

BACKGROUND BOOKS

THE CHANGING AMERICAN CAMPUS

In the beginning there was Harvard College, established in Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1636 "when the little community perched on the edge of a howling wilderness hardly numbered 10,000." The colonists gave thanks to Providence for inspiring the vision of "one Mr. Harvard." But as Richard Hofstadter and Wilson Smith make clear in **American Higher Education: A Documentary History** (2 vols., Chicago, 1961, cloth; 1968, paper), the urge to found "a place for the exercise of Learning" has also had considerable secular appeal throughout American history.

Statesmen like Jefferson, shrewd investors like Ezra Cornell, acerbic critics like Thorstein Veblen—all helped shape U.S. higher education as the small, quasi-religious colonial enterprises led to private liberal arts colleges, big land-grant universities, and, by the early 20th century, first-rate research universities rivaling their European models.

From the start, campus debate has been vigorous—over academic freedom, admissions policy, the curriculum, research. Should Harvard tolerate heretics (Cotton Mather, 1702)? Are the classics an anachronism (*The Yale Report*, 1828)? Must the university deal with populist as well as aristocratic tastes (Ezra Cornell, 1865)?

In Laurence Veysey's view (**The Emergence of the American University**, Chicago, 1965, cloth; 1970, paper), the genius of the American university as a species may be that it has never really drawn the line. Elitism? By 1900, universities were essentially open to all, even though

"all" usually meant "children of northern European extraction whose fathers did not work with their hands." Quality? On a cushion of growing enrollment, advanced scientific and scholarly work prospered—even if most university administrators in the 1890s favored the collegiate, not the scholarly, ideal.

The full-fledged university is a relative latecomer in America. The best general histories of the broader academic enterprise—covering the whole spectrum of institutions, their changing curricula, students, purposes—include Frederick Rudolph's **The American College and University** (Knopf, 1962, cloth; Random, 1965, paper) and the more up-to-date **Higher Education in Transition, 1636-1976** by John S. Brubacher and Willis Rudy (Harper, 1958; rev. 1976). Both surveys boast excellent bibliographies.

The diversity of the modern American post-secondary school system is partly a result of the Supreme Court's decision in the famous Dartmouth College Case of 1819, which, in effect, legalized the private sector in higher education. Elaine Kendall's **Peculiar Institutions** (Putnam's, 1976) looks at one group of private schools, the Northeast's Seven Sisters. Starting with Mary Lyon's founding of Mount Holyoke Seminary in 1837, Kendall traces the lives of a handful of brewers, spinsters, and assorted eccentrics who by bequest or other expressions of will power helped make women's education "an alarming success."

The end of a very different "peculiar institution"—slavery—spawned

the black colleges; the basic text here is Dwight O. W. Holmes's **The Evolution of the Negro College** (Teachers College, 1934; Arno, 1969). A more critical treatment is former U.S. Commissioner of Education Earl McGrath's **The Predominantly Negro Colleges and Universities in Transition** (Teachers College, 1965, paper). Writing before the influx of minorities into "mainstream" institutions, McGrath found that, on average, the poorly endowed black colleges had failed to keep pace, in terms of facilities, faculty, and academic standards, with comparable predominantly white institutions.

Philanthropy and the federal government have since helped stabilize the black schools; they are probably stronger than ever before. Yet most black college-goers now do not attend predominantly black colleges—a result of the civil-rights struggles of the 1960s and 1970s. One of the most concise overviews of "affirmative action" and minority enrollment is **Selective Admissions in Higher Education**, a report from the Carnegie Council on Policy Studies (Jossey-Bass, 1978, paper). The report endorses the consideration of race in college admissions; a statistical appendix buttresses the text. Sociologist Nathan Glazer supplies a contrary view in **Affirmative Discrimination** (Basic Books, 1975, cloth; 1978, paper), contending that the new "group consciousness" of the law threatens to erode the rights of individuals.

What do other professors say? According to a survey of 60,000 faculty members by Everett Carl Ladd, Jr. and Seymour Martin Lipset (**The**

Divided Academy, Norton, 1976, paper), preferential treatment of minorities and women has "sharply divided academe." At the same time, the professoriat retains a generally "liberal orientation."

Educators produce a sizable flow of more or less "philosophical" literature: distinguished lectures, occasional manifestos, reasoned "white papers." Often cited is John Henry Cardinal Newman's **The Idea of a University** (London, 1873; Oxford, 1976), portions of which were first published in 1852, which defined liberal education as an effort "to fit a man of the world for the world." Also cited is Alfred North Whitehead's crusade against "dead knowledge" and "inert ideas" in **The Aims of Education** (Macmillan, 1929; Free Press, 1967, paper). Three other little classics: the influential Harvard "red book" (**General Education in a Free Society**, Harvard, 1945); former University of Chicago President Robert Hutchins's **The Higher Learning in America** (Yale, 1936; 1962, paper); and Carnegie Council Chairman Clark Kerr's **The Uses of the University** (Harvard, 1963; rev. 1972). All three deal with the aims of "general education": how, as Hutchins defined the task, to "educate the student for intelligent action."

Unfortunately overlooked by many academic writers, we might add, is **The Elements of Style** by William Strunk, Jr. and E. B. White (2nd ed., Macmillan, 1972, paper). The precepts of "the little book" ("Use the active voice," "Be obscure clearly") have much to offer both to the general reader and to the scholar's world of publish or perish.

EDITOR'S NOTE. *Help in choosing some of these titles came from Larry Van Dyne and Edward T. Weidlein, both on the staff of The Chronicle of Higher Education.*