

Alberta has long been in the forefront of policy and practice of adult education in Canada, and Professor Campbell's monograph is a worthy addition to the province's laurels in this field. As already noted, many of the specific recommendations in his book are directed to the Government of Alberta, but the foremost amongst them – the establishment of a Provincial Standing Committee on Adult Education Development as a coordinating and planning agent – might equally well be a recommendation to the governments of each of the other nine provinces. However, in the midst of the current financial squeeze with its accompanying tendency for conservatism in matters of educational policy, the recommendation is perhaps less likely to be ignored in Alberta than in many other parts of the country.

Robert M. Pike
Department of Sociology
Queen's University

Burton J. Bledstein, *The Culture of Professionalism: The Middle Class and the Development of Higher Education in America*. New York, W.W. Norton & Co., 1976. 354 pp.

In this book, B.J. Bledstein discusses and relates the three themes which comprise the title: the middle class, the culture of professionalism and the development of higher education. The book is a social and cultural history of the evolution of these themes in the United States during the nineteenth century. It indicates how the culture of professionalism and the transformation of higher education developed *pari passu* from about 1830 on, both as expressions of the new, ascendant middle class. Bledstein goes so far as to say that "the culture of professionalism is the neglected theme in American history".

This is a fascinating and engaging work of considerable scholarship, and it is important as background and context for any discussion of professional education today. For the Canadian reader, it provides further verification of the hypothesis proposed by R.S. Harris in his pioneering work, *A History of Higher Education in Canada* (1976), that the Canadian university is unique, at least in reference to the American. The contribution of Bledstein's ideas to an understanding of the evolution of higher education and the culture of professionalism in Canada is examined further at the conclusion of the review.

It is Bledstein's contention that life today is organized chiefly by the attitude or habit of mind called the culture of professionalism, a phenomenon that came into prominence in the nineteenth century. What brought about this cultural development was the emergence of the new middle class, which showed "an unprecedented enthusiasm for its own forms of self-expression," and a strong desire for rational order, self-discipline and social control that would enable it to achieve an identity not dependent on old class barriers. Ambitious individuals who comprised the middle class gradually became influential in structuring society according to their own particular vision: upward mobility through a career. Professionalism provided just what was needed to satisfy the aspirations of members of the new middle class: it would enable them to shape their own educational needs, to demonstrate their powers of intelligence and to offer their services to society, while at the

same time improving their own position by vertical movement through a career. Bledstein argues that the institutional support for the middle class culture of professionalism was to be found in the modern university, which developed after the Civil War under the leadership of such presidents as Daniel Gilman of Johns Hopkins, Charles Eliot of Harvard and Andrew Dickson White of Cornell. He describes in some detail the work and influence of these and other presidents, who themselves exemplified the new middle class and its professional aspirations. Bledstein attributes to their influence many of the characteristics of the modern university and hence of contemporary culture and society.

Bledstein does not spend much time examining reasons for the emergence of the middle class, suggesting that economic theorists have already done this adequately. He does, however, state that the 1830's and 1840's were watershed years in this regard and offers some economic explanations for events in those decades that at least provide a context for the emergence of the middle class. For the middle class person who was competitive and "absorbed in his own egotism", 'middle' no longer meant a fixed position; rather it now "referred to the individual as 'escalator,' moving vertically between the floors of the poor and the rich".

The culture of the middle class dominated American social thought and institutional developments between 1840 and 1915. Those Americans who shared middle class beliefs "wanted respectability, orderliness, control, and discipline" and exhibited what Bledstein calls a new control over space and words. As an example of the new uses and structuring of space and words that these traits called forth in the middle class person, Bledstein refers to an article in *Good Housekeeping* magazine which advised the housewife on the proper management of her increasingly elaborate household and on her own deportment:

The new magazine devoted an entire column to the proper use of the three billion toothpicks made annually for "people who turn their mouths into pulp mills by reducing wooden toothpicks into fibrous splinters, damaging to the gums and throat, to say nothing of the disgusting offensiveness when mixed with saliva, in the process of expectoration." Not an "article of diet," toothpicks should never be placed on the meal table, but kept near at hand in another room where they could be used "as quietly and privately as possible" and then "*religiously thrown away*"

Character and career were also essential ingredients. The person of character possessed a certain psychological firmness and stability, exhibited self-discipline, and was able to resist all forms of temptation such as alcohol, tobacco, coffee and, of course, for the new upward-bound university student, the torments of sex. Charles Eliot was so concerned about the development of proper character and the dangers of alluring vices, as were all the university presidents discussed by Bledstein, that on one occasion he stated: "I made a bad speech last night . . . I was garrulous and diffuse. In fact I was intoxicated – I had taken a cup of coffee."

People who had developed strong characters would be in a position to devote themselves to careers, for they would be able to withstand the rigours that a vertical vision of life demanded.

Professions were the ultimate in careers, for they were consummate. They enabled the person to understand scientifically the fundamental order of nature and society and the essential principles that underlay their day-to-day work. Bledstein identifies a number

of factors that characterized the culture of professionalism. A profession was a full-time occupation in which a person had mastered a body of systematic knowledge and had completed a period of theoretical training before entering a practice. There was an insistence on technical competence, on a superior level of skill, and on a high quality of performance, as well as an ethic that indicated concern for a client's interest was to take precedence over personal profit. The professional person as he emerged was independent, ambitious and well organized, and possessed scientific knowledge based on respect for rules and proven experience. Since the withholding of this knowledge could lead to harm, the professional person had considerable authority. As Bledstein comments, "the Mid Victorian as professional person strove to achieve a level of autonomous individualism, a position of unchallenged authority heretofore unknown in American life".

The culture of professionalism went a long way toward releasing the creative energies of the middle class person who was accountable only to himself and his particular interpretation of the ethical standards of his profession. In short, for Bledstein, the professions in nineteenth century America were the achievement of those who "sought the highest form in which the middle class could pursue its primary goals of earning a good living, elevating both the moral and intellectual tone of society, and emulating the status of those above one on the social ladder". In the last third of the nineteenth century, there was a tremendous increase in the number of professions, as well as the development of specialties in the older professions such as law and medicine.

At the same time that the culture of professionalism allowed for autonomy, it exhibited conservative tendencies that were most obvious in the growing dependence of clients on professional advice: "Perhaps no Calvinist system of thought ever made use of the insecurities of people more effectively than did the culture of professionalism". A harsh judgement indeed. At the conclusion of his book, Bledstein returns to this theme, with a question for today, directed at all those concerned with the potential abuses inherent in the vertical vision held by professionals, a vision that may lead to them betraying their trust by invoking professional privilege to cover up any wrong-doing:

How does society make professional behavior accountable to the public without curtailing the independence upon which creative skills and the imaginative use of knowledge depend?

Having established the middle class and the culture of professionalism, Bledstein turns to a description of the rise of the new university and of how this too was encouraged, almost demanded, by the rising middle class. In the old college system which the presidents who established the new orientation for universities had attended before the Civil War, things were anything but calm. There had been student brawls, a riot at Harvard that had cost one historian his sight, the fatal wounding of a tutor, and the killing of two town rioters by students at Yale. Other threats on faculty had occurred regularly. According to Bledstein, rioting, rebellion and chaos were the order of the day at American universities in the early decades of the nineteenth century because these old institutions did not meet the needs of the new first generation of middle class students. The education offered by these institutions was unfocused and impractical, and this, combined with an external and authoritarian mode of discipline, was seen as a barrier to the aspiring middle class students and proved disastrous.

The new university engineered by this group of presidents provided the training ground

for the new middle class to effect its complete transition to the culture of professionalism. It used the new vertical vision and the students' ambition to advantage. Competition was encouraged and exams were instituted to grade and rank students. When Eliot, president of Harvard, announced that strict annual written examinations were to be passed, an alarmed professor of surgery, Dr. Bigelow, decided to enlighten Eliot:

[He] told the Board of Overseers that Eliot's reform would wreck the Medical School within a year or two. "He actually proposes," said Bigelow, "to have written examinations for the degree of doctor of medicine. I had to tell him that he knew nothing about the quality of the Harvard medical students; more than half of them can barely write. Of course they can't pass written examinations".

Needless to say, Eliot got his way. Academic facilities generally were improved.

As Thomas Haskell points out in a review of this book ("Power to the Experts," *The New York Review of Books*, October 13, 1977, 28-33), one of the problems with Bledstein's argument is that he never really provides an adequate definition of the term 'middle class'. It is more a state of mind, as is the concept of the culture of professionalism. Bledstein is then in the position of having to explain the emergence of one state of mind (culture of professionalism) from another (middle class), an argument that is always in danger of slipping into perfect circularity. It is here that one might challenge the cause and effect relationship loosely suggested by Bledstein between the rise of the new middle class on the one hand and the development of professionalism and the new institutions of higher learning on the other. Bledstein defines 'middle class' so broadly that almost no-one is excluded.

Finally, as Haskell notes, Bledstein overemphasizes the supply side of the equation by arguing that professionalism developed out of a new middle class that was predisposed psychologically to seek the order and rewards of a professional career. The other side of the equation, the demand, is never really dealt with, yet surely there was a new demand by the growing urban and industrial society with its attendant problems that called for the services of existing professions and for the development of new ones. Bledstein attributes the cultural transformation known as professionalism to the careerist ambitions of the middle class rather than suggesting that part of the reason for the rise of professionalism is to be found in the objective conditions that make us dependent on the expertise of professionals.

Whatever the shortcomings, this is an important book, describing, exploring and inter-relating the culture of professionalism, the growth of higher education, and their evolution from the middle class. It provides considerable stimulation for thinking about the professions and professional education, and it provides the necessary historical background for any serious contemporary examination.

The Canadian reader of both Bledstein's book and R.S. Harris' *A History of Higher Education in Canada* will be in a position to ask whether the Bledstein description of the culture of professionalism and its institutional support in the universities is applicable to Canada and, in answering, will be able to evaluate further the Harris conclusion that Canadian higher education is *sui generis*. As Harris has pointed out, Canadian universities around 1860 were devoted to the ideal of a liberal education and were committed almost totally to undergraduate programs in the arts. Even such traditional professions as law,

medicine and theology did not occupy positions of any prominence in Canadian universities at that time. They relied on the universities to draw up courses of study, conduct examinations and grant formal degrees, but at the same time they accepted the fact that instruction remained their own responsibility. This tenuous relationship between the professions and the universities in Canada continued during the rest of the nineteenth century. In comparison with their American counterparts, Canadian universities were much more hesitant, even reluctant, to embrace whole-heartedly the responsibility for professional education. Formal affiliation of professional programs of higher education with universities occurred only gradually, and it was not until about 1920 that Canadian universities were finally recognized as having prime responsibility for professional education. By that time, the governments of six of the nine provinces had decided to assign responsibility for professional education to the universities.

This account of the Canadian situation does not match Bledstein's description of higher education as it relates to the culture of professionalism. The explanation for this difference is to be found in the fact that each country developed according to its own particular social conditions and dominant ideas. For example, industrialization and urbanization occurred later in Canada. Furthermore, as H.A. Innis and S.D. Clark have pointed out, Canada never did experience a period of unadulterated *laissez-faire* capitalism and always relied on considerable state involvement for both its economic and its social development, as in the case of Macdonald's "national policy." The United States, with its revolutionary rejection of the British tie, gave thorough support to the ideas of individualism that were encompassed in classical Lockean liberalism; Canada, in maintaining the British connection, remained more collectively oriented. This difference between the United States and Canada is graphically illustrated in the founding charter of each country: the United States constitution emphasized the more individualistic goals of "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" whereas the British North America Act stressed the collective ends of "peace, order and good government." S.D. Clark has observed that "the effect [of extensive state intervention in Canada] has been to weaken the development within Canadian society of capitalist, urban middle class social values and forms of social structure."

Thus, the middle class in nineteenth century Canada was never as strong a force in the development of a culture of professionalism and its establishment in institutions of higher learning as was the American middle class described by Bledstein. Canadians did not have the same all-consuming, individualistic vertical vision of a career; Canadian universities never experienced the upheavals that were sparked at American universities in the decades before the Civil War by middle class students frustrated by institutional impediments to their professional aspirations.

The reader of both Bledstein and Harris can therefore conclude that higher education for the professions in Canada and the United States followed divergent paths during the nineteenth century. As has been suggested here, this can be attributed largely to the different role that the middle class played in American and Canadian social development during this period. This does seem to confirm the contention of Professor Harris that Canadian higher education generally has distinctive characteristics. Further, it suggests that professional education in Canada originally may have served substantially different purposes from those of its counterpart in the United States. What is now required to

extend this analysis is a detailed study of Bledstein's three themes – the middle class, the culture of professionalism and higher education – as they developed in Canada. One hopes that a Canadian social historian will undertake the task.

Allan Irving
Faculty of Social Work
University of Toronto