customer-focused, should engage in continuous quality improvement, and should provide commensurate measures of quality (Juran 587-92).

Indeed, in this chapter I will argue that the quality management movement,³⁴ meant to transform American industry during the 1980s and '90s, contributed to the transformation of postsecondary education as well by supplying much of the language and conceptual framework used to guide its reform. By analyzing commission reports, speeches, legislation, and other artifacts, I will show how the language of quality management—most notably, tropes of “quality,” “competitiveness,” “accountability,” and “standardization”—quickly pervaded reform rhetoric in the 1980s and then structured symbolic action in calls for reform over subsequent years. Based upon Jürgen Habermas’s theory of technological rationality, I posit that quality management served a legitimating function within the rhetoric of reform of this period, dictating “norms of conduct” based on values of efficiency and economy (*Theory and Practice* 259-70). As these norms took hold during the 1980s and '90s, higher education became increasingly bound up with what Habermas calls “the production and transmission of technologically exploitable knowledge” while retreating from what he identifies as its three other primary responsibilities: equipping graduates with “extrafunctional abilities,” (meaning those relevant to pursuit of a career but not to a specific profession), transmitting the “cultural tradition of a society,” and raising the “political consciousness” of its students (*Toward a Rational* 2-4).

A management system originally intended to reengineer processes within a manufacturing plant was thus applied to higher education, with the result that it, too, was

³⁴ Although there are different approaches to quality management, including the Total Quality Management (TQM) system promulgated during the 1980s and 1990s and the more recent permutation of Six Sigma (see, e.g., Jacowski), these will be referred to generically here as part of the quality management movement.

reengineered. Conceptualized in Japan in the aftermath of World War II, quality management was based on the assumption that statistical controls could be applied to mass production as a means to improve efficiency, enhance quality, and eliminate product defects (Juran 537-49). When W. Edwards Deming and Joseph M. Juran, both management consultants trained as engineers, introduced this approach to the U.S. through a series of books and lectures in the late 1970s and early '80s, it quickly caught on among corporations looking to regain their competitiveness (Juran 584-85). As leaders of these corporations became more engaged with higher education reform following publication of *A Nation at Risk*, they naturally carried precepts of quality management with them, and before long, the transference of metaphoric language from one discursive domain to another was complete.³⁵ Quality metaphors proliferated in reform reports of the 1980s as a reflection of this process. Sociologist Jeanette Webb contends that quality management supplies a “vocabulary of motive,” which is used to legitimate programs and actions based upon a particular view of how an organization should operate (252). “Motives are ‘accepted justifications for programmes or acts and seek to influence others,’” she writes (252). In this same vein, I argue that the language of quality management was used to justify arguments that higher education should operate along the same lines as a manufacturer of commercial goods or a purveyor of consumer services.

Not only was terminology transferred from one realm of experience to another, but organizational theories and practices were force-fitted as well. For example, higher

³⁵ Deming first wrote about the application of quality management to educational institutions in his 1994 book *The New Economics for Industry, Government, Education*. However, the idea was already widely circulated by then.

education was assumed to be amenable to the same processes that make up what is known as Juran’s trilogy: planning for quality, controlling for quality, and continuous quality improvement—that is, establishing standards, using statistical controls to monitor results, and improving processes based upon this feedback. In addition, colleges and universities were assumed to have customers whom they should satisfy just as corporations managing for quality would seek to “delight” their internal or external customers.³⁶ The metaphor of higher education as a business necessarily entails a focus upon customers, as communication scholar Roy Schwartzman explains: “In higher education, the vocabulary of TQM brings assumptions of equivalencies: students are customers or consumers, and educational institutions should apply principles of customer service gleaned from business” (4). When these notions were applied to higher education, they resulted in radical shifts to the way the institution was both perceived and operated. Figure 4.1 provides definitions of a number of other basic tenets of quality management that had a similarly transformative effect:

Table 4.1: Basic Concepts of Quality Management

Term	Definition
Alignment	Actions to ensure that a process or activity supports the organization’s strategy, goals, and objectives.
Assessment	A systematic evaluation process of collecting and analyzing data to determine the current, historical or projected compliance of an organization to a standard.
Benchmarking	A technique in which a company measures its performance against that of best in class companies, determines how those companies achieved their performance levels and uses the information to improve its own performance.

³⁶ In quality parlance, to “delight” is to exceed the customer’s expectations.

Best practice	A superior method or innovative practice that contributes to the improved performance of an organization, usually recognized as best by other peer organizations.
Continuous improvement	The ongoing improvement of products, services or processes through incremental and breakthrough improvements.
Culture	A common set of values, beliefs, attitudes, perceptions and accepted behaviors shared by individuals within an organization.
Feedback	Communication from customers about how delivered products or services compare with customer expectations.
Goal	A broad statement describing a desired future condition or achievement without being specific about how much and when.
Indicator	Established measures to determine how well an organization is meeting its customers' needs and other operational and financial performance expectations.
Inputs	The products, services, and material obtained from suppliers to produce the outputs delivered to customers.
Leadership	An essential part of a quality improvement effort. Organization leaders must establish a vision, communicate that vision to those in the organization, and provide the tools and knowledge necessary to accomplish the vision.
Measurement	The act or process of quantitatively comparing results with requirements.
Metric	A standard for measurement.
Mission	An organization's purpose.
Objective	A specific statement of a desired short-term condition or achievement; includes measurable end results to be accomplished by specific teams or individuals within time limits.
Outputs	Products, materials, services, or information provided to customers (internal or external), from a process.
Plan-do-check-act (PDCA) cycle	A four-step process for quality improvement. In the first step (plan), a way to effect improvement is developed. In the second step (do), the plan is carried out, preferably on a small scale. In the third step (check), a study takes place between what was predicted and what was observed in the previous step. In the last step (act), action is taken on the causal system to effect the desired change.
Reengineering	A breakthrough approach for restructuring an entire organization and its processes.
Results	The effects that an organization obtains at the conclusion of a time period.
Standard	The metric, specification, gauge, statement, category, segment, grouping, behavior, event, or physical product sample against which the outputs of a process are compared and declared acceptable or unacceptable.
Standardization	When policies and common procedures are used to manage processes throughout the system.
Value-added	A term used to describe activities that transform input into a customer (internal or external) usable output.
Vision	An overarching statement of the way an organization wants to be; an ideal state of being at a future point.

Source: American Society for Quality

Although many of these terms have other common meanings, they take on particular significance and exert rhetorical force within the framework of quality management. As Webb explains, Total Quality Management, the version of quality management first introduced in the U.S. in the late 1970s and early '80s, took on the force of a "corporate religion"—a doctrine which went unchallenged largely because it seemed so rational and all-powerful (252). "Proponents of TQM claim[ed] that it offer[ed] a new logic of co-ordination where problems of labour control and motivation [could] be resolved simultaneously with problems of technical control by producing the conditions for a self-disciplining workforce," she writes (251-52). Although the terminology of quality management is varied, it falls into two primary categories: terms of management and terms of measurement. In fact, the term "management" itself derives from a combination of words meaning both measured action and constraint ("Management"). The vocabulary is therefore part of what Lyotard calls a "language game," by which leaders in advanced capitalist societies "attempt to manage... clouds of sociality according to input/output matrices, following a logic which implies that their elements are commensurable and that the whole is determinable" (xxiv), or what Habermas describes as scientific and technical "rationality," whereby "a system can be maintained which can allow itself to make the growth of the forces of production, coupled with scientific and technical progress, the basis of legitimation" (*Toward a Rational* 83). Quality management also constitutes a form of what Michael Foucault terms panopticism: "it is a type of power, a modality for its exercise, comprising a whole set of instruments, techniques, procedures, levels of application, targets; it is a 'physics'

or an ‘anatomy’ of power, a technology” (*Discipline* 215). In this connection, metaphors of quality management appeal to a specific set of ideologies associated with late-capitalism, which have been used by presidential commissions and other advocates of higher education reform to garner support for their proposals over the past 30 years. I conclude this chapter by analyzing how appeals to free-market capitalism, neoliberalism, and neoconservatism are woven almost inextricably together in the 2006 report of the Spellings Commission on Higher Education, marking the ascendancy of such market-oriented ideologies over the democratic, progressive, and humanistic beliefs and values often espoused in previous commission reports.

In recent years, many scholars have bemoaned the ways in which commercial values have overtaken universities and colleges.³⁷ No longer is higher education *like* a business, they contend; it *is* a business—dominated by a set of business ideologies and operated in accordance with current business principles. Even the language of academe has been inundated with business buzzwords. This is evident, as Christopher Lucas observes, in the “mechanistic discourse” adopted by many administrators and academicians, which describes “learning as a commodity; information as a ‘product’ to be packaged and marketed; knowledge bundled into credits and ‘delivered’ via an instructional ‘system’; students as ‘consumers’ or ‘resources’ or ‘human capital’ awaiting batch processing, and so on” (*American* 319). Yet, while other scholars view this

³⁷ The titles of several recent scholarly books on higher education reveal this preoccupation: *Universities in the Marketplace* (Bok); *Academic Capitalism* (Slaughter and Leslie); *University, Inc.* (Washburn); *Knowledge and Money* (Geiger); *The Lost Soul of Higher Education* (Schrecker); *Unmaking the Public University* (Newfield); *The Marketplace of Ideas* (Menand); and *Not for Profit* (Nussbaum). Ironically, the publishing of such books has become, in itself, quite a profitable business.

language as merely an effect of the so-called “commercialization” of higher education,³⁸ I argue that it is, in fact, a direct cause. Consistent with the theory that metaphors may be “self-fulfilling prophecies” (Lakoff and Johnson 156), the metaphoric portrayal of higher education as a business has influenced patterns of thought and behavior to the extent that the institution has taken on a commercial mold. Reform rhetoric of the past 30 years has thus left an indelible stamp on higher education, instilling a measurement-oriented, bottom line-driven mindset whereby its results are reduced to those which are readily quantifiable and its worth calculated almost entirely in economic terms. The following section explores how this form of reform rhetoric proliferated in the decade following publication of *A Nation at Risk*.

Awash in a Rising Tide: Selections from the “Decade of Reports”

Despite *A Nation at Risk*’s broad reach and influence—Berliner and Biddle call it “the mother of all critiques” (139)—it was far from the only commission report on higher education reform to be issued during the Reagan years. In fact, education historians have dubbed the years 1983 to 1993 the “decade of reports” (see, e.g., Gutek 280). Garman and Holland say of this period, “It seemed as if we were awash in commission reports. In less than a year following publication of *A Nation at Risk*...more than 260 blue-ribbon

³⁸ Daniel Bell uses the term “commercialization” in a narrow sense to refer to “efforts within the university to make a profit from teaching, research, and other campus activities” (3). However, he outlines the many additional meanings it is taken to encompass here, including 1) “the influence of economic forces on universities” (referred to in this chapter as “marketization”), 2) “the influence of surrounding corporate culture,” 3) “the influence of student career interests on the curriculum,” 4) “efforts to economize in university expenditures...or to use administrative methods adapted from business,” and 5) “attempts to quantify matters within the university that are not truly quantifiable” (3). He also notes that “commercialization” is used interchangeably with similar terms such as “corporatization” or “commodification” (3).

commissions had been created across the nation” (101). The majority of reports issued by these commissions focused on K-12 reform. However, the few that zeroed in on higher education bore some striking similarities. First, rather than being written by educators for educators as was often the case with earlier commission reports, these were penned primarily by representatives of business and government for audiences of their peers. Commissions were more frequently sponsored by private-sector and intra-governmental agencies than by educational organizations during the 1980s and early 90s, and their membership altered too, with business and political interests assuming dominance (Ginsberg and Plank 8). Second, these commission reports further normalized the metaphor of higher education as a business, as their writers brought to bear their “trained incapacity” in recommending postsecondary reforms. As Burke explains, such trained incapacity operates both as an orientation, causing one to view any new subject through the lens of one’s previous training and experience, and as a way of “means-selecting,” meaning one adopts measures in accordance with that training (*Permanence* 10). The commissions therefore selected the means which were being embraced at the time within their own circles as those by which higher education should be reformed—most notably, the systems of measurement and control associated with quality management. Third, given that the audiences targeted by these commissions were also composed increasingly of government and business leaders—audiences with the same trained incapacity as the commission members themselves—the idea that postsecondary institutions should be reengineered for quality exerted persuasive force because it seemed commonsensical. Besides, as Welch explains, “the assumption that the

private sector is (necessarily) more efficient than the public sector is often legitimated by the perceived greater conformity of the private sector to the canons of (business) efficiency” (159). Given this, quality ceased merely to be what Habermas calls “a critical standard for the developmental level of the forces of production” but became in addition “an apologetic standard through which these same relations of production [could] be justified as a functional institutional framework” (*Toward a Rational* 83). That is, quality management became a way of sanctioning certain types of reforms while delegitimizing certain others.

Clearly, it would be impossible to cover an entire decade of reports, or even those which focused solely on postsecondary education, in this chapter. But the six reports analyzed below exemplify the ways in which the language of quality management rapidly spread through reform rhetoric of the 1980s and ‘90s, solidifying the metaphorical and ideological associations between higher education and global business. They also exemplify the ways in which democratic values associated with higher education were subordinated to economic ones over the decade of reports.

- *America’s Competitive Challenge: The Need for a National Response* (April 1983).

This report of the Business-Higher Education Forum, commissioned by Ronald Reagan and issued the same month as *A Nation at Risk*, reinforces the positioning of higher education as a handmaiden to American business. The report makes but one overall recommendation, that “as a nation, we must develop a consensus that industrial competitiveness on a global scale is crucial to our social and economic well-being” (7). It calls upon universities and colleges to furnish “knowledge for

action,” meaning the information and innovation needed for advancement in the emerging global economy, and to redouble its teaching and research efforts toward that end (6, 12). By pooling resources and talents, universities should become essentially the R & D arm of corporate America, the Forum suggests, but corporations should direct the research agenda (12-13). Moreover, the Forum appeals to ideologies of free-market capitalism and neoliberalism in arguing that such “institutional flexibility” should be incited and any regulatory or legislative barriers to it eliminated (5). In sum, as Sheila Slaughter writes, “the Forum asserts the primacy of private enterprise. If the United States is to be internationally successful in its high cost, high technology, high service, high return fields, then all restraints on competition should be abolished” (221).

- *Involvement in Learning: Realizing the Potential of Higher Education* (1984). Commissioned by Terrel Bell and prepared by a Study Group of the National Institute of Education,³⁹ this report was expressly intended to extend the work of the National Commission on Excellence in Education to the level of postsecondary undergraduate education (1). It is not surprising, then, that it reinforces many of the same metaphorical linkages between higher education and business as had *A Nation at Risk* and frames its recommendations in much the same terms. It asserts, for instance, that “true equity requires...access to *quality* higher education,” that “institutions should be accountable” for “*demonstrable improvements* in student knowledge,” and that

³⁹ The report distinguishes a Study Group from a commission in that the former “functions much like a seminar” and is composed of members “chosen not on the basis of whom they represent but on the evidence of what they know” (National Institute x). In this case, the group included six distinguished university administrators and faculty members, along with a representative of the Institute for Educational Leadership, a nonprofit organization devoted to K-16 education reform.

- “assessment and feedback [should] constitute indirect means of control” (3, 15, 20-22, italics in original). Further, it stresses, colleges should be focused on controlling ““outputs,”” not ““inputs”” (14). Italicizing or placing such key words in quotation marks draws attention to their incantatory power as part of the Study Group’s vocabulary of motive. The references to quality management are unmistakable, predicated as they are upon the assumption that the outputs of higher education, like those of a manufacturing plant, can be quantified and controlled for. Yet, the Study Group worries that expansion and diversification of higher education have undercut both its quality and competitiveness. “The strains of rapid expansion...have taken their toll,” it states. “The realities of student learning, curricular coherence, the quality of facilities, faculty morale, and academic standards no longer measure up to our expectations” (8). Hence, although the report does espouse democratic values of educational access, it implies, as did *A Nation at Risk* before it, that quality is the overriding value and is imperiled by equity.
- *Business and Education: Partners for the Future* (1985). This report, issued by the Chamber of Commerce of the United States, pushes beyond the metaphoric association between higher education and business to actualize that linkage. To achieve its stated purpose of encouraging “business involvement in a community-wide response to improve education” (Martin III), it highlights best practices at the state and local level and offers guidance for initiating similar business-education partnerships. Echoing previous reports, it correlates education with economic competitiveness and calls for quality improvement to address the supposed “crisis in

education” (Martin 2). Indeed, in quoting directly from *America’s Competitive Challenge* and *A Nation at Risk*, it demonstrates how such rhetoric circulated from one commission report to another during this period, gaining rhetorical force as it went (Martin 6-7). Yet, the Chamber also puts some new teeth in this old saw. For example, it takes greater pains than previous commissions to quantify the nation’s expenditures on education and to calculate the return on investment, finding it not very profitable (Martin 2-5). On this basis, it then reasons that the business community must intervene “to help ensure that the resources made available to our school systems *result* in educated students” (Martin 5, italics mine).⁴⁰ Students thus become a measurable output in a quality improvement process. Finally, as the title of its report suggests, the Chamber looks not only to the current crisis of competitiveness but also to the future to support its contention that business-education partnerships are vital to ensuring America’s survival in the globalized information economy. This is in keeping with what Garman and Holland call “the myth of infinite progress” (104), meaning the capitalistic emphasis on ever-increasing profitability and growth.

- *College: The Undergraduate Experience in America* (1987). Commissioned by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and written by its then-president, Ernest L. Boyer, this book-length report focuses on the “undergraduate experience in America.” Arthur F. Levine, then president of Bradford College, hailed

⁴⁰ Here as elsewhere in the report, the Chamber is condescending in its tone toward education. It states, for example, that “cooler and calmer heads are needed to manage and solve the problems of American education” (2), implying that business leaders can exercise more reasoned, dispassionate judgment than academics.

Boyer's text as "by far the best of the current wave" of reform reports by virtue of its comprehensiveness, careful documentation, and balance (J6), and indeed, it does weigh the social and academic purposes of postsecondary education more evenly with its economic purposes than do other reports of the decade (see, e.g., 68-69). Even so, the Boyer report bears the distinct imprint of quality management in both its content and choice of language. First, it repeatedly emphasizes the pursuit of "quality" in higher education. "The nation's colleges and universities must ask hard questions about the quality of their own work," writes Boyer in the foreword, and later, "The quality of the effort must be measured not by the certainty of the outcome, but by the quality of the quest" (xi, 7). Second, while the document makes clear that faculty and administrators play a role in establishing their institutions' goals (58), it nonetheless places the undergraduate student at the center of its analysis. It focuses, for example, on "the way the structures and procedures of colleges affect the lives of students," mirroring the customer-orientation of quality management (xi). Third, the report reflects quality management's emphasis upon interrelated missions, goals, and objectives, with an entire section devoted to setting forth "a clear and vital mission" for higher education (43-69). Fourth and finally, it advocates the measurement of results of higher learning through standardized testing, advising, like quality handbooks of the day, that such measures be aligned with the organizations' mission: "Only as we gain greater clarity about the mission of the college—about the purposes that the functions are to serve—will we have the standards against which to measure our procedures" (262). In retrospect, the report seems prescient in urging institutions

- to establish standards and conduct assessments themselves lest “state-imposed ‘outcome measures’” be imposed” (262).
- *Beyond the Rhetoric: Evaluating University-Industry Cooperation in Research and Technology Exchange* (1988). The title here is apt because this report of the Business-Higher Education Forum moves “beyond” rhetoric, implying mere talk, toward the symbolic enactment of quality management. Recognizing the existence of “a broad range of university-industry (UI) interactions in research and technology exchange”—a tribute to the apparent influence of previous reports—the Forum calls here for determining whether these exchanges “contribute significantly to such national goals as strengthening the American science and technology base and improving U.S. economic competitiveness” (Mogee 7). Consistent with quality management principles, it seeks to identify sources of quantitative data as well as processes for generating it (Mogee 8). “Assuring productivity,” it states, “requires systemic and effective assessments of those programs. . . . What have been the results of university-industry partnerships? What tangible products and processes have emerged?” (Mogee 9). It also urges that UI partnerships establish measurable objectives and evaluation procedures early in the research process (Mogee 21), thereby ensuring that commercial interests will drive such collaboration. “Developing a culture amenable to [such] cooperation may require changing established attitudes and modes of behavior,” the report acknowledges, but it makes clear which institutional culture will require changing when it addresses its transmittal letter to the leaders of business and higher education alike by writing, “Dear Fellow Chief

Executive” (Mogee 9). Much as reform rhetoric of the industrial era had popularized the notion of a university president as *non dominus sed dux*, the leader of his administration, rather than the earlier *primus inter pares*, first among faculty (Lucas, *American* 196-97), the Forum advances the idea of the president as a CEO, ostensibly sitting at the helm of a large corporation.

- *America’s Choice: High Skills or Low Wages! The Report of the Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce* (1990). In many respects, this report completes the trajectory that began a decade earlier, reflecting the movement from limited involvement of private sector members on reform commissions to their extensive involvement, from metaphoric association of business with higher learning to actual association, and from expressed commitment to equality in higher education to a complete fixation on quality. Leaders of American industry and labor made up the majority of members of the Commission on Skills of the American Workforce, and their trained incapacity comes across in their narrow focus upon job skills and wage-earning. As Garman and Holland point out, “This entire text is devoted to describing the changes that must occur in American education to provide workers with the knowledge and skills needed to function in the kind of ‘high performance work organization’ that must become the norm in American business and industry” (105). The title of the report sets up a false dichotomy between high skills or low wages, with an exclamation point meant to convey the urgency of this “choice.” Rather than dwelling on the past crisis of competitiveness, it looks ahead toward a new one, a “third industrial revolution,” which will ostensibly require even greater productivity

and competitiveness than the first and second (1-2). With such pressure looming, it is not enough that some workers are highly skilled; now all must be (3-4). Hence, the commission recommends that an array of technical and professional certifications be offered by community colleges and “proprietary” schools—a hint at greater privatization to come in higher education (7). Even so, tropes of quality, competitiveness, and standardization remain constants in *America’s Choice*. The report bemoans the lack of a “national system capable of setting high academic standards” in the U.S. and proposes a “framework for developing a high quality American education and training system” (4, 9). It echoes *A Nation at Risk* when it suggests that Americans are “unwittingly making a choice” between high skills and low wages and thereby undermining the “American dream of economic opportunity for all” (5). Once again, higher education is portrayed merely as a means for economic advancement, an agent of capitalism and neoliberalism. The repetition of these ideological appeals reflects how firmly entrenched they had become in reform rhetoric over the course of the decade of reports.

As these six commission reports illustrate, then, the metaphorical and ideological linkages between higher education and quality management that were introduced in *A Nation at Risk* were subsequently reinforced and elaborated upon as part of legitimating strategy for reform proposals of the so-called decade of reports. Reports of this period not only reflect the increasing involvement and influence of business and governmental representatives in matters of higher education reform, but the decreasing influence and involvement of the higher education community itself. In addition, in their circulation of

metaphors and principles of quality management, the reports progress from what businesspeople of the time would have called “talking the talk” to “walking the talk”—that is, from adopting the lingo of quality management toward implementation of its principles. By emphasizing quality over equality along the way, the reports of the also decade generally “turn their backs on the educational reforms of the 1960s, as Sheila Slaughter observes, tending instead toward “a redefinition of merit and a consequent restratification of educational opportunity in the United States” (218). However, I would argue that this same trajectory extended both through and beyond the 1990s in commission reports and other calls for reform, moving from the mere rhetoric of quality management to its symbolic and quite literal enactment.

Of Metrics and Meritocracy: Reports of the 1990s and Early 2000s

By the early 1990s, the rhetoric of higher education reform was becoming reality as quality management began making major inroads within academe and its administration. Writing in 1991 about the movement of Total Quality Management from the private to the public sector, Ted Marchese, then-vice president of the American Association of Higher Education (AAHE), speculated on whether its next stop would be the academy. His answer: “TQM has *already* arrived in higher education, in dozens of institutions, notably research universities and community colleges. TQM’s collegiate practitioners, their zeal and worries on full display, already have networks in place and literature on display” (3, italics in original). He also noted that the agendas of many higher education conferences at the time, including the AAHE’s own, were dominated by

presentations on quality management. As further evidence of TQM's influence, a 1993 issue of the journal *Higher Education* was entirely devoted to its impact upon postsecondary education.⁴¹ One contributor, British education scholar Gareth Williams confirmed that since the 1980s TQM had "permeated the thinking of many higher education managers very quickly" (229). Its primary themes of continuous improvement, quality assurance, customer-orientation, and statistical measurement were all applicable to "the development of efficient and effective mass higher education systems and institutions," he asserted (229). Another contributor, university administrator Edwin Coate, described the experience of Oregon State University as one of the first U.S. research universities to adopt TQM methodology in 1989. "Quality improvement teams were introduced and achieved significant improvement in process effectiveness and efficiency," he attested. "Improved quality was also achieved and measured by customer satisfaction" (303). As these comments reflect, academics were not only adopting the vocabulary of quality management by the end of the decade of reports, but acting enthusiastically upon it.

The same was true of commissions on higher education reform, who began to enact quality improvements to higher education much as colleges and universities were undertaking them on their campuses. In *Language as Symbolic Action*, Burke writes that language as a symbolic act not only communicates something but it *does* something (15). Like Aristotle, who holds that drama produces catharsis, Burke contends that rhetoric in

⁴¹ The date seems especially fitting given that 1993 marked both the end of the so-called "decade of reports" and the 10-year anniversary of the publication of *A Nation at Risk*, both of which contributed greatly to the embrace of quality management by academe.

its suasive capacity performs “dramatistic” action (*Language* 44-45). Similarly, Habermas in *The Theory of Communicative Action, Volume 2*, posits that language, by establishing mutual understanding among various individuals, may serve to coordinate their action (140). By this same theory, reform reports of the 1990s and early 2000s acted upon recommendations for quality reforms made in earlier reports and thereby coordinated action among colleges and universities, driving their reform. The language of quality management was not only used persuasively to advocate for changes, but in this way it also *enacted* a reshaping of the institution. If the earlier reports had taken the “plan” and “do” steps of the PDCA cycle, then these later reports proceeded with the “check” and “act.”

One primary method commissions on higher education reform used to symbolically enact quality management during the 1990s and early 2000s was by measuring the supposed performance of colleges and universities through various report cards, rankings, outcomes assessments, and other instruments. The first rankings of U.S. colleges and universities were published by *U.S. News and World Report* in 1983, the same year that *A Nation at Risk* was released, based partly upon the dearth of comparative data discovered in compiling that report and partly upon the commercial potential (Morse, Bell *The Thirteenth* 136-37).⁴² But thereafter, so-called report cards designed to grade the performance of institutions and systems of higher education flourished at the state and federal levels of government. These were an outgrowth of

⁴² Interestingly, *A Nation at Risk* recommended that the Federal Government assume greater responsibility for “collecting data, statistics, and information on education” and supporting “research on teaching learning and the management of schools” (33), but the private sector, seeing the marketing potential, grabbed a share of this role.

Terrel Bell's 1984 and '85 "wall charts," which compared states' college entrance exam scores and other data (*The Thirteenth* 136-37). Bell's successor, William Bennett, continued the practice of state-by-state rankings in 1986 and '87, and in 1988, the task fell to the Education Commission of the States (Bell, *The Thirteenth* 138-39). These comparisons spurred competition between states and their postsecondary institutions to increase their academic standards, raise the bar for their applicants, add rising stars to their faculties, and ostensibly improve their performance. The rankings thus motivated further checks and action. A survey by the Nelson A. Rockefeller Institute of Government at the State University of New York confirmed that state reports cards spurred increased performance reporting among postsecondary institutions during the 1990s (Burke and Minassians 11). By 1998, this enactment of quality principles had been overtaken by the nonprofit, nonpartisan National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education with establishment of its biannual report, *Measuring Up: The State-by-State Report Card for Higher Education*. It, too, exemplified the plan-do-check-act cycle, as it was feasibility-tested through a ten-state pilot before being rolled out nationwide (4). In 2000, the Center for Measuring University Performance, a "research enterprise" staffed and advised largely by academics, began issuing its own annual report entitled *The Top American Research Universities*. It ostensibly aimed to "deconstruct" misleading performance data contained in other rankings reports (Center). Yet, rather than challenging the implementation of quality measures in higher education, it only extended them by developing standards and indicators meant to gauge research universities in particular and attempting to measure productivity and quality in parts of

these institutions not normally examined—for instance, among unionized faculty and administrative staff (Lombardi et al. 6-7, 9-15).

The other primary way in which reform rhetoric of the 1990s and early 2000s symbolically enacted quality management was by establishing systems of accountability. These accountability systems burgeoned as institutions were forced to prove themselves answerable to funders (Caboni and Adisu 170-71). As Gerald Gaither, Brian Nedwek, and John Neal of the National Teaching and Learning Forum attest, “the litany of studies published in the 1980s lament[ing] the poor condition of undergraduate education” led states across the country to develop assessment and accountability initiatives in the years afterwards, constituting the most “fundamental change” in higher education to have occurred over the period (n.p.). A 1990 working paper issued by the Education Commission of the States (ECS), for example, revealed that fully 42 states had some form of accountability system in place, with the other eight characterized as doing “nothing” (Ewell 2). Such commission reports not only publicized the number of states adopting systems of accountability; they also influenced the performance indicators that colleges and universities selected and employed a bandwagon approach to pressure institutions not already demonstrating accountability to get on board. “The train is rolling fast,” stated the ECS study, which categorized the most popular state initiatives by “four cross-cutting themes” (Ewell 2). A 1998 report by the Clinton-appointed National Commission on the Cost of College Education similarly stressed the need for financial accountability among postsecondary institutions. “The phenomenon of rising college tuition evokes a public reaction that is sometimes compared to the ‘sticker shock’ of

buying a new car,” it stated (1). “The Commission is worried that many academic institutions have...permitted a veil of obscurity to settle over their basic financial operations” (1). Again, the commission’s rhetoric constituted a form of action, comparing colleges and universities to car dealers and thereby attempting to shame them into being more forthcoming about their financial dealings.

In suggesting that the performance of higher education may be quantified and rewarding institutions accordingly, such measurement and accountability systems have fundamentally altered the formulation of higher education’s value. With college viewed as a mere service or commodity, it is expected to provide quantifiable “value-added,” and if it does not, it is deemed not worth the money paid. Accompanying the assessment and accountability movement, explain Gaither, Nedwek, and Neal, “was a subtle shift from growth in funding, primarily through formula funding, toward funding ‘outcomes,’ ‘results,’ and ‘performance’” (n.p.)—all terms that reflect the quality management emphasis in reform rhetoric of the 1990s and early 2000s. Such “performance-based funding...links institutional performance with future funding streams,” explain education scholars Timothy Caboni and Mitiku Adisu (171). Many states, including Arizona, have since tied ongoing funding of their systems of higher education to quality measures in precisely this way, while some, including Texas, have gone so far as to assess their faculty members’ “productivity” based on their contributions to their institutions’ bottom lines (see, e.g., Dexheimer). Meanwhile, many students and their families have come to judge the value of a college degree according to the jobs it will enable them to land or the added salary it will allow them to earn over a lifetime (see, e.g., U.S. Census). Colleges

are now being asked to publicize their “sticker prices” to ensure that consumers know exactly what they are paying for (see, e.g., Supiano), and, given the recent economic downturn in the U.S., many Americans now question whether a college education is “worth” the price at all (see, e.g., Taylor).

In these ways, the ethical values once associated with higher education—including its potential to enlighten, to liberate, and to engage citizens—have largely been displaced by economic ones, and reform rhetoric of the 1990s and early 2000s has enacted its most lasting legacy of all: the articulation of free-market capitalism, neoliberalism, and neoconservatism which has dominated the rhetoric of higher education reform ever since. Catherine Shea traces this shift in values to a conservative management model developed by the Heritage Foundation for the fledgling Reagan administration. But its education proposals, she stresses, “have been (without fail) articulated to the general public in the familiar meritocratic veneer” (19). So skillful has been this articulation, in fact, that even Democratic administrations since the 1990s have appealed to this same set of conservative values in proposing their own educational reforms. In signing the Higher Education Amendments of 1998, for example, William Clinton echoed the neoliberal bootstraps mentality of *A Nation at Risk* when he remarked that he wanted “to open the doors of college to all Americans who were willing to work for it.” And, as both vice president and a presidential candidate, Al Gore endorsed a platform of educational standards, accountability, and choice—all quality-oriented reforms advocated in commission reports of the 1990s and early 2000s. However, this

articulation of values received its fullest expression, as the following section will describe, in the 2006 Spellings Commission Report, *A Test of Leadership*.

The “Ideologic” of the Spellings Commission Report

In September 2005 Margaret Spellings, Secretary of Education under George W. Bush, established the Commission on the Future of Higher Education and directed its members to focus on four specific aspects of U.S. postsecondary education: accessibility, affordability, accountability, and quality (U.S., *A Test* 34). These were, by then, such commonplaces in discussions of higher learning that one member, Robert Zemsky, dubbed them the “four horsemen of academic reform” (*Making Reform* 107). Following a year of public meetings and hearings with higher education stakeholders across the country, the Spellings Commission issued its final report, *A Test of Leadership: Charting the Future of U.S. Higher Education*. The findings outlined in its 35 pages were highly critical of U.S. colleges and universities, as well as the accreditation and financial aid systems which undergird them. “The commission believes U.S. higher education needs to improve in dramatic ways,” it states. “Our yearlong examination of the challenges facing higher education has brought us to the uneasy conclusion that the sector’s past attainments have led our nation to unwarranted complacency about its future” (ix).

The Spellings Commission relies heavily on the emotional sway of ideology in advancing its arguments for reform. As it was well aware, U.S. higher education had long been viewed as a means of promoting military, economic, and technological defense, and *A Nation at Risk* had triggered a great wave of conservative school reform in the U.S. by

tapping into anxiety about the nation's economic security and global competitiveness (Berube 93-94). It seems no accident, then, that Spellings made reference to *A Nation at Risk* when she convened the first meeting of the commission: "As you all likely remember," she said, "in April 1983 we woke to the news that America was a nation at risk thanks to a rising tide of mediocrity in our public primary and secondary schools" (U.S. 5-6). Her commission used the same metaphorical and ideological linkages as the earlier report in constructing its arguments for higher education reform. That is, it appealed to beliefs and values that had gained rhetorical force over time—an articulation of several well-established ideological positions, or what Crowley terms an "ideologic" (75). Spellings and her commission were able to take advantage of the power inherent in such a tightly interwoven ideologic to persuade readers by appealing to their existing acceptance of hegemonic values and beliefs. Yet, in so doing, they attempted to "cover," in the Burkean sense, their "motives" or "ulterior purposes" (*A Rhetoric* 88, 99).

In *A Test of Leadership*, the Spellings Commission purports to endorse liberal and progressive educational values while actually promoting a conflicting set of ideologies. It claims to support greater access to colleges and universities so that low-income and minoritized students can more readily attend, to advocate reducing costs of higher education so that working-class families can be free of financial hardship, and to promote greater accountability among institutions of higher learning so that consumers can make better informed decisions about their relative costs and merits. On the surface, these positions seem laudable; the Spellings Commission appears to side with underserved and minoritized populations. However, closer analysis reveals that the Spellings Commission

is actually engaging in a form of rhetorical expropriation, advancing elitist interests in the guise of egalitarianism, couching its largely conservative reform agenda in the lexicon of liberalism. This practice is consistent with the theory that non-corresponding or even contradictory ideologies may be linked through articulation. “A hegemonic formation also embraces what opposes it,” write Laclau and Mouffe (139). Moreover, it enables the Spellings Commission to establish consubstantiality with an audience that leans politically both right and left. But articulation occurs for the purposes of establishing a *hierarchy* within such a set of ideological positions, or, as Daryl Slack explains, “these relations constitute unities that instantiate relations of dominance and subordination” (118). In justifying its call for higher education reform, then, I argue that the Spellings Commission asserts the dominance of the three hegemonic ideologies discussed in the following sections for the purpose of subordinating competing value and belief systems which had previously held sway within the rhetoric of reform.

Free-Market Capitalism

When Spellings formed the Commission on the Future of Higher Education, she charged its members with considering “how best to improve our system of higher education to ensure that our graduates are well prepared to meet our future workforce needs and are able to participate fully in the changing economy” (U.S., *A Test* 33). Given this focus and the Spellings Commission’s membership—composed largely of individuals with ties to business and industry—it is not surprising that free-market capitalism is among the most prominent ideologies underlying the rhetoric of its report.

Capitalism constitutes what Laclau and Mouffe call a “moment,” meaning a “differential position” which appears “articulated within a discourse” (105). In analyzing how capitalism functions discursively within the Spellings Commission Report, it is useful to remember Frederic Jameson’s distinction between the market as “either ‘word’ or ‘idea’” (260), for free-market capitalism is more than just a set of economic practices; it is also a way of thinking. Richard Hooker outlines several concepts which are integral to this mindset: free-market capitalism is essentially individualistic, focusing on personal gains over societal good; it is rooted in the Enlightenment concept of progress, so its goal is to produce increasingly greater wealth; it treats economics as being independent from other realms of knowledge, such as religion, ethics, or politics; it depends upon establishment of a consumer culture, wherein most of the population does not produce what it consumes; and finally, it sees the economy as being subject to a set of mechanistic laws; in this sense, it is always future-directed. Within a capitalistic system, as Hooker explains, the past is “of no concern.”

This helps to explain why, in the preamble to the Spellings Commission Report, American colleges and universities are reduced in only a few pages from being “one of our greatest success stories” to “seeing their market share substantially reduced and their services increasingly characterized by obsolescence” (ix, xii). Consistent with a capitalistic viewpoint, the Spellings Commission chose to focus on higher education’s future instead of its past. This is what led to its “uneasy conclusion” that “U.S. higher education needs to improve in dramatic ways,” that “the sector’s past attainments have led our nation to unwarranted complacency about its future” (ix). The Nobel Prizes,

Rhodes scholars, and scientific advances which American colleges and universities have helped to produce are but yesterday's news, according to this view. Higher education cannot afford to rest on its laurels; it must be always progressing, moving forward, for its goal, according to the report, is to generate ever greater wealth.

Focusing on the future gave the Spellings Commission considerable license in the way it depicted U.S. higher education. While studies of American colleges and universities have typically focused on accomplishments of the past 400 years, the Spellings Commission situated its critique of higher education within a “new century” and within the vast, abstract realm of the “global marketplace” (29, xiii). Not confined to actual places or events, it could portray its subject in ways that suited its purposes and fit its worldview. Concentrating almost exclusively on economic attributes, the Spellings Commission depicts “tomorrow’s world” as “tougher, more competitive, less forgiving of wasted resources and squandered opportunities” than any known before (xii). Its 21st century is a time when nations grapple for market dominance and individuals for economic security—“an era when intellectual capital is increasingly prized” (1). This shift from past to future enables the Spellings Commission to ring the alarm bells that were sounded in previous reports on higher education reform, thereby creating a sense of crisis. According to its report, American colleges and universities are stagnating, not progressing; they are becoming outmoded, not adapting with the times. In so stating, the Spellings Commission Report effectively subordinates values that have been traditionally associated with higher education, such as the ability to create and perpetuate new knowledge, to the capacity of colleges and universities to contribute to the free-market

economy. Thus, while the storied accomplishments of U.S. higher education are indeed mentioned in the report, they are mentioned largely for the purposes of subordinating them.

Yet another way in which the Spellings Commission shifts the ground in the argument about higher education is by presenting it within the context of a consumer-driven environment. Consumerism functions in the Spellings Commission Report much as other concepts related to business and industry have functioned in previous rhetoric of higher education reform: by serving as a terministic screen which focuses attention on some aspects of higher education while directing attention away from others. The report consistently suggests that colleges and universities need to accommodate to the demands of consumers, not vice versa, and that any standards or services that don't please the customer are obstructive. Accordingly, students and their parents should be able to comparison-shop among postsecondary institutions, consulting a one-stop "consumer-friendly information database" to guide their decisions (21). Tuition should be in line with what consumers can afford, not what is required to uphold the quality of instruction, and the "true cost" should be as obvious as the "sticker price" on an automobile (x). Moreover, students should be able to come and go from institutions as they please, transferring credits from one to another seamlessly and selecting courses like a la carte choices on a cafeteria line (xi). Not only is the student a consumer within the Commission's scenario, but postsecondary institutions must become aggressive marketers. This accords with what Slaughter and Rhoades have called the theory of academic capitalism: "Institutions advertise education as a service and a life style.

Colleges and universities compete vigorously to market their institutions to high-ability students” (1). By situating higher education within the consumer marketplace rather than the academic milieu, the Spellings Commission is able to imply that colleges and universities are not measuring up. High entry standards become “barriers” in consumer terms; tuition costs, while perhaps justified, become “worrisome” (1-2). Once again, the commission means alarm bells to sound in its readers’ ears. The function of such ideologically-based rhetoric, as Crowley explains, is to trigger the “visceral register” (87-88). The logic that U.S. higher education is falling behind is questionable, but logic is beside the point; the very suggestion is meant to provoke fear.

In discussing the ostensible purposes of higher education, the Spellings Commission reveals yet another element of its capitalistic worldview: the privileging of individual good over societal good. “U.S. higher education institutions must recommit themselves to their core public purposes,” the commission insists (xii). But ironically, some of these public purposes prove to be quite private. Higher education is “increasingly vital to an individual’s economic security,” says the Spellings Commission’s report (x). It should give “Americans the workplace skills they need to adapt to a rapidly changing economy” (xi). It is also a “principal...means of achieving social mobility” (xii). In short, these “core” purposes involve considerable economic self-interest. This accords with the view, first expressed by Adam Smith in *The Wealth of Nations*, that capitalism is driven not by the public good, but by private advantage. “It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker that we expect our dinner,” Smith writes, “but from their regard to their own interests” (14). On a broader

scale, the Spellings Commission does contend that higher education should contribute to the “nation’s inventiveness” as well as to its “economic prosperity and competitiveness” (xi-xii). Still, self-interest is the primary driver. The individual gains greater skills and prosperity by attending college and thereby contributes to the nation’s wealth; any public good that results is merely a byproduct. Again, this is consistent with Smith’s view that the capitalist best promotes the interests of society by serving his own. To be fair, the Spellings Commission does associate higher education at one point in the report with a greater good: promoting “a kind of democracy that only an educated and informed citizenry makes possible” (xii). However, this single reference to a broader civic purpose is effectively subordinated; it gets lost among the many private advantages the Spellings Commission enumerates.

Capitalism provides the basis on which the Spellings Commission articulates other values associated with higher education as well. Seeing colleges and universities as “major economic engines” (7), the commission measures their worth solely in terms of capitalistic values: by their ability to promote prosperity, profitability, market share, and return on investment. Higher education becomes a means of production and distribution; other values are almost entirely divorced from it. A college degree becomes a commodity to be bought and sold, its only value measured by its exchange value. In a section of the report titled “Findings Regarding the Value of Higher Education,” the Spellings Commission tellingly lists only three major points: first, higher education will enable the nation to “sustain economic growth and social cohesiveness”; second, colleges and universities will be a primary source of “human and intellectual capital”; and third, a

college education will enhance earning power (7). “Over a lifetime, an individual with a bachelor’s degree will earn an average of \$2.1 million,” says the Spellings Commission, “nearly twice as much as a worker with only a high school diploma” (7). It implies that the value of higher education can best be measured in dollar signs. Whether students actually learn anything is apparently beside the point; what matters is what they *earn*. Learning is thus subordinated to earning. Of course, such emphasis on higher education as a means of vocational preparation has been a constant in reform rhetoric since colleges and universities were first founded in the U.S., but what is striking about the Spellings Commission Report is its elevation of this value to the near exclusion of any other.

Indeed, from the standpoint of the Spellings Commission, a university or college does not exist as an institution of higher *learning* but as a business beholden to customers and shareholders or a factory whose purpose is to churn out a human capital like so many parts on an assembly line. Like so much reform rhetoric before it, the Spellings Commission Report relies on the structural metaphor of business to focus and filter its portrayal of higher education. Postsecondary education, according to the report, is an “enterprise,” an “establishment,” a “complex, decentralized... system” and in this respect is subject to business cycles and fluctuations of the marketplace (xii, xi, 14). Comparing the U.S. postsecondary system to “what in the business world would be called a mature enterprise,” the report claims that higher education is “increasingly risk averse, at times self-satisfied, and unduly expensive” (xii). Here again, it emphasizes only what is relevant to the capitalist: risks, rewards, and responsiveness to the market. From this standpoint, colleges and universities, like other industries, risk “seeing their market share

substantially reduced and their services increasingly characterized by obsolescence” because they have ostensibly failed to keep pace with “an evolving marketplace characterized by new needs and new paradigms” (xii). They are “mature” because they have ostensibly passed through a business cycle, moving from expansion to inevitable contraction. By this way of thinking, higher education lacks many of the characteristics which fuel capitalism today, so it *must* be in decline. This contention is difficult to fathom, given the U.S. Department of Education’s own projections that enrollment in postsecondary institutions will rise from 17.3 million in 2004 to 19.9 million by 2015 (National Center). If higher education *is* an economic engine, it appears to be humming along. Yet logic isn’t the basis of the Spellings Commission’s argument; ideologic is. Such tightly articulated ideological appeals create their own kind of reason.

By presenting higher education through the dominant ideology of capitalism, the Spellings Commission attempts to harness the power of this hegemonic belief system. It appeals to a unity of ideas, counting on readers to readily accept the correlation of higher education with business and industry based on their own indoctrination into ideologies of the free market. Since few readers would challenge these belief systems, the commission could expect buy-in to its reform agenda at least in certain quarters, for nowadays, as Crowley explains, it is very difficult to “not-think” capitalism (64). Indeed, capitalism is thought by some to be “*in human nature,*” as Jameson writes (263, italics mine). “The surrender to the various forms of market ideology...has been imperceptible but alarmingly universal” (263). In other words, it has normalized a particular view of

reality, exactly as Hall says that hegemonic articulations do. It has become *doxa*, or a matter of common sense, and as such, exerts powerful rhetorical sway.

Globalization or Neoliberalism

As demonstrated in the previous chapter, globalization is another ideology which has become a “common sense” staple of the rhetoric of higher education reform. Over time, capitalism and globalization have become so intertwined within reform rhetoric that it is now challenging to disarticulate the belief systems that underpin each. They are part of what Laclau calls “a system of misleading articulations in which concepts do not appear linked by inherent logical relations, but are bound together simply by connotative or evocative links which custom and opinion have established between them” (*Politics and Ideology* 7). Marx observed the seemingly inevitable linkage between the two in *The Communist Manifesto*: “The need of a constantly expanding market for its products chases the bourgeoisie over the whole surface of the globe. It must nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connections everywhere” (33). Still, disarticulating the two ideologies and analyzing them separately demonstrates how the Spellings Commission uses each to evoke distinct emotional responses from its audience—that is, how the two function jointly in the its report as part of a highly complex and calculated ideologic.

Whereas Marx provided the seminal definition, globalization has been redefined in recent years with the advance of powerful international financial institutions and global free trade. The term was first used in an economic context by Theodore Levitt in a 1983 article in the *Harvard Business Review*. He writes,

The globalization of markets is at hand.... Corporations geared to this new reality benefit from enormous economies of scale in production, distribution, marketing and management. By translating these benefits into reduced world prices, they can decimate competitors that still live in the disabling grip of old assumptions of how the world works. (92)

More recently, globalization has been used interchangeably with “neoliberalism” as another term for global market liberalism and free-trade policies (Ross and Gibson 2).

There are alternative views of the concept of neoliberalism. Some view it as the integration of economic, political, and cultural systems around the globe, while others see it as the Americanization and U.S. dominance of world affairs and world markets (Carnegie). The Spellings Commission obviously embraced the latter conception, insisting that U.S. higher education, as well as all other U.S. enterprise, needs to outstrip that of any other nation in the world.

This view is apparent in the preamble to the Spellings Commission’s report, where after briefly extolling some of higher education’s accomplishments, it turns to describing how postsecondary institutions are losing ground in a hotly contested race for global dominance. “We may still have more than our share of the world’s best universities,” says the report, implying that market share is what counts. “But a lot of other countries have followed our lead, and they are now educating more of their citizens to more advanced levels than we are. Worse, they are passing us by at a time when education is more important to our collective prosperity than ever” (x). By stating that U.S. higher education is lagging behind that of other countries, the Spellings Commission implies that a competition is going on and spoils must go to the winner. Alfie Kohn rightly terms this the “nonexistent international contest,” pointing out that the percentage

of U.S. adults completing four or more years of college has actually increased substantially, not fallen, over the past 40 years. He also identifies the nationalism inherent in this competitive worldview: “When we’re perpetually worried about being—and staying—king of the mountain, we find ourselves taking a position that leads us to view progress made by young people in other countries as bad news. That’s both intellectually and ethically indefensible.” Given all this, the Spellings Commission’s assertions that we are falling behind seem less than tenable. However, they make sense within the context of globalization, where, as Levitt says, corporations attuned to the “new reality” aim to “decimate competitors” (92). The Spellings Commission knowingly taps into this attitude, recycling the ideology of American exceptionalism from previous proposals for education reform, utilizing it to appeal to its audience emotionally if not rationally.

The Spellings Commission appeals to the ideology of neoliberalism to support other claims in its report, as well—most notably, its contention that U.S. higher education needs to become “more entrepreneurial” if it is to “compete in the global marketplace” (4). Lamenting that American colleges and universities have “yet to successfully confront the impact of globalization” (xii), the commission repeatedly suggests that their viability depends on their willingness to embrace “new providers and new paradigms” (xi). Indeed, such phrases as “new paradigms,” “new providers,” and “new models” are repeated so frequently in the report that they appear to be a kind of code.⁴³ Their

⁴³ The Spellings Commission makes reference to “new paradigms” on pages xi, xii, 18, and 26; to “new models” on pages 15, 20, 21, 25, and 26; and to “new providers” on page xi. In addition, it used the words “innovation” or “innovative” to denote business- or private sector-oriented practices on pages xiii, 1, 4, 5, 7, 15, 16, 17, 20, 21, 25, 26, and 29.

juxtaposition with such descriptors as “for-profit” and “entrepreneurial,” though, reveals precisely what is “new” about them (xiii, 4). The Spellings Commission implies that colleges and universities should adopt private-sector practices. In this way, the Spellings Commission Report reflects what Elizabeth Martinez and Arnaldo Garcia identify as one of the main tenets of neoliberalism: the push toward privatization, or the selling off of public enterprises and institutions to private investors. The Spellings Commission readily admits that it cares little for the “distinctions” between nonprofit and for-profit institutions that “sometimes preoccupy the academic establishment” (xi). Rather, it cares “about results” (xi). And what better way to achieve those results, it suggests, than to make public institutions “more nimble, more efficient, and more effective” (xiii)—that is, to make them more like businesses?

If U.S. higher education were privatized, there would be obvious advantages for conservative political and global business leaders. For one, privatization would be highly profitable.⁴⁴ As Ross and Gibson explain, “education is a key target of the neoliberal project because of market size (e.g., global spending on education is more than \$1 trillion)” (4). Moreover, higher education would be self-sustaining if it were privatized; it would require little or no governmental support, thus helping to reduce taxes in accordance with another tenet of neoliberalism: its emphasis on reducing public expenditures for social services. There would be other advantages for businesses and conservative political factions as well. As Carol Schneider notes,

⁴⁴ The profit-motive for Commission members was made especially clear when one member, Gerri Elliot, corporate vice president of Microsoft’s Worldwide Public Sector division, “objected to a paragraph [of the final draft report] in which the panel embraced and encouraged the development of open source software and open content projects in higher education” (Lederman). This would have conflicted with Microsoft’s promotion of its own proprietary software.

Business leaders and political figures love [for-profit] degree programs. Their overhead is low, since they make no pretense at advancing scholarship or even of sustaining full-time faculty. Their business plans are reassuring since they offer only high-profit majors.... The for-profit schools even have pioneered in new assessment and accountability strategies.... (67)

All these supposed advantages provided a very strong motive for the Spellings Commission to pursue privatization of higher education. And discovering such a motive, as Burke writes, helps “reveal, beneath an author’s ‘official front’ the level at which a lie is impossible” (*Philosophy* 20). It allows us to disarticulate the complex web of ideologies within the commission’s report and rearticulate what is actually being said.

Although the Spellings Commission was at pains prior to the release of its report to dispel rumors that it planned to institute a program comparable to No Child Left Behind for higher education, not only does the Spellings Commission Report advance the same commodifying of public education that NCLB represents (Ross and Gibson 4), but it also surreptitiously calls for privatization of what has largely been a public system. The commission’s vague references to “new paradigms” are apparently meant to hide this intention, but they do not conceal the ideology at work. In fact, the Spellings Commission counts on the appeal of privatization to bolster its arguments for higher education reform. As Belfield and Levin state, those who endorse educational markets do so “because they believe that freedom of choice is the highest priority.... They also argue that efficiency and equity will follow from choice and market competition” (56). By couching its calls for privatization in this same language, it engages in a rhetorical game of bait and switch, seeking to render higher education far less free but considerably more profitable.

Of course, achieving marketplace freedom and choice, especially on a global scale, often requires the reduction of regulatory barriers, and this is yet another tenet of neoliberalism that the Spellings Commission invokes. Reporting on its findings, it says, “We found that numerous *barriers* to investment in innovation risk hampering the ability of postsecondary institutions to address national workforce needs and compete in the global marketplace” (4, emphasis added). And later, enumerating its recommendations, it argues, “Federal and state policymakers and accrediting organizations should work to eliminate regulatory and accreditation *barriers* to new models in higher education that will increase supply and drive costs down” (20, emphasis added). Given the Spellings Commission’s obfuscating language, one might wonder what these so-called *barriers* are. But the wording clearly indicates that they are those precluding “new models”—that is, barriers to privatized or for-profit models of higher education. Further, the emphasis on “investment” implies a possible ownership interest or profit-motive. Reducing barriers to such profit-making is in keeping with two of the primary aims of neoliberalism: the goal of liberating private enterprise from any state-imposed restrictions and of reducing governmental regulations that might reduce profits. Slaughter and Rhoades describe how such regulatory changes have contributed in recent years to the rise of for-profit institutions like the University of Phoenix:

The U.S. Department of Commerce, along with several other countries, has recently put forward negotiating proposals for GATS [General Agreements on Trade and Services] to treat education like any other service that is traded in the global marketplace.... The neoliberal state has also promoted privatization, commercialization, deregulation, and reregulation within the United States. Colleges and universities that pursue an academic capitalist knowledge/learning regime have benefited from these processes. (21)

Recounting his own participation as a member of the Spellings Commission, Zemsky confirms that benefiting for-profit institutions was indeed part of its agenda: “I got a firsthand glimpse of the growing world of for-profit education,” he says, “...the degree to which it feels disadvantaged by current regulation and accreditation processes” (“The Rise” 6). Thus, the regulatory “freedom” the Spellings Commission promoted in its report was apparently the freedom to profit from higher education; the “barriers” it fretted over were those in the way of privatization.

Using nebulous language, the Spellings Commission attempts to advance its agenda of neoliberalism under the guise of traditional liberal values, such as choice, equity, democracy, and freedom. This articulation of values is largely inherent in the ideology itself, though, for, as Crowley notes, neoliberalism merges liberalism with free-market capitalism (5). For this reason, the ideology of neoliberalism appeals to those on both sides of the political spectrum (Ross and Gibson 2). By adopting this dominant ideological stance in its report, the Spellings Commission not only attempts to appeal to an audience of both conservatives and liberals, but it also tries to render its findings and recommendations less vulnerable to criticism. The slipperiness of its rhetoric makes this all the more so; it is difficult to refute statements that cannot easily be pinned down. The seemingly liberal side of the commission’s promotion of neoliberalism is a smokescreen, though, for its recommendations, if they were ever implemented, would have a decidedly inequitable, undemocratic effect. As Ross and Gibson explain, curricular reforms “which commodify public education by reducing learning to bits of information and skills to be taught and tested” often result in “user fees in place of free, public education” (4).

Moreover, according to Hursh, educational reforms that ostensibly promote choice and competition actually result in greater educational inequality (15). Thus, while claiming to be concerned “for students from low-income families and for racial and ethnic minorities,” the Spellings Commission actually promotes educational changes that would tend to disadvantage these groups (x). Or, to quote Marx and Engels, “the very realization of equality and freedom . . . turn out to be inequality and unfreedom” (180). Obscuring its intentions through a nearly impenetrable articulation of ideologies, the Spellings Commission appeals to those with liberal or progressive views by taking up the mantle of the underrepresented and underserved, but actually supports the interests of the privileged and powerful.

Neoconservatism

The third major moment articulated in the Spellings Commission Report is neoconservatism, another ideology which tends to serve elitist interests while seeming to promote equal access and opportunity. Formulated during the Cold War and brought to the fore with Barry Goldwater’s Republican nomination for president in 1964, neoconservatism has more recently influenced the administrations of Ronald Reagan, George H.W. Bush, and George W. Bush (Buckley). Irving Kristol, considered before his death to be the godfather of neocons, described this belief system as “a new kind of conservative politics suitable to governing a modern democracy.” Its primary positions, he says, are the desire to lower tax rates to stimulate continued economic growth; the acceptance of the growth of government, seeing it as inevitable; a concern with the

supposed decline of democratic culture; and, on the foreign policy level, an acceptance that the state will be compelled to defend democracy when it comes under attack by nondemocratic forces. Clearly, this last position overlaps with the idea of American exceptionalism, reinforcing the notion that our national interests are at risk and must be defended. These intertwining positions in the Spellings Commission Report increase its persuasive appeal. When the belief systems are so densely woven, they are all the more difficult to challenge.

Another tenet of neoconservatism intertwines tightly with those advanced in both neoliberalism and capitalism: the idea that the individual is responsible for promoting his or her own economic self-interest. Neoconservatism assumes that, “as a consequence of the spread of affluence among all classes, a property-owning and tax-paying population will, in time, become less vulnerable to *egalitarian illusions*...and more sensible about the fundamentals of *economic reckoning*” (Kristol, italics mine). In other words, neoconservatism accepts economic disparity that is produced through “economic reckoning”; it aims to subvert such “egalitarian notions” as equal opportunity and diversity. This conception is especially troublesome when overlaid on higher education, which has, since passage of the GI Bill, promoted programs to encourage diversity on campuses and extend greater opportunity to underrepresented student populations. The Spellings Commission challenges the need for such programs, suggesting instead that meritocracy should determine who goes to college and who stays. With “better high school preparation,” the report says, students admitted to college must “take responsibility for academic success” (2). That is, students are free to pull themselves up

by their own bootstraps; if they should fail, it is their own fault. Crowley explains this neoconservative conflation of freedom with inequality: “Individual freedom rewards those who are most fit to prosper” (76).

Such neoconservative doctrines are anathema to most traditional liberals, while the neoconservative acceptance of government growth is unpopular with traditional conservatives (Kristol). Because these audiences might react unfavorably, the Spellings Commission tends to deemphasize its devotion to several neoconservative positions in *A Test of Leadership*. This is consistent with Sonja Foss’s view that rhetors often downplay ideological content that may reflect negatively on them (247). The Spellings Commission uses this strategy, for example, when it presents its findings regarding access to higher education. “Among high school graduates who do make it on to postsecondary education,” it writes, “a troubling number waste time—and taxpayer dollars—mastering English and math skills that they should have learned in high school” (x). Although the supposed waste of tax monies is slipped in between dashes here, making it appear to be an afterthought and subordinate to the “troubling” issue of students wasting time, the Spellings Commission is actually voicing a common refrain among conservative and neoconservative politicians: that college remediation amounts to double-billing of taxpayers and therefore must be eliminated. By this reasoning, students should be offered one chance—in high school—to master subjects required for college-level work. Clearly, such a position places students from low income and underrepresented, minoritized backgrounds at a disadvantage since the high schools they attend are unlikely to be on a par with those attended by more privileged students. The

“access” the Spellings Commission apparently wants to provide, then, is for non-minoritized students of the middle and upper classes.

The Spellings Commission similarly downplays its bias toward neoconservatism when it addresses reductions in public funding for higher education. It makes these cuts seem trivial compared to its larger “concern” with the “seemingly *inexorable* increases in college costs” (2, italics mine). “Even as institutional costs go up,” it writes, “in recent years state subsidies have decreased on a per capita basis and public concern about affordability may eventually contribute to an erosion of confidence in higher education” (2). Here, the Spellings Commission avoids drawing any connection between decreasing state funding and increasing tuition costs, although the two are obviously related. It buries the information about state subsidies in the middle of a sentence, amid obfuscating language like “per capita basis” and “recent years.” It uses “costs” as a catch-all term, thereby obscuring any meaning the reader might glean. And, it suggests that confidence in higher education is eroding when state cutbacks are in fact largely to blame for the situation being described. In these ways, the Spellings Commission fails to acknowledge any government culpability for the funding crisis and justifies its own failure to offer any relief by claiming that colleges and universities are simply “costly and inefficient” (8). In addition, it was aware that its intent to further reduce tax-related support for higher education would be unpopular with some readers, so it hid this fiscal agenda under a cloak of do-gooder rhetoric.

Though it may seem contradictory that a report biased toward neoliberalism would also espouse values of neoconservatism, this articulation of ideologies is actually

quite consistent, for both serve to advance business-oriented education policies (Lipman 35). Both embrace the notion that marketplace competition and consumer choice lead to school improvement, and both have been historically intertwined in U.S. school reform efforts, ranging from *A Nation at Risk* to *No Child Left Behind*. Observes Lipman, “The business rhetoric of efficiency and performance standards and the redefinition of education to serve the labor market has become the common vocabulary of educational policy” (35-36). This is evident in the Spellings Commission’s proposals to establish national “accountability mechanisms” as a supposed means to improve the quality of higher education and enable consumers to make comparisons among various higher education institutions (x, 4). It writes:

We believe that improved accountability is vital to ensuring the success of all the other reforms we propose. Colleges and universities must become more transparent about cost, price, and student success outcomes, and must willingly share this information with students and families. Student achievement, which is inextricably connected to institutional success, must be measured by institutions on a “value-added” basis that takes into account students’ academic baseline when assessing their results. This information should be made available to students, and reported publicly in aggregate form to provide consumers and policymakers an accessible, understandable way to measure the relative effectiveness of different colleges and universities. (4)

Although the language in this passage is apparently vague by design, it does provide clues as to the kind of “accountability mechanisms” the Spellings Commission is recommending. First, “student success outcomes,” along with cost and price, must be made “transparent” through these mechanisms (4). That is, the commission suggests that “student success” can be quantified in terms of immediate, measurable “outcomes,” or results. This is consistent with the kind of “results-oriented” or “output” system that the

business community has been advocating for American education since the 1980s (11). Second, it involves the adoption of standardized goals for education, as well as an assessment system to determine whether such goals are being met. In business terms, such assessment would measure the value-added student achievement that colleges and universities produce above a certain baseline (presumably the educational attainment with which students enter). If these outcomes are to be transparent, as the Spellings Commission recommended, then they must be easily understood (i.e., simple) and comparable across institutions (i.e., standardized).

Such standardized testing has been tied, since the Sputnik era, to the same ideas of meritocracy and excellence in education which informed the Spellings Commission Report. However, Michael Grady and Faith Sandler also note that “while standardized tests were developed with the goal of more easily fitting schools and students to the needs of the American economy, they have come to represent continued social and economic stratification, which is at odds with the ideals of equality of education” (86). Hence, the Spellings Commission’s demands for quality would lead to inequality, its desire for accountability to the loss of academic freedom. Slaughter and Rhoades explain that, within the capitalist knowledge/learning regime, the autonomy of universities becomes less possible (15). Though the possibility that the Spellings Commission would create an NCLB for higher education never materialized, the commission still stimulated the kinds of demands for quality standards and accountability that are very much in evidence today.

One other way in which the Spellings Commission appeared to promote greater economic equality but actually promoted the opposite was through its proposals for

“streamlining” financial aid (3). The commission acknowledges that low-income and minoritized students often depend on need-based financial aid to attend college; “unmet financial need is a growing problem for students from low-income families, who need aid the most,” it says (3). Ostensibly to assist these students in securing the aid they need, it proposes “replacing the current maze of financial aid programs, rules and regulations with a system more in line with student needs and national priorities” (3). This certainly sounds noble. Who could be against eliminating such a bureaucratic “maze” if it would make college funding more widely available and accessible? The problem is conveyed in the word “streamlining,” which in the business world almost always involves the reduction or elimination of some functions that are deemed unnecessary or duplicative. Such reduction of financial aid would be consistent with the neoconservative emphasis on cutting taxes, which in turn is meant to stimulate economic growth. Once again, the Commission seems to value economics over equality; it apparently wants economic growth for somebody—not for those who need it most, but for the wealthy corporations and individuals who would benefit by substantial tax savings.

By attempting to reduce diversity, equity, and autonomy in higher education, the Spellings Commission sought to address one final element of neoconservative ideology: the supposed decline in democratic culture in the United States. Several of the commission’s recommendations would help advance a neoconservative agenda in the ongoing culture wars. For example, if financial aid were reduced as the Spellings Commission intended, there would be fewer diverse students and therefore fewer diverse viewpoints in the academy; the gains of multiculturalism on college campuses would be

threatened. Similarly, if nationalized standards and testing were adopted, there would be less chance of universities and colleges circulating ideas that threaten the interests of corporate America or conflict with government policies; the pluralistic emphasis of liberal education could come under fire. On the other hand, if the Spellings Commission's recommendations were ever adopted, it would become more possible to promote favored neoconservative causes, including military recruitment, sexual abstinence programs, and attacks on gays and lesbians, on American college and university campuses (Lipman 36). The adoption of a national curriculum in higher education could also serve to promulgate the kind of "common American culture" that Western traditionalists like E.D. Hirsch, Jr. and Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. have advocated—a culture both highly conservative and homogeneous (Berube 114-21). Or worse, it could allow for the growing infiltration of the Religious Right into public higher education, for many neoconservatives embrace the social agenda of the Christian Right (Crowley 213). Ultimately, the kind of higher education reforms proposed by the Spellings Commission could lead not only to the dumbing down of college and university curriculums but also to the dumbing down of the nation's citizenry. "The real danger of policies that privatize education and throw it into the corporate market," says Lipman, "is that they 'will erode the public forums in which decisions with social consequence can be democratically resolved'" (55). In short, the reform agenda the Spellings Commission perpetuated could circumvent the long-held mission of higher education to promote civic engagement as well as the pluralistic aims of democracy itself.

Hierarchy and Hegemony

In asserting the economic value of higher education over its traditionally vaunted civic and humanistic purposes, the Spellings Commission Report reflects the hegemony of neoconservatism, neoliberalism, and free-market capitalism that has been gaining ground in the rhetoric of higher education reform over the past sixty years. Hegemony is established, as Gramsci explains, when “what was previously secondary and subordinate, or even incidental, is now taken to be primary—becomes the nucleus of a new ideological and theoretical complex” (qtd. in Laclau and Mouffe 68). This very kind of displacement can be seen clearly in the reform rhetoric analyzed within this dissertation. In *Higher Education for American Democracy*, for example, a very different set of values was used to justify redefining the roles and responsibilities of our nation’s colleges and universities. These institutions, the Truman Commission said, should “bring to all the people of the Nation”:

Education for a fuller realization of democracy in every phase of living. Education directly and explicitly for international understanding and cooperation. [And] education for the application of creative imagination and trained intelligence to the solution of social problems and to the administration of public affairs. (86)

In other words, postsecondary learning was meant to uphold the values and ideals of Deweyan progressivism, to democratize education for *all*, and to enrich students both as individuals and as engaged citizens. Sixty years later, with issuance of the Spellings Commission Report, these egalitarian, progressive, and humanistic values once used to justify reforms to higher education appear to have fallen completely by the wayside.

Following release of the Spellings Commission Report in September 2006, responses from associations representing the higher education community poured forth in media statements, membership communications, and letters to Secretary Spellings herself. Not only did these associations criticize what was in the report, but they also honed in what was missing. David Ward, president of the American Council on Education, set the pattern for many other responses when he acknowledged “the investment of time and resources that the commission has dedicated to this important endeavor” but also roundly criticized the report’s findings:

many of the problems cited...are the result of multiple factors but they are sometimes attributed entirely to the limitations of higher education. The recommendations as a whole also fail to recognize the diversity of missions within higher education and the need to be cautious about policies and standards based on a one-size-fits-all approach.

Other associations weighed in with similar responses, pointing out the report’s subordination of goals and values traditionally associated with higher education, or more particularly, liberal education. For example, the executive council of the MLA wrote, “We note that the commission makes virtually no mention of the humanities, despite their established central role in higher education,” and James Perley of the AAUP noted that the report “pays scant attention to important educational goals, such as increasing students’ capacity to understand different perspective and to engage in critical and ethical reasoning.”

Some subsequent responses in academic journals also pointed out the ideological biases apparent in the Spellings Commission Report. For example, Thomas Reeves noted that the report was heavily weighted to the needs of business and industry. “While lip

service is paid briefly to lifelong learning and civic responsibility,” he wrote, “the true aim of higher education, it seems, is cash” (59). Similarly, David Breneman objected to “the report’s relentless focus on higher education as a marketplace, with students as consumers, colleges and universities as producers, and the economic contribution that postsecondary education and training make to society” (2A). Unfortunately, very few of these responses circulated beyond the audience of the particular journal in which they were published or the membership of the association by which they were issued. The Spellings Commission, however, was able to make use of the White House’s sophisticated publicity capabilities to circulate its report not only to national and local news media but also to such stakeholder groups as state legislators, boards of regents, accrediting agencies, and business leaders, all of whom could exert pressure on universities and colleges to adopt, or at least pay attention to, the Spellings Commission’s recommendations.

The result has been that while the Spellings Commission Report itself may now be considered dead in the water, many of the higher education reforms it advocated remain very much alive. The hierarchy of ideologies established by the Spellings Commission has taken hold not only in the minds of those who would reform institutions of higher learning but in practice as well. It has become what Laclau and Mouffe call “ideological cement,” holding together an “organic and relational whole” which is “embodied in institutions and apparatuses” (67). Moreover, in keeping with Althusser’s theory, these state apparatuses are now reproducing the very ideologies articulated in the report.

Recent cuts in state funding for higher education provide one example of how this is occurring. A recent analysis by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities notes sizable reductions in state budget appropriations for public colleges and universities by 43 states across the nation over the 2009-10 fiscal year. To help offset these funding shortfalls, university systems are taking such measures as increasing tuitions, cutting enrollments, and reducing financial aid (Johnson et al. 12). For example, the University of California was forced to increase tuition by 32 percent and reduce freshman admission by nearly 2,300 students as a result of state funding cuts, while the California State University system had to reduce enrollment by some 40,000 students (Johnson, Oliff, and Williams 12). In Arizona, \$191.5 million was cut from appropriations for the state university system during the 2009 fiscal year while the Board of Regents approved tuition increases ranging from 9 to 20 percent (Arizona Board).

These dramatic changes to the funding of public universities both reflect and reproduce the capitalistic and neoconservative agendas advanced by the Spellings Commission Report. The funding cuts themselves are consistent with the neoconservative agenda of reducing taxation and transferring greater responsibility to individuals for their own advancement. With reduced state and federal support, students must truly pull themselves up by their own bootstraps. However, as Jeff Madrick points out, the rising tuitions and reduced financial aid merely increase the disparity in higher education attainment between students from wealthy families and their less well-off peers. “Families in the bottom 20 percent of the income distribution, who earn on average about \$12,500 a year, are simply overwhelmed by college costs,” he writes. “The net

expenditure [for annual college tuition], before borrowing, comes to nearly 70 percent of the average income. Small wonder many of the poor give up on college even before they graduate from high school” (C2). Yet this outcome is consistent with the neoconservative desire to shatter “egalitarian illusions” and bring about “economic reckoning,” thus widening what neocons view as an inevitable and acceptable gap between rich and poor (Kristol). Principles of the free market also come into greater play when states slash their budget appropriations for higher education. Not only is competition for admission increased among students, but universities and colleges also increasingly vie for those applicants who can pay top dollar (Slaughter and Rhoades 308). Meanwhile, institutions compete for funds from companies willing to foot the bill for research that supports their own product development, and faculty become more entrepreneurial, securing grant dollars wherever they may. Academic departments that fail to generate revenue are sometimes merged with others or completely eliminated, as occurred at the University of Arizona. One result of all this is greater privatization of once public institutions. As Zemsky has observed, “When the market interests totally dominate colleges and universities, their role as public agencies significantly diminishes” (qtd. in Giroux, *University* 106). It also perpetuates the so-called “corporatization” of higher education, wherein the university “acts like a profit-making business rather than a public or philanthropic trust,” according to Richard Ohmann (qtd. in Giroux, *University* 103). The Spellings Commissions Report reads almost like a blueprint for this radical overhaul of postsecondary education and the corresponding overturning of public and pluralistic values in favor of profit motives and private gains.

Further reflections of the ideologies articulated by the Spellings Commission can be found in commission reports on higher education reform that have been released in the months or years since. The 2006 report of the blue ribbon commission of the National Council of State Legislatures (NCLS), for example, *Transforming Higher Education: National Imperative—State Responsibility*, mirrors the same ideological influences as well as many of the same lines of arguments advanced by the Spellings Commission Report. An emphasis on capitalistic values is evident in the NCLS commission's statement that it means to approach "higher education reform as part of a national economic development strategy" and in its choice of verbiage throughout. Tellingly, it positions higher education as an "important *investment*," a means of "mass education *production*," and a "ticket to a *good job* and *economic security*" (1-2, italics mine). The NCLS report's acceptance of the neoliberal case for higher education reform is reflected in its heavy reliance on Thomas Friedman, a well-known advocate for globalization, as an authoritative source. Referencing his work, the report repeats the familiar refrain that "the United States is losing its competitive advantage in a new, high-tech, highly mobile economy" and that "higher education is both the problem and the solution" (2). Not surprisingly, the NCLS commission also makes a nod to the Spellings Commission, expressing the hope that the two might work hand-in-hand toward reshaping higher education policy (3). In a similar vein, the 2007 final report of Innovation America, a task force established by the National Governors Association, reflects the hegemony of free-market capitalism, neoliberalism, and neoconservatism in its call for the improved "alignment of the postsecondary system with state economies" (ii). Its neoliberal

viewpoint is evident in its insistence that postsecondary institutions must “focus on developing the skills needed to compete in the international marketplace,” for example, while its neoconservatism comes across in its remarks that colleges and universities must be “adaptable, flexible, and market-driven” as well as “entrepreneurial in terms of partnerships with the private sector” (12).

Perhaps the greatest measure of the Spellings Commission Report’s influence, though, is that its lines of argument have become so commonplace they are now being adopted by those of differing political stripe. President Obama, for example, in announcing his community college grant program in July 2009, focused almost exclusively on the economic and business-oriented benefits of the program: the expansion of a “skilled American workforce,” the creation of programs that “match curricula in the classroom with the needs of the boardroom.” He harked back to Lincoln’s signing of the Morrill Act and Roosevelt’s signing of the GI bill, both of which generated “unprecedented prosperity,” he said, for our nation. In remarks delivered more recently at the University of Texas, President Obama invoked the same trio of ideologies articulated in the Spellings Commission Report. “We’ve got to prepare our graduates to succeed in this economy,” he said, elevating the capitalistic value of higher education above any other. “We’ve got to make college more affordable. That’s how we’ll put a higher education within reach for *anybody who is willing to work for it*,” he said, invoking the bootstrap mentality that those who are fit may prosper. “That’s how we’ll reach our goal of once again leading the world in college graduation rates by the end of this decade,” he said, asserting the *doxa* that America must win the global race for

economic dominance. Similarly, in a recent interview on education reform, Arne Duncan stated, “We want to have the largest percentage of college graduates in the world.... That’s our Moon shot” (qtd. in Richardson 24). His statement echoes both the Spellings Commission Report and reform rhetoric of the Sputnik era. This is not to suggest that Obama’s or Duncan’s plans for increasing investment in higher education or providing greater access to financial aid are unwelcome—on the contrary. But their remarks demonstrate how firmly entrenched the association of higher education with capitalism, neoliberalism, and neoconservatism has become.

If hegemony is indeed able to impose a uniform worldview, neutralize potential antagonism, and cause disadvantaged groups to comply in their own subordination, then the hegemony of ideologies articulated in the Spellings Commission Report appears to have achieved precisely that. Even those who might be expected to speak out against the ideological formations of the Spellings Commission Report are speaking in favor of them. Even institutions which might be expected to resist its rhetorical lines force are being co-opted by them. While the Spellings Commission Report may have constituted but a single shot across the bow of higher learning, it is part of the larger sustained campaign, theorized by Giroux and Aronowitz, among others, to attack higher education at its very core. What is at stake in this campaign are many of the fundamental values, including academic freedom, social justice, and commitment to the public good, that many of us within the higher education community hold dear. As Slaughter and Rhoades argue, U.S. higher education is currently undergoing “a shift from a public good knowledge/learning regime to an academic capitalist knowledge/ learning regime” (8).

But it does not have to be so. This shift in values is not inexorable; it can be resisted. Articulation theory holds the hope for this with its insistence that ideological formations are neither determined nor forever fixed. “The question is not the unfolding of some inevitable law but rather the *linkages*, which, although they can be made, need not necessarily be,” says Hall (“Signification” 96). In the following chapter, I will trace one additional strand of the contemporary rhetoric of higher education reform and argue that the ideologies now associated with higher learning must be rearticulated if the university is to regain its place as a public sphere and the humanities are to retain a viable role within it.

CHAPTER 5

THE COUNTERCURRENT OF CULTURAL LITERACY: REARTICULATING A DEFENSE OF THE HUMANITIES

As discussed in the preceding chapters, two major metaphorical and ideological strands have woven their way through the rhetoric of higher education reform over the past 60 years. Commission reports during the first two decades of the Cold War linked higher education metaphorically with national defense, appealing to such ideologies as militarism and American exceptionalism to justify their calls for reform. From the Reagan era onward, commissions played upon the metaphor of higher education as a business or industry in their efforts to reengineer the institution. By associating postsecondary learning with forces of free-market capitalism, neoliberalism, and neoconservatism, these latter-day reformers contributed to the so-called “marketization” of higher education.

Yet, while defense and business have served as the primary structural metaphors for postsecondary learning since the Truman era, it would be misleading to suggest that they have been the only metaphors used to frame depictions of higher education or to imply that the ideologies mentioned above have been the only ones evoked in advocating for reforms. That is far from the case. Indeed, as discussed in the opening chapter of this dissertation, reform rhetoric since the founding of our nation’s first colleges has reflected a continuous vacillation between such belief and value systems as sectarianism and pluralism, traditionalism and progressivism, quality and equality. In addition, reformers have continued to debate whether higher education should serve utilitarian or more

exalted ends, and it is this debate I wish to take up here. In this final chapter, I will examine a major movement in contemporary reform rhetoric which has run *counter* to portrayals of higher education as a business or form of national defense over the past 60 years: that is, the attempt to reassert the value of the liberal arts, or of broad-based liberal education—including instruction in the humanities—as a means of perpetuating the Western intellectual tradition and of promoting a common culture.

The contemporary argument that higher education should convey a nation's cultural and intellectual legacies is rooted firmly in the Western tradition. Since antiquity, education has been viewed as the means by which a society “preserves and transmits its...intellectual character,” according to classicist Werner Jaeger (xiii). For the ancient Greeks, *paideia*, or education, conveyed the loftiest ideals or standards of a culture (Jaeger xiv-xvii): “It was ultimately in the form of *paideia*, ‘culture’, that the Greeks bequeathed the whole achievement of the Hellenic mind to the other nations of antiquity” (Jaeger xvii). This argument has resurfaced repeatedly in American reform rhetoric, most notably in the 1829 Yale Report, which defended the classical liberal arts curriculum on the grounds that it exposed students to “intellectual culture” and supplied “the ground work of a thorough education,” one that is “broad, and deep, and solid” (300), and the 1945 *Harvard Report on General Education*, which, while acknowledging the need for some curricular specialization, nonetheless upheld the “liberal and humane tradition” as the foundation of both a college education and civilization itself (viii).

Such defenses of the liberal arts stem, too, from the classical period. Many scholars credit Isocrates with being the first to institute a system of liberal education,

which was intended both to improve the student morally and prepare him for civic engagement (Bizzell and Herzberg 68-71). However, as the Latin term *artes liberales* evolved through the Middle Ages, it came to denote not merely arts suited for the “free man,” but the “gentlemanly arts” (Parker 417). These included grammar, rhetoric, and logic (known as the *trivium*), as well as arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music (known as the *quadrivium*)—subjects which were considered to be of limited value in themselves yet valuable as preparation for more advanced studies (Parker 417, 420). In this evolution, the liberal arts largely lost their earlier connection with civic or practical pursuits. Even now, as economist Victor E. Ferrall, Jr. observes in *Liberal Arts at the Brink*, the liberal arts are most often defined by negation, meaning that they are set in opposition to professional, vocational, or technical fields (8). Figure 5.1 delineates the “liberal arts” from “liberal education” and other commonly confused terms.

Table 5.1: “Liberal Education” and Often-Confused Terms

Liberal education	An approach to learning that empowers individuals and prepares them to deal with complexity, diversity, and change. It provides students with broad knowledge of the wider world (e.g., science, culture, and society) as well as in-depth study in a specific area of interest.
Liberal arts	Specific disciplines, including the humanities, social sciences, and sciences.
Liberal arts college	A particular institutional type—often small, often residential—that facilitates close interaction between faculty and students, and has a strong focus on liberal arts disciplines.
<i>Artes liberales</i>	Historically, the basis for the modern liberal arts; the <i>quadrivium</i> (arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music) and the <i>trivium</i> (grammar, logic, and rhetoric).

General Education	The part of a liberal education curriculum shared by all students. It provides broad learning in liberal arts and science disciplines, and forms the basis for developing important intellectual, civic, and practical capacities.
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Source: Association of American Colleges and Universities

Likewise, the humanities, as core disciplines within the liberal arts,⁴⁵ have traditionally been defended on the basis that they are disinterested fields of study, divorced from vocational or practical utility. According to Princeton’s *WordNet*, the humanities are “studies intended to provide general knowledge and intellectual skills, rather than occupational or professional skills” (“Humanities”). William Blizek, philosopher and author of *Humanities and Public Life*, adds that they “are characterized by intellectual activity that is rational and which focuses upon the products of man” (73). Both these definitions align the humanities with the Enlightenment project of liberating the human mind through reason. But much earlier, Protagoras may have first expressed the essence of the humanities with his statement, “Man is the measure of all things” (Jaeger 301-02). This generalized knowledge of *humanitas*, of being human, was considered appropriate preparation for leaders of the ancient Greek *polis*, and so, humanism became tied to a tradition which is now considered classist, sexist, and essentialist because it assumes a shared conception of “man” (Jaeger 112-14). “Aristocracy [was] the first, and the early city-state [was] the second, in the development of the ‘humanistic’ ideal of a universal ethico-political culture,” writes Jaeger (114). The

⁴⁵ The Humanities Resource Center of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences counts among the humanities study of the following: English language and literature; foreign language and literature; history; philosophy; religion; ethnic, gender, and cultural studies; American and area studies; archaeology; jurisprudence; selected arts, including art history, music, drama, and cinema; and selected interdisciplinary studies, including general humanities programs and studies of specific historical periods.

classical revival during the Renaissance helped to cement this reputation, tying humanism to the study of canonical texts, or Great Books (Harpham 13-14, 83-84). “The *studia humanitatis* of the fifteenth century sought to recall humankind to its divine origins through a reading of the classical and early Christian texts as an extended meditation on ethics whose ultimate goal of personal salvation was manifestly Christian,” explains Geoffrey Galt Harpham, president of the National Humanities Center (83). Matthew Arnold renewed this particular strain of humanism with his 1882 work *Culture and Anarchy*, bemoaning the decay of “Christian knowledge” yet holding out hope that “all sides of our humanity” might still be developed “by means of getting to know... the best which has been thought and said in the world” (Preface 3, 7). Conservative reformers in the U.S. today still employ a similar Arnoldian defense in arguing for preservation of the humanities (Harpham 87).

For the past 60 years, advocacy of the liberal arts on this basis has formed a reactionary current within reform rhetoric: a backlash against curricular specialization, on the one hand, and curricular diversification, on the other; against the sway of capitalism, scientism, and technologization, at one end of the ideological spectrum, and democratization at the other. Amidst these forces, reformers have depicted the liberal arts as ballasts which will stabilize not only higher learning but also the very foundations of American culture. Their reports have appeared whenever traditional cultural and curricular standards have been threatened, and faced with these perceived threats, they have endeavored to restore higher education to its classical and humanistic roots. Like other contemporary reform rhetoric, they summon a “crisis” as the exigency for their

reform proposals, yet theirs is a crisis which dates back to Plato's challenge of the sophists. "Education always needs a standard," explains Jaeger, "and at that period, when the traditional standards were dissolving and passing away, it chose as its standard the *form* of man: it became formal. Situations of that kind have recurred at various periods in history, and the appearance of humanism is always closely connected with them" (302). According to humanities scholar W.B. Carnochan, this "crisis" of educational standards only escalated with establishment of American universities during the late 19th century, for these institutions were:

a blend of European example and American practice, touched by the almost invisible hand of social Darwinism yet also by the habit of American egalitarianism, a volatile combination of meritocracy and democracy, an adaptive response to the heterogeneity of an immigrant society, and (nonetheless), an institution seeking to preserve the values...of a "liberal education." (1)

Contemporary efforts to preserve the liberal arts and humanities arise from these same age-old conflicts between diversity and standardization, progressivism and the *status quo ante*. The forces that Carnochan describes rise and fall like sides of a see-saw throughout the history of higher education reform.

In the following pages, I will show how six major commission reports of the past 60 years operate in this same manner, rising to the fore when the weight of opposing arguments grows too great. Each of these reports reacts to or against the reform rhetoric which preceded it, including texts analyzed in previous chapters. The 1952 reports of the Commission on Financing Higher Education, for example, oppose reforms recommended by the Truman Commission; the 1964 *Report of the Commission on the Humanities* seeks equal support for the humanities following passage of the National Defense Education

Act; the 1980 Rockefeller Commission Report responds to the alleged elitism and ethnocentrism of the humanities as described in the earlier Commission on the Humanities report; and the 1984 report, *To Reclaim a Legacy*, reasserts Western cultural values in the face of growing multiculturalism as advocated by the Rockefeller Commission. Western traditionalists like Allan Bloom and E.D. Hirsh also attempted to assert the values of “cultural literacy” in response to the culture wars of the 1980s, but rather than striking a blow for the defense of traditional humanism, they essentially rang its death-knell. The 1993 report of the Wingspread Group on Higher Education was the last of its kind to plead for a revival of humanism *per se*.

To frame my analysis in this chapter, I will draw first upon Kenneth Burke’s theory of piety and impiety, much as it was applied in my earlier examination of the excellence movement within education reform. Reform reports which appeal to the values associated with the liberal arts and humanities may similarly be seen as attempts to restore piety to higher education. Indeed, Burke notes in *Permanence and Change* that the range of piety may be extended to “refined critics, of the Matthew Arnold variety, [who] assumed that exquisiteness of taste was restricted to the ‘better’ classes of people” (77). In mounting such defenses of the humanities, contemporary reformers attempt to remove the supposed “taint” of declining standards and values from U.S. higher education, while camouflaging similar elitist, classist, and racist motives.

Secondly, I will base my analysis on Catherine Prendergrast’s theory that conceptions of literacy and racial justice are rhetorically opposed within the discourse of educational reform. Prendergrast describes a continuous push-pull between the literacy

attainment of African Americans and a white backlash which attempts to regain control of literacy as a form of rightful property or exclusive privilege. “Throughout American history,” she explains, “literacy has been managed and controlled in myriad ways to rationalize and ensure White domination” (2). Given this frame, we can see reform reports which assert the centrality of the liberal arts as a direct response to, or backlash against, those which seek to make literacy attainable to African Americans and other marginalized groups. Through these reports, advocates of “cultural literacy” attempt to regain control over a privileged form of higher learning. Prendergrast goes on to say that “the rhetoric of declining literacy standards was brought to slow the progress of the civil rights movement....Once African Americans were granted relief in one literacy environment—public high school, for example—that environment was subsequently perceived to have lowered its value” (11). The same may be said of reform rhetoric which attempts to raise the standards of literacy that “should” be upheld by postsecondary institutions. When minoritized and other previously excluded groups gain access to college-level literacy, its value is perceived to be lower, and therefore, newly elevated standards are demanded.

Still, postmodern theorists have pointed out that any defense of the humanities on the basis of a “cultural literacy” is problematic because it derives from a supposedly common but, in fact, Westernized conception of culture. As Aronowitz and Giroux explain, “various discourses of postmodernism have challenged the ethnocentricity that rests on the assumption that America and Europe represent universalized models of civilization and culture” (71). Indeed, postmodernism challenges the existence of any

legitimizing “center”—whether it be a cultural tradition, an intellectual standard, a canon of texts, or any other—as a “a unique and superior position from which to establish control and to determine hierarchies” (Richard 6). Although would-be reformers have appealed to values deriving from Western humanism in attempting to defend the liberal arts and humanities, this line of ideological defense has not withstood attacks by its critics. As early as 1984, Gerald Graff observed that “‘humanism’ and ‘humanistic’ [were] among the stock of once respectable words which [had] been so emptied of meaning that anyone foolhardy enough to try to rehabilitate them [was] in for an uphill fight” (“Humanism” 495). On the one hand, universities were being blamed for *not* fulfilling their humanistic ideals, according to Graff, but on the other, they were being faulted for fulfilling them all too well—thus reinforcing the hegemony of Westernized culture and values (“Humanism” 496). This latter critique, coming from such postmodernists as Derrida, Foucault, and Lyotard, has ultimately discredited many of the humanistic appeals made in the reform reports I analyze in the following pages. Lyotard, for example, has challenged both the “great story” of the Enlightenment, charging that it is drawn from cultural scripts which are both sexist and elitist, as well as the “foundational claims” of modernism, arguing that they merely sustain normative interests and legitimate entrenched relations of power (Aronowitz and Giroux 58, 68).

Posthumanists, a loose assemblage including Michel Foucault and Donna Haraway, among others, have likewise challenged traditional humanism on the basis that anything “human” is actually constructed. Therefore, human nature, knowledge, identity, or agency are themselves constructions of the modern *épisteme*, which is moving rapidly

toward obsolescence. As Foucault theorizes, “Man is an invention of a recent date. And perhaps one nearing its end” (*The Order* 387).

While the commission reports examined here attempt to restore a cultural and intellectual center which cannot hold (to paraphrase Yeats), they also attempt to counter another view of higher education: the capitalistic conception of postsecondary learning as a means of vocational training or professional preparation. They argue that higher learning must transcend mere workaday concerns by exposing students to a broader course of study and stimulating in them capacities of the mind that extend beyond mere practical skills. In so doing, however, they often play rhetorically right into their opponents’ hands, defending the supposed irrelevance of the liberal arts and humanities to the “real” world while also disregarding the potential of such fields to prepare students for participatory citizenship and civic engagement. By contrast, I argue that any successful justification of the humanities must take into account the long-standing metaphorical associations of higher education with business and defense while also recognizing contemporary theoretical movements toward postmodernism and posthumanism. I conclude this chapter by outlining how the ideologies now associated with higher education must be rearticulated if the university is to regain its place as a public sphere and the humanities are to retain their integral role within it. This rearticulation must build upon a very different conception of humanism than the one described above. It must rearticulate the value of rhetoric not only as a field of study and mode of public deliberation, but as a means of knowledge-making—one which is more germane than ever now that the truth claims of the Enlightenment and grand narratives of

modernism have been effectively refuted. Beyond this rearticulation, the generic conventions and limitations of commission reports must be challenged so that groups whose interests have long been subordinated or subsumed may gain a voice within the rhetoric of higher education reform. In the commission reports examined in the following sections, these voices are almost entirely elided.

“Our Heritage of Freedom”: Defending the Liberal Arts during Cold War

The first commission reports on higher education to follow *Higher Education for American Democracy* were those of the Commission on Financing Higher Education, also known as the Millett Commission. Issued in 1952, these companion reports, *Nature and Needs of Higher Education* and *Financing Higher Education in the United States*, present research findings on two interrelated topics: first, the nature, scope, and structure of higher education; and second, the needs and priorities for funding it. Like the Truman Commission Report that preceded them, these reports specifically link higher education to defense of a democratic society. One of higher education’s basic purposes, the Millett reports state, is to uphold and extend “our heritage of freedom” (*Nature* 30); to neglect this “would be to undermine and eventually to destroy the very basis of our civilization” (*Financing* 37). However, the Millett Commission focuses not on higher education’s ability to defend the nation’s “freedom” against outside aggressors, but instead on fighting forces within our nation that might undermine higher education’s unfettered role in conserving and transmitting cultural and intellectual resources. In this respect, it stands in opposition to the Truman Commission Report’s efforts to position postsecondary

learning as a means of national defense. *Financing Higher Education* suggests, for example, that universal compulsory military service during the Cold War threatens higher education's enrollment needs: "There is thus a direct conflict of interests between considerations of national security and considerations of educating the superior intelligences of the nation" (57). Whereas the Truman Commission advocates sending the nation's best-educated abroad as emissaries for democracy, the Millett Commission argues for keeping them home by establishing a more consistent policy of military deferment (*Financing* 60-66). Although its reports were ostensibly meant only to present research findings, their opposition to the "egalitarian" impulses behind both universal access to higher education and universal military service becomes apparent. "For a number of years to come, it seems evident, all young men who are physically and mentally able to serve will have to reconcile themselves to some period of compulsory service," it states (*Financing* 57). The word "reconcile" here infers that the Millett Commission bemoans such a requirement, especially for those of the "highest intellectual promise," and would prefer that others of lesser class or caliber would "bear the burden" (*Financing* 56-57). Its emphasis is meritocratic, then, not democratic.

Moreover, unlike the Truman Commission, the Millett Commission aims to promote the values of traditional liberal education, not general education for the masses (*Nature* 14-16). Emphasizing eternal truths and grand narratives, it defends liberal education on grounds which are traditionally humanistic:

The understanding of man's cultural heritage, an appreciation of the great ennobling sentiments and thoughts of philosophers and scholars, a grasp of the ways in which man's knowledge has accumulated and how it advances—all these aid the development of spiritual insight and of

wisdom. These capacities may be awakened by the liberal arts properly conceived and taught. In this sense liberal education is the heart of all higher education. (*Nature* 16)

Man stands at the center of this educational enterprise, with all the essentialism that implies, but certainly not all men, or women. Identifying “dangers in mass higher education,” the Millett Commission eschews universal access in favor of a more meritocratic goal: “enhancement of training for the most able” (*Financing* 44; Kerr, “Four Decades” 4). “Mass higher education,” it contends, is an oxymoron in that “education in an intellectual sense is only for the few” (*Financing* 45). It recommends limiting access to only the top 25 percent of students based on “intellectual qualifications” as determined by I.Q. scores on other standardized testing, and it exults at the possibility that such standards might bar from higher learning those who “fall below that general level of intelligence” (*Financing* 47-48, 50-51). In this respect, the Millett Commission attempts to restore Burkean piety to higher education by eliminating the supposed taint of the unqualified. Its reports also reflect the kind of backlash Prendergrast describes against any loosening of literacy standards. Although it does admit that economic factors have a bearing on students’ college admission, it downplays these influences in its effort to restore intellectual standards. “We ought to acknowledge that our colleges and universities have done a fairly satisfactory job already in equalizing educational opportunity,” it states complacently (*Financing* 56). Attempting to tilt the rhetorical see-saw to the opposing side, the Millett Commission also takes direct aim at its predecessor, suggesting that the Truman Commission’s concerns about economic barriers to college education were based on outdated studies and its goals of “education

for citizenship” and “education for democracy” were already being met through primary and secondary schooling (*Financing* 55, 43).

The Millett Commission also warns of the massive financial infusion that would be necessary if postsecondary education were to be made universally available and, in this respect, takes a distinctly conservative stance relative to that of the Truman Commission. The Truman Commission had called for vastly increased financial support for higher education, estimating the annual expense of its recommended educational programs 1960 at \$3.25 billion, or 1.5 percent of the Gross National Product (5:26-27).⁴⁶ As part of this, it had projected significantly increased federal investment of approximately \$600 million annually (5:52). The Millett Commission, by contrast, projects the total cost of higher education in 1960 at \$1.9 billion (based upon its proposed enrollment reductions) and advocates no increased federal support (*Financing* 442). On the contrary, it expects federal investment to “contract” with a presumed drop-off in veterans’ assistance (*Financing* 441). “Higher education would perhaps do well to learn how to cope with this degree of federal participation before seeking new, untried expenditures,” it observes, taking another apparent swipe at the Truman Commission (*Financing* 442). As grounds for this position, the Millett Commission cites the “freedom” that might be lost if federal investment in higher education, and thus federal influence, were to grow. “There is one absolute for a higher education which would be free, even as there is for a society that would be free,” it analogizes. “That absolute is to cultivate and promote competing centers of power, to avoid any centralized or single

⁴⁶ This includes the Truman Commission’s projection for capital outlays. Its estimate for expenditures on educational programs alone in 1960 is \$2.6 billion, or 1.19 percent of GNP.

power, and to learn how to live successfully amid the complexities of diversity” (481). However, the “freedom” and “diversity” it supports is institutional—that of well-endowed private universities and liberal arts colleges, like those represented by a majority of its members,⁴⁷ to operate without federally imposed regulation or competitive encumbrance. This constitutes yet another attack on the Truman Commission, which had advocated increasing federal support only for *public* universities and colleges, thus potentially disadvantaging private institutions. It also anticipates later arguments for privatizing higher education on the basis of consumer choice and market freedom.

“Democracy Demands Wisdom”: The Humanities as Allies of Science and Technology

As discussed in Chapter 2, reform rhetoric in the aftermath of Sputnik focused almost exclusively on bolstering science and technology within higher education to defend the nation against military and ideological incursion. With establishment of the National Science Foundation (NSF) in 1950 and passage of the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) in 1958, support of the humanities had fallen to the low end of the rhetorical see-saw. The Commission on the Humanities (COH) was formed in 1963 by a trio of scholarly associations—the American Council of Learned Societies, the Council of Graduate Schools in the United States, and the United Chapters of Phi Beta Kappa—and charged with investigating this worrisome state of affairs (V). The COH

⁴⁷ Institutions represented on the Millett Commission included Harvard, Johns Hopkins, California Institute of Technology, Stanford, Brown, and Union College. Only one, University of Missouri, was a public institution.

sought to provide a counter-balance to reform reports which promoted science and technology by positioning the humanities as equally vital to the nation's survival. Its 1964 report stresses that "expansion and improvement in the humanities are in the national interest and consequently deserve financial support by the federal government" (V). To that end, it recommends creation of an independent federal agency, the National Humanities Foundation, which would serve both as a counterpart and counterweight to the NSF.

Although the *Report of the Commission on the Humanities* underscores the need for creation of this new agency by employing militaristic appeals, these merely cloak its traditionally humanistic defense of the humanities. "Democracy demands wisdom of the average man," the COH states. "Without the exercise of wisdom free institutions and personal liberty are inevitably imperiled" (4). The language here seems to validate Harpham's claim that the humanities were promoted as part of "a discourse of crisis" after World War II, based upon "the desire to strengthen the American nation by producing citizens capable of the confident exercise of the freedoms available in, and protected by, a modern democratic culture" (15). However, far from focusing on the country's current peril, the COH looks backward toward "man's conscious past," toward the "liberal tradition we inherit from antiquity" (1). And, after signaling imminent danger, it retreats to an Arnoldian commonplace: "To know the best that has been thought and said in former times can make us wiser than we otherwise might be" (4). Neither preparation for citizenship nor defense of democracy counts among its primary rationales for humanistic study. Rather, it says, the humanities center on "concern for the

human individual: for his emotional development, for his moral, religious, and aesthetic ideas, and for his goals—including in particular his growth as a rational being and a responsible member of the community” (1). Responsible citizenship occurs as an afterthought here, one subordinated to and subsumed within personal development. The *Report of the Commission on the Humanities* does not follow the pattern of other Cold War reform rhetoric, then, in depicting the humanities as a means of national defense. It instead provides a counterpoint to that argument, proposing “a program to meet a need *no less serious than* that for national defense” (1, italics mine). It advocates a kind of defense, certainly, but of “our beliefs, our ideals, our highest human achievements” (1).

Attempting to piggyback on popular support for the sciences in the wake of Sputnik, the COH positions the humanities as the sciences’ “natural allies” but also as a necessary check and balance to them (2). In the foreword to its report, the COH establishes ethos by praising the “admirable record” of the National Science Foundation and implying that the National Humanities Foundation, the COH’s proposed new agency, will be a stabilizing counterpart (V). Further, the COH ingratiates itself with the “in” crowd by appealing to the authority of higher-profile presidential commissions of the time, especially those focused upon science. It nods to the President’s Commission on National Goals, for instance, by quoting its admonition that posterity will judge the United States “by the creative activities of its citizens” and to the President’s Advisory Committee on Science by approving its statement, “Even in the interests of science itself it is essential to give full value and support to the other great branches of man’s artistic, literary, and scholarly activity” (qtd. on 2). The implication here is that the humanities

must be worthy of support if scientists deem them so. Yet, at the same time, the COH warns of the threat posed by too single-minded a focus on science. “If the interdependence of science and the humanities were more generally understood,” it states, “men would be more likely to become masters of their technology and not its unthinking servants” (2-3). In this reference, the humanities become the potential savior of mankind *from* science—and from potential nuclear disaster.⁴⁸ This double-edged treatment of science as both ally and adversary tends to undercut the COH’s advocacy of humanities funding. The commission never articulates the humanities’ value in and of themselves, but only as ancillaries to other branches of learning. Still, its alliterative defense of the humanities still echoes in the mission statement of the National Endowment for the Humanities, whose creation the COH helped to spur: “Because democracy demands wisdom...” (“Who We Are”).

Whatever influence The Commission on the Humanities may have had did not endure, however, for 14 years later, the Rockefeller Foundation established a commission by the same name to report, yet again, on the sorry state of the humanities in America and propose ways they could be strengthened (xi). This second Commission on the Humanities,⁴⁹ chaired by Stanford President Richard W. Lyman, issued its report, *The Humanities in American Life*, in May of 1980. Although the Rockefeller Commission

⁴⁸ The involvement on the COH of Glenn Seaborg, then chairman of the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission and Nobel chemist responsible for discovering transuranium elements used in development of the atomic bomb, may help account for these references to the dangers posed by science. As noted in Chapter 3, Seaborg later served on the National Commission for Excellence in Education and was one of the primary writers of *A Nation at Risk*. His history suggests that particular themes, such as the threat to the nation posed by nuclear weaponry, may circulate through reform rhetoric as a result of members’ re-appointment to successive commissions. Devereux Josephs and Clark Kerr were among other COH members who served on multiple commissions.

⁴⁹ To avoid confusion, this second Commission on the Humanities will be referred to here as the Rockefeller Commission.

shared many aims in common with its predecessor, its arguments in favor of the humanities followed along somewhat different lines. Its report does reiterate some elements of a traditional humanistic defense, saying that these fields of study “mirror our own image and our image of the world,” for instance, and allow us to “reflect on the fundamental question, what does it mean to be human?” (1). In suggesting that being “human” can be boiled down to some distinctive meaning, the Rockefeller Commission Report also reflects the essentialist strain of humanism that postmodern and post-humanist theorists have criticized. At the same time, though, the Rockefeller Commission attempts to recuperate another variant of humanism, one which, it says, “our society has only had fleeting perceptions of” (6). This is the ancient view of humanism as a “civic ideal” (6). “Since ancient Athens humanists have been expected to contribute to the general sense of civic responsibility,” it explains (6). Unlike humanities reports before it, the Rockefeller Commission’s also adds a new—though, at once, very old—rationale for supporting the humanities: their capacity to promote civic engagement, not merely within the *polis* and nation-state, but the world beyond. “The humanities lead beyond ‘functional’ literacy and basic skills to critical judgment and discrimination, enabling citizens to view political issues from an informed perspective,” it states. “Through familiarity with foreign cultures—as well as with our own subcultures—the humanities show that citizenship means belonging to something larger than neighborhood or nation” (12). In this respect, *The Humanities in American Life* reflects values of liberal internationalism and civic humanism that are more consistent with those expressed in the Truman Commission Report than with by its immediate predecessors. (See Chapter 2, 21-

24.) That is, the Rockefeller Commission positions the humanities not as regressive, like earlier advocates, nor as standing apart from civic ideals, but as pillars of participatory democracy.

The Rockefeller Commission Report differs from previous commission reports on the humanities, too, in that it embraces cultural diversity rather than attempting to purge its ostensible taint. Rejecting an ossified Westernized canon, it treats the humanities as “flexible and alive,” as being “enlarged and enriched by non-Western cultures, by new works of art and scholarship, by the contributions of people never before given their due,” and within these diverse cultural traditions, it maintains there are works which should be rightfully regarded as “classics” (10-11). Written in the aftermath of the Civil Rights Movement and Vietnam War, the Rockefeller Commission acknowledges the “elitism versus populism” debate that was spawned by both, as well as the rising ethnic and cultural tensions on college and university campuses during the 1970s (9, 61). “Those who emphasize our common culture are sometimes called elitist, whereas those who accentuate cultural pluralism are called populist,” it concedes (9). Still, this contentious debate needn’t limit support for the humanities nor undermine their relevance for diverse contemporary audiences, it argues (21). It lays the blame for any decline in support of the humanities upon the very individuals and institutions which ought most to uphold them.⁵⁰ “When the humanities do not relate directly to contemporary public issues or draw large crowds,” it states accusatorily, “the reason should be sought in the private

⁵⁰ The Rockefeller Commission directs particular blame at the NEH, saying that it should “clarify its policies of support in ways that transcend divisive ideological terms” (24). In addition, it directs ire at professional humanists and academic administrators who have, it says, “dodged demands for accountability without defending the value and indeed the relevance of the humanities” (5).

and detached qualities of some humanistic inquiry rather than in its alleged irrelevance” (21). The Rockefeller Commission thus challenges prior conceptions of the humanities as cloistered studies, carried on merely for personal improvement and ascent toward an otherworldly ideal. By contrast, it argues that humanistic studies generate capacities which are “decidedly practical” and which “illuminate relationships *between* the public and private” (12-13, italics mine).

In its effort to return humanistic disciplines to the heart of the college curriculum, the Rockefeller Commission seeks not only to repair divisions between the public and private but also the “cracks” that mar the coherence of higher education (5). Attempting to heal the rift between the humanities and scientific and technical disciplines, for example, it argues that learning in one complements learning in the other within a cohesive program of liberal education. “New and coupled technologies can help students, teachers, scholars, and adult learners by saving time and offering versatile modes of learning” it writes. “To explore this cognitive terrain wisely, humanists, scientists, and technicians must overcome divisions that have been institutionalized in our educational system” (15). Scholars in these fields must do more than simply work side-by-side, though, for humanists must not be the “ultimate authority liberating others from the necessity of deliberating about ethical problems,” according to the Rockefeller Commission (18). Rather, scientists and technicians must themselves study the humanities, just as humanists must gain understanding of science and technology. In this way, literacy in “a multiple sense”—the ability to apply science and technology to human needs and judge their human impacts—becomes the glue which holds both our society

and its system of postsecondary education together (18-19). *The Humanities in American Life* attempts to bridge, moreover, the long-standing divide which has historically existed between liberal or humanistic learning and vocational or professional preparation. “As higher education enters the 1980s, it must formulate afresh the ideals of liberal education,” the report states. “New models of a liberal curriculum must accommodate the various backgrounds and goals of today’s students, including their concern with careers” (66). In refusing to accept that vocational and liberal studies are antithetical, the Rockefeller Commission follows lines of argument advanced by Alfred North Whitehead, whom it quotes on the subject, as well as John Dewey, who contended that the two should be intertwined within a system of general education. Yet, while it rightly identifies synergies between these fields and forms of study, the Rockefeller Commission still articulates the value of the humanities as a distinct mode of inquiry and learning:

Study of the humanities makes distinctive marks on the mind: through history the ability to disentangle and interpret complex human events; through literature and the arts, the ability to distinguish the deeply felt, the well wrought, and the continually engrossing from the shallow, the imitative, and the monotonous; through philosophy, the sharpening of criteria for moral decision and warrantable belief. (12)

In this respect, the Rockefeller Commission Report echoes the contentions of Renaissance rhetorician Giambattista Vico and his later adherent Ernesto Grassi that the humanist tradition, with its emphasis upon *ingenium* derived through discovery of relationships, stands apart from, and even above, the scientific rationalism of the Enlightenment (see, e.g., Grassi 15-16).

With its defense of humanistic study as a distinct means of knowledge-making, of the humanist tradition as diverse and dynamic, and of humanism as a civic ideal, *The*

Humanities in American Life diverges rhetorically from other major commission reports on the humanities issued during the latter half of the 20th century. It foregoes many of the traditional defenses that had come under fire during the 1960s and '70s and instead offers justifications for the humanities which would seemingly have appealed to advocates of liberal education and multiculturalism at the time. But why, then, did the Rockefeller Report not have the lasting influence that at least some of its reviewers hoped it would (see, e.g., Bonham, Stellar)? Mel Toph, critiquing the report shortly after its release in *College English*, complains that it simply reiterated the same “litany” of lamentations, defenses, and counter-defenses as earlier reports of its kind had and therefore failed for the same reasons (463-65). However, my preceding rhetorical analysis would suggest otherwise. Christopher Lucas posits that the Rockefeller Commission Report failed to further the cause of the humanities because of the stranglehold that scientific positivism still had upon human imagination and culture at the time (“Liberal” 25). That may be so—in which case, the passage of years, as well as the diminishing faith in positivism, may have increased the report’s persuasiveness since its issuance. Added to this, three other factors may help to explain why the Rockefeller Commission Report gained so little traction at the time it was released. First, whereas some of the commission’s arguments in support of the humanities were relatively nontraditional, most other elements of its report smacked of traditional humanism. The first chapter opens, for example, by describing the gold doubloon nailed to the mast of Captain Ahab’s vessel in *Moby Dick* (1)—a symbol bound to evoke not only the Western canon but also a conventional view of humanism as inwardly focused and individualistic. The history recounted in the report

is also Western and male-dominated, as are the artists, philosophers, and scientists it cites: Plato, Galileo, and Cézanne, to name but a few. Second, the timing of the Rockefeller Commission Report relative to that of the nation's crisis of competitiveness and the release of *A Nation at Risk* was not propitious. As discussed in Chapter 3, the country was engulfed in economic woes during this period, and the metaphoric depiction of higher education in reform rhetoric had shifted accordingly. The Rockefeller Commission Report, more focused on the crisis within the humanities than on threats to the nation's business sector, lacked the necessary *kairos* to capture an attentive audience. Third, the Rockefeller Commission Report was followed shortly by a higher-profile commission report which reasserted the supposed centrality of Western culture and reinvigorated the tenets of Arnoldian humanism: William Bennett's *To Reclaim a Legacy: A Report on the Humanities in Higher Education*. This report effectively foreclosed the possibility of mounting a more progressive or pluralistic defense of the humanities for many years afterwards.

“In the Company of Great Souls”: The Humanities and Cultural Literacy

To Reclaim a Legacy was published in November 1984, based upon research and hearings conducted by the 31-member Study Group on the State of Learning in the Humanities in Higher Education. Bennett characterizes this blue-ribbon group in the report's preface as being “as diverse as the enterprise of education itself” (ii). But its membership roster, like that of virtually every other commission on higher education

reform, does not bear this out.⁵¹ Although the report was published by the National Endowment for the Humanities, Bennett himself claims responsibility for its authorship (iii), and it could hardly have been written at a more opportune moment. The back-to-basics and excellence in education movements were both in full swing; *A Nation at Risk* had, only a year earlier, warned that the pillars of our civilization were crumbling; and Americans were primed for a report which promised to restore structure and stability to our system of higher education—and thereby, to society itself.

With its avowed purpose of returning the humanities to the core of the college curriculum (4), *To Reclaim a Legacy* filled precisely this bill. Its epigraph by Walter Lippmann foregrounds what was ostensibly at stake if this purpose was not achieved: “Our civilization cannot effectively be maintained where it still flourishes, or be restored where it has been crushed, without the revival of the central, continuous and perennial culture of the Western world” (qtd. in Bennett, n.p.).⁵² The use of these lines implies that the West faces the same peril it did when Lippmann originally penned them in 1941, at the height of Nazi occupation: Some portions of “our civilization” had already been “crushed” by barbarous forces, while others could have succumbed to the same fate if the superior strength of the allies had not been reestablished. From his report’s opening pages, then, Bennett associates the humanities primarily with Western culture. As John Trimbur observes, “Bennett’s goal is nothing short of rehabilitating liberal education by reconstituting a common heritage—the shared knowledge of Western tradition—at the

⁵¹ Unless, of course, one assumes that the “enterprise of education” itself is not very diverse.

⁵² Interestingly, Lippmann contended that modern societies were too complex to allow for anything beyond minimally democratic politics—a theory which Dewey opposed (Festenstein). Given this, the epigraph seems to presage Bennett’s own elitist beliefs relative to the humanities.

center of the undergraduate curriculum, as the distinguishing mark of a college education” (110). The “legacy” of Bennett’s title, and that to which he claims students are entitled, is “an adequate education in the culture and civilization of which they are members”—assuming they are all members of the same one (1). His choice of financial metaphors to describe the humanities—students are “rightful heirs” to them; college graduates have been “shortchanged” in these disciplines (1)—recalls Martin Luther King’s depiction of African Americans’ civil rights as a “check” or “promissory note” in “I Have a Dream.” Yet Bennett’s use of these metaphors, especially in combination with the Lippmann epigraph, suggests too that humanistic learning is a form of property which may be devalued or forfeited if it should fall into the wrong hands. His effort to reassert the centrality of Western culture may thus be seen, in accordance with Catherine Prendergast’s theory, as an attempt to retain this form of cultural literacy as an exclusive privilege for an elite (and presumably white) group.

Bennett’s defense of the humanities in *To Reclaim a Legacy* likewise reflects an effort to restore the Burkean piety of the Western cultural tradition. His insistence on the highest standards and his rejection of any divergent cultural or theoretical influences demonstrates the kind of pious devotion that is possible, according to Burke, not only in evangelism but also in education (*Permanence* 81). Bennett defines the humanities, paraphrasing Arnold, “as the *best* that has been said, thought, written, or otherwise expressed about the human condition” (5, italics mine). Intent on establishing what “properly goes with what” (Burke, *Permanence* 74), he proposes to allow universities and colleges little variance either in their core curricula or the cultural artifacts to which

students are exposed. “Each institution must decide for itself what it considers an educated person to be and what knowledge that person should possess,” he says (9). Yet, “while doing so, no institution need act as if it were operating in a vacuum. There are standards of judgment: Some things are more important to know than others” (9-10). Bennett thus reasserts the Great Books conception of humanism. Consistent with the theory that piety is a “system-builder” which bases its standards upon “remembrance of things past” (Burke, *Permanence* 74), Bennett even supplies an abbreviated canon of texts which, he says, “profoundly influenced” his own life (15). But, tellingly, only two of the 40 were written by women and only one by an African American (16). “Why these particular books and these particular authors?” he asks, then answers, “Because an important part of education is learning to read, and the highest purpose of reading is to be in the company of great souls” (16). Apparently, “great souls” are predominantly white and male. Further evincing such “piety,” Bennett re-appropriates the arguments typically advanced in support of educational access for minoritized communities when he insists that “no student citizen of *our civilization* should be *denied access* to the best that tradition has to offer” (38, italics mine)—as if access to Western literature, philosophy, or history were somehow lacking.

While many other forces were clearly at play in reducing curricular emphasis on the humanities during the 1960s and ‘70s, Bennett lays the blame solely on those in the higher education community. “We in the academy have failed to bring the humanities to life and to insist on their value,” he writes (18). “A collective loss of nerve and faith on the part of both faculty and academic administration... was undeniably destructive of the

curriculum” (27). In accusing faculty themselves for failing to make a strong case for humanistic study, Bennett follows the example set by the Rockefeller Commission, though he is far more disparaging in his tone and language. He especially disapproves of faculty who treat the humanities as if they were “the handmaiden of ideology” (8), apparently referring to critical pedagogues or cultural studies scholars, who would view canonical knowledge as inherently ideological. In fact, Bennett’s derision toward academicians presages the type of anti-intellectualism that has grown fashionable among many conservatives today. He warns against humanities professors who invite students “to join a club of sophisticated cynics who are witty, abrasive, and sometimes engrossing” (8)—this “club” apparently being postmodern theorists or others who might question the grand narratives he so piously endorses. Still, Bennett reserves his greatest disdain for those who challenge the primacy of Western culture:

We frequently hear that it is no longer possible to reach a consensus on the most significant thinkers, the most compelling ideas, and the books all students should read. Contemporary American culture, the argument goes, has become too fragmented and too pluralistic to justify a belief in common learning. Although it is easier (and more fashionable) to doubt than to believe, it is a grave error to base a college curriculum on such doubt. (14)

For Bennett, any dispute over the preeminence of Western tradition amounts to cultural relativism (28). Multiculturalism, he suggests, is merely a passing fashion, a stubborn refusal to “reach a consensus,” or an “easier” way to deny what is obvious (14). His sarcasm comes across clearly in such phrases as “we frequently hear” and “the argument goes,” as if those who defend cultural diversity are but tiresome pedants (14). Still, while Bennett disparages university faculty and administrators, he also expects them to

revitalize humanities instruction. He offers them two recommendations for doing so: first, they should insist upon “good teaching” by faculty whose mastery of the subject matter and passion for teaching it inspires their students (7-8); and second, they should adopt “a good curriculum,” meaning a common core of courses, which includes humanities instruction beyond the freshman and sophomore years (9-13). Anything different, he implies, can only be bad.

Despite its simplistic recommendations, Bennett’s *To Reclaim a Legacy* spawned a widespread cultural literacy movement, which advocated that students gain mastery of specific knowledge of Western civilization in order to sustain a common American culture. The report paved the way for a series of books, all published under the banner of cultural literacy, which rose to the tops of bestseller lists in the 1980s by playing to the public’s fear of a widespread literacy crisis and deterioration of American values (Anson 14-15). Among these, Hirsch’s *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know* shared with Bennett’s report a predilection for specifying the content—the shared “background knowledge” or “network of information”—that students needed to absorb if they wished to function effectively in American society (Hirsch 2). Another, Bloom’s *The Closing of the American Mind*, upheld the Great Books tradition, arguing that “men may live more truly and fully in reading Plato and Shakespeare than at any other time, because they are participating in essential being” (380).⁵³ Though publicly popular, these paeans to cultural literacy were widely derided within academe as being nostalgic, elitist,

⁵³ Bloom is unapologetic for the obvious chauvinism and essentialism of this statement. Indeed, elsewhere in the book, he blames feminism for having undercut the value of classic texts (65-66). His profuse praise of Plato may also reflect his elitism, for Plato argues in *The Republic* that only members of the elite guardian class may ever attain the wisdom of philosopher-kings.

essentialist, or worse. Reviewing the books in *College English*, for example, Robert Scholes wrote that Hirsch merely waxed sentimentally about “past humanistic glories lost,” while Bloom wholly abandoned education for the masses to concentrate on a “tiny elite” (323-24). Trimbur characterized both Bennett’s and Hirsch’s texts as neoconservative attempts to resolve the legitimation crisis in liberal education by “restoring the hegemony of canonical knowledge” and “reestablish[ing] monolithic cultural and political values” (112, 114). The cause of the humanities was thus perceived to be affiliated, by way of the cultural literacy movement, with elitist and conservative, or even neoconservative, political interests. Bennett, Bloom, Hirsch, and their ilk made it difficult for teachers or scholars to champion the humanities without appearing to espouse the same conservative and elitist positions (Weiland 142). In his 1984 assessment, then, Graff had been prescient: by the 1990s, traditional humanism had become veritably indefensible (“Humanism” 495-96).

This accounts, at least in part, for the steep drop-off in the number of commission reports defending the humanities that were issued during this period. As noted anthropologist Clifford Geertz observes, “Not only [was] the class basis of such a unitary ‘humanism’ completely absent, gone with a lot of other things like adequate bathtubs and comfortable taxis, but, even more important, the agreement on the foundations of scholarly authority, old books and older manners, [had] disappeared” (161). As noted earlier, the 1993 report of the Wingspread Group on Higher Education, sponsored by

various private foundations,⁵⁴ was one of the only commission reports that attempted to breathe new life into broad-based liberal education following the culture wars of the 1980s. Titled *An American Imperative: Higher Expectations for Higher Education*, it railed against the trivialization of undergraduate education and the dereliction of institutions that offer “the credential without the content, the degree without the knowledge and effort it implies” (1). In supporting the need for “the rigors of a liberal education,” it appealed to the democratic values expressed in the U.S. Constitution and the civic virtues affirmed in the earlier Newman and Truman Commission reports (9). It also distinguished itself among reform reports by stressing the need for students to gain experiential learning through engagement in the greater community, “the world beyond the campus” (10). Despite its focus on democratic values and civic engagement, though, the Wingspread Group’s report was largely ignored,⁵⁵ and commission reports thereafter, even those which might have been expected to do so, said little in defense of the humanities.⁵⁶ The Spellings Commission Report, as discussed in Chapter 4, paid only lip service to the need for humanistic learning or to the civic values associated with postsecondary education. And, though numerous books have since been published that bemoan the decline of liberal education and the humanities,⁵⁷ these have largely targeted

⁵⁴ Sponsors of the Wingspread Group on Higher Education included the Johnson Foundation, Lilly Endowment, Pew Charitable Trusts, and the William and Flora Hewitt Foundation.

⁵⁵ A search of JSTOR, for example, finds that the report was never reviewed in any significant language or literature journal and was mentioned only passingly in a small number of articles.

⁵⁶ Most surprising in their lack of any specific humanities defense were the 1998 Boyer Commission report, *Reinventing Undergraduate Education: A Blueprint for America’s Research Universities*, and the 2001 *Reports of the Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Universities*, collectively titled *Returning to Our Roots*.

⁵⁷ These include Richard Hersh and John Merrow’s *Declining by Degrees*; Ellen Schrecker’s *The Lost Soul of Higher Education*; Frank Donoghue’s *The Last Professors*; Geoffrey Galt Harpham’s *The Humanities*

academic audiences that are least in need of convincing. As Graff rightly points out, we in academe do a remarkably poor job of representing ourselves (*Clueless* 39).

Hence, in the concluding sections of this dissertation, I will propose how we in higher education—within our disciplines, our institutions, our labor unions, our professional associations, and our communities outside academe—may rearticulate a defense of the humanities and effectively mobilize a social movement in support of them. My proposals are based not only on my scholarly research and rhetorical analysis of texts for this dissertation, but also on my extensive professional experience in creating public awareness, coalition-building, and grassroots advocacy campaigns. From my standpoint, any campaign in support of the humanities must transcend the limitations associated with the genre of commission reports and the higher education community's typical responses to them; it must build upon the deeply entrenched conceptions of higher education as a means of national defense and as a competitive business or industry; it must take into account the need for students to receive not only a broad-based liberal education, but also preparation for their future vocations or professions; it must involve those constituencies, including students, parents, minoritized populations, and other underrepresented groups, who have largely been excluded from the rhetoric of reform but who have the most at stake in maintaining educational access and equity; it must be consistent with current theoretical developments within the humanities; and further, it must confront the fundamental transformation of higher education that is occurring at the opening of the 21st century, whether we in academe endorse that transformation or not. In short, any

and the Dream of America; Victor Ferrall, Jr.'s *Liberal Arts at the Brink*; Anthony Kronman's *Education's End*; and Andrew Delbanco's *College: What It Was, Is, and Should Be*; among many others.

successful defense of the humanities or movement in support of them must be viable given the social, political, and economic realities that our institutions and disciplines face today—and will face for the foreseeable future.

Rearticulating a Defense

How does one defend a type of education or a group of disciplines which have become seemingly indefensible? The reform reports analyzed in the preceding pages defend the humanities, almost uniformly, on the grounds of a form of humanism referred to here as “traditional” or “Arnoldian.” It is an “idealizing and universalizing” brand of humanism, as Harpham terms it (15), one which corresponds with both Enlightenment and modernist values of intellectualism, individualism, and human progress, and therefore, one which both postmodernist and posthumanist critics have rightly challenged as antiquated. Recent reports on the humanities, as shown, have also appealed to the ideology of neoconservatism in their lament over the supposed degradation of American culture and values. To hear these reports tell it, the sky is falling as Western civilization and all that once made it great circles the drainpipe. But for many of us *within* the humanities, the sky appears to be falling, too. Our disciplines are under attack from all sides—by neoconservative critics who wish to restrict what we teach in our classrooms, by uninformed state legislators who go on slashing our budgets, by pencil-headed administrators focused mainly on the bottom line, by disengaged students who seem more intent on landing a job *after* college than on learning anything while there, and by combined ideological forces which strike many of us as untenable yet appear so

thoroughly entrenched. Nevertheless, articulation theory holds out the hope that no constellation of ideologies can remain forever fixed or dominant (Hall, qtd. in Grossberg 53). The process of disarticulating those value and belief systems may allow us to rearticulate them, and thereby, as Stuart Hall says, to “intervene in history in a progressive way” (“Signification” 95). To return to my rhetorical question, then: how does one defend a type of education or a group of disciplines that have become seemingly indefensible? The rhetorical answer: first, by refusing to believe that they are.

As a means toward that end, I propose rearticulating a defense of the humanities, as core disciplines within liberal education, on the basis of three primary ideologies: first, political progressivism; second, cultural pluralism; and third, what Thomas Kinney and Thomas Miller have termed “*civic posthumanism*” (147, italics in original). The latter, they explain, comes from acknowledging that “our interdependence with technology has replaced modern conceptions of the autonomous individual” and that “our freedoms from and duties to others” are “more mediated” than we might previously have realized (147). It derives, too, from Donna Haraway’s conception of “techno-scientific liberty,” which “takes place in strong, contestatory democratic practice,” in which “consequences matter; knowledge is at stake; freedom and agency are in the making, and there is no possible transcendent resolution of questions by appeal to context-independent disembodied entities, whether they be called God, reason, or nature” (*Modest_Witness* 114-16). The “civic” element of civic posthumanism, as well as the “humanism,” spring from a distinct humanist tradition which grew up apart from and largely in opposition to the one described in the introduction to this chapter. While Protagoras may be seen as the

founder of both, he and his fellow sophists challenged the divine basis of the Greek cultural ideal and thereby introduced a more secular and relativistic strain of humanism (Jaeger 301-02). It was this more civically oriented, rhetorical form of humanism which Cicero and his fellow Roman leaders developed as part of the *artes liberales* (Harpham 10-11). Centuries later, during the Renaissance, such Italian humanists as Giambattista Vico defended this civic tradition of humanism against both the formalism of Plato and the rationalism of Descartes (Grassi 4-5). But, as Kinney and Miller explain, because this civic humanism has roots in the classist, masculinist tradition of “the good man speaking well,” it has become objectionable as a basis for any disciplinary identification (141). Their proposed ideology of civic posthumanism rejects these problematic and anachronistic elements of the tradition, while retaining its civic, collectivist, and rhetorical impulses and melding them with Haraway’s posthumanistic vision to shape a “broadly articulated pragmatic” justification for the humanities disciplines within higher education today (Kinney and Miller 153).

A defense on this ideological basis provides a civic and democratic rationale for the humanities, one which situates our work within the broader community and world and provides a cohesive framework for such outwardly focused forms of study as service learning, community literacy outreach, and ethnographic research (Kinney and Miller 153). Such a defense justifies the humanities not on the basis of their connection to the Great Books or grand narratives of the past, but to the most pressing social concerns of the present and future. Rather than being defended on the grounds of their uselessness, the humanities are positioned as being socially use-*full*. A civic defense also legitimates

humanistic development of the self, but only as a means of cultivating concern for others. That is, the humanities take on the role of developing what education scholar Robert Rhoads has called the “caring self” (27)—one very different from the autonomous and inwardly focused self of traditional humanism.

Under the banner of civic posthumanism, the humanities become the means by which students are prepared for informed participatory citizenship. Humanistic learning hones their critical thinking; broadens their perspectives; immerses them in relevant social, cultural, religious, and political issues; and equips them to take part in deliberative, democratic processes. Within the civic tradition, as Thomas Miller explains,

engaging in public debate helps the citizen know what is best. Purposeful practical action is a means to realize the potential of situations which cannot be determined in the abstract or from a distance. It is in the public sphere that shared values are debated against changing political needs, a debate that advances the common good. (“Rhetoric Within” 36)

Indeed, within the framework of civic posthumanism, the university or college *becomes* a public sphere, where critical engagement with conflicting ideas, values, or belief systems may occur. This is consistent with the political and pedagogical project envisioned by Giroux and Aronowitz, which “links the creation of citizens to the development of critical democracy; ...[and] education to the struggle for a public life in which dialogue, vision, and compassion are attentive to the rights and conditions that organize public life as a democratic social form” (82). Even more broadly, a justification on the basis of civic posthumanism links liberal education with promotion of the social good, helping to avoid the narrow market mentality and careerism which have sapped it of much of its meaning and relevance for students in recent years (Rhoads 25-26). Andrew Deblanco, American

studies and humanities scholar, observes that too many colleges and universities have done little to help students cope with the world's current financial crisis "by failing to reconnect [them] to the idea that good fortune confers a responsibility to live generously toward the less fortunate" (148). Especially at a time when the return on investment or cost-value of going to college has been called into question, liberal education becomes, ironically, *more* marketable when it is positioned not merely as a means to make a living, but as a way to live meaningfully within the larger world.

Most importantly, at least for those of us within rhetoric and composition, the ideology of civic posthumanism assigns to rhetoric a pivotal role within the humanities and liberal education—one which is distinct from the empiricism of science and more in keeping with current postmodernist and posthumanist theoretical movements. As a distinct mode of knowledge-making, rhetoric becomes what compositionist James C. Raymond calls the "methodology of the humanities" (778). Rhetoricians, he explains—whether they are teachers of literature, philosophers, musicologists, art critics, or adherents of any other humanities discipline—rely on words, rather than numbers, signs, or symbols, as their medium. They also have a distinctly nonscientific ways of proving their points: "analogies that obviously limp, striking examples rather than random samples, speculations about chains of causality involving human motives that are inscrutable in any scientific sense or variables more numerous than actuaries can account for" (Raymond 780). That is, they utilize the lines of reasoning Aristotle describes in the *Rhetoric* (Raymond 780-81). Because of this, Raymond contends that rhetoric constitutes the third largest of a set of nesting boxes, encompassing within it both the

methodologies of mathematics and those of science. Rhetoric may draw upon the latter two in deriving its proofs; however, it may also employ its own dialectical methods to demonstrate points that are merely probable (Raymond 781).

In a similar vein, Vico and Grassi point out that rhetoric and philosophy, as unified within the humanistic tradition, are uniquely capable of discovering those “first principles” which provide the basis of all rational thought (Grassi 33-34). Even science, for Vico, is based on argument and conviction and on analogic thinking (Bizell and Hertzberg 862). “All that man is given to know...is limited and imperfect,” he writes (34); it is “impossible to assess human affairs by the inflexible standard of an abstract right” (34)—a position which is very much in keeping with postmodernist and posthumanist thought. For Vico, all knowledge derives from metaphor, the ability to see similarities between unlike things (Grassi 34). Indeed, it is this *ingenium*, or capacity to grasp relationships, which forms the ground of all human capacities (*virtutes*), of all humanly derived meaning, and thus, of all human community (Grassi 65). In addition, rhetoric provides the grounds for reasoning ethically, another methodology which stands apart from and above that of empiricism. Vico complains that modern educational methods, with their emphasis upon natural science and their lack of attention to ethics, leave young people ill-equipped for civic engagement (77), whereas liberal arts education nurtures *ingenium*, thereby making a civilization, with emphasis upon civility and the civil, possible (Grassi 92).

Closely related to civic posthumanism, the second ideological plank of my rearticulated defense of the humanities is political progressivism, in particular, that which

was formulated and promulgated early in the 20th century by John Dewey.⁵⁸ As opposed to classical or *laissez-faire* liberalism with its emphasis upon the autonomous, competitive, and self-serving individual, the progressivism that Dewey espoused positions the individual in relation to the larger society as one whose well-being is “tied to the well-being of the whole” and whose freedom emanates from participation in “an ethically desirable social order” (Festenstein). “Men are not isolated non-social atoms, but are men only when in intrinsic relations *to* men,” Dewey writes. “A state represents men [only in] so far as they have become organically related to one another, or are possessed of unity of purpose and interest” (“The Ethics” 231-32, italics mine). For this type of social order to exist, though, citizens must be educated democratically through direct inquiry and construction of their own knowledge, not through mere spectatorship (Festenstein). This is where liberal education and study of the humanities come into play. Under the banner of political progressivism, liberal education and learner-centered, humanistic study become a means by which students—not merely the privileged few, but *all* students—gain the requisite knowledge and capabilities to take part in participatory democracy. As humanities scholar Christopher Voparil argues in his own defense of liberal education, educating students liberally goes beyond exposing them to a range of disciplines: “It is also about cultivating habits: habits of critical thinking, reading, writing, and effective communication, to be sure. But also habits of expressing what one believes, of taking seriously the perspectives of others, and of seeing issues from more

⁵⁸ Also known as “New Liberalism,” political progressivism is distinguished here from the educational progressivism espoused by Dewey, which focused upon scientism as a means toward social progress (Jackson and Miller 93).

than one side” (3). If aligned with progressivism, then, liberal education may be promoted as a way to help heal our badly fractured democracy, a way to cultivate civil dialogue and participatory decision-making while helping to overcome partisan narrow-mindedness and civic malaise. Further, it may help to build the bridges within our democracy that the Truman Commission on Higher Education once envisaged while narrowing the gaping divides of inequality that Lyndon Johnson in his remarks on higher education so deplored. By giving every student a voice, as well as the capacity to use it, liberal education and the humanities thus provide pathways to social justice.

Finally, my rearticulated defense of the humanities rests upon the plank of cultural pluralism, or multiculturalism, a political philosophy which recognizes differences among groups, revalues the contributions of those who are unrecognized or disrespected, and challenges dominant patterns of representation or communication that serve to marginalize some groups while positioning others as predominant or normative (“Multiculturalism”). According to Jürgen Habermas, multiculturalism calls for “the mutual recognition of *all* members as equals,” whether individually or collectively, and requires “transformation of interpersonal relations via communicative action and discourse that can ultimately be achieved only through debates over identity politics within the democratic public arena” (“Between Naturalism” 293, italics mine). For their very survival, he contends, all individuals and groups must have access to cultural resources that provide for them “the orienting power of internalized cultural values” (“Between Naturalism” 295). To gain a sense of identity and belonging, they must be able to see reflections of themselves and their own culture(s). Further, to become caring

members of their local communities and capable global citizens, they need opportunities to interact with cultures besides their own (Rhoads 27).

Defending humanistic study on the basis of cultural pluralism, then, means making such diverse cultural resources available both to students and members of the broader community. It requires eschewing essentialist notions of what it means to be human and abandoning efforts to designate a canon of great books or great works of civilization(s). A pluralistic defense of the humanities would build upon the acceptance of multiple cultural traditions expressed by the Rockefeller Commission, but differ from it in rejecting any uniform standard meant to determine what constitutes a “classic” or any attempt to incorporate those independent cultures into one “common culture.” Thus, it would accord with impulses of both postmodernism and posthumanism in that it would value individual difference without requiring assimilation or consensus, while recognizing, too, that culture is socially constructed, so it may be reconstructed. Such a defense of the humanities might seem Pollyannaish, especially at a time when ideologies of capitalism, neoliberalism, and neoconservatism are so firmly rooted and multiculturalism is being assailed from all sides. Yet, to borrow language from Donna Haraway’s own regenerative cultural politics, we in the humanities need to believe that “sight can be remade...to see the world in the hues of red, green, and ultraviolet” and to accept “responsibility for an imagined elsewhere that we may yet learn to see and build here” (*The Promises* 295). The concluding sections of this dissertation propose strategies by which we in the humanities disciplines may contribute toward actualizing this culturally pluralistic, posthumanistic vision.

Restructuring a Metaphor

As this dissertation has amply demonstrated, the metaphors that have historically been associated with higher education are not only long-standing but also long-enduring. The ways in which metaphors of business and defense have successively shaped and reshaped higher education are literally carved into the masonry of our buildings and ossified within the organizational structures of our institutions. One or the other may recede from view for a while, but it always reemerges, often in a slightly altered form. And, though many scholars have objected to the superimposition of these linguistic domains upon academe, their arguments have, if anything, only served to reinforce the metaphoric connections. However, as ample evidence shows, too, structural metaphors do evolve over time in response to changing social, cultural, or economic circumstances. As Lakoff and Johnson affirm, conceptual metaphors may persist for thousands of years and, even if fallacious, take on the aura of truth, especially if they are “imposed upon us by people in power—political leaders, religious leaders, business leaders, advertisers, the media, etc.” (245, 159-60). Yet they also evolve along with “the construction of social and political reality” and spawn what are perceived as new truths (Lakoff and Johnson 159). Therefore, it is not unreasonable to suppose that metaphors of higher education as a form of national defense and as business or industry might evolve or be restructured accordingly.

The metaphor of defense, for example, might be aligned with a defense of the humanities as described above through a slight alteration to one of the metaphor’s many entailments. Rather than positioning the humanities as a way to defend the U.S. as a

nation-state, they could be promoted instead as a way to defend the principles on which the nation was founded. Correspondingly, rather than associating liberal education with ideologies of nationalism, militarism, and American exceptionalism, it could be linked through the metaphor of defense to such democratic ideals as freedom, equality, and participatory government. Through this restructured metaphor of defense, liberal education would be characterized very differently than in reform reports of the Cold War era; it would be conceptualized not as a way to proselytize for democracy or maintain U.S. world domination, but instead as a way to sustain and engage democratic values within our own civic spheres and communities. The humanities disciplines would be metaphorically situated, then, in relation to the kind of virtual or actual public sphere theorized by Habermas, in which citizens legitimate or contest the policies and operations of their government through their own acts of assembly or dialogue (Soules).

Additionally, they would be linked, as Aronowitz and Giroux propose, to “a democratic social form...in which different voices and traditions exist and flourish to the degree that they listen to the voices of others” (82). Given the growing dissatisfaction with the governance of our country today as well as the widespread sentiment that the majority of citizens lack a voice, this may be an opportune moment to metaphorically tie liberal education to the defense of participatory democracy and thus seize the rhetorical openings provided by such highly publicized social actions as the Occupy Movement, recent anti-Wall Street rallies, and large-scale labor union protests. Through such “external politicization,” according to Habermas, universities and colleges may also

evolve to be more internally democratic, with students, junior faculty, and professors playing a greater role in their administration (*Toward a Rational* 10-12).

The current internal structure of postsecondary institutions, with its highly demarcated and specialized academic departments and power vested in a centralized administration, grew from the metaphoric association between universities and business during the industrial era, as discussed in Chapter 3. When the metaphor of higher education as a business re-emerged in reform rhetoric of the 1980s, it reinforced this antiquated organizational model, while overlaying it with the tenets of quality management. Like any other structural metaphor, though, the metaphor of business has the capacity to evolve and generate new entailments. Given its longevity, it is unlikely to cease being used. Still, if universities or colleges are inevitably to be conceptualized as businesses, then shouldn't their structures at least adapt to be more consistent with business models of today? *The Second Newman Report: National Policy and Higher Education* advanced this line of reasoning as far back as 1973, when it called for restructuring of postsecondary education to accord with its greater egalitarianism (U.S. Dept. of Health xxii). "Higher education is not, and should never become, a 'system,'" it contended. "These institutions are already more homogeneous in their missions and academic programs and more uniform in their teaching and administration than they should be if they are to maximize their effectiveness as centers of thought and learning" (U.S. Dept. of Health xxii). Employing the metaphor of business, the report concluded that institutions needed to differentiate themselves from one another to better serve the needs of their "diverse clientele" (U.S. Dept. of Health xxiii). More recently, Stanley N.

Katz, president emeritus of the American Council for Learned Societies, has argued for *less* specialization within universities as a means to better educate undergraduates and rekindle relations with the public (B7). “Research universities have, sadly, become too large, arrogant, rapacious, and impersonal for outsiders to understand and sympathize with,” he writes (B7). Despite their differing conclusions, both Katz and the Newman Commission emphasize the need for postsecondary institutions to communicate more effectively with constituencies outside their ivory walls and to array complex disciplinary knowledge more accessibly for those within. To achieve these ends, higher education needs to be restructured, both metaphorically and actually, as a networked organization, one which facilitates connectivity and collaboration across an extended web of people, disciplines, institutions, and ideas. This kind of organizational model, based upon the theory that new knowledge is born through the convergence of ideas, is one being adopted by many businesses today. Rhetoric and composition departments have already begun establishing such connectivity outside the university through service learning, community literacy, and other outreach programs, but a broader conceptualization of the field under the banner of “literacy studies” may also facilitate networking across traditional disciplinary boundaries of rhetoric, poetics, and civics (T. Miller, “Lest We Go” 34-35). This networked architecture may be realized more fully if the metaphor of higher education as a business comes to reflect it, for where the structural metaphor leads, the university tends to follow.

Restructuring the metaphor of business would also lend to a less hierarchical, less fractionalized conception of higher education, in which liberal learning would be seen as

complementary to professional or vocational preparation. Within a networked university or college, the two needn't be antithetical. The tendency to perceive them as such arises from the opposition between knowing (*episteme*) and doing (*techne*) in the Western intellectual tradition, but such dualism has been persuasively challenged by progressivist educational theorists, among others. In *Democracy and Education* Dewey argues, for example, that “there is no such thing as genuine knowledge and fruitful understanding except as the offspring of doing” (321). Class divisions have perpetuated the existing split between vocational preparation and liberal education, he contends,⁵⁹ but this false dichotomy must be overcome:

An education which acknowledges the full intellectual and social meaning of a vocation would include instruction in the historic background of present conditions; training in science to give intelligence and initiative in dealing with material and agencies of production; and study of economics, civics, and politics, to bring the future worker in touch with the problems of the day and the various methods proposed for its improvement. Above all, it would train power of readaptation to changing conditions so that future workers would not become blindly subject to a fate imposed upon them. (Dewey, *Democracy* 372)

A similar argument can be made for bridging the divide between professional education and liberal or humanistic learning, for business leaders today require the same educational grounding and powers of re-adaptation that Dewey describes. A recently commissioned study by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, entitled *Rethinking Undergraduate Business Education: Liberal Learning for the Profession*, supports synthesis of the liberal and business education, arguing that business

⁵⁹ The kind of two-tier educational system Dewey warned of is taking shape once again, as rising tuition costs at public universities force lower-income students into community or for-profit colleges, where vocational preparation is emphasized over liberal learning. This type of system merely reproduces class divisions.

schools have much to learn from the humanities disciplines, and vice versa.⁶⁰ “Business and liberal learning must be woven together to prepare students for their professional roles and work and also to prepare them for lives of social contribution and personal fulfillment,” write the authors. “In this sense, we propose an integrative vision” (Colby, et al 2). To promote this vision, though, the metaphoric depiction of higher education in commission reports and other reform rhetoric must reflect it, not deflect it. The terministic screen must be widened to reveal a fuller picture of postsecondary learning as a way to prepare students both vocationally and liberally.

Even so, remembering that any metaphor highlights some aspects of the subject while downplaying or deflecting from others, we in the humanities would also be wise to continue emphasizing ways in which higher education is *not* like a business. In so doing, we would only be reminding our constituents of what business and education leaders recognized at the dawning of the 20th century but seem to have forgotten today: that universities and colleges (other than for-profits) are not profit-making enterprises. They neither have direct control over their funding sources nor the ability to raise funds in the way that businesses commonly do by selling equity shares to investors (Newfield 31-33). This makes it nearly impossible for them to forecast their revenue streams from year-to-year or to operate with businesslike efficiency. We also need to reinforce the message that a monetary valuation cannot be placed on every line item on a college or university’s balance sheet; some values that higher education produces are intangible or not

⁶⁰ Especially relevant in this context, the study suggests that the humanities disciplines may steal a page from business schools by incorporating more experiential learning, thus overcoming the perceived dichotomy between learning and doing.

immediately apparent. As Lears points out, for example, “Good teaching is an investment in the minds of the young, as obscure in result, as remote from immediate proof as planting a chestnut seedling” (27). Its “value-added” cannot readily be gauged by standardized tests. Lastly, as we talk about business values in relationship to higher education, we need to reiterate that in the cost-value equation, reduction of means ultimately requires a commensurate reduction of ends. Thus, less going *in* to higher education must inevitably result in less coming *out*; at some point, only so much efficiency can be achieved without lowering the quality of product. Failing to recognize this has hamstrung higher education in fulfilling some of its most basic public purposes over recent decades. As Slaughter and Rhoades demonstrate, practices of academic capitalism tend to erode public benefits of higher education as well as the public’s support of it (29). But, by restructuring the metaphors of higher education as business and defense, we may hope to reverse these trends.

Reshaping a Genre

Just as structural metaphors like those of business or defense may evolve, so may genres. In fact, Carolyn Miller relates metaphors and other figurative language directly to genres, arguing that both have a similar capacity to bring together disparate groups and to structure social action. Both offer “a wealth of ways to create similarity out of difference, to wheedle, as it were, identification out of division,” she writes (“Rhetorical Community” 74). Not only that, but genres, like metaphors, evolve as a construction of their cultures; in this way, they are “fundamentally heterogeneous and contentious” (C.

Miller, “Rhetorical Community” 69, 74). Charles Bazerman likewise argues that genres may either shape social action or be shaped by it. “By using these typified texts,” he explains, “we are able to advance our own interests and shape our meanings in relation to complex social systems” (79). Nevertheless, we needn’t act as “cogs,” merely driven by genres. He encourages us instead to recognize genres as “levers” we may “use and construct close to type (but with focused variation) in order to *create* consequential social action” (Bazerman 79, italics mine). Bazerman’s parenthetical statement here bears emphasis, for while genres may be reproduced, they may also be recreated. This applies not only to commission reports but also to the higher education community’s responses to them. There is no reason we must adhere to generic conventions, although a brief glance at our responses to commission reports demonstrates that we generally do.

The responses of nine professional associations representing the higher education community to the August 2006 release of the Spellings Commission Report provide a case in point.⁶¹ Each association raised its objections to the report in a terse but diplomatically worded statement to its members, the commission, and the news media. Each followed much the same rhetorical pattern, first commending the commission, then critiquing specific aspects of the report, and finally, making gestures of conciliation. While space does not permit a more detailed analysis here, suffice it to say that the response statements represent what Carolyn Miller calls “typified rhetorical action” and therefore might arguably instantiate a genre (“Genre” 152). Because the statements were

⁶¹ These include the American Association of Community Colleges, American Association of State Colleges and Universities, American Association of University Professors, American Council on Education (ACE), American Federation of Teachers, Association of American Colleges and Universities, Association of American Universities, Modern Language Association of America, and the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities.

restrained by generic conventions and expectations, they were limited in their rhetorical effectiveness. If their purpose was to garner significant media coverage or generate a groundswell of opposition to the Spellings Commission, they had neither effect.⁶² From a public relations standpoint, the statements lacked persuasiveness because, by their very nature, they were responsive. In issuing such statements, the associations did not take a proactive stance on issues of reform but instead sought to stonewall against the recommendations of others—a strategy which may have been effective when federal and state agencies had limited influence over the future direction and funding of postsecondary education, but is no longer. The second shortcoming of the associations' responses, and with other responses of the higher education community to commission reports, is that they were issued separately, not jointly, so their rhetorical impact was diffused. Rather than forming a united front, the associations spoke to the interests and concerns of their own members, not to key influencers in the debate over higher education reform.

This is not to lay blame or deny that other strategies for countering the Spellings Commission's recommendations were not carried out beyond the media's glare or public's purview. Still, given that many of the Spellings Commission's recommendations have now been implemented in some form and that its articulation of ideologies has been reproduced in much of higher education reform rhetoric since, it is fair to say that the professional associations did not respond effectively, whatever their strategies may have

⁶² An analysis of national newspaper coverage that appeared in the two weeks following issuance of the Spellings Commission Report reveals that the only association response statement quoted widely was that of David Ward, then president of the ACE (who was also the Spellings Commission's lone dissenting member), and even his response was almost universally buried toward the end of stories.

been. Commissions continue to issue their reports with little involvement from the higher education community and little effort toward rearticulating the value of the humanities.

Reshaping the genre of commission reports may offer one hope for rectifying this imbalance of power and influence. As history has shown, representatives of higher education can form commissions of their own or play a more influential role in those formed by others. Such an approach would enable those of us within the humanities to rearticulate the values of our disciplines along the lines I have proposed here and to restructure the metaphors of defense and business in accordance with our own aims. Not only would this involve reinventing the genre of commission reports but also re-envisioning the commission as a means of structuring social action. According to Carolyn Miller, genres exert the “centripetal forces” necessary to draw together groups whose interests and actions are normally centrifugally divided (“Rhetorical” 74). Along these lines, commissions may unite those who have traditionally been excluded from the dialog over higher education reform, whose interests have been subordinated, or whose voices have been silenced—most notably, women and minoritized communities, students and their families, as well as faculty and staff who toil beneath the upper echelons of academe. In addition, the genre of the commission report would allow for our disciplines, institutions, labor unions, and professional organizations to present a more unified front on reform issues to policymakers, the news media, and other constituencies.

History offers many precedents for such collective social action. British linguistics scholar Liz Morrish suggests that we look to feminism and queer studies as “models of appropriating discourse, of confounding the rhetorical privileging of

exclusionary language, and of reworking the meanings of language used to oppress” (237). These forms of resistance might enable us to battle the “technologization of discourse” and “disciplining of subjects” within the university, which could otherwise render us “a cadre of bureaucratized ciphers” (Morrish 230, 236-37). Brian Jackson and Thomas Miller turn to the progressive movement as an instructive study in educational coalition-building. “Progressivism served as an inclusive ideological frame for coalitions of educators and ministers, bureaucrats and social workers, muckraking journalists and realist novelists, and community activists who ranged from socialists seeking to build a new order to reformers looking to check the excesses of capitalism,” they explain (94). Such a “shared sense of...needs and aspirations” might spur a similar social movement to counteract the impacts of liberal individualism and free-market capitalism upon higher education today (Jackson and Miller 111-13). Paradigms for engaging students in resistance or reform might also be found in the responses of veterans returning to classroom under the GI Bill, the student protest movements of the 1960s and ‘70s (leaving aside their violence), and the recent Occupy Movement.

Whatever models we follow, we need to draw lessons from the commission reports on higher education reform analyzed in these pages. Those that have had the most profound and enduring influence have propelled the genre beyond its traditional boundaries; have harnessed the exigency of social, political, or economic crisis; and have coalesced the power of metaphor and ideology to restructure staid conceptions of higher learning. Such a genre “can give us the understanding to lead old hopes and expectations down familiar-seeming garden paths, but that lead to new places” writes Bazerman.

“Only by uncovering the pathways that guide our lives in certain directions can we begin to identify the possibilities for new turns” (100). The current debates over the “worth” or “value” of higher education challenge those of us within the humanities to respond, but further, they provide a *kairotic* moment for us to rearticulate the value of our disciplines and to reshape a genre toward new rhetorical ends.

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