NEW AMERICAN IDOLS? THE IMPACT OF NEOLIBERALISM ON COMMENCEMENT SPEAKER SELECTION

By

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INTRODUCTION

Over the past four decades, neoliberal economic principles have dramatically transformed the sociopolitical landscape and have achieved hegemonic status within the United States and throughout much of the developed world (Harvey, 2005). Neoliberalism is not a particularly new phenomenon, as it derives much of its philosophical underpinning from the classical liberalism that dominated nineteenth and early twentieth century American economic thought (Friedman, 1962; Harman, 2008; Hayek, 1944). However, where it diverges from this previous historical thread is in its scope and intensity. The increase in scope can largely be attributed to the historical era in which it emerged as a dominant economic paradigm. The 1970s presided over one of the bleakest economic moments in recent American history as the post-War boom abruptly came to a close, resulting in widespread economic stagnation and rampant inflation, and the notion of "fiscal austerity" acquired an authoritative position within the national discussion (Harvey, 2005). Combined with the increasing globalization of the geopolitical and economic realms and the arrival of the post-industrial, knowledge-based economy, neoliberal economic thought began to penetrate new geographical and social arenas, forming the ideological backbone for much of post-industrial development within the modern world.

Amid these transformations, one of the most powerful and "radical" facets of the neoliberal paradigm is its transcendence of the basic economic principles upon which it is predicated and its subsequent expansion into the realm of *culture*, as well as other institutional arenas previously shielded from economic intervention (Saunders, 2010). As Saunders points out,

> Neoliberalism radically expands the classical liberal idea that the market is the governing mechanism of the economy to include every aspect of society… Polanyi (1944) foretold this in his discussions of the logical extensions of a free market society, "Instead of economy being embedded in social relations, social relations are embedded in the economy" (p. 60). The expansion of the market results in the commodification and marketization of not only goods, services, and labor, but also of *culture*, *relationships*, *and social institutions* (such as schools and prisons)... [In] a neoliberal world there is no longer a distinction between the economy and society; everything is economic. (46-47)

Thus, in almost systematic fashion, the neoliberal landscape diverges from its liberal heritage in that it has been marked by a dominant logic of laissez faire economic rationality, effectively unifying the market and the state, blurring the lines between what were once the separate spheres of public and private, and conflating individuals' self-serving "rational" action with the overarching goals of the population more broadly (Lemke, 2001; Saunders, 2010). Drawing upon this latter point, it becomes quite clear that neoliberalism captures an element of the collective consciousness to a much greater degree than its economic predecessors, effectively becoming a "belief system" or "ethos" within the minds of its individual adherents and within the social sphere more broadly.

Positioning neoliberalism as an invasive ideological platform carries significant ramifications for social functioning more broadly, particularly within the realm of *education*. Simultaneous to their rise in contemporary American political and economic thought, neoliberal ideas have fundamentally transformed the institution of higher education, altering not only the "economics, structure, and purpose of higher education" but "the priorities and identities of faculty and students" as well (Saunders, 2010:42). Due to sweeping fiscal cuts at the federal and state level (as prescribed by neoliberal economic ideology), American universities have grown increasingly dependent upon novel, entrepreneurial means of generating necessary revenues and private sources of funding (Giroux and Giroux, 2004; Hill, 2003; Levin, 2005; Slaughter and Rhoades,

2004). As a result, college and university administrators have been forced to adopt a managerial mentality along the lines of the neoliberal ideal of "economic efficiency", treating college educations as commodities to be purchased by student "consumers". These shifts in institutional decision-making have precipitated a number of changes to the structure of the institution itself, such as a decline in the hiring of full-time professors in favor of cheaper part-time and adjunct faculty (Aronowitz, 2000; Giroux, 2005; Rhoades, 2004), more hierarchical models of governance (Ayers, 2004; Currie, 1998; Eckel, 2000; Gumport, 1993), an increased focus on applied (i.e., commercially-viable) research (Alexander, 2001; Clark, 1998; Slaughter, 1998; Slaughter and Rhoades, 2004), and, finally, an attack on the tenure system itself as "economically irrational" (Saunders, 2010; Tierney, 1998).

While many scholars have addressed these transformations within higher education, few have actively attributed their occurrence to the rise and hegemonic dominance of neoliberalism (for exceptions, see Aronowitz, 2000; Giroux and Giroux, 2004; Hill, 2003; Kezar, 2004; Levidow, 2005; Levin, 2005; Saunders, 2010; Slaughter and Rhoades, 2004). Moreover, past research has broadly overlooked the impact of neoliberalism on university activities that reside outside both the classroom *and* the board room – namely, traditions, rituals, and other manifestations of the unique institutional culture that exists within academia. The overarching purpose of this study, then, is to discuss how shifts in governance within higher education impact the aforementioned "novel" approaches to fund-raising, with a discussion of how such attempts are manifested through more *cultural* (in an institutional sense) events and displays. To bolster this argument, I draw upon a quantitative analysis of one such public display of

academic institutional culture – commencement proceedings – as a means of gauging the impact of neoliberalism on aspects of the academy previously viewed as insulated from broader society.

ON NEOLIBERALISM AND HIGHER EDUCATION

Neoliberalism and Culture

While "neoliberalism" is frequently cited within social research as a paradigmatic, ideological shift which has dramatically transformed the contemporary social and economic landscape, all too often the concept exists primarily as a place holder for the events of the late-twentieth century and escapes proper analytical attention. Some research does play closer attention to the fundamental nuances of the term, particularly the dominant themes of laissez faire free market economic rationality, the restriction of state intervention and regulation within the economy, and the ascendance of the individual as a truly "rational" economic actor, but the magnitude of such transformations and their appropriate linkages to other social phenomena often elude contemporary scholars.

In terms of elucidating the thematic elements of neoliberalism, it is perhaps of use to begin the present analysis with a concise definition. In his *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (2005), Harvey refers to neoliberalism as "a theory of political and economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade" (2). Such ideas are not altogether distinct from classical liberalism, with the "neo" portion

of the term simply reflecting the modern realities (i.e., fiscal austerity, globalization, the rise of the knowledge economy) in which the philosophy's resurgence took place (Turner, 2008). While the economic downturn of the early- to mid-1970s was crucially important in ushering in an age of neoliberal economic thought, Harvey identifies the years 1978-1980 as particularly influential in the global transformation toward such a paradigm. It is this brief period, he argued, that presided over the elections of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan to top leadership positions in the United Kingdom and United States, respectively, the ascendance of Paul Volcker to Chair of the Federal Reserve in the U.S., and the institution of a variety of liberalizing economic policies within communist China by then-leader Deng Xiaopeng. Based upon their positions within three of the world's preeminent economic and cultural centers, neoliberalism's ascendance within these locales precipitated a domino effect throughout the rest of the developed world (Harvey, 2005).

However, while Harvey's conceptualization of neoliberalism is valid and offers a useful starting point, the ideas surrounding neoliberal thought are quite varied and often confound scholars' attempts to arrive at a concise set of fundamental components that is at once comprehensive and legible (McCarthy and Prudham, 2004). Nevertheless, some generalities emerge. First, the emphasis on the inherent "benevolence" of free market economic policy and limited and/or nonexistent state intervention in its operation remains a consistent theoretical thread throughout neoliberal ideologies (Saunders, 2010). Second, neoliberalism is marked by the increasing emphasis on the individual as a rational economic actor – i.e., "homo economicus" – whose behaviors, both economic and social,

are determined by a strict cost/benefit analysis (Fitzsimons, 2002; Giroux, 2005; Lemke, 2001; Saunders, 2010).

While the principles underlying the basic functioning of the neoliberal economy are a fundamental prerequisite for understanding the impact of neoliberal economic thought within contemporary US (and, arguably, global) society, an additional facet of the neoliberal "revolution" further differentiates it from previous economic paradigms: its transcendence of the economic realm and subsequent foray into *culture*. This occurs on two levels: that of the individual and that of society. Under neoliberalism, the individual is transformed into *homo economicus*, a rational economic actor whose choices, actions, and beliefs – economic or otherwise – are rationally driven by a conscious calculation of the potential costs and benefits (Lemke, 2001; Saunders, 2010). At its core, then, the neoliberal individual is one who possesses both considerable freedom and ultimate responsibility; the individual is "free" in a sense to pursue his or her own interests, though the burden of cost and responsibility of doing so also falls on that individual (Fitzsimons, 2002). Where one can see this transcendence of neoliberalism most clearly is in the redefinition of the individual as a "consumer" (Giroux, 2005). Life decisions, from whether to engage in a relationship with another person to deciding upon a particular educational path or career trajectory to countless other decisions an individual is faced with throughout the life course, effectively become economic decisions, or "purchases" to be made in an attempt to further enhance human capital (Saunders, 2010). Thus, as *homo economicus*, the individual acquires unilateral "freedom" in achieving a self-actualized existence, but at every step, he or she is bound by the economic rationality of the neoliberal paradigm.

On a broader level, there is an inherent paradox regarding neoliberal thought amid the wider American landscape. Few political leaders, ordinary citizens, or institutions explicitly identify themselves as "neoliberal", yet the paradigm remains hegemonic within contemporary American society. Eagleton (1991) argues that the *tactics* of the neoliberal ideology are to blame, as they consistently and systematically exclude rival paradigms, act in ways to legitimize both the extant structure and the (unequal) outcomes that emerge, and, perhaps most importantly, *obfuscate* the impacts of neoliberalism. Secondly, neoliberalism has become so saturated within the national consciousness that it "defines our common sense beliefs and becomes indivisible from our basic ideas and fundamental assumptions" (Apple, 2004; Saunders, 2010). The former point became especially clear during Thatcher's tenure as prime minister of the UK, as the phrase "There is no alternative" or "TINA" became part of the common parlance (Harvey, 2005). The failures of Keynesian economic policies to combat the rampant stagflation of the 1970s and the heightened tensions of the Cold War throughout the era provided an opportunity for neoliberal proponents to espouse their beliefs as the *only* option to revitalize the economy, and the change promised by these proponents found a welcome audience in a general populace burdened by a decreased standard of living and bleak future prospects under the old regime (Harvey, 2005).

While such arguments carried weight for much of the 1980s and 1990s, a set of economic recessions around the turn of the century and throughout the early 2000s (most prominently in 2008) threatened to undermine the perceived gains brought about by neoliberal economic ideals. This period is marked by an extreme concentration of wealth in the upper regions of the social structure, the disappearance of a prosperous middle

class, and exorbitant growth in personal debt, among other things, and each of these social outcomes has opened the door to the discussion of utilizing alternative economic paradigms going forward (Dumenil and Levy, 2005; Harvey, 2005). However, despite such threats to its hegemony, the neoliberal regime has preserved its central role within the Western world by utilizing *obfuscating* tactics and embedding its ideology within social institutions *beyond the economy* (Aronowitz, 2000; Herman and Chomsky, 1988; McChesney, 2004). As Saunders (2010) succinctly puts it,

> To ensure that [unfavorable] outcomes of neoliberal policies and institutions are removed from the dominant discourse, the media, schools, and other ideological institutions are utilized to hide and distort the true impact of neoliberalism… The reality conveyed through these institutions is only a partial picture of the neoliberal world, as they obfuscate the devastating impacts of neoliberalism while highlighting any beneficial outcomes that could possibly be related to it. When this occurs, people are more likely to accept the neoliberal regime, thus reducing any immediate need to question it or create alternative systems. (50-51)

Thus, through its expansion beyond the economic realm and into the political, cultural, and social spheres of society, neoliberalism achieves near universality as a fundamentally "natural" phenomenon within the social world (Apple, 2004). By centering on such naturalistic undertones, neoliberal ideology effectively "saturates" both the individual and collective consciousness in such a way that "the educational, economic and social world we see and interact with, and the commonsense interpretations we put on it becomes… the only world" (Apple, 2004:4). Therefore, while the entire preceding discussion is useful in delineating the impact of neoliberal economic thought on social institutions that previously existed outside the economy, it is this final point that is of critical importance for a broader discussion of the role of neoliberalism in fundamentally altering both the day-to-day functioning and overarching mission of higher education.

Neoliberalism and the Academy

The transcendence of neoliberalism's historical role as a theoretical approach to economic development into a comprehensive institutional "ethos" has perpetuated considerable change within academia, leading to an institutional logic predicated upon economic efficiency and the commodification of academic credentials rather than the broader socializing benefits of promoting civic engagement and providing a democratic education (Aronowitz, 2000; Giroux, 2005; Kezar, 2004). As such, higher education, once considered a "public good" designed to assist students in their endeavors to establish a meaningful philosophy of life and in their development as fully-fledged citizens, has increasingly become a "private" commodity to be purchased by students (i.e., "consumers") as a means of ensuring subsequent employment within a neoliberal economy (Chaffee, 1998; Swagler, 1978; Wellen, 2005). The ramifications of this rather subtle shift in designation are considerable. At the social and institutional levels, the removal of higher education from the realm of "public goods" led to considerable declines in state and federal funding, placing greater responsibility on university administrators and faculty to seek out external sources of private funding (i.e., alumni, corporations, etc.) for overall university operations and applied research, respectively (Slaughter and Rhoades, 2004). For their part, students themselves appear to have internalized the same rational-economic logic by shifting their attention from the aforementioned emphasis on individual development to the fulfillment of more extrinsic educational goals, such as future earning potential (Astin, 1998; Astin and Oseguera, 2004; Saunders, 2007). In all, it seems a fairly substantial argument can be made linking

neoliberal policy agendas with these more recent transformations within higher education.

Some scholars, however, disagree. Barrow (1990) argues that American higher education began to grow increasingly corporatized well before the 1970s and that such transformations synced up more fluidly with another major paradigm shift within American social policy – the dramatic expansion of public education in the 19th century. Bowles and Gintis (1976) share a similar perspective, arguing that public education's emphasis on fulfilling the needs of capital rather than existing as an autonomous, "altruistic" institution geared toward socializing a knowledgeable citizenry has always been part and parcel of the American educational structure. Thus, the contemporary transformations within the academy are hardly novel phenomena that differ from the practices of more "democratic" educational institutions of a bygone era. Rather, they follow quite closely with the logic that separates liberalism (which defined the era in which Barrow and Bowles & Gintis acknowledged such changes first emerged) from *neo*liberalism (which, as mentioned earlier, differs from its predecessor not in terms of core ideology but in its *scope* and *intensity*). What scholars are witnessing within the contemporary American educational landscape, therefore, is not a new phenomenon but an intensification and magnification of previously existing (though perhaps latent) functions of higher education.

The neoliberal logic that the state must necessarily divest itself of most, if not all, of its socially-oriented outflows extends quite clearly to higher education, as real dollar allocations to the academy have consistently decreased over the past thirty years (Aronowitz, 2000; Rhoades and Slaughter, 1997). These deficits have placed greater

burdens on students, as universities have attempted to make up the difference by increasing tuition and fees (Alexander, 2001), and they have also led to adjustments in admissions policies and priorities, as institutions focus more keenly on "full-paying and well-qualified students who will cost less to serve" (Saunders, 2010). Beyond increased costs of attendance, academic institutions have also leaned heavily on research-oriented means of alleviating financial deficits. Departmental funding is frequently re-allocated to those departments which offer the greatest potential for external funding, with applied research disciplines whose "products" are more easily commercialized benefiting over disciplines geared more toward less marketable "basic" research (Slaughter and Rhoades, 2004). Thus, instead of research being conducted for the benefit of society more broadly, it instead becomes a valuable form of intellectual property to be utilized by institutional actors. Within the neoliberal university, the primary function of faculty is no longer as educators, researchers, or members of a broader academic community, but as "entrepreneurs" (Slaughter and Rhoades, 2004). Their performance is no longer reviewed in terms of academic rigor or their impact as educators, but by their ability to utilize their time and abilities to generate revenue (Levin, 2006).

Neoliberal economic thought also plays an integral role in altering the ways in which universities are structured and, more importantly, its impact on institutional decision making processes. As Ayers (2005) and Gumport (1993) demonstrate, university administration has gradually assumed a more corporatized structure, implementing strict hierarchical information flows between administrators and staff (including faculty) and eschewing previous forms of mutual decision making in which all such members of the institution were offered a voice. Furthermore, as academic institutions incorporate an

increased focus on economic efficiency, one sees a dramatic increase in the number of part-time faculty, adjunct professors, graduate students, and post-doctoral students assuming teaching roles for the institution's undergraduate "consumers". While the ramifications of this shift alone are considerable with regard to the *quality* of contemporary higher education, one notable aspect is these individuals' explicit exclusion from faculty senates or other established labor organizations and, therefore, lack of access to avenues which would afford them the right to provide input regarding institutional decision-making (Gumport, 2000; Kezar, Lester, and Anderson, 2006; Levin, 2006; Slaughter and Rhoades, 2004). Of course, academic matters themselves are not the only arenas in which this form of change has occurred. In true neoliberal fashion, other peripheral functions of the university, such as dining, bookstores, and residential life, have increasingly been outsourced to private entities (Currie and Newson, 1998). "As [such] areas become privatized," Saunders (2010) argues, "their educational focus becomes secondary to profit generation and corporate success" (58).

In all, then, we see a dramatic shift in the governance and decision-making processes at all levels of the academy, from student-consumers at the bottom of the hierarchy to faculty and university administrators at the top. As federal and state-level funding evaporates, administration must necessarily adapt and utilize alternative means of generating the necessary revenues for operations. On one level, this simply means utilizing a more market-oriented approach and passing a larger proportion of the cost to students themselves. Yet it also entails a considerable transformation in the basic *function* of the academy. While the university has always functioned to create a new generation of workers for the economy, it no longer possesses the insulation from broader economic

forces to focus primarily on the intellectual development of its students. Instead, it must consistently capitulate to the needs of capital, leading to increased corporatization within administration and the reconstruction of curricula and other institutional processes to better meet these needs. Furthermore, as I will demonstrate throughout the remainder of the paper, there are considerable ramifications for institutional *culture* as well, as even rituals and traditions within the university – particularly commencement proceedings – are transformed to meet economic objectives.

ON COMMENCEMENT SPEAKER SELECTION IN A NEOLIBERAL ERA

The Role of the Commencement Speaker

According to Rutherford (2004), commencement proceedings within higher education are often a useful "window" on culture at large. Though primarily an artifact of middle-class American society, commencement serves as a "semi-formal marker in a series of steps to adult status," solidifying the transition from youth/adolescence to adulthood and communicating societal expectations placed upon the individual as he or she completes this transition (Rutherford 2004; see also Bird 1980; Buchmann 1989; Turner 1982). In Rutherford's words,

> [as] a central ritual in an institution of key cultural importance, the ceremonial discourse of the commencement speech not only calls attention to the occasion itself as a marker of an important life transition – a rite of passage – it also communicates (both explicitly and implicitly) what it means to be a full-fledged and "good" member of adult society. (2004: 587)

While once restricted to only an elite constituency within American society, higher education expanded considerably over the course of the 20th century. In 1900, only 2% of Americans has completed a college degree; a century later, over half of Americans had attended at least some college, with one-quarter achieving at least a bachelor's degree

(Caplow et al. 2001; Newburger and Curry 2000; Rutherford 2004). This massive expansion in academic opportunity, Smith (2003) argues, led to a sufficient number of college graduates and attendees to effectively exert a "decisive" influence on both American culture and public life.

As an initiation rite, commencement speakers are often alumni or other individuals who have "achieved prominence in business or the professions, and thus can speak to the initiates for the entire adult community" (Martin 1985). Furthermore, the themes of the university commencement speech are fairly commonplace:

> Speakers are expected to congratulate the graduates, their parents and others who have supported them through the trials of the preparatory period, to receive those who have completed their education into the economic marketplace, or to mark their passage into another phase of preparation in graduate or professional school, to warn them of the hardships or pitfalls before them, and to urge them to fulfill the social responsibilities of the privileged. These themes are so familiar that they have evoked occasional satire of the address. (Martin 1985:514)

This does not, however, mean that all speeches are boilerplate, though many speakers do adhere to rather straightforward congratulatory remarks. "Commencement," Martin argues, "invites preoccupation with the moment, its exigencies, its promise, its admonitions," and speakers who see themselves as possessing "urgent messages" have often utilized this platform to present their ideas to a "neutral…[if not] putatively dispassionate, open-minded, non-partisan audience" (514). For instance, Presidential commencement speeches – the primary subject of Martin's work – highlight the relative importance of this seemingly ceremonial process to shaping national and/or global policy; "the President and his advisors," Martin claims, "seem to feel that addresses at college and university commencements get attention from important opinion leaders" (514). Though no studies have verified the extent to which commencement speeches are viewed as influential media for the transmission of values or ideas to a broader

population base, the relative frequency with which Presidents and other top government officials have engaged with an academic audience as commencement speakers lends credence to the notion that these events are valued, respected opportunities for speakers and hold a position of importance within American culture at large.

Neoliberalism and Speaker Selection

First published in 1944, Leo Lowenthal's "The Triumph of Mass Idols" represented one of the first scholarly approaches to the notion of celebrity and social prestige in American society. Analyzing regularly published magazine biographies of public figures over time, Lowenthal argued that those individuals whom society idolizes and whose lives they might seek to emulate had shifted over time from "idols of production" – such as prominent businessmen and other leaders in industry – to "idols of consumption" – movie stars, professional athletes, etc. At its core, Lowenthal saw this shift as representing an ascension of recreation and leisure as central objects of desire within the American collective consciousness, thus eschewing previously valued notions such as hard work and ingenuity in favor of seeking the fatalistic "good fortune" of their newfound heroes.

Lowenthal's study presided over a transformative period in American history, with two global military conflicts, a crippling depression, as well as the rise of consumption as a central facet of both the American economy and social sphere. More importantly, it demonstrated how such external and internal conflicts often serve to transform a society's value system. When individuals are honored publicly – whether in print or in the flesh – their recognition is frequently demonstrative of certain core values

that a society holds. Furthermore, looking for moments of conflict provides one important lens for understanding competing claims to status, reputation, and honor. The argument can be made, therefore, that *university commencement addresses* comprise one such conflict. While such events may seem conflict-neutral, underlying each is a process of selection driven by the belief that "who is chosen to speak" reflects the values of the institution and that these ceremonies project certain ideals and values to the graduates, their parents, and the public. In other words, commencement speakers are in effect symbolic goods whose selection represents societal values much broader than those which they personally carry; the type of person selected, particular traits they may possess, and, more generally, collective notions of success are prominently featured in the selection process. While controversies might bring the symbolic value of these events into high relief, it is important to study what (or who) is being honored even in the absence of public controversy, as symbols can communicate something powerful even if they are not explicitly recognized as doing so.

How might one expect such selection processes to play out? Which choices, in other words, fulfill the initiatives of university administrators (i.e., to promote the university, attract external private funding, etc.) as well as the mandate of the commencement ceremony itself (i.e., "initiating" graduates into full-fledged adulthood)? In practice, speaker selection emerges out of broad committee composed of faculty, administration, and at least one student (typically the undergraduate student president). While the discussions within such committees remain far enough removed from the public sphere to invite analysis, the products of such decision-making processes may indeed shed some light on their content. If one accepts the premise that neoliberalism has

played a role in the tremendous changes occurring within higher education, the overwhelming presence of university administration on speaker selection committees may ultimately skew the vote toward a candidate most likely to benefit the university's overarching objectives. Such assertions, of course, offer fertile ground for scholarly assessment.

Because commencement speakers offer a useful "window" on culture more broadly, it is clear that the broader socio-political climate of the past four decades has played a considerable role in shifting not only how institutions are structured and their basic functioning but also in providing a glimpse into what society actually *values.* The neoliberal era has precipitated an increased emphasis on economic rationality and efficiency within contemporary decision-making at all levels, from the individual to the institution. Within academia, neoliberal social and economic thought has dramatically transformed institutional culture, altering not only the physical structure of the academy but initiating fundamental changes within decision-making processes on the part of administrators. Thus, commencement speaker selection offers a unique analytical arena for unpacking this latter point, as commencement proceedings reside at the intersection of institutional decision-making and broader cultural trends. Such proceedings are frequently highly publicized events, designed not only to fulfill their role of initiating students into the broader social world but also to bring attention to the institution as a means of attracting external funding from alumni and other private donors. Speaker selection, then, plays an integral role in higher education's attempts to market its activities to a broader population.

HYPOTHESES

There are a number of potential avenues to be investigated regarding the relevance of different occupational groups as potential commencement speakers within the neoliberal university. First, given the function of higher education to capitulate to the needs of capital and socialize students into the contemporary workforce, one might logically conclude that those individuals who have achieved success or carry a certain amount of esteem within society at large are prime candidates to fill the role of commencement speaker. However, given the transformations precipitated by neoliberal social and economic ideologies both within the academy and within society more broadly, how one defines "success" may be of critical importance. For instance, due to the increasing corporatization of both the American university and the American social landscape as a result of neoliberal economic development (Ayers, 2005; Gumport, 1993), one might thus expect that individuals who occupy leadership roles within the corporate and managerial sectors are held to high esteem within contemporary society. Furthermore, such processes may be reactionary rather than proactive, in recognition of the increasing importance of corporate partnership with the academy (i.e., corporate executives on university boards of directions; see Domhoff, 2013) and past funding received by the university from corporate entities. Thus, I hypothesize:

> *H_1: Commencement speakers whose primary occupation is within the professional and/or managerial sector will be more greatly represented after the neoliberal turn in United States politics/higher education (i.e., 1980) than before*.

On the contrary, given that such transformations within the academy have occurred (often) at the expense of the traditional "democratic" educational model (Slaughter and Rhoades, 2004), one might expect to find a decrease in social prestige for

those who occupy research or faculty positions either within the university or within the private sector. Furthermore, given the decreasing emphasis on academic pursuits as an end in themselves, but rather, as alternative means of accumulating external capital (Slaughter and Rhoades, 2004), one might also expect to find further justification for the omission of faculty and researchers as viable candidates for commencement speaker selection. Therefore,

> *H_2: Commencement speakers whose primary occupation is within academia, research, or the sciences will be less frequently represented after the neoliberal turn in United States politics/higher education (i.e., 1980) than before.*

The commodification of contemporary higher education, which positions a college degree as a "private good" to be "sold" to students (i.e., "consumers), may also be thematically preserved within commencement proceedings with the selection of artists, media personalities, and other entertainment figures (Chaffee, 1998; Swagler, 1978; Wellen, 2005). In a sense, then, this would represent a continuation of the logic underlying Lowenthal's (1944) argument within the pre-neoliberal era, though one may perhaps find different motivations behind such decisions than simply a reflection of societal valuation. Therefore, Hypothesis 3 below argues that such occupational groups will attain greater social prestige as potential commencement speakers after the neoliberal turn in higher education:

> *H_3: Commencement speakers whose primary occupation is within the arts, media, and/or other entertainment-oriented sectors will be more greatly represented after the neoliberal turn in United States politics/higher education (i.e., 1980) than before*.

While the above hypotheses offer a relatively straightforward application of neoliberal ideology to the practice of commencement speaker selection, one group that

escapes such basic arguments are those involved in the political sphere. Neoliberal ideologies – while pervasive – remain significant (and contradictory) rallying points for both major political parties in the United States. Given the fact that neoliberal ideology warrants a *strong* state, one might expect to find that politicians, regardless of their political and/or ideological creed, preserve some element of social prestige within contemporary society. On the other hand, neoliberalism also asserts that the *function* of the strong state is to effectively capitulate to the needs of the market, which would position some left-leaning politicians, with their support of social welfare initiatives, federal minimum wages, and general market regulation as less favorable than their more conservative, market-oriented counterparts. Furthermore, given that the polity as a whole features its own ebbs and flows in popularity based upon the current political milieu, one might also suspect temporal shifts in the prestige afforded to Senators, Congressmen, Governors, and the like. Hypothesizing potential shifts in the relative prevalence of politicians and other governmental figures as commencement speakers is therefore somewhat complicated.

However, the data include information regarding *secondary* occupations, referring to those duties an individual engaged either in the past or on a part-time basis (aside from their primary occupation, which remains the focus of the study with regard to the groups outlined above). While speakers' political and/or ideological perspectives and similar orientations presented by the institutions at which they spoke are relatively difficult to ascertain, including this occupational data may shed some light on the *types* of politicians and administrative leaders being selected. Thus, I have similarly coded secondary occupations to reflect the occupational groups outlined above; in the instance of public

administrators and politicians, I am particularly interested in those whose previous careers were *corporate, professional, and/or managerial* in nature. Based upon the arguments above, then, one might expect to find a greater proportion of politicians with ties to the business community represented among commencement speakers in post-1980 era:

> *H_4: Commencement speakers whose primary occupation is within the political and/or public administration sectors* **and** *who possess strong ties to the business community (through secondary occupations as executives, professionals, or other business elite) will be more greatly represented after the neoliberal turn in United States politics/higher education (i.e., 1980) than before.*

While a number of questions certainly remain about how each of these (and other) occupational groups fit within the neoliberal ideological framework, the preceding discussion highlights some of the ways in which neoliberal ideals may impact commencement speaker selection. The present paper positions itself as an examination of the potential avenues by which neoliberalism impacts institutional decision-making as it pertains to certain *cultural* aspects of higher education, specifically commencement exercises, speaker selection, and the various rituals and traditions that surround these events. One can clearly see this impact as academic institutions increasingly utilize these events to bring greater attention to the university itself, in hopes (theoretically) of garnering the external funding that so centrally drives contemporary institutional objectives. Thus, drawing upon the above hypotheses, the following empirical analysis attempts to flesh out these relationships in greater depth.

STUDY DESIGN

Sample

As alluded to earlier, an empirical link has yet to be made between neoliberal transformations in higher education and the traditional, culture-laden aspects of the academy previously viewed as insulated from external forces. This study, therefore, attempts to correct this empirical gap by studying commencement speaker selection as a proxy for such internal and historically-traditional decision-making processes. The following analyses draw from a sample of 2,315 commencement speakers at 52 American institutions of higher learning over 49 years (1955-2003) in an effort to learn more about the types of people that have been honored by universities and colleges over the latter half of the 20th century.[1]

Variables

Drawing on U.S. Census occupational classification schemes as a means of highlighting how various occupational groups may be "received" as potential candidates to participate in commencement proceedings, the following analysis focuses primarily on four distinct occupational groups: (1) professionals and managerial-level corporate employees, (2) faculty/researchers within academia and the sciences, (3) artists, media personalities or journalists, and other entertainment figures, and (4) members of public administration (i.e., politicians, appointed leaders, etc.).

Characteristics of speakers include basic indicators such as sex, age, race/ethnicity, as well as other measures such as citizenship and/or country of origin, year

[1] Permission for use of commencement speaker data has been granted by the primary investigator and owner of the data, Dr. Steven J. Tepper of Vanderbilt University/Arizona State University.

of commencement speech, and primary and secondary professions. College characteristics feature indicators of prestige (particularly Carnegie classifications [1973]), public/private status, location, setting (rural, suburban, or urban), selectivity, enrollment (in 1970), year founded, religious orientation, and other special characteristics (such as single-sex enrollment or HBCU). A comprehensive list of the colleges and universities used within the present research is provided in Appendix A, while Appendix B provides basic descriptive characteristics for the schools included in the study.

Analytical Strategy

The study utilizes statistical procedures to isolate trends within the data and attempt to uncover whether any temporal patterns exist with regard to selection preferences among commencement speakers. Initial analyses will rely on graphical representations of the relative frequency of selected occupational categories and the general linear trajectory provided by the data. Such an approach measures "relative" frequency in that the number of instances within each calendar year in which an individual of a particular occupational category is selected as a commencement speaker is necessarily weighted (i.e., proportionalized) relative to the total number of commencement speeches in a given year. While such an approach offers minimal statistical inference, tracing changes in relative frequency over time allows one to identify potential "turning points" in the data; furthermore, linear approximations of these proportionalized frequencies allow for a simplified view of the general trajectory of the data across a particular time period (see Figure 1). The above technique was replicated for each occupational category across a number of school characteristics, including

Carnegie classification (1973), private/public status, special institutional characteristics (HBCU, single-sex, religious), region, and setting (urban, suburban, rural), with the intention of looking for non-conformity (i.e., whether a given institutional arrangement *does not* conform to the overarching trends within the data). While such comparisons resort largely to a fairly superficial visual judgment rather than more rigid (and quantifiable) statistical analyses, they remain a useful tool for analyzing the role of institutional characteristics in either insulating the college/university from external neoliberal changes and/or indicating a greater responsiveness to these forces.

To further test changes in relative frequency across the analytical periods (and to provide more inferential rigidity), logistic regression techniques were also applied to each occupational category. Each category was transformed into a binary metric (i.e., for professional occupations, 1="professional occupation"; 0= "all other occupations") and regressed on an indicator variable designed to measure the impact of the neoliberal period on their predicted frequency among commencement speakers. In short, this latter approach allows for a more rigorous analysis of potential changes in relative frequency before and after the neoliberal transformation in higher education, most notably in its ability to test for both the significance and magnitude of any such change, as well as the relative impact of various institutional characteristics on selection processes.

Pinpointing the Neoliberal Transformation

While it is difficult to isolate the neoliberal transformation to a single moment in American history, this study designates the year 1980 as a proxy for the "moment" at which this transformation occurred. Given the considerable space allotted to the cultural

(i.e., academic) ramifications of this ideological shift earlier in this paper, my explanation for this decision will be brief. Certainly, it is true that neoliberalism had begun to evolve within Western European nations throughout the mid- to late-1970s, but 1980 is particularly notable in that it featured the election of Ronald Reagan, a conservative proponent of neoliberal fiscal policy, to the US presidency. Reagan's election ushered in an era of unprecedented deregulation within the economic sector, signaling a transformational moment within US economic policy that has continued to the present day (Harvey, 2005). Thus, while the American university has experienced "corporatizing" pressures in the past (see Barrow, 1990; Bowles and Gintis, 1976), the neoliberal era marks a fairly considerable shift in the broader context in which academia operates, and it is therefore useful to align this shift (for analytical purposes) with the ideology's "formal" introduction to American fiscal policy – which, by many accounts, coincided with the election of Reagan to the nation's highest office.

While the present project is primarily data-driven, combining these two approaches provides the researcher considerable flexibility in interpreting not only the statistical significance of changes in occupational frequency among commencement speakers in the neoliberal era but also the subtle temporal nuances (i.e., "turning points" other than 1980) among the occupational groups under analysis. This latter point, while important, will be discussed only briefly in subsequent sections, as a thorough analysis of these considerations is worthy of its own analytical project and would require more advanced statistical techniques (i.e., time-varying regression, forecasting models) than are utilized in the present analysis.

Table 1. Summary Descriptive Characteristics of Commencement Speakers (1955-2003)

Variables	*All Speakers (N = 2,315)*		*Pre-1980 (1955-1979) (N = 1,135)*		*Post-1980 (1980-2003) (N = 1,180)*		
	Mean/ Percent	*S.D.*	*Mean/ Percent*	*S.D.*	*Mean/ Percent*	*S.D.*	*Percent Change*
Occupation (Census Groupings):							
Professional/Management	16.46 %	-	14.63 %	-	18.22 %	-	24.54 % *
Education/Sciences	29.20 %	-	36.21 %	-	22.46 %	-	-37.98 % ***
Arts/Entertainment/Media	14.64 %	-	9.69 %	-	19.41 %	-	100.24 % ***
Religion/Clergy	8.86 %	-	10.66 %	-	7.12 %	-	-33.23 % **
Public Administration/Government	30.84 %	-	28.81 %	-	32.80 %	-	13.84 % *
Individual Characteristics:							
Male (1=Yes)	81.64 %	-	91.37 %	-	72.29 %	-	-20.88 % ***
Female (1=Yes)	18.36 %	-	8.63 %	-	27.71 %	-	220.95 % ***
White (1=Yes)	88.64 %	-	91.81 %	-	85.59 %	-	-6.77 % ***
African-American (1=Yes)	8.21 %	-	5.73 %	-	10.59 %	-	84.97 % ***
Hispanic (1=Yes)	1.56 %	-	0.88 %	-	2.20 %	-	150.08 % *
Other Race/Ethnicity (1=Yes)	1.60 %	-	1.59 %	-	1.61 %	-	1.53 %
Age (in Years)	55.10	10.33	53.38	9.39	56.75 ***	10.92	-

Note: '+ p < .10 * *p* < .05 ** *p* < .01 *** *p* < .001

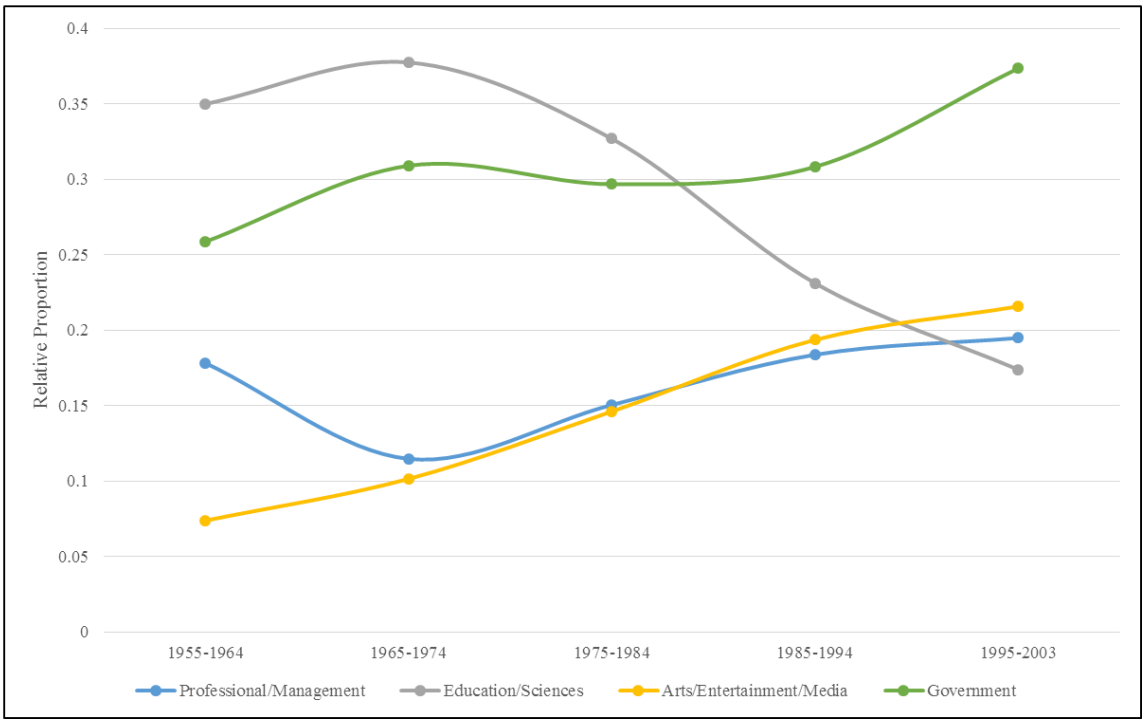
RESULTS

Sample Characteristics

Table 1 provides basic descriptive characteristics for commencement speakers overall, as well as distinctions between the pre- and post-1980 neoliberal transition within higher education. As one can see, commencement speakers constitute a fairly non-representative sample of the broader American population. They are disproportionately male (81.64%), white (88.64%), and older, with a mean age of 55.10. Occupational characteristics for the individuals selected are also quite diverse. A majority of speakers come from two economic sectors: education and the sciences (29.20%) and public administration/government (30.84%). Among the remaining occupational groups, professionals and managers or other corporate occupations constitute 16.46% of the sample, followed by artists, media personalities, and other entertainment figures (14.64%) and religious leaders and clergy (8.86%). While the changes in relative

occupational frequency demonstrated in Table 1 appear to indicate some initial confirmation for the hypotheses presented earlier in the study, further analyses are necessary to fully address these shifts. With these initial findings in mind, then, I now take a closer look at each occupational group in turn to further gauge the direction and magnitude of these shifts.

Figure 1. Relative Proportions of Study Occupations (1955-2003)

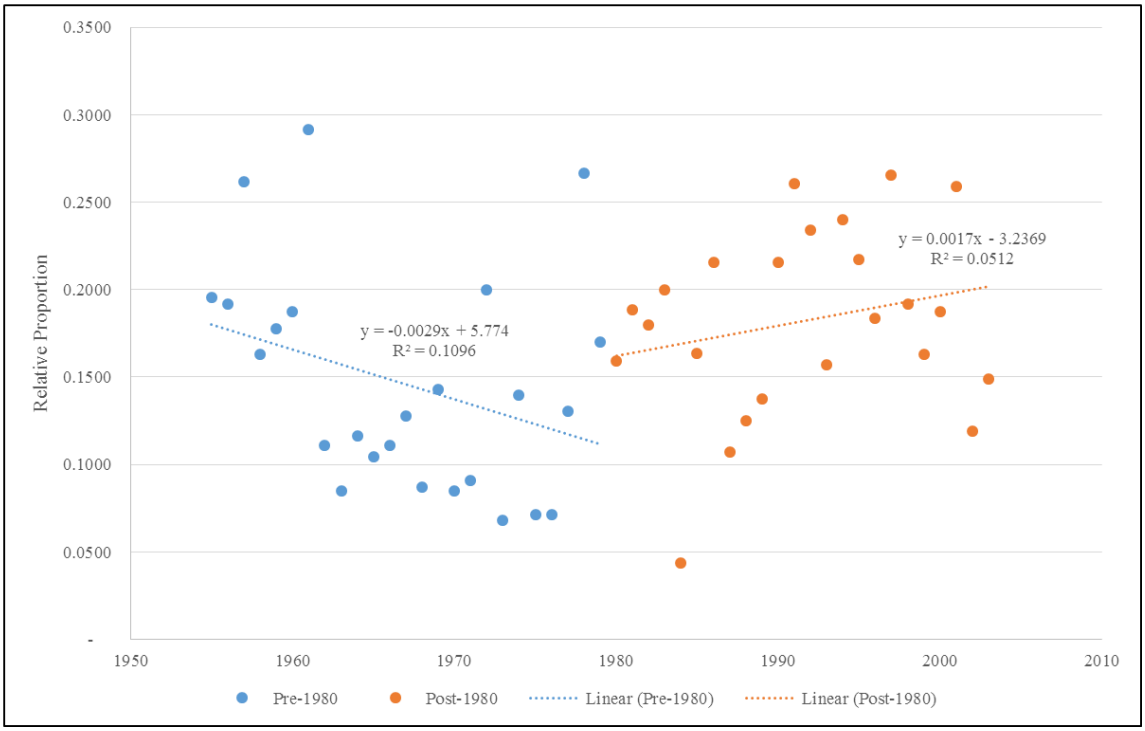


Professional and Managerial Occupations

While one could certainly argue that "professional" and "managerial" occupations differ substantively and, thus, should be separated analytically, they are addressed in unison here to highlight the similar manner in which is elevated ideologically within a neoliberal economic paradigm. As mentioned earlier, one essential function of higher

education is to capitulate to the needs of capital and socialize students into the contemporary workforce; thus, one might logically conclude that those individuals who have achieved success or carry a certain amount of esteem within society at large are prime candidates to fill the role of commencement speaker. In this vein, the increasing corporatization of higher education and shifting definitions of what defines "success" in a neoliberal era may lead to increasing prestige for individuals who occupy leadership roles within the corporate and managerial sectors. Thus, Hypothesis 1 posited that commencement speakers whose primary occupation were within the professional and/or managerial sector would be *more* greatly represented after the neoliberal turn in United States politics/higher education (i.e., 1980) than before.

Figure 2. Relative Proportions/Linear Trends of Professional/Managerial Occupations (Pre/Post-1980)



The findings in Table 1 seem to offer some initial evidence for this hypothesis, as there is a 24.54% increase in relative frequency from the pre-1980 study period to the succeeding era for professional/managerial occupations (14.63% to 18.22%; $X^2 = 5.44$, $p < .05$). However, visual analyses of the temporal trajectory for these occupations provide somewhat mixed validation of this initial claim (see Figure 2). Looking across the entire study period, professionals and managerial-level business leaders maintain a fairly consistent position among commencement speakers relative to other occupational groups, ranking as the third-most common groups in all but one of the decades under analysis. Furthermore, after experiencing a "trough" in the second decade (1965-1974), one sees a fairly steady increase throughout the remainder of the study period with little to no adjustment in trajectory around the neoliberal "turning point" in 1980. These initial observations, then, would seem to contradict (or, in the least, minimize) the previous findings.

On the other hand, an analysis of the pre-/post-1980 periods separately provides more substantial evidence in support of Hypothesis 1. Linear approximations of the pre-/post-1980 eras indicate that the relative frequency of professional/managerial commencement speakers in the pre-1980 period was marked by a gradual decline in prevalence (an average of -0.29 percentage points per year); after 1980, however, this linear trajectory shifts completely and begins to trend in a positive direction (+0.17 percentage points per year) (see Figure 2).[2] There is further evidence for this shift in

[2] While such numbers may seem small and perhaps insignificant, it is important to acknowledge the scales upon which they are calculated. First, individual occupational groups (as Table 1 indicates) constitute relatively small (albeit modest) proportions of the overall sample, signifying that even a seemingly small percentage change may indicate significant changes in overall frequency from one year to the next. Second, and perhaps more importantly, the fact that each period measures approximately 25 years of data entails that such small yearly adjustments may aggregate into relatively substantial changes in the overall proportion of a given occupational group.

Table 2. Logistic Regression Analysis of Professional/Managerial Occupations Relative to All Others, Pre-/Post-1980 Isolated, and Post-1980 Temporal Effects

	Model 1: Overall Model (1955-2003) (N = 2,315)			*Model 2: Pre-1980 (1955-1979) Only (N = 1,135)*			*Model 3: Post-1980 (1980-2003) Only (N = 1,180)*			*Model 4: Temporal Effects (1955-2003) (N = 2,315)*		
Predictor	β	*SE* β	e^{β} (odds ratio)	β	*SE* β	e^{β} (odds ratio)	β	*SE* β	e^{β} (odds ratio)	β	*SE* β	e^{β} (odds ratio)
Post-1980 (1=Yes) [1]	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.2729	0.1140	1.314 *
Institutional Characteristics												
Public Institution (1=Yes)	-0.2144	0.2130	0.807 ***	-0.4881	0.3371	0.614	-0.0475	0.2849	0.954	-0.2226	0.2136	0.800
Single-Sex Institution (1=Yes)	0.0211	0.1736	1.021	0.1646	0.2568	1.179	-0.0764	0.2397	0.926	0.0185	0.1738	1.019
HBCU (1=Yes)	-0.2137	0.2723	0.808	-0.5037	0.4452	0.604	-0.0845	0.3638	0.919	-0.1922	0.2730	0.825
Enrollment (1970) (in Thousands)	-0.0043	0.0243	0.996	0.0024	0.0396	1.002	-0.0080	0.0316	0.992	-0.0044	0.0243	0.996
Selectivity (1=Low to 5=High)	0.0509	0.0679	1.052	0.0296	0.1027	1.030	0.0744	0.0939	1.077	0.0467	0.0680	1.048
High Prestige (1=Yes)	-0.0288	0.3186	0.972	0.2157	0.4835	1.241	-0.2520	0.4349	0.777	-0.0367	0.3191	0.964
Carnegie Classification (1973) [2]												
Research I/II	-0.0681	0.3890	0.934	-0.0143	0.6339	0.986	-0.1178	0.5041	0.889	-0.0429	0.3884	0.958
Doctoral I/II	-0.3394	0.2516	0.712	-0.0986	0.3791	0.906	-0.6414	0.3496	0.527 +	-0.3381	0.2524	0.713
Liberal Arts I/II	-0.1217	0.1990	0.885	0.1142	0.3133	1.121	-0.2916	0.2681	0.747	-0.1052	0.1995	0.900
Region [3]												
West (1=Yes)	0.0564	0.2631	1.058	0.3293	0.3915	1.390	-0.1306	0.3683	0.878	0.0750	0.2638	1.078
Midwest (1=Yes)	0.2456	0.1555	1.278	0.5251	0.2332	1.691 *	-0.0040	0.2171	0.996	0.2589	0.1559	1.296 +
Northeast (1=Yes)	-0.1940	0.1692	0.824	-0.2757	0.2673	0.759	-0.0949	0.2250	0.909	-0.1866	0.1696	0.830
Setting [4]												
Urban (1=Yes)	0.2469	0.1917	1.280	-0.0050	0.2820	0.995	0.4595	0.2694	1.583 +	0.2356	0.1917	1.266
Suburban (1=Yes)	-0.0105	0.2001	0.990	-0.4604	0.2968	0.631	0.3429	0.2794	1.409	-0.0167	0.2002	0.983
Intercept	-1.7464	0.3466	-	-1.8251	0.5326	-	-1.7320	0.4733	-	-1.8861	0.3525	-
-2 Log Likelihood	2070.468			944.680			1120.335			2070.468		
Pseudo-R^2	0.0099			0.0252			0.0104			0.0124		

Note: + p < .10 * *p* < .05 ** *p* < .01 *** *p* < .001

[1] Reference Group = "Pre-1980 (1=Yes)"

[2] Reference Group = "Comprehensive University I/II (1=Yes)"

[3] Reference Group = "South (1=Yes)"

[4] Reference Group = "Rural (1=Yes)"

findings from the logistic regression analyses (see Table 2), as prospective speakers whose primary occupation is professional/managerial in nature have a 31.4% greater likelihood of being selected by schools in the neoliberal era compared to the prior period ($X^2 = 6.21$, $p < .05$). Other indicators demonstrated no significant influence on the selection of professional/managerial speakers, further supporting a purely temporal justification for the shift toward greater representation in the post-1980 period. Overall, then, there appears to be ample evidence in support of Hypothesis 1.

Educational and Scientific Occupations

Theoretically, as suggested above, the absorption of neoliberal operating practices by college/university administrators has led to the decline of the "democratic" educational model and the diminishing role of academics and scientists as visible representatives of the university. As such, it is plausible that one would expect the inclusion of fewer academics and researchers as commencement speakers in the neoliberal era, as their respective "missions" more greatly serve the behind-the-scenes functioning of higher education rather than as an explicit marketing role.[3] Contrary to the above group, then, I argued that commencement speakers whose primary occupation is

[3] Another, more practical reason may potentially explain declines in both educators/scientists and other groups (i.e., religious leadership). Given that commencement speaker selection – both by design within this analysis and, arguably, in reality as well) effectively comprises a zero sum equation, expected increases in the prevalence of certain occupational groups must necessarily correspond to decreases in other groups. As such, given their limited ability to accomplish the external marketing objectives of the university (at least relative to other occupational groups), one might expect educators and researchers to comprise one of those occupational groups which experience a decline by virtue of increases found in other groups. Certainly, this practical consideration requires a "big picture" view of the all groups simultaneously. However, while the relative prevalence of each occupational group may be responsive to different ideological mechanisms within neoliberalism, a decline of a particular group by virtue of increases elsewhere does signal some evidence of declining prestige on a societal level, and such findings perhaps indirectly offer greater support to the arguments residing behind those groups which experience such an ascendance.

within academia, research, or the sciences would be *less* frequently represented after the neoliberal turn in United States politics/higher education than before.

Analytically, these assertions appear to ring true. Of the five occupational groups under analysis, educators and scientists (32.75% of all speakers) represented the most common selection over the initial decade of the study (1955-1964) – a position they maintained throughout the following two decades. By the final decade (1995-2003), however, they ranked fourth, comprising only 17.27% of all speakers. This downward trend remains quite visible even after data are aggregated into pre- and post-1980 groups. As indicated in Table 1, the relative frequency of educators and scientists in the post-1980 period declines almost 40% from the earlier era, going from 36.21% to 22.46% of all speakers ($X^2 = 52.94$, $p < .001$). Viewing the data graphically, one comes to a similar conclusion. Linear approximations of the general trend demonstrated by frequencies in

Figure 3. Relative Proportions/Linear Trends of Education/Sciences Occupations (Pre/Post-1980)

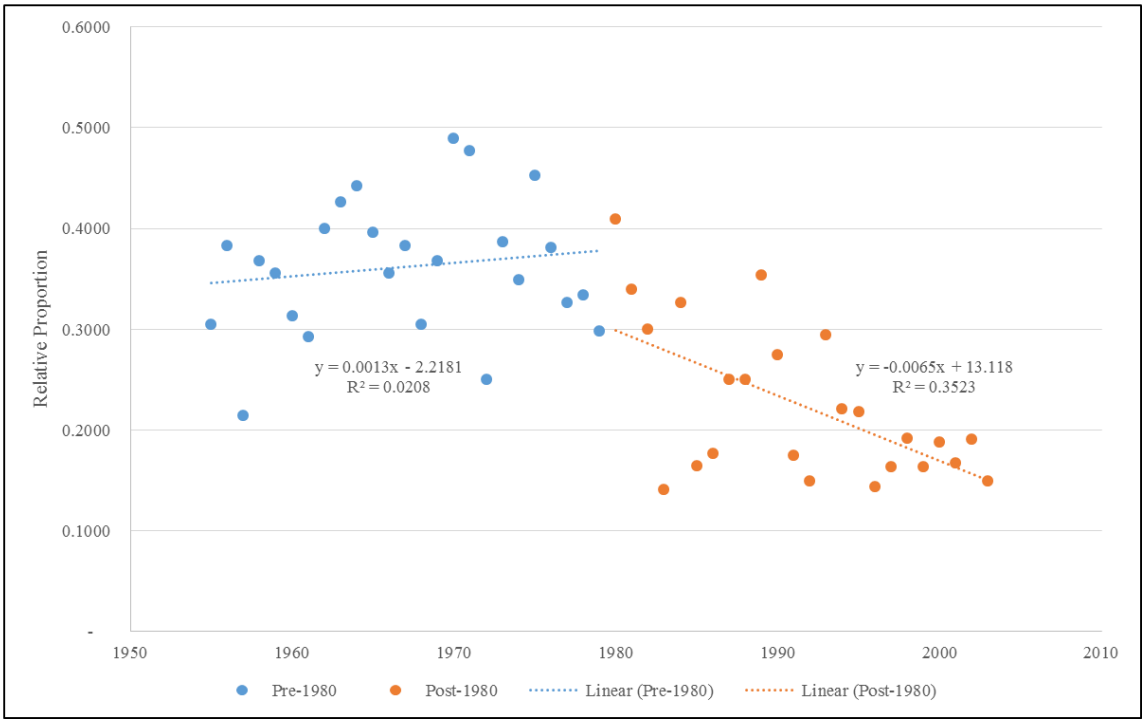


Table 3. Logistic Regression Analysis of Education/Science Occupations Relative to All Others, Pre-/Post-1980 Isolated, and Post-1980 Temporal Effects

	Model 1: Overall Model (1955-2003) (N = 2,315)			*Model 2: Pre-1980 (1955-1979) Only (N = 1,135)*			*Model 3: Post-1980 (1980-2003) Only (N = 1,180)*			*Model 4: Temporal Effects (1955-2003) (N = 2,315)*		
Predictor	β	*SE* β	e^{β} (odds ratio)	β	*SE* β	e^{β} (odds ratio)	β	*SE* β	e^{β} (odds ratio)	β	*SE* β	e^{β} (odds ratio)
Post-1980 (1=Yes) [1]	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-0.6878	0.0946	0.503 ***
Institutional Characteristics												
Public Institution (1=Yes)	0.7275	0.1811	2.070 ***	0.8012	0.2493	2.228 **	0.8598	0.2799	2.363 **	0.7618	0.1833	2.142 ***
Single-Sex Institution (1=Yes)	-0.2888	0.1437	0.749 *	-0.3921	0.1956	0.676 *	-0.1856	0.2193	0.831	-0.2893	0.1453	0.749 *
HBCU (1=Yes)	-0.2352	0.2160	0.790	-0.1186	0.2773	0.888	-0.6134	0.3804	0.542	-0.2876	0.2182	0.750
Enrollment (1970) (in Thousands)	-0.0080	0.0207	0.992	-0.0336	0.0290	0.967	0.0219	0.0330	1.022	-0.0081	0.0211	0.992
Selectivity (1=Low to 5=High)	0.0126	0.0550	1.013	0.1059	0.0706	1.112	-0.1055	0.0939	0.900	0.0210	0.0555	1.021
High Prestige (1=Yes)	0.0779	0.2708	1.081	-0.2102	0.3412	0.810	0.6495	0.4864	1.915	0.0855	0.2728	1.089
Carnegie Classification (1973) [2]												
Research I/II	0.0311	0.3271	1.032	0.6846	0.4536	1.983	-1.0572	0.5446	0.347 +	-0.0096	0.3326	0.990
Doctoral I/II	-0.1080	0.2094	0.898	0.2022	0.2854	1.224	-0.3230	0.3328	0.724	-0.0823	0.2110	0.921
Liberal Arts I/II	0.2628	0.1710	1.301	0.1194	0.2320	1.127	0.4946	0.2704	1.640 +	0.2340	0.1731	1.264
Region [3]												
West (1=Yes)	0.4933	0.2027	1.638 *	0.2624	0.2786	1.300	0.6703	0.3081	1.955 *	0.4463	0.2057	1.562 *
Midwest (1=Yes)	0.3212	0.1311	1.379 *	0.0802	0.1796	1.084	0.5173	0.2012	1.678 *	0.2966	0.1326	1.345 *
Northeast (1=Yes)	-0.0076	0.1335	0.992	-0.0174	0.1781	0.983	-0.0569	0.2154	0.945	-0.0307	0.1351	0.970
Setting [4]												
Urban (1=Yes)	-0.1267	0.1516	0.881	0.1629	0.2105	1.177	-0.3919	0.2306	0.676 +	-0.0985	0.1542	0.906
Suburban (1=Yes)	0.0812	0.1551	1.085	0.1736	0.2163	1.190	0.0342	0.2312	1.035	0.1071	0.1574	1.113
Intercept	-1.2377	0.2896	-	-1.2213	0.3876	-	-1.3023	0.4671	-	-0.9355	0.2950	-
-2 Log Likelihood	2796.244			1485.999			1257.029			2796.244		
Pseudo-R^2	0.0168			0.0227			0.0396			0.0395		

Note: + $p < .10$ * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

[1] Reference Group = "Pre-1980 (1=Yes)"

[2] Reference Group = "Comprehensive University I/II (1=Yes)"

[3] Reference Group = "South (1=Yes)"

[4] Reference Group = "Rural (1=Yes)"

the pre-1980 period actually demonstrate a mild, *positive* trajectory (+0.13 percentage points per year); after 1980, however, these approximations fall off sharply (-0.65 percentage points per year) (see Figure 3).

This decline is further corroborated by the logistic regression analyses (see Table 3), as schools are roughly 50% *less* likely to select an educator or scientist as a commencement speaker after 1980 (compared to the prior period). Other institutional characteristics do appear to play a role in the selection of educators/researchers as well, even after controlling for time (i.e., Model 4). For instance, public institutions were more than twice as likely as their private counterparts to select an educator/scientist, a trend that remained both significant and constant across all time periods. Similarly, institutions located in either the West (odds ratio = 1.638) or Midwest (odds ratio = 1.379) were significantly more likely to select an educator/scientist (relative to schools located in the South), though as Models 2 and 3 indicate, these increased odds appear to have emerged only *after* the neoliberal turn in higher education. In all, then, there appears to be considerable evidence in support of Hypothesis 2.

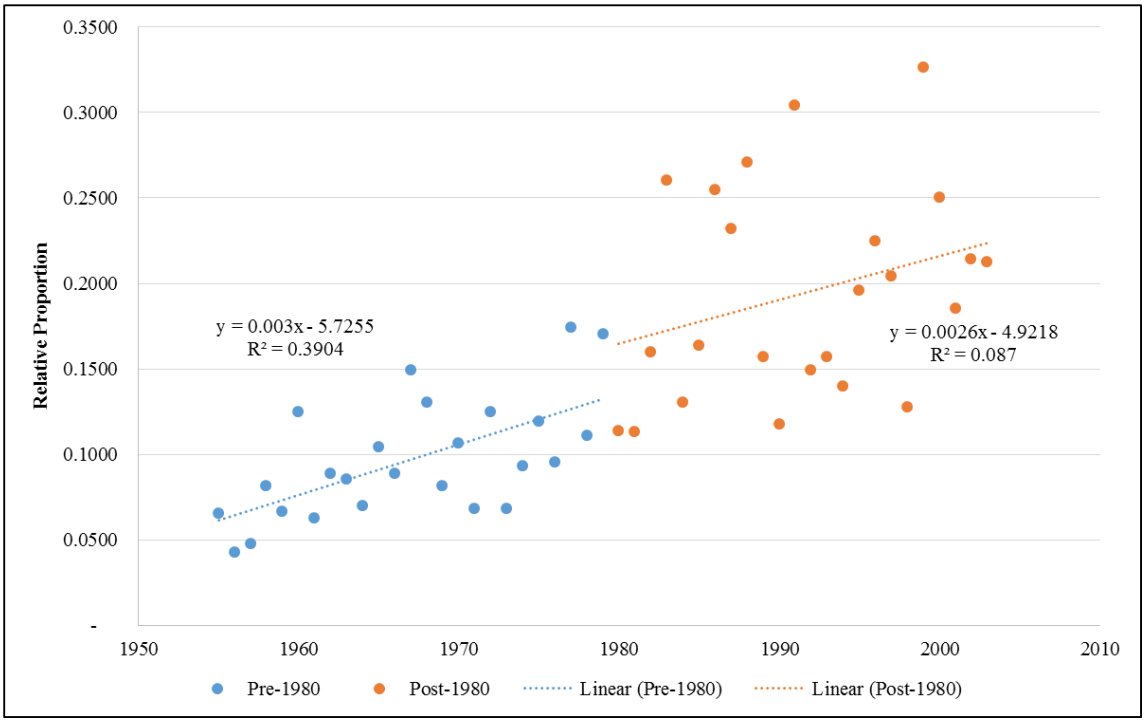
Arts, Entertainment, and Media Occupations

As a means of garnering external notoriety for the university, few occupational categories offer a greater outlet for capitalizing on the marketing endeavors of the institution than by selecting individuals who carry celebrity status within popular culture. Furthermore, given the increasing emphasis on consumption of higher education as a "private good", I argued that such transformations may be "thematically" preserved within commencement proceedings by the selection of artists, entertainment figures, and

media personalities (Chaffee, 1998; Swagler, 1978; Wellen, 2005). In other words, such individuals are selected less to serve the traditional functions of commencement and more to fulfill the aforementioned marketing objectives of the university and provide a source of "entertainment" for departing graduates. Thus, Hypothesis 3 posited that commencement speakers whose primary occupation is within the arts, media, and/or other entertainment-oriented sectors will be *more* greatly represented after the neoliberal turn in United States politics/higher education than before.

Of all the groups under analysis, individuals with occupations within the arts, entertainment, or media demonstrate perhaps the most considerable shift from study outset to completion, rising from the least common occupational group selected between 1955-1964 (7.39% of all speakers) to the second-most prevalent between 1995-2003 (21.58%). Between the pre- and post-1980 periods, the selection of artists, media

Figure 4. Relative Proportions/Linear Trends of Arts/Entertainment/Media Occupations (Pre/Post-1980)



personalities, and other entertainment figures as commencement speakers more than doubled in relative frequency, from 9.69% to 19.41% ($X^2 = 43.69$, $p < .001$). As with the professional/managerial occupational group, however, a visual analysis of this trend brings into question the ultimate role of neoliberalism in precipitating this change. The aforementioned upward trajectory begins at the study outset and continues, unabated, until study completion, with little to no alteration around 1980.

Factoring in the results from the logistic regression analyses tells a similar story, with artists, entertainment figures, and media personalities experiencing a 134.4% increase in the odds of being selected as a commencement speaker (see Table 4). As with the preceding group, other institutional characteristics do appear to play a role in these individuals' selection as well, even after controlling for time. Notably, regression analyses provide two seemingly contradictory findings, particularly with regard to institutional prestige. First, there appears to be a positive relationship between selectivity and the selection of entertainment figures, with these individuals experiencing a 22% increase in the likelihood of being selected as schools become more selective. However, institutions which carry high prestige (i.e., ranked in the top 25 nationally) – schools which are often renowned for their selectivity – were significantly *less* likely to choose artists and performers as commencement speakers (odds ratio = 0.498). While these findings seemingly contradict one another, the earlier discussion provides some potential insight into this disparity. Given that the marketing function of institutional governance within higher education is predominantly viewed as *need-based* (due to decreased federal and state funding) rather than simply being a manifestation of the corporate logic of the neoliberal academy, it is quite possible that prestigious universities (such as those in the

Table 4. Logistic Regression Analysis of Arts/Entertainment/Media Occupations Relative to All Others, Pre-/Post-1980 Isolated, and Post-1980 Temporal Effects

	Model 1: Overall Model (1955-2003) (N = 2,315)			*Model 2: Pre-1980 (1955-1979) Only (N = 1,135)*			*Model 3: Post-1980 (1980-2003) Only (N = 1,180)*			*Model 4: Temporal Effects (1955-2003) (N = 2,315)*		
Predictor	β	*SE* β	e^{β} (odds ratio)	β	*SE* β	e^{β} (odds ratio)	β	*SE* β	e^{β} (odds ratio)	β	*SE* β	e^{β} (odds ratio)
Post-1980 (1=Yes) [1]	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.8517	0.1266	2.344 ***
Institutional Characteristics												
Public Institution (1=Yes)	-0.2070	0.2487	0.813	-0.3797	0.4803	0.684	-0.3051	0.3076	0.737	-0.2494	0.2522	0.779
Single-Sex Institution (1=Yes)	0.0458	0.1724	1.047	0.4818	0.2687	1.619 +	-0.2555	0.2324	0.775	0.0360	0.1748	1.037
HBCU (1=Yes)	-0.1562	0.3302	0.855	-0.4000	0.6464	0.670	0.1347	0.4026	1.144	-0.0828	0.3340	0.921
Enrollment (1970) (in Thousands)	-0.0170	0.0268	0.983	0.0193	0.0542	1.019	-0.0315	0.0323	0.969	-0.0144	0.0270	0.986
Selectivity (1=Low to 5=High)	0.2043	0.0707	1.227 **	0.0229	0.1134	1.023	0.3102	0.0958	1.364 **	0.1990	0.0720	1.220 **
High Prestige (1=Yes)	-0.6670	0.3106	0.513 *	-0.1800	0.5764	0.835	-1.0993	0.4013	0.333 **	-0.6980	0.3162	0.498 *
Carnegie Classification (1973) [2]												
Research I/II	0.5810	0.4073	1.788	-0.0013	0.8066	0.999	0.9123	0.4907	2.490 +	0.6055	0.4081	1.832
Doctoral I/II	0.2622	0.2735	1.300	-0.3693	0.5595	0.691	0.4098	0.3349	1.506	0.2386	0.2776	1.269
Liberal Arts I/II	0.1827	0.2286	1.200	0.4200	0.4239	1.522	0.0669	0.2832	1.069	0.2324	0.2310	1.262
Region [3]												
West (1=Yes)	-0.0082	0.2781	0.992	0.5197	0.4346	1.681	-0.2807	0.3862	0.755	0.0270	0.2824	1.027
Midwest (1=Yes)	-0.0632	0.1805	0.939	0.2046	0.3168	1.227	-0.1208	0.2297	0.886	-0.0290	0.1827	0.971
Northeast (1=Yes)	0.5183	0.1631	1.679 **	0.6034	0.2974	1.828 *	0.5387	0.2064	1.714 **	0.5526	0.1657	1.738 ***
Setting [4]												
Urban (1=Yes)	0.0842	0.2042	1.088	-0.2428	0.3728	0.784	0.1039	0.2506	1.110	0.0485	0.2052	1.050
Suburban (1=Yes)	0.1481	0.2066	1.160	0.0606	0.3534	1.063	0.1008	0.2615	1.106	0.1427	0.2078	1.153
Intercept	-2.7163	0.3813	-	-2.8386	0.6666	-	-2.5356	0.4850	-	-3.2253	0.3958	-
-2 Log Likelihood	1928.290			722.437			1161.280			1928.290		
Pseudo-R^2	0.0210			0.0306			0.0312			0.0410		

Note: + $p < .10$ * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

[1] Reference Group = "Pre-1980 (1=Yes)"

[2] Reference Group = "Comprehensive University I/II (1=Yes)"

[3] Reference Group = "South (1=Yes)"

[4] Reference Group = "Rural (1=Yes)"

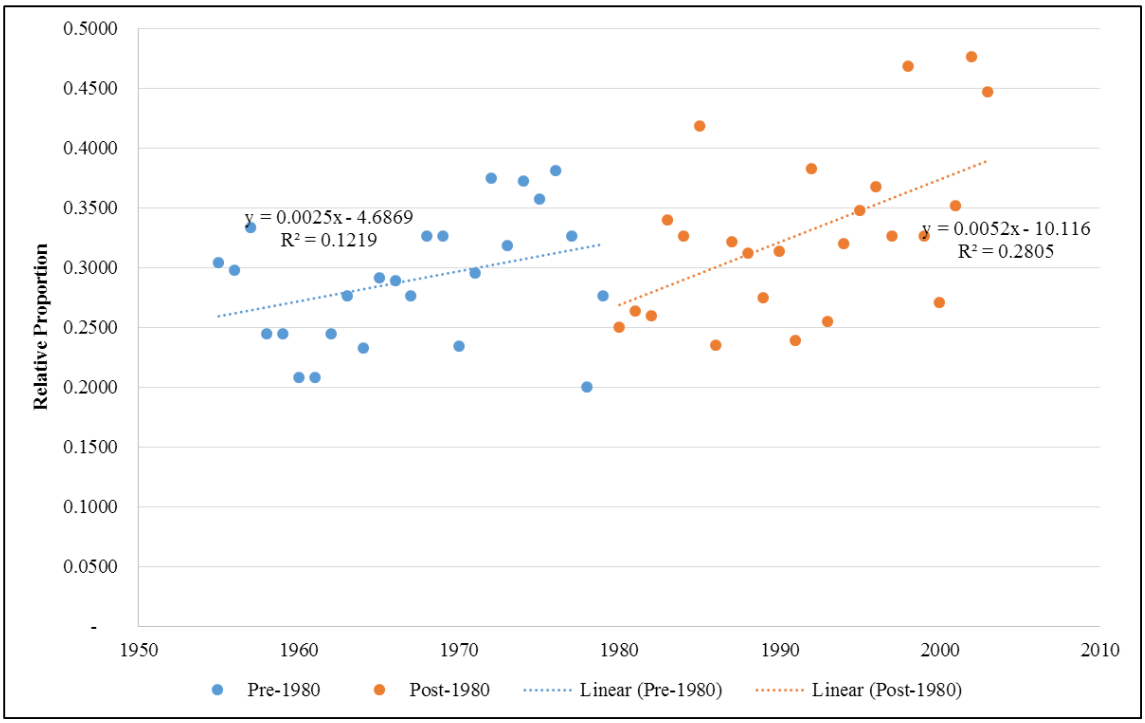
Ivy League) are less dependent on external funding in the first place, and thus less responsive to broader societal changes and an evaporation of outside funding. With extensive endowments and continually-replenishing coffers from high attendance fees, such schools – relative to their less prestigious (and, relatedly, less wealthy) counterparts – do not need to utilize commencement proceedings to attract public attention and are therefore insulated from the external neoliberal logic that has so considerably impacted lesser institutions. This finding aside, the significant increase in the relative prevalence of artists, media personalities, and other entertainment figures more broadly in the post-1980 period lends considerable support to Hypothesis 3.

Government Officials and Public Administrators

Government officials and other public administrators escaped easy prediction, as neoliberalism does not necessarily argue for a decline in governmental relevance in economic and other public affairs across the board. Rather, it almost explicitly requires a *strong state*, albeit one that is closely aligned with neoliberal ideology. Given the lack of data regarding the political and/or ideological stance of the individual officials and administrators, it was difficult to test the notion that particular groups *within* government may experience different trajectories in terms of their relative prevalence among commencement speakers. Nevertheless, I attempted to accommodate such individual-level factors by utilizing politicians' *secondary occupations*, that is, their careers prior to their political appointment or election and/or other social roles which they may presently occupy. Because the role of "politician" does not lend itself to straightforward analysis without more precise information regarding an individual's ideological and/or political

orientation, a variable was added to the logistic regression model to account for secondary experience within the corporate/business sector. This dichotomous variable measures leaders' past or current secondary roles as executives, professionals, or other managerial positions within the corporate world and (theoretically) serves as a proxy for connections to a neoliberal economic orientation. In all, of the 714 politicians included in the sample, 154 (21.57%) possessed secondary ties to the professional/business sector. One might therefore expect that these politicians and other political figures are treated more similarly to individuals whose primary occupations reside within that field than their political contemporaries without such experience.

Figure 5. Relative Proportions/Linear Trends of Governmental/Pub. Admin. Occupations (Pre/Post-1980)



Overall, in terms of their relative proportion, political leaders and other public officials are a fairly common group selected as commencement speakers. Among the five

decades under analysis, they remain either the second-most (1955-1984) or most (1985-2003) commonly selected occupational group, with percentages ranging between 25.87% and 37.36% of speakers throughout the study. While selecting government officials as commencement speakers remains a fairly consistent process across the two time periods, however, one does see a small (albeit significant) 13.84% increase in their prevalence (28.81% to 32.80%; $X^2 = 4.31$, $p < .05$) from before 1980 to after.

Across the two study periods, the selection of government figures remained fairly constant, and Table 5 demonstrates that there was no significant temporal effect on selection. When accounting for secondary business experience, one finds that leaders who possessed ties to the business community were significantly more likely to be selected throughout the sample period (odds ratio = 1.798). Despite this consistent relationship and contrary to Hypothesis 4, these effects were actually stronger *before* 1980 than after. As such, it appears that corporate ties have long played an influential role in commencement speaker selection for politicians and other government officials, though it is perhaps difficult to pinpoint the neoliberal transformation as responsible for this relationship. It is important to remember, however, that, while relevant, secondary business experience serves as a rather imperfect proxy for a plethora of other ideological factors which may in fact demonstrate shifts across the neoliberal divide; in this instance, the data simply do not offer a sufficient breadth of information to capitalize on these alternative factors.

Table 5. Logistic Regression Analysis of Government/Public Administration Occupations Relative to All Others, Pre-/Post-1980 Isolated, and Post-1980 Temporal Effects

	Model 1: Overall Model (1955-2003) (N = 2,315)			*Model 2: Pre-1980 (1955-1979) Only (N = 1,135)*			*Model 3: Post-1980 (1980-2003) Only (N = 1,180)*			*Model 4: Temporal Effects (1955-2003) (N = 2,315)*		
Predictor	β	*SE* β	e^{β} (odds ratio)	β	*SE* β	e^{β} (odds ratio)	β	*SE* β	e^{β} (odds ratio)	β	*SE* β	e^{β} (odds ratio)
Post-1980 (1=Yes)[1]	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.1181	0.0888	1.125
Secondary Business Experience (1=Yes)	0.5866	0.1182	1.798 ***	0.7741	0.1769	2.169 ***	0.4042	0.1638	1.498 *	0.5836	0.1182	1.792 ***
Institutional Characteristics												
Public Institution (1=Yes)	0.0495	0.1719	1.051	-0.1525	0.2583	0.859	0.2956	0.2384	1.344	0.0470	0.1720	1.048
Single-Sex Institution (1=Yes)	0.2841	0.1387	1.329 *	-0.4646	0.2250	0.628 *	0.9071	0.1899	2.477 ***	0.2857	0.1388	1.331 *
HBCU (1=Yes)	0.3233	0.1952	1.382 +	0.4003	0.2802	1.492	0.2925	0.2758	1.340	0.3305	0.1955	1.392 +
Enrollment (1970) (in Thousands)	0.0018	0.0188	1.002	0.0157	0.0293	1.016	0.0018	0.0252	1.002	0.0014	0.0188	1.001
Selectivity (1=Low to 5=High)	0.1382	0.0493	1.148 **	0.1164	0.0697	1.123 +	0.1630	0.0720	1.177 *	0.1397	0.0493	1.150 **
High Prestige (1=Yes)	0.6237	0.2327	1.866 **	0.2879	0.3264	1.334	1.0348	0.3401	2.815 **	0.6190	0.2327	1.857 **
Carnegie Classification (1973)[2]												
Research I/II	0.0447	0.2920	1.046	-0.1631	0.4476	0.849	0.0815	0.3972	1.085	0.0601	0.2921	1.062
Doctoral I/II	0.2422	0.1880	1.274	0.0834	0.2839	1.087	0.1521	0.2617	1.164	0.2397	0.1882	1.271
Liberal Arts I/II	-0.3645	0.1629	0.695 *	-0.4479	0.2328	0.639 +	-0.2642	0.2336	0.768	-0.3619	0.1629	0.696 *
Region[3]												
West (1=Yes)	-0.2852	0.2177	0.752	0.0761	0.3036	1.079	-0.6370	0.3312	0.529 +	-0.2727	0.2178	0.761
Midwest (1=Yes)	-0.0314	0.1310	0.969	0.2355	0.1983	1.266	-0.1242	0.1820	0.883	-0.0264	0.1311	0.974
Northeast (1=Yes)	0.2233	0.1279	1.250 +	0.5443	0.1911	1.723	0.0030	0.1790	1.003	0.2286	0.1281	1.257 +
Setting[4]												
Urban (1=Yes)	0.0397	0.1494	1.040	0.0782	0.2310	1.081	-0.0103	0.2004	0.990	0.0347	0.1495	1.035
Suburban (1=Yes)	-0.0547	0.1572	0.947	0.3565	0.2392	1.428	-0.4075	0.2155	0.665	-0.0613	0.1573	0.941
Intercept	-1.4444	0.2523		-1.6299	0.3635	-	-1.4417	0.3642	-	-1.5098	0.2573	-
-2 Log Likelihood	3170.329			1483.790			1684.323			3170.329		
Pseudo-R^2	0.0442			0.0527			0.0682			0.0448		

Note: + p < .10 * *p* < .05 ** *p* < .01 *** *p* < .001

[1] Reference Group = "Pre-1980 (1=Yes)"

[2] Reference Group = "Comprehensive University I/II (1=Yes)"

[3] Reference Group = "South (1=Yes)"

[4] Reference Group = "Rural (1=Yes)"

Summary

Four overarching hypotheses were analyzed with regard to the impact of neoliberal transformations with higher education on commencement speaker selection. Each of these directly pertains to changes in organizational structure as a result of neoliberalism. Due to the study's inclusion of relative proportions of occupational groups as a means of measuring differences in speaker selection, some groups that experienced declines did so in direct relationship to increased prevalence of other groups. As discussed above, however, this is not necessarily simply an artifact of study design but also correlates to societal measures of relative occupational prestige.

The combined methodology utilized in this study produced fairly consistent results. For professional/managerial occupations, both visual analyses and more inferential regression techniques demonstrated that, as academic institutions transitioned from the pre- to post-neoliberal era, there was a significant *increase* in the group's relative proportion of speakers. These findings offer support for Hypothesis 1. Similarly, both methodological approaches demonstrated a significant change in the relative proportion of educators and scientific researchers as commencement speakers, though in this case the trend was in a *negative* direction; this finding corroborates the argument posited in Hypothesis 2. Hypothesis 3 asserted that artists, entertainment figures, and media personalities would experience an increase in relative prevalence in the post-1980 period, and both visual observations and regression analyses confirmed this expectation. Finally, Hypothesis 4 was refuted, though there appeared to be no temporal effect on politicians/public officials' selection as commencement speakers across the two study periods. While their selection overall remained fairly consistent both before and after

1980, leaders' ties to the business/corporate sector were significant for both periods; contrary to Hypothesis 4, however, the odds of selecting a public official with ties to the business world was actually greater *prior* to 1980 than after.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The preceding analysis supports a fairly compelling story that commencement speaker selection has undergone a fairly significant transformation over the second half of the 20th century. In most instances, the findings corroborate the trends one would expect to find when applying a neoliberal logic to decision-making within higher education, particularly regarding the greater representation of professional/managerial and arts/entertainment/media occupational groups in the post-1980 period. In fulfilling the role of commencement as celebration of the entrance of graduates into the formal marketplace, colleges/universities increasingly select individuals who are held to high esteem within broader society as suitable candidates to preside over these proceedings. Of course, this aspect of the selection process retains much in common with commencement proceedings throughout history. Where such processes differ, I argued earlier, is in how such notions of prestige are defined by society more broadly. The neoliberal era has dramatically transformed both the economic and social logic of contemporary American life, shifting how individuals and institutions view, anticipate, and strive toward "success." As a reflection of these broader ideals, the academy has experienced dramatic transformations in terms of changes to its curricula, its institutional structure, the roles and functions of its professoriate, and – as this paper demonstrates – its application of such ideals to institutional culture and the various traditions utilized to

display this culture to the public. While commencement proceedings represent but a small component of such external displays, they offer a clear, measurable manifestation of the university's attempts to preserve and celebrate this internal institutional logic. In a sense, then, just as commencement proceedings offer a "window" into culture at large, they similarly offer a glimpse into the internal institutional logic that guides the contemporary American college/university.

Two theoretical threads emerge from the preceding discussion and analysis which, it can be argued, are largely responsible for the trends in commencement speaker selection discussed above. First, with the introduction of neoliberal ideology into higher education, one observes a greater emphasis on the maximization of efficiency and a more corporatized organizational structure within the academy. This is perhaps most clearly manifested in the functional shift experienced by faculty as students become "consumers" and educators become "providers" of the private good that is a post-secondary education. Thus, instead of maintaining their former position of prestige within both the institution and society more broadly, educators simply become cogs in an organizational machine – not altogether dissimilar from workers on an assembly line – whose individual efforts are fundamentally transformed to benefit the overarching objectives of the institution. In a sense, the market becomes elevated and the means of entrance into the market (i.e., a college degree) decrease in significance. The findings above corroborate this argument quite clearly, as those occupational groups held to highest esteem by the market (professionals, corporate executives, and other managerial-level employees) experience a significant increase in representation in the post-1980 period, whereas those formerly

prestigious groups (professors, educators, and scientific researchers) experience a precipitous decline in relative prevalence among commencement speakers.

Second, and related, neoliberal transformations within the political and economic spheres have undermined the traditional sources of funding to institutions of higher learning, forcing individual colleges/universities to increasingly take financial matters into their own hands. In addition to increased costs of attendance (i.e., placing a greater financial burden on the students themselves), departmental funding has also been effectively "privatized", pushing scholars to pursue external avenues of funding for their research projects rather than relying on funding from within the institution. More importantly, at an institutional level, administrators have become increasingly reliant on external revenue streams from alumni and other wealthy benefactors (both individuals and corporations). Thus, to attract these limited resources, the school must take steps to effectively market itself to the broader society as an institution deserving of external support. College athletics often occupy a central role in such marketing campaigns, though one could also argue that the publicity generated by enlisting a notable figure to preside over commencement proceedings serves a similar institutional end. Following this logic, then, the rather considerable increase in commencement speakers who are entertainment figures and/or media personalities – individuals who often carry a significant amount of celebrity and cultural cachet – makes sense as an outflow of increased efforts to market the institution to outside investors. In short, then, it is clear that the types of individuals selected as commencement speakers has changed dramatically over the course of the past 50 years. While a number of major, transformative cultural events have occurred within that span, the rise of neoliberal

principles within the governance of the academy and within society more broadly offers a solid explanation for most, if not all, of the trends discussed above.

As always, however, the present study is not without limitations. Among these, there remain some concerns about the representativeness of the data compiled, distinctions in selection processes among institutions, and, finally, whether disparate findings may emerge from a closer look at potential "turning points" before or after 1980. First, the data was collected primarily through convenience sampling, as comprehensive institutional data regarding commencement speaker selection over the time period being analyzed proved relatively difficult to obtain. As a result, there are a relatively small number of public institutions (roughly 27% of sample), an overrepresentation of liberal arts institutions (50% of sample), and an underrepresentation of both historically black colleges/university (HBCUs) (7.69%) and religious/evangelical institutions (3.85%). Of these concerns, the first two are particularly critical. Public institutions are considerably more affected by shifts in governmental funding than private colleges/universities, whereas liberal arts colleges/universities may be perhaps the most insulated from such external forces. Together, then, a skewed representation of either type of institutions may unduly impact the findings presented above. Certainly, only a few occupational categories demonstrated a significant difference across the public/private divide (and none with regard to a college's liberal arts focus), indicating that the findings above may remain valid regardless of the relative representation of either type of institution. However, the possibility remains that a more representative sample may demonstrate a somewhat different picture.

Second, it is certainly possible that commencement speaker selection proceedings may differ considerably from one institution to the next. As such, as mentioned above, one must necessarily rely on the *products* of such processes (i.e., characteristics of the speakers selected) as sufficient explanation of the institutional (and, perhaps, individual) logic(s) that went into each decision. In a similar vein, outside research (such as the present study) is often unable to gain access to certain aspects of the selection process, such as the possibility of monetary remuneration for prospective speakers or the presence of institutional constraints (financial or otherwise) that may steer the decision-making process. In many ways, however, such matters are relatively unavoidable consequences of the nature of quantitative research, though such arenas offer relatively fertile ground for future qualitative analysis. Further unpacking the precise mechanisms that enter into the decision-making process with regard to commencement speaker selection, whether through a comparative-case study or some other means, may provide greater insight into the exact role of neoliberalism in affecting such processes.

Finally, while the evidence is fairly compelling in proving a distinct difference in the orientation of college/university administrators before and after 1980 in terms of their selection of commencement speakers, the actual trajectories of the occupational groups under analysis do not necessarily provide a clean interpretation of the role of the neoliberal transformation on commencement speaker selection. Thus, one must ask the question: Is 1980 the true "turning point" in these processes? The findings for each occupational group feature some concerns and/or considerations regarding this point. For professional/managerial occupations, for instance, one easily observes a decline in relative prevalence as commencement speakers prior to 1980 and a steadily increasing

proportion in the years that followed. However, looking more closely at the trajectory of this occupation across *all* years, one sees that the apparent "shift" in trajectory occurred not in 1980 but about a decade prior. Similarly, the decline in prevalence of educators and researchers also began prior to 1980, seemingly at some point between the years 1965-1974. Another finding of note in this regard concerns the trajectories of artists, entertainers, and media personalities. The upward trend in relative prevalence is quite apparent, but it appears to increase steadily across the entire study period, with little to no alteration in trajectory in or around 1980.

What, then, do these observations entail for the broader argument? I argue that their effect is minimal, though they do offer some interesting avenues for future research regarding the shifting dynamics surrounding commencement speaker selection. At its core, a fundamental objective of this paper has been to trace changes in commencement speaker selection across the second half of the 20th century, and while the rise of neoliberalism as a central structural and ideological principle within both higher education and society more broadly during that period has produced dramatic changes to institutional functioning at all levels, this does not necessarily preclude alternative explanations for changes in speaker selection. For instance, it is possible that commencement speaker selection is a more "culturally-bounded" exercise than the arguments in this paper present, indicating that apparent changes in relative prevalence of certain occupational categories may hinge more greatly on other transformations *within* the institution of higher education or may be relatively immune to the governing structure and/or orientation of the academy, however much it may change.

Alternatively, then, the reflection theory perspective within cultural sociology (particularly that of the Frankfurt School) may shed some light on the role that cultural transformations outside of neoliberalism impact speaker selection. In other words, on the one hand, speakers may reflect a certain "zeitgeist" – those obsessions, preoccupations and values that animate citizens at a particular moment in time. On the other hand, speaker selection may simply be the result of more nuanced "institutional context," namely, the desire to align the speaker choice with the core values and mission of the university. That is, universities pick speakers that embrace their own ideals and values (even if those values are not perfectly aligned with the broader society). Combined with more advanced time-series regression analytical techniques (which effectively constitute a more quantifiably rigid variation on the visual analysis utilized in the present study) and a more invasive investigation of the unique mission of each college/university within the sample, such a framework may indeed provide a more complex understanding of the cultural transformations occurring within higher education.

In conclusion, it is quite clear that neoliberalism has had a considerable impact on the overarching functions, structures, and decision-making processes of higher education and has dramatically changed the ways in which we approach education within contemporary American society. As the above discussion(s) and analyses demonstrate, few institutions have escaped the broader trend toward neoliberal economic orientations, though these processes' impact on the academy is particularly profound. Higher education within the United States has made a marked transformation toward a more rational economic paradigm geared toward greater efficiency in all facets of its operation, from the classroom to the board room. Furthermore, the structural alterations which have

occurred have also effected considerable change in academic institutional culture, changing the decision-making calculus regarding how best to educate students, how to generate new revenues and maximize current streams of funding, and, as this study demonstrates, even tailoring university rituals and traditions (i.e., commencement proceedings) toward a more rational-economic function.

More broadly, the findings of this study demonstrate that the economic transformations of the past four decades have altered not only the organizational functioning of higher education but have also transcended their economic bounds and ingrained their underlying logic in all facets of campus life (and well beyond). The above discussions illustrate the magnitude of this "invasion" of the American psyche, particularly the rise of "homo economicus" and the centrality of rational economic action in all social arenas, from individual relationships to institutional decision-making. Thus, barring a complete upheaval of the socioeconomic status quo, it is perhaps not too far-fetched to anticipate even more dramatic interventions of neoliberal ideology into institutional operations and, by extension, individual lives.

APPENDIX A

Appendix A: Schools Responding with Data and Selected Institutional Characteristics

School Name	*State*	*Region*	*Setting*	*Public/ Private*	*Carnegie (1973)*	*HBCU*	*Single-Sex*	*Religious/ Evangelical*	*Enrollment (1970)*	*Year Founded*
Asbury College/University	Kentucky	South	Suburban	Private	Liberal Arts	No	No	No	1,044	1890
Buena Vista College/University	Iowa	Midwest	Rural	Private	Liberal Arts	No	No	Yes	948	1891
College of Our Lady of the Elms/Elms College	Massachusetts	Northeast	Suburban	Private	Liberal Arts	No	No	Yes	566	1928
Columbia College	South Carolina	South	Urban	Private	Liberal Arts	No	Yes	Yes	878	1854
Dakota Wesleyan University	South Dakota	Midwest	Rural	Private	Liberal Arts	No	No	Yes	609	1885
Dartmouth University	New Hampshire	Northeast	Rural	Private	Doctoral	No	No	No	3,928	1769
Dickinson College	Pennsylvania	Northeast	Suburban	Private	Liberal Arts	No	No	No	2,797	1783
Duke University	North Carolina	South	Suburban	Private	Research	No	No	Yes	8,061	1838
George Fox College	Oregon	West	Suburban	Private	Liberal Arts	No	No	Yes	471	1891
Georgian Court College	New Jersey	Northeast	Suburban	Private	Liberal Arts	No	No	Yes	727	1908
Hampden-Sydney College	Virginia	South	Rural	Private	Liberal Arts	No	Yes	Yes	682	1775
Harvard University	Massachusetts	Northeast	Urban	Private	Research	No	No	No	18,465	1636
Jacksonville State University	Mississippi	South	Urban	Public	Comprehensive	No	No	No	4,665	1877
John Brown University	Arkansas	South	Rural	Private	Liberal Arts	No	No	Yes	757	1919
Knox College	Illinois	Midwest	Urban	Private	Liberal Arts	No	No	No	1,484	1837
Lee College	Tennessee	South	Urban	Private	Liberal Arts	No	No	Yes	1,110	1918
Loras College	Iowa	Midwest	Urban	Private	Liberal Arts	No	No	Yes	1,586	1839
Loyola College	Maryland	South	Urban	Private	Comprehensive	No	No	Yes	3,029	1852
Loyola University of Los Angeles	California	West	Suburban	Private	Comprehensive	No	No	Yes	3,664	1911
Marquette University	Wisconsin	Midwest	Urban	Private	Doctoral	No	No	Yes	10,678	1881
Mary Baldwin College	Virginia	South	Urban	Private	Liberal Arts	No	No	Yes	778	1842
MIT	Massachusetts	Northeast	Urban	Private	Research	No	No	No	7,557	1861
Notre Dame College	Ohio	Midwest	Suburban	Private	Liberal Arts	No	No	Yes	602	1922
Oglethorpe College	Georgia	South	Suburban	Private	Liberal Arts	No	No	No	1,159	1835
Ohio Wesleyan College	Ohio	Midwest	Suburban	Private	Liberal Arts	No	No	Yes	2,597	1842
Regis College	Massachusetts	Northeast	Suburban	Private	Liberal Arts	No	Yes	Yes	898	1927
Ripon College	Wisconsin	Midwest	Suburban	Private	Liberal Arts	No	Yes	No	1,067	1851
Rosemont College	Pennsylvania	Northeast	Suburban	Private	Liberal Arts	No	Yes	Yes	670	1921
Saint Edward's University	Texas	South	Urban	Private	Liberal Arts	No	No	Yes	1,052	1885
Saint John's College, Main Campus	Maryland	South	Urban	Private	Liberal Arts	No	No	No	328	1696
Saint Norbert College	Wisconsin	Midwest	Suburban	Private	Comprehensive	No	No	Yes	1,673	1898
Scripps College	California	West	Suburban	Private	Liberal Arts	No	Yes	No	541	1926
South Carolina State College	South Carolina	South	Urban	Public	Comprehensive	Yes	No	No	2,148	1896
St. Louis University, Main Campus	Missouri	Midwest	Urban	Private	Doctoral	No	No	Yes	9,383	1818
State University of New York, Genesco	New York	Northeast	Rural	Public	Comprehensive	No	No	No	5,278	1871
Stephens College	Missouri	Midwest	Urban	Private	Liberal Arts	No	Yes	No	2,140	1833
Syracuse University	New York	Northeast	Urban	Private	Research	No	No	No	15,320	1870
Tennessee State University	Tennessee	South	Urban	Public	Comprehensive	Yes	No	No	4,404	1912
Trinity College	Connecticut	Northeast	Urban	Private	Liberal Arts	No	No	No	1,967	1823
University of Connecticut, Main Campus	Connecticut	Northeast	Rural	Public	Research	No	No	No	16,488	1881
University of Detroit	Michigan	Midwest	Urban	Private	Comprehensive	No	No	Yes	9,638	1877
University of Maine, Orono	Maine	Northeast	Rural	Public	Doctoral	No	No	No	10,136	1865
University of Mississippi	Mississippi	South	Urban	Public	Doctoral	No	No	No	7,376	1844
University of Missouri, Columbia	Missouri	Midwest	Urban	Public	Research	No	No	No	22,572	1839
University of New Mexico	New Mexico	West	Urban	Public	Doctoral	No	No	No	18,107	1889
University of Oklahoma, Main Campus	Oklahoma	South	Urban	Public	Research	No	No	No	20,706	1890
University of Pennsylvania	Pennsylvania	Northeast	Urban	Private	Research	No	No	No	19,577	1740
University of South Carolina	South Carolina	South	Urban	Public	Doctoral	No	No	No	14,484	1801
Wellesley College	Massachusetts	Northeast	Suburban	Private	Liberal Arts	No	Yes	No	1,766	1870
West Virginia State University	West Virginia	South	Suburban	Public	Research	Yes	No	No	17,260	1891
Winthrop College	South Carolina	South	Suburban	Public	Comprehensive	No	No	No	3,887	1886
Wisconsin State University, Superior	Wisconsin	Midwest	Urban	Public	Comprehensive	No	No	No	3,268	1893

APPENDIX B

APPENDIX B. Summary Descriptive Characteristics of Colleges/Universities (1955-2003)

	All Schools (N = 52)		*Public Universities (N = 14)*		*Private Universities (N = 38)*	
Variables	*Mean/ Percent*	*S.D.*	*Mean/ Percent*	*S.D.*	*Mean/ Percent*	*S.D.*
Year Founded	1859	58	1874	29	1854	65
Public/Private:						
Public	26.92 %	-	-	-	-	-
Private	73.08 %	-	-	-	-	-
Enrollment in 1970	5,596	6,469	10,770	7,224	3,689	5,049
Region (Census):						
West	7.69 %	-	7.14 %	-	7.89 %	-
Pacific	5.77 %	-	0.00 %	-	7.89 %	-
Mountain	1.92 %	-	7.14 %	-	0.00 % +	-
Midwest	26.92 %	-	14.29 %	-	31.58 %	-
West North Central	9.62 %	-	7.14 %	-	10.53 %	-
East North Central	17.31 %	-	7.14 %	-	21.05 %	-
South	36.54 %	-	57.14 %	-	28.95 % +	-
West South Central	5.77 %	-	7.14 %	-	5.26 %	-
East South Central	9.62 %	-	21.43 %	-	5.26 % +	-
South Atlantic	21.15 %	-	28.57 %	-	18.42 %	-
Northeast	28.85 %	-	21.43 %	-	31.58 %	-
Middle Atlantic	11.54 %	-	7.14 %	-	13.16 %	-
New England	17.31 %	-	14.29 %	-	18.42 %	-
Setting:						
Rural	15.38 %	-	21.43 %	-	13.16 %	-
Suburban	34.62 %	-	14.29 %	-	42.11 % +	-
Urban	50.00 %	-	64.29 %	-	44.74 %	-
Selectivity:						
Most Selective	5.77 %	-	0.00 %	-	13.16 %	-
More Selective	13.46 %	-	35.71 %	-	39.47 %	-
Selective	32.69 %	-	42.86 %	-	28.95 %	-
Less Selective	38.46 %	-	7.14 %	-	15.79 %	-
Least Selective	9.62 %	-	14.29 %	-	2.63 %	-
Carnegie Classification - 1973 :						
Research Universities I/II	17.31 %	-	28.57 %	-	13.16 %	-
Doctoral-Granting Universities I/II	13.46 %	-	28.57 %	-	7.89 % +	-
Comprehensive Universities and Colleges I/II	19.23 %	-	42.86 %	-	10.53 % **	-
Liberal Arts Colleges I/II	50.00 %	-	0.00 %	-	68.42 % ***	-
Special Characteristics:						
Historically Black College/University (1=Yes)	7.69 %	-	21.43 %	-	2.63 % *	-
Non-Coeducational Institution (Single Sex) (1=Yes)	17.31 %	-	14.29 %	-	18.42 %	-
Religious/Evangelical Affiliation (1=Yes)	3.85 %	-	0.00 %	-	5.26 %	-

+ p < .10 * p < .05 ** p < .01 *** p < .001

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