

# A Review of the Time Magazine Article, Can Community Colleges Save the US Economy?

-by Geoff Hagopian

Here's the opening sentence of Laura Fitzpatrick's Time Magazine July 20, 2009 article, *Can Community Colleges Save the US Economy?* :

*Community Colleges are deeply unsexy.*

It's one of those rhetorical grabs that journalists like Laura Fitzpatrick (hereafter referred to as LF) learn to pen at Ivy League schools like Princeton, her alma mater. "Unsexy" is a bit of a theme in her work: she has an article, for instance, about the burqini (a cross between the burqa and the bikini) and a provocative blog with the poser, "Did the Beatles destroy rock and roll?" Which strikes me as akin to asking, "Did Galileo destroy mathematics?" (Heidegger seems to have thought so – something about the indolence of modern science preferring the ontic to the ontological.)

It happens that Heidegger was a Nazi and perhaps kind of a sphincter, too, I don't know. I'd rather read Hegel – or better yet, Galileo.

Galileo revolutionized the world view in ways that people indoctrinated by Princeton dogma or Nazi propaganda are loathe to attempt to understand.



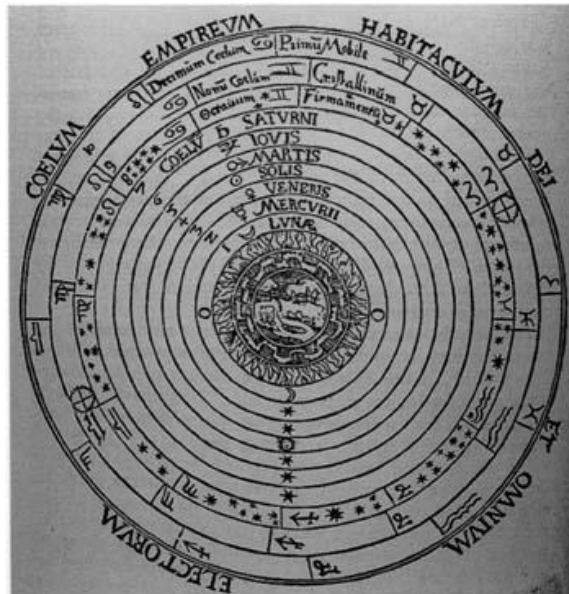
Figure 1 - Heidegger

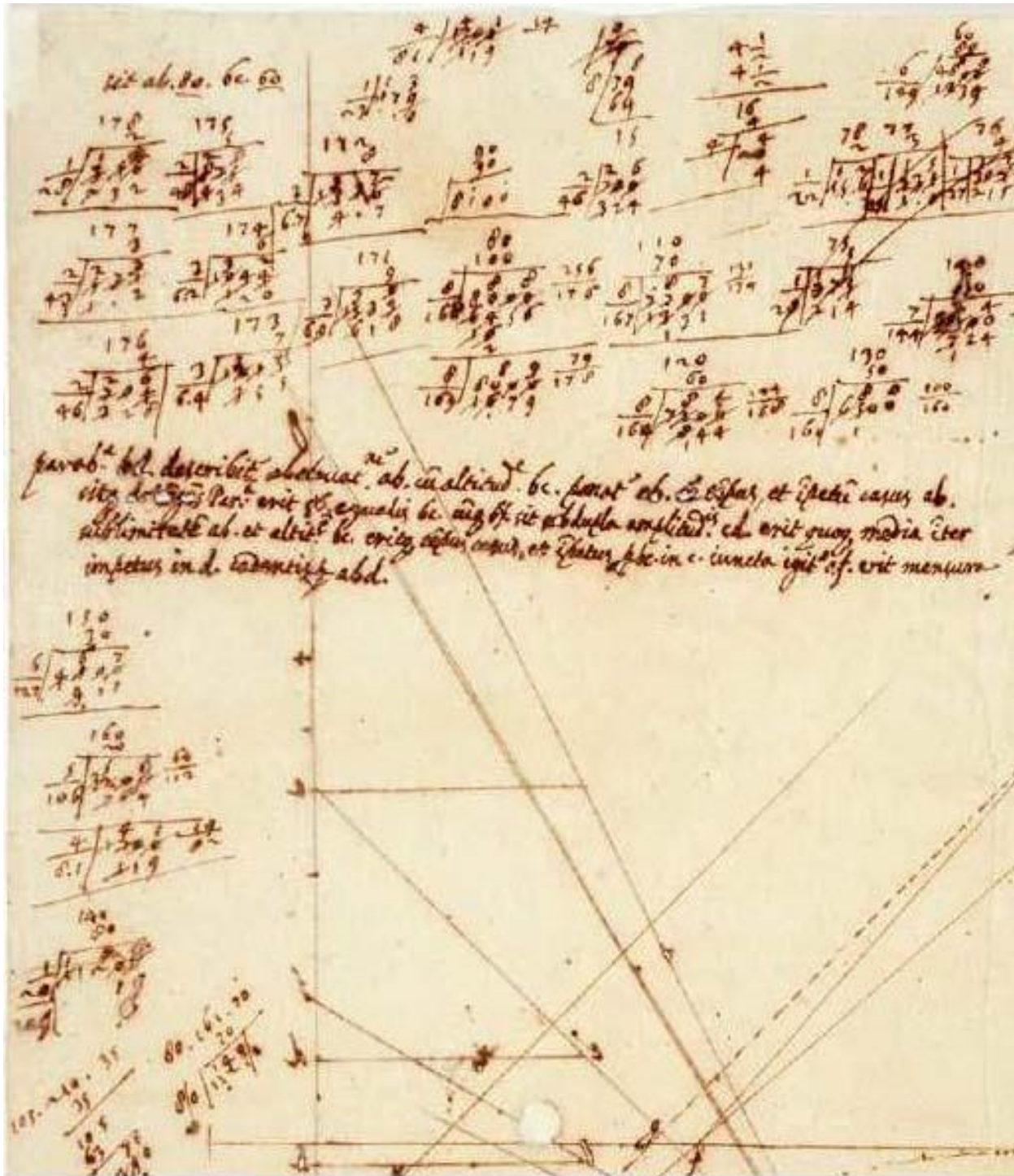


Figure 2 - Hegel

Aristotle was half, no doubt, a clever bastard, but consider how stupid his ideas look in light of Galileo. He adopted the geocentric and four-element theories of Plato and Empedocles. He imagined the Moon as a material spherical shell nested with other concentric shells in which their respective orbiters are embedded – a flawed logical certainty that became a sort of final edict that persisted for some 18 centuries. Thomas Aquinas used Aristotelian reasoning to establish the veracity of faith and the existence of God.

But I digress.





Above is an excerpt from Galileo's notebooks. It's fun to puzzle over the computational algorithms he's employing here. Maybe Time/Warner/AOL can cover this story sometime soon? This looks like the kind of modern science whose calculations Heidegger might question.

I digress further. It's math and science that interest me more than bad education journalism.

To understand how LF came to regard community colleges as “unsexy” it may help to know what she thinks *is* sexy. The burqini, perhaps? Here’re the Merriam Webster definitions for “sexy” that I have:

- 1 : sexually suggestive or stimulating : EROTIC
- 2 : generally attractive or interesting : APPEALING \*a sexy stock\*

I gather LF is using the second of these definitions. She means that community colleges are deeply *unappealing*. Parsing the first sentence further, consider the “unsexy” modifier, “deeply.” She means, I think, “very,” but it might look bad to write simply “very unappealing.” That newly minted Princeton sheepskin in English might crawl down off the wall at sheer the banality of it.

Of course, maybe she’s going for the third definition for “deeply”:

- 3 a : difficult to penetrate or comprehend : RECONDITE \*deep mathematical problems\* b : MYSTERIOUS, OBSCURE \*a deep dark secret\* c : grave in nature or effect \*in deepest disgrace\* d : of penetrating intellect : WISE \*a deep thinker\* e : intently engrossed or immersed \*she was deep in her book\* f : characterized by profundity of feeling or quality \*a deep sleep\*; DEEP-SEATED \*deep religious beliefs\*

Is it a deep dark secret as to why community colleges are perceived as unsexy? Maybe it’s the manifestation of a profound Masonic plot? Could be...I can’t prove it’s not.

LF may prefer to fulfill her sexual fantasies by mixing algebra & homeland security? Thanks to the Homeland Security Act or whatever, academies of military-industrial complexes now exist where you can follow the lure of 007-level security clearance to wind up working as an airport screener. It may be a niche market, but its growing like wildfire!



In LF’s second sentence we find a demonstration of her Princetonian erudition mistaking self-fulfilling opinion as a kind of fact of nature, or as Heidegger might say, “confusing the ontic with the ontological”:

*This fact tends to make even the biggest advocates of these two-year schools — which educate nearly half of U.S. undergraduates — sound defensive, almost a tad whiny.*

That stings. Opinions such as hers (that community colleges are unsexy) tend to be self-fulfilling – something I’ve oft whined about. That is, rich kids don’t like community colleges because other rich kids don’t choose to attend them, rendering them unappealing. She supports her claim by quoting a college president:

*We don't have the bands. We don't have the football teams that everybody wants to boost," says Stephen Kinslow, president of Texas' Austin Community College (ACC). "Most people don't understand community colleges very well at all." And by "most people," he means the graduates of fancy four-year schools who get elected and set budget priorities.*

It may take one to know one, it seems. Kinslow is an alumnus of SMU: home of the George Bush Library. Of course, guilt by association is ugly: Just because SMU's graduating class is 78% white, in contrast to Dallas' 51% white population, don't think they don't have representatives from the black community: Clarence Thomas is scheduled to speak there this coming term.

### Student Graduation Demographics

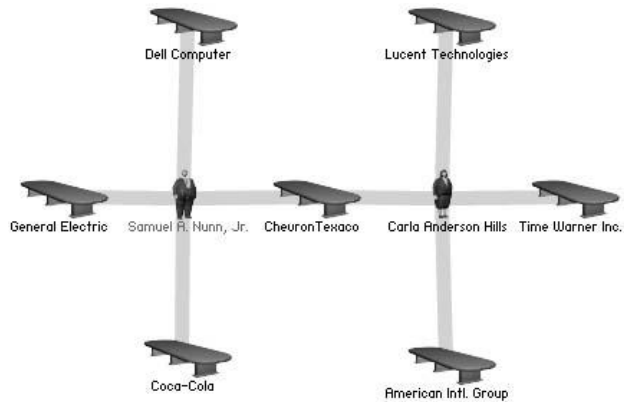
How many students graduated at Southern Methodist University?

	Men	Women	Total
Non Resident Alien	25	20	45
Black Non-Hispanic	25	42	67
Hispanic	38	53	91
Asian / Pacific Islander	35	48	83
American Indian / Alaskan Native	3	6	9
White Non-Hispanic	437	544	981
Race Unknown	N/A	N/A	N/A
<b>Total</b>	<b>563</b>	<b>713</b>	<b>1,276</b>

It may be Kinslow misses his Mustangs, but many junior colleges do have football teams and bands too, so it's a red herring.

Good to put red herrings in the first paragraph – get them out of the way – a cornerstone of Princetonian scholarship? Or just an anchovy thrown to the barking seals of Time Warner...is it still AOL too?

In the second paragraph, LF introduces us to the sort of dramatic productions that must pass as Princetonian amusement. War promoter and profiteer General Electric NBC's sitcom, Community, an, I assume, hilarious trashing of community colleges consistent with GE's proud tradition of anti-intellectualism and rotting American brains, gets a plug from LF – in the grand tradition of incestuous amplification that is the hallmark of main stream mass media we've come to regard as our collective pederastic uncle.



If you're wondering what the connection between GE and Time Warner, Inc might be, observe that Sam Nunn, who serves on the Board of Directors of GE, also serves on the Board of Directors of Chevron/Texaco, whose Board of Directors also include Carla Anderson Hills, who happens to sit on the Board of Directors of Time Warner, Inc...also.

Clearly LF is using shallow stereotypes such as those on the sitcom Community as a foil for developing her story of Obama's stated goals of reversing some of these negative trends. Maybe it works – got me going, anyway. I just wish they'd gotten someone who has experienced being a community college student and/or teacher to give evidence in the story.

Moving on to paragraph three we find this claim:

*[Community colleges] are our nation's trade schools, training 59% of our new nurses as well as cranking out wind-farm technicians and video-game designers — jobs that, despite ballooning unemployment overall, abound for adequately skilled workers.*

That's just not right, and betrays quite a bit of Ivy League ignorance. While there is some overlap in occupational training programs, community colleges and trade schools have many significant distinctions. If you google "trade schools," it lists zero community colleges. What you find are the private schools: Devry, Phoenix, Capella, etc. These are the private schools that have been sucking at the public trough by charging students exorbitant tuitions which are paid with federally guaranteed student loans. It's a scam. This is the real back story that LF doesn't tell here but Time did touch on back in 1988.

In civilized countries higher education is free. Jesse Jackson has recently advocated grants instead of loans. When I first heard him advocate for this I thought he said “grass, not lawns,” but it’s serious business for many, especially less affluent students. Jackson’s idea is to allow students to borrow at something similar to the discount window like the big banks do. He calls it the 1% solution.

LF goes on to claim that

*The 1,200 community colleges in the U.S. are especially suited to helping students adapt to a changing labor market.*

The real reason for this, as I see it, is that 4-year schools are too expensive to make it feasible to educate a whole generation or more of forsaken young Americans who’ve gotten the Reagan shaft – plus, they’re not set up to provide the kind of remediation many older, returning students need. While educating these adults is essential to the true prosperity, it is not on the radar screen of Ivy League educated wizards on Wall St. and at the Pentagon who prefer to amass wealth and power.

Outside of the staples of nursing and police academies, Community colleges, like high schools, have been largely divested of their vocational mandate. The hands-on laboratory equipment, automotive gear, etc. is just too expensive to maintain on dwindling budgets. The root problem, as I see it, is that union-busting manufacturers have deindustrialized the US and sent what used to be good union jobs to countries that have no worker rights. So programs in US high school and junior colleges that trained people in manufacturing skills have just dried up and disappeared. COD used to teach welding, for instance. The \$250K startup money for the Austin Community College program cited by LF will accommodate 12 students. This hardly seems like a cornerstone for a nationwide community college renaissance.

LF boasts that

*The U.S. ranks a respectable second (after Norway) in producing adult workers with bachelor's degrees.*

This is a specious claim. What matters is not how many degrees are being awarded, but what people know – an observation a Princetonian is likely to finesse. Let’s face it: American culture has embraced ignorance with a fierce resolve. It is enough to gloat over our global empire.

Still, that’s a really sexy picture!

