

ation against women, African Americans, or gay men and women deprives the country of their contributions at a time of great need. And discrimination against blacks became increasingly untenable when the nation was rallying against fascism and communism in the name of freedom. Second, war tends to engender a stronger sense of national cohesion. Deep divisions in society take on a different cast when we feel “we’re all in this together.”

SOCIETY

Work Hard, Play Harder

THE SOURCE: “The Drinking Game” by Marshall Poe, in *Policy Review*, Oct.–Nov. 2010.

THE RULES OF THE COLLEGE Drinking Game are simple: Students must drink excessively, and politicians, college presidents, and public health specialists must rail excessively about the excessive drinking. They’re missing the mark, says historian Marshall Poe. “College drinking per se is not the problem,” he argues.

Not the problem? That may come as a surprise to many, but Poe argues that the effect of alcohol on campus is “largely positive.” American higher education is the envy of the world, and one of the reasons for that is that colleges and universities have done something very difficult: create strong communities and a sense of identity. From his perch at the University of Iowa, Poe has observed that for most students, “rowdy drinking is considered

essential to becoming a Hawkeye.” Social events such as house parties, pregame tailgating, and Greek life build cohesion, and all run on the fuel of alcohol.

College life wasn’t always this way. Until the 1970s, the drinking age in almost every state was 21—and the college population was relatively small. But when thousands of young American men went off to fight in Vietnam, many at home argued that if they were old enough to die for their country, they should be old enough to drink. (The draft age had been lowered from 21 to 18 in World War II, but few argued then that the drinking age should follow.) By 1975, only 11 states still had a drinking age of 21, and alco-

pus of booze in the years since. Today, roughly 80 percent of students drink and 45 percent binge drink.

College administrators have employed a variety of strategies to end alcohol’s reign: calling in law enforcement, imposing academic sanctions, pushing “responsible” drinking, limiting supply on campus, and spreading the word that alcohol is not as popular as students perceive. All of these strategies have failed, and the colleges must share some of the blame; they have often been half-hearted in their efforts.

College administrators will never succeed in drying out their campuses, nor should we want them to, Poe argues. Administrators should



Chug! Chug! Chug! Chug! University of Wisconsin football fans do their part to rouse school spirit.

hol began its starring role in the life of the American college student.

It wasn’t long before statistics from the National Transportation Safety Board began to show a shocking rise in teenage traffic accidents. Between 1976 and 1985, the drinking age bounced back up in 26 states. But colleges have been unable to rid their cam-

narrow their focus, harshly punishing the minority of college drinkers who pose a threat to themselves and others—about 10 to 15 percent of the population. Any student charged by police with public intoxication or driving under the influence should be expelled without ado, he recommends. For everyone else, bottoms up!