

# The Turning Point

The crisis in public higher education  
in historical perspective

John Protevi

[www.lsu.edu/orgs/aaup](http://www.lsu.edu/orgs/aaup)

[www.protevi.com/john](http://www.protevi.com/john)

[protevi@lsu.edu](mailto:protevi@lsu.edu)

# Five moments in the history of the American university<sup>1</sup>

- Colonial period: the sectarian college
- Mid-19<sup>th</sup> C: state universities
- Late-19<sup>th</sup> C: research universities
- Mid-20<sup>th</sup> C: the “Golden Age”
- Late-20<sup>th</sup> C: the “corporate university”

• Jeffrey J Williams, The Post-Welfare State University, *American Literary History* 18.1 (Spring 2006): 190-216

# The “Golden Age” (1945-75)

- The GI Bill
- Large-scale federal funding of basic research
- The New Deal, the Cold War, the Great Society

# The Key(nes) to the Golden Age

- Public education as investment in the future
- Public education as a public good
  - Widespread economic *and* social benefits
  - Unpredictable innovation
  - Theory of the “commons”
    - Shared knowledge base
    - Shared communication means
- Government as organized expression of community decisions

# The Turning Point (1975-85)

- The triumph of neo-liberalism
  - “there is no such thing as society”
  - “government is not the solution; it’s the problem”
- The denial of education as a public good
  - Education becomes a commodity
  - Universities become credentializing agencies
  - Students become
    - consumers of services
    - self-entrepreneurs: private investment in “human capital”
- *A reductio*: public education is immoral

# The Vicious Spiral

- “Tax revolts” of the 1970s
  - Prop 13: response to demand by Cal Supreme Court for equal state spending in K-12
  - Local property tax differentials and public schools
- Cuts in state support for higher education
- Increases in tuition and fees
- Resistance to “paying for other people’s kids”
- More cuts / decreased access / increased private payoff / increased human capital outlook

# The corporate university (1985-2010)

- Change in faculty composition<sup>1</sup>
  - 1975: T = 36.5% / TT = 20.3%. Total = 56.8%
  - 2003: T = 24.1% / TT = 11.0%. Total = 35.1%
- Growth of administration (1987-2007)<sup>2</sup>
  - 17.6% faculty increase relative to enrollment
  - 35% management increase relative to enrollment
- Rise in student work and debt
  - Student work<sup>3</sup>: 78% of college students now work / 25% work full-time / part-time students, older students, low-income students, and students from under-represented minority groups work more than others.
  - Debt<sup>4</sup>: Student loans: \$22,000 (for students w/ any loans at all) / Credit card: 84% of undergrads have at least one card; mean debt = \$3,000; 20% owe > \$7,000

(1) 2006 AAUP Contingent Faculty Index

(2) Trends in Higher Education Labor Force, Center for College Affordability and Productivity (2009)

(3) American Council on Education Brief, May 2006

(4) College Board, Trends in Student Aid 2008, p. 5 (loans) / Sallie Mae, Student use of credit cards (2009) (credit cards)

# What's next?

## Regarding neo-liberalism

- We cannot argue for the ivory tower
- We must make an economic argument
  - Against education as only a private investment
  - For education as a public good

# What's next?

## Regarding the corporate university

- Restoring collegiality
  - Faculty governance
  - Shared governance
- Accepting the corporate university
  - Collective bargaining
    - Current administration – faculty relations
    - Are really management – labor relations
  - Calling the administration's bluff
    - Bring in the MBAs and let's do a real productivity study
    - The corporations of the 2000s vs those of the 1950s