

ECONOMICS, LABOR & BUSINESS

Why Go to College?

THE SOURCE: "How Many College Graduates Does the U.S. Labor Force Really Need?" by Paul E. Barton, in *Change*, Jan.-Feb. 2008.

FEW BUT THE FOOLHARDY WOULD dispute the value of a college education. In addition to enjoying the intrinsic benefits of four years of education beyond high school, college graduates simply make more money—a lot more.

But Paul E. Barton, a senior associate at the Educational Testing Service, asks not whether higher education is good for you or me—it is—but whether more college graduates are necessary to American prosperity. That answer is far less clear. The

occupations that are expanding most, he writes, don't require a degree. The fields that *do* aren't adding large numbers of new jobs.

Take the government's estimates of the needs of the 10 fastest-growing occupations between 2004 and 2014. These occupations range from home health aide (No. 1) to computer engineer in applications (No. 5) and in systems software (No. 8). Only 39 percent of the jobs in the 10 occupations require a college education. That's 615,000 jobs. The total number of U.S. jobs is expected to increase by nearly 19 million.

The outlook is different when researchers study the 30 occupations with the greatest projected job growth in absolute terms, rather than percentage terms. These occupations, led by salesperson and registered nurse, are expected to need about 8.8

million new workers. But only 30 percent of these positions will require a college degree.

Overall, a mere 29 percent of all jobs required postsecondary education in 2004, and that proportion is expected to rise only to 31 percent by 2014. Such modest growth actually outpaces the norm. Between 1984 and 2000, a period when highly technical occupations became more numerous, the rise in the *number* of jobs in these occupations was so small that the average level of education needed for all jobs stayed exactly the same.

There is no question that higher education enriches society, but the real benefit is to the individual. Barton quotes the late political scientist Stephen K. Bailey: "I get an education so that later in life when I knock on me, somebody answers."

SOCIETY

Apology Mania

THE SOURCE: "Apologies All Around" by Gorman Beauchamp, in *The American Scholar*, Autumn 2007.

THE CATHOLIC CHURCH HAS apologized to Galileo, the Jews, Jan Hus (for burning him at the stake), and Istanbul (for sacking it in the Fourth Crusade, when it was known as Constantinople). It's weighing requests for similar action in the torture death of Knights Templar grandmaster Jacques de Molay in 1314. But what about the scattered heirs of the citizens of Jerusalem, massacred by

victorious Crusaders in 1009? Or poor Cecco d'Ascoli, burned at the stake in 1327 not by ordinary kindling, but by the flames of his own encyclopedias? Where does it stop? asks Gorman Beauchamp, a professor of humanities at the University of Michigan. It's not just the Catholic Church, he notes. A mania for apologies is sweeping the world.

Apologies offered for actions taken before the apologizers were born seem "vacuous and more than a little exhibitionistic," he writes. Actual victims—slave laborers in Nazi Ger-

many, Japanese Americans interned after Pearl Harbor, "comfort women" forced into prostitution by the Japanese—deserve an official apology and more. But apologies to the long-dead are "gestural feints toward now-empty victim categories."

The slavery reparations movement exemplifies the American version of the international apology craze. Who should pay restitution for slavery, and who should be paid? Should the nation exempt the millions of immigrants and their descendants who arrived in America after slavery was abolished? If slave descendants are compensated, why not compensate the heirs of the earliest cotton mill workers, 70 percent of whom died of brown lung disease? And if slavery is to be the subject of

compensation when practiced by dead white people, why passively stand by when the current Sudanese kidnap their black compatriots into servitude?

“We as a nation have grown and profited from the exploited labor . . . of people of every race, creed and condition of servitude, from the indentured servants of colonial days to the migrant workers of today,” Beauchamp says. “Can we even begin to imagine a social mechanism that could right wrongs of this magnitude that were committed so long ago?”

History offers so much to apologize for that it’s hard to know where to stop. The towering 19th-century historian Lord Acton said that “neither paganism nor Christianity ever produced a profound political historian whose mind was not turned to gloom by the contemplation of the affairs of men.” History depresses, saddens, chastens, tempers, and rigorously instructs us. It’s an essential process, Beauchamp says. But “no more apologies.”

SOCIETY

Shrink to Greatness

THE SOURCE: “Can Buffalo Ever Come Back?” by Edward L. Glaeser, in *City Journal*, Autumn 2007.

BUFFALO IS NOT THE ONLY old, cold city where urban fortunes seem stuck in reverse. Cleveland, Camden, and Detroit can tell the same tale. When cities shrink, increased poverty is a likely outcome. Declining areas with cheap housing become magnets for even more poor people, who drive up

demand for social services. Buffalo’s advantages—good transportation, plentiful electricity, proximity to Niagara Falls—are historic. Its disadvantages—bad weather and a lack of jobs—are city wreckers of the most modern sort.

Buffalo’s last boom occurred in the 1920s. It got its first great boost from the Erie Canal a century earlier, when it became a premier transfer point for wheat and other goods from the boats of the Great Lakes to the barges that traveled east on the canal. The invention of a steam-driven grain shovel made the city the world’s leading grain port. So much wheat was offloaded that it became a flour milling center. Its transportation advantages attracted steelworks, and with its access to the electricity generated by Niagara Falls it began calling itself the City of Light.

But eventually trucks and efficient rail transport undermined Buffalo’s *raison d’être*, writes Edward L. Glaeser, an economist at Harvard University. Its population, 580,000 in 1950, is now well under 300,000.

Since 1950, the federal government has invested billions upon billions of dollars in Buffalo and other failing cities, Glaeser says, but none of it has worked. The city “renewed” a district of its downtown. A 40-story bank headquarters designed by a famous architectural firm rose on its waterfront. A multimillion-dollar arena sprouted nearby. A \$500 million rail system running from the arena to the University of Buffalo took six years to build, but its ridership has been declin-

ing steadily for more than a decade.

The federal government should stop spending money on distressed *places* and instead use aid to help disadvantaged *people*, Glaeser argues. America’s taxpayers should not be bribing people to stay in Buffalo. Washington should invest in people-based policies such as the Earned Income Tax Credit to improve the economic futures of children, whether they stay put in New York State or move to Las Vegas. If Buffalo is to rebound, private innovators will have to make it happen. Better schools and safe streets might improve its odds of survival. But Buffalo should accept life as a smaller but more vibrant community, Glaeser says. It should shrink to greatness.

SOCIETY

America Escapes Again

THE SOURCE: “Crime, Drugs, Welfare—and Other Good News” by Peter Wehner and Yuval Levin, in *Commentary*, Dec. 2007.

FIFTEEN YEARS AGO, CONSERVATIVE social commentators were predicting a precipitous and seemingly inexorable national decline. Former education secretary and drug czar William J. Bennett summed up the evidence most starkly: Since 1960 violent crime had increased 500 percent; out-of-wedlock births, 400 percent. The teenage suicide rate had tripled and the divorce rate had doubled. SAT scores had plunged by more than 70 points.