10-21-1969

Higher Education in the Waves of History, delivered at Lions Club of Grand Rapids on October 21, 1969

Arend D. Lubbers
Grand Valley State University

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/presidential_speeches

Part of the Archival Science Commons, Education Commons, and the History Commons

Recommended Citation
https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/presidential_speeches/2

This Speech is brought to you for free and open access by the University Archives at ScholarWorks@GVSU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Presidential Speeches by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@GVSU. For more information, please contact scholarworks@gvsu.edu.

AS A COLLEGE PRESIDENT I MUST ASSAY THIS RAPIDLY MOVING SOCIAL AND POLITICAL INSTITUTION WITH GREAT CONCERN, FOR THE COLLEGE CAMPUS
HAS NURTURED THE SEEDS OF THESE VAST SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND HOUSES ITS LEADERSHIP. AN OLD ORDER OF SOCIETY IS BEING ATTACKED BY SOME, IS BEING DEFENDED BY OTHERS, AND THE COLLEGE CAMPUS HAS BECOME THE BATTLEGROUND. THE CAMPUS, YOU SEE, IS HOME TO THE STUDENTS WHO ARE INVOLVED IN THE DYNAMIC CHANGES IN SOCIETY AND ITS AVAILABILITY STIRS CLOSE EXAMINATION. THE RESULTS OF THE EXAMINATION HAS BEEN A REVOLT BY THE AMERICAN STUDENTS, OFTEN WITH FACULTY SUPPORT, AGAINST THE WHOLE IDEA OF THE AMERICAN COLLEGE'S TRADITION OF ISOLATING ITSELF AND ITS LEARNING PROCESS FROM THE OUTSIDE WORLD AND ITS PROBLEMS. COLLEGE NEWSPAPERS, CLASSROOM ACTIVITY, AND STUDENT CONVERSATIONS ARE INCREASINGLY FOCUSED ON ACTIVITIES OUTSIDE, RATHER THAN ON THE STUDENT MILEAU OR INTELLECTUAL ENDEAVORS INSIDE THE UNIVERSITY.

THIS STUDENT UNREST, COMBINED WITH OTHER SOCIETAL DEMANDS, HAS RESULTED IN THE COLLEGE CAMPUS GRADUALLY EXPERIENCING A BASIC SHIFT IN ITS WHOLE POSITION IN AMERICAN LIFE. THE COLLEGE IS RAPIDLY LOSING ITS PAST AURA OF REMOVAL FROM THE SOCIETY AND ITS PROBLEMS AND IS BECOMING AN INTEGRAL PART OF THE PUBLIC SPHERE. POLITICIANS USE ITS PLATFORMS TO DELIVER MAJOR POLICY ADDRESSES, TO SEEK SUPPORT, AND TO QUELL DISSENT. UNIVERSITY SCHOLARS ARE CAUGHT UP IN THE VERY PRACTICAL PROBLEMS OF SOLVING INFLATION AND RESEARCHING SPACE TRAVEL. MANY SCHOLARS SPEND AS MUCH TIME IN FEDERAL GOVERNMENT AGENCIES OR CONSULTING AS THEY DO AT THEIR COLLEGE
BASE. STUDENTS WHO USED TO RELIGIOUSLY ABIDE BY UNIVERSITY REGULATIONS NOW DEMAND THE SAME TREATMENT FROM THE COLLEGE AS THEY EXPECT FROM THE WORLD OUTSIDE IT. THE COLLEGES NOW SELDOM POLICE THEIR STUDENTS OR ACT IN LOCO PARENTIS FOR THEM.

THE INTEGRATION OF HIGHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS INTO THE PUBLIC REALM IS VERY SIMILAR TO WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO THE AMERICAN CORPORATION. SCHOLARS NOW POINT OUT THAT LARGE ORGANIZATIONS, PARTICULARLY CORPORATIONS, HAVE BECOME SO INTERRELATED WITH THE COUNTRY'S ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL LIFE THAT THEY HAVE ATTAINED A QUASI-GOVERNMENTAL FUNCTION.

THIS PHENOMENON BY WHICH THE EDUCATIONAL AND BUSINESS INSTITUTIONS ARE BEING INTEGRATED INTO THE LARGER SOCIETY SHOULD NOT BE PARTICULARLY ASTONISHING IF WE TURN TO AMERICAN SOCIAL AND INTELLECTUAL THEORY IN THE PAST FEW YEARS. FOR SOME TIME AMERICA HAS BEEN MOVING INTO A MORE INTERDEPENDENT AND MASS ORIENTED EXISTENCE. THE PUBLIC REALM IS INVADING EVERY FACET OF AMERICAN LIFE. THE SOCIETY, ONCE COMPOSED OF DOZENS OF SMALL AND DISTINCT PARTS IS BEING WELDED IN A WHOLE. SO IN THE LARGEST SENSE THE STUDENT REVOLT AGAINST THE COLLEGE HAS BEEN SYMBOLIC OF A MUCH LARGER PROBLEM, A TREND IN HISTORY WHICH HAS PULLED THE HIGHER LEARNING INSTITUTIONS EVER CLOSER TO THE LARGER SOCIETY. MANY FACTORS INFLUENCED THIS TRENDS. THE DEPENDENCE OF INDUSTRY, COLLEGES FOR TRAINED PERSONNEL, AND THE RELIANCE BY GOVERNMENT ON ACADEMIC EXPERTISE, ARE JUST
TWO SUCH FACTORS. BUT THE STUDENTS COMPLETED AND PUBLICIZED THE SYNDROME, FOR THEY DEMANDED THAT THE COLLEGE ALSO CONCERN ITSELF WITH SOCIETY'S PROBLEMS, AND LEND ITS HAND TO ARBITRATING ITS MAJOR ISSUES. WITH THE INTEGRATION PROCESS WELL UNDER WAY, I THINK WE CAN LOOK FORWARD VERY SOON FOR STUDENT REBELLIONS TO DIMINISH. AS STUDENTS FIND THEY ARE ABLE TO WORK THROUGH UNIVERSITIES FOR THE BETTERMENT OF SOCIAL PROBLEMS, AND THOSE WHO WORK WITH SOCIAL PROBLEMS CAN INCREASINGLY LOOK TO THE UNIVERSITY FOR EXPERT HELP, THE REASONS FOR THE ORIGINAL HOSTILITY WILL ABATE. I AM NOT SAYING THAT THE BATTLE IS OVER, BUT IT IS DECLINING.

THE INTEGRATION OF THE AMERICAN COLLEGE INTO THE LARGER SOCIETY BRINGS TO LIGHT AN ACCOMPANYING TREND: THE MOVEMENT TOWARD UNIVERSALIZING HIGHER EDUCATION. THE REPORTS ON EDUCATION TO CONGRESSIONAL COMMITTEES ARE ALREADY ASKING AMERICA'S COLLEGES TO MOVE IN THIS DIRECTION. EVERY SOCIAL AND POLITICAL SURVEY CONDUCTED IN RECENT YEARS HAD INDICATED THAT THE MOST IMPORTANT SOLUTION TO AMERICA'S PROBLEMS IN EDUCATION. THERE ARE OTHER FACTORS WHICH CALL FOR UNIVERSALIZING HIGHER EDUCATION. OUR SOCIETY IS BECOMING TECHNOLOGICALLY COMPLEX, AND EDUCATION IS NEEDED TODAY IF THE GENERAL PUBLIC IS TO UNDERSTAND IN ANY SENSE THE COMPLICATED SOCIAL, POLITICAL, AND MATERIAL ISSUES THAT SURROUND THEM. IT USED TO BE THAT A COLLEGE DEGREE WAS A GUARANTEE OF A SECURE ECONOMIC EXISTENCE. NOW COLLEGE DEGREES ARE VERY
COMMON, AND CARRY WITH THEM LITTLE WEIGHT IN JOB APPLICATIONS.
THOSE WHO HAVE NOT RECEIVED ANY EDUCATION PAST SECONDARY SCHOOL
WILL SOON HAVE GREAT DIFFICULTY IN RECEIVING THE EMPLOYMENT THEY
WANT. THE TIME IS COMING WHEN SOME KIND OF EDUCATION PAST HIGH
SCHOOL WILL BE A PREREQUISITE TO ANY REASONABLE JOB SECURITY.

WITH THE EVER GROWING DEMAND FOR A MORE UNIVERSAL HIGHER EDUCATION
WILL COME A TREMENDOUS PUBLIC RESPONSIBILITY. THIS WILL BECOME
ONE OF AMERICA'S MOST CRUCIAL PROBLEMS IN THE FUTURE. THE ERA
OF STUDENT PROTEST MAY BE NEARING ITS COMPLETION, BUT THE ERA OF
TAXPAYERS' REBELLION IS JUST BEGINNING. THE COST OF UNIVERSALIZING
EDUCATION WILL BE ENORMOUS, AND THE RESISTANCE OF THE AMERICAN
TAXPAYER WILL UNDERSTANDABLY BE ENORMOUS. BUT THE RESISTANCE
WILL DIE, WHEN THE LARGEST PROPORTION OF THE POPULATION REALIZES
THAT THEY NEED THE EDUCATION FOR THEIR OWN FAMILIES, AND THAT THEY
WILL BENEFIT FROM IT IN THEIR OWN LIVES AND IN THEIR BUSINESS
ENDEAVORS. THE TAXPAYERS' REBELLION WILL ABATE WHEN THE PUBLIC
INEVITABLY REALIZES THAT MORE WIDESPREAD HIGHER EDUCATION IS
ESSENTIAL FOR OUR SOCIETY'S PRESERVATION.

A MORE UNIVERSAL HIGHER EDUCATION WILL BRING A SHIFT IN THE ORGANI-
ZATIONAL STRUCTURE AND GOALS OF THE AMERICAN COLLEGE. THE SUBJECT
MATTER OF COLLEGE STUDIES WILL BECOME MORE DIVERSIFIED. THE STAN-
DARD COURSES NOW EXISTING SUCH AS PHILOSOPHY, POLITICAL SCIENCE,
Sociology, math, and so on will continue to exist, but other ingredients, less familiar, will seep into the college curriculum. Such subjects as forestry, plumbing, carpentry, and variety of occupations formerly learned largely by apprenticeship will become the focus of extensive academic inquiry. With increasing technical expertise needed in these fields, training beyond the secondary years will become a necessity. John Gardner, the former secretary of health, education, and welfare, speaks of this in his fine book *Excellence*, where he homes in on the need in America to promote distinguished work in every field of life. In addition, there will be dozens of additional specialized subjects offered that we perhaps have not even heard of at this point. At a much earlier age, students will begin to aim in a particular academic direction, and their coursework will be directed toward their occupational goals. There will be fewer required courses, and academic schedules will depend instead on the students' life ambitions and study patterns.

With the change in curriculum will come a complete revision of our currently accepted beliefs in learning and teaching. The old idea of the classroom with a teacher and required materials; with tests given and grades assigned will probably not be with us for long. The assault has already begun on grades. Some colleges no longer use the standard grading patterns at all. In our Thomas Jefferson College of General Studies at Grand Valley State College,
FOR EXAMPLE, EVALUATION IS ATTUNED TO THE UNIQUE EDUCATIONAL PURPOSES OF EACH STUDENT. AN ADVISOR REVIEWS THE WORK OF THE STUDENT TO DETERMINE WHETHER HE HAS MASTERED THE MATERIAL WELL ENOUGH TO RECEIVE CREDIT FOR THE SUBJECT IN WHICH HE IS ENGAGED. CLASSROOM LESSONS AND LECTURES MAY GRADUALLY WANE IN LIEU OF INDIVIDUAL STUDY DIRECTED BY PROFESSORS AND TUTORS. COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATIONS OVER ENTIRE FIELDS WILL BECOME MORE PREVALENT. (OVERVIEW OF THE STUDENT TO FIND MATERIAL OTHER THAN IN THE CLASSROOM. NEW TECHNIQUES IN COMMUNICATIONS ARE ALREADY IMPROVING. AUDIO VISUAL NETWORKS PERMEATE MANY SCHOOLS, AND LECTURES AND INFORMATION CAN BE AVAILABLE IN THE LIBRARY AT THE PUSH OF A BUTTON. WE HAVE THE BEGINNINGS OF SUCH A NETWORK AT GRAND VALLEY RIGHT NOW. A CHANGE IN THE COMPILATION, STORING, AND RETRIEVAL OF THE EVER GROWING BODY OF KNOWLEDGE WILL ACCOMPANY NEW APPROACHES TO TEACHING AND LEARNING. THE OLD LIBRARY SYSTEM WILL BE REPLACED BY COMPUTERS THAT SIMPLIFY AND SPEED UP THE RETRIEVAL AND LISTING OF INFORMATION SOURCES.

THE VAST PROLIFERATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION WILL BRING ABOUT A SHIFT IN THE PRIORITIES OF EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS. WHAT ARE NOW THE HUGE RESEARCH ORIENTED MULTIVERSITIES WILL PROBABLY BE LARGELY GRADUATE SCHOOLS IN A FEW YEARS, AND EVENTUALLY PERHAPS ENTIRELY RESEARCH INSTITUTIONS. THE YOUNGER STUDENTS WILL FIND THEIR APPROPRIATE PLACE IN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS ESPECIALLY ENGINEERED FOR PROPER UNDERGRADUATE EDUCATION. ALREADY SOME
UNIVERSITIES ARE EXPERIMENTING WITH SUCH IDEAS AS THE "CLUSTER CONCEPT" BY WHICH LARGE UNITS ARE SPLIT INTO SMALLER UNITS WHO LIVE AND WORK TOGETHER. THIS GIVES STUDENTS A CHANCE TO DEVELOP THE FRIENDSHIPS AND IDENTIFICATION THAT SATISFY NORMAL HUMAN DESIRES FOR LOVE AND SECURITY. EFFICIENT PLANNING, YOU SEE, CAN SERVE A VERY HUMANITARIAN PURPOSE. BECAUSE OUR PRIORITY AT GRAND VALLEY IS TO REMAIN A PRIMARILY UNDERGRADUATE TEACHING INSTITUTION, WE ARE CURRENTLY EVALUATING THE CLUSTER SYSTEM FOR FUTURE USE ON OUR CAMPUS.

LASTLY, THE INTEGRATION OF EDUCATION WITH AN INCREASINGLY INTERDEPENDENT SOCIAL AND POLITICAL WORLD WILL NOT BE CONFINED TO NATIONAL BOUNDARIES. EDUCATION WILL PROBABLY BECOME INCREASINGLY INTERNATIONALLY ORIENTED. IN ANY PARTICULAR SUBJECT, INFORMATION FROM ALL ACROSS THE WORLD WILL BECOME AVAILABLE TO SCHOLARS. STUDY ABROAD WILL BECOME A REGULAR EXPERIENCE FOR STUDENTS. ALREADY MANY UNIVERSITIES ARE BEGINNING EXTENSIVE FOREIGN STUDIES PROGRAMS. AT GRAND VALLEY WE ARE MAKING OUR FIRST INROADS INTO THIS ARENA. WE CURRENTLY HAVE STUDENTS IN TWO FOREIGN STUDY PROGRAMS, AND WE HAVE PLANS IN PROGRESS TO FURTHER DEVELOP OUR INTERNATIONAL

THE TRENDS THAT I HAVE OUTLINED HERE ARE SPECULATIVE, BUT I HAVE TRIED TO REVEAL TO YOU THE EVIDENCE AND LOGIC UPON WHICH I BASE MY POINTS OF VIEW. I AM PARTICULARLY INTERESTED IN ANALYZING CONTEMPORARY CURRENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION BECAUSE I HAVE ALWAYS
BEEN CONVINCED THAT THE SUCCESS OF AN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION
DEPENDS UPON ITS BEING LED INTO NEW AND THRIVING INTELLECTUAL
ADVANCES RATHER THAN ITS CLUTCHING VAINLY AT THE PAST. AT GRAND
VALLEY STATE COLLEGE, WE ARE TRYING TO STAY AWARE OF THE DIRECTIONS
THAT HISTORY MOVES US.

I HAVE MENTIONED TODAY SOME OF THE PROGRAMS AND PLANS THAT WE
HOPE WILL KEEP US IN HARMONY WITH THE ERA IN WHICH WE LIVE. WE
HAVE A REORGANIZATION COMMITTEE AT GRAND VALLEY WHICH IS COMMISSIONED
THIS YEAR TO REVIEW THE COLLEGE'S GOALS AND STRUCTURES IN LIGHT OF
THE MOST RECENT EDUCATIONAL ADVANCES. THIS DOES NOT MEAN THAT WE
ARE PREPARED TO LEAP ON EVERY NEW EXPERIMENTAL DEVELOPMENT. WE
MAY WANT TO SLOW DOWN THE FORCES OF CHANGES, OR WE MAY WANT TO
SHIFT THEIR DIRECTION A BIT, BUT WE KNOW THAT WE CANNOT STOP THEM.
I AM CONVINCED THAT IT IS THIS KIND OF HISTORICAL CONSCIOUSNESS
THAT WILL CONTRIBUTE TO MAKING OUR INSTITUTION A GROWING AND THRIVING
ONE. AS I SPEAK OF THIS SUBJECT I AM REMINDED OF A PARAGRAPH FROM
ECONOMIST ROBERT HEILBRONER'S FAMOUS BOOK THE FUTURE AS HISTORY.
HEILBRONER WROTE:

WE CANNOT HELP LIVING IN HISTORY. WE CAN ONLY FAIL
TO BE AWARE OF IT. IF WE ARE TO MEET, ENDURE, AND TRANSCEND
THE TRIALS AND DEFEATS OF THE FUTURE, IT CAN ONLY BE FROM A POINT OF VIEW
WHICH, SEEING THE FUTURE AS PART OF THE SWEEP OF HISTORY, ENABLES US TO ESTABLISH OUR PLACE IN THAT IMMENSE PROCESSION
IN WHICH IS INCORPORATED WHATEVER HOPE HUMANKIND MAY HAVE.