Coming of Age — A Comparison of the United States and the Federal Republic of Germany*

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Volljährigkeit und Schulabschluß — Ein Vergleich zwischen den Vereinigten Staaten und der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*

Inhalt: Die Studie untersucht das Verhalten der westdeutschen und amerikanischen Jugend der frühen 60er Jahre und stellt es dem derselben Alterskohorte zu Ende des Jahrzehnts gegenüber. Hinsichtlich der Berufs- und Beschäftigungsmuster, die jeweils zur Ausprägung kamen, konnten für die entsprechenden Länder erstaunliche Gleichförmigkeiten aufgezeigt werden; die Prozesse hingegen, die dieses Ergebnis bewirkten, erwiesen sich als von auffälliger Unterschiedlichkeit. Es werden Überlegungen angestellt, die diesen Befund erklären sollen.

Abstract: The activities of West German and American youth in the early 1960's are examined and contrasted with the activities of these same cohorts at the end of that decade. A remarkable similarity in the occupational patterns of the two countries was found. There were, nevertheless, some striking differences observed in the processes through which these "end results" were achieved. Some speculations are offered as to the consequences of these differences in process.

Most social research, understandably perhaps, is focused on adult populations. Another significant focus involves young people, those who have not yet achieved adult status. With relatively rare exceptions, the transition period between these two conditions has been overlooked. Among the exceptions are BADER 1962; COLEMAN et al. 1974; EMNID-INSTITUT 1955; HALL and MCFARLANE 1962; JAIDE 1961; MAIZELS 1970; and, in a more speculative vein, FRIEDENBERG 1965. The present article provides a basic descriptive account of that transition for young people ages 16 to 24 in two highly industrialized societies, the United States and the Federal Republic of Germany. Our aim is to show the major full-time commitments of these persons in the two societies, and in so doing, to indicate important differences between them in the ways in which young persons "come of age".

Many studies of "total societies" and their internal processes begin with what might be called a "generalizing bias", that is, they impose a common analytic framework on a range of discrete cases. Usually, this choice reflects some attempt to reach highly generalized conclusions about "universal invariants", about fundamental social processes which characterize all societies. While perfectly acceptable from one standpoint, this strategy leads to a corresponding difficulty, namely, a tendency to overlook unique or particular developments within the societies being compared. This, in turn, leads to highly deterministic theories of society and of history; it facilitates the assumption that particular social forms arise in response to ineluctable needs inherent in the processes of modernization and industrialization. An alternative possibility, that societies have a range of choices open to them or that particular social structures may only reflect special political decisions, is therefore seldom seriously entertained.

Many such accounts show what might be referred to as the "equivalency" thesis, one which assumes that all societies at the same stage of development will have roughly similar social processes. Thus, all "advanced industrial societies" have approximately equal rates of social mobility, are required to select talent for the higher strata on non-particularistic bases, or must provide high levels of educational opportunity in order to fulfill the escalating labor force "requirements" of the advanced industrial system (LIPSET and BENDIX 1959). A major variation on the

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equivalency theme recognizes differences within any given sample of nations but argues that basic "evolutionary" or "developmental" processes will ultimately lead to equivalent outcomes (HARBISON and MYERS 1959; KERR et al. 1960; TREIMAN 1970). Typically, the United States is taken as the point of comparison, as the "most advanced" case; thus, the U.S. experience provides the guideline as to what is "necessary" and "inevitable" for advanced industrialization. The progress of the other countries is measured in terms of how closely they approximate the American standard (DAHRENDORF 1965). TALCOT PARSONS states that the United States has taken "the lead in the latest phase of modernization". (PARSONS 1971: 114)

The basic causal mechanism of most such theories is presumed changes in the labor force requirements which come with advanced industrialization. A common theme is that as the productive task becomes more "rationalized", so too must its supervision and control. Thus, the division of industrial labor is accompanied by a proliferation of the bureaucratic form. This, in combination with the use of advanced technology creates the demand for proportionately more highly trained and technically proficient white collar workers who can manage the complex needs of the industrial system. A corollary development, of course, is a relative decline in the demand for traditional blue collar labor. Given this shift in the kind of work done, the society must provide mechanisms to feed the changing labor demands; it must both "democratize" and expand access to educational training. Thus, advanced industrial societies witness an expansion of the middle class and a relative decline of the working class, with the educational system providing the necessary means for movement between those classes.

Until recently, it was rather uncritically assumed that the United States was at or near the final flowering of this process, and that all other advanced industrial nations would soon follow the U.S. lead. In the late 1950's and early 1960's, the depiction of the U.S. as a "middle class society" was common. Such claims, typically, would be accompanied by a projection of future trends to show the "middle class" dominance becoming ever greater. For criticism of these claims see HAMILTON (1972: Chapter 4) and HAMILTON and WRIGHT (1975). Concomitant with the development of the middle class majority, it was said that ever larger proportions of young people were attending college; this too was predicted as an invariable future development. One commentator, writing in 1962, offered a figure of 38% as the proportion then attending college, and projected a growth rate of about one percentage point a year for the indefinite future (TROW 1962). One commentator writing in 1968 went so far as to assert that the major remaining problem for the advanced industrial society was finding the proper means to induce people, especially lower and working class people, to avail themselves of the rapidly expanding opportunities at the top (PORTER 1968).

With some allowance for historical and cultural particularities, these fundamental social changes—an expanding middle class and the democratization of education—were assumed to be occurring in most, if not all, industrializing societies, certainly in the Western European and Anglo-American countries. One prominent work, entitled A New Europe? contained several contributions arguing one or another variation on this common theme (GRAUBARD 1964, see especially the articles by DAHRENDORF and LIPSET).

This paper compares the United States and the Federal Republic of Germany in light of the several considerations just raised. First, we make a simple structural comparison between the current labor forces of the two societies. Then we turn to a comparison of the respective social processes through which these structures are staffed. Although the occupational structures in both societies are virtually indistinguishable, the mechanisms by which new generations are "tracked" into those occupations differ substantially. The "fit" between process and structure is closer in Germany than in the United States; this in turn may account for other differences between the two nations.

Preliminary occupational evidence for the United States and West Germany is shown in Table One. The U.S. data come from the Survey Research Center's (University of Michigan) 1968 election study; the German data come from a 1969 survey of the West German population¹.

¹ Both these surveys were made available to us through the auspices of the Inter-University Consortium for
Shown (in Part A) are the occupational distributions for males and females in the two countries.

One is struck, first of all, by the close similarity between the two nations in their basic occupational structures. There are no statistically signif-icant differences in the patterns of activities of the males in the two countries. Among the females, the major difference is in the larger percentage in Germany who are classified as housewives. As for those in the labor force, one is struck again by the remarkable similarities. If one re-

**TABLE 1** Labor force characteristics of the adult population of the United States (1968) and the Federal Republic of Germany (1969), by sex

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>United States (a)</th>
<th>West Germany (b)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Males</td>
<td>Females</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>A. Total Samples</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Collar</td>
<td>35.8%</td>
<td>23.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blue Collar</td>
<td>37.5</td>
<td>16.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farm</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NA Occupation</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>17.3</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housewife</td>
<td></td>
<td>50.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>(682)</td>
<td>(869)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>B. Young Persons</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ages 24–32</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Collar</td>
<td>37.7</td>
<td>25.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blue Collar</td>
<td>51.8</td>
<td>14.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farm</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NA Occupation</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housewife</td>
<td></td>
<td>55.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>(114)</td>
<td>(159)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(a) Source: Survey Research Center 1968 Election Study
(b) Source: KLINGEMANN–PAPPI 1969 German Election Study

Political Research. We wish to acknowledge our appreciation to the ICPR and to the original researchers for making this analysis possible. We alone, of course, are responsible for our conclusions. Throughout this paper the discussion is presented in terms of a clear either/or option; either the subject is a student, or he/she is in the labor force. In a large number of cases, however, subjects were involved in both areas. The U.S. Census data used here, nevertheless, gives precedence to the educational involvement. Any person enrolled in school, whether full or part time, was considered to be in school for purposes of this tabulation. The part-time night student who was working a forty-hour week in a factory was counted only as being in school. The figures given here, therefore, do not describe full-time students. Another census source indicates that approximately one-quarter of the 18 and 19 year olds in 1970 were simultaneously "in" school and "in" the civilian labor force. U.S. BUREAU OF THE CENSUS (1973)

calculated so as to take only the gainfully employed, the respective United States and West German percentages employed in white collar ranks are 58.6 and 56.3. Initially this similarity lends support for the equivalency thesis or, if one prefers the evolutionary variant, the suggestion is that they have both achieved the same level of development.

In both nations the male blue-collar or manual workers have a slight plurality over the white collar workers with those in farm occupations making up the remainder. The absence of a clear “middle-class majority” in these advanced industrial societies is inconsistent with the standard claim discussed earlier. Despite proliferating bureaucracies, increased use of advanced technology
and so forth, these data show just over half of the non-farm labor force in both nations to be employed in manual work. Census data for the United States from 1900 to the present do not indicate any major "class transformation"; for the non-farm labor force, the "decline of blue-collar work" has amounted to about one percentage point per decade for the twentieth century. Although precisely comparable data are not available, the trend in Germany does not appear to have been very different.

Census materials for both the United States and the Federal Republic indicate even higher blue-collar percentages than those shown in these surveys (HAMILTON 1969; HAMILTON 1972: 154–159; HEMPHILL 1968). A survey, unlike a census, will ordinarily have a non-minuscule percentage of respondents who were not reached and will have another group who refuse to answer the questions. Some investigations have discovered that "not-at-homes" and refusals are more frequent in working-class than in middle-class populations.

It will be noted in Table 1 that in the non-farm population the proportion of blue-collar workers among the young is considerably greater than within the entire employed populations. This points to some upward mobility occurring later on as blue collar workers become independent businessmen. In part also the result stems from differences in retirement practices. In the 65 and over age category, a clear majority of those still gainfully employed were independent businessmen. In terms of the present categories, they are white collar.

Sizable majorities of employed women in both countries, by comparison, are engaged in white collar occupations. The widely-disseminated claim about the new "middle class majority" in short is based on labor force figures that are not differentiated by sex. Historically one has seen two tendencies: first, a rising proportion of women in the labor force in both nations; and second, a tendency for women to enter the labor force at the lower white collar "clerical and sales" ranks. Much of the speculation about "class transformations" in fact refers mainly to these points, not to some fundamental realignment of social classes. Taking the social science convention that occupations of heads of households determine family class position, we conclue that the middle-class majority has not yet arrived in these nations. One must remember too that many of the women in white collar jobs are the wives or daughters of men engaged in blue collar occupations (MILLER 1964, Chapter 10; SWEET 1973).

The similarity of occupational structures, it will be noted, also appears for the youthful segments of these populations (Part B of Table 1). These figures will be discussed later in the article.

Given the very similar "outcomes" in West Germany and the United States, the related question may be asked about the processes by which these outcomes are attained. For this purpose, it has proven useful to compare the activities of young people, ages 16–24, seven and eight years prior to these "outcomes". This in turn allows some determination, albeit a crude one, of the relative "goodness of fit" between occupational structure and early training in the two societies.

The West German data come from a relatively large survey of German youth done in September 1962. The U.S. data are taken from published reports of the 1960 census (U.S. BUREAU OF THE CENSUS 1964). For convenience, we discuss the U.S. data first. Because the "careers" of males and females differ so sharply, they are considered separately. 1960 Census data on U.S. males aged 16–24, then, are shown in Table 2.

Unsurprisingly, the large majority of 16–19 year old males are still in school, most of them finishing up their high school education. Even at this early age, however, approximately a third had left school for other pursuits. Some, approximately one in twenty, were in the armed forces. One in ten were either unemployed or simply "not in the civilian labor force". Of those employed in the civilian labor force, a sizable majority were in blue collar occupations.

Possibly the most insistent claim about advanced industrial societies, at least until very recently, 2 The German Youth Study (Jugendstudie) was conducted by the DIVO Institut, Frankfult a.M., under the direction of Professor LUDWIG von FRIEDEBURG. It is based on a multi-stage probability sample of the 16–24 year old non-institutionalized population of the Federal Republic of Germany (N = 3404). We wish to thank Professor von FRIEDEBURG for his generosity in making these data available to us.
TABLE 2  Activity of United States Males: 1960

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>16–19</th>
<th>20–21</th>
<th>22–24</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In School (Enrolled) Less than College</td>
<td>55.5%</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freshman or Sophomore</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior or Senior</td>
<td>.4</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate or Professional</td>
<td>-*</td>
<td>.5</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not in School Armed Forces</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>10.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In Civilian Labor Force Employed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Collar</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>18.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blue Collar</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>31.5</td>
<td>37.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farm</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NA Occupation</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not in Civilian Labor Force</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>99.9</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>99.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N**</td>
<td>5,253</td>
<td>2,144</td>
<td>3,133</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* less than .1%  ** in thousands

Based on 1960 Census materials.

has been the assumption of pressing and escalating educational needs. As mentioned above, it was rather common, already in the early 60's, to hear that a majority or near-majority of young people were attending college (TROW 1962; LIPSET 1963: 260; PARSONS 1971: 95). Given these conclusions, the U.S. data must come as something of a surprise: Even in the peak attendance years of ages 20 and 21, only 20.8% of the male population was enrolled in an institution of higher learning. (This figure, for reasons to be discussed later in the article, does involve some underestimation.) At this juncture, an additional 5% were in school at lower levels, and the remaining three-quarters – the large majority – were out of school and committed elsewhere. Slightly more than 10% were in the armed forces, about 12% were either unemployed or not in the labor force. The remainder were already established in the early phase of their adult careers. As of ages 20 and 21, blue collar employment still exceeds white collar employment, the ratio being approximately 3 to 1.

By the ages 22–24, approximately 15% of the males were still in school. Even at this relatively late date, about a tenth were with the armed forces and another tenth were unemployed or not actively seeking employment. Of those employed in civilian occupations, blue collar workers still outnumber white collar workers by a large margin.

Lacking longitudinal data, the “links” between the evidence just considered and the subsequent labor force picture shown in Table 1 can only be inferred. One may assume that most of those still in college at ages 22–24 would enter the labor force at the white collar level. Some of those in the armed forces at this point would have been planning to continue military careers; the remainder, we expect, would have entered the civilian labor force mostly at the blue collar level. Most of the then unemployed, likewise, would probably find employment in the manual ranks.

3 A typical enunciation is provided by university president MARTIN MEYERSON: “America's colleges and universities are not limited to a social, an economic, or an intellectual elite; they are educating nearly everyone. Soon most American families will have one or more members who have had some college or university education”. (MEYERSON 1966: 268)
The experience of American males in 1960, then, may be summarized as follows: In the youngest age groups, the majority were in schools, most of them still in high school. By age 20, however, the largest portion had already left school and moved off into civilian jobs, the sizable majority going directly into blue collar work. For the typical American male, "Coming of Age in America" did not mean going to college; rather, at that time the "university" career line was followed by only a minority. For most, "coming of age" meant going to the factories, the shops, and the construction projects. Some other "careers"—essentially postponements of careers—were also available. About a tenth were in military occupations. Another tenth were unemployed or out of the labor force altogether. There was, in short, a range of "opportunity" open to American males. The most attractive of these, has received exaggerated attention, far out of line with its actual numerical importance. Most males followed other opportunities and other career lines, ones which offered much less promise for the future.

Although not shown in our presentation, it need scarcely be mentioned that these various "opportunity" lines are themselves linked to social class backgrounds (BLAU and DUNCAN 1967: Chapters 5 and 6; SEWELL 1971). Most of the university students are supplied by middle and upper middle class families; those who "leave" the schools for immediate employment come disproportionately from the working and lower middle classes.

The distributions shown here, clearly, are not constants. The proportions attending college showed a sizable rise in the 1960–1970 decade. According to one Census source, the proportion of 20–21 year old males enrolled in colleges and universities increased from 29.4% in 1962 to 44.7% in 1969. The 1969 figure represents the peak attendance figure. In 1970 the proportion fell to 40.9%, then to 37.8% in 1971 and 36.0% in 1972. The drop-off in those three years amounts to nearly 20%. A similar fall-off occurred in the proportions for 18–19 year old males. No equivalent drop, however, occurred for women (U.S. BUREAU OF THE CENSUS 1973). These trends seem to reflect evasion of military service more than the "pressing" educational needs of the advanced industrial society. Another spin-off of the war could be some increase in the proportions in the armed forces. There would, accordingly, be some declines in the other categories. For these reasons, it would be a mistake to "freeze" the results and suggest that they represent the "pattern for the United States".

A comparison of the figures in the preceding paragraph with those given earlier would suggest that a sizable increase in attendance occurred between 1960 and 1962. That conclusion, however, is not warranted since the results are not comparable. The 1960 figure is taken from census results and the percentage is based on the entire cohort. The figures for 1962 to 1972 given here are based on the Current Population Surveys, that is, on samples of the U.S. population. The key consideration in this connection is that the surveys sample only the non-institutional civilian population. The 1970 census found 14.3% of the 20–21 year old cohort in the armed forces. The C.P.S. figures then overestimate attendance because of the reduced "denominator" used in these calculations. As against the 1970 figure of 40.9% given by the C.P.S., the census found 33.9% of the males in that cohort attending college.

The initial patterns for young females are similar to those of the males (Table 3). The majority of the youngest cohort was still in school, for the most part in the high schools. Among those

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4 While acknowledging the impact of class background on later "achievement", it is sometimes argued that this is generally less so in the United States than in other advanced industrial societies such as Great Britain. The most recent available evidence contradicts this view: "... England and the U.S. differ little in the process of educational attainment. The degree of continuity of social level from father to son is almost identical in the two societies, and the relative importance of social origin and ability in affecting education attainment is the same". (KERCKHOFF 1974)

5 A corollary point to emphasize here is that "social structures" change—sometimes rather dramatically—in response to short-term political forces. Someone "tapping into" the American system in the mid-to late-60's would get a very distorted view of the character of the American educational arrangement. Some serious analytic problems would then be posed if that "picture" were taken as a necessary feature of contemporary American society. As an example, see PARSONS and PLATT (1973).
already employed, the majority was in white collar positions, as discussed earlier. For the most part, “white collar employment” in this instance means secretarial, clerical, sales and other “lower” white collar activities. Relative to males of the same age, there was less unemployment but a considerably larger segment was not in the labor force. Of those, many were housewives who, in all probability, would never enter the labor force; their non-labor force status, in short, would be permanent, not a transitional period intervening between other activities.

In subsequent cohorts, the proportion in school predictably declines; correlativey, there are increases in both the employed and “not in the labor force” categories. Among females in the high attendance years, the proportion enrolled in college was less than that for males, about 13%. The predominance of white collar work among employed females was evident in all cohorts, a finding consistent with labor force data for all females in the ensuing decade.

It proves useful to postpone further discussion of the U.S. data until the comparative evidence for the Federal Republic of Germany is presented. Although the categories of analysis afforded by the German survey are not exact equivalents of the U.S. data, they are close enough to indicate some sizable differences in the “process of status attainment” between the two societies. As before, males and females are treated separately.

The first striking difference one observes in the data for West German males is the much smaller proportion of youths in school, even within the youngest cohort (Table 4). Whereas the majority of U.S. males aged 16–19 were still in school, the majority of equivalent West German youth had already left school for civilian employment.

In contrast to the U.S. figure of 66% in school during those years, only 17% of the German youth were engaged in fulltime school activities.

A second striking feature of the West German arrangement is the large percentage involved in some kind of apprenticeship or on-the-job training. About two-fifths of the younger cohort (a majority of those 16 and 17, and about a quarter of the remainder) reported receiving some training of this sort. Such training, for all practical purposes, is unheard of in the United States.

In comparison with the United States, a higher proportion of 16–19 year old West German males were already employed in civilian occupations. The figures are about 15% and 40% respectively. Of those already employed at age 16 to 19, the overwhelming majority were in blue collar work.

Only a few persons in the sample were occupied in military endeavors. This “result” does involve a distortion of the reality since West German rearmament had already achieved a significant post-war “takeoff.” Unemployment was very low in comparison to the United States; none of the 16–19 year olds reported that they were out of work. Finally, the sizable U.S. proportion “not

7 The question reads: “Sind Sie Lehrling oder in einer anderen Berufsausbildung?” (“Are you now an apprentice or in some other occupational training?”).

8 The 1960 Census lists 85,282 males in the category “apprentice”. Assuming that all of these are males in the age range 16 to 21, no more than 2% of the total would be receiving training of this sort.

9 The West German armed forces contained 389,000 persons in 1962. The Jugendstudie sample clearly under-represents this segment of the population.

10 In the United States, what is called the “acceptable” rate of unemployment (four and, more recently, five per cent) necessarily assigns a significant proportion of the labor force to an unemployed condition. The persistently high unemployment rate must discourage many from even seeking work, adding to those “not in the labor force”. This “acceptable” level of unemployment is often said to be necessary for economic stability, to keep inflation under control. The West German arrangement, for many years now, has been characterized by “over full” employment. Seen as a percentage of the domestic labor force, employment in West Germany exceeds 100%. This means simply that millions of foreign workers have been

6 Taking all employed females ages 16 and over as of 1970; about 19% were employed in professional, technical and managerial positions (the bulk of these being nurses, elementary school teachers, librarians, and other traditional female occupations), about 7% were employed in sales occupations, and about 35% were employed in clerical jobs - a total of 61% employed in white collar occupations. About 38%, in turn, were employed in blue collar occupations, the bulk of these concentrated at the semi-skilled level, with the remaining one per cent reporting a farm occupation.
TABLE 3  Activity of United States Females: 1960

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>16–19</th>
<th>20–21</th>
<th>22–24</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In School (Enrolled) Less than College</td>
<td>51.2%</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freshman or Sophomore</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior or Senior</td>
<td>.5</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate or Professional</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>.2</td>
<td>.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not in School</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In Civilian Labor Force</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Collar</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>24.8</td>
<td>24.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blue Collar</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>10.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farm</td>
<td>.2</td>
<td>.4</td>
<td>.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NA Occupation</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not in Civilian Labor Force*</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>41.9</td>
<td>54.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>99.9**</td>
<td>99.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N***</td>
<td>5,226</td>
<td>2,250</td>
<td>3,257</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Females not in Labor Force are primarily housewives, plus a small percentage of females out of the Labor Force for health or other reasons.
** Some members of the armed forces were omitted from these percentages.
*** in thousands
Source: Same as Table 2.

TABLE 4  Activity of West German Males: 1962

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>16–19</th>
<th>20–21</th>
<th>22–24</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In School</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary or Middle</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical (Fachschule)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gymnasium</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On Job Training</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Class</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working Class</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farm</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–*</td>
<td>–*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>(638)</td>
<td>(356)</td>
<td>(705)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* less than 0.5 percent
Source: DIVO, Jugendstudie, September 1962

brought in to fill the vacant positions. Until recently, the number of vacant positions has continuously exceeded the number of persons seeking work. This meant that youths who had finished their schooling did not face unemployment. For them, again until recently, it was a question of which job they wished to take. They could, of course, have voluntarily chosen unemployment, but obviously, few did so.
in the labor force” is missing from the German data. The German survey contained a category “Other” which is about as close to “Not in the Labor Force” as this study provides. There were, however, no respondents in that category. The extended period of unemployment which touches a significant minority of American youth was, effectively, non-existent in the West German case.

Turning to the next oldest age group, one finds 14% still in school, most of them in the universities. A German university begins with the equivalent of the American sophomore year, hence a simple U.S.-German comparison is not possible (LINDEGREN 1957: 5). A rule-of-thumb, estimate, omitting U.S. freshman, would show an American figure of 15 or 16 per cent, as compared to the West German nine per cent. Other adjustments to reflect further differences between the two systems would narrow this difference even more.

In sum, claims about dramatic differences between the societies, at least on this score, appear to be unfounded. The belief held by some West German intellectuals that the U.S. is distinctively “advanced” and West Germany peculiarly “backward” is largely without foundation. As of about 1960, the real difference between the two countries in respect to university education must have been rather small, a matter of a few percentage points.

There are some additional qualifications one must add to this summary judgment; these will be discussed below.

On-the-job training is relatively rare among the 20-21 year olds, the vast majority of them being already in full-time employment. One person out of 356 reported that he was unemployed and four said they were with the armed forces. Although a larger proportion of German than U.S. youth are employed at this stage of their lives, the proportion in blue collar vs. white collar work were roughly the same in the two countries.

In the oldest age category, one finds eight per cent of West German males still in the universities, as compared with the equivalent U.S. figure of 11.8%. The narrowing of the U.S.-German gap among the 22-24 year olds might reflect the lower drop-out rates in the German universities or perhaps a slightly greater proportion staying on for graduate training. About 8% were either in technical schools (Fachschulen) or else receiving on-job training. The remaining 85% were employed in full-time occupations (with the exception of one respondent who said he was unemployed). The overwhelming majority of those employed were in manual occupations.

Comparable data for West German females are shown in Table 5. Relative to the U.S., few females continued their schooling to ages 16-19, only about 20% being enrolled. An additional fifth were involved in on-the-job training. The majority of West German women ages 16-19 were already employed in full-time civilian occupations, and of these the majority — showing the same labor force pattern as American females — were employed in non-manual work. At this age level, very few women were housewives (about 2%), reflecting a later normal age of marriage in Germany than in the United States. None of the proportions of 20-24 year olds enrolled in college which indicates a 663 per cent difference between the two countries. The U.S. figure on which his comparison is based, 27.2%, is higher than the highest figure for any of the age groups reported in the 1960 U.S. Census (LIPSET 1963: 260; and PICHT 1965). As against these factors that lead to overestimation of U.S. attendance, there is one countering consideration that yields an overestimate of the West German attendance, the omission of those in the armed forces from the sample.

11 In the normal course of events, a West German student is in school for thirteen years before going on to university. He or she would normally be 18 years of age in that thirteenth year.

12 The U.S. figure, for example, includes part-time students. It appears too that the rate of dropping-out is higher in the U.S. than in Germany; thus, the U.S. figures include a higher proportion who are “in” school but not likely to successfully complete the year. Both these points are discussed later in the text.

Another problem involves the classification of the various kinds of education. Some activities that in the United States are classified as “higher education” are likely to appear as “vocational training” in the Federal Republic. The course in “electric chick sexing” found in an American Agricultural and Technical College would not appear anywhere in the curriculum of the German Hochschule.

13 One can describe the difference between 16 and 9 per cent as “a matter of a few percentage points”, or alternatively, as the former figure being 178% of the latter. While this 178% figure might seem like a very large difference, it is still small compared to claims made elsewhere. LIPSET, for example, gives a U.S.-German comparison for “about 1956” for
of the women in this age category reported that they were unemployed.

In the 20–21 age category, four per cent of the females were in the universities, a figure well below the equivalent for the United States. About three-quarters of this group were employed, most of them in white collar occupations. Also at this point, the percentage who were housewives showed an increase. No respondent in this category reported being unemployed. A very small percentage were classified as “other”.

Among the West German females ages 22–24, about 3% were still in the universities, about the same as the comparable U.S. figure. This suggests that while proportionately more American than West German women enroll in college, a larger proportion of the latter stay on through the completion of their degree. Also in this age category, there is a clear drop-off in labor force participation and a correlative rise in the proportion of housewives. A rough comparison between the 20–21 and 22–24 year old categories suggests that many of those in middle class jobs at ages 20 and 21 marry and drop from the labor force. Comparing U.S. and West German women in the 22–24 age category, it is apparent that many more of the latter are employed (37% vs. 62%).

What lessons can be learned from these comparisons? As we noted earlier, the final “outcomes” in both nations are approximately the same. There are substantial differences between the two countries, however, in the processes through which these outcomes are achieved. Focusing for the moment on males, consider the following: About half the males in both nations eventually come into blue collar labor (Table 1, Part B). Among West German youth, nearly three-quarters of this blue collar group was “in place” by age 19 and essentially all of it was “in place” by age 21 (Table 4). In the United States, on the other hand, only about one-fifth of the eventual blue collar workers were employed by the age of 19, about three-fifths were “in place” at age 21, and at age 24, about a quarter of the eventual blue collar workers were still engaged in other activities. The United States’ pattern, in short, is characterized by what might be called “digressionary” tracks. In this way “coming of age” in America involves a set of circumstances and experiences which postpone the beginnings of normal adult careers.\(^{14}\)

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14 The formulations of this paragraph are not intended to suggest an implacable fate awaiting individuals. Within the aggregates being discussed there are no doubt many persons who would have escaped their “class fate”. A focus on individual successes (or

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 5 Activity of West German Females: 1962</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16–19 20–21 22–24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary or Middle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gymnasium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On Job Training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working Class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housewife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Same as Table 4
Perhaps the most important “digression” involves the tendency of American youth to remain in school longer, at least until the end of high school, or about twelve years. This extensive “education”, it is said, is “necessary” in order to compete in the labor market of the advanced industrial society, yet little is imparted in the high schools in the U.S. which in any sense prepares one for eventual blue collar labor — the fate, let us emphasize, to which more than half are eventually “assigned” (LUCAS 1971). The alternative West German arrangement has large numbers in on-the-job apprenticeship training at this age. Thus, while American males in the 16–19 year old bracket are occupied in high school classrooms, learning high schools civics or English literature, a large proportion of their West German counterparts are receiving on-job training — that is, being taught the skills necessary to secure steady employment, guarantee a reasonable income, in short, to begin one’s adult life.

failures) however should not blind one to the major “flows” within the population. The processes being discussed here could be better charted, to be sure, through the use of a long-term panel study. The different careers (e.g. upwardly mobile, non-mobile, digressionary) could then be followed, the quantities established, the satisfactions or resentments, assessed, etc.

A part of the “anomie” in the life of American males of the 50’s and 60’s was stimulated by the peculiarities of the draft law which allowed persons to be taken between the 18th and the 26th year thus making career planning and employment rather difficult. Employers in many cases did not wish to hire persons who could have been drafted at any time. This feature of the institutional arrangements would have enlarged the unemployed and the “not in labor force” percentages in the younger age categories. In 1970, the arrangement was changed to a one-year liability and still later the all-volunteer army was adopted.

15 LUCAS reports that many firms use “education” as a screening device; it allows them to reduce the number of applicants. In many instances the educational “demand” makes no technical sense. Sons with more education than their fathers are denied jobs similar to those of their fathers because, it is said, they lack the “requirements”. See pp. 116–117 and 366.

16 The young worker associates with older workers and also undergoes an informal and appropriate “political socialization” process. Those who engage in digressionary careers postpone this education. For an interesting study of this process see LAUPEOU-LEPLATRE (1960). We do not wish to suggest that the German arrangement in its entirety represents the lack of marketable skills makes a second “digressionary” career line, military service, somewhat attractive. For some at least, military service “replaces” the on-job training which young American males are otherwise denied, a point frequently emphasized in armed forces’ recruiting efforts. Many of the “careers” for which one may prepare in the armed forces unfortunately have little market value in civilian life.

A final diversion, for at least a tenth of U.S. males between 16–24, is unemployment or the limbo status, “not in the civilian labor force”. This tenth, for all practical purpose, is put “on the streets”, the arrangement of the economy effectively denying them gainful employment (U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR 1974: 17–25). Aside from the obvious direct cost in lost productivity, this arrangement entails other social costs. It adds to the costs of welfare and unemployment compensation programs. And in a setting where the ability to spend is important to one’s “life chances”, there will be considerable incentive to acquire income through illegal means; this arrangement, in short, probably contributes to the generally high rate of crime in the United States. And where one is apprehended and sent through “correctional” institutions, the chances for a relatively permanent criminal “career”, according to most accounts, are increased. This too would add to the overall social cost and, for those involved, would further postpone normal adult careers.

As was previously noted, in 1960 only about a fifth of American males and perhaps 13 or 14 per cent of American females were actually enrolled in colleges and universities in the prime atten-
dance years. In many cases, perhaps in most cases, even this experience may be seen as a "digres-
sion" from normal adult life. Nation-wide, taking all colleges and universities, only about half of
those who enter actually remain through to the completion of their degree. Those years of "in-
complete college" have very little discernible effects on careers; for all practical purposes they
are just another postponement. And here again, one has direct social costs, both to the families
who must pay for those years and to the public whose tax dollars underwrite the effort.\(^\text{18}\)

A sizable proportion of those "going to college", especially those from the working classes, in
fact enroll in junior or community colleges rather than in the state colleges and universities.
According to the leading account, the junior college experience is basically diversionary. BURTON
CLARK's study (1960) of one such institution showed that many of the students "in" the college
were actually in the process of dropping out. There was an extensive "counselling" effort in this par-
ticular junior college, the thrust of the effort being to "cool out" what were termed the "latent ter-
mal" students and direct them elsewhere, mostly into full-time employment.

Such experience points to another serious problem with the statistics on educational accomplish-
ment. The official statistics on the numbers "in college" count all "years" of college as equal. The fresh-
man year in the high quality university is counted as the equal of the first year in the junior col-
lege. The year successfully completed is counted as the equal of the year in which another student
"dropped out" or was "counselling out". The assumption that "one equals one" is clearly not
justified. Much of the expansion of educational opportunity in the fifties and sixties must have
involved what could be called "debased units". It is unlikely that West German education of this
period involved a comparable quantity of such "doubtful years".

The large discrepancy between our one-fifth college attendance figure and the more optimistic
figures of 40% or even half that were common fare in academic commentaries of the last decade
deserves some attention. Perhaps the best known of these commentaries is the TROW article (1962).
On the basis of 1960 data, TROW states that about 38% of the 18 to 21 year old population
was enrolled in institutions of higher learning. The difference between our figure and TROW's
is that ours is a true proportion, whereas TROW supplies a ratio — in this case, a very misleading
one. The denominator of that ratio is the total population aged 18 to 21. The numerator, on the
other hand, is the total number of persons enrolled in colleges, at all levels and all ages. Thus,
any college student aged 17 or less and any aged 22 or more is included in the numerator, but not
in the denominator. In a period where people were going to college at a younger age and stay-
ing in college and graduate schools for longer periods, this ratio thus involves considerable
distortion — in this case, over-estimation by an approximate factor of two.\(^\text{19}\)

\(^{18}\) On the occupational fate of those dropping out of college, see ECKLAND (1965).
It is to be noted that the process involves payment of immense costs in the service of the equality value,
or, as it is sometimes put, in "offering a chance". Some persons do undoubtedly benefit from this
"chance". But most, apparently, do not. That is assessing the process in terms of its provision of
mobility chances. To be sure, the education itself might be of some value, regardless of the ultimate
occupational fate. It might or it might not. The process of "flunking out" (or of being guided out)
points to a year or years of "not getting it" (i.e.
the education). Implicitly at least a major line of
evaluation involves the happiness or satisfaction of the participants. It might be useful to undertake
some assessment through the use of the recently-de-
veloped "happiness studies". One could discover
whether those on digressionary careers, particularly
whether those on the education track see it as a
welcome opportunity. It would be interesting to
see a contrast with employed youth.

\(^{19}\) TROW's figures count full-time and part-time stu-
dents equally. Junior and community college en-
rollments are also included. Whether foreign stu-
dents are also counted is unclear. Concerning the 
"appropriateness" of his numerator, a footnote in
the original source used by TROW mentions that
only about 55–60% of the total college students are
actually aged 18–21. If one corrected TROW's
estimate on this basis, the figure would be very close
to the one we report in the text. See HUDDESTON (1961: 8ff.).
A striking example of such "inflation" of university attendance figures may be seen in the State Uni-
versity of New York Master Plan (1960 revision).
It declared that 55 per cent of New York State's
college age group (18 to 21) were attending col-
lege. They projected a 70 per cent figure by 1970.
Their enrollment figures also included part-time
students.
The Ohio Board of Regents' Master Plan (1966:
Another cautionary statement with respect to these figures is needed. Our Tables 2 and 3 show the actual percentages in given age groups who were enrolled as of 1960. One should note, however, that some of the persons in the 20–21 category who were in the labor force at that point might have achieved some college education when they were 18 or 19 or even when 16 or 17. The figures in those tables in short show their activity at a given time and neglect their educational achievements either before or after that point. That one-fifth attendance figure, the highest indicated for 1960, understates the real accomplishment.

One way of getting at the real accomplishment is to pick this group up again in the 1970 Census and examine the reported levels then, at which point one could assume almost all formal education would be completed. The best data we could find have results for the age category 30–34, that is, the middle and older age groups of Table 2. At that later point 31.7% reported 13 or more years of education. The larger part, 18.3%, reported 16 or more years.\(^{20}\)

The same problem must appear in the West German data. Unfortunately we have no equivalent later data to allow a correction. A direct comparison of the United States’ 1970 results with the German figures, it should be remembered, is not possible because the U.S. result includes the non-comparable freshman year.

\(^{20}\) contains a 50 state breakdown of Fall enrollments of “18–21 year olds”. In first place was Utah with 82.3% followed by Arizona, 72.7%, Ohio, 63.1% and Massachusetts with 62.6%. Other studies can be cited which show considerably higher proportions attending college than the figures shown here. One reviewer of an earlier version of this paper mentioned the Project Talent surveys in this connection. That study, however, was based on a sample of persons who were in the twelfth grade in March and April of 1960. It thus omits from consideration a sizable proportion, approximately 30 per cent, who had dropped out of school prior to the senior year. The initial Project Talent study then picked up its sample “about 12–18 months” after high school graduation; hence, the figures reported only show enrollments for the first year. The study also found that 21% of the males and 24% of the females dropped out in their first year. FLANAGAN et al. (1964: Chapter 10); and COMBS (1966: Chapter 3).

In West Germany there is a markedly different lead-in to the normal or conventional male career. There is, first of all, an earlier exit from formal schooling. To the extent that any education follows, it consists of on-the-job training which is likely to have a close and integral link to the later normal career. This education obviously “fits” much better with (or has more “relevance” for) what one will be doing for the rest of one’s life than most of what goes on in an American high school or junior college. It is at least an open question as to whether German youth suffers by being deprived of the longer years of formal schooling “enjoyed” by their U.S. counterparts. Two of the digressionary tracks so apparent in the U.S., unemployment and the “not in the labor force” status, were absent from the West German scene. A corollary lesson here is that an advanced industrial society can obviously do quite well with many fewer formally educated persons than exist in the United States.

One up-shot of the American arrangement, a rather bizarre one, is that the United States is perhaps the only society in history with significant numbers of college-educated manual workers. The percentage of economically active blue collar males reporting at least some college education has risen from 4% in 1952 to about 11% in 1964. A National Opinion Research Center survey from 1974 puts the current proportion at 17%. In this respect, PARSONS might well be right: The United States almost certainly has taken “the lead in the latest phase of modernization.”\(^{21}\) Touching on a related theme, it might be suggested that the presence of college-educated blue collar workers points to some “proletarianization” of the middle class. Given the working-class origins on many of these persons, however, it appears rather to be a case of the “non-bourgeoisification” of a segment of the working class.

There are some marked differences between the two nations as well in terms of the early “training” of females. As with males, German women leave formal schooling earlier than American women. For most, school is followed by on-the-job training or direct movement into full-time employment, either of these apparently preceding marriage. Although the Census categories for the U.S.

\(^{21}\) For data, see HAMILTON (1972: 213). For further discussion of the “excess education” problem, see BERG (1970); COLLINS (1971) and LUCAS (1971).
do not provide all the desirable detail, the tendency for most American women seems more likely to involve a direct move from high school to marriage. At no point do we find a majority of young U.S. women in the labor force, in sharp contrast to the patterns observed for West Germany.

Concerning “training” for marriage, the best that can be said in this connection is that the relative delay in marriage in West Germany provides some additional years of maturation and wisdom for both sexes which would eventually be brought to the task. Labor force participation of women prior to marriage might be expected to have similar effects. Certainly, much of the “education” acquired in the later years of American high schools or, for a small minority of women, in college, would have only the most tenuous relationship to any adult role, marital or occupational.

This adds up to the suggestion that the West German arrangement, to use KARL MANNHEIM’s phrase, has more “functional rationality” than the American one. The early training and experience provide a better “fit” for adult life than is the case in the United States. This is not meant to pre-judge the “substantive rationality” of either arrangement. The end product in both cases, the entire system, might well be deficient in whole or in part. But seen simply in terms of providing a clear linkage between growing up and what one is going to do when grown up, the West German arrangement appears to be the more adequate.

The differences between the United States and West Germany in the transition between youth and adulthood provide strong evidence against the unilinear evolutionary theory discussed earlier. As we have already mentioned, the net result of these various processes, the ultimate shape of the adult labor force, is approximately the same in both nations. Although the “structural demands” might be equivalent, the “responses” of two societies to these demands are not. In the one case, the “demand” is met by extended formal education and other diversionary career paths, in the other, by early training and experience with direct linkages to later adult careers. The West German case thus provides some evidence that the “anomic” features of contemporary American society are not inherent in the advanced industrial system. Long years of formal schooling are clearly not necessary to satisfy the labor force requirements of advanced industrial societies; and extensive unemployment is not required for economic stabilization.

The present discussion of the West German development has been focused on the experience of persons coming of age in the early 1960’s. At that time there was a single “digression” built into the career lines of the West German males, that being the military service obligation. In the last few years, a second “digression” has made its appearance on the scene, substantial unemployment. If unemployment were to become a permanent feature in the Federal Republic, one might then see the development of the related features of digressionary careers observed on the American scene. On the other hand, if it is a short term, a transitional phenomenon, one might then see a continuation of the process observed in the 1960’s.

The “solutions” available to a society, in short, are not wholly determined by ineluctable features of the complex industrial system. Rather, a range of options is open to them, and the choice among those options is not “mandated” by system “pre-requisites” (23). The focus on equivalency theory and its evolutionary variant has led observers to overlook key differences in the political economies of modern industrial nations and in their socialization processes, and thus to minimize the potential impact of political decisions or conscious design. In short, there is some element of choice available in the construction of institutional patterns; to overlook this is to run the risk of mistaking contingent for necessary truths.

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22 The “structural demands” might be equivalent, but then again, they might not. The similarities might mask important differences, some of which may stem from differences in the process (see, for example, the discussion in note 17).

23 Intellectuals may themselves play some role in creating parallel results. If they assume a single pattern of development and take the most advanced country as a model, activist intellectuals may induce legislators to respond accordingly, through their arguments of “necessity”. Some such change may be “necessary”. On the other hand, they may have simply played a role in fulfilling their own prophecies.


OHIO BOARD OF REGENTS, 1966: Master Plan for State Policy in Higher Education. Columbus, Ohio.


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