

SOCIETY

gardening and rural embellishment" as evidence of America's growing refinement. He also saw it as an antidote to the characteristically American "spirit of unrest": Growing plants in a way encouraged men to put down their own roots.

Between 1818 and 1857, some 40 horticultural societies had sprung up in towns and cities across the youthful republic. It might be said that the gardening movement bloomed—and has never withered.

A Failing Grade For Colleges

"Trying Higher Education: An Eight Count Indictment" by Chester E. Finn, Jr., in *Change* (May-June 1984), 4000 Albenmarle St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20016.

The recent flurry of published outcries over the sorry performance of the nation's public schools has left America's 2,013 four-year colleges and universities largely unscathed. It is only "a matter of time" before that oversight is corrected, predicts Finn, who teaches at Vanderbilt University, and a "huge ruckus" erupts. He will be among the first to stand up and cheer.

Finn contends that America's colleges must share the blame for the defects of the public schools: They train the schools' teachers and happily accept their mediocre graduates.

Partly because the pool of college-age youths is shrinking, "Our colleges will do practically anything to lure warm, tuition-paying bodies into their classrooms," Finn asserts, and "practically anything to hold onto them"—from supplying such amenities as bowling alleys and psychological counseling to "individualizing" instruction so that students can avoid required courses. Grade inflation further eases the pain. A University of California study found that the percentage of "A" grades awarded by the faculty doubled between 1963 and 1974.

The universities are ill equipped to cure such decadence, Finn believes. Most university presidents stick to fund raising and alumni relations, leaving academic affairs in the hands of faculty committees. Change will be slow in coming without strong, centralized leadership.

Finn has few kind words for his fellow professors. Of the 850,000 full- and part-time teachers in U.S. higher education, he speculates, only about 10 percent contribute materially to the "enlargement of human knowledge." Few are "workaholics." None punch time clocks. A full-time professor typically teaches only three courses per semester, involving at most some 22 hours of classroom and office work, according to Finn. Some spend additional hours on faculty committees, which he dismisses as largely unnecessary. And faculty pay averages \$28,509—not bad for a nine-month year of "flex-time."

America's university educators must be made more accountable, Finn argues. Needed is a set of common measures to gauge the performance of individual students and, thereby, of the institutions charged with their education. If academe does not heal itself, he warns, the public is likely to apply "some very painful therapies."