



The Ends of Education

Higher education today seems to reside in the two cities of Dickensian fame. More students, faculty, and campuses. Bountiful endowments. Its own celestial beings. A program for every proclivity. Lifelong learning. An abundance of patents, strategic partnerships, and product lines. Whether these attributes make for the best of times or the worst is the subject of considerable debate. The same might be said for escalating student debt, erosion of tenure, commercialization, heightened accountability, and outcomes assessment. The queasy mix of celebratory expansion and fitful proclamations of crisis that comprises the current range of opinion on the topic speaks above all to the challenges of evaluating the purposes of higher education for self and society. What once appeared to be a secure confluence of interest between individual and social enrichment, private and public good, professional and national allegiance, no longer abides the same measures of certainty. The feeling of lack amid such abundance poses anew the question of what education is for.

The characterization of our world as a knowledge society where self-managed professionals reign would seem to settle the matter once and for all.¹ For professionals, knowledge is both raw material and finished product. Enlightened management is predicated on ceaseless learning. The rise of a professional-managerial stratum to the leadership of society serves to anchor the university at the central nexus of social class, nation, market, and state. And yet for those very reasons, the university stands as a bellwether of societal fissures and points to the discrepancies between what is promised and what is possible, between what counts as accomplishment and what points

to failure. Nor does knowledge itself guarantee success, a lesson painfully in evidence when experts responsible for managing a range of disasters from the environmental to the economic report that they could not imagine, let alone model, what actually took place. Paradoxically, the number of people who can claim to be university-trained professionals continues to rise. The university measures its success in terms of this expansion, yet both professionals and universities have lost their commanding purchase on the means and end of knowledge production. The professional turn is at once a sign of growth and evacuation, democratization and selectivity, expansion and disorientation in the conditions and applications of knowledge work. Self-rule yields to the proliferation of managerial protocols. Specialized domains of expertise jostle restlessly with the generalized conditions of information processing and judgment. Hence, the university has become more than a strategic industry that explains and encapsulates American global might—or its diminution and decay. It is also key in rendering an understanding of what our society is and is not.

If the university is to teach these lessons to either its denizens or detractors, a comprehensive approach is required, one that looks at what education is for, at who decides its contents and delivers its forms, and at what is taught and how. Yet any effort at a broad understanding quickly gets ensnared in a kind of double bind. Higher education is at once central to the societal enterprise and undervalued for what it offers. Its traditional value derives from the fact that it is exceptional in its norms of comportment and exemplary in its excellence. Yet it is also increasingly captive to external measures of performance and productivity. Higher education is attacked as an ivory tower, yet these parapets can no longer defend it. Indeed, the production, dissemination, and evaluation of what counts as literacy is not contained by cloistered walls but suggests a vast industrial complex of communications media, technoscience, and knowledge-based service in which the university is but one node among many. As a consequence, the neat divide between what is inside and outside the university, whether it be between policy and pedagogy, market-driven instrumentality and education for itself, or worker and student, cannot any longer be sustained.

WHITHER AUTONOMY?

In 1968, two sociologists looked at the university in the United States and declared an “academic revolution.” What Christopher Jencks and David Riesman were referring to was not the social upheaval on campus spearheaded by antiwar activists but a shift in the locus of power and authority from the nineteenth to mid-twentieth century, when trustees and presidents ruled to the advent of a “unified faculty” that had an informal veto. Jencks and Riesman found that “the shape of American higher education is largely

a response to the assumptions and demands of the academic professions.”² At its core, this transformation amounted to what they took to be a managerial revolution whereby the upper administrators represented the interests of the faculty—who control the central identity of the institution as its middle managers. Their research was more than a generalization from their own particular experience at Harvard, where norms of faculty centrality are perhaps strongest. Theirs was a report on a societal project, demonstrating that professional expertise lies at the heart of and drives the mission of an expanding range of specialized institutions. From this perspective, modern societies prove to be something of a sociologist’s dream, artfully balancing the ideational content of rule-governedness or rationality with the material form of autonomous institutions. The competence and clarity of professional self-rule eliminates competition and conflict over who is best placed to perform socially necessary tasks to make society run smoothly. The university professoriate can rightfully claim pride of place in this system because its institution not only runs rationally but also is devoted to the pursuit of reason as an end in itself.

Writing a few years later, French sociologist Alain Touraine was impressed by the American academic system’s ability to balance a range of otherwise contending forces. He noted that it had “the exceptional capacity to combine excellence and massification by various processes of internal differentiation and hierarchization” and to achieve a “complementarity of personal development and collective solidarity.”³ The idea of a society centered upon professional self-regulation of knowledge production has persisted in the sociological literature since Daniel Bell’s 1973 pronouncement of the professional as the protagonist of the postindustrial society. Writing two decades later, Harold Perkin confidently proclaimed, “The modern world is the world of the professional expert. . . . The professionals have created this world with its fantastic range of sophisticated products and services, and their leading lights have received and are receiving high rewards, prestige, status and in some cases permanent wealth for their efforts.”⁴ Accordingly, this dominance of professional expertise amounts to no less than a third revolution that supersedes the preindustrial rule by landlords and industrial rule by capitalists, and that rests upon the centrality of higher education and the replacement of class structure with meritocratic hierarchy.

Not all who see professionals as the harbinger of a new era are as celebratory of this new state of affairs. For critics like Donald Clark Hodges—building on the work of James Burnham, Milovan Djilas, and Alfred Chandler—professionals have constituted themselves in a republic of expertise that undermines democratic deliberation by excluding from participation those deemed unqualified and exploits, in a manner that capitalists once did, the toiling majority. “In postcapitalist societies, as in capitalist ones, an underlying population provides the wherewithal for the overlying privileged layer. Such is the condition of exploited wage earners—human livestock, albeit lords over other

animals they in turn domesticate. They, too, are engaged in a class struggle, but one they periodically lose. Today they are lackeys of the new class of professionals in times of peace, cannon fodder in times of war.”⁵ Knowledge sorts privilege and demands obeisance to its perquisites.

The professions not only support the new order but also constitute a self-regulating system in their own right, an argument most fully elaborated by Andrew Abbott. Abbott wants to demonstrate the fundamental historical continuity of expert control over knowledge that concentrates power in the hands of a professional elite. The mobility associated with career advancement preserves the security and autonomy of the professions. Social change both creates and destroys conditions for professional work. Concentrated ownership of the means of professional production yields greater dependence on organizations that assume a federated character and that can lobby government to create a legislatively friendly environment. Groups compete over control of knowledge and its application and dispute the jurisdictional boundaries of their work. Those who can define old problems in new ways will prevail. Only experts possess what is juridically recognized as knowledge—others merely possess information—and are in a position, as knowledge shifts, to maintain the upper hand as the threshold of what counts.

Abbott’s strong concept of professionalization points toward an evolution of “a particular structural and cultural form of occupational control. . . . Culturally, professions legitimate their control by attaching their expertise to values with general cultural legitimacy; increasingly the values of rationality, efficiency, and science.”⁶ The spread of knowledge production means that the university can no longer claim to be the exclusive producer of these values. Internally, it becomes more of a holding company for professional schools that are closer to professional associations than to university fidelity, and these credentialing centers become battlegrounds for professional competition. Externally, the erosion of the university’s monopoly over knowledge-making fosters an explosion in continuing education rather than a one-time conferral of a credentialing degree.

The claims for professional autonomy often rest upon a presumption that the views experts have of themselves are generally shared. Abbott, for example, asserts, “For whatever reason, public images of professions are fairly stable.”⁷ As publics and consumers gain more information, their capacity to judge the efficacy of professional expertise expands. The result is a less atomized clientele who can create cartels for services that increase competition among providers who nonetheless are able to maintain control over what is provided. Other defenders of the value of professional autonomy have been less sanguine on this point. One, Elliot Friedson, sees the professional’s ability to maintain a logic of occupational control against conflicting demands of institutions and markets coming under increasing assault. Placed in jeopardy “is the independence of professions to choose the direction of development of

their knowledge and the uses to which it will be put.”⁸ Friedson, writing in 2001, more than a decade after Abbott, observes that the common assault on professional elitism weakens its capacity to “fend off the pressures of capital and the state,” a circumstance that exacerbates its loss of credibility with the public.⁹

These arguments regarding the persistence and centrality of professional autonomy are in marked contrast to two very different sentiments toward the growth of occupational expertise. One is that professionals constitute a new working class and the other is that they comprise the new mandarins, a professional-managerial class aligned with the highest echelons of societal command. Building on the discussion of the new working class broached by Andre Gorz (1964), Alain Touraine (1971), and Serge Mallet (1975), Charles Derber defines professional proletarianization as a “shift toward dependent, salaried employment, in which the labor of professionals becomes subject to the authority and management of others.”¹⁰ Derber is careful not to suggest that this process amounts to a convergence with the historical nineteenth-century working class. Elsewhere he articulates the contrary position that professionals have created a “junior partnership” with employers to enhance key elements of traditional authority in what amounts to a mandarin capitalism, a position that follows the influential formulation made in the seventies by Barbara and John Ehrenreich of a professional-managerial class (PMC) in the service of business.¹¹

The Ehrenreichs argued that while the PMC was made up of “mental workers,” without control over the means of production, the workers served to reproduce capitalist culture by solving the problems of daily life, be these affective or scientific. While the PMC divided between business and nonprofit services, the generalized anxieties about class reproduction or upward mobility meant that “private life thus becomes too arduous to be lived in private; the inner life of the PMC must be continuously shaped, updated and revised by—of course—ever mounting numbers of experts: experts in childraising, family living, sexual fulfillment, self-realization, etc., etc.”¹² Paradoxically, this insecurity was the basis for class expansion and hegemony over the working class through self-legitimation of its own expertise, with a consequent anti-working class radicalism. The Ehrenreichs’ analysis points to the emergence of the new right at the end of the seventies. While Derber notes that professionals have the power to “enclose the mind,” he also observes that the Reagan revolution was hostile to the new mandarins.¹³ No longer disinterested or narrowly self-interested in expert autonomy, the professions have become a field where larger social contests are played out. Ironically, this was the very critique of the university that Jencks and Riesman neglected, one exemplified, in 1966, in the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) position that higher education is a social factory whose commodities are the masses of the knowledgeable, with the faculty as subsidiary, unproductive salaried workers.¹⁴

Taking up this trajectory in the early eighties led John Beverly to declare, “The autonomy of the higher education system in the United States (and other advanced capitalist countries) is rapidly collapsing, posing new problems and prospects to students, faculty and other workers engaged in this sphere.”¹⁵ When all are expected to be professionals and perform professionally, the result is a loss of exclusivity over claims to expertise that secure a unique sense of place and grounding. The costs of generalizing the professions as models of labor have been duly noted. “The price is a loss of faith, trust and sense of order, an increased perception of risk.”¹⁶ Professionalization under these circumstances becomes a portal to increasing managerialism, which effects a collision between expanded demands for judgment (when expertise is everywhere) and frustrated expectations that knowledge should but cannot control one’s fate.

If university-generated professional expertise is drifting toward managerialism, what direction is management taking? The “frontiers of management” in the words of Rosabeth Moss Kanter, are under the sway of humanistic ideals and emphasize core values such as “empowerment,” which is now “part of the conventional repertoire of enlightened managers.”¹⁷ In Kanter’s view, corporations are now flatter, focused, speedier, customer service oriented, organized through teams and projects, engaged in cross-functional contact. More, they partner with customers, pursue strategic alliances, and embrace social responsibility. All this leads to the erosion of the distinction between managers and nonmanagers such that reputation serves as a principle career resource. Peter F. Drucker, who until his death in 2005 was considered the dean of modern management, defines this field as the practice of performance-based results, which he sees as encompassing the operations of all organizations, not just business. At its heart, organizational survival depends on comparative advantage in making the knowledge worker productive. “And the ability to attract and hold the best of the knowledge workers is the first and most fundamental precondition.”¹⁸ Knowledge workers need to be able to manage themselves. They waste little effort trying to improve areas of low competence. They focus on strengths, types of learning performance, and values that allow them to decide where they are going. With lifelong learning at their cores, organizations can be built on trust and not force. Drucker’s vision makes the business organization sound much like the university, with the top manager acting something like a college dean committed to recruitment and retention.

Not all writing on management holds such a sunny view regarding the use of management theory and practice as a platform for professionally based or society-wide pedagogy. Henry Mintzberg, longtime teacher of managers, has written a biting critique of the prevailing training of managers via the standard MBA curriculum. In his words:

The trouble with “management” education is that it is business education, and leaves a distorted impression of management. Management

is a practice that has to blend a good deal of craft (experience) with a certain amount of art (insight) and some science (analysis). An education that overemphasizes the science encourages a style of managing I call “calculating” or, if the graduates believe themselves to be artists, as increasing numbers now do, a related style I call “heroic.” Enough of them, enough of that. We don’t need heroes in positions of influence any more than technocrats. We need balanced, dedicated people who practice a style of management that can be called “engaging.” Such people believe that their purpose is to leave behind stronger organizations, not just higher share prices. They do not display hubris in the name of leadership.¹⁹

The first undergraduate program in business started at the University of Pennsylvania in 1881, to be followed by the inaugural MBA at Harvard in 1908. Despite initial criticism from business for being overly abstract and having high student attrition, in the subsequent two decades, nearly two hundred business schools were established.²⁰ For Mintzberg, the development of the Graduate School of Industrial Administration at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, during the fifties marked a renaissance in business education that was grounded in an interdisciplinary integration of psychology, sociology, economics, mathematics, and other humanistic studies. This liberal arts approach to training business leaders was replaced in the seventies with one championed by Harvard’s Michael Porter—a technical analytics known as “strategy,” based upon the quantifiably measurable unit of a decision. The play of diverse disciplinary strands was undone in favor of a singular method that could not inspire innovation or the work of others. Against this hegemony of the American approach, Mintzberg advocates a more intellectually speculative manager, hastening a “time for the agents of change to change” so as fulfills the manager’s purpose, “to enhance the quality of leadership in society.”²¹ Leadership is itself a marker of excellence that links the aims of business and universities.

Leaving aside for a moment the question of whether the pressures to focus on share prices at the expense of organizational or other kinds of development can be resolved through a shift in educational preparation, Mintzberg has sharpened the quandary posed by the confluence of management and education. The imperative to increase share price or add value is not reserved for those who lead organizations, but it is a feature of the demands placed on all who work in them. The push to add value applies now to managerial work and education alike, seemingly placing the model of professional training at the heart of all manner of learning. The emphasis on measurable outcomes, or accountability, is usefully understood along the lines of professional training. What has been described as the abdication of a higher calling is exchanged for technical training of hired hands, something that has hollowed the mission and

rationale of the business school, but stands more broadly as a dilemma of the rush to relevance that has overtaken higher education under the sway of this professional model. Surveying the historical mission drift, Rakesh Khurana finds “that with the abandonment of the professionalization project and the idea that managers—not shareholders, labor, the state, or the market—should exercise ultimate control over the corporation, university business education lost the grand narrative that had sustained it from its beginnings.”²² The subordination of specialized expertise to externally derived norms undoes the larger story of autonomy by which professions generally had legitimated their authority.

Rather than being forced upon professional education, its instrumentalization appears with its own appeals to efficiency and innovation that makes it difficult to provide a critical context or more comprehensive evaluative criteria for the changes afoot. Jeff Schmidt sees professionals as conservative, uncritical, and ideologically obedient in the “attitudes they display at work and *in* their work.”²³ This is not simply a matter of pursuing self-interest by holding on to a specialized field of expertise, but rather of how professionals learn to labor. At the heart of this deficit in critical capacity is the educational formation by which they become credentialed based upon their test performance. The licensing exams taken by architects, doctors, lawyers, and the like are the mothers of high-stakes testing. Ironically, the very instrument meant to sequester specialized expertise from lay understanding standardizes and generalizes a regime of knowledge management. The qualifying exam becomes both model and measure of an appropriate disposition, a “qualifying attitude” in an “ideological workforce.”²⁴ Whereas intelligence testing causes disproportionate anxiety in nonconformist students because the test question is a fragment of actual, fully contextualized problems, the technical aspect as a mnemonic trick selects for students with a narrow approach—those who can combine boredom with endurance, and glean a sense of personal accomplishment through completion of the test.

IN CLASS

The fates of higher education and the professional-managerial class are deeply intertwined. Both have experienced secular growth in numbers of participants and social decay in the compact by which knowledge was to be imbued with power. Talk of class carries this problem. It is conventionally described by measures of individual attributes that make it difficult to conceive of what class means as a social phenomenon. But if class is to be spoken of effectively, measures cannot simply be refused with the argument that they render the concept of class incoherent. Rather, the numbers become a feature of understanding how class works, of what the concept can do, and where its limits lie. Taking the measure of social class is therefore a more complex proposition

than is typically conceded. Class is a manner of arranging persons according to discrete categories within a stratified or hierarchical social order (while begging the question of why or how such an order is maintained). It is assigned by a range of factors, such as income, educational attainment, and occupational status. So conceived, class is defined as an aggregate of individuals. Class has no internal social logic, dimension of collective action, or historical purpose. When class is defined more ambitiously as a way of understanding how a particular kind of society is achieved, of what divides populations internally, and what renders them mutually interdependent, the term takes on a clearer political resonance as a principle of association from which emanates a larger historical project. While autonomy based upon expertise over a specialized domain of knowledge was the founding condition of the PMC, the emergent terms of interconnectedness need to be identified. The attributes of persons that stand in for class as a social and historical formation must be read not only for their statistical sufficiency but also for the traces they bear to a larger collective project.

The most selective measures of the PMC by income or credential would restrict membership to the upper 15 percent to 20 percent in the distribution of households, or to less than 5 percent of the workforce according to those holding advanced professional degrees and doctorates.²⁵ When jobs are typed by occupational category, management, professional, and related occupations are by far the largest, at more than 50 million of a workforce that totals 140 million (as compared with 7.5 million for “production occupations”).²⁶ By a still more expansive measure of professional and managerial responsibilities across all occupation categories, these jobs comprised nearly 60 percent of the U.S. workforce in 2006.²⁷ A hundred years earlier, only a tenth of the workforce was employed in professional and managerial fields, and less than 3 percent had completed college.²⁸

The first doctoral degree was awarded in 1861, and little more than 50,000 mostly male students, roughly one person in a thousand, attended college. Of course, since that time, for those who finish high school, higher education has become the norm.²⁹ In 1960, fewer than half of those who completed high school went on to college, now more than two-thirds continue their educations.³⁰ By 2009, more than one hundred million of those 18 and older had at least some college experience, with more than eighty million holding some kind of degree.³¹ Projections are for continued growth. Between 2006 and 2018, associate’s degrees are slated to rise 25 percent, bachelor’s degrees are expected to increase by 19 percent, master’s by 28 percent, doctorates by 49 percent, and first professional degrees by 24 percent.³² With growth has come a loss of exclusivity but also a greater internal differentiation of institutions that parallels the growing inequality, especially in the past thirty years, that has accompanied the expansion of the professional-managerial stratum, where, by 2004, the top 1 percent of households had

tripled its after-tax income gains when compared to the top fifth of earners taken as a whole.³³

This proliferation of a professional class without allowing for its social significance was already in evidence in the late seventies when a range of Keynesian welfare projects were running aground. Randall Collins spoke of a “credential society” that was a victim of its own success. While educational attainment appeared to predict status and salary, on closer inspection, education delivered mass literacy but could not account for gains in productivity or economic development, which were tied to skills acquired on the job. For Collins, credentials had more to do with normative control, which linked occupational loyalty to monopoly of opportunity, a closed cycle yielding a sinecure sector that perpetuates its own privilege. Yet, he observed that, since the sixties, the credential system has gone into crisis, as education no longer guarantees selective positions. Its confidence eroded, education becomes “a means to a non-intellectual ends” as the “reasons for going to school are extraneous to whatever goes on in the classroom.”³⁴ Consistent with what seemed the Keynesian dilemma of growth unmoored from human development, Collins decried the overproduction and excess capacity that the paper chase generated, or what he termed “credential inflation.”³⁵ The specter of growth without reference to value, of self-absorbing struggles over formal control, of sinecure without calling would orient professionals toward an assault on their own success.

During the same year as Collins, but in a very different intellectual register, Jean-François Lyotard, in his influential report on the postmodern condition—precisely a consideration of the conditions for the valuation of knowledge—highlights as basic features of the emerging situation the loss of university autonomy and education as an end in itself:

In any case, even if the performativity principle does not always help pinpoint the policy to follow, its general effect is to subordinate the institutions of higher learning to the existing powers. The moment knowledge ceases to be an end in itself—the realization of the Idea or the emancipation of men—its transmission is no longer the exclusive responsibility of scholars and students. The notion of “university franchise” now belongs to a bygone era. The “autonomy” granted the universities after the crisis of the late 1960s has very little meaning given the fact that practically nowhere do teachers’ groups have the power to decide what the budget of their institution will be; all they can do is allocate the funds that are assigned to them, and only then as the last step in the process.³⁶

For Lyotard, the commodification of knowledge strips it of its abiding justification as the pursuit of truth and as a unifying idea for humankind.

Truth and idea constitute the general accounts, or meta-narratives, by which science was legitimated as the means and end of societal advancement. Science vies with other specialized ways of knowing, all of which are subject to a general doubt or incredulity toward meta-narratives. Each way of knowing must legitimate itself through its own statements and actions, advance its own ideas, and tell its own stories—what Lyotard refers to as small narratives (*petits récits*). While all manner of professional occupations can blossom under these conditions, the professor whose legitimacy was conferred by the institution is displaced and subsequently becomes “no more competent than memory bank networks in transmitting established knowledge.”³⁷ While professions may advance by managing their own rules for valuing innovation—an operation that takes place within language games—when an innovation threatens to change the rules of the game, it is denied minimal internal consensus. And the consequences of exclusion or rejection can be harsh. Anything that might place the system of self-legitimation in jeopardy is considered “terrorist,” defined as “the efficiency gained by eliminating, or threatening to eliminate, a player from the language game one shares with him. He is silent or consents, not because he has been refuted, but because his ability to participate has been threatened. The decision makers’ arrogance . . . consists in the exercise of terror.”³⁸

Contrary to the conventional way of understanding the postmodern as a discrete age or comprising a succession of historical eras (periodization), Lyotard sees the postmodern as an anticipatory, nascent state of the modern, a moment of rupture that breaks the consensus around a particular discourse. “The postmodern would be that which, in the modern, puts forward the unrepresentable in presentation itself; that which denies itself the solace of good forms, the consensus of taste which would make it possible to share collectively the nostalgia for the unattainable; that which searches for new presentations, not in order to enjoy them but in order to impart a stronger sense of the unrepresentable.”³⁹ By this account, the erosion of autonomy at the hands of informatics, which renders the claims of transcendental truth incredulous, might now describe the fate of the professions themselves. The exclusion without refutation that professional convention had arrogated to itself is now visited from without. Incredulous toward specialized expertise, the *petits récits* would subject the postmodern to its own modern moment.

Jürgen Habermas, with whom Lyotard shared a critical engagement, thought that the postmodern suspicion of truth made the self-proclaimed critical currents of those such as Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault ultimately neoconservative.⁴⁰ What would seem to be more accurate is that the neoconservative impulse was manifest as a rightist assault on cultural and intellectual radicalism, which would become formative of a generalized threat in the war on terror. The idea that special interests and particular identities were undermining the tranquility of college campuses coincided with the decaying power of intellectual capital to defend professional legitimacy. Writing on

the status of expertise thirty years after Lyotard, Harry Collins and Robert Evans declared, “In today’s world the scales upon which science is weighed sometimes tip to the point where ordinary people are said to have a more profound grasp of technology than do scientists. Our loss of confidence in experts and expertise seems poised to usher in an age of technological populism.”⁴¹

The erosion of professional status, along with the decline of the middle class, is now itself a common narrative. Whereas the professional-managerial class was defined in terms of expert knowledge production, the middle class referenced a forward-moving or upwardly mobile mass measured by a rising consumption index. Given the growth imperative built into both of these formulations, they would each be vulnerable to cyclical downturn in fortunes but also susceptible to a more general mission drift if they failed to deliver the privilege and security they promised. The professional-managerial class was always conceived of as being internally divided and subject to split interests and attention, and the middle class authorized racial, ethnic, and gender partition through the geopolitics of segregated neighborhoods. Both conceptions of class were tied in key ways to ideals of the business cycle, whereby fading fortunes are presumed (with proper faith and patience) to swing upward again. Within the closed world of the cycle, more fundamental shifts are difficult to discern. Indeed, between the forces of risk and self-management that have borne upon class formation, the past thirty years have also witnessed a more general class decomposition. The principle of association known as social class is forged by perpetual processes of making and unmaking. The rise of the PMC is accompanied by an internal cleavage between compromised professionalization and rampant managerialism. The utopian promises of emancipating consumerism are swallowed by unending labors of credit and debt. Middle-class anxieties are multiplied between professional services and the industry in self-help. As Micki McGee has shown, the impulse to do it yourself was explicitly at odds with organized labor as a means to collective betterment, as the DIY movement simultaneously expanded the work of reproduction into the spheres of private lives.⁴²

Not only does the home become a workplace—or more specifically for the knowledge economy, a research center—under these circumstances but the haven from anxiety promised by home ownership, so fundamental to the American Dream, loses its capacity to provide security in the same way. The corollary of increased participation by women in the workforce is an intensification of the kinds of labor and management that take place at home. Home ownership enters a speculative gambit whereby presumed increase in value is set to compensate for eroding earnings—at least as long as the real estate boom prevails. The home, no longer a bank vault to deposit security, is prized for its liquidity, its ability to transfer credit or serve as an ATM.⁴³ The bust, evident in the subprime meltdown of 2007, targets newer buyers,

especially in minority communities, and exacerbates the disequality of access to resources like higher education.⁴⁴ Large lenders, like Citibank, were quick to pare back loans to students at community colleges and less selective four-year schools, effectively redlining nonelite campuses, increasing the hours those students would need to work and diminishing their chances of completing their studies.⁴⁵ When the home becomes a line of credit for medical or educational expenses, it is viewed as a source of revenue, something to be managed, and not a respite from management. This is not to say that the decline in the PMC or the middle class is uniform, indeed the professions have themselves become a field that has differentiated outcomes of winners and losers, a feature that Steven Brint has noted, in which the disproportionate growth of professions promotes a “splintering of the professional stratum along functional, organizational, and market lines.”⁴⁶

The formalization of knowledge associated with expertise has replaced the moral grounding in social purpose that provided a distinctive place and voice in the public arena. The consequence has been what Andrew Ross characterized as “no respect” for the distinctive function of intellectuals in postwar U.S. public life, to which their own assertion of position and tendency drove a more interested posture that was treated as confirmation of public suspicion.⁴⁷ While anti-intellectualism has long been a reported feature of U.S. culture and a concern for observers of higher education going back to Thorstein Veblen at the beginning of the last century, the current challenge to expertise has as much to do with the access to and proliferation of specialized knowledge as the disdain for it.⁴⁸ One recent *New York Times* account offered a poignant reckoning of this public sentiment:

But in the days when a successful career was built on a number of tacitly recognized pillars—outsized pay, long-term security, impressive schooling and authority over grave matters—doctors and lawyers were perched atop them all. Now, those pillars have started to wobble. . . . The pay is still good (sometimes very good), and the in-laws aren’t exactly complaining. Still, something is missing, say many doctors, lawyers and career experts: the old sense of purpose, of respect, of living at the center of American society and embodying its definition of success. In a culture that prizes risk and outsized reward—where professional heroes are college dropouts with billion-dollar Web sites—some doctors and lawyers feel they have slipped a notch in social status. . . . Increasing workloads and paperwork might be tolerable if the old feeling of authority were still the same, doctors said. But patients who once might have revered them for their knowledge and skill often arrive at the office armed with a sense of personal expertise, gleaned from a few hours on www.WebMD.com, doctors said, not to mention a disdain for the medical system in general.⁴⁹