

# They Must Not Be Considered a Burden

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*"In the conditions of modern life the rule is absolute, the race which does not value trained intelligence is doomed. Not all your heroism, not all your social charm, not all your wit, not all your victories on land or at sea, can turn back the finger of fate."*

—Alfred North.

IT IS IRONIC that, scarcely past the hour of her greatest triumph, flushed with heroism and victories on land and at sea, possessed of social charm and wit, the nation upon whom the greatest blessings of education ever have been visited should find herself in a "crisis in education."

The American educational crisis thus far has taken several forms. It exists in the form of the financial problem in private higher education. It exists in the form of a growing financial problem in state-supported higher education, fostered by more and more stringent restrictions imposed upon state institutions through legislative enactments. It exists in the form of a tidal wave of young citizens now surging through the elementary schools, who must be educated at all levels.

We have had a tendency to view each of these forms as a separate problem, within education. Fundamentally, all of them are clear reflections of the *same* problem. But it is an altogether different problem; and it isn't *in* education. These problems should be brought together into the single crisis they represent—a crisis born of subtle shifts in the American standard of values.

This done, here is your crisis: *In the new conditions of our modern life, how do we perpetuate the American belief in trained intelligence?*

Private institutions of learning have had, and still have, and will continue to have, critical problems of financing in an inflated economy. The passing of the age of great

personal fortunes and of high individual incomes notwithstanding, this is evidence of a shift in traditional values. It reflects a reluctance of people to spend more in gifts and grants to private colleges and universities, if giving more to education means spending less for all the other things we have become accustomed to buy.

The problem of private education has received a great deal of attention. It must receive more attention. But the problem does not stop at the edge of the private institutional system.

The feeling is being expressed in the states of the Union that *public* institutions of higher learning are growing too large and too costly to maintain. This feeling has given rise to the expression of certain new concepts related to our social responsibility for education.

One concept holds that there is too much disparity between the tuitions charged by private and by public institutions, and that tuitions in the public institutions should be substantially increased.

Another concept holds that the level of state expenditures is reaching a limit, beyond which states should not go, even to maintain present levels of educational opportunity.

The disturbing feature of these concepts lies in the *spirit* of their suggestion.

They suggest a fretfulness with the historic American principle that educational opportunity not only should be provided in a free and open society, but that it should be available to all qualified students who can benefit from it, *regardless of economic status*.

They suggest resistance, not to the idea of trained intelligence, but to the *cost* of trained intelligence.

They suggest that education—education which provides the sharp edge of trained

intelligence in a nation's people—is *no more important* than anything else for which the public provides support through government. The Council of State Governments itself has given voice to this view.

The recurrence of such concepts carries a hint of corrosion in the vitals of American society. Are they not suggestive that, despite the conditions of modern life, a lesser value threatens trained intelligence in America?

Finally, what of our present unprecedented numbers of young Americans? What of the 28 million youngsters in elementary schools this year, who will have become 34 millions by 1960? What of this fresh, new, hopeful generation, already born and on the way? Here they are; the greatest potential any nation ever had for its own future. To the earth's most vigorous and prosperous people, *they must not be considered a burden!*

Down through the years, in the conviction that intelligence is the key to a great civilization, we have made educational opportunity available at all levels, in the broadest sense. Until now, we have never found it inconvenient to pay the costs.

But now? Now we are to be put to the test. The economic and fiscal conditions of life have changed. The changes have brought clear manifestations of a wavering and indecisive public attitude about the *need* for trained intelligence, in the new light of its rising costs.

No public institution has a "right" to be supported at this appropriations level or that. No private institution has a "right" to the benefactions of its friends or constituents. The "right" in this case is the right of free youth to its own opportunity, in its own time. We have always believed in *that* right, and in our hearts we believe in it now . . .

AN EXCERPT FROM AN ADDRESS ENTITLED, "THE SO-CALLED 'CRISIS IN EDUCATION,'" PRESENTED AT DISTRICT MEETINGS OF THE AMERICAN ALUMNI COUNCIL.