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Introduction: The Worlds That Undergraduates Make

In the spring of 1983, a black freshman at the University of Michigan summed up his first year in college: "I'm having no fun." The students around him were so bent on work that they walked to class without looking up and then rushed back to study: "nobody is willing to stop and talk to each other." All he heard around him was GPA—grade point average: "three letters that I am tired of hearing." He mimicked what he disliked: "Why should I mess up my GPA? Why should I do this to my GPA?" He had come to college because he saw it as a chance "to get away, to find yourself." But college had turned into "study, study, study." With everyone thinking about grades, he felt cheated: "You don't have time to expand."

A white friend down the hall agreed. He had not found what he had looked for in coming to college, "that other side of college life besides academics." He did not hold his professors or deans responsible for the competitive, tense atmosphere. Rather he blamed his fellow students, who—"too ready to grow up"—wanted to jump from high school to career. What he heard around him was "I have to get a 3.5 to get to med school." As a result "the stuff in between is kind of lost," what he had come to college for: the "freedom to find out what to do."[1]

As these freshmen realized, this is a difficult time to be a college student. The pressures are great; the life, often grim. Although undergraduates enjoy partying on weekends that can begin on Wednesday night, they confine their friendships to the narrow social groups from which they spring. For some, extracurricular activities form part of their work or recreation, but the college no longer inspires any sense of community or service. Few college students ask existential questions about the meaning of life. As they

compete for the grades that will get them into professional schools, they allow themselves little room to grow and become. College moves them along to a job or a career, but for most it no longer serves to liberate their souls.

What is the cause? Are undergraduates really only children of whom we should expect little? No; earlier collegians, equally youthful, were not content to be dependent sons and daughters. They demanded to be considered adults. Are contemporary students less villains than victims, caught by economic forces beyond their control? Perhaps; but other generations of students confronted in college the harsh challenges of an unfriendly future and yet allowed themselves the pleasures and the pains of an intense college world. What makes the 1980s different?

The answer lies in the collective experience of undergraduates inherited from the nineteenth century and transformed in the 1960s and 1970s. In entering college, freshmen step into a complex environment containing alternative student cultures, each with its own standards and values. These particular undergraduate worlds give form to students' lives and meaning to their experience. Collegiate canons shape how students perceive both their formal education of courses, classes, and books and their informal education of social relationships, organizations, and rituals. Although college authorities have attempted to mold undergraduate worlds, they have succeeded only in setting the outer parameters of permissible behavior. College faculty has seen itself as determining students' lives through the courses that it teaches and through the power of personal influence. But professorial words and gestures have been filtered through the evolving cultures of students' own devising.

Eighteen-year-olds who leave home to enter college feel as if they are embarking on a great adventure in which all the choices are theirs. In part this is true, for the college world contains a number of possibilities which give the appearance of choice. But college students enter a social order that, like the communities they are leaving, has emerged from an earlier time. The undergraduate cultures that today's students inherit have traditions that shape the way those within them see their situation and act.

The multiple contexts in which these traditions operate have undergone radical transformation. As the United States became an industrial nation and world power, higher education shifted from a marginal to a central force in the polity. The number and proportion of young people going to college greatly increased. Their socioeconomic composition shifted. And the relation between higher education and their futures changed.

In 1800 roughly 2 percent of young men went to college. They were a

motley crew, ranging in age from the early teens to the thirties. The youngest were the sons of Southern landed and Northern mercantile wealth eager for the polish of the gentleman. Also young were the offspring of the small urban professional elite, in college to attain skills comparable to their fathers'. The oldest came from modest farms with the clear intention to become ministers. At first counting in 1840, 16,233 students were reported in 173 institutions.[2]

The nineteenth century saw important changes in higher education. As the population rose, the numbers of enrolled students increased: by 1880 there were 85,378 students in 591 colleges and universities. New types of schools came into being, offering courses that challenged the traditional curriculum. Through the Morrill Act of 1862, the national government attempted to foster agricultural and mechanical training and the spread of public institutions. Philanthropists endowed separate colleges for women and blacks, and some institutions integrated them. But despite these changes, until the 1880s the proportion of young Americans in college remained relatively stable.[3]

Agrarian and mercantile America was largely uninterested in formal credentials and gave youths the chance to learn occupations in a wide variety of ways. College had limited usefulness. For well-placed young men, it proffered the good times they had come to expect, contacts with others of their own kind, and the foundation for the culture of gentlemen. For the small numbers of the urban elite with professional fathers, college promised to extend status into the next generation. For the striving, it opened a way into the professions, yielding entry into the middle class and at least a modest income. By the late nineteenth century, such industrious students were shifting from the ministry to education, journalism, engineering, scientific agriculture, pharmacy, and medicine. They now included women, who, like their brothers, came to college for general culture or to train for the professions, especially for schoolteaching. For young men looking forward to careers in business as entrepreneurs or as managers, however, there was little incentive to go to college. Far better to begin working early and gain useful experience. Even some doctors or lawyers might bypass college (or even secondary school) and study with a practitioner or go to an independent professional school without benefit of the liberal arts.

By the end of the nineteenth century the rate of college-going began its steady rise. In 1880 less than 2 percent of those between eighteen and twenty-one attended college; by 1890, 3 percent did so. In the first half of the twentieth century, the numbers roughly doubled every ten or twenty years. By 1900, 4 percent of those between eighteen and twenty-one at-

tended college; by 1920, 8 percent; by 1940, 16 percent; by 1950, 30 percent; by 1970, 48 percent.[4]

What explains this increase? Changes within the educational system provided the necessary support. Higher education built on the elementary and secondary school system that vastly expanded in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, preparing larger numbers and proportions of children over increasing numbers of years. Except among those training to become schoolteachers, however, this did not in itself generate new college enrollments. In the course of the twentieth century, the ratio of students in colleges and universities to those in primary and secondary schools shifted from 1 in 80 to 1 in 10.[5] This suggests that more important than the number of students prepared to go to college was the proportion of those prepared students who chose to enter college. The twentieth century saw the founding of new institutions of higher education to attract students. So had the nineteenth century. The difference in the twentieth century was that students came to the colleges, old and new.

The true source of the pull of higher education on American youth was the transformation of American society. In the nineteenth century the United States became an industrial nation. Beginning with textile mills and railroads before the Civil War, the application of machinery to the process of production vastly increased the output and the scale of manufacturing. After the war the development of heavy industry and growing production greatly intensified the process. Natural increase and immigration swelled the population. Agriculture, which once occupied the bulk of the population, required fewer hands.[6] Changes in sources of power from water to coal brought factories to cities. As manufacturing was added to mercantile enterprises, cities grew and spread across the continent and attracted dwellers from American farms and from Europe and Asia. The wave of consolidation gathered firms into large combinations. Beginning with the railroads and the federal government, bureaucratic organization spread to these combines. American business and manufacturing corporations began to hire new kinds of employees: a vast army of white-collar workers, such as bookkeepers and clerks, and a smaller number of professionals, such as corporate lawyers, accountants, engineers, and architects. Growing urban populations and greater wealth meant the increasing need of goods and services of all kinds and the more frequent resort to experts—doctors, dentists, architects, and lawyers. In the four decades after 1870 the number of professionals increased over four times to total 1,150,000 by 1910. In the same period, those in finance, real estate, and trade more than trebled, amounting by 1910 to 2,760,000.[7]

In the post–Civil War years higher education was altering in form and content. Out of the many experiments of the nineteenth century came the university with its new approach to knowledge and conception of the curriculum. Empiricism reshaped the liberal arts. In addition, with the decline of apprenticeship, frankly vocational subjects, such as engineering and accounting, became college-level courses. Innovative teachers introduced empirical methods and reshaped graduate and professional education to incorporate scientific and technological knowledge. Newly created or strengthened professional associations devised standards for entry that required graduation from accredited schools and licensing examinations. Professional schools, once independent, associated with universities and increasingly required a B.A. degree for entrance.

As work and education in America changed, so did the prospects for youth and the place of college in their lives. While the bulk of white-collar positions required only high school, those that promised movement upward through management gradually began to prefer college men. American business had always favored those with capital and connections. College became the place to extend these benefits, broaden acquaintances, and learn how to lead. As more and more middle-class youth came to college, some of them aspired to these advantages. They saw college as instrumental for acquiring not only business and accounting skills but also contacts and style. By the 1920s going to college became normal for youth from the broad reaches of the middle class. They came from American farms and cities because they perceived college as their principal access to jobs with futures—careers.

While many in the middle class had their eyes on business, some looked to the professions, old and new. In this they were joined by some sons of wealth and by the small number of working-class youth in college. Family backing, connections (now enhanced by college), imagination, grit, and luck might account for financial success in many businesses, but, especially in larger corporations, engineering provided one of the surer routes to management.[8] The substantial salaries of the new vocations and professions demanded competence proven through disciplined training. The elite looked to professions, such as corporate law, that promised the highest prestige and income. The few of the aspiring poor who entered college continued to prepare themselves for occupations that promised upward mobility.[9]

For those hoping to enter the professions, new standards began to apply. An engineering degree or admission into law school may have required only passing grades, but to some employers academic achievement began to matter. Industry looked to high marks in the hiring of engineers. To make

law review became a source of prestige respected by prominent law firms.

By the early twentieth century, a coherent, though heterogeneous, educational system had emerged in which the institutions of higher education sat at the top. Children moved up the grade ladder of elementary and secondary schools. Upon graduation, those with backing and motivation entered college. In 1910 there were approximately 150,000 undergraduates in American colleges and universities. Roughly one-third took the classical course, as it was then defined, to prepare themselves in a general way for business or for professional school. Two-thirds took courses geared to vocations, such as engineering or accounting.[10] After receiving a B.A. or its equivalent, those intent on a profession, such as law or medicine, that required an advanced degree then attended a graduate school within a university.

College students increasingly went to schools under public control. At the turn of the century, there were almost 3 students in public colleges and universities for every 2 in private; by 1965 there were almost 2 in public institutions for every 1 in private.[11] The two-year community college arose to open access to higher education to new segments of the population, claiming enrollments of over one-half million by 1950.[12]

Certain colleges and universities became competitive by the mid-twentieth century. Their graduates fared far better in occupation, leadership, and income. In all institutions, but especially those with open admissions, grades became the means to sort students. Poor grades forced some to leave, flunking out. Of those who remained, some stayed in place, merely graduating. Others made high grades and advanced to graduate and professional schools. In 1960 over 75 percent of Yale students anticipated post-graduate training, in contrast to 20 percent in 1920 going on to graduate work.[13]

Despite the emergence of a stratified educational system channeling its most achieving students into the professions, a dual relation between the American occupational structure and higher education has persisted. Although in the twentieth century more positions of high income and prestige have required high grades in college and professional school, sectors have remained where academic achievement has counted for little, and family background, confirmed only by college admission, all. Until the 1960s the children of alumni still had preference in Ivy League colleges and universities. Right connections led to the right clubs and the right firms. Quotas in private institutions limited the number of Jews; outside the Negro colleges or the public institutions of the North, racism effectively barred all but a few blacks. Jews might make law review, but discrimination within major corporate law firms limited their entry into jobs and partnerships and

relegated them to less prestigious and less lucrative forms of legal practice.[14] Although discrimination has eroded in the last decades, the white Gentile enclave has been partially able to protect itself from the claims of academic achievement. Moreover, entrepreneurship continues to bring rewards to a few. Although large firms have dominated the economy, a sector has remained open to small business. Here, where good fortune, determination, and an idea or product count, no high-level educational credentials have been necessary, although they might help.

But as the twentieth century has progressed, an increasing proportion of positions of high income and prestige have required both the B.A. and professional training. Because of the manner in which the U.S. Census sorted the labor force there are no accurate totals for professionals as a group. However, specifics are illuminating. In 1900 there were 131,000 in health callings, which included healers and chiropractors as well as physicians and surgeons. By 1920 there were 157,000 physicians and surgeons alone, a number that rose to 195,000 by 1950. During the half century, lawyers and judges rose from 108,000 to 184,000; accountants and auditors, from 23,000 to 390,000; scientists, from 12,000 to 302,000.[15]

Beginning with World War II, the demands of industry and government created new positions in engineering and experimental science: almost 150,000 new jobs in engineering appeared during the decade of the 1940s. For those with educational credentials, industrial and government bureaucracies had jobs with the possibility of rapid advancement. Professional schools and firms softened their quotas. Colleges and universities largely ceased to discriminate in their professorships. Between 1950 and 1970 the proportion of the employed holding professional positions grew from 6.9 percent of the work force to 12.1 percent. The number of government officials, salaried businessmen, and non-profit managers—many of them trained as professionals—rose markedly. In contrast, both the relative position and the absolute number of independent businessmen declined.[16]

During these years higher education underwent enormous expansion at all levels—community colleges, four-year institutions, and universities. The great growth was in the public sector, and it received the lion's share of students. By the late 1970s the ratio of public to private enrollments was over 3 to 1. Increasing numbers went, at least for their first two years, to community colleges, which drew roughly 40 percent of undergraduates. At the same time, a small number of prestigious private colleges and universities faced a rising flood of applicants competing for scarce places in the "hot" colleges. Graduate education mushroomed to include over 1.3 million taking graduate and professional courses.[17]

Shifts in employment patterns and educational opportunities in the past and present matter because young people have their eyes on the future. Their initial decisions of whether or not to enter college and of which college to attend are shaped by their economic and social position and career expectations. So, too, are their choices once in college. On campus they are confronted with conflicting worlds. To a large extent existing student societies do the choosing, sorting students out by wealth, status, and gender. But to some degree assent is necessary, requiring students to decide which group to join and whether or not to try another.

In addition to economic and social position and hopes about the future, undergraduates have brought basic human differences to the creation of their college worlds. They have varied not only in that they have been rich and poor, male and female, Jewish and Gentile, black and white. They have also differed in their need for others, their casts of mind, their approach to knowledge, and their desire for action. When all undergraduates studied the same curriculum, formal higher education did not take their variety into account. As the higher learning grew and changed, greater flexibility in courses of study accommodated many more kinds of students. Though wide-ranging in its offerings, college has nonetheless presupposed that its young population was willing to spend long hours alone in study. This may have satisfied the inquisitive or contemplative who enjoyed being by themselves. Gregarious doers, however, may have felt compelled to seek company and action outside of class.[18]

Humans differ profoundly, but in any society and era certain types tend to dominate. On a familiar level we think of the distinctive traits of Americans and those of other nations, and look to foreign observers such as Alexis de Toqueville to inform us about ourselves. We also implicitly accept the notion of a Representative Man, one who from Ralph Waldo Emerson's time until ours has captured the spirit of the age. David Riesman perceived a basic shift in the American type from the individualistic, inner-directed men of the nineteenth century to the peer-oriented, other-directed ones of the mid-twentieth century. In the 1960s Kenneth Keniston and Robert Jay Lifton posited that the needs of post-industrial society were creating a new protean man. In the 1970s Christopher Lasch characterized the American—emerging in what many were calling the age of "Me-ism"—as narcissistic.

In the twentieth century it has been a fashionable intellectual pursuit to link these changing types of Americans to evolving child-rearing practices. This reached absurd levels in the 1960s as critics rushed to blame student unrest on the advice of Dr. Benjamin Spock. Although the linkage is subject

to abuse, it is too useful to relinquish. It helps us understand how students have sorted themselves out in college.

Young people have come to college from widely divergent backgrounds with very different life histories. In some households they have been implicitly encouraged since birth to be gregarious and expressive; in others, introspective and obedient; in others, independent and questioning. Parental expectations and rewards and punishments have shaped young minds and bodies. Undergraduates bring to their higher education a great deal of baggage from their short pasts.[19]

Wealth and status have set the outer dimensions of possibility; the psyche, the inner dimensions of choice. Because family position is frequently related to child-rearing practices, the external and the internal have often fit, and undergraduates have found the form of college experience that has satisfied them. But college students have been confronted with only a limited repertoire of possibilities. Given the many varieties of human beings who enter college, some students have not had a recognized path open to them. This has created the conditions that have made for personal unhappiness, individual resistance, or collective change.

By the late eighteenth century American youth in college divided into two basic paths. Undergraduates might become college men or remain outsiders. As women entered coeducational and all-female institutions of higher education in the nineteenth century, distinctive female variants emerged. In the early twentieth century, a third route opened, collegiate rebellion, available to both men and women. These three contending male undergraduate cultures and their female counterparts arose from particular historical contexts and were linked to socioeconomic position and personal style.

College life was born in the violent revolts of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. All over the new nation colleges experienced a wave of collective student uprisings, led by the wealthier and worldlier undergraduates. College discipline conflicted with the genteel upbringing of the elite sons of Southern gentry and Northern merchants. Pleasure-seeking young men who valued style and openly pursued ambition rioted against college presidents and faculty determined to put them in their place. In every case, the outbreaks were forcibly suppressed; but the conflict went underground. Collegians withdrew from open confrontation to turn to covert forms of expression. They forged a peer consciousness sharply at odds with that of the faculty and of serious students and gave it institutional expression in the fraternity and club system.

College life was altogether agreeable to affluent male adolescents of the

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nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In the competitive world of peers, *college men* could fight for position on the playing field and in the newsroom and learn the manly arts of capitalism. As they did so, they indulged their love of rowdiness and good times in ritualized violence and sanctioned drinking. Classes and books existed as the price one had to pay for college life, but no right-thinking college man worried about marks beyond the minimum needed to stay in the game. Faculty and students faced each other across the trenches. If cheating was needed to win the battle, no shame inhered in the act. No real college man ever expected to learn in the classroom, not at least the kind of knowledge that bore any relation to his future life in the world. No, college life taught the real lessons; and from it came the true rewards.

The culture of the college man took its mythic shape in the late nineteenth century. In 1896 Henry Seidel Canby dragged a suitcase of books from the train to the Yale campus. As he crossed the New Haven Green he felt himself joining the thousands of collegians who had left their families and the past to step "overnight . . . through the opening door into tradition, a usable, sympathetic tradition of youth. It was our privilege to be born again, painlessly, and without introspection." What he saw in the Yale he approached was not "the dingy halls ornamented with pseudo Gothic or Byzantine," nor the high-minded world of scholarship cultivated by the faculty. Rather before him loomed the prospect of college life, "a little space of time . . . where the young made a world to suit themselves."[20]

As traditional college life created an adolescent peer culture, it linked students on any particular campus in a network of shared assumptions and joined them to their fellows in other institutions. Youthful high spirits, insubordination, and sexuality helped to shape its forms. But equally significant was that part of adolescent mentality that looked to the future and saw college as a staging ground for adult life. College students had their eyes on the society that they were about to enter. To an important degree, the college world that they made was their reading of the present so that they might claim it for their future. To those heading for the combat of American capitalism, the trials of the extracurriculum appeared to offer valuable lessons.

Yet traditional college men were not just adolescents. They were adolescents in a particular context: they were a subject people. They entered a society in which they did not make or enforce the rules. The world that some of them created—college life—was their effort to protect themselves from the harsh and seemingly arbitrary authority of their faculty.

College authorities generally insisted that students regard college as a

period of self-abnegation in which they denied present needs in the hope of future reward. Fearful of disruption, college masters forbade students the freedoms and pleasures generally accorded the youth of their era and subjected rule-breakers to censure and punishment. College men saw the four years as a staging ground for their adult lives; they insisted, however, that it not be merely a time of preparation. For them life was now. Thus their eager pursuit of the pleasures of the table and the flesh and their high tolerance for the excesses that accompanied indulgence. They refused to judge each other as they were judged and offered mutual aid to those threatened with being caught and sympathy to the convicted.

College men placed a high value on mutuality, on the bonds that united them with each other against their faculty. They insisted that they did not share the social prejudices of their era and boasted of their "democracy." While their words suggest a degree of egalitarianism, their social structure was intensely hierarchical. What collegiate democracy meant was that college men did not fully accept the status system of the broader society but created their own where athletic prowess, social grace, and a sense of fair play weighed significantly.

Male college life proved both stable and adaptable. It remained constant in its belief in the war between students and faculty, its devaluation of academic work, its willingness to cheat, and its disdain for those outside its circle. It continued to attract the wealthier students and to emphasize polish and style. However, it changed in significant ways. In the early twentieth century, as presidents and deans empowered college men as the official student leaders, the canons of college life shifted from antagonism to support of the administration. When sex came on campus, the codes of the college man made dating as important as male life among peers. Going out with the right girl became a way to confirm prestige on campus. Hedonism, always one of college life's distinct features, incorporated the new elements of each era. Men had always smoked and drank and enjoyed their kinds of music. Now they did so in the company of women, and the music shifted to jazz. As later in the century new temptations, pleasures, and threats were added, they, too, joined into the play of the college men.

One unchanging element of college life has been its code of fair conduct. To protect themselves from the demands of faculty, college men of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have attempted to define a reasonable amount of academic work. They have perceived the especially diligent student as the "grind" and the student seeking faculty friendship as the "fisherman" or "brownnose."

Such terms of derogation have been necessary because college life has

always had to contend with a significant number of students who have wanted no part of it—the *outsiders.* To the early colleges came some men for whom higher education was intended, those studying for the ministry. By the early nineteenth century their numbers increased, as poor men, often in their twenties, came off the farm, fired by the ambition to become ministers. Either by inclination or out of fear, the future ministers avoided the hedonism and violence of their rowdy classmates. Studious, polite, and respectful of authority, these hardworking students sought the approval of their teachers, not of their peers. Of an evangelical temperament, they brought their highly developed conscience with them to college. Throughout the four years they remained within the culture of their parents, a culture shared with their faculty. Some were ministers' sons and patterned their lives after those of their fathers. Others were poor and ambitious: college offered to them the chance to rise in the world. During college vacations they frequently taught school. Such men were rewarded with tutorships upon graduation and pulpits a few years later. The ministerial claim weakened in the nineteenth century, but not the pattern these students had established.

When the fraternities formed, these students stood outside. At some schools they banded together in an anti-secret society; but mainly they remained independent. College was for them not a time for fun, but a period of preparation for a profession. They focused on academic, not extracurricular, success; sought the approval of their teachers; and hoped, by dint of hard work, that achievement in the future would compensate for the trials of the present.

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Beginning in the mid-nineteenth century other outsiders took the pastors' places: ambitious youth from all over rural America; the first college women; immigrants, especially Jews; blacks; veterans after World War II; commuters; and, beginning in the 1960s, women continuing their education. Such students have looked askance at their more playful classmates to wonder how they could waste their time with foolishness. Some outsiders entered with a clear vocation which, whether it was Greek grammar or engineering, absorbed all their energy. Others became infatuated with the content of what they were studying. But whether vocationally or academically motivated, the outsiders avoided looking at other students and directed their gaze at the faculty.

Nineteenth-century college professors had a clear notion of the good student. They tried to form him through penalties and rewards. Faculty offered students high grades, membership in honor societies, and awards for excellence. Those who called themselves college men created an alternative system that distributed status by their own standards, not those of professors, and denigrated the good student; the outsiders, however, who hoped to rise above their station, worked for high marks and professorial recommendations.

The transformation of American society created new demands on American education and new opportunities for youth. The numbers and proportions of young people in college began their dramatic rise. The emergence of the university and changes in the colleges altered many of the conditions of undergraduate life. To this new situation, college men and outsiders reacted differently. College life shielded those under its canons from many of the changes, and they continued to emphasize the extracurriculum as the way to business success. Outsiders saw and used the emerging system to their own advantage. Heading for vocations and professions, old and new, they focused on the curriculum and sought to do well. They accepted the hard discipline of study and its stimulating challenges. They saw the classroom as the arena of combat, and sparred with each other and their professors. They connected to their teachers, perceiving them as mentors and allies, not as antagonists. Many achieved, moving into jobs in the expanding professional and managerial sectors of the economy. A few entered the exciting terrain of the life of the mind.

Gaining an education from the curriculum was not to be limited to outsiders. Beginning in 1910 a few rebellious collegians directly challenged traditional college life and called it false and exclusive. Arriving at Harvard a decade later than Canby, Walter Lippmann unpacked his trunk of well-tailored clothes in preparation for his ascent to the top of Harvard's undergraduate society. He quickly learned that no major athletic team took Jews, nor did the *Crimson,* nor did any of the final clubs that confirmed college social prestige. Lippmann turned elsewhere. The world that he created with friends such as John Reed broke with college codes. It denounced Harvard's exclusions and claimed both the politics of the broader society and the intellectual commitments of the faculty.

Individuals had long dissented from college life, finding personal strategies to confront its conformity, but Harvard in 1910 saw the birth of college *rebellion.* This third path collectively opposed college life. College *rebels* took their language from early modernism, whose creative currents they identified with the ideal university. Initial partisans came from nurturant families of the middle class whose deviance—often the mere fact of being Jewish—barred them from college life. As excited by ideas as any outsider, college rebels could be as cavalier about grades or as hedonistic as a college man, for they did not see their four college years as instrumental to future

success. College rebels demanded the content, not the form, and identified keenly with artists and writers breaking conventions and with the few iconoclastic professors moving into the academy. College rebels fought the social distinctions that sorted out college students and reveled in difference, not uniformity. Not content with individual resolutions, they began to battle with college men for positions in student government and on undergraduate newspapers.

With its heady mixture of iconoclasm, radicalism, intellectuality, bohemianism, and opposition to traditional college life, collegiate rebellion traveled quickly. By 1920, when Margaret Mead transferred to Barnard, the Columbia-Barnard rebels composed a lively group.

Because college iconoclasm has always stood as a counter to the collegiate way, it has never appeared as a college culture in its own right. Each succeeding college generation believes it alone has discovered the truth. But since 1910 collegiate rebellion has existed as an alternative available to entering freshmen. Once the pattern was cut, iconoclastic youth needed no special spur to become rebels, only a conception of themselves as nonconformists. They were supported in their struggles on campus by rebellious graduates out in the world, who publicized their efforts, goaded them in periodicals and books, and helped them form a national organization.

Beginning in the 1920s, when innovation in the arts split from radical politics, college rebels divided into two streams. Some students of an independent cast of mind withdrew from political discourse to struggle for inner psychic freedom. Others continued their openly political fights to link questions on campus to broader national issues. In the 1930s political rebels moved into the ascendancy. At the University of Minnesota, Eric Sevareid and his friends took control of college publications and student government. They sympathized with truckers on strike; and they successfully fought to abolish compulsory ROTC. They also discovered the world of ideas in the classroom.

The confidence in their own cause that stimulated college rebels in the 1930s disappeared as the United States entered World War II. In its wake nonconforming undergraduates searched for inner transcendence, a quest that often took them off campus. The Columbia outcasts and poets, such as Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac, who found each other in the 1940s, turned to the streets of New York and the highways of America. Later known as the Beats, with their underground poetry and novels they shaped the consciousness of experimental undergraduates in the 1950s, who began to gather to read their work, listen to folk music, and take their clues about the mind-expanding powers of drugs. In the same period most observers claimed

political rebellion to be dead. But Willie Morris found it on the pages of major college dailies and revived it in full at the University of Texas.

The first women to go to college were as serious and aspiring as any male outsider. Many had only the diffuse wish to continue study, but some looked to schoolteaching as their future profession. They had a choice between the women's colleges and the coeducational institutions. Those who ventured to the all-female schools such as Vassar College had a chance to define themselves on their own terms. The more outgoing created a robust college life. Although these women students were independent and hedonistic in their way, their college life did not incorporate male hostility to the faculty or disinterest in study. As the colleges attracted the daughters of affluence, they brought society on campus with its divisions and exclusions. Those of humbler backgrounds or with serious commitment to study found themselves partially outside this world. To this degree the women's colleges imitated their masculine counterparts. But female collegians lived within a community of women. As they competed in athletics or ran for offices in campus organizations, they learned new skills which took them beyond the canons of feminine behavior. No future positions awaited them upon graduation. Unlike college men geared up for capitalism, some of the all-round girls of the women's colleges became unconventional women who turned to public life and causes.

At coeducational institutions the pioneer women students, such as Alice Freeman at Michigan, saw themselves cast in the role of outsiders. It fit their serious purposes and those of generations of women from modest backgrounds preparing themselves for paid work. As more affluent and conventional women entered college at the end of the nineteenth century, they found a way to get partly inside: they created the sorority world that allied them with male power on campus. Conservative and cautious, sororities insisted on social distinctions and feminine behavior. In the twentieth century, as college men partially traded male solidarity for female companionship, the organized women became the sought-after dates of college men. A few gained a moment of glory when their beauty or popularity singled them out for social honors. Less affluent women or those with intellectual ambitions remained outsiders. The more freewheeling joined male rebels and entered the political fray.

As young men and women have entered college, they have surveyed the campus scene and asked the question: Where do I fit? Implicitly they have wondered if they were college men or women, outsiders, or rebels. But throughout the twentieth century educational reformers have questioned the cultural system of undergraduates, the structure of college life. Influenced

by their own college memories and prejudices, educators have worked to reshape undergraduate experience. For some the problem was that outsiders, not college men, were gaining academic glory. How could undergraduate leaders, so spirited and attractive, be made to study? How could their energies be harnessed to the academic ends of the curriculum? Others, less elitist, opposed the divisions themselves that denied respect to scholars and denigrated their activity. The focus of concern of educators shaped their answers to the instrumental questions that followed. Should clubs and fraternities be abolished, controlled, or ignored? How might fruitful relationships with faculty and administrators be established? How might college men come to value academic excellence and give prestige to scholars? Should outsiders be brought inside or limited by quotas?

Educators experimented with a wide range of reforms, some constructive, some vicious: new colleges without fraternities or intercollegiate athletics; undergraduate residential houses staffed by tutors; Jewish quotas; systems for recognizing and empowering student leaders; honors programs. In some places, efforts at change worked, and larger numbers of students took to their books.

Pushing them were not only presidents and deans, but a new perception of economic forces. Students, even college men, came to college as a way to improve their chances as adults. College was for them the staging ground for future success. They had once believed that college life alone prepared them for American life. Gradually, the worldly success and prestige of former outsiders and rebels called into question the assumption that the extracurriculum had future value. By midcentury it was becoming clearer, even to undergraduates, that disciplined training leading to the professions—the curriculum—had the surest potential economic benefits.

In the 1960s cultural currents strong enough to feel like a revolution in consciousness opened college youth to new ways of thinking and behaving and caused some of them to question the nature and the goals of higher education. Triggered by the civil rights movement, political college rebels became more radical and more numerous, collectively creating the New Left, what they called the Movement. It provided them with increasingly radical explanations for their discontent, a common identity, and linked plans of action.

In the late 1960s as New Left radicals changed their strategy, they turned to protests designed to teach idealistic students about the collusion of the university with the system. They brought conflict—sometimes violent conflict—to campus. Although radicals remained in a small minority, they found a newly responsive audience among their fellow students. In the democracy of

rock music and denim, the boundaries that had formerly divided college men and women from outsiders and rebels softened. The escalation of the Vietnam War and the extension of the draft personally threatened many male undergraduates and caused them to question not only governmental authority but all authority. As radicals tangled with administrators and police, they drew on undergraduates' loyalty to each other and their sense of common cause against adult power. Although the increasing radicalism of the New Left isolated it politically, campus actions drew into their wake undergraduates terrified by the draft and outraged by the violence and tear gas turned against protesters. Student strikes of the late 1960s altered the consciousness of those who participated and of those who observed.

Until May 1970 only a minority of students ever involved themselves in the campus protests of the 1960s. Why this period felt unique, even compared to the 1930s—when a larger proportion of undergraduates had engaged in radical campus politics and strikes—was that the dissenting minority of the 1960s was different. As observation showed and reports confirmed, protest drew in those who, a decade earlier, would have been college men and women—the campus leaders. Some joined radical groups and led campus actions; others provided the reformist outrage that turned these actions into strikes. The athletes—no longer the pre-eminent college men, but a special breed of student whose career aspirations centered on sports—split off in opposition. The vast army of outsiders, once the principal support for college radicals, divided. Academically committed students, influenced in part by liberal social science and humanities faculty, tended to become rebels or their supporters; the vocationally minded, especially in science and engineering, frequently imitated their more conservative faculty mentors and eschewed politics or took cautious positions.

The cumulative events of the 1960s ended the hegemony of college life. At the end of the decade it remained as one option, but hardly the most important. Divisions persisted on campus, but they signified personal preferences unconnected with prestige.

The killings at Kent State University and Jackson State College in May 1970 evoked an outpouring of protest unmatched in earlier periods. When undergraduates returned to campus in the fall, however, an era had ended. The termination of the draft and the winding down of the war, repression, the death of innocents, self-destructive forces within youthful radicalism, a turn in the economy, and ennui worked their way. Protest stopped. Observers who had anticipated an ever-growing radical movement among college youth were caught off guard. In the place of building takeovers and rallies, calm descended. Students suddenly took to their books and began a period

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in their history that has persisted now for over a decade and a half. All the energies that had once gone into campus high jinks or political demonstrations focused on the curriculum. In the permissive social environment of the 1970s hedonism continued unabated. Colleges had largely withdrawn their oversight of manners and morals, leaving undergraduates relatively free to experiment. Drugs and sex continued to be part of the campus scene, and alcohol returned. But the demand that life and learning join was no longer heard; and students separated their private pleasures from academic work.

As they returned to study, college students of the 1970s dropped earlier concerns for relevance and societal well-being and concentrated on enhancing their competitive advantage for professional schools. A narrow feminism that advocated women's advancement within the existing society encouraged female students to pursue formerly male-dominated professions, thereby adding to competitive pressures. The majority of all students looked to the professions as their route to financial well-being and security. The claims of meritocracy, apparent to some since the beginning of the century, now appeared invincible, drowning out the actual possibilities in the economic order for chance, connections, and entrepreneurship. Undergraduates responded with a vengeance to the message that they make high grades for medical or law school. They wondered if there was anything for them in fraternity life or political action groups. The corrosive effect of this question decimated the ranks of collegians and rebels. In the 1970s the culture of the outsiders triumphed over the ethos of college men and women and rebels. But what had once been the province of aspiring youth, optimistic about their futures, became that of prosperous collegians fearful of downward social mobility. Beginning in the 1970s the New Outsiders transformed the campus.

The classroom retrieved its centrality as increasing numbers of students vied for high grades. A feeling of entitlement soured the air as undergraduates fought over the scarce goods of library books and laboratory space. The sense of community eroded, and ethnic, racial, and gender relationships became clouded by the hostility of the established defending their prerogatives. Faced by the anarchy of the war of each against all, many students retreated socially into the lives they had known before college.

By the mid-1980s changes in the economy and a growing sense of routine have moderated slightly the harsh world of the New Outsider, but its essential dimensions remain intact. Boundaries between student groups remain permeable, and thus the ethos of the New Outsider shapes those who currently choose to be college men and women or rebels. The fear of

economic and social erosion, of not being able to reproduce the comfortable world of one's parents, continues to dominate undergraduate consciousness. In this atmosphere education is largely being reduced to the quest for grades through the application of all the strategies of grinding that college men once imagined outsiders pursued. Despite their seriousness, today's New Outsiders do not connect to the life of the mind: ideas are far too risky in the game of grade-seeking that they play. Holding themselves in as carefully as did high school students in the past, these undergraduates fail to follow individual interests that might lead them to find true vocations or to develop autonomy from parental standards. They work for a grade, for the cumulative grade point average that will get them into law school. If college today is "no fun," it is not just because professors are piling on work, but because students see that work in a different way.

Those who choose to become college men and women share much of the culture of the New Outsider as well as assume the traditions of organized life. The Greek-letter fraternity system is attracting more takers, offering as it does the pleasures of an established group and of a clear place in the campus firmament. Because service to the college remains devalued, its primary attractions are personal and social. Hedonism is no longer the preserve of college men, but fraternities continue to support communal cheating, violence, and rape. Elitism and conformity do not set sorority women apart from independents, but nonetheless can be located in their more vicious forms in the houses. While those outside the system do not recognize Greek superiority, those inside work to convince each other of the rightness of their choice. At a time when the consciousness of the New Outsider pervades the campus, fraternities and sororities have added the rhetoric of academic excellence and future connections.

Collegiate rebellion has returned in its more politicized forms to campus, but, by this writing, few students see the point of demonstrations. More pervasive among college students is an emerging consciousness that questions rather than attacks. The objects of 1980s college rebels are not college men and women, who—however caught in their own positive self-estimation—remain marginal to others. Contemporary rebels confront the New Outsider. They attempt to distance themselves from the careerism and grade-grubbing of their classmates. Many rebels outwardly conform, adopting no special costume or hairstyle. The struggle they wage is within their own minds to frame an independent course, to mediate the pressures of parents, professors, and peers. Their stance is cautious and wary. Their quiet achievements, however, are solid and real.

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The calm of the 1970s has continued into the mid-1980s. Because no rapid swings of student mood blur our vision, we can now see for the first time certain constants in undergraduate culture as well as new elements that have reshaped old forms. The clarity of the present makes this the moment for understanding.