COOPERATING FOR CONSENSUS:
THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE COOPERATIVE STUDY IN GENERAL EDUCATION

BY

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THESIS

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ABSTRACT

This work posits that the Cooperative Study in General Education, which operated under the auspices of the American Council on Education from 1937-1947 held special significance to the larger general education movement in American higher education. It presents a discussion of the movement as a quest for both institutional and societal consensus. It then argues that the Cooperative Study actively took part in this quest as well.
I dedicate the present thesis to my parents
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INTRODUCTION

The year of 1987 was a particularly tumultuous year for the public perception of American higher education. Allan Bloom had put forth his scathing critique of undergraduate studies (and the academy at large) in his popular and controversial monograph *The Closing of the American Mind*.¹ As Manhattan Institute Scholar James Piereson reflected in 2007, “Unlike many polemical works…*Closing* nimbly transcended its moment. Love it or hate it – or love it and hate it – Bloom’s book was an unavoidable document.”² As one would expect, a war of words ensued between those who wished to validate Bloom’s claims and those seeking to debunk them. It was in this year of turbulence and intense introspection that the Head of the Carnegie Foundation Ernest L. Boyer poignantly asked, “Can the American college, with its fragmentation and competing special interests, define shared academic goals? Is it possible to offer students, with their separate roots, a program of general education that helps them see connections and broadens their horizons?”³ Perhaps unbeknownst to Boyer and certainly unbeknownst to Bloom -- who had located the increased tendency toward specialization and lack of emphasis on discovering the “Truth” to have been a side effect of the “Academic Revolution” of the 1960s -- such a question had been posed fifty years earlier by the American Council on Education’s Cooperative Study in General Education.

This particular Study, however, was not remote in its occurrence or even obscure in its day, but rather it was part of a mood or movement often coined the General Education

Movement. There is some dissension regarding the dates marking the origin and demise of this Movement, but for the present moment the Movement should be considered as occurring between 1930 and 1960. Within the most indispensable compendiums of literature on the topic of the history of American higher education, one is likely to see a few pages devoted to it. However, much of the writing solely dedicated to this topic was published during its very occurrence. While the body of literature available presents valuable insights, its obvious limitation is that it does not afford the hindsight and source considerations that typically accompany the passing of time. As one author remarked of his contemporary work, “Inherent in a study of this kind is, of course, the difficulty of representing accurately something which of its nature is frequently subject to change.” Historians David Tyack and Larry Cuban argue, “When reforms aim at basic institutional changes or the eradication of deep social injustices, the appropriate period for evaluation may be a generation or more.” Hence, there appears to be a “gap in the literature” which is represented by both the lack of adequate publications and, more pressing, the lack of non-determinant publication dates of the literature that does exist. This “gap” appears even more concerning and peculiar when considering the remark made by University of Chicago humanist Russell Thomas in 1962. Thomas wrote,

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4 Though there are hundreds of definitions of “general education” floating across thousands of years of educational literature, this particular Movement was dedicated to discussing, testing, and evaluating methods of offering knowledge (and the content of that knowledge) to students who had graduated high school before they embarked upon more specialized study or vocational pursuits.


For more than a quarter of a century general education has been a major concern of higher education in America. In its name curriculums have been reorganized, administrative structures of colleges have been altered, and countless workshops, conferences, and self-Study projects have been undertaken to the end that higher education might be improved. A forbidding volume of literature has been published on the subject. The literature reflects not only the immense amount of energy and thought which has been devoted to the idea and practice of general education; it reveals an almost staggering diversity of opinion about both the ends and means of general education and no inconsiderable misunderstanding about many of the experiments which the idea has generated.  

Given these deficiencies in the current literature, an opportunity to enhance the understanding of the American social and higher educational past has been presented. Certainly a key value inherent in studying this Movement is the illumination of precisely what questions, concerns, and projects captured the interest, vigor, and passion of a generation of administrators, professors, and students of higher education. Yet, as Thomas’s discussion of the considerable amount of effort and material makes perfectly clear; performing a sustained inquiry of the entire Movement would be difficult to confine into a single thesis. However, the selection of one particular and significant experiment or “self-study” would certainly lay a solid foundation for increased exploration into the Movement as well as to properly explicate characteristics of it, American higher education, and American society during its time period. As curriculum historian Herbert M. Kliebard states, “Often, in our attempts to make sense out of social and intellectual movements, we use guideposts to set off the route our subject has taken.”

The present thesis utilizes the Cooperative Study in General Education to serve as its “case study” and “guidepost.” It demonstrates that the Study held the same values as the larger General Education Movement during its run, and that both were responses to the disruptive nature of the events occurring between 1937–1947 that threatened to alter the traditional

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conceptualization of American values in the spheres of political and economic theory and social relations. Though the Movement was present before and after the Study, this thesis focuses primarily on the context of the ten years. The Study and the Movement were also reactions to the growth and expansion of American higher education during this time period. This growth forced higher education to redefine its identity, and the Movement and Study were attempts to offer a particular conceptualization of higher education and what it should provide as general education to its old and new clientele. This thesis posits that the nature of the response to these larger societal and institutional trends was one of consensus building. It accepts historian Wendy L. Wall’s assertion that “America’s mid-century ‘consensus’ can best be understood not as a ‘natural’ development but as a political project.” The Cooperative Study took part in this project as well. As such, it adds to the growing understanding of the “politics of consensus” that reigned during the time period of the Study.

The General Education Movement was one of diverse opinion, action, content, and location. Such a movement provides historians with a litany of case studies to choose from. Thus a justification must be put forth as to why the Cooperative Study was chosen. The Study embodies the essence of the Movement. It allows readers an opportunity to see how the Movement continually changed to react to the social and institutional topography of its day. As Kliebard suggests, “successful reforms are not simply someone’s good idea; they are sustained by or are at least consistent with broad social and political forces in which schools are situated.” As any student of American history familiar with the era from 1930-1960 can imagine, the context varied quite dramatically but it was certainly a time of increased activity.

where the American polity and body politic sought to interrogate their conceptions of politics, economics, society, justice, and higher learning. The Cooperative Study occurred in a prime moment during the Movement and during American history. As such, it is rich in the ability to demonstrate a share of the context and execution of the larger Movement that it falls under as well as its ability to illuminate the nature of the American consensus. It is partially for this reason the Study has been chosen as the very topic of this thesis.

Another reason lies in our very ability as historians to understand educational reform. Historian David F. Labaree suggests that despite the massive history of educational reform in the twentieth century; classrooms, curriculum, and other apparatuses of formal schooling looked and functioned at the end of the century essentially as they had in the beginning. He argues that this occurs because, “Each wave of reform dramatically transforms the rhetorical curriculum, by changing the way educational leaders talk about the subject. This gives the feeling that something is really happening, but most often it’s not.”12 The General Education Movement certainly has been accused of proffering empty rhetoric, but the Cooperative Study in General Education represents more than that. It represents an example of how the Movement, as historian Gail Aileen Koch suggests, had a “full-blown preoccupation with [educational experimentalism].”13 It is more than a simple treatise contained in one of the many journals concerned with higher education. It is a story of introspection, influence, and, most importantly, action.

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13 Gail Aileen Koch, “The General Education Movement in American Higher Education: An Account and Appraisal of Its Principles and Practices and Their Relation to Democratic Thought in Modern American Society” (PhD diss., University of Minnesota, 1979), 143. Koch was referring to this being especially high in the late 1930s.
A brief description of the Study is necessary before laying out the outline of the individual chapters of this thesis. The Study itself was headed by a “Central Staff” which consisted of some of the most important individuals in American higher education during the twentieth century. Ralph W. Tyler served as director and William P. Tolley of Syracuse University served as chairman of the Study. The Executive Committee featured these individuals along with Lloyd C. Emmons of Michigan State College, B. Lamar Johnson of Stephens College, and Earl J. McGrath of the State University of Iowa. The Study ran mainly “each summer from 1939 through 1944” when workshops would be conducted for administrators to share their ideas.

The Study involved administrators from twenty-five institutions (over the course of the Study). The institutions represented were

Allegheny College, Antioch College, Ball State Teachers College, Bethany College, University of Denver, Hendrix College, Hiram College, Hope College, Iowa State College, Little Rock Junior College, University of Louisville, Michigan State College, Mills College, Muskingum College, Northwest Missouri State Teachers College, Olivet College, Park College, Pasadena Junior College, College of St. Catherine, Stephens College, Talladega College, and the College of Wooster. During the course of the Study the following colleges withdrew; Bethany College, University of Denver, Hiram College, Hope College, Mills College, Olivet College, and the College of Wooster. The following colleges were not originally members of the Study but joined it: Centre College of Kentucky, Fisk University, and Macalester College.

Certainly this collection of institutions represented the immense diversity of American higher education in its day. This was no mistake, as Tyler claimed, that “this…criterion is particularly important in understanding the nature of the Study.” The Study itself was “sponsored” by the American Council on Education and housed at the University of Chicago where representatives

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16 Ibid, vi-vii.
17 Ibid, vi.
from the institutions came and discussed their general education programs. It was funded through various sources, most notably the General Education Board who contributed $142,000.18

Chapter one provides a brief history of the General Education Movement and contextual information for how the members of the Movement negotiated the social and institutional landscape. The first section is a discussion of the historiography of the General Education Movement that lists and analyzes various works that have been produced as well as illuminates various strands of theory common to this collective of works. The sources involved in this section will be are comprised of a nearly complete collection of works written on the General Education Movement. The second section discusses the political, economic, social, and institutional turmoil that engulfed the United States as well as higher education from 1937-1947, as well as movements to create consensus. This provides the reader with adequate background information to understand the historical context in which the Study was situated, as well as how the Movement negotiated itself during these times. This will be complemented with secondary histories and writings by thinkers in the Movement contemporary to the Study, as well as historians of the time period. The final section will discuss the growth of American higher education during this time period and how the Movement responded to this with an attempt to create a consensus.

Chapter two discusses the origins of and the impetus for the Cooperative Study. It examines the diversity of the participating institutions and the politics of cooperation among them. The Study contained one or more representatives from the following categories: “the land-grant college, the municipal university, the state teachers college, the independent liberal arts college, the Catholic college, the Protestant church-related college, the Negro college, the four-

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year college for women, the junior college for women, and the coeducational junior college.”¹⁹ It offers a history of the selection of the participations institutions. It then discusses the advantage these institutions enjoyed by choosing to participate in this cooperative atmosphere. The chapter concludes with a description of the attempts of the Study’s administrative members to breed a sense of consensus among these participating institutions and how this was analogous to New Deal governmental theory.

The third chapter is similar to chapter one, but instead of discussing the General Education Movement, it focuses exclusively on the Cooperative Study. It demonstrates that the people involved with the Study guided their efforts toward creating a consensus to assuage their larger societal and institutional concerns. It begins by discussing the pressure that the Cooperative Study’s members felt to abandon the question of general education for more pressing wartime concerns. It then shows the Study navigating the political, economic, social, and institutional waters. It utilizes published reports of the Cooperate Study, and archival evidence from the American Council on Education’s holdings to substantiate its interpretation and findings.

Finally, chapter four discusses the publicity the Study received before, during, and after its run. While attempting to negotiate what historian Richard Emmons Thursfield referred to as “the special difficulties involved in determining influence in intellectual history,” it argues that the Cooperative Study bore special significance to the General Education Movement, American higher education, and American society as well.²⁰ It relies on mentions of the Study by commentators in education, publication issues regarding the nationally distributed reports of the

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¹⁹ Tyler, “Foreword,” vi.
Study, and histories that have mentioned the Movement. It adds to the source list the Ralph W. Tyler papers also.

This thesis will demonstrate that the Cooperative Study was significant to the General Education Movement, and that this Movement was socially grounded; it is also of interest to historians of K-12 and higher education, as well historians of American social and intellectual history. Specifically, it offers historians of education a number of perspectives that could provide perspective toward a number of diverse contexts.

It offers a perspective into a number of institutions attempting to define and construct their form of the “common good.” We may borrow the definition of this term from historian William J. Reese who suggests, “The ‘common good’ is subject to various definitions, but it usually means the elevation of civic values and ideals above individual self-interest.”\(^{21}\) Granted the literature from the history of education is saturated with examples of introspective and sententious institutions, however the Cooperative Study warrants inclusion into a rare category. Historian Larry Cuban argues that “[good schools] are hard to get because few have examined carefully, deliberately, and openly different conceptions of ‘goodness’ and how each view is connected to the essentials of democratic life.”\(^{22}\) The Study is one of those “few” examples where institutions are operating in this matter of enquiry and are very conscience of this. To illustrate this very point, it is beneficial to consider historian Lawrence Cremin’s praise of the Progressive Education Association’s Eight-Year Study. He claimed, “certainly the sort of systematic inquiry and appraisal typified by the Eight-Year Study has been all too rare in the

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\(^{22}\) Larry Cuban, “Why Is It So Hard to Get ‘Good’ Schools?” in *Reconstructing the Common Good*, 168.
history of American education.” Interestingly enough, the fact that Ralph W. Tyler was
involved with both studies is not coincidental. In a 1983 interview, Tyler admitted that President
of the American Council of Education George F. Zook and others in the organization “were
conscious of the effectiveness of the Eight-Year Study, and working that way
[cooperatively]…what they wanted, I think, was the experience growing out of the Eight-Year
Study. So it [the Cooperative Study] was designed very much like that.” Hence, both studies
may be considered part of that “rare” category.

The fact that those involved with the Study were conscience of, and responsive to, their
social surroundings is advantageous for historians. The reason for this is because historians have
long since relegated the field of general education in American colleges to be governed by the
same unstable and cyclical forces that govern the field of curriculum and education policy as a
whole. One option that is available to historians who have recognized these forces is to simply
write whatever Movements or shifts that appear in the field of general education off as evidence
of the process of “ebb and flow.” However, taking this approach might lead to the sense of
lethargy that often accompanies the acceptance of a deterministic system. There is another
alternative present. Another cue may be taken from Kliebard, who claims, “If some kind of
understanding of the cycles of curriculum fashion is to be achieved, then, it is likely that we
would have to come to grips with the question of how events in the larger social and political

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23 Lawrence A. Cremin, The Transformation of the School: Progressivism in American Education, 1876-1957 (New
139-144.

Activities of Ralph W. Tyler: An Oral History” (EdD diss., Pepperdine University, 1984), 56. The similarities
between the two studies are also discussed in James Phillip Echols, “The Rise of the Evaluation Movement” (PhD
diss., Stanford University, 1973), 351.

25 For an argument that the history of general education in American higher education has been a simple tale of
pendulum swings between “integration” and “fragmentation” see Kenneth Boning, “Coherence in General
sphere interact with fundamental ideas we have about what should be taught in schools.”

Given that this may be the theoretical method for ascertaining meaning and significance from each “ebb” and each “flow” in curricular and educational change, then the thesis may serve as an example of this method being applied to a historical case study. This case study is especially pertinent as it provides an opportunity to see historical actors discussing the “larger social and political sphere” and constructing “fundamental ideas” about educational content and method.

This thesis will also be of interest to historians of higher education for several reasons. It offers a rare glimpse into a Study that intentionally enlisted virtually every type of institution of higher learning available at the time period. Whereas different institutional types have been studied as individual categories and entities, seldom has the opportunity to see them cooperating on a topic as fundamental as general education been presented.

It will also offer an opportunity to see a cast of characters who represent a sampling of some of the most versatile and famous educators of their day at work on the problem of general education. In many instances, their concern and efforts on this topic have been relegated to mere footnotes in their biographies. Examples include individuals such as Ralph W. Tyler, Earl J. McGrath, and George F. Zook.

This thesis will also be worthwhile for historians of American social and intellectual history. Perhaps it is serendipitous that this thesis is being written on the cusp of what may be a major revisal of the particular time period with which it deals. Whereas the term “consensus” was used with great regularity to describe the decades following the completion of the Study, it had rarely been associated with the late 1930s and 1940s. Wendy L. Wall’s landmark study, *Inventing the “American Way”: The Politics of Consensus from the New Deal to the Civil Rights*

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Movement has traced this movement for consensus back to the mid 1930s and has provided an outstanding context through which to situate the General Education Movement. She suggests, however, that “Because the dynamics of national identity in this period have only recently begun to attract attention from scholars, this book takes an inclusive approach.”

Indeed, Wall did uncover many sources and areas of American culture where consensus existed and analyzed why: but education was left virtually untouched aside from small mentions of the intercultural education movement. Perhaps this was because the dominant K-12 educational theory; progressive education, which historian Lawrence Cremin once referred to as a “polyglot system of ideas, assumptions, and practices” was struggling throughout the late 1930s and 1940s to maintain its monopoly. Perhaps Wall had come to believe that the ample amount of literature that exists on “Americanization” of immigrants would suffice to illustrate her point from an educational perspective. Regardless of the somewhat glaring omission, it is necessary for future historians to begin to uncover and discuss the examples of educational consensus that occurred during this time period beyond the intercultural education movement. This thesis offers a small chapter toward this end.

Beyond all theoretical discussions of increasing understanding of educational practice and historical knowledge, there must be an argument made for the present day concerns which this thesis may inform and influence. For perspective on the importance of this study, it is beneficial to turn once again to the 1980s and Ernest L. Boyer. Along with Arthur Levine, he claimed in 1981, “During the past few years, we have seen a quiet but growing swell of concern for general education across the country. Most of the institutions we visited recently are revising

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29 Cremin, The Transformation of the School, 274.
their curriculum in one way or another. In aggregate, this appears to us to be nothing less than a national revival.”

Consider this claim against the statement of one of the most recognizable and respected scholars of higher education, Clark Kerr. “General education has been in decline for most of the past three centuries. It was almost devastated in the late 1960s and early 1970s…the near demise of general education was the greatest of the ‘popular’ academic ‘reforms’ of the 1960s.”

Less than ten years after bearing the brunt of campus turmoil, general education found a new group of adherents to carry the torch. General education was revived.

Whether it lies willfully dormant due to administrative, faculty, and student lethargy, or it is reeling from the blow of the latest educational reform: general education resurfaces. In a sense, it is the Haley’s Comet of higher education due to its consistency. Though other educational reforms have been purported to upstage it, they essentially take on the form of Comet Kohoutek. They are glorified and charged with the task to transforming the landscape (be it higher education or the night sky): yet fall short of expectations. Thus, there is no question the time to reevaluate general education will return, the question is how might history assist us in navigating this process for the betterment of society? It is a question that each generation will have to grapple with, and rightfully so.

It is hoped that this thesis provides a lens through which to understand past thought and action on general education and American society; establishing at the very least, that the two are inextricably linked. Perhaps too future “revivals” may be better understood if analyzed in this light.

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CHAPTER 1

“A CONSTRUCTIVE HOPE”: THE GENERAL EDUCATION MOVEMENT IN HISTORIOGRAPHICAL, SOCIETAL, AND INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT

Historiographical Context

“It is perhaps too early to discover exactly the meaning of the present general education movement. It may be the beginning of a fundamental reconstruction of the ideal and practice of education to keep pace with the social and cultural changes of the past generation. It may be the medium within which American society will create widespread public intelligence to deal with increasingly complex questions of social policy. It may be the means of applying on a mass scale the scientific method to the problem, of using a power technology for the welfare of all. It may be the channel through which people will cooperate in accelerating social invention to take up ‘social lag.’ It may be the way to the exploration and development of a better conception of the individual and to the fulfillment of his greatest potentialities in society. All of these hopes one might wish to hold before it as its principal opportunities, but this movement has not yet revealed its essential direction and we cannot know its strength.”

Any discussion of the General Education Movement must begin with an introduction to the literature surrounding the topic. A presentation of the historiography of this topic would not only be illuminative of what might be gleaned from grappling with the available literature, but more importantly it would reveal the lines of inquiry to have been applied to the Movement. What has been well established by historians of education within the last several decades is that inquiry of educational policies and curricula may be dichotomized between two dominant methods. The first is to discuss the topic for the sake of its appeal to the professional or institutional realm it

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occupies. The second is to place the topic within its political, economic, social, and intellectual contexts.²

Such a conclusion had been rendered by other specializations within history in the mid-twentieth century as well, including, notably, intellectual history. In the introduction of his Pulitzer Prize winning book; The Growth of American Thought, historian Merle Curti argues that practicing the type of analysis upon a topic in which it is discussed within a contextual vacuum is "valuable," but that it merely exposes the "interior" of an idea.³ To place a topic within its various contexts is to discuss the "exterior" of the idea. He writes,

If the history of growth of knowledge, thought, values, and the agencies of intellectual life is not to be a mere chronicle, it is necessary to explain, as far as possible, how this growth took place. The factors that have aided and the factors that have retarded it must be considered. The status of knowledge, the tissue of thought, the cluster of values are all at any particular time affected by the physical environment and economy, polity, and social arrangements, all more or less in the process of change.⁴

It is within this theoretical context that the discussion of the historiography of the General Education Movement will take place. The works will be examined with an eye for their proportions. Do they "mere[ly] chronicle" or do they attempt to situate the idea of general

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² Many historiographies of the field tend to suggest that the former approach had been taken by the most primitive generation of educational historians. They equate this school of thought most notably with Stanford University Professor of Education Ellwood P. Cubberly. For discussions of this see, Bernard Bailyn, Education in the Formation of American Society: Needs and Opportunities for Study (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1960) and Lawrence A. Cremin, The Wonderful World of Ellwood Patterson Cubberly: An Essay on the Historiography of American Education (New York: Bureau of Publications, Teacher’s College, Columbia University, 1965). For a more recent work that chronicles the rise of various schools of educational historical thought see Barbara Finkelstein, “Educational Historians as Mythmakers,” Review of Research in Education 18 (1992): 255-297. While Cremin, Finkelstein, and others see educational historians embracing contextualization of their topics as a signifier of progress in the second half of the twentieth century and beyond, other historians have challenged this conception of the historiography. This second group argues that educational historians of all eras simply represent practitioners who followed standard practices as defined by the larger field of history. For an example of this, see Milton Gaither, American Educational History Revisited: A Critique of Progress (New York: Teachers College Press, 2003).


education within their political, economic, social, and institutional contexts? Are they works that represent the tradition of “interior” historians (Arthur O. Lovejoy) and “professional” educators (Ellwood P. Cubberly), or do they represent the “exterior” historians (Merle E. Curti) and “modern” educational historians (Lawrence A. Cremin)?

Historian Milton Gaither has complicated this type of analysis of educational history by claiming,

> It is simply false that pre-1960 historiography revealed ‘no significant pattern,’ nor is it true that the early works focused exclusively on schools because of their narrow definition of education. They did not isolate education from what they took to be the broader context within which it operated, nor were they out of touch with the mainstream of historical writing. What they present to us is in fact a deeply contextual historical account perfectly attuned to the intellectual currents fashionable in their time. What happened in 1960 was not that educational history discovered context, but that by then the intellectual context within which educational history was written had changed.5

Seen in this light, historical works describing the General Education Movement as a creation of ideas mostly divorced from political, economic, and social context have redeeming qualities. Indeed, many of the publication dates of these works denote a time when studying the “interior” of an idea may have been more conventional. Hence, any work that is presented as slanted toward an analysis of the Movement as autonomous is not intended to be dismissive. Rather, it aims to present a central limitation of the literature taken as a whole.

The central thesis of this section is that the literature is lacking, though not devoid of, political, social and economic context. Where past historians have recognized that the General Education Movement was motivated by upheaval in the dominant conceptions of the polity, the economy, and the body politic; their discussions were sparse and inadequate. Instead they presented somewhat detailed examples of general educational programs. Certainly more context appears as time progresses, but again, this may be attributed to the historical profession

changing. This historiography will also illuminate a common strand of thought within the works analyzed. This strand is that all of these works see the General Education Movement as a development that attempts to restore cohesion, or unity into the system of American higher education (from a curricular and institutional perspective).

A final word is necessary before analyzing the works. The collection of monographs that are assembled here are works that purport to discuss the General Education Movement within its historical context. Very few works are purely dedicated to this particular topic, and some are manifested as chapters within larger works. What are not analyzed in this section are “contemporary” accounts of the Movement. These exist in abundance and have been organized bibliographically, but cannot be described as part of the historiographical literature, so to speak.6 This historiography will follow a linear path beginning with the earliest works and extending the discussion to the most recent.

As the Movement is widely considered to have existed between 1930 and 1960 (and having reached its apex of public relevance with the publication of Harvard’s General Education in a Free Society in 1945), it is not surprising that the first writing that dealt with this Movement in a historical sense was completed in 1952.7 It is, similar to many of the significant writings on this topic, a doctoral dissertation. It was completed by Andrew Park Orth at Pennsylvania State

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7 There is a case to be made for R. Freeman Butts, The College Charts Its Course: Historical Conceptions and Current Proposals (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1939) being the first work to describe the General Education Movement in a historical sense. It deals with the Movement as a current proposal, but one that is couched in a dialogue with the question of collegiate curricular purpose that stretches back throughout the history of American higher education. As such, much of it deals with the current issues of the Movement which, by 1939, was in full-swing. This was no mistake as Butts was an author known to subscribe to the belief that “history of education…should speak directly to the problems of present-day education.” For this discussion of Butts’ style of writing see Sol Cohen, “An Essay in the Aid of Writing History: Fictions of Historiography,” Studies in Philosophy and Education 23 (2004): 322.
University and entitled “The History of General Education as a Philosophical Development in American Higher Education.” It is particularly lofty in its scope and attempts to trace the history of American higher educational curriculum from its colonial conceptions to the present. A special focus of this dissertation is the treatment of “general education” through the writings of significant thinkers such as the Revolutionary Benjamin Rush and Harvard President Charles Eliot. Once Orth reached the twentieth century, however, he turned his focus away from theorists to programs.

In discussing the 1910s-1930s, Orth chose to provide a description of about two dozen schools that ranged from the renowned (Columbia and Harvard) to the obscure (Chico State College and Black Mountain College). Unfortunately, each description is merely one to two pages long and relies on published and non-archival sources. While these case studies and their relevance to general education serve as a valuable reference, very little attempt is made to contextualize general education within American society. Orth occasionally provides hints to the social causes of the Movement, but does not engage with any type of writings (by historians or generalists) that might lead to a more enlightened understanding of the context. Hence, it is logical to conclude that his dissertation is merely an “interior” study of the topic of general education, as well as the General Education Movement. The author does, however, see the Movement as a chance to restore some sort of moderate unity to the state of American higher education. He writes of general education in the twentieth century as “vacillation between extremes” where “many colleges lacked the directing force of clearly conceived purposes and functions.”

Orth saw the Movement as attempting to remedy this condition.

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1952 also saw the publication of Bernard T. Rattigan’s dissertation entitled “A Critical Study of the General Education Movement.” This particular work began life as “The General Education Movement and Its Implications for the Catholic College” and was accepted by The Catholic University of America. The reworked version saw national distribution as it was published by the Schuster Printing Service in Dubuque, Iowa. Whereas Orth’s work contained dozens of examples of college programs, Rattigan contains a mere eight institutions. Rattigan takes a far more theoretical approach to the Movement. In discussing its causes, the author centers upon the sense of unity and cohesion present in the Medieval University. This type of institution, with its reconciled religious stance was disrupted by the Reformation. Though wounded, it was still able to influence the earliest American universities, yet later it succumbed to various competing interests. Rattigan then attempts to show a myriad of definitions of general education as well as some representative projects. Finally, the work shows the “implications for the Catholic College.”

Though his work stands as one of the finest examples of inquiry to the idea of general education, it is entirely devoid of social context save for references to ecclesiastical history. Instead, Rattigan sees the General Education Movement much as his colleagues do. He writes, “Practically all will agree, at any rate, that the general education movement is basically a quest

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9 The town of Dubuque served as a major publishing center for works on general education during this time period. Yet, many of these works were published by W.C. Brown and Co. At least six titles were published under the “Brown General Education Series” with Earl J. McGrath’s oversight. The publication and national distribution of Rattigan’s dissertation may suggest that members of the General Education Movement were looking for a synthesis of general educational thought to fill a gap in the literature. The revised version of this dissertation focused less on implications for the Catholic College than did its predecessor yet it was published as if it were a dissertation.

10 This discussion of the unity and a reconciled religious stance that existed is in the spirit of Rattigan’s interpretation. It should be noted that this unity was not voluntarily entered into by all parties. There were still issues of academic freedom, especially with regards to religious blasphemy and conceptions of “Truth.” See the discussion of academic freedom as a medieval conception in Timothy Reese Cain, “Academic Freedom in an Age of Organization, 1913-1941” (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2005), 22-23.
for some sort of unity now lacking in higher education.”\(^{11}\) While he recognizes the contemporary disunity, he does not make an attempt to locate causes of it in the political, economic, or social context of the Movement. Instead, for Rattigan, the unity was disrupted by religious differences.

While these works were beneficial, by the Movement’s decline in the late 1950s it appeared that a book length treatment and synthesis were necessary. University of Chicago Humanities Professor Russell Thomas set forth about the task in 1962. Through his monograph, *The Search for a Common Learning: General Education 1800-1960* he sought to provide a work that would situate “contemporary practices within the area of general education within their complex and often conflicting points of view in their historical context.”\(^{12}\) It is necessary to recall, however, Gaither’s implied assertion that “historical context” is a constructed sense of method shared by historians and based upon contemporary assumptions. Hence, the phrase “historical context” may still be referring to providing only the considerations that would qualify the work to describe the “interior” of the Movement. This appears to be the case with this work.

Thomas’s title is a touch misleading. While he does provide a linear history of the idea of general education stretching back to 1800, the bulk of his work discusses what he sees as the General Education Movement. Broken into two parts, 1800-1930 is dealt with only in the first ninety-two pages. Within these pages lies a reconstruction of the theories of college presidents and the structures of institutions. The next two-hundred and twenty-six pages are given to the “Contemporary Problems of General Education: A Study of Ends and Means.” Within this section, one-hundred and seventy pages are designated for a diverse group of colleges to present their current general education programs. The final chapter, entitled “A Retrospective View”


\(^{12}\) Thomas, *The Search for a Common Learning*, ix-x.

Thomas explains that this work grew out of the Carnegie Corporation funded “Joint Program for Internships in General Education” which had charged him with the task to “direct some studies of contemporary views of the general education ‘movement’---views about present practices and the movement’s promise for the future.”
analyzes the current college programs and offers new methods through which to speak about general education in an effort to allow the idea to be “freed from some of the misconceptions and abuses it has suffered from both friend and foe.”13 Yet, in the end it reads as yet another “contemporary account” which brings forth background information.

As with the other works on the Movement, Thomas sees general education to be, as evidenced by his title, a “Search for a Common Learning.” He claims, “Conceptually the goal assumes an area of common responsibilities and common pleasures which are ours by virtue of our common manhood; and the goal aimed at is an education which qualifies us for the better exercise of our responsibilities and the richer sharing of our pleasures, both of which are a duty and a privilege. It is a goal which unites a man with his fellow men.”14

One distinguishing feature that renders Thomas’s work particularly important to the historiography of the Movement is that it is the last account that holds that it is being written as the Movement is still occurring. Certainly, Thomas alerts readers to the theory that the jargon of the Movement was becoming tiresome for many. He writes, “There have been signs in recent years which might be construed as a disenchantment with the whole business of general education. More than one of the colleges reviewed in this study have within the past five years abandoned or deemphasized the use of the term ‘general education’ in descriptions of their academic program. The trend, if it is a trend, seems to me to be a reaction to a name rather than to a basic educational idea.”15 Despite this, he still considers the Movement to be taking place.

That same year of 1962, Frederick Rudolph issued what was regarded as the standard history of American higher education for decades. Though he devoted a mere page to the Movement, he did speak of it as though it had ended. Rudolph also saw this Movement as one

13 Ibid, 301.
14 Ibid, 277.
15 Ibid, 300.
that would restore a sense of unity to higher education. He claimed, “Where the general education or core-course program received its most dramatic treatment, there the forces of chaos had earlier made their most dramatic impact...General education proposed to restore some balance.” 16 Perhaps by the time Rudolph had completed his book, the General Education Movement appeared only worthy of one page, but then again to have earned a page in a history both highly esteemed and derided for its pithiness may have been an achievement unto itself. Yet, the page itself was not, as one can imagine, appropriate for providing any context whatsoever.

Rudolph’s work was not the only historical synthesis in the decade to briefly discuss the Movement. Christopher Jencks and David Riesman’s highly touted and critiqued tome The Academic Revolution assigned a dozen pages to it in their “Anti-University Colleges” section. Though the work proposes to conform, and often succeeds in this vein, to the framework of “a sociological and historical analysis of American higher education” it does not provide this level of analysis for the Movement. And although the historical profession was beginning to embrace a social analysis by this point and this was trickling down to historians of American higher education, the General Education Movement would unfortunately not be analyzed in this manner within this work. 17 Jencks and Riesman do briefly discuss perhaps the three most famous examples of general education: Columbia, Chicago, and Harvard. Rather than describing the programs, however, the authors provide a relatively new method of analysis that had not been used in any of the aforementioned works. They attempted to provide a psychological analysis of

16 Rudolph, The American College and University, 455.
the individuals largely responsible for these programs (and perhaps for all associated with the General Education Movement).

Jencks and Riesman described the evolution of the type of person who would be interested in the Movement. They wrote,

Large numbers of B.A.s still decide to become college teachers in the hope of accomplishing something akin to what these old liberal arts colleges claimed to accomplish. They are interested in teaching rather than publishing, and particularly in teaching young and impressionable non-specialists rather than mature and committed departmental majors or doctoral candidates. Many have little commitment to one discipline as against another, and look forward to careers that will allow them to follow their curiosity wherever it leads. When these students come face to face with the reality of doctoral study, many simply drop out. Others are co-opted….Such men often indulge in sentimental polemics about the virtues of the old liberal arts college, with its smaller numbers, its less specialized faculty, and its exclusively undergraduate student body….Over the years many have found time, energy, and freedom to try out some of their youthful hopes….Such men have, however, only rarely come together in sufficient numbers and won sufficient freedom to create a whole institution embodying their ideas about undergraduate education.18

As this is a significant departure in interpretation and method from the previous and subsequent historiography, it is too difficult to reconcile with the dominant themes which I have presented as representative of the historiography. Jencks and Riesman do not see a quest for unity (beyond that which flourished in the perception of the liberal arts colleges), but rather immature individuals indulging themselves in recreating a past that never existed. Perhaps this type of rhetoric won David Riesman acclaim in his masterpiece, *The Lonely Crowd* but in this context it serves very little purpose toward informing the literature of the efforts of the members of the General Education Movement.19 The analysis presented simply suffers and collapses under the weight of its presuppositions. As will be discussed later, the Movement was concerned with civic education. Yet, this is portrayed by the authors as an attempt to exert influence upon minds who

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have not resolved to think their own thoughts. Perhaps such an analysis (with its lack of evidence) may simply be chalked up to the zeitgeist of the time in which it was written. The moment in which *The Academic Revolution* was being published also represented a time in which a systematic dismantling of the “progress” that was achieved by the Movement was occurring. Hence, to portray the leaders of this Movement as flighty and emotional may symbolize less a serious contribution to the historiography as it does “contemporary” educational criticism couched in historical discourse.

As general education suffered (or rather, was massively altered) at the hands of the popular student movements of the late 1960s and early 1970s, the topic was left to gather dust for a number of years. Perhaps the well documented student protests of the late 1960s which had taken aim at the very concept of general education had made the idea of completing a history of the topic (celebratory or otherwise) an arduous or odious task. It was not until 1976 that another work had appeared to discuss the Movement in a historical perspective. This work was the doctoral dissertation of Michael A. Soupios completed at Columbia entitled “Greek Ideals and the General Education Movement.”

Rather than a social history, it was a comparative history of ideas piece that proposed to compare the philosophical orientation of the Movement to that of the Ancient Greeks. The study was broken down into the comparison of three “ideals” which were “the Communal ideal…the Merits of the Contemplative Life…the Supremacy of Reason.”

Though the work had the potential to produce a particular context from the comparison between the Movement and Greek society, it chose not to go this route. Instead, it compared the Movement on the level of educational theory. What is clear is that Soupios sees the General

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20 Michael A. Soupios “Greek Ideals and the General Education Movement” (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1976).
Education Movement as interested in unity. Though he does not state this explicitly, he spends a portion of his dissertation describing the “communal” ideal of the Movement.

A mere two years later, perhaps the finest work on it was produced. The dissertation was written by Gail Aileen Koch entitled, “The General Education Movement in American Higher Education: An Account and Appraisal of its Principles and Policies and Their Relation to Democratic Thought in American Society.” It lays the groundwork for announcing that the Movement itself should be looked at with a keen eye toward social considerations. Yet, it is only able to present discussions on democracy as a political theory (and how this may have influenced those involved with the Movement). A central limitation to Koch’s discussion of democracy is that it only conceptualizes democracy through the minds of intellectuals and public figures who have chosen to write on the definition of democracy. She presents Jeffersonian democracy and Deweyan democracy but fails to cope with the idea as it was perceived on college campuses during the Movement. Yet, the work can be commended on a number of different points. Koch brings forth new perspective on the Movement by attempting to provide a richer backdrop (through literary works) to epitomize the society in which the Movement occurred in. Koch also accepts that the Movement was a quest for unity.

Building upon this progress two years later, M. Elizabeth LeBlanc wrote her two-volume dissertation entitled “The Concept of General Education in Colleges and Universities, 1945-1979.” Though this work only covers roughly half of the Movement’s trajectory, it is notable particularly for the statements it makes about how a history of general education ought to be written. LeBlanc claims, “The concern for general education did not emerge in a political vacuum. In many respects, general education is the brainchild of politics. It can be said unequivocally that our democratic political system called forth the movement for general
education which emerged during the early decades of the twentieth century and received great
impetus during the social crisis of the 1930s.”21 While the author makes these statements, she
does not attempt any type of analysis along these lines. In particular she does not use much of the
historical literature that had been written by 1980 on the time period. LeBlanc also finds the
Movement to be a matter of consensus building.

Much of the 1980s were quiet as far as histories were concerned. An exception to this
rule was the thought-provoking A Quest for Common Learning: The Aims of General Education.
While not a history per se, it did well to posit the theory that general education throughout the
twentieth century could be viewed as a “succession of revivals.” Furthermore, its own approach
to historiography was somewhat innovative. The authors wrote,

To a remarkable degree, these successive general education reforms did reflect the social
concerns of their respective eras. Each movement occurred in a period of social drift and
personal preoccupation. The movements were the products of times when war destroyed
community, when political participation declined, when government efforts to set a
common social agenda weakened, when international isolation was on the rise, and when
individual altruism decreased.22

This understanding of social context as a direct cause and influence on general educational
reform is the precursor to exterior-focused history. The authors are also clearly of the mindset
that the Movement was defined by a search for unity, as can be ascertained by the title.

Perhaps the ultimate testament to the poverty of the literature on the General Education
Movement is the fact that the final work that deals with it to any degree was published in 1988.
Written by Gary E. Miller, it was entitled The Meaning of General Education: The Emergence of
a Curriculum Paradigm. This work posited itself more as a theoretical history of general
education. However, it did focus on the ideas of the individuals as ideas that were intended to

21 M. Elizabeth LeBlanc, “The Concept of General Education in Colleges and Universities, 1945-1979” (PhD diss.,
Rutgers University, 1980), 25.
22 Boyer and Levine, The Quest for Common Learning, 17.
change society. What is lacking is a context for how their ideas came to fruition. Miller aptly describes that their goals were social engineering or reconstruction, but it does not give a sense as to what type of society was being responded too. Picking up where his predecessors left off, Miller describes the Movement in the 1930s as a struggle between instrumentalists and humanists.

To say there isn’t any social context in this work would not be entirely correct. There is a fair amount of information describing the rapid changes that American society experienced during the General Education Movement. Yet, it is presented in a manner that leaves it autonomous and non-integrated. We are told that the Great Depression had rocked American society, but it does not provide a representation of individuals from the General Education Movement discussing their interpretation of these changes. Granted, there is any number of ways that a historian may represent the shock that these historical actors felt by the Great Depression, but their voices were conspicuously silent in this work.

Though this monograph represents the most contextually endowed work written on the Movement, it still provides us with little new information. The specific colleges and thinkers it dealt with had been written about in great detail by earlier writers. Examples of Miller’s specific case studies include the program at Columbia, Alexander Meiklejohn’s experiments at the University of Wisconsin, the Great Books Program of Robert Maynard Hutchins at Chicago, Bennington College, and the General College of the University of Minnesota. Given these considerations, it is best to recognize this work as an excellent contribution, but not one that establishes a clear link between social context and the General Education Movement.

The previous section attempted to establish that the bulk of the historiography on the General Education Movement is an interior focused lot. In some ways, it mirrors the trajectory of
American and educational history. The earliest conceptions were decidedly descriptive of particular programs with the stated aim of discovering how general education had been marshaled as an idea during the present time period. As time moved forward, authors began to state the link between general education and the very forces that shape our society, in particular democracy. Yet, for their statements about the necessity for social context, each author fell decidedly short.23 The works did however assert that the General Education Movement was a “Quest for Unity.” In providing a sense of the social context of the General Education Movement, the question becomes, was the political, economic, and social context of the United States engaged in the same quest?

Societal Context

It would be quixotic to assume that the entirety of American spheres of thought during any time period could be appropriately discussed in any particular work. This would be especially difficult given the time period of the General Education Movement. Consider the statement of renowned historian C. Vann Woodward, who claimed “The brief period from 1929 to 1945 is unique in American history for its complexities of change and violence of contrasts. People who lived through the years of the Great Depression, the New Deal, and the Second World War – only half the years normally assigned to one generation – experienced more

23 We should be careful about assuming that histories became uniformly more contextual as time and the field progressed. In many ways the particular model of discussing general education remained the same. That is to say that authors have continually felt it proper to discuss roughly three-hundred years of American higher educational history in limited spaces. This was evident in Orth’s dissertation as well as Miller’s book. The attempt at dealing with the topic of general education in this broad scope was even occurring in journal articles of roughly a dozen pages as late as the early 1980s. For an example see Michael Bisesi, “Historical Developments in American Undergraduate Education: General Education and the Core Curriculum,” *British Journal of Educational Studies* 30 (1982): 199-212. As one might expect, this article also lacked a significant effort to place these developments in a serious social context.
bewildering changes than had several generations of their predecessors.”24 This is merely the first half of the trajectory of the Movement itself, yet we may safely assume that the period between 1946 and 1960 was equally rich. While the fact that discussing this span of history is daunting is made clear by Woodward; he does imply a method through which to investigate the history. He suggests that the time period exhibits “complexities of change and violence of contrasts.” Perhaps it may be best to see the contrasts as instability and consensus.

In other words, to view this time period is to see that traditional conceptions of politics (democracy), economics (capitalism), and the social status quo were being challenged by rival theories (totalitarianism, socialism, and inclusive equality). The Great Depression offered the impetus necessary for people to genuinely consider redefining the very ideological fabric upon which their society rested. A new consensus needed to be rendered, one that focused on the efficiency of society. Historian Richard H. Pells writes of how authors began to conceptualize the necessity of this change. He claims, “Writers began to focus on the need for a stable, well-regulated, responsible society—one that did not threaten to fall apart at any moment. ‘Coherence’ was more than a metaphor; it literally meant a social order in which every element was organically interrelated…in which man had regained control over his environment and his destiny.”25 What was remarkable was the opportunity to re-imagine society and to alter it in an expeditious fashion to achieve these aims. Henry Wriston remarked in 1937, “The appearance of speed accounts in part for the ‘new era’ complex from which we suffer. Men expect to leap from democracy to dictatorship, from capitalism to communism, from orthodoxy to humanism, in a

Experiments were under way to both tinker with and revolutionize society along these lines.

While their specific objectives differed, their common goal was to restore stability (consensus) to society. Yet, by the end of the 1930s it was clear that the United States, for all of its rhetoric, was not interested in abandoning its investments in democracy, capitalism, and implicit (structural) racism. Hence, American entry into World War II became symbolized as an opportunity for Americans to stultify alternative beliefs on the world stage in order to recommit themselves to those original ideas. As historian Lawrence Samuel points out, “The war was believed to be good because it represented an opportunity to defeat fascism, defend and renew the faith in American democracy, restore the American economy, and reap the benefits of a new improved consumer ethic.” The restoration of the American economy would be fully along capitalistic lines and the War would also come to be explained as the ultimate defense of democracy. It is certainly natural that World War II provided a moment in which the American people could reflect upon their nature of the society and defend their choices. As historian Robert B. Westbrook states, “Wartime is one of those rare occasions on which the political theory implicit in our institutions and practices is made explicit and becomes a widely shared concern.” These concerns trickled down to and were influenced by the most social of American institutions: the school.

In particular, institutions of higher learning in America would not only be shaped by the social context of the 1930s and 1940s: but also attempt to influence it. Their histories during the

time period also reflect instability and a search for consensus. But this introspection and experimentation did not simply affect their identities in the abstract. For the heart of the institution (even with its physical layout and ethereal reputation) is built upon a community of individuals. Stripped to its core, a college can be conceived of as an administration, faculty, staff, and students. The latter were at the center of attention as the colleges had, as they still do, a “socializing function.” Sociologists Oscar and Mary Handlin argue, “Insofar as education administered by the college was neither totally religious nor totally professional, it was connected with the desire to adjust the individual to the society which he would play a part. That is, attendance at college was an aspect of his socialization. Precisely how the process of socialization operated depended not only on the college as an institution but also upon the changing structure of the society in which an individual would move.”

To demonstrate the parallel between society and higher education during the time period; consider the claim made by Joseph Brewer and Donald Heiges. They suggested in 1946 that “it ought to be noted that the confusion in education is to a very large degree a reflection of the cultural, political, and economic chaos of the contemporary world. Education is in a state of confusion because life itself is a madhouse of conflicting thought patterns, incompatible forces, irresponsible and irresolvable powers, rampant nationalisms, and bitter cultural and racist animosities.” This confusion itself was the cause of the General Education Movement, which the authors in the historiography suitably defined as a “Quest for Consensus.” Brewer and Heiges would go on to claim, “Clearly then, the problem of achieving unity within the sphere of education is inextricably bound up with the larger problem of achieving some degree of

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integration within our contemporary culture. But while education will continue inevitably to reflect the larger situation, education as part of its function in the culture, should help to create the unity lacking in the culture. In any case, the problem cannot be conceived in educational terms alone: it is, as we have said, the problem of our whole culture.”31 The authors were absolutely correct in linking society’s confusion with education’s confusion and vice versa. Their sense of urgency for social and educational consensus was certainly prevalent in higher education during their time period. Yet, what they had not pointed too was any evidence that a social quest for unity was actually occurring and that the General Education Movement was pushing toward the same goal. Still, their contribution of linking the two is monumentally important for examining the specific spheres of thought.

In the political sphere, instability was arising by the perceived sense of the failure of democracy and growing curiosity in foreign forms of political theory; especially different forms of totalitarianism. This was countered by an intellectual movement dedicated to labeling totalitarianism and tyranny as illegitimate and constrictive to liberty. In the sphere of education, the General Education Movement went to great lengths to affirm the intellectual movement for democracy. This was accomplished primarily by forcefully stating the aims of higher education were to produce democratic citizens. The argument was made that these citizens could not be “generally” educated by the elective system as it was reflective of the German model of higher education and this had been a direct cause of the rise of the totalitarian Nazi regime.

In the economic sphere, capitalism was under attack by alternative economic theories which threatened to replace the dominant economic theory in the United States. This was countered by a movement that reiterated that mere tinkering with capitalism could once again produce a prosperous society and that an outright shift to an alternative was unnecessary. The

31 Ibid, 39.
General Education Movement attempted to advance this argument primarily by arguing that a proper general education would lead to a workforce that was demanded by capitalistic industry.

In the social sphere, minorities were aggressively seeking rights and liberties not previously afforded to them. The larger public responded with a modicum of compassion for these plights, though not enough action to ensure just outcomes. The General Education Movement assisted this by offering attempts to redefine general education as a concept necessary for all institutions. However, a split emerged in the General Education Movement between those who saw general education as a socializing instrument for the masses to continue the educational method of social efficiency and those who saw it as necessary to ensure equal and just outcomes for the “new” college students. It mirrored debates over the social functions of public education that were being waged during the time period. It demonstrated a clear example of what Kliebard describes as “the opposition between the social reconstructionists and the social-efficiency educators.”

**Political Sphere**

When writing about the United States in the 1930s, historians have traditionally employed words such as anxiety, fear, and uncertainty with great frequency. Pells writes,

> The sense of total collapse, of a society in various stages of decomposition, had a profound effect on most Americans—intellectuals as well as ordinary citizens. The depression meant more than simply the failure of business; it was to many people an overwhelming natural catastrophe. Much like an earthquake that uprooted and destroyed whatever lay in its path….It gave Americans the feeling that their whole world was literally falling apart, that their traditional expectations and beliefs were absolutely meaningless, that there was no personal escape from common disaster.

Indeed the nation was fraught with this overwhelming sense of anxiety that was related to, and a by-product of, lines of thought prevalent in American society. One such line of thought was the

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belief that “a leader might arise…someone who could piece together a new political vessel to hold all the boiling discontents of a people increasingly confounded by the depression.” But, the very nature of the words, of a leader who might “arise,” suggests that the new head of state would not be democratically elected (or democratically elected and eventually tyrannical). Instead, much in the fashion of Germany in 1933 (no more than a few years earlier), there would be a totalitarian takeover. Historian Benjamin L. Alpers suggests that this idea was not only disconcerting to Americans but considered highly feasible. He claims, “In the mid-1930s American attitudes toward dictatorship underwent a transition…dictatorship was nearly universally unpopular in the United States by 1936. Despite this fact, fears that dictatorship would soon arise in America were, if anything, growing.” Though dictatorships, like those established by the Nazi Party posed a threat, it was a more comprehensive fear of totalitarian governments in general. The fears were stimulated by more than simply the Nazi regime. Other contemporary cases included the Spanish Civil War and the Italian fascist movement. As Alpers points out, “By the end of the 1930s the use of ‘totalitarianism’ to link dictatorships of both left and right had become common coin in the United States.”

Much in the way that the domino theory would become the justifying ideology for fighting communism abroad in subsequent decades; government officials and citizens alike agreed that totalitarianism had to be obstructed abroad as well as within the U.S. borders. Such actions, it was believed, would lead to a defense of democracy and even capitalism. Wall argues, Americans of diverse backgrounds and divergent agendas were alarmed by the chaos of the depression years as well as by the rise of fascism and communism abroad. To conservative industrialists and left-liberal intellectuals alike, these ‘alien’ ideologies seemed to threaten the U.S. not only externally, but internally as well. To counter such

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34 Kennedy, *Freedom From Fear*, 227.
36 Ibid, 130.
threats—to shore up their vision of American democracy or the nation’s economic system diverse groups articulated their vision of a unifying national ideology and sought to convince their fellow citizens of its merits.\textsuperscript{37}

Many historians have commented on the various manifestations these efforts took on in popular culture and media throughout the late 1930s and especially during World War II. For example, historian Harvey Green describes an attempt to discredit totalitarianism through popular film during the war years. He states,

As in World War I, the government marshaled a multitude of tools to bring public opinion behind the war effort. The Special Service Division of the War Department hired famous Hollywood director Frank Capra, best known for his comedies, to complete a seven-part series of one-hour films entitled \textit{Why We Fight}. The series rearranged some facts of the conflict, and portrayed the Germans as evil marauders bent on enslaving defenseless peoples such as the Danes or Norwegians.\textsuperscript{38}

Certainly the notions of discrediting totalitarianism and movements toward consensus have long been used as contextual information to discuss the period. Consider historian Paul C. Violas’s study of academic freedom for K-12 teachers. Violas states,

The World War II era saw a new threat and the development of a different complex of fears on which to focus the academic freedom dialogue. This threat, represented by the fascist dictators of Germany, Italy, and Japan, was both visible and foreign-based. The Garden [of Eden, referring to America] had been cleansed and a crusade to protect democracy against totalitarianism was sanctioned. This crusade required a unified national effort, and groups and individuals contributing toward that effort consequently were awarded increased esteem.\textsuperscript{39}

What has not been written about extensively within this context is how American higher education underwent internal scrutiny during this time period for having accepted a German ideal: the German University model.\textsuperscript{40} The model was often linked to Harvard president Charles

\textsuperscript{40} For an introduction to the German university model see Abraham Flexner, \textit{Universities: American, English, German} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964 [1930]), 305-361. The dominant characteristics of the German model of higher education create an institution marked by intense research by professors and graduates alike and an elective-based undergraduate program. This may be considered against its polar opposite: the English model. The
W. Eliot, whose reign lasted from 1869 to 1909. It is traditionally accepted that several American universities had had retired their identities as the “English college on the American frontier” in the 1870s.\(^{41}\) Certainly this choice to switch to the German model had received criticism when it first occurred, especially for imbuing American students with a “specialized” course of study.\(^{42}\)

John S. Brubacher and Willis Rudy speak to this point by arguing,

> One point which all critics of Eliot’s program stressed was the fundamental difference between American college and university education. The former, it was argued, was *general* education, in which elective studies properly had no place, while the latter involved advanced and specialized study. Allied with this was the contention…that the American college was in no way comparable to the German university, where freedom was permitted because the students had already undergone a stiff, high-quality preparatory course.\(^{43}\)

Hence, we see a tradition of criticism in America of the German model. Particularly, we see the criticism leveled at the specialized nature of the curriculum. This contempt would be sharpened by members of the General Education Movement by their adding of a social and political element. Their argument was that the switch to the German model would harm American democracy by explicitly pointing to the fact that contemporary Germans were under the thumb of a totalitarian regime. Specifically, it was the rejection of general education on the higher education level, and embrace of the elective system which had allowed the totalitarian regime, represented by Hitler, to usurp their liberties.

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\(^{42}\) Though many definitions of “specialized” abound in the literature of American higher education, one should consider this term against its polar opposite: general education. A “general education” program would offer some manner of “interconnected” learning that stresses coherence for some civic or personal end. A specialized course of study may be marked by extreme coherence (e.g. a vocational course in a medical program), or one of relative incoherence (a student’s construction of a curriculum based on the elective system that has no recognizable or a very vague end stated).

The General Education Movement Responds to the Political Sphere

In order to reconstruct how the members of the Movement put forth their argument, the first step is to recognize their interpretation of the evolution of the institution of higher education. For this we turn to Joseph J. Schwab. Schwab wrote in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1942 that

> The early American college attempted to train men to be good men and able citizens. It sought to imbue the student with a knowledge of and a passion for the ideals the country served. It sought to provide him with those intellectual tools necessary for effective choice and administration of the means to serve those ends. It sought to provide him with knowledge enabling him to communicate meaningfully with the array of experts whose services government and citizenry required. It provided the student with experiences designed to yield habits and attitudes which would serve him in his search for personal happiness and in his efforts to contribute to the common good….Whatever errors of methods and means the early American college may have made, these were its ends and they are good ends….They are the ends of the American college no longer. The American college has been engulfed by the backwash of an American version of the German ideal of exhaustive, factual, and specialized research.

Hence, we can notice an understanding of the switch from English (or American version of English model) having changed to the German model. We can also notice the link of civic and personalized education to the English model and not to the German model. It is this particular link that must be explored when analyzing the thought of the General Education Movement. For this is the first part of their thesis, that only a strong general education program provided in a proscriptive manner would yield an intelligent and civically-oriented citizenry. Though Schwab wrote during the war, this argument stretched back to the mid 1930s. This matches with the timeline Alpers stretched out of the general American distrust of totalitarianism.

> Exploring the link between civic-mindedness and general education fully we must consider the *Atlantic Monthly* article that appeared in 1936 by English physicist and philosopher

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44 A brief biography of Schwab, who became famous for his later work *The Practical: A Language for Curriculum* may be found in *The American Curriculum: A Documentary History* edited by George Willis et al. (Westport CT.: Greenwood Press, 1993), 375.

Herbert Dingle, entitled “Knowledge Without Understanding.” Dingle begins by describing “people in democratic countries, on whose clear thinking ultimately depend their own civilization and others.” 46 In this statement and further in the article, we see Dingle tying “clear thinking,” which was a clearly stated goal of the General Education Movement, to good democratic practice. He argues that lay citizens who have been educated generally would be able to participate in their government effectively as well as to evaluate the state of the nation. Dingle claims, “The Non-specialist cannot hope to understand all the details by which the results have been reached, but he is capable of understanding quite well what those results are, and can judge for himself in what manner and to what degree they bear on his life as a whole. A nation of men and women with free, disciplined minds is a dream, and I am under no illusion that we are going to realize it in the twinkling of an eye, but I hope readers will agree that it is a dream worth realizing.” 47 Again we see Dingle emphasizing the point that clear thinking leads to effective citizenship.

It may be beneficial to note that this argument about education has been made by countless societies stretching back to ancient times. What makes Dingle’s claims characteristic of the General Education Movement, however, is the moral of his story. He turns his attention to specialism and the type of student he perceives it to have created. He then claims, “There is no state of mind more easily exploited by the clever demagogue, charlatan though he may be, than that which exists at the moment.” 48 Couple this with the troublesome perception of a youth problem during the time period that historian Joel Spring speaks too, “During the depression

46 Herbert Dingle, “Knowledge Without Understanding,” *Atlantic Monthly* 160 (1937): 122. While this thesis has conceptualized the General Education Movement to be an American Movement responding to circumstances in the American context of political, economic, social, and institutional context, there are instances in which concerns were shared by those abroad. Herbert Dingle, being an Englishman also represents a citizen of a nation terrified of totalitarianism.
47 Ibid, 123.
48 Ibid.
there was a general feeling that youth was a powder keg that might explode at any moment from its general apathy and provide the ranks for a fascist movement” and the argument is completed.

49 The link between general education and proper civic response is implied. And the link between specialism and totalitarianism is leveled.

This is repeated in other places. Consider Teacher’s College Professor Donald P. Cottrell writing in *The Social Frontier*. His question, posed in the article entitled “The University and General Education” is “What principal qualities should be found in a program of general education for American democracy and how far does the present movement seem to exhibit them?”50 As the very nature of his question exhibits, general education programs needed to be concerned with democracy. In more specific terms, they had to exist to *defend* democracy. To make this apparent to readers, Cottrell set about describing the treacherous path that foreign universities had followed by acquiescing to specialism. He writes,

*For the university to fail to recognize the possibilities of a broad and fundamental reconstruction of general education and to aid in the promotion of a movement with such potentialities is a repudiation of its trust. From abroad Americans have only recently been treated to the spectacle of once powerful universities following the course of aloofness from general education at times to critical social change and as a consequence withering to dust so far as their influence upon public affairs is concerned. The American university has an historic advantage over these European institutions in its very constitution and development. The ideal of that university must be maintained. This is not only for the good of universities themselves. It is also one additional assurance that the principal values for which the university stands will continue to be influential in American life.*51

Again, readers are being treated to a discussion of current events. In this case, as with others the European universities may be assumed to be German, Italian, or even Spanish. But, let us assume they are German as Cottrell hits home the idea of the university ideal (or model). The author

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51 Ibid, 15.
appears to be arguing that universities which do not maintain strong general education programs will lose their credibility on the national stage, or rather, their most available product of influence: students. This is not to say that they will lose enrollments, but rather that students who are not properly generally educated will cease to be influential on a public stage. They would cease to participate democratically, leaving the possibility for totalitarian subjugation. Such a scenario was not out of the realm of complete possibility, as Kennedy notes, Hitler upon seizing power quickly turned his attention to “nazifying…the universities”\(^{52}\) It appears that Cottrell recognized, like so many of his contemporaries that “the Nazi and Fascist movements were profoundly anti-intellectual.”\(^{53}\)

This particular understanding of what Nazi universities had come to represent was not only an American interpretation, but one held by other western nations as well. Historian Craig K. Pepin notes that recent scholarship has demonstrated that German professors were accommodating to the Nazi regime and that this, “disturbing fact led to further attempts to understand Nazism at the universities, filtered through prewar debates about the dangers of overspecialization and superficial credentialization.”\(^{54}\) As Pepin describes, these attempts were coupled with an analysis on the rise of Nazism. He claims, “For the Americans…the basic interpretation stressed cultural and historical developments that made Germans susceptible, but not predestined, to authoritarianism.” This also was followed by “the solution…lay in long-term cultural change, facilitated by the removal of dangerous elements from public life (through

\(^{52}\) Kennedy, *Freedom From Fear*, 384.


denazification), and reeducation.”

This, of course, was very similar to the formula which the General Education Movement was putting forth for American universities. If specialization represented Germany, and Germany represented Nazism, then it needed to be removed. Though insofar as the members of the Movement were concerned, their treatment of the problem was in a preventative sense; washing the hands of their universities to prevent the cold of Nazism from infecting the American political experiment.

The choice of outlet for these articles holds meaning as well. Previous examples came from the *Atlantic Monthly* which is a literary magazine and is by no means a periodical for specialists. Cottrell’s article was published in *The Social Frontier*. Journalist Caroline Bird writes, “In 1934, John Dewey and his disciples at Teachers College launched a journal of ideology, *Social Frontier*, that urged teachers to find ways to advance ‘the welfare and interests of the great masses of the people who do the work of society—those who labor on farms and ships and in the mines, shops, and factories of the whole world.’”

These publications were able to reach a wider audience of laypeople and teachers as opposed to scholarly periodicals such as *The Journal of Higher Education* or *The Journal of General Education*. They were not set up with rigorous anonymous peer-review processes in mind, though they often published rigorous scholarship. Rather, they were created to present reflection for the consideration of literate citizens and those affiliated with institutions of higher education. Another one of these publications was *The Educational Record* which was the publishing arm for the American Council on Education. Though less “popular” than *Atlantic Monthly, Social Frontier, or School and Society*, it was still read (and contributed too) by administrators and others with interests in higher education.

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It was in this publication that the argument of general education in defense of democracy and specialism as path to totalitarianism received its most forceful treatment. In a 1944 article by liberal arts college president W.H. Cowley, he dubbed this argument “Freedom and Discipline.” Cowley proclaimed,

Educators must not only stir up student purposes, but they must also be constantly vigilant about the kinds of purposes they encourage to stimulate. Hitler is a man of purpose….Hence the arousal of purpose is an adequate educational goal. Stripped to its fundamentals education is moral and socializing. But for decades American education has largely turned its back upon this, its chief raison d’etre. Excessive emphasis upon training the individual so that he may achieve his purposes, socially desirable or socially reprehensible though they may be, has blacked out much of our historical American interest in the public welfare. We have been overwhelmed by egocentric materialism and we have become more concerned with the ‘success’ of our students than with their duties as citizens. Colleges have invariably been established to educate their students for more ethical participation in society, but most of them have forgotten the dedications of their founders. The fact remains, however, that if education does not give students a sharp awareness of their personal, social, and civic responsibilities, it has failed and failed miserably. The purposes of our students must be harmonized with the interest of society. The public weal must be protected by our students or our whole educational enterprise is a selfish sham.57

Paying close attention to Cowley’s words reveal him to be demeaning specialization. By claiming that any type of educational program that allows the individual’s interests to trump those of the collective is to the detriment of both society and the individual, Cowley has simply suggested that the German model would harm democracy. His reference to Hitler adds an illustrative touch to his somewhat philosophical point. This point, well explained in his article is that to preserve future freedom, discipline was needed on the undergraduate level. To maintain liberty as a political goal of society, liberty needed to be sacrificed in the first two years of undergraduate study.

What must also be understood about the proscribed curriculum which members of the General Education Movement were advocating was that it differed from traditional conceptions

of what a proscribed curriculum looked like or aimed to accomplish. In other words, it was not the proscribed curriculum that ruled at English universities or even colonial American institutions. Rather, it was one that was transfixed with preparing students to be citizens of the contemporary world. R. Freeman Butts discusses these differences by arguing, “Whereas the traditional prescribed curriculum conceived a liberal education as essentially literary in character and as opposed to a ‘useful’ or ‘practical’ education, the modern prescribed courses conceive a liberal education as supremely useful and practical for the art of living in modern society.” Of course living in modern society meant taking an active role in not only participating in democracy, thereby perpetuating it, but also actively rejecting totalitarianism. Thus, the General Education Movement was chiefly interested in linking proscribed curricula to democracy and juxtaposing this to specialized study, which was perceived to have contributed to the rise of totalitarian regimes. Next, we turn our attention to the economic argument which saw a similar struggle to defend capitalism against socialism.

*The Economic Sphere*

It would not be an overstatement to suggest that Americans have toyed with the idea of switching to an alternative economic theory since the progressive era and even before. Historian Richard Hofstadter argues that “the characteristic Progressive thinker carried on a tolerant and mutually profitable dialogue with the Socialists of the period, perhaps glancing over his shoulder with some anxiety from time to time, to be sure that Marxian or Fabian ideas were not gaining too much ground in the United States…when the socialist said that grievances of the people

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58 R. Freeman Butts, “Liberal Education and the Prescribed Curriculum,” *The Educational Record* 18 (1937): 563. It should be noted that many defenders of the “classics” argued that these works should be read in a very “practical” way. In a sense, the term “traditional curriculum” here is defined as less useful by Butts, but this would not be the opinion of every member of the General Education Movement.
could be relieved under Socialism, the typical Progressive became more determined to find ways of showing that these grievances were remediable under capitalism.”

Yet, for their caution to keep support of non-capitalistic theories at a minimum, one might argue that Progressives had relatively little to worry about. American society was simply a cyclical mesh of unrestrained growth and periodic depressions which people were comfortable with. Hofstadter’s words do, however, provide insight into the nature of economic thought which had prevailed in the 1920s. Alternative theories always had the potential to gain ground, but never seemed too for any number of reasons. As Curti notes, by the 1920s, “Socialism, supported by almost a million voters in 1912, was now reduced to a feeble fragment. Communism was virtually driven underground.”

Though Theodore Draper has argued that American communism being driven “underground” was simply a necessary transformation “into conspiratorial organizations,” what is important is merely that communism also failed to gain a strong hold on the American economy. Fascism, which historian Roland N. Stromberg has argued, “owed something to the fierce strife between socialist trade unions and the industrialist capitalists,” seemed to thrive on chaos which was difficult to find the United States in the 1920s and did not seem a strong enough candidate to have any domestic prowess.

Socialism and communism, however, did appear to be possibilities. This only reinforced the fear and aversion to alternative economic theories that had long existed in the American conscience. It was a mix of nativist repugnance (toward a “foreign” ideology) and contented

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60 “Comfortable,” in the sense of not seeing the need for an ideological revolution.
63 Stromberg, An Intellectual History of Modern Europe, 388.
indifference (to the cycles of laissez-faire capitalism) while American prosperity was commonplace under the current situation.

But nothing could seem to prepare public officials and other proponents of capitalism for the Great Depression. This downturn was unique, and left many out of work. As Green notes, “In 1936, even after ‘recovery’ measures had been adopted, 9 million were still out of work. By 1939 about 8 million were unemployed, representing 17 percent of the work force.” Such conditions created favorable conditions for a groundswell of support for socialism, communism, and fascism within the United States. Thus, the old anxieties resurfaced. But despite what logic would suggest; that a devastating depression beyond all prior conceptions would inevitably result in an ideological revolution, such changes were never entirely implemented.

As historian H. Wayne Morgan claims, “Terrible as it might seem to the sensitive person, the falling price indexes, slumping wages, rising unemployment, and public despair of the early 1930s were a kind of godsend to American socialism. Every indicator, rational and emotional, proved to many that the socialists had been right.” But, as sociologist Daniel Bell has observed, “no socialist movement emerged, nor did a coherent socialist ideology take seed either in the labor movement or in government.” This fact, which was and is clearly disconcerting to socialists has produced a massive amount of literature and cannot be fully considered in this particular thesis.

Obviously the Depression had presented the same opportunity to communism as it had to socialism. But, historian Sarah E. Igo argues that historians have explored how “anticommunist

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64 Green, The Uncertainty of Everyday Life, 75.
“rhetoric” functioned as a type of “national glue.” 68 Fascism was also presented the same opportunity as a political theory. However, Wall argues that the “liberal left…sought to shape an antifascist consensus both at home and abroad.”69 Thus, there were active movements against alternative economic theories at work, but there was also an absurdity to fear.

The more people feared political totalitarianism and/or alternative economic theories, the less likely it became that these would become dominant ideologies. In a way, that very fear only further cemented democracy and capitalism. As Wall describes, “faith in cooperation—together with the assumption that Americans had harmonious interests—had shaped the New Deal approaches to the economic crisis ever since Roosevelt’s inauguration in March 1933.”70 This faith was firmly invested in defending capitalism, which was the perceived to have advanced those “harmonious interest[s].”

Thus, while it would appear to observers that a struggle was being waged for the economic soul of the country, what was argued was what Hofstadter suggested the Progressives had argued a decade earlier. That being that capitalism would simply conform to fit contemporary needs. Though it changed the identity of the American economic theory from purely capitalistic to being one that was a bit more mixed, the American economic response to the Great Depression still “provided, as some saw it, a democratic alternative to Communist totalitarianism in the area of national economic planning.”71

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69 Wall, *Inventing the “American Way,”* 112
70 Ibid, 36.
The General Education Movement Responds to the Economic Sphere

The American uncertainty surrounding economic theory had posed a frightening proposition to the General Education Movement. The members of the Movement were well aware that “American education in general has provided an effective service function to the business community in the training of both producers and consumers. It also has served as the vehicle through which the basic values of consumer culture are transmitted from generation to generation.” The question then became, with alternative theories being posed to upend capitalism, which basket was the proper one for the Movement to throw its eggs in? The choice became clear for the members of the Movement and an emphatic selection of capitalism was made. They would seek to make the argument that they would produce good capitalists, but before viewing this it is necessary to view currents of American thought that were moving against them in this regard.

It was well known by the late 1930s regarding communism and fascism that “both totalitarian views conceive of education as a weapon of indoctrination to be wielded by the power elite.” It was also becoming the case by the late 1930s that “newer images of fascism and communism emphasized the ordered, regimented, uniform crowd.” Igo suggested that this made Americans nervous enough to begin a discussion, claiming “Americans watched Hitler and Mussolini harness the mass media to appeal to populations that seemed only too willing to cede their individuality and rationality. From the 1930s to the 1950s, discussions of ‘the masses’ and their susceptibility to persuasion flowed from many quarters.” Further complicating matters, the elective system which the Movement was attempting to displace was historically, though

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74 Alpers, Dictators, Democracy, and American Public Culture, 95.
inaccurately, linked with a modicum of social and economic utility. The elective system itself was implemented on the grounds that it was liberating.

It fully appeared that the General Education Movement, with its emphasis upon proscription was not only producing economic actors who would play well into the stereotypes of a communist and fascist citizenry, but also ones who could not contribute to a capitalist system as *efficiently* as students under the elective system could.

To demonstrate this, consider that the 1930s were a time where Americans had already seen their society altered by the inception of the assembly line. This method of production requires, in essence, an elective education for a workforce. Each worker is taught merely his/her role and specializes in it to the point of utter perfection. It is repeated day in and day out with no broader learning. In other words, one who paints the chassis has no idea of the functions of an engine. One who is an accountant is not given any understanding of physics. Hence, the Movement had to make the argument that they were not only producing free thinkers (which they did on a political scale as was previously discussed), but that these free thinkers would also contribute to the economic sphere in the same manner as the “efficient” students of the elective system were.

The members of the General Education Movement attempted to make this argument first by suggesting that higher education’s mission was to prepare students generally before they allowed them to specialize because industry *desired* this. Gilbert E. Doan put forth this argument in a 1937 issue of *American Scholar* in an article entitled “Our Sons Specialize.” The author begins to discuss the plight of young engineering students. This choice may have been for any number of reasons. Perhaps engineers were most at-risk for losing the benefits of liberal studies

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76 Laurence R. Veysey, *The Emergence of the American University* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1965), 119. Veysey argues that the supporters of the elective system ideal had, by their early twentieth century victories, perceived “the complete triumph of the ideal of public service in American universities.”
if they were not forced into an appropriate general education program that sought to remedy that perceived deficiency. Perhaps it was because the study of engineering had encroached upon the throne of importance traditionally occupied in the university by the liberal arts. Yet, it may be just as well to assume it is because an engineer represented the ideas of Progress and technology that, while being attacked by the Depression’s circumstances, still sat upon a lofty pedestal in American life.

Doan wrote, “Fresh out of high school the boy comes to college eager as boys are for a deeper understanding of the big things of life. He trusts his college to know what industry wants him to learn and to steer him wisely, a sacred trust if ever there was one.”77 The author presents these students as having a thirst for knowledge so immense that only a thorough general education could quench it. However, faced with the vast expanses of the American curriculum, Doan argues that this optimistic and docent student “must shut out everything but science from his serious attention or fail all his courses.”78 This argument invokes general education not only as humanizing, but perhaps even ethical. It assumes that industry wanted ethical human beings to lead as opposed to mindless drudges. Later in the same issue of American Scholar, James R. Angell writes in the same vein in his article “The Scholar and the Specialist.”

This argument was also repeated by Hans Zinsser in his article “What is a Liberal Education?” that appeared in School and Society in 1937. Zinsser claims,

The university has the obligation of training scholars for independent criticism and accuracy of observation. It has the responsibility of setting sound standards for education in the learned and technical professions. Much might be said about every one of these interlocked activities, no one of which can thrive in the absence of the others. But fundamental to all of them is its major obligation of providing what is spoken of as a liberal education. For, after all, the ideal of any educational system –probably never quite attainable but always to be pursued should be to find that formula for training which shall

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78 Ibid.
make men capable of appraising intelligently what Huxley ‘that immense capitalized experience of the human race which we call knowledge of various kinds.’ Specialization can take off soundly only from such a foundation.  

Within this quote we can see the author arguing that general education was necessary for any type of specialization to occur. As specialization is key to a capitalist system, to inhibit the possibility of it occurring would naturally be detrimental.

Through these arguments we see the General Education Movement positioning itself as a bulwark for capitalism by producing students who could take advantage of specialized courses of study. In a sense this argument was also important as it reconciled the perceived rift between general education and specialized study. Next, we turn our attention to the social context.

*The Social Sphere*

The 1920s were a particularly violent time for the nation in regards to social and racial relations. Reacting to the perception that *their* country was being undermined and usurped by foreign elements, traditionalists and conservatives waged a campaign of terror to rid the country of elements they deemed unsuitable. The historical record and literature is quite rich in details of examples. Whether it was the first *Red Scare*, the rise of the Eugenics movement, or the 1924 National Origins Act, America was seeking to deny the rights of those who did not conform to a very particular racial and identity.

Perhaps it was the devastation caused by the Great Depression, but for any number of reasons many American groups turned the pressure and politics of fear down a notch by the early 1930s. So much so that “by the mid-1930s, America’s ‘new immigrants’ and racial minorities were making a bid for greater political, social, and cultural inclusion.”

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on the social periphery and so distant from traditional sources of power that they had hardly provoked notice or attention.”81 This trend can be interpreted from any number of writings regarding minorities and immigrants. Consider the statement of historian Yoon K. Pak who argues that this was true was Japanese-Americans during the time period. She claims, “For many generations, Japanese Americans had fought for recognition and viable rights as American citizens. Their continuous efforts, despite racist governmental policies of the past, to voice their loyalty to the United States had gone unheard.”82

It was these minorities, Fass goes on to claim, that the Federal government was interested in assisting during the mid 1930s. Not only was the government taking an interest, but also the American public as well. With the rise of totalitarian governments across Europe, and in particular with news of the barbaric treatment of minorities under the Nazi regime, Americans became concerned that their principles clearly defined during their founding and evoked during their Civil War would be compromised by the treatment of their minority citizens. This anxiety only intensified when the dichotomy of American democracy and Nazi totalitarianism was constantly perpetuated throughout American popular culture. As Samuel suggests, “because World War II was fought on the premise of protecting the inalienable rights of individual freedom and liberty, exceptions of race and ethnicity became increasingly difficult to defend.”83

As a result of these comparisons between America and Germany (which occurred before War was declared), there was a fair amount of sympathy for the plight of minorities. As historian Philip Gleason notes, by the late 1930s, “there was growing evidence of sympathetic interest in

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minority groups and their place in life.”84 However, this sympathy was not one that came with sweeping social reforms. Rather, to quell white cognitive dissonance, a language of consensus was drafted and minorities were expected to participate. Samuel claims that “rhetorically grounding the war in terms of pluralistic democracy…offered those outside the (white) power bloc a rationale to support the consensus.”85 Certainly this argument was put forth prior to the war as well.

Different minority groups had different methods for negotiating this consensus. For African Americans, who “shared a collective memory of the unfulfilled promises of democracy generated by the First World War,” the consensus seemed suspicious and charlatan.86 Instead, African Americans set forth “to convincingly demonstrate the contradictions between America’s rhetorical democracy and [the] African American experience.”87

Unfortunately the argument was lost on whites during the Great Depression and especially during World War II. The push for rights appeared to be agitation on the part of African Americans during a time of national crisis and exploded in episodes of racial violence in northern and western cities such as Los Angeles and Detroit in 1943. The other side of the coin for whites who were somewhat committed to African American rights was to pay lip service and then simply sweep the legitimate concerns of the African American population under the rug when it was politically, economically, or socially expedient. As historian Peter J. Kellogg notes, “Actively involved in raising racial questions during the thirties, the left downplayed race during the war lest it should prove a divisive issue that would hamper the war effort.”88 Even the

progressive minded Franklin Delano Roosevelt appeared to be “politically straitjacketed” on the issue of race both during the 1930s and 1940s.\(^8\) This was followed by a movement for consensus that African Americans would be “awarded esteem” as Violas would put it, for joining.\(^9\)

The case study of African Americans shows a trend that would be evident in the history of many minority groups during the time. The first step was the overwhelming sense of apprehension that many Americans felt when comparing the treatment of minorities in totalitarian regimes, combined with “the nation’s best image of itself as a tolerantly inclusive, fair-minded, ‘melting pot’ society—an image long nurtured in national mythology,” and the contemporary treatment of minorities.\(^9\) The separate and synthesis literature of social history would also illuminate a trend of the minority groups seizing upon this argument and receiving sympathy and little in the way actual social reform from elected officials and the general public.

Hence, we have a social context in which much was being put forth in terms of rhetoric for achieving equality for minorities, but a lack of action. As historian Alice Kessler-Harris states, “Faced then with a crisis of major proportions, United States policy makers chose to expand social provision dramatically, but in ways so restrictive that they did not challenge the nation’s sense of itself as a predominantly individualistic nation. Put another way, Americans chose to utilize…the Great Depression…not to reframe a particular national self-image, but to reaffirm it.”\(^9\) While a healthy debate raged rhetorically, it would be difficult to point to much in the way of reform that achieved equality for minorities in this time period. And if minorities were not given the necessary rights that the rest of the nation enjoyed, then egalitarianism could

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\(^8\) Kennedy, *Freedom From Fear*, 775.
\(^9\) Violas, “Fear and the Constraints,” 74.
\(^9\) Ibid, 760.
not be achieved. This trickled down into discussions of higher education. As historian V.R. Cardozier argues, “Following World War I there was a sharp increase in college attendance and throughout the 1930s, when the country was deeply involved in examining the nature of American democracy and opportunities for those less favored, there was a growing sense that less privileged members of society should have greater opportunity for personal growth and development, including education at the postsecondary level.”

The General Education Movement represents a Movement that was committed to working on this problem as well. As a result, a debate raged about whether or not the purpose of general education was to perpetuate a system of social efficiency or to reconstruct society through a system of egalitarianism.

The General Education Movement Responds to the Social Sphere

To gauge how certain members of the Movement favored an approach that would create a system in which the goal was social efficiency, we require a definition. A definition of this term is offered to us by Labaree, who claims “social efficiency, has exerted its influence on American schools through structural pragmatism—operationalized within the schools in the form of vocationalism and educational stratification.” It does seem almost counterintuitive to suggest that general education might be promoting a system of social efficiency as it purports to be the education that all must receive. But, such a situation could be possible under any number of conditions.

For example, if the curriculum of general education is culturally biased in any sense, it might produce the same results of a curriculum geared for social efficiency. Perhaps another,

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more chilling way to consider the idea of social efficiency as an allele in the genetic makeup of
general education is to consider the close relationship of liberal education with general
education. Liberal education had *always* been considered the hallmark education of the elite.95
But, then what was general education when differentiated from the liberal arts? It was, as
historian John W. Tresch suggests, “considered to be general because it was the education all the
citizens of any free society ought to have, and citizens must be familiar with the advancing
knowledge that brought that society into being and the culture that characterized it in the
contemporary era.”96 So there might indeed be the education for the elite, and the *general*
education for everyone else, creating, if anything, some semblance of an intellectual aristocracy.
Yet, this could be justified as a consensus situation as the intellectual elite could receive general
education along with everyone else, so long as elites received something of more value, or
something that was associated with power.

This mode of thinking, in which liberal arts is necessary for the ruling elite and general
education is necessary for the everyone else is evident in Vanderbilt University Chancellor O.C.
Carmichael’s piece in the *Southern Association Quarterly* entitled “Liberal Arts Versus General
Education.” The author describes the changing nature of college enrollments (which will be fully
dealt with in the following section on institutional context) and argues that these “new” students
needed general education. He writes

In 1900 there were scarcely 200,000 college students in this country; in 1940 there were
more than 1,300,000. With an increase of almost 600 per cent in college population the
interests and abilities of the group as a whole have changed greatly. Instead of having in
college mainly those preparing to enter the learned professions, such as law, medicine,

95 For more on this see Butts, *The College Charts its Course* and Bruce A. Kimball, *Orators and Philosophers: A
of how liberal education has been “displaced” by professional education since the late nineteenth century see David
96 John William Tresch, “The Impact of the Second World War on Liberal Arts Education in the United States”
(PhD diss., Oklahoma State University, 1986), 52.
teaching, the ministry, et., the majority of the present generation of college students is not concerned in learned professions of any kind. Indeed, it would appear that large numbers are essentially lacking in love of learning necessary to successful achievement in any exacting discipline. Such students naturally welcome a course, general in nature, that gives them a chance to earn a degree.97

Indeed, these students appeared to have no future in any position of power. Neither did they appear to Carmichael to have any position in working in any area that required a specialized education. One cannot be certain why Carmichael held this particularly low view of many of the students who were college-bound. However, it might be well to note that there was a “skills crisis” during this period which was not recognized until much later and these students might have benefitted from being looked at as capable of embarking upon a specialized course once they had completed their general education, of course.98

Whatever was to become of these students, it is clear that they were not the students who would be heads of state and captains of industry. Juxtaposed to these students were the elite and Carmichael described their ideal education. It was a liberal education dominated by what is now known as the western cannon. Carmichael proclaims, “for the real leaders of the future it is an essential part of their background and training if the American way is to be perpetuated, because it rests upon the heritage and tradition in the centuries of Western Civilization dating from the city states of Greece.”99 In other words, a more specific liberal arts education would distinguish the elite from the rest of the pack.100 This would be an adequate representation of the tendency toward social efficiency contained as an element in the thought of the General Education Movement.

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99 Carmichael, “Liberal Arts Versus General Education,” 252. For more on this type of thinking and a resulting curriculum that sought to achieve these ends see Gilbert Allardyce “The Rise and Fall of the Western Civilization Course,” American Historical Review 87 (1982): 695-725.
100 It should certainly be noted that this is only one conception of liberal education, and a very nationalistic one at that. It was supported most notably by the American historical profession. For more on this, see Novick, “That Noble Dream,” 281-319.
This can be juxtaposed by the egalitarian element in the Movement. Consider the statement of B. Lamar Johnson, who, writing in *The Junior College Journal* in an article entitled “Patterns of General Education,” claimed,

> Despite the differences in institution, however, there is one factor which we all need to recognize. It is this: No matter whether a student is a terminal or a college-prepatory student, he needs a general education. Regardless of whether he is going to be a lawyer or a filling-station operator, a librarian or a secretary, he will be a citizen. He will need the type of training that will make him a better citizen, a more effective member of the family circle. He needs a general education, an ‘education for common life.’

What we see is a more egalitarian approach to the professions. All must have this particular type of education, and support the political, economic, and social consensus by taking part in the same cultural transmissions. This is distinct from having a set of students go on to learn their culture from a liberal education curriculum that differs from their peers with professions that are esteemed less by society at the given moment.

Hence we see the Movement split on whether or not to proceed with a social efficiency model or one that promoted egalitarianism and ultimately social reconstruction. This, as was demonstrated, mirrored the hesitation toward equality in American social life from 1937-1947. It also was in response to institutional trends.

**Institutional Context**

In attempting to answer a particularly irritating and difficult question about higher education (why is there change without reform?), Larry Cuban suggests, “No one crisp explanation can suffice to fully answer the question. Any answer, however, must begin with the constantly changing environment in which American universities are nested and to which they must respond if they are to survive…unceasing social political, economic, and cultural changes.

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have impacted universities through direct intervention…and indirectly through each generation of increasing numbers of students who enter as undergraduates.”

From this statement we may draw inferences about how to proceed to write the institutional context of higher education from 1937-1947. The first is that it cannot be divorced from the larger social context of American politics, economy, society, and culture. The second appears to be that universities have been directly impacted by the expectations which society (through the vein of local, state, and federal governments and consumers alike) place upon them. As Cuban hinted at, the universities are reliant upon meeting social expectation to ensure their survival and this was accentuated during the Great Depression. Hence, there is a power relationship upon which the university is subordinate to American society, though it may be well to point out that “American society” only existed roughly eight years before establishing an institution of higher learning. Thus, to discuss institutional context is to discuss not only social context, but also social expectations and their management by institutions. This all falls under the umbrella of the purpose of the institution, or more properly for the intent of this discussion, the **social purpose** of the institution. Finally, Cuban offers a sense that there is a

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103 This is a reference, of course, to the founding of Harvard College in 1636. For a history of this founding see Samuel Eliot Morison, *The Founding of Harvard College* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1936). Though it may be controversial to suggest that Puritan society represented “American society” as to do so would be to perpetuate the New England-centric portion of the historiography of American education as well as an earlier master narrative of American history that locates the ideological origins of the United States within Puritan society, it should be noted that this is not my intent. I simply see it beneficial to complicate the perception (though I do not believe Cuban holds it) that institutions of higher learning are locked in a dependent, non-reciprocal relationship with society. American society and its immediate predecessors showed little interest in carrying on without institutions of higher learning. Aside from Harvard, there had indeed been earlier attempts to form institutions of higher learning, though they were unsuccessful. For a short discussion of this see Lawrence A. Cremin, *American Education: The Colonial Experience, 1607-1783* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970), 210. A more in-depth treatment of college creation in the colonial period is offered in Beverly McAnear, “College Founding in American Colonies, 1745-1775,” *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 42 (1955): 24-44.

104 The difference between purpose and social purpose lies in the ability in the latter to be shaped by social forces, whereas the former might remain stagnant because it accepts a universal truth. For example, the purpose of a Christian parochial university would be to promote the Christian faith. Such a purpose is not easily altered by society. A social purpose of a university could change rather frequently. Consider how the social purposes of a university shift dramatically during and after wartime.
correlation between change and increasing enrollment. Though there have been peaks and valleys associated with college enrollments; there has been a general upward trend throughout the history of the institution. Thus, the discussion of institutional context of the higher education in the United States will tackle the question of context, social purpose, and enrollments. First, we turn our attention to the social purposes of higher education.\textsuperscript{105}

The university has had shifting social purposes throughout American history. To discuss these would be rather cumbersome, thus we may refer to Daniel Bell who quickly outlines the major points of the evolution. He claims, “The historic role of the university, more so in Europe perhaps than in the United States has been the transmission of a traditional culture and common learning and the education of an elite. In the industrial societies, and particularly in the United States, the university took on a very different, triple-service function: as a ladder of social mobility for the middle class; as the place to train the emerging professional classes…as a community agency providing…varied services.”\textsuperscript{106} Bell describes this change in the social purposes of higher education occurring contingently with industrialization. The accepted dates for this occurring fall roughly between 1880 and 1920.\textsuperscript{107} While it is true a great deal of change occurred during this time, it would be a misnomer to suggest all of the change from the traditional ideal to a more service-oriented ideal occurred during this time period.\textsuperscript{108} To do so would be to sweep the land grant universities under the rug.\textsuperscript{109}

\textsuperscript{105} It is necessary, as this thesis has discussed the context of the Great Depression and World War II previously, to juxtapose these through the conversations about social purposes and enrollment.
\textsuperscript{107} For an excellent synthesis history of industrialization and the transformation American society underwent see, Robert H. Wiebe, \textit{The Search for Order, 1877-1920} (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967). This work should be supplemented with Maureen A. Flanagan, \textit{America Reformed: Progressives and Progressivism, 1890s-1920s} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). The latter, though written in the same vein, is more inclusive of the various constituencies that worked to transform America: especially minority and women’s groups.
\textsuperscript{108} It is important to note that there is an inherent bias in the labels “traditional” and “service-oriented” as the traditional university ideal was oriented toward serving the community by training men for the clergy and learned
Whatever the quarrels of the time period of higher education’s transformation should be abandoned for the time being in favor of suggesting that by 1937 the institutions had this “triple service function” embedded into their identities. It had transitioned from the traditional university to what Clark Kerr dubbed the “multiversity” in the 1963 Godkin Lectures given at Harvard. Kerr explains, “The university started as a single community—a community of masters and students. It may even be said to have had a soul in the sense of a central animating principle. Today the large American university is, rather, a whole series of communities, and activities held together by a common name, a common governing board, and related purposes.”\textsuperscript{110} What is implied here is that the university (and indeed, other institutions of higher learning) might be in a position to have any number of social purposes, not just the training of scholars, which corroborates Bell’s point. Yet, it leads us to a place where we are forced to discuss several proposed uses for higher learning in the U.S. during the time period.

But before that can happen, we must consider the distress that some felt over the transformation from a single-purpose institution to the multiversity. For this distress created one of the more internally based social purposes of higher education: the purpose of reconstructing the unity which had once existed in higher education. This may be justified as a social purpose because, as Brewer and Heiges’s article “The Search For Unity in Higher Education” suggested; not only did the lack of unity in the university mirror the lack of unity in society, but solving the


\textsuperscript{110} Clark Kerr, \textit{The Uses of the University} 4\textsuperscript{th} ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995 [1963]). 1. Though Kerr was speaking 1963, this statement would have been true in the context of our time period as well.
former would assist in solving the latter. Certainly many factors destroyed unity in the university, but the elective system might be chief among them. Others have cited enrollment increases and cultural diffusion from Americans who went abroad (particularly to Germany) for the destruction of this unity.\footnote{William C. DeVane, \textit{The American University in the Twentieth Century} (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1957), 5-6. This author specifically points to cultural diffusion between German trained American scholars.}

As the loss of unity was felt by many involved with higher education to be an issue during the time period of 1937-1947 several steps were being taken to create the appearance and feel that the institution of higher learning in America once had. Frederick Rudolph argues, “Football…was also helping to restore the old collegiate unity which had been broken by enrollment increases and the development of the elective curriculum.”\footnote{Rudolph, \textit{The American College and University}, 379} Indeed, it could be something as simple as a community building exercise through the support of an institution’s football team that could be a factor in restoring institutional and inter-institutional unity.\footnote{It also represented a threat to unity from the vantage point of some college presidents. For more on collegiate football see, John Sayle Watterson, \textit{College Football: History, Spectacle, Controversy} (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 2005). This work deals with Charles W. Eliot’s as well as Robert M. Hutchins’s opposition to the sport.}

Facing the Great Depression in the 1930s provided external pressure on the university to not only to socialize youth (as Fass demonstrates this was also occurring in the lower schools), but also to prepare students for the job market. As Joel Spring notes, in the Depression, “unemployed youth now became a central issue.”\footnote{Spring, “Youth Culture In the United States” in \textit{Roots of Crisis}, 207.} Something was needed to bridge the gap between the few youth that would be employed and those who would not be. There would need to be a credential. Whereas college had traditionally offered this credential to the elite, middle class students who were earning these credentials in high school needed the increased advantage
that a college degree would offer them to be competitive on the job market.\footnote{115} Oscar and Mary Handlin explain the increasing reliance upon the college degree as a credential for the workforce. They write,

After 1930...young people between the age of 18 and 22 were less and less likely to discover alternative modes of launching a desirable career. The depression was particularly hard upon job-seeking youth, and when the end of the [First World] war relieved the acute manpower shortage, the casual employments that had once provided stepping stones for some tended to disappear; bureaucratic organizations required credentials of those they hired; unions set tight requirements around valuable positions; and mechanization eased the need for hands. The high school graduate, unwanted on the labor market, had a desperate need for the college degree; and the number of families that could afford to assist their children to that goal rose with the general increase of incomes.\footnote{116} (Italics added)

This sentiment also filtered down to greater emphasis on seeking a broader (general or liberal) education. As historian Hugh Hawkins claimed, “Perhaps as jobs disappeared during the Great Depression students were more willing to seek a broad education, since it was hard to know what ‘career’ to prepare for.”\footnote{117} This belief in the college as the road to workplace success had become widespread amongst the middle classes.\footnote{118} The value of a college degree is evident by understanding that enrollments were increasing in the face of rising tuition.\footnote{119} Indeed, one could ascertain that college was gaining a reputation as an institution that could train students for employment outside of the learned professions from public opinion polls. Consider the American Institute of Public Opinion Poll conducted on November 30, 1936 that asked a cross-section of


116}{Handlin, \textit{The American College and American Culture}, 72.


118}{For more on this see, Burton J. Bledstein, \textit{The Culture of Professionalism: The Middle Class and the Development of Higher Education in America} (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1976).

the American population “Do you think a college education is worth what it cost in time and money to persons who are not going into the professions?” The national total was 58% answering in the affirmative while only 38% answered negatively.\textsuperscript{120} To alter their purpose to fit these needs, higher education in America became an institution that became more populist. This was accomplished through the increasing of enrollments and the offering of a more diverse set of schools and curriculum to meet the perceived needs of the “new” students.\textsuperscript{121}

This enrollment increase was noted by contemporary scholars, regardless of whether they were apprehensive or excited by the increases. Fass states, “The expansion of American education in the early twentieth century was often described in language drawn from the theater or circus: ‘dramatic,’ ‘spectacular,’ ‘amazing,’ ‘extraordinary.’”\textsuperscript{122} The college enrollment phenomenon was not only related to the workplace difficulties, but also to the rise of high school enrollment. Richard Hofstadter and C. De Witt Hardy remark on this claiming, “The [college] student body increased thirtyfold between 1870 and 1940 while the population was increasing threefold. These large numbers were accommodated in a way similar to that adopted by the secondary schools, which faced a ninetyfold increase during the same period.”\textsuperscript{123} The National Center for Education Statistics has pinned the fall college enrollment in the nation to have been 597,880 in 1919-20, 1,100,737 in 1929-30, and 1,494,230 in 1939-40.\textsuperscript{124} Though we do see overall growth from the 1920s to the 1940s, there were significant ebbs and flows in enrollment. Sociologist Raymond Walters observes, “Contraction occurred in the earliest years of the

\textsuperscript{121} The word “perceived” is suggested because the true needs of students may not have been met in this period because they were subject to the interpretation of school administrators.
\textsuperscript{122} Fass, \textit{Outside In}, 38.
depression, but the federal government took steps to counteract this via the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA) in 1934. By mid to late 1930s we see growth once again. \(^{125}\)

Unfortunately, these increases in enrollment only represented “a middle-class phenomenon at nonelite universities.” \(^{126}\) The time period was marked by quotas that aimed to keep groups out of universities. As historian David O. Levine remarks, “Many of the nation’s best-known colleges gave the appearance of being selective only because they chose to reject deliberately and systematically qualified but socially undesirable candidates in order to placate their alumni and other upper-middle-class WASPs.” \(^{127}\) It is certainly true that this was an overarching problem that affected numerous minority groups, however the history of these denials of admission to legitimate candidates can only be told through a racial and ethnic lens as the context is typically situated and differs along those lines. For Jewish Americans their success at penetrating the Ivy League institutions’ admissions processes alarmed administrators at those colleges who responded with quota systems. \(^{128}\)

Whereas the presence of Jewish Americans was limited by a quota, “most white colleges refused to admit black students.” \(^{129}\) Rather there was “racially segregated system of public

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126 Green, *The Uncertainty of American Life*, 127.


higher education” that many whites (especially in the south) wished to maintain.\footnote{James D. Anderson, “Philanthropy, the State, and the Development of Historically Black Public Colleges: The Case of Mississippi,” Minerva 35 (1997): 309. This is not to say there were no African-Americans at white universities, but rather that a systematic structural process to maintain segregation existed. As Anderson argues, “It was a shared responsibility between state and philanthropy.” For an additional case study, see John A. Hardin, Fifty Years of Segregation: Black Higher Education in Kentucky, 1904-1954 (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1997). Treatments of discrimination of African-Americans in admissions (or lack of admissions rather) in the period between Reconstruction and 1920 abound.} In the case of African-Americans, the maintenance of this system was vital to perpetuate the status quo and racial hierarchy. College represented education for full citizenship, education that allowed a choice of careers, and general advancement. Perhaps, though, the perpetuation of a segregated system of higher education represented a more symbolic gesture of discrimination. It stultified the progress of African-Americans in a unique way simply because “black college students were undeniably prime candidates for membership in W.E.B. Du Bois’ ‘talented tenth.’”\footnote{V.P. Franklin, “Whatever Happened to the College-Bred Negro?” History of Education Quarterly 24 (1984): 411. The “Talented Tenth” is, of course, Du Bois’ famous theory that ten percent of African-Americans should be educated for social mobility to transform society as well as “uplift” their fellow African-Americans.}

Certainly women were subject to being segregated either by institution or by curriculum.\footnote{For more on this see Lynn D. Gordon, “Annie Nathan Meyer and Barnard College: Mission and Identity in Women’s Higher Education, 1889-1950” History of Education Quarterly 26 (1986): 503-522 and the relevant passages in Barbara Solomon, In the Company of Educated Women: A History of Women and Higher Education in America (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986).} This particular form of gender discrimination occurred because women were seen as vital to the replication of the nuclear family unit.\footnote{Carol Dyhouse, “Men and Women in Higher Education in the 1930s: Family Expectations, Gendered Outcomes” in Carol Dyhouse, Students: A Gendered History (New York: Routledge, 2006), 34-59.} These discussions could include anyone outside of the accepted norm of the 1930s including Catholics, Latina/os, and Arab-Americans but for the purposes of brevity it may be best to simply state that admissions policies attempted to engineer the college population and what social mobility existed was reserved for middle-class “white” students. This was done in the face of the “egalitarian rhetoric” which those involved with higher education espoused.\footnote{Levine, The American College, 160.} This is not to say that there was not progress made in democratizing higher learning in America. There certainly was to some extent, but what was
occurring was a creation of a hierarchical system that included several types of institutions.\textsuperscript{135} Each institution had a (perceived) responsibility to accept and train a particular type of student. Along with this educational responsibility typically came a program of general education that would meet this need. This would help to reinforce the social order of the day and to ensure social efficiency.

But social efficiency requires a number of different strands of educational thought being practiced at once in the national context. This results in a system in which functionalist and anti-functionalist systems of educational theory are debated. Hence, each institution was engaged in reflection over whether to offer a functional (adjustment based education tailored to local context and obligation) or an anti-functionalist (liberal education based upon seeking Truth and obtaining skills that would work in numerous contexts).\textsuperscript{136} This debate offers yet another consideration that must be grappled with in seeking to define the purposes of the various types of institutions present in higher education during the time period.

To construct a description of these institutions is to mirror them to the social hierarchy and examine their stances on general education. Nestled firmly atop this hierarchy were liberal arts colleges. They would seek to train the best and the brightest students for the leadership positions in society. These institutions justified themselves as simply training those students with the most talent for positions to advance society while still maintaining democracy under the guise of a meritocracy. Such an idea can be traced deep into American colonial roots to Thomas Jefferson and his notion of a natural aristocracy.\textsuperscript{137} But, of course, no institution has ever been


\textsuperscript{136} In terms of schools of educational thought, a functionalist method of education has been defined as “life-adjustment education” while anti-functionalist education has been defined as “perennialism” and “essentialism.”

\textsuperscript{137} For more on Jeffersonian educational thought see the opening chapter of Gordon C. Lee, ed., \textit{Crusade Against Ignorance: Thomas Jefferson on Education}, (New York: Teachers College Press, 1961). This should be considered in context of colonial society and debates on popular schooling, which is covered well by Cremin, \textit{The Colonial
able to *objectively* determine the best and the brightest without interjecting an interpretational bias and the liberal arts college was no exception. Historian Agatho Zimmer noted as early as 1939, “Early in the present century colleges showed liberal tendencies by denying admission to no student whose qualifications for entrance satisfied the demands of culture, broadly and liberally interpreted. The colleges accepted as their own the ideals of the communities they served, and they were considered to have accomplished their work most perfectly when they most effectively helped them to achieve their ideals.”  

Once students were granted admission, the institution they discovered was one that had hardly evolved over time. It was static in its absolute insistence upon a rigorous program of liberal education. This very insistence led to their programs being seen as a form of general education. Thus one might say a liberal education became synonymous with general education in this context.

What might be next on the hierarchy, if we are to leave research universities out of this conception (as we are focusing heavily on undergraduate populations) are the land-grant colleges. By the inception of the Cooperative Study in General Education in 1937 the stigma of land grant universities was beginning to disperse. They were expanding both in attracting talented high school students and in offering a more diverse curriculum through its extension programs to a wider proportion of the public. But, more importantly this institutional category “played an important part in the discussion of and experiments with general education.”  

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139 A detailed picture of liberal arts colleges of the time period is given in Wriston, *The Nature of a Liberal College*.

140 Eddy, *Colleges for Our Land and Time*, 205.

141 Ibid, 212.
sense, they were the ideal institution by providing a research function and also training a great deal of the public to have revised their general education programs.  

The next institution in the hierarchy might be the community (junior) college. Its mere existence is something of a paradox. Initially dubbed a “peoples’ college” that was to provide every member of society with a higher quality education (especially from a civic perspective); it came to provide a weaker curriculum and served as a holding function (at best) for society. Its appearance “fundamentally altered the shape of American higher education, for it introduced a new tier into the existing hierarchy” of institutions. It was welcomed at first as it relieved the pressures brought upon by so many of the “new” high school students seeking some form of higher learning. It promised to provide those students with the promise of a credential in a communal setting in an efficient manner that would be easier on the wallets of their families. Yet these “new” students were considered to have only been socialized in the high school setting, and not adequately prepared for the work force and/or civic life. Historian Gregory L. Goodwin argues, “The dominant social value placed upon efficiency, social intelligence, and a rationalized workforce had underscored the public acceptance of the movement.”

These goals filtered down into the curriculum of the institution, especially as it related to their program of general education. It was a functional type of general education that was related closely to the local context of where the school was situated and the clientele it served. Though it

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143 As we move to this point in the analysis, we begin to see students who are considered inferior for any number of unjustifiable reasons such as race, gender, or class. I begin with the community college as it was not perceived to have had the stigma that other institutions had because it still contained members of the dominant group in society, albeit what was considered to be the worst academic students of that lot.
145 Gregory L. Goodwin, “A History of the Community-Junior College Ideology” Eric document ED 093-427, 6. While the early goal of the community college movement was to educate students in a manner that would create a more professional workforce and more intelligent body politic, there were other goals that members of the movement debated. For more on this see John H. Frye, *The Vision of the Public Junior College, 1900-1940: Professional Goals and Popular Aspirations* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1992), 27-30.
appeared that this type curriculum simply met the goals that community college administrators saw fit for their students: it simply ended up giving the term “general education” a bad reputation in that setting. Goodwin suggests that these administrators “were mainly concerned with terminal students and their attempts to build a suitable general education curriculum resulted in their speaking of general education as if it were applicable only to one class in society.”\footnote{Goodwin, “A History of the Community-Junior College Ideology,” 153-154. For an example of a call for a functional type of education at the community college level see George F. Zook, “General Education at the Junior College Level,” \textit{The Junior College Journal}, 9 (1939): 353-354.} Certainly this harkens back to the relation between liberal and general education that had been discussed earlier. There was, however, a minority of educators who saw the community college as an institution where a superior type of learning could occur in a more democratic setting as opposed to the functional holding institution that it had become. Consider University of Chicago president Robert M. Hutchins, who proclaimed in 1938,

> With notable exceptions the junior college has so far done only a negative job. It has kept young people from going places and doing things that would have been worse for them. It has supplied an institution where they could pass the time in relatively harmless pursuits until they could go to work….But housing, however excellent, is not a wholly adequate educational ideal….From the standpoint of my university, at least, this is a serious matter. Thirty per cent of the new students entering Chicago this fall are graduates of junior colleges. This proportion will increase, not only in my university, but also in yours.\footnote{Robert M. Hutchins, “The Junior College,” \textit{The Educational Record}, 29 (1938): 5-6.}

One can read the opportunity that Hutchins saw in this situation rather easily. Students were succeeding in community colleges despite their perceived inferior curriculum. If community colleges offering a more rigorous program of general education (even one that approached the liberal education ideal of the liberal arts colleges, or Hutchins’s own Chicago plan which focused on general education via engagement with a series of “Great Books” that marked the western tradition), the students who would be emerging from these institutions would be enlivening the universities they entered next, the workforce, and the society. This type of
thought that emphasized the liberal education of every member of society in a rigorous fashion was a hallmark of the Hutchins’s career.¹⁴⁸

Next in the hierarchy were the normal schools. These schools had been around for several decades by the 1930s but were marked as inferior because they larger catered to a female population. This was due to the assumption that teaching (especially at the lower levels) was an occupation that should be held by females.¹⁴⁹ Regardless, historian Christine A. Ogren has demonstrated that Normal Schools had from their inception offered a strong program of liberal arts. But this tradition had faded after the turn of the twentieth century as Normal Schools began to focus on offering a more comprehensive program. Modernization meant specialization at this point, and hence liberal and/or general education suffered.¹⁵⁰

Women’s colleges also dealt with the same demarcation as inferior because of their students. Regardless, they took a somewhat dual stance between educating women to replicate the nuclear family structure, which was considered the foundational block of the social structure and offering opportunities for occupational advancement to their students. In essence, women’s colleges could be as progressive as they wished, but still had to deal with the nature of the workplace. As historian Barbara M. Solomon states, “the most prestigious professions—the ministry, medicine, law, and academia—while not literally closed to women, remained supremely male strongholds.”¹⁵¹ Thus, the debate continued.

Finally, the historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) lay at the bottom of the hierarchy. Mirroring the status of public life (especially in the south where Jim Crow laws were

¹⁵¹ Solomon, In the Company of Educated Women, 130.
in effect and heavily enforced), HBCUs were segregated. As historians Marybeth Gasman and Christopher L. Tudico note, “Until the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision in 1954, both public and private Black colleges in the south remained segregated by law and were the only educational option for African Americans.”\(^{152}\) The students and professors of these institutions also had to grapple with the question of how to educate students to make inroads into (or perpetuate) a work and social culture that had relegated them to second-class citizenry.

The method of accomplishing this had been fiercely debated for decades prior to the Great Depression. As Solomon states, “Black…educators had their own problems to resolve on the issue of vocationalism. From the turn of the century Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois had clashed over the competing values of liberal arts and technical subjects for black men and women.”\(^{153}\) Du Bois, who had been educated at the most prestigious of American liberal arts institutions (Harvard), had perceptively noticed that a liberal arts education was the valued method for producing society’s elite. However, Du Bois was not simply interested in creating a social elite of African-Americans known as the “talented tenth,” he also envisioned an African-American body politic that could demand and utilize the rights of participatory democracy that were *already* granted to them under the American Constitution. Washington, on the other hand, had envisioned a much more gradual process of racial integration. This included a system of technical and vocational education that would provide employment. Yet, the employment that was available came with the demarcation of subservience in the eyes of many.

Were this debate only held by black intellectuals it is difficult to tell who would have won out. Yet, forces gathered in the defense of Washington (and perhaps Washington may have


\(^{153}\) Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women*, 151.
been a weapon in an arsenal that sought to keep African-Americans subservient to a dominant class as he could voice white concerns with the added value of his skin color.) Though outside forces supported Washington’s quest for technical education for African-Americans it would be a misnomer to suggest that Du Bois had no white support. Both men had support through a system of philanthropic groups. Historian James D. Anderson argues, “The different philanthropic groups, particularly the missionary and industrial philanthropists, were in sharp disagreement over the ends and means of black education in general. Most visible were their divergent conceptions of the value and purpose of black higher education.”\textsuperscript{154} As these debates raged on, they, of course, filtered down into the general education curriculums of HBCUs and caused a system and created a system of general education that had divergent purposes. They are well documented by Irving Derbigny, who was an administrator of the Tuskegee Institute and in 1947 produced the volume General Education in the Negro College.\textsuperscript{155}

Thus, the stratification of higher education led to a system in which the types of institutions who were on top were actively attempting to preserve their dominant position by producing a natural aristocracy while institutions with minority populations were struggling with producing students who perpetuate the system or reconstruct it. This was a major factor toward destroying the unity of higher education, thus any theory or group who wished to restore this unity had to contemplate the reconciliation of these educational aims. This would require creating a system of unity in American social life, which could never be created as long as minorities demanded (and the majority population refused to provide) the equality that was guaranteed to them under the American constitution and recommended through the American rhetoric of equality and democracy.

\textsuperscript{155} Irving A. Derbigny, General Education in the Negro College (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1947).
Leaving the context of the Great Depression (and its potentially divisive nature as well as its individualistic purposes) we turn our attention to higher education in the context of World War II. Perhaps the finest monograph produced on American education during the War to date is Charles Dorn’s recent *American Education, Democracy, and the Second World War*. Dorn situates his discussion of educational institutions well within social context by stating, “World War II led to fear, anxiety, and concern on the part of many Americans, not only over the course of the conflict but in response to the political, social, and economic forces it had unleashed on the nation’s homefront. Higher education…as many of the country’s other axial institutions, bore the brunt of these forces.”156 Within this work, Dorn argues that the main question that institutions of higher education (as well as all other American formal schooling institutions) faced was whether to function as “arsenals” of democracy or “citadels.” Social forces compelled the question to be asked, but so too did memory and the memory of World War I in particular. In fact, the choices which higher education administrators made were directly influenced by this. Cardozier speaks to this point by arguing, “The higher education community felt that the government, and the War Department in particular, had delayed much too long during World War I before involving colleges and universities in defense activities. College leaders were also bitter about the fact that when the military services did call on higher education in World War I, they virtually took control of campuses.”157

These two sentiments evoked a reaction from higher education that suggested that their participation in World War II would be fundamentally different in two ways. First, institutions of higher learning would monitor the world situation closely and begin to mobilize earlier. As Dorn

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states, “higher education administrators began planning for U.S. involvement in World War II prior to the attack on Pearl Harbor.”\textsuperscript{158} Second, the participation would be dictated more by the administrators of higher education rather than external governmental organizations or branches. This is not to say that campuses were not transformed into training facilities for the military, but rather to suggest that the \textit{discourse} of the war’s impact upon higher education and American society was more democratic and abundant whereas it had been reactionary and stifled in World War I.\textsuperscript{159}

It was at the insistence of administrators of higher education that these circumstances which allowed the question which Dorn eloquently phrased to even be asked were created. One of the central points of contention between military brass (who took a hard-line against college administrators who were not interested in solely pursuing war aims) and college administrators was the issue of liberal education.\textsuperscript{160} General education also fell under this umbrella to members of the military who did not have the very refined understanding of educational theory that warranted discernment between the two. Dorn remarks, “Colleges and universities across the United States dramatically curbed liberal arts offerings as higher education institutions became increasingly militarized during the war years.”\textsuperscript{161} This ran up against two movements concurrently occurring in higher education. The first was a movement to resurrect the emphasis placed upon humanities which had suffered as the university shifted its emphasis to research and

\textsuperscript{158} Dorn, \textit{American Education}, 27. Cardozier argues that college presidents were in agreement that America could not evade involvement in the present conflict. Cardozier, \textit{Colleges and Universities in World War II}, 3-4.

\textsuperscript{159} In fact, discussion that was deemed “anti-American” by professors during World War I was grounds for dismissal. The climate was dangerous to democratic discourse and all involved with higher education suffered by the draconian measures taken to ensure that higher education and its representatives “supported” the war. For more on this see Cain, “Academic Freedom,” Gruber, \textit{Mars and Minerva}, and Clifford Wilcox, “World War I and the Attack on Professors of German at the University of Michigan,” \textit{History of Education Quarterly} 33, (1993): 59-84.

\textsuperscript{160} The classic defense of liberal education during the war years was put forth in Mark Van Doren, \textit{Liberal Education} (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1943).

\textsuperscript{161} Dorn, \textit{American Education}, 46.
the social sciences were created as legitimate fields of inquiry.162 The second was the General Education Movement.

Single institutions had difficulty not succumbing to the demands of the military, so they relied on their collective presence to represent a source of strength, much like individual workers rely on their labor unions. Cardozier argues that “Throughout World War II and in the period leading up to it when defense preparations were underway, the American Council on Education (ACE) became the spokesmen for all of higher education, logically so, for it was and is the one national organization that represents all colleges and universities.”163 This would be an important point to remember because it placed ACE as a serious contender through which a movement toward unity could be brought about during the 1930s and 1940s. And thus, we move to examine the Cooperative Study in General Education which was under the auspices of ACE and how it attempted to function as an instrument of unity.

162 This is dealt with in Patricia Beesley, The Revival of the Humanities in American Education (New York: Columbia University Press, 1940). For the shifted emphasis to research see Geiger, To Advance Knowledge. On the creation of the social sciences see Dorothy Ross, The Origins of American Social Science (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991). This should be supplemented by well crafted essays that appear in Alexandra Oleson and John Voss eds., The Organization of Knowledge in Modern America, 1860-1920 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1979).

163 Cardozier, Colleges and Universities in World War II, 4.
CHAPTER 2

BREEDING CONSENSUS AMONG DIVERSE INSTITUTIONS: THE POLITICS OF COOPERATION IN THE COOPERATIVE STUDY IN GENERAL EDUCATION

The Cooperative Study sought to achieve progress through the cooperative action of teachers and college faculties who did not agree about such issues. In the face of such disagreements, how was it possible to cooperate?1

To begin to approach the significance and/or meaning of the Cooperative Study in General Education it is imperative to keep in mind the theory put forth by Joseph Brewer and Donald Heiges. Higher education would never approach unity unless there was a marked degree of unity in the social world in which the institutions operated in. But, the authors recognized that this was a reciprocal process. In other words, they recognized what many who have studied the history of education have understood. That the social world interacts with the school and vice versa, both inevitably altering each other’s destinies in the process.

Given Brewer and Heiges’s theory, either society or higher education had to make the first move. It could not be society who was mired in a Depression of previously unimagined proportions. Consensus building was being attempted by many facets of the social world. It was higher education (with its localized symptoms of disunity troubling so many) that would attempt to provide unity, first for itself, and then to assist in the national consensus being formed. As Cardozier reminded us, this could best (if not only) be accomplished through the work of the American Council on Education. But ACE had its work cut out for them. Higher education manifested as a set of hierarchical institutions, each with a different set of objectives and

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clientele. Higher education demonstrated the same stratification that the social world did. And of course, the crossroads for those who wanted to unify socially was the same for those who wanted to unify institutionally. They needed to bring various groups together, and in the case of higher education representatives of the various types of institutions to work together on the problems of general education.

Origins, Impetuses, and Institutional Selections of the Study

By 1936 and 1937, the Great Depression was in full swing which strained individual institutions and their budgets. This caused many schools and colleges to do everything they could go just to stay alive. It was in this atmosphere that cooperative study of selected problems emerged, and after the Eight Year Study conducted by the Progressive Education Association, it was all the rage. General education had been an issue that had dominated the higher educational scene since the 1870s but it reached an all time high directly after World War I and was once again coming on the scene. Thus, the two educational movements converged; the preferred method (cooperative study) and the content (general education).

George F. Zook, the President of the American Council on Education and a national celebrity who had already graced the cover of Time Magazine had noticed this by 1938. As such, and as he recognized that ACE was the national organization, he was receptive when faculty members at certain universities approached him to see if ACE would sponsor a cooperative study. Even at the first meetings of the Cooperative Study in General Education he recognized that his Study had the potential to become a regional model. The minutes of an early meeting report, “Dr. Zook expressed the opinion that this study would be of crucial importance, and that
others of a similar type would probably develop in the future. Already groups in California and in the south have shown an interest in a regional project of this sort.”

But this initial meeting revealed an initial tension. Should the group from California who wanted to join be included in this “Midwestern” group which was already housed at the University of Chicago under the directorship of its Department of Education Head Ralph W. Tyler? Ideally yes, but this was the Depression and resources had to be taken into consideration. The minutes of the meeting reveal the settlement of their inclusion and why it was of the utmost importance. The minutes read, “Dr. Zook referred to the request of a group of California institutions for membership in the study. At its earlier meeting the committee decided that the resources available would not permit the inclusion of institutions on the west coast. This policy was reversed, however…on the grounds that the Council is a national organization and therefore, has the obligation to include institutions in the far west.” While ACE was a national organization and this needed to be demonstrated through its selections, practicality was still a defining point along which the institutions were selected. After all, what good was the Study if it exhausted its resources too quickly?

Indeed, its initial budget was “based on a contribution of $1,000 yearly by each of the cooperating institutions, and a similar amount contributed by the General Education Board.” Of this budget, which totaled $43,000, personnel costs accounted for $28,000, travel expenses accounted for $9,200, supplies and equipment accounted for $2,275, the accounting fee of the Council was $1,075, and finally a contingent fund of $2,000. As the travel expenses only

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2 “Minutes of the Meeting of the Sub-Committee on General Education, November 29 and 30, 1938 at the Stevens Hotel, Chicago, Illinois, Box 115, Folder 1, American Council on Education Archives, Hoover Institution Library and Archives, Stanford, California. Hereafter cited as “ACE Papers.”
3 Ibid.
4 “Minutes of the meeting of the Committee on the Cooperative Study in General Education at the Stevens Hotel, Chicago, Illinois, November 18, 1938” Box 115, Folder 1, ACE Papers.
5 “Budget,” Box 115, Folder 1, ACE Papers.
accounted for 21% of the budget. “The committee found it necessary to select a majority of institutions from the states within the north central area, because of the expense involved in visitation to institutions by members of the Central Staff. However, several institutions outside the north central region were nominated in order to give the study a national complexion, and also with the purpose of stimulating activity in this field in other sections of the country.”

Hence, the resources would not be exhausted for the members of the Central Staff (such as Ralph W. Tyler and other experts in education) but a diversity of institutions could be maintained. As Earl J. McGrath, who was a member of the board of directors and Central Staff of this Study would later write, “This diversity should guarantee the widest possible application of the results of the study.” This “diversity” also included, by definition, a set of institutions that represented the immense range of higher education regarding the different types of institutions. In other words, it included at least one of every type of institution which was previously discussed that made up the hierarchical system of higher education in America. After these two considerations were set in stone, the Committee charged with the task of selecting the institutions set about making the tough decisions.

To draw prestige to the Cooperative Study, they initially sought out institutions of higher distinction and celebrity once they had settled on a core group of interested institutions whose representatives had recommended to ACE that the Study be conducted in the first place. But they were frustrated with the negative reception they received by these institutions such as Sarah Lawrence College (which was already hard at work on its own program of general education)

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6 “Minutes of the First Meeting of the Committee on the Cooperative Study in General Education, Held in Dean Works’ office, the University of Chicago, on Wednesday Evening, July 13, 1938, Box 115, Folder 1, ACE Papers.

and Vanderbilt University.\footnote{See the section on Sarah Lawrence College in Louis T. Bénézet, \textit{General Education in the Progressive College} (New York: Arno Press, 1971 [1943]).} The reasons for this response from the more famous institutions were related by Dr. George A. Works who was a member of the board for the Cooperative Study.

The minutes of one of the earliest meetings reveal that,

Dr. Works then went on to say that he was disturbed by reasons given by some of the stronger institutions in refusing to join the group. Those were that: (1) the earlier representatives of the project had referred to the publicity value of membership in the group; (2) some of the institutions already members of the group were not of high quality; (3) some of the colleges of liberal arts stated that their programs of general education extended through four years, and therefore any program of evaluation limited to the junior college level would not be adequate to their needs.\footnote{Minutes of the meeting of the Committee on the Cooperative Study in General Education at the Stevens Hotel, Chicago, Illinois, November 18, 1938” Box 115, Folder 1, ACE Papers.}

As we can deduce from this information, the liberal arts colleges were well aware of the dichotomy between liberal and general education and wanted to preserve the prestige of the former. By suggesting that the liberal arts method of general education lasted four years as opposed to two they were not only asserting a fact but also explaining that they were above cooperation (as to do so would dilute their position). Nevertheless, liberal arts colleges did join.

We can also have a closer glimpse at the sense of anxiety over the dilution of prestige an institution might suffer if it were the \textit{namesake} of the Cooperative Study. Works wrote Zook to break this bit of bad news. “There is a possibility that Vanderbilt will not participate as I judge from Chancellor Capen’s letter he is not particularly enthusiastic about it. I gathered from what Mr. [Earl] McGrath said that he felt the institutions were not quite up to the level of a group in which he would like to see Vanderbilt.”\footnote{George A. Works to George F. Zook, 30 December 1938. Box 115, Folder 1, ACE Papers.} It is from this that we can begin to understand how those who served on the Central Staff such as Samuel P. Capen of Vanderbilt and Ralph W. Tyler of the University of Chicago could or would not persuade their own prestigious institutions to participate. To do so would require, as the selection committee required of all institutions, not
only the financial commitment of $1,000 annually, but also “a letter indicating that the trustees have taken favorable action and that the faculty has voted to participate.”

Having learned their lesson from attempting to corral institutions of greater repute, the selection committee “decided that its collective judgment concerning the qualifications of institutions, supplemented by such additional information as it seems desirable to collect, would furnish an adequate basis for the selection of the cooperating institutions.” In other words, unity was not going to be something that everyone wanted to be a part of and the committee had to locate candidates and simply invite them to join while hoping for the best. The (re)construction of unity, it was slowly being realized, was going to be a cumbersome process.

The steps of this process was first to gather all those institutions that had heard of the Study in one way or another and had expressed interest and then to create a list of backup institutions. The selection committee needed two of each type of institution to assure that they could include at least one in the Study. The minutes of an early meeting show how this functioned (albeit with institutions that had little national prestige).

Dr. Works read a letter from Oklahoma A. and M. College in which this institution expressed a desire to join the group. It was decided not to invite Oklahoma A. and M. The application of Portales College of New Mexico was also rejected. Mr. McGrath then reported on his visits to Allegheny College, Bethany College, Winthrop College, and Talladega College. Each of these institutions with the exception of Winthrop College was admitted. Milwaukee State Teachers College and Ball State Teachers College were discussed and the committee decided to extend an invitation to the latter institution. Several members of the committee urged the addition of another land grant institution. A preference was expressed for Iowa State College at Ames and Purdue University. Accordingly the Chairman was authorized to invite Iowa State College, and if this institution does not consider it desirable or feasibly to participate, the invitation will be extended to Purdue.

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11 George A. Works to George F. Zook, 16 December 1938. Box 115, Folder 1, ACE Papers.
12 Minutes of the First Meeting of the Committee on the Cooperative Study in General Education, Held in Dean Works’ office, the University of Chicago, on Wednesday Evening, July 13, 1938, Box 115, Folder 1, ACE Papers.
13 Minutes of the meeting of the Committee on the Cooperative Study in General Education at the Stevens Hotel, Chicago, Illinois, November 18, 1938” Box 115, Folder 1, ACE Papers.
And as such, the invitations were sent out and accepted one by one. But, to get representatives of these institutions in a room is one thing while assisting them in cooperating on something as foundational as general education (which rested upon their assumptions of political, economic, social, institutional, and educational theory) was something else.

The Politics of Cooperation

As one might imagine, any gathering of people discussing education (especially at the level of general education) is likely to become a discussion or rather a debate of competing views of the “good.” That education is a key battleground of politics has been understood for millennia and this was staring the Central Staff plainly in the face. Further complicating matters, diverse institutions representing different races, genders, social classes, and agendas were intentionally brought together in a time of disunity and social chaos. Tempers might flare. A melting pot was certainly being constructed. But, too often writers have envisioned a melting pot as being a delectable mixture of complimentary flavors all producing a unified taste through harmony and communion. It could and should be. Bitterness, however, is the state of taste when too many flavors all vie for the limited resource of recognition. Thus, the contents of a melting pot could by the same token be unpalatable. The ingredients are placed in the cauldron with good intentions, but a degree of sensitivity is required to allow them to mix properly. It was this end that the Central Staff sought. To do this they needed to navigate the treacherous terrain of egos, entitlements, wounds of discrimination, and legitimate concerns.

The first step in this process was to define general education (and to keep that at the forefront of the discussions). For as we well know; general education has received thousands of definitions over the millennia. It was at the first summer workshop (where the representative
faculty of each institution was present) with the proceedings handout distributed to everyone where the representatives read that, “The Cooperative Study was organized for the purpose of assisting the cooperating colleges to re-examine and improve their programs of general education, i.e., the education appropriate for students before they have reached the level of specialized instruction, or ‘education for the common life as distinguished from education for the specialist.’”

Hence, the key was that general education was to be the dominant topic, and though the subtexts of politics may be there but the discussions could not disintegrate into political battles. In other words, they could (and should) influence the work on general education which was what being cooperated on, but they could not become the dominate point of discussion. This was a matter of practicality so to speak, because these faculties were not writing political treatises, but working on general education curriculums.

Another matter of practicality came into play by the point where the colleges were cooperating that was already foreseen by Tyler and his associates. Earl J. McGrath has written that the institutions were selected upon the basis of criteria (which was previously discussed), but one piece of criteria not yet discussed was that “the committee sought institutions which could show evidence of educational vitality; that is, those in which some form of educational experimentation had taken place.” Thus, each institution was in a different place in its experiments and had naturally different concerns. To make this common required a reductionist perspective. This was put into place initially by the Central Staff as it tried to construct the outline of the Study prior to the selections. Its constitution of sorts was the document “Proposed Emphases for the Study during 1930-40” which laid out how the Study and more importantly,

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14 “Proceedings of the Workshop in General Education” Box 121, Folder 2, ACE Papers.
the cooperation was to be handled. In it, “Mr. Tyler commented on another possible purpose of
the statement in suggesting common threads running through many diverse projects.

For instance, in the first statement we might recognize a common thread about student
needs that would lend itself to cooperative effort. Ways of cooperative study of student needs
would be suggested, although different institutions would attack different problems involving
student needs and use different methods in approaching the problems.”16 In a way this provided
institutions an opportunity to select their own pedagogical preferences to attack the problem.
This seemed like (and still does) good pedagogical practice as it could be used to cater to the
needs of their students. But, more important in this statement was the creation of the idea of
“common threads.” That is to say that while problems all have their local contexts which need to
be taken into account, they are indicative of larger issues that need to be dealt with. In other
words, all politics may indeed be local, but a centralized system of governance still has its
advantages. This was mixed with adherence to the belief that “the project should preserve the
autonomy of each college yet at the same time give every college some assistance in attacking its
major problems.”17 This led to cooperative effort and resulted in everyone involved realizing,
“More and more, as faculty members and staff members work with rather specialized problems,
it becomes clear that these problems have broad implications.”18

Now with the participation of several institutions the Central Staff recognized that there
was power. This power could be used against each other in attempting to establish that their
route of general education was supreme. Or, they could be used against the local problems. The
latter appeared more appealing and thus the Proposed Emphases stated, “Each school does not

16 “Proposed Emphases for the Study During 1939-40” Box 115, Folder 1, ACE Papers.
17 “Brief Summary of Activities of The Cooperative Study in General Education, October, 1941” Box 123, Folder 3,
ACE Papers.
18 “Staff News Letter, Vol. 3 No. 2, November 19, 1941” Box 123, Folder 3, ACE Papers.
have to go after all facets or all problems. Choose the ones it wishes to choose. Then, pool the work of all colleges on student needs and you will have something that is the very core of this Study.”\textsuperscript{19} Student needs in this case is but one example that Tyler marshaled. But what would come from the Study, and then be distributed to the public was the synthesis of understanding on this problem.

This may seem to be presenting a picture in which the colleges were working alone and the Central Staff was the only body with the information to compile. Nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, “one purpose of the Study was to explore effective methods of cooperative effort as between the Central Staff and the twenty-two colleges, and between the participating colleges themselves.”\textsuperscript{20} Colleges were able to cooperate together at the annual summer workshops, but their work continued throughout the school year. The Central Staff had anticipated this and thus the Central Staff gave high priority to their “clearing-house function” which required that they “be informed of significant developments within each college including materials, procedures, and ideas. The file of information about significant developments should periodically be made available to all of the colleges.”\textsuperscript{21} This was made possible through a “Staff News Letter…issued periodically to cooperating colleges as a means of disseminating information regarding the Cooperative Study. Staff Members write the letter.”\textsuperscript{22} Only about half a dozen Staff News Letters have survived and thus it is difficult to gauge their frequency. Yet they served as an excellent source of communication between the colleges as members of the colleges frequently contributed. This was mixed with discussions of the staff members which presented their findings from their travels to the colleges themselves.

\textsuperscript{19} “Proposed Emphases for the Study During 1939-40” Box 115, Folder 1, ACE Papers.
\textsuperscript{20} “Cooperative Study in General Education, Minutes of the Second Conference, October 23-24, 1939” Box 117, Folder 9, ACE Papers.
\textsuperscript{21} “Proposed Emphases for the Study During 1939-40” Box 115, Folder 1, ACE Papers.
\textsuperscript{22} “Staff News Letter, Vol. 2, No. 7, April 12, 1941” Box 121, Folder 1, ACE Papers.
While this may strike the reader as common sense from an educational practice perspective, consider its implications for political theory. What had undergirded all debates of good government since Thomas Hobbes published Leviathan in the seventeenth century was how to ensure cooperation without the need of a larger entity that forced groups to cooperate. The American example was navigating treacherous waters by the 1930s. It had tiptoed around questions of centralization and federalism during its founding period and with its first attempts to ensure minority rights had seen half of its states secede. Leviathan was called into power at that point just to preserve the union. Now the nation appeared to be on the brink of revolution and the only hope of the democratic regime staying in place was to again work on minority rights or economic centralization while only cautiously using federal power. Either extreme (using too much federal power or complete inaction) could provoke revolution. This method of cooperation demonstrated by the Cooperative Study was fascinating so to speak. It showed local actors in a central place discussing “common” issues. It was the Platonic dialogue in action. It was representative of the New Deal approach to government.

The question then remains, of whether or not it was successful? In the Final Report, it was written by the Central Staff that “Different institutions had different points of view, and the diversity of opinion among instructors was still greater. But through work on various points the common ground of agreement was extended….More important was the agreement which came from common work and discussion.”

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CHAPTER 3

BREEDING CONSENSUS DURING DEPRESSION AND WARTIME

The war has affected dramatically many concerns of students. As reported in the Staff News Letter (Vol. 4, No. 10, May 20, 1943), students expressed such feelings such as, ‘The war makes you want to determine what you are living for.’ ‘I have great difficulty becoming enthused about our fighting for democracy when we have Jim Crow sections and poll taxes.’ ‘How can we have good government without moving from democracy to dictatorship?’ ‘Some way must be found to reduce the poisonous hatreds generated by this war.’ Such statements taken in the context of the essays in which they appear show that for large numbers of students the war has accentuated concerns with issues of enduring importance in general education.1

In short, the chief demands which the war makes upon general education result in a re-emphasis upon those great objectives with which general education has always been concerned. These are not new objectives. The criteria of a good curriculum are as valid now as before the war.2

As Brewer and Heiges suggested, the unity of the institution (or lack thereof) mirrors the amount of unity in the social situation. By 1937 society (with its elements of political and economic theory and social relations) was embracing a particular type of consensus (or working toward creating the sense that this existed). I argue that the Cooperative Study in General Education reflected that particular stance of consensus in all of its various elements. But, before we can examine those specific contexts we must turn our attention to a different unifying movement that threatened to stop the Study dead in its tracks.

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2 The Staff of the Cooperative Study in General Education, “The College Curriculum and the War, October 22 1942” Box 126, Folder 1, ACE Papers.
Wartime Consensus

When the Study began, there was the opinion that the nation could indeed go to war but hostilities had not yet broken out in Europe. Hence, there was no reason to suspend work on general education nor was there any reason to consider appending the nature of the Study to discuss war issues. But, as the war began and America entered the battlefields, the Central Staff saw the nation mobilize and wait impatiently for them to put down their higher pursuits and join the war effort. This was completely anathema to the Central Staff, who understood that general education was more important in wartime and that they represented the advancement of American democracy on the homefront. Yet, they experienced the disapproval of others rather quickly on this point (as many other liberal artists had). A shaken member of the Central Staff, Ralph W. Ogan wrote to George F. Zook on September 25, 1942 to explain a situation that had transpired. Ogan stated,

Let me give you some of the facts that have stimulated me to write you. First, I read the enclosed paper titled, ‘Wartime Problems of Students,’ at the Institute for the Society of Social Research which met at Chicago August 14 and 15. While the paper provoked much discussion and favorable comment, one person Mr. A.J. Jaffe, Research Division, Navy Department, rose to criticize my emphasis upon the importance of doing whatever our resources would permit us to do to preserve the values of general education….Although I can only quote his comments from memory, he said something as follows: I am no longer under the influence of Mr. Hutchins. I don’t know much about educational philosophy nor am I interested in it. I do believe, however, that it is high time for us to recognize that we are in a war, that we are in danger of losing this war, and that a large portion of so-called liberal arts education…are not worth a damn and should be stopped. Colleges must begin to train people as scientists and technologists. By technologists I mean trained stenographers, radio technicians, and the like.3

Both Ogan and Zook were shaken up by their experiences with the Navy Department which was beginning to put serious constraints over higher education in America. Yet, both men knew that eight months earlier, merely a few weeks after America declared war on Japan that those involved with the Study decided that it was not to be altered in any serious way. On

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3 Ralph W. Ogan to George F. Zook, 25 September 1942. Box 126, Folder 1, ACE Papers.
January 4, 1942, there was a called meeting in which all representatives of the colleges of the Study attended to discuss how the war would alter their Study (if at all). The minutes of the meeting read, “There was considerable discussion in regard to whether the colleges and the Central Staff should devote their energies to the central problems of general education or whether we should minimize this interest and do more in the way of preparation for war time conditions. It seemed to be the general consensus of opinion that the Central Staff and the colleges should continue working on the problems of general education.”  

Also discussed at this “called meeting,” was the method of approaching these problems. The minutes of the meeting read that “it was agreed by common consent that colleges should be sure to send in to the Central Staff any information regarding organization of student activities, courses, community projects growing out of the emergency. These materials should be exchanged among the colleges.” Hence, cooperation and consensus reigned in the face of a common enemy. In the case of the Cooperative Study, the military brass represented the common enemy. But selecting this course of action was not to undermine the consensus which was being worked upon in the social world, but rather to buttress it.

The Central Staff made these aims clear in their materials for distribution. To counteract the disapproval of the military, they did research and found that the military was at odds with its

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4 “Called Meeting of Representatives of the Colleges in the Cooperative Study in General Education” Box 123, Folder 4, ACE Papers.

5 Ibid.
commander in chief, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. In their publication “The College Curriculum and the War” they quote Roosevelt and offer commentary.

“Winning the war is now the sole imperative. But we may seem to win it and yet lose it in fact unless the people everywhere are prepared for a peace worthy of the sacrifices of war. Furthermore, the real test of victory may well be found in what the people of the victorious United Nations are prepared to make the ‘United’ concept live and grow in the decades following the peace. Education, world-wide education, especially liberal education, must provide the final answer. Colleges can render a fundamental service to the cause of lasting freedom.” If liberal education is to provide the kind of persons our president hopes it will, it can become neither a hodge podge of unrelated courses nor a mere duplication of the training which the Army will provide more effectively. War does not change the aims of general education. The good life, the good man, the good society—these educational aims must not be pushed aside. Rather we must continue to meet these educational demands under new and critical conditions.6

Hence, we see the military brass circumvented by the Central Staff and the Study continuing in the fashion which it had always intended too.

The Cooperative Study in General Education Responds to the Political Consensus

As discussed in the first chapter, America and American higher education were distancing itself from German influence. In the case of the General Education Movement, rejecting the German educational theory of overspecialization was crucial to assist the war effort. The Cooperative Study was no exception. The Final Report (though published in 1947, reflected the views of the Central Staff and was written during the war) devoted an entire section to German educational theory in higher education. The Report claimed, “The German educational system was founded on intellectual as well as social purposes which are no longer consistent with the needs of America. German universities…were dedicated to the extension rather than the dissemination of knowledge… [It] has caused teachers to assume that every student would devote himself to the life of a scholar or to some other highly specialized professional activity

6 “The College Curriculum and the War: The Staff of the Cooperative Study in General Education” Box 126, Folder 1, ACE Papers. The letter is marked “Roosevelt to Dr. Snavely” and given no date.
related to a particular field of learning.” Notice that the discussion is not merely of “intellectual” purposes but of “social purposes.” This takes the interpretation of the influence of German educational theory and suggests that it had infested the social world as well. In this case, German educational theory (overspecialization) supported German social theory (which is labeled as undemocratic). There is much to be said for the fact that for as long as German educational theory had been present on American soil (which was the early nineteenth century according to the Central Staff), Germany has had both democracy and dictatorship. Yet, in this case it appears to be tied to the idea of a uniformed student body. This uniformed crowd was reminiscent of dictatorship according to historian Benjamin Alpers.

But, there was a way to take back American universities. It could be done by excising all German influence. Better stated by the Final Report in the following statement, “If educational institutions are to recast their offerings in such a manner as to adapt them to the needs of American youth, educators must abandon the educational and political philosophy upon which the present program of the school rests. The determinative influence on American education, especially higher education since the early nineteenth century was of German origin” Clearly stated is that to reject the educational theory is to reject the political theory of Germany which could not satisfy the needs of American youth (the next generation of citizens).

To give an account of this throughout the Study, the Central Staff humanized the issue by noticing that the American students’ needs were not being made and then suggesting that students had decided it was German influenced overspecialization that was harming them. The College Curriculum and the War” bulletin also stated, “Those educators who are asked by students, as was the master in the fable, ‘How shall we care for our bodies?’ , How shall we work

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8 Ibid, 13.
together?’, How shall we live with our fellow men?’ and ‘For what ends shall we live?’ and who are unwilling to believe that ‘their learning touches not these things’ frequently feel that a treatment of these problems which transcends departmental barriers produces more efficient result than the traditional compartmentalization by departments. ⁹ In this manner, the Cooperative Study (much like the General Education Movement) was able to advance its own goals by contributing to the anti-German rhetoric and reaffirming democracy.

The Cooperative Study in General Education Responds to the Economic Consensus

The Cooperative Study recognized the economic conditions and youth problem of that had been present in the Great Depression and afflicted capitalism. Much like the General Education Movement and the larger consensus it sought to create good capitalists through broad education. Child labor was discussed in the Final Report and regarding child employment laws the Report stated,

Before the outbreak of the war this movement toward the schools was accelerated by the scarcity of gainful employment for young people of high school and college age. That such a situation was no depression phenomenon alone is revealed by the studies of the American Youth Commission which showed that even in the prosperous years prior to 1929 it was increasingly difficult for young people to find work. Students of economic and social conditions believe that when the present urgent demands for workers has passed, a large percentage of young men and women from fourteen to twenty years of age will again seek admission to educational institutions. ¹⁰

In referencing the ACE study of the American Youth Commission, the Central Staff suggested that students would once again descend on institutions seeking credentials. This provided the opportunity to train a generation (and even retrain some adults who were working through the

⁹ “The College Curriculum and the War: The Staff of the Cooperative Study in General Education” Box 126, Folder 1, ACE Papers.
system of junior colleges) of capitalists. Much like the General Education Movement, the Study believed that capitalists must be broadly trained individuals. The Final Report stated,

One of the most common misconceptions among educators and laymen alike is that the student who pursues a narrow program of highly specialized courses automatically prepares himself for a superior record in a professional or graduate course of study or for success in his chosen vocation…A number of studies have shown, however that those students who pursue a narrow, highly specialized course of instruction are no more successful in professional schools or in professional practice than those who have a broad general education.\(^{11}\)

In choosing the natural aristocracy, the Central Staff settled upon those who would benefit most from capitalism. They would be the future titans of industry whose inventions and business maneuvers would be supported by a capitalist system. In also presenting general education as something that would benefit the individual, the Central Staff reaffirmed the capitalist system which places its focus squarely on the individual.

The Cooperative Study in General Education Responds to the Social/Institutional Consensus

The Final Report had boldly proclaimed, “Society increasingly demands an education for all youth; democracy requires an educated citizenry and trained in leadership.”\(^{12}\) In making this statement, the Central Staff and the Colleges that made up the Cooperative Study chose instead of reforming the hierarchical system of higher education they would support the consensus which manifested as a system of segregated education. Trained leadership would come from the liberal arts colleges and all youth would be educated at the institution that was deemed proper for them (whether the determinant was skin color, gender, or even class). They recognized this system, but either stated they were powerless to reform it, or that cooperation would lead to a process of unity.

\(^{11}\) Ibid, 21.
\(^{12}\) Ibid, 29.
The Final Report demonstrated that the Central Staff was equally awestruck by the increase in enrollments at institutions of higher education. They stated, “In 1890 there were 125,000 young people in colleges and universities in the United States. By 1940 this number had risen to nearly a million and a half. In the earlier year only one person in thirty between eighteen and twenty-one years of age attended college while in 1940 this figure had risen to one in ten.”

Hence, they saw that the face of higher education had changed early in the twentieth century.

They saw firsthand how liberal arts colleges protected the domain they felt they were entitled to. The Final Report states, “One group of colleges, for the most part liberal arts colleges, aims to select for admission only those high school graduates who have superior intellectual ability. These institutions conceive their function as one selecting and training leaders for various fields of American democracy. Are they concerned with providing general education? Yes, by all means, but providing it for a chosen few selected on the basis of intellectual ability.”

Certainly it may be difficult to fault the Central Staff for not recognizing that it was not always ability that gained one admission into an elite liberal arts college, but other factors such as race and social class. Were the liberal arts colleges purely a meritocracy, the increasing number of Jewish students would not have frightened them.

The Final Report moved to suggest that the junior college was an important part to ensure democratic equality. It stated, “Over against this position is that of those educators and colleges which accept as their particular function the training of an educated citizenry—not only leaders but also, and perhaps especially, the ordinary citizen. Many such institutions would not be particularly interested in what they are called or how they are designated—college, junior

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13 Ibid, 11.
14 Ibid, 28.
college, people’s college, institute. The important factor is the function they serve.”¹⁵ In contrasting the liberal arts college and junior college as engaged in conflict the Central Staff did nothing to show that there could be reconciliation. Rather, it simply buttressed the hierarchy which was the root of the consensus.

This consensus was based upon a particular reading of democratic equality. That there will eventually be democratic equality through a system of popular education. Indeed, under this model everyone was given an “education.” Of course, the Cooperative Study’s understanding of consensus was not unique. Consider Lawrence Cremin’s statement that “the United States maintains a diversity of higher education institutions organized according to missions, missions that vary considerably. And I think that kind of organization is part of the genius of American education—it provides a place for everybody who wishes one, and in the end yields one of the most educated populations in the world.”¹⁶ Contrast this with the brilliantly obvious statement of historian James D. Anderson, “Both schooling for democratic citizenship and schooling for second-class citizenship have been basic traditions in American education.”¹⁷ “Trained leadership,” “Educated citizenry,” “Ordinary people,” may merely be code words either for democratic citizens and second-class citizens. Hence, there may be an inherent danger of an educational consensus.

¹⁵ Ibid
¹⁷ Anderson, The Education of Blacks, 1.
CHAPTER 4

BROADCASTING CONSENSUS: THE PUBLICITY RECEIVED BY THE COOPERATIVE STUDY IN GENERAL EDUCATION

“One need not, however, be entirely negative. The general-education movement which has been fighting against odds for a trial in American secondary schools and colleges represents a ‘white hope’—a constructive hope... The recent report of the Cooperative Study in General Education which is embodied in ‘Cooperative Study in General Education’ and companion volumes published by the American Council on Education will advance the general-education movement in another important step.”

Now relegated to an occasional footnote and a set of aging library held green volumes; one may wonder what the significance of the Cooperative Study was during its day and even today. It was particularly well known during its run and especially after the volumes were released in 1947. It captured the attention and respect of the higher education community and begat further cooperative study.

During the Study

Aside from the word of mouth and the mention in the annual reports of the American Council on Education, there were strategically placed articles that described the Cooperative

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Study in educational journals.\(^2\) McGrath’s *Junior College Journal* article describes the origins and development of the Study, purposes of the Study, and the method of selecting institutions. Ralph W. Ogan’s piece appeared in the *Educational Record* and described the development of student inventories (which were created to describe how students felt about general educational issues) and describes how they might be purchased. Ogan’s piece also describes the major projects in the humanities, science, personnel and counseling, and social studies which the Study undertook. This warmed the seat for interest in the volumes that were to be produced and sold after the Study had completed. Each of these topics had a specific volume except the science volume which never came to fruition. Finally, Tolley’s article suggested how cooperative study was the cutting edge of educational scholarship and leadership.

Indeed Tolley’s article described stimulated action in other regions of the country where there were practitioners who wanted to unite in their own cooperative study. Tolley wrote, “The idea of the Cooperative Study has, however, already proved its worth. The movement of cooperation is one that should continue to grow…As regional workshops are established in other sections of the country new ventures in cooperation should be organized and new studies started.”\(^3\) Tolley had been referring primarily to the south where in 1939 interest had been generated in a cooperative study. President of Mercer University John B. Clark wrote to Zook in to explain that

October 28 last, some forty-five representatives from thirty Southern colleges and universities held a conference at the Biltmore Hotel, Atlanta, Georgia, to consider ways and means of stimulating General Education in the institutions of higher learning in the South…The principal speaker of the occasion was Dr. Earl J. McGrath of your own Council. Enthusiastic discussion followed Dr. McGrath’s talk and the conference voted

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\(^3\) Tolley, “Twenty-One Colleges,” 312.
unanimously that its president appoint a committee to request the American Council on Education to exert its influence toward securing financial assistance for a cooperative program of General Education in Southern colleges and universities.  

McGrath had discovered great promise in future cooperative studies and also pressured Zook to seize the opportunity. Zook was also pressured by the Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools who were anxious to take the lead if they could secure some funds. The General Education Board, however, saw fit that the southern group complete something of an internship by viewing the ACE group. This met with approval by Clark who wrote to Zook to say, “Permit me to say that I am indeed gratified to know that the Board has seen fit to provide $4,000 for Southern fellowships at the University of Chicago Workshop for 1940. In my opinion, this is a tremendously significant and valuable contribution toward educational leadership in the South and I wish to express to you personally, as well as to the American Council on Education and the General Education Board, my sincere gratitude.”

While there was strength in numbers in the south, there were individual institutions in other parts of the country who wanted to join the Study as word spread around via the journal articles and by other means. Unfortunately, this led to the denial of admission for a few institutions. William P. Tolley wrote to Zook to explain that the Vermont based Green Mountain Junior College had shown some interest in joining the study in 1941 but had to be turned away. He wrote, “Thank you for forwarding the correspondence from President Bogue of the Green Mountain Junior College. I have written him explaining that the Executive Committee doubts the wisdom of adding any new institutions to the Study during the time that remains.”

This interest in the Cooperative Study filtered all the way down to graduate students. As the Study was concluding its work in 1946, a Yale graduate student named (James) Keith Baker

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4 John B. Clark to George F. Zook, 16 November 1939. Box 117, Folder 9, ACE Papers.
5 John B. Clark to George F. Zook, 15 April 1940. Box 117, Folder 10, ACE Papers.
6 William P. Tolley to George F. Zook, 6 February 1941. Box 121, Folder 1, ACE Papers.
was completing a dissertation that was to be called, “The Evolution of the Concept of General Education.” Baker had heard of the Cooperative Study and wrote to its Director Ralph W. Tyler,

At present I am writing a dissertation in the Department of Education of Yale University on the subject of “General Education.” I am attempting to make a historical study of the present concept of general education. Since the Cooperative Study in General Education was one of the more important studies in that field, I am anxious to secure all available information about it and its results, but so far my search has been singularly unrewarding. Knowing that you were director of the study, I am writing to ask if you can give me any information about the outcome of the study, if it were published, or, if it were not, where I might be able to obtain mimeographed material that was present during the course of the study.

Tyler wrote back to Baker to inform him that the volumes were in press and should help him.

Turning our attention to these volumes, it should be noted that their eventual publication was not the first notification people received of the philosophy of the Cooperative Study in General Education. Indeed, in creating the final report, which the Central Staff felt would be the only volume actively read by most, there was a desire to create an amalgam of the educational theory that they had been putting out for years. Perhaps this decision was made to stave off the obscurity that comes with an aging article in the *Educational Record* etc. The Central Staff came together in planning this first volume by claiming, “The general volume would consist of three main sections: I. The first explaining the background of the Study with special emphasis upon the reasons for the Study and the controlling philosophy. Assigned to Mr. Ogan – using materials already written (preliminary statement of General Education Board formulated when the Study began, article by McGrath in *Junior College Journal*, May, 1939, articles by Tyler, Ogan, Tolley, etc.) with scissors and paste.”

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8 Keith Baker to Ralph W. Tyler, 4 April 1946. Box 1, Folder 11, Ralph W. Tyler Papers, Special Collections Research Center at the University of Chicago Joseph Regenstein Library, Chicago, Illinois. Hereafter cited as the “Tyler Papers.”
9 “Preparation of Final Reports of Cooperative Study: September 11, 1943” Box 129, Folder, 13, ACE Papers.
To show the extent of which the Central Staff was willing to make their interpretation of their Study broad (while saving time) they republished Earl J. McGrath’s entire article “Factors Influencing the Development of General Education” which had appeared in the *Association of American Colleges Bulletin* as the first chapter in the Final Report.\(^\text{10}\) Finally, after the volumes had gone to press, there were “several circulars announcing the publication of the Cooperative Study in General Education… [which]…are being mailed out this week.”\(^\text{11}\) Hence, the publicity was both stimulated by the Central Staff and ACE as well as sought out by others. As Tyler wrote to Zook regarding the Final Report, “I feel sure that at least the Executive Committee [Final] Report will enjoy a fairly large and immediate sale because of the great current interest in general education.”\(^\text{12}\) This sentiment applied to the Cooperative Study itself.

**Participating Schools Adopting the Study**

Perhaps the greatest proponents of the Study were the institutions involved in it. As the Study was created to affect practice, it did just that fairly early in the Study. As a Staff Newsletter suggested as early as 1941, “The Study has now reached a stage in its progress at which many significant activities are under way in the various colleges.”\(^\text{13}\) At the end of the Study as Michigan State College Dean Lloyd C. Emmons was bidding adieu to Tyler after years of cooperation he wrote, “I have enjoyed my long association with the study and have learned a great deal from it, much of which has been put into operation here at Michigan State College.”\(^\text{14}\)


\(^{11}\) Robert Quick to Ralph W. Tyler, 20 June 1947. Box 1, Folder 11, Tyler Papers.

\(^{12}\) Ralph W. Tyler to George F. Zook, 14 August 1945. Box 143, Folder 7, ACE Papers.

\(^{13}\) “Staff News Letter, Vol. 3, No. 2, November 19, 1941” Box 123, Folder 3, ACE Papers.

\(^{14}\) Lloyd C. Emmons to Ralph W. Tyler, 14 December 1946. Box 1, Folder 11, Tyler Papers.
This even trickled into college histories. When Stephens College’s Roy Ivan Johnson wrote *Explorations in General Education: The Experiences of Stephens College* he made sure to mention that, “In 1939 the faculty voted to co-operate with twenty-two other colleges in an evaluation study…This co-operative program…stimulated increased research activity on part of the local staff. Objectives in various departments were reviewed, new objective measures were set up and refined, and a faculty council on evaluation was established. Frequent interviews were arranged with directors of the co-operative program.”  

Finally, specialized journal articles were placed by instructors at participating institutions to tell other specialists how to teach a general education course on a specialized topic. One such article was written by James L. McCreight who was the Head of Religion at participating Muskingum College. He published “Human Living: An Integrated Course in Psychology, Philosophy, and Religion” in *The Journal of the American Academy of Religion*.  

These publications were supplementing the publication of “Materials Prepared by Participants in the [variable] Group of the Summer Workshop.” The Groups ranged from humanities to Science and in the summer workshop of 1939 each had put together prospective materials for integrated general education courses.

The Cooperative Study in the Historiography of the Time Period  

As the General Education Movement was raging on by the end of 1947, two reports had surfaced to stimulate even further discussion. *General Education in a Free Society* by the

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Harvard Committee and the President’s Commission on Higher Education which were influenced by the Cooperative Study. What had made the Cooperative Study more impressive in terms of how people viewed general education was that they were the first to speak to the social analysis of general education. This method of placing general education in its social context has not, as was discussed in chapter one, been taken up throughout the historiography. However, the blueprint was there. As Tyler wrote to Tolley in 1944, “In place of beginning Chapter II with the history of the idea of general education, I should like to see it spotlight certain perplexing problems facing all colleges and then come back to show the way in which these problems have been produced or accentuated by social and economic trends.”17 This method was seconded by Tolley who instructed the Central Staff who were writing and compiling the final report that,

The purpose of Chapter II would be to reveal the social and economic forces which have unobtrusively been causing a reconsideration of the purposes, character, and social ends of general education in the youth of America. Many individual educators who are supposed to lead their faculty associates in the adoption of the program of general education to the needs of youth are entirely ignorant of, and if informed about, frequently contemptuous of these powerful forces which are changing our school program. This chapter should reveal the irresistible forces which must be recognized if general education is to be made adequate to the needs of our day.18

Though this social analysis of general education did not catch fire, it still remains as a blueprint for a great method of historicizing general education (or even studying it in the present).

The Cooperative Study in the Historiography of Today

Unfortunately, the Cooperative Study has been relegated to a mere footnote in the larger more esteemed works in which its most famous participants went on to work. But, one can see the parallel between the method of cooperation involved in the Study and the Tyler Rationale.

17 Ralph W. Tyler to William P. Tolley, 4 October 1944. Box 136, Folder 1, ACE Papers. Tyler was reacting to the outline suggested for the Final Report.
18 “No Title: Sent By Tolley, October 10, 1944” Box 136, Folder 1, ACE Papers.
One can see general education dealt with in the President’s Commission on Higher Education which was spearheaded by George F. Zook. One could see the distrust of German educational ideals as Zook went abroad to Germany after the war. Indeed, historian Ethan Schrum has recently linked the Cooperative Study (albeit in a minor footnote) to a movement to defend democracy in the war years. Linking the Cooperative Study to the Progressive movement, historians Craig Kridel and Robert V. Bullough Jr. claimed, “The Cooperative Study in General Education…remains one of the more remarkable yet much overlooked projects of American higher education.”

Indeed, the prestige of the Cooperative Study (along with a critical understanding of its deficiencies) will return to illuminate the nature (and deficiencies) of the American consensus between 1937 and 1947. Its lessons should emerge ideally every generation. For as Ralph W. Tyler recalled in 1983,

There are no easy answers. We must thoughtfully raise the question: Is this something that our young people should learn? Will it be helpful to them? Does it have permanent value, or is it largely peripheral? These kinds of questions must be dealt with in every generation. Of course, this has been true in our history. For example, I was director of the Cooperative Study in General Education in 1939 under the support of the American Council on Education. At that time, with the development of the Depression, there was great concern over what general education should be. It was believed that too much attention was given to specialized occupational education. Hence, 22 colleges and universities undertook a pilot study to try to formulate what good general education should be, and to work out programs in their own institutions. As soon as the war came, there was no unemployment and there was a good deal of money available to support the war, people forgot about general education. Now they are coming back to it again. This has happened over the years.

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