

# “Tuition is Not a Dirty Word”

*Ronald Reagan, the University of California, and the Dismantling of the Tuition-Free Principle*

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## **Introduction**

It was February 12, 1970. William Forbes, a Regent of the University of California (UC), waited patiently as a pint of blood was drawn from the crook of his arm. With a practiced gesture, the nurse withdrew the needle, bandaged Forbes’s arm, and handed him a pin. “Bleed for UC,” it read. Resolutely, he fastened it to the lapel of his suit jacket.

This was no ordinary medical procedure. Forbes had come for a political purpose: to express his opposition to tuition at the University of California. Here on the Los Angeles campus (UCLA), students organized a creative protest against the possibility of tuition at their historically tuition-free university. Rather than line up in the streets, they lined up to donate blood, selling it by the pint and using the funds to publicize anti-tuition arguments.<sup>1</sup> In many ways, however, it was already too late. The “Bleed for UC” campaign was ultimately unsuccessful: only eight days later, the Board of Regents voted in favor of an educational fee, in a symbolic move away from the historical commitment to tuition-free higher education.

The dismantling of the tuition-free principle was a gradual process. Between the 1960s and the present, the principle was chipped away bit by bit. Tuition—in the form we know it—truly began in the 1990s, but the year 1970 marks the moment when the Regents abandoned their commitment to the principle of tuition-free education.<sup>2</sup> In this article, I will

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<sup>1</sup> Dorothy Townsend, “UC Students Avoiding Action Against Tuition,” *Los Angeles Times*, February, 18, 1970.

<sup>2</sup> Tuition will be defined according to the University of California Student Tuition and Fee Policy’s designation of its function: “In addition to funding programs and services supported by Tuition (such as student financial aid and related programs, admissions, registration,

examine how and why the principle was undermined, in the hope that this case study might inform an understanding of the broader shift away from heavily-subsidized public education and towards a tuition-based funding model at the University of California.

For nearly one hundred years, tuition-free higher education had been a defining feature of the University of California system. It had survived two World Wars and the Great Depression, and in 1960 had been reaffirmed in a historical document known as the Master Plan for Higher Education in California.<sup>3</sup> In 1970, however, the Regents cast it aside. The dominant narrative portrays this moment as a reaction to necessity—a pragmatic response to financial conditions. This perspective is insufficient and limiting in that it neglects the role of human agency in driving this decision. In 1970, the Regents renounced the tuition-free principle because the forceful, charismatic figure of Ronald Reagan shaped the conditions necessary to break down old traditions and make tuition plausible.

Newly-elected Governor of California and ex-officio UC Regent, Reagan had both an economic and a cultural motive for undermining the tuition-free principle and for using tuition as an instrument for university reform. In the economic sphere, Reagan was concerned with government spending, believed firmly in tight budgets for public institutions, and felt that university financing was weighing too heavily on California's taxpayers. Portraying himself as the champion of the taxpayer, he vowed to ease this burden. In the cultural sphere, Reagan was appalled by the culture of protest that became dominant on UC campuses in the 1960s. Reagan held a very specific view of a university's function. In his mind, a university was a bastion of tradition, a space for creating objective knowledge, and a training center for molding students into good members of society. In the 1960s, the University of California became famous for the

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administration, libraries, and operation and maintenance of plant), income generated by Tuition may be used for general support of the University's operating budget. Revenue from Tuition may be used to fund all costs related to instruction, including faculty salaries." As will be shown later in the article, this definition differentiates tuition from previous fees, and designates the educational fee as a form of tuition. "Regents Policy 3101: The University of California Student Tuition and Fee Policy," University of California Board of Regents, Approved January 21, 1994, available at <http://regents.universityofcalifornia.edu/governance/policies/3101.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Although, notably, the recommendation of adherence to the tuition-free principle was included in an earlier general agreement that was never actually written into law. It continued to be referenced by Regents as an important promise, however.

opposite: rejecting tradition, honoring subjective knowledge, and challenging old models of good citizenship. As governor, Reagan felt responsible for shaping the university into the conservative institution he envisioned—though whether the UC had ever been such an institution is questionable.

Reagan believed that the tuition-free principle both overburdened state finances and enabled a culture of protest that he found intolerable. Tuition, on the other hand, could present a solution. For one, it would shift the financial burden partially onto the student and away from taxpayers. In addition, it would restrain impulsive student protests by making students more responsible, keeping faculty accountable to the students, and increasing the opportunity cost of protesting. Tuition could act as a mechanism for reconstituting the university as a moral and orderly institution.

As governor, Reagan was well placed to dismantle a principle that he saw as pernicious. With the power to appoint Regents, he could choose new members who shared his views. Through his influence over the state budget, he could apply pressure in crucial areas and compel the Board to seek alternate funding. Poised as the mediator between the taxpayer and the university, he could activate popular indignation against the university, then reference taxpayer resentment to justify underfunding it. Political and financial pressure proved overwhelming. Though many Regents had expressed doubts throughout the month-long decision-making process, a sense of inevitability pervaded the room as the Regents decided that, given insufficient state funds for the university, the tuition-free principle was no longer feasible. UC President Charles Hitch summed up the general feeling when he lamented that the Board had "no other real choice" but to raise fees, "unless we turn our backs on future students."<sup>4</sup> Contrary to this language of inevitability, however, the tuition-free principle did not die a natural death. Rather, it was the victim of a carefully designed and powerfully ideological process driven by Governor Reagan.

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<sup>4</sup> Charles J. Hitch, "President's Statement Concerning Student Charges," January 7, 1970, Box CU-1.4: November 1969-July 1970, Folder 15-16: January 1970, University Archives, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley (hereafter UCA-BL).

The abandonment of the tuition-free principle can be understood as an early element of the neoliberal project. Admittedly, the year 1970 predated the widespread rise of neoliberal doctrine, defined here in Jamie Peck's terms as "a contradictory process of market-like rule," characterized by "deep antipathies to collectivist, planned, and socialized modes of government."<sup>5</sup> Ronald Reagan, however, would be remembered as the champion of neoliberalism: promoter of small government, minimal regulation and taxation, and the rule of market forces. The move towards tuition in 1970 foreshadowed the neoliberal force that Reagan would become.

Reagan was powerful and his influence decisive, but I do not intend to write a Great Man theory of history in these pages. Scottish historian Thomas Carlyle, intellectual father of the Great Man theory, proposed that history is shaped by the actions of "great men."<sup>6</sup> In this case, his words ring true, but British philosopher Herbert Spencer's critique presents an important caveat. Spencer asserted that great men are themselves products of the society they live in: "Before he can re-make his society," Spencer argued, "his society must make him."<sup>7</sup> Reagan, also, was a societal creation. Reagan's ideas had social traction because California was ready for them. Nevertheless, by wielding both the power of the people who had chosen him as well as the institutionalized authority vested in him as Regent and governor, Reagan the politician, the ideologue, and the cultural critic was able to actively erode a time-honored principle.

This analysis relies on a variety of sources, primarily the Regents' meeting minutes, the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library Archives, and a series of oral histories conducted circa 1984 with various members of the Reagan administration and the state government. Each source is limiting in its own way, and I have attempted to employ them as judiciously as possible. Minutes from Regent meetings were the only source available for exploring the decision-making process, but they are neither comprehensive nor unbiased. Filtered through the language of the note-taker, it was at times challenging to distinguish between the diplomatic phrasings of the minutes and the true sentiments of the speakers. They

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<sup>5</sup> Jamie Peck, *Constructions of Neoliberal Reason* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 16.

<sup>6</sup> Carlyle wrote: "this history of what man has accomplished in this world, is at bottom the History of the Great Men who have worked here." Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* (London, 1895), 1.

<sup>7</sup> Herbert Spencer, *The Study of Sociology* (London, 1892), 35.

were useful for understanding the process, but less so for investigating the motivations. The archives of the Reagan Library proved most useful for discovering the driving forces behind Reagan’s stance on tuition. The sources examined in these archives had, in some way, come into contact with Reagan himself. They therefore best reflected his understanding of the issue and gave insight into his rationale for desiring tuition. In this archive, I hunted less for hard facts and more for driving factors. Finally, the oral interviews provided a window for examining the events of 1970 with the benefit of hindsight. As a reflection on the educational fee decision, this source unearthed Reagan’s motivations as perceived by those who had worked with him and who no longer had a stake in the outcome. These interviews reflected the biases of the speakers and the passage of time, but I found them to be valuable in certain contexts.

The structure of the article is not chronological, but conceptual. I first consider the dominant narrative for understanding the shift away from the tuition-free principle and suggest that this analysis is incomplete. This narrative invokes financial constraints, but I examine the financial “crisis” of 1967 and argue that Reagan was exaggerating fiscal conditions to justify cutting back the university budget. I then examine Reagan’s rationale for underfunding the university: first, that the university was not adhering to its public mission, and therefore did not deserve a generous public subsidy; second, that education was not only a public good but also a private investment, which its funding should reflect; and thirdly, that California taxpayers were outraged with the university and unwilling to continue funding it at the same levels. Here, tuition enters the stage as an instrument for restoring the university to its former glory. Finally, I explore how Reagan accomplished his goal through political and economic pressures. Though the educational fee was minimal, certainly smaller than Reagan had wanted it to be, it was a powerfully symbolic move. It was the triumph of an idea: the victory of Reagan’s belief in the transformative power of tuition over the historical principle of tuition-free education.

### *The Necessity Narrative*

The conventional wisdom on rising tuition tends to portray what I will refer to as the necessity narrative. This narrative encompasses the various financial, economic, political, and social pressures that allegedly drove the

adoption of tuition and suggests that this shift was exclusively, or chiefly, pragmatic. In doing so, it neglects to consider the actors who engineered this transition, seeing them only as static participants in a process beyond their control. This strips the narrative of human agency, portraying the shift to tuition as an impersonal and natural process. It was neither of these things. This section will consider a few of the leading academics in the field and then suggest how the necessity narrative can benefit from a wider consideration of human agency.

In *California: America's High-Stakes Experiment*, Peter Schrag argues that it “was probably beyond the bounds of financial possibility, or maybe even equitable public policy, to maintain the low fees—in some cases no fees—that the Master Plan of 1960 had promised.”<sup>8</sup> Subsidizing tuition largely meant paying for the children of the wealthiest members of society to attend college.<sup>9</sup> These students would then go on to take high-paying jobs, often times much more high-paying than the job of the taxpayer who had supported him or her financially. It was unrealistic to expect this to go on forever. Schrag suggests that the tuition-free model was unsustainable in the long run and that its abandonment was both foreseeable and, perhaps, an equitable policy response. However, he also notes that “what happened in California higher education was never planned or even formally discussed.”<sup>10</sup> Though convinced of the unsustainability of the tuition-free principle, as well as of its potential inequity, Schrag critiques the fact that the move towards tuition was not directed by defined guidelines or intentions.

Former UC President Clark Kerr also critiques the lack of intentionality in this process. In his book, *The Great Transformation in Higher Education*,

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<sup>8</sup> Peter Schrag, *California: America's High-Stakes Experiment* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 110.

<sup>9</sup> In a speech to the Los Angeles Breakfast Club, Reagan contended that the tuition-free financing model bore more heavily on low-income taxpayers in comparison to their ability to take advantage of the free university system: “At present, every student, regardless of whether he or his parents are rich or poor, is given a subsidized scholarship of about \$2,000 a year. That is roughly the cost of a year's schooling at the university. The wealthy benefit from this bonanza at the expense of the poor. 72 percent of the 18-year-olds from families with income over \$14,000 are in colleges but only 12 percent from families with less than \$2,000 annual income. Yet, the taxes for financing the bonanza bear more heavily on the poor than on the rich.” Ronald Reagan, Speech at Los Angeles Breakfast Club, July 26, 1967, Box 873, Ronald Reagan 1980 Campaign Papers, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library (hereafter 80CP-RRPL).

<sup>10</sup> Schrag, *California*, 110.

1960-1980, he situates tuition in a wider trend that prioritized university growth above all else, making university leadership blind to the fact that it had become "a plaything of external events." If it had been more farsighted, he argues, the university "might have been more in charge of its history."<sup>11</sup> Citing increased costs, lack of public confidence, and stagnating growth in operating resources, Kerr counsels that "higher education needs to be less introspectively concerned with itself alone and more alert to its environment."<sup>12</sup> In Kerr's understanding, the university allowed itself to be blown about by the turbulent winds of external events, heedless of its surroundings.

John Douglass, scholar of higher education, takes a less political and more economic approach, arguing that the unplanned progression of tuition trends left universities with no coherent understanding of the most effective way to divide costs among beneficiaries. Douglass takes note of multiple factors, including an intensifying focus on the sciences and increased operating costs. The primary factor, Douglass argues, "has been the corresponding decline in state and local government subsidies," a point which he justifies by noting that "jumps in tuition correlate with economic cycles and fiscal crises within state governments."<sup>13</sup> Increasing tuition was a response to financial downturns, not to a carefully evaluated program examining the efficacy of a tuition-based model. "In essence, states and their public universities have backed into tuition increases without a broader plan or idea about what the proper contribution might be from the state, from students and their families, and from other sources," writes Douglass.<sup>14</sup> Without a plan, there was no way of knowing whether the new tuition model would be better than its predecessor.

Crucially, scholars who adhere to the necessity narrative represent the tuition trend as a spontaneous process: unplanned and undirected. While this may be true over the time span between 1970 and the present, this article aims to show that it may not have been true at particular moments in time when funding decisions were made. The intention here is not to

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<sup>11</sup> Clark Kerr, *The Great Transformation in Higher Education, 1960-1980* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 368.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 133.

<sup>13</sup> John Aubrey Douglass, *The Conditions for Admission: Access, Equity, and the Social Contract of Public Universities* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007), 247.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

refute the necessity narrative, but to build upon it and to suggest that it did not apply to the University of California in 1970.

There is no doubt that the challenges facing the UC were daunting, and tuition seemed to present a solution. Declining state and public support left the university with very little foundation. However, rather than falling into the trap of the necessity narrative—asserting simply that the funds were not there, that the taxpayers did not want to invest, and that this was an element of a quasi-natural process—I ask why public support declined and why the state gave increasingly less money. While the Regents were responding to conditions that necessitated an alternate source of funding, the conditions themselves were not spontaneous. Instead, they were carefully orchestrated by the governor, ultimately backing the Regents into a decision that they had opposed from the beginning. The necessity narrative is not wrong, but it is incomplete, and to some extent, fatalistic.

### ***Background: The Tuition-Free Principle***

In its original charter, the university pledged that higher education would be provided free-of-charge to any Californian student who wanted to learn. The Organic Act of 1868 stipulated that “as soon as the income of the University shall permit, admission and tuition shall be free to all residents of the State,” and, excluding a short three-month period, this principle held for nearly a century from the university’s inception.<sup>15</sup> Tuition-free higher education was a legacy of the university’s public mission. Prominent California educator Gustavus Schulte proudly declared that “Of all the high institutions of learning, both in the new and old world, the State University of California is the only one which, responsive to the call of the people, through the liberality of its Board of Regents, has been created free—absolutely free.”<sup>16</sup>

The principle of tuition-free higher education arose out of the egalitarian, populist mission envisioned by the founders of the public university movement. This mission was characterized by what historian Douglass has referred to as the “social contract” of public universities,

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<sup>15</sup> During the first three months of the university’s existence, a minimal tuition was charged, but within three months it had been abolished. See California Assembly Bill No. 583 (“Organic Act”), March 5, 1868, available at <http://vm136.lib.berkeley.edu/BANC/CalHistory/charter.html>.

<sup>16</sup> Quoted in John Aubrey Douglass, *The California Idea and American Higher Education: 1850 to the 1960 Master Plan* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), 48.

aiming to “proactively mitigate barriers to access” as part of a project to provide education for every eligible citizen of the state. Public funding of higher education institutions aimed to socially engineer a more progressive, productive, and prosperous society by equipping individuals with free educational opportunities.<sup>17</sup>

Rather than being a public gift to the individual, the tuition subsidy was seen as a social investment in the state’s future. The UC was intended to serve the state; individual benefits were subordinate to those of society. In the words of Daniel Gilman, second president of the University, the UC was to “perform the service of the State in the education of the young,” since it “is of the people and for the people—not in any low or unworthy sense, but in the highest and noblest relation to their intellectual and moral well-being.”<sup>18</sup> By designing the institution in this way, the founders of the university primarily envisioned that its students would serve the advantage of the state. Several years later, UC President Benjamin Wheeler proclaimed similar intentions. In his 1899 inauguration address, he described the “supreme purpose of the University” as the mission “to provide living beings for the service of society—good citizens for the State.”<sup>19</sup> Higher education, like primary and secondary education, was seen as a public good necessary for a functioning democratic society.

Commitment to tuition-free education was espoused consistently in university and state rhetoric, perhaps most notably in the 1960 Master Plan.<sup>20</sup> The Master Plan united the three branches of California’s university system into a cohesive whole, assigning each a particular role. As the culmination of years of planning and organizing higher education, the Master Plan became the hallmark of California’s unique education model, and its rhetoric shaped the university’s conception of itself for many years, arguably even to the present day. The Master Plan famously recommended that the governing boards of California higher education

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<sup>17</sup> Douglass, *The California Idea and American Higher Education*, 6-8.

<sup>18</sup> Daniel C. Gilman, “The Building of the University, an Inaugural Address Delivered at Oakland,” November 7, 1872, available at <http://bancroft.berkeley.edu/CalHistory/inaugural.gilman.html>.

<sup>19</sup> Benjamin Ide Wheeler, “The Inauguration of Benjamin Ide Wheeler as President of the University,” 1899, available at <http://bancroft.berkeley.edu/CalHistory/inaugural.wheeler.html>.

<sup>20</sup> The tuition-free principle was never codified into law, and the university’s governing Board of Regents retained the legal right to charge tuition at any time.

reaffirm “the long established principle that state colleges and the University of California shall be tuition free to all residents.”<sup>21</sup> Yet, exactly ten years later, the tuition-free principle would be undermined with the imposition of an educational fee, the first fee to be charged for instruction. The educational fee was tuition in all but name, steadily rising throughout the twentieth century and skyrocketing in the beginning of the twenty-first. Eventually, in 2010, the Regents officially acknowledged that the educational fee constituted a tuition, and renamed it accordingly.

### ***Choosing a Moment: Why the 1970 Educational Fee was Distinct***

The educational fee was the true beginning of tuition, since, excluding the initial three months after the UC's inception, it was the first time that students would be asked to contribute to the costs of instruction. This understanding of the fee is complicated by the fact that, for the first few years, it was actually spent on capital outlay rather than education, which is to say that it was earmarked for expenditure on buildings. However, it clearly represented tuition in that the intention behind the fee was distinctly different from fees that had preceded it.

Before 1970, attending the University of California had by no means been free. Cost of living, the opportunity cost of foregone income, and textbook prices were augmented by an incidental fee, which had been instituted in 1921 and had reached \$300 by 1970. An argument could be made that tuition, in the form of the incidental fee, had thus begun much earlier than 1970. Regent Edward Carter certainly felt this way, brushing aside “the philosophical question” of whether or not to charge tuition, since “In my judgement [*sic*] we already have tuition—by whatever name.”<sup>22</sup> However, the Board members who first implemented the incidental fee were careful to introduce a distinction between this fee and what might be termed tuition. According to the General Catalogue, the incidental fee covered “expenses of students other than the cost of their

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<sup>21</sup> Master Plan Survey Team, *A Master Plan for Higher Education in California: From 1960-1975* (Sacramento: California State Department of Education, 1960), 174, available at <http://www.ucop.edu/acadinit/mastplan/MasterPlan1960.pdf>.

<sup>22</sup> Regents Meeting Minutes, February 19, 1970, Box CU-1.4, Folder 19-20: February 1970, UCA-BL.

instruction," such as maintenance of cafeterias, libraries, and gyms.<sup>23</sup> Defining the incidental fee in this way indicated an understanding of tuition as a charge for cost of instruction. The incidental fee therefore "cannot properly be regarded as tuition," wrote the University Comptroller in a memo recommending the policy.<sup>24</sup> In 1953, over thirty years later, the Committee on Finance of the Board of Regents affirmed that the fee "should not be considered as a revenue producing instrument and it should also not be assessed on the theory that a student should pay a part of the cost of his education."<sup>25</sup> Levied for particular services unrelated to instruction, the incidental fee furthermore rejected the principle that students should contribute to education costs. These characteristics distinguished it from the 1970 educational fee.

The incidental fee did not nullify the tuition-free principle, or so the Regents claimed. When voting for the educational fee, though, the Regents were fully aware that this move would be regarded as a break from tradition. Regent John Canaday "was reluctant to accept the principle of tuition embodied in the...motion," while State Senator Albert Rodda urged against "abandonment of the principle of free higher education."<sup>26</sup> Regent William Roth expressed concern that the new fee "would be abrogating [the Board's] traditional policy of tuition-free higher education."<sup>27</sup> The similar apprehensions presented by various members of the Board indicate that the educational fee was not simply the extension of an existing tuition-based policy. Though the incidental fee had incorporated some tuition-like elements, its purposeful delineation as pertaining to costs other than instruction implied a continued adherence to the principle of tuition-free education. Members of the Board of Regents and participants in the audience recognized the educational fee as something different: a shift away from the tuition-free model.

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<sup>23</sup> "History of Incidental Fee," October 1964, Box GO 168, Governor's Office Files: 1967-1975, Series XII: Research Files (Molly Sturgis Tuthill), 1967-1980, RRPL (hereafter GOF67-75-SXII-RRPL).

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Regents Meeting Minutes, February 19, 1970.

<sup>27</sup> Regents Meeting Minutes, November 20, 1969, Box CU-1.4, Folder 20-21: November 1969, UCA-BL.

Unlike the incidental fee, the educational fee was not restricted to non-instructional costs. Nor was it explicitly differentiated from the concept of tuition. At the 1970 meeting, Regents were aware that this moment was different from past tensions over student fees. By discussing the educational fee as a move away from tradition, as “abandonment” and “abrogation” of the tuition-free principle, the Regents and associated participants made it clear that 1970 marked a critical turning point in the philosophy and practice of higher education finance.

### *Challenging the Tuition-Free Principle*

By the time Reagan assumed office, attitudes towards the University of California were already shifting. The statutory body established to coordinate higher education in California was questioning the validity of considering education as a public good. Taxpayer support was declining in response to the UC's culture of protest. Reagan was elected in part because he tapped into these discontents and shifting perspectives, incorporated the language into his political platforms, and made this discourse the basis for his tuition proposal. Though dissatisfaction with the university and shifting attitudes towards public education made conditions conducive to a tuition proposal, it was not until Reagan came onto the scene that the possibility of tuition became a reality.

From 1868 to 1970, the tuition-free principle had been seriously threatened only twice. Each time, the philosophical commitment to free education outweighed other considerations. In the first three months of the university's existence, a minimal tuition was charged, but this fee was quickly abolished in deference to the tuition-free model recommended in the Organic Act. In 1895, the Regents passed a temporary fee of \$10, but the tuition charge was immediately overturned by the governor.<sup>28</sup> The 1921 incidental fee, however, was incrementally increased over the years, reaching \$50 in 1957, \$75 in 1962, and \$110 in 1964. Gradually raising the incidental fee offered an outlet for deferring debates about tuition. It was not until the 1960s that tuition reemerged as a serious consideration.

It is perhaps unsurprising that the issue of tuition reared its head in this decade. The 1960s were a particularly chaotic time in the university's

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<sup>28</sup> Willard B. Spalding et al., *An Evaluation of the Tuition-Free Principle in California Public Higher Education* (Sacramento, CA: Coordinating Council for Higher Education, May 1965), 8.

history. Beginning in the fall of 1964, the Free Speech Movement tore apart the Berkeley campus, radicalizing students against Clark Kerr’s administration. Students occupied buildings and held enormous rallies. A mass arrest put over 800 students behind bars. Controversy raged about politicized classes, such as a series of lectures taught by Black Panther leader and political activist Eldridge Cleaver. Berkeley was not the only incendiary campus, however. The appointment of avowed communist Herbert Marcuse at UC San Diego (UCSD) proved extremely divisive. In response to the 1970 Kent State shootings of anti-war protestors, UCLA students staged a massive demonstration, breaking into buildings and provoking a state of emergency. At UC Santa Barbara (UCSB), protesting students set a Bank of America branch on fire. As radical elements of the campuses became more pronounced, the university’s reputation as the great Californian institution became tarnished. Clark Kerr noted that “many citizens resented what they considered misuse of the campuses at their expense as taxpayers.”<sup>29</sup> In this context, arguments in favor of tuition began to gain traction.

At the same time, the language of the university’s social contract and public mission was being undermined by rhetorical shifts towards more market-based language. The 1960 Master Plan had firmly upheld the tuition-free principle, but the ideas undergirding this conviction were already beginning to erode. Higher education, once envisioned as a public good necessary for a flourishing democracy, was increasingly seen as an investment undertaken jointly by states and individuals to reap financial rewards.

This perspective is epitomized in the language of the Coordinating Council for Higher Education, a fifteen-member organization established under the Master Plan, representing public and private higher education institutions as well as the general public and charged with monitoring the implementation of the plan. In 1965, the Council published *An Evaluation of the Tuition-Free Principle in California Public Higher Education*, examining the effectiveness of the tuition-free policy: had it achieved its mission of providing economic benefits to the state, training manpower, and increasing access? The report toyed with the idea of considering higher education as a private investment rather than a public good. Weighing

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<sup>29</sup> Kerr, *The Great Transformation in Higher Education*, 132.

individual benefits, such as the “enduring consumer benefits of education,” against social benefits, it found that both parties benefited.<sup>30</sup> For society, the costs of education “can be considered a financial investment that has produced a substantial addition to national income,” and the costs for the student “have been handsomely reimbursed in future lifetime earnings.”<sup>31</sup> Under such rhetoric, the student had become a consumer and the university quantifiable purely by its economic contributions.

The philosophy of the social contract and public mission of the university came under serious pressure, faced with this new language of financial investment and consumer benefits. The notion that providing education free-of-charge would have social benefits and allow for more egalitarian access to the institution was no longer enough. Now, the principle was subjected to rigorous analysis, as policy-makers became concerned with proving that it could be upheld under the doctrine of efficiency. An alternative language, setting individual before public benefit, was now made available to those who sought to undermine the tuition-free principle. In 1968 and 1969, two legislative challenges to the tuition-free principle used this logic to advance their arguments. The Monagan Plan proposed “requiring those who benefit to shoulder an increased cost burden” of education expenses.<sup>32</sup> The Collier Plan suggested that students “Learn, Earn, and Pay.”<sup>33</sup>

The university was thus being attacked from all sides. The legislature picked up market language to criticize the university’s tuition-free policy on efficiency grounds. The public threatened to withdraw its subsidy in response to radicalization on campus. To make matters worse, the first major campaign of Reagan’s governorship was to cut state spending in response to what he envisioned as a crippling budget deficit.

In a 1968 graduation address, Vice Chancellor William Boyd deplored the loss of the university’s golden years:

I suspect that the most noticeable change of the past four years has been in the hearts of people. Berkeley was once the crown jewel of California, a

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<sup>30</sup> Spalding et al., *An Evaluation of the Tuition-Free Principle*, 17.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> Robert Monagan, “Graduated Student Charges: An Equitable Plan for Raising Revenue for Improved Support of Higher Education Based on Ability to Pay,” CA Assembly Bill No. 468, introduced February 12, 1969.

<sup>33</sup> Tom Goff, “Reagan Favors ‘Learn, Earn’ Tuition Package,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 16, 1969.

source of affection and pride for its state. Year after year the legislature gave what was asked for its support until finally it produced one of the world’s finest universities. Now our very name is a shorthand for trouble, our budgets are inadequate, our lagging salary schedules make faculty recruitment ever more difficult, and the public holds us in varying degrees of distrust or disgust.<sup>34</sup>

The university’s newly gained reputation as a hotbed of trouble had made it a contentious issue in the legislature, and a sore spot with California taxpayers. Funding the university became a political issue. In the past, Boyd indicates, the university received funding commensurate with its needs. By the late ‘60s, however, the gap between the Regents’ budget request and the actual state allocation was widening. In 1967, the Regents requested a \$264 million operating budget, and received only \$252 million. In 1968, they requested \$311 million and received \$276.5 million.<sup>35</sup> Declining support from the state placed pressure on the Regents to find alternative funding models.

### ***Put to a Vote: The Educational Fee of 1970***

In January 1967, William French Smith, a representative of Reagan, brought the subject of tuition before a reluctant Board of Regents. Smith proposed a budget that would provide 20% less funding for the university than it had received the year before, even though enrollments were expected to increase by 15%. To compensate for the decreased funds, he suggested a \$400 tuition fee.<sup>36</sup> After months of discussion, Governor Reagan proposed in August of that year that the Board of Regents “adopt tuition as a policy of the University of California.” Tabling a motion to uphold the tuition-free principle, the Board considered Reagan’s three-pronged approach, whereby the Regents would first decide on the principle of whether to charge tuition, then on the size of the charge, and finally on how it would be used.<sup>37</sup> Though the Regents sanctioned a \$33

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<sup>34</sup> Address by William B. Boyd at Baccalaureate service for graduating seniors, GOF67-75-SXII-RRPL.

<sup>35</sup> “UC Regents Ask Legislature to Restore Reagan Budget Cuts,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 13, 1968.

<sup>36</sup> Minutes from Special Meeting of the Regents, January 9, 1967, Box January–December 1967, Folder 9: January 1967, UCA-BL.

<sup>37</sup> Regents Meeting Minutes, August 30-31, 1967, Box 1967, Folder 30-31: August 1967, UCA-BL.

registration fee to fund student financial aid, the motion for tuition was soundly defeated by a vote of 14 to 7, with two Regents abstaining.<sup>38</sup>

Three years later, the Board's response to a similar motion was surprisingly different. In 1970, the Regents voted overwhelmingly *in favor* of the \$150 annual educational fee: the motion passed 16 to 6, with one abstention. What changed from 1967 to 1970 to make tuition more palatable? In the specific context of the Board, the answer includes a change in membership: ten members left the Board and nine new members joined. Of those who left, six voted against tuition, only two for it, and two abstained. Of those who joined, all but one voted for tuition. Five of Pat Brown's seven appointees voted against tuition, and all five of Reagan's appointees voted for it.

The makeup of the Board was not the only change between the 1967 and the 1970 vote. The \$276 million funding for the 1968-69 academic year was a figure that UC President Charles Hitch decried as "too low to support essential programs of the university."<sup>39</sup> Student financial aid and capital outlay funding were particularly hard-hit between 1967 and 1970. State support for student financial aid dropped from \$172,000 in 1967-68 to only \$80,000 in 1969-70.<sup>40</sup> In 1969-70, the university requested \$97.8 million for capital outlay expenditures, but received only \$37.4 million.<sup>41</sup> Deferred maintenance was accumulating to a backlog of \$5.3 million by 1969.<sup>42</sup>

The state was not actually *defunding* the university. Throughout the 1960s, expenditure on higher education was increasing in nominal terms and, as a percentage of California's General Fund, remained remarkably stable.<sup>43</sup> However, the university was facing starkly different budgetary needs than in the past. Enrollments grew from nearly 15,000 in 1953 to almost 27,000 in 1964.<sup>44</sup> In addition, costs of higher education were rising.

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> "UC President Hitch Asks Citizens of California," *San Jose Mercury*, July 19, 1968.

<sup>40</sup> "Analysis of Tuition Alternatives," Report, Box CU-1.4, Folder 20-21, UCA-BL.

<sup>41</sup> Floyd Norris, "Conservatives Push Tuition," *New University*, August 24, 1969.

<sup>42</sup> Committee on Finance Meeting, January 16, 1970, Box CU-1.4, Folder 15-16, UCA-BL.

<sup>43</sup> California Postsecondary Education Commission (CPEC), *Fiscal Profiles 2010: The Seventeenth in a Series of Factbooks about the Financing of California Higher Education* (Sacramento: CPEC, December 2010), 22, available at <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED516151.pdf>.

<sup>44</sup> Neil J. Smelser, *Reflections on the University of California: From the Free Speech Movement to the Global University* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 59.

Clark Kerr reflected that the "cost of higher education, as another negative factor, rose from 1 to 2.5 percent of the GNP [gross national product] in the 1960's."<sup>45</sup> Faced with ballooning enrollments and increased educational costs, the minimal increases in state funding were being stretched to cover a wider range of needs.

State funding for the university was stagnating at the same time that the UC was seeking to serve more students than ever before, at a higher cost per student. It was in this fiscal context that attacks on the tuition-free principle were gaining ground. From this vantage point, it is understandable that tuition emerged as one solution to the particular conditions of the late 1960s and tempting to suggest that this solution was the only one. This perspective is limiting and insufficient because it neglects the role of human agency, particularly the role of Governor Reagan, in creating the financial conditions under which the university had to reexamine its funding model. Although the UC was already facing daunting challenges when Reagan entered the governorship, it was not until his ascendancy that these began to be reflected in and aggravated by the university's budget allocations.

### ***Financial "Crisis" or Intentional Divestment?***

The necessity narrative claims that tuition was a pragmatic response to declining state support. However, it assumes that state support declined exogenously, that is, as a result of factors that had nothing to do with the university. The evidence suggests that this was not the case. Instead, Governor Reagan created budgetary restrictions for the university by exaggerating the state financial "crisis" and personally limiting the amount of funds that the UC would receive.

By the mid-1960s, the UC was already facing increased enrollments and higher costs per student. Beginning in 1967, it also encountered tighter budget allocations from the state. A fierce believer in moderate government spending, Reagan set out in 1967 to balance California's budget, asserting that the state found itself in "an unprecedented fiscal crisis."<sup>46</sup> Nearly every branch of state government saw its funding decline,

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<sup>45</sup> Kerr, *The Great Transformation in Higher Education*, 132.

<sup>46</sup> Lawrence E. Davies, "Reagan's Budget 'Crisis'—Real or Not?" *New York Times*, February 19, 1967.

and higher education was no exception. Economies would have to be made, Reagan pronounced, suggesting that some government services were “just goodies dreamed up for our supposed betterment.”<sup>47</sup> These had to go.

During Pat Brown’s governorship, the state was spending \$1 million more than its revenue on a daily basis.<sup>48</sup> In order to meet its expenses, California was using tax revenues from 15 months to fund 12 months’ worth of spending. To make matters worse, the deficit was already \$63 million. In his inaugural speech, Reagan tempered these numbers with the following analogy:

Our fiscal situation has a sorry similarity to the situation of a jetliner out over the North Atlantic, Paris bound. The pilot announced he had news—some good, some bad—and he would give the bad news first. They had lost radio contact; their compass and altimeter were not working; they didn’t know their altitude, direction or where they were headed. Then he gave the good news—they had a 100-mile-an-hour tailwind and they were ahead of schedule.<sup>49</sup>

Reagan promised to resolve California’s financial problem. The time had come to “squeeze and cut and trim until we reduce the cost of government,” he declared, and vowed to include every governmental department in the austerity measures.<sup>50</sup>

Reagan stood by his commitment. In *The Report to Californians*, the Reagan administration proudly declared the “largest cut ever made in a state budget:” a reduction of \$127 million in 1967-68, including \$43.5 million that Reagan personally penciled out of the Legislature’s final budget.<sup>51</sup> With regard to austerity at the university, Reagan emphasized that there was simply “no way we could exempt them from the belt tightening that is necessary.” Higher education would have to bear its share of the burden. “The problem, briefly, is finances,” Reagan affirmed.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Reagan, “Inaugural Address,” January 5, 1967, available at <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/govspeech/01051967a.htm>.

<sup>48</sup> “Report to Californians: The First Eight Months of the Reagan Administration,” Box 873, 80CP-RRPL.

<sup>49</sup> Reagan, “Inaugural Address,” January 5, 1967.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> “Report to Californians: The First Eight Months of the Reagan Administration.”

<sup>52</sup> Reagan, “Statement of Governor Ronald Reagan on Tuition,” January 17, 1967, available at <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/govspeech/01171967a.htm>.

There were many, however, who disputed the severity of the proclaimed crisis. Students and faculty of the university denounced the "crisis" as contrived. In a November 1969 position paper on tuition by the Associated Students of the University of California (ASUC), students declared: "It is difficult for us, as students, to believe that this crisis is not a fiction when the State can 'discover' budget surpluses and has been able to give tax rebates and apparently, if the news is to be believed, anticipates giving more of these rebates in the current year."<sup>53</sup> The crisis, the students alleged, was a cover for providing tax breaks to select groups. At a Sacramento rally, a philosophy professor called out the governor directly, asking "whether there was 'a real crisis, or a manufactured crisis.'"<sup>54</sup> Professor T. L. Allen, the chairman of the University Committee on Education Policy of the Academic Senate, asserted: "It should be made quite clear that there is no financial or economic reason for the imposition of tuition charges."<sup>55</sup> Allen believed the push for tuition to be motivated by ideology, not pragmatism.

Voices outside of the university supported these accusations. Speaker of the California State Assembly Jesse Unruh accused Reagan of a "complete distortion of the fiscal facts of life," citing Democratic studies that indicated the state would end the year with a budget surplus of \$115 million. While Reagan was making cuts to the university's budget, he was unwilling to decrease spending for county fairs, in what Unruh denounced as "a bad case of an inverted sense of values."<sup>56</sup> For Unruh, the budget problems were a value judgment, not a response to necessity. In addition, Alan Post, legislative budget analyst since Earl Warren's administration, criticized Reagan's concern with balancing the deficit. In a press conference with Governor Reagan, a journalist mentioned to Reagan:

Governor, A. Alan Post in his analysis of the budget apparently disagrees with yours considerably. He sees no need for any crucial delay in the spending programs...What about Mr. Post's accusation that this is not the

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<sup>53</sup> "Position Paper on Tuition," November 1969, Box CU-1.4, Folder 20-21, UCA-BL.

<sup>54</sup> Davies, "Reagan's Budget 'Crisis' — Real or Not?"

<sup>55</sup> "Statement Presented by Professor T.L. Allen, Chairman, University Committee on Education Policy of the Academic Senate, to the Regents," November 21, 1969, Box CU-1.4, Folder 20-21, UCA-BL.

<sup>56</sup> Tom Goff, "Unruh Accuses Reagan of Using 'Half-Truths' in UC Budget Row," *Los Angeles Times*, July 18, 1969.

time to cut back, as he put it, the investment in education in California youths?<sup>57</sup>

Even budget analyst Alan Post, who had served under Democratic and Republican governors alike, and who had no particular stake in how the university was to be funded, took issue with Reagan's spending policy.

The financial crisis rhetoric implied fiscal conditions so severe that necessity required cutting back drastically. However, Reagan was by far the most adamant about slashing budgets, more so than the Legislature responsible for state finances. Significant portions of the cuts came directly from the governor's office as line-item vetoes to the budget passed by the Legislature. In 1969, Reagan personally vetoed \$9.6 million of the Legislature's budget for the UC.<sup>58</sup> In an article for *Times Education*, William Trombley noted that this same pattern had held true for many years after the deficit problems of 1966. Each year, "Reagan has trimmed the regents' budget request and then has held firm in the face of legislative efforts to restore some of the cuts."<sup>59</sup> Reagan's personal vetoing of portions of the UC budget suggests that he was ideologically committed to paring the university budget as much as possible. In addition, though by 1968 Reagan was asserting that California's budgetary problems were largely resolved, Trombley claimed that "As far as the University of California is concerned the fiscal crisis has lasted not one year but six."<sup>60</sup> According to Trombley, the state fiscal situation of 1967-68 did not explain the six years of austerity at the University of California.

Financial crisis rhetoric invoked a state of emergency, with Reagan as the far-sighted reformer, come to save the state from its own mismanagement. If the "crisis" had more to do with Reagan's political ideology of minimal state spending, could it have been an overreaction to the fiscal facts? The protests of everyone from the students to the legislative budget analyst suggest that this might be the case. The legacy of underfunding the UC from 1967 through 1973 tells a similar tale, but also indicates a differential treatment of the university, one not arising

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<sup>57</sup> "Press Conference of Governor Ronald Reagan, Reported by Alex. C. Kaempfer," February 28, 1967, available at [http://chronicle.com/items/biz/pdf/Reagan\\_press\\_conference\\_02-28-1967.pdf](http://chronicle.com/items/biz/pdf/Reagan_press_conference_02-28-1967.pdf).

<sup>58</sup> Goff, "Unruh Accuses Reagan of Using 'Half-Truths' in UC Budget Row."

<sup>59</sup> William Trombley, "Student Must Come First, Reagan Says," *Times Education*, January 7, 1973.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

purely from financial conditions. In any case, the tradition invoked by William Boyd, where “Year after year the legislature gave what was asked for its support until finally it produced one of the world’s finest universities,” had been replaced by a political fight over finances, pitting the university against the state.<sup>61</sup> The necessity narrative claims that charging tuition was a response to economic conditions. However, the issues facing the University of California in the late 1960s were predominantly ideological rather than financial. The state’s financial condition was only one element of a broader process of underfunding the university.

### *If Not Financial, What Then?*

While advocating for austerity as a temporary response to necessity, Governor Reagan simultaneously spoke of permanently reorienting university finances, indicating a non-financial motive for austerity. When asked how he would respond if Regents refused to implement tuition that year, Reagan warned that “We’re going to have to review our entire approach to the financing of the university based on the funds that are available if they reject this as a permanent program.”<sup>62</sup> This assertion undermined Reagan’s allegation that the lack of state funding for the university was only a temporary result of the financial crisis. At the same time that he claimed a short-lived state of austerity, the governor implied that a new long-run funding program for the university was unavoidable. Reagan was creating the conditions for a new financing model for the university, not based on pure economic necessity, but on principle. As the *Christian Science Monitor* alleged in late 1967, it seems that the governor was “philosophically committed to students paying their own way.”<sup>63</sup>

In a 1967 letter to the Regents, Reagan himself suggested that his attitude towards the university was motivated by factors unrelated to the financial conditions of the state, noting: “It is ironical that our primary problem for the University is no longer a problem of the state’s financial condition.” The state was “getting its financial house in order,” he wrote, but the university suffered from “a drive toward total chaos: pornographic

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<sup>61</sup> Address by William B. Boyd at Baccalaureate service.

<sup>62</sup> “Press Conference of Governor Ronald Reagan,” February 28, 1967.

<sup>63</sup> Curtis J. Sitmoer, “Regents Veto Reagan Tuition,” *Christian Science Monitor*, September 2, 1967.

and lewd behavior without limit, takeover of buildings and campus, setting of race against race, and violence.”<sup>64</sup> Just a year after Reagan demanded 10% budget cuts from the university—and in the same year that the university received 11% less than requested—Reagan suggested that the university’s finances were not the most pressing issue it faced.<sup>65</sup> Instead, he argued that there was a moral crisis, that students and faculty were behaving in unacceptable ways, and that the university was not serving the taxpayer in the way it should.

At a press conference a few years later, Reagan expounded on his conviction that the university’s problems were not financial. “They never get as much as they would like,” Reagan said, referring to the university administration. He wished the administration would focus less on the financial aspects and more on the “deterioration of quality within the university over the last few years and that had nothing to do with money.”<sup>66</sup> Deterioration of quality was a result of “an attitude within some elements of the university,” unrelated to the budget. Convinced that the university’s issues originated “from within,” Reagan rejected Chancellor Hines’s allegation that he was “starving the University of California to death by [his] budget economies” and suggested the university itself was the cause of its own deterioration.<sup>67</sup> The challenge facing the university, Reagan alleged, was “not whether outside assistance is necessary to keep the University operating in the face of a threat of violence, but whether the University community itself will choose to take the necessary action to meet its responsibilities.”<sup>68</sup>

Shifting blame to the university, Reagan began creating an image of the University of California as an immoral, undeserving institution, not a victim of circumstance but itself the cause of its problems. For one, Reagan criticized the university faculty as lazy and inefficient. Citing a random audit of thirty-six departments, Reagan noted that professors were spending an average of 4.3 hours in their classrooms every week. He

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<sup>64</sup> Reagan to Regents, February 16, 1967, Box GO 169, GOF67-75-SXII-RRPL.

<sup>65</sup> “UC President Hitch Asks Citizens of California,” *San Jose Mercury*, July 19, 1968.

<sup>66</sup> Reagan, Press Conference, March 23, 1971, Box GO 169, GOF67-75-SXII-RRPL.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> Reagan, “Excerpts from Remarks by Governor Ronald Reagan,” Commonwealth Club of California, June 22, 1971, Box GO 169, GOF67-75-SXII-RRPL.

expressed concern that teaching was not being prioritized and demanded that faculty members lecture for at least nine hours a week.<sup>69</sup>

Furthermore, as Reagan proclaimed in a speech to the Commonwealth Club, the UC tolerated “the willful use of the classroom by too many faculty members trying to impose on students their own beliefs and biases.”<sup>70</sup> The once great university had become an institution engaged in “a manipulation of academic freedom contradicting the very purpose of the academy as a place where truth and knowledge can be pursued objectively, without fear.”<sup>71</sup> As evidence, Reagan read from a letter sent to him by a student:

I’m being cheated—all too often I must write essays from the New Left viewpoint in order to get good grades. Three papers were returned with progressively better grades in direct proportion to my discovery that only by submitting work with the New Left line would my grade improve. My last paper dealt with U.S. involvement in Vietnam and could have been written by a North Vietnamese minister’s aide. It received the highest grade in the class.<sup>72</sup>

Reagan saw freedom of speech and objective knowledge besieged by a revolutionary faculty with a low work ethic. The university administration was refusing to take responsibility for maintaining order and discipline, Reagan maintained. Now was the time, he declared to the Commonwealth Club, to “reclaim for higher education its proper role as guardian, advocate and inspiration for all the lasting values of our civilization.”<sup>73</sup>

### *The Dissenting UC*

When he took office, Reagan was faced with a university he found deplorable. In his eyes, the UC was promoting a culture of protest and dissent, advocating for the destruction of traditions and accepted values, and departing from its public mission. If the university was not acting as a university should—according to Reagan’s distinct vision of a

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

university's function—then it did not deserve to benefit from taxpayer money.

In a letter to the Regents, Reagan noted that he carried “heavy responsibilities to the people of our state,” and laid out his vision for what the UC should be. The taxpayers “have earned, and well earned, a quality institution in which they can feel pride, and which, God knows, they need not fear,” Reagan wrote, and “they have sent their children to learn more of the values of their culture.”<sup>74</sup> The university of 1968, however, did not fit Reagan’s idea of the appropriate role of this publicly funded institution. If the Regents were unwilling “to bring the University back to its true course,” Reagan cautioned that he would “have no choice but to turn to the people to get the job done.”<sup>75</sup> A publicly funded university held certain obligations to the taxpayers of the state: to maintain quality and excellence along common standards and to pass down the traditions and values of the people it served.

Reagan envisioned a public university as an incubator of good citizens for the state, a place to pass down communal traditions and values, and an opportunity to instill respect for justice, law, and order. The taxpayer paid for every student’s education; it was therefore reasonable for the taxpayer to have a say in what that education entailed. “It does not constitute political interference with intellectual freedom for the taxpaying citizens—who support the college and university systems—to ask that, in addition to teaching, [the students] build character on accepted moral and ethical standards,” Reagan pronounced during his inauguration speech.<sup>76</sup> Students who refused to follow the norms for appropriate conduct had a simple choice, he declared: “obey the rules, or get out.”<sup>77</sup> The University of California was no place for students who would not conform to conservative moral standards. The current attitudes and actions of the campuses, Berkeley in particular, undermined Reagan’s view of what a university should be. Even more significant, they were undermining the very purpose of why this university should be subsidized by the taxpayer. “Our colleges and universities were created—

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<sup>74</sup> Reagan to Regents, February 16, 1967.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> Reagan, “Inaugural Address.”

<sup>77</sup> Reagan, State-of-the-State Address, California State Legislature, January 9, 1968, Box 873, 80CP-RRPL.

and are tax-supported—as centers of education—not staging areas for insurrection," Reagan asserted.<sup>78</sup>

Moreover, Reagan believed that the university was misusing its funds. After all, tax dollars were not meant to subsidize "intellectual curiosity," he stated in a 1967 press conference. Reagan cited a master's degree in the repair of band instruments and a course at UC Davis that taught how to organize demonstrations; these courses were "intellectual luxuries," and the university could surely do without them. After all, "carrying a picket sign is sort of like oh, a lot of things you pick up naturally, like learning to swim by falling off the end of the dock," he said.<sup>79</sup> A university was not a place for indulging such forms of knowledge, Reagan felt.

In Reagan's mind, the university faced two related problems. One was a lack of efficiency, an unwillingness "to face up to the fact that as public institutions they have a public responsibility not to spend beyond the public's means."<sup>80</sup> The other problem was the politicization of the university, the cultivation of a culture of dissent, protest, and nonconformity. As a result, the university had simply become too expensive and too controversial to justify being fully state-funded. Reagan envisioned the ideal university as the representative of "society's highest devotion to objectivity, a place where reason ruled over emotion, where the cultural values of our civilization were passed on from generation to generation, pushing forward the frontiers of knowledge."<sup>81</sup> Objectivity, reason, and a common culture: these were the university's legacy and could be its future, if it would reorient itself towards what Reagan termed its "traditional role in our society."<sup>82</sup>

Conservative Regent and Reagan-appointee W. Glenn Campbell espoused similar beliefs. As director of the conservative Hoover Institution at Stanford University, Campbell observed in a 1971 speech that the University of California had reached a decisive turning point. It could return to its true function, teaching and research, or it could

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<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>79</sup> "Press Conference of Governor Ronald Reagan," February 28, 1967.

<sup>80</sup> Reagan, "Address of Governor Ronald Reagan to California Republican Assembly, Lafayette Hotel, Long Beach," April 1, 1967, available at <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/govspeech/04011967a.htm>.

<sup>81</sup> Reagan, "Excerpts from Remarks," Commonwealth Club.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

continue on the path towards politicization. If it did not turn back, “only the quacks and demagogues will remain to man the lifeless form,” he warned. The university thinks it is indispensable, he contended, and uses this as “a license to arrogance and self-aggrandizement,” but it would do well to remember that “history is littered with the ruins of allegedly indispensable institutions.”<sup>83</sup> The problem of the university, according to Campbell, was its flirtation with radical political ideas and its tolerance of dissent. Such an institution could not survive if it did not return to the pursuit of traditional knowledge and leave politics behind.

UC President Charles Hitch found this conservative view of a university’s function too limiting. “Are [universities] good because the faculty engages in noncontroversial and irrelevant research,” he inquired at the National Conference of State Legislative Leaders, “or because it probes the fringes of knowledge however controversial and wherever that may be?...Are they good because professors talk only to each other, or because they engage the issues of society with people in the community?”<sup>84</sup> A university, Hitch implied, was by definition provocative. Seeking new knowledge meant crossing boundaries. Mediating between society and the world of ideas, a university was meant to engage with the problems it encountered. Often, this precipitated a certain level of dissent. “You can’t have a relevant, current, active university and, at the same time, have tranquility,” he suggested. The university that Reagan envisioned was a university of the past, with “eccentric professors conducting irrelevant research, philosophizing in their ivory towers, passing on the wisdom of the ages to obedient and worshipful students, a University of winning football teams and snappy marching bands.”<sup>85</sup> The University of California was no longer such an institution.

Reagan’s conception of a university must be situated within the grander arch of the rise of neoliberalism, under which higher education became a quite different institution than the one Hitch described. According to Gary Rhoades and Sheila Slaughter, the neoliberal

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<sup>83</sup> Glenn Campbell, “The Universities and National Priorities,” Stanford Campus Conference on Relevance: 16 Stanford Definitions, May 22, 1971, Box GO 69, Governor’s Office Files 1967-1975, Series II: Education Unit, Subseries B, RRPL (hereafter GOF67-75-SII-SB-RRPL).

<sup>84</sup> Charles J. Hitch, “The University as a Public Issue: National Conference of State Legislative Leaders,” Honolulu, Hawaii, December 4, 1968, Box GO 69, GOF67-75-SII-SB-RRPL.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

university specializes in preparing students "to be malleable workers who will fit into (and be retrained for) new information-based jobs and workplaces."<sup>86</sup> Students are not intellectuals or revolutionaries, but workers-in-training. Henry Giroux, scholar of critical pedagogy, denounces the doctrine of neoliberal education, which replaces critical learning "with mastering test-taking, memorizing facts, and learning how *not* to question knowledge or authority."<sup>87</sup> Reagan's vision of a university echoes Giroux's critique: higher education institutions as producers of objective knowledge, passing down sanctioned ideas from professor to student, and undermining the capacity for dissent.

The conservative university of Reagan and Campbell's conception was docile and objective, but in 1970 the University of California was neither of those. With a powerful vision of what a university should be and how knowledge should be attained, Reagan set out to reshape the University of California into a conservative institution. While the university dissented, he did not see fit to reward it financially, subsidizing the "intellectual luxuries," the politicization, and the spreading of controversial values.

### ***From Public Good to Private Investment***

Not only was the UC unworthy of public subsidy, argued Reagan, but the very structure of university financing was flawed. To make his case, he borrowed from language in the Coordinating Council for Higher Education's previously discussed report, *An Evaluation of the Tuition-Free Principle in California Public Higher Education*.<sup>88</sup> In his position of authority both as the governor and as a member of the Board of Regents, Reagan would exercise the necessary political power to give credence to these suggestions.

The report established an alternative language to the public mission and social contract that had been so crucial to the university's self-

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<sup>86</sup> Sheila Slaughter and Gary Rhoades, "The Neo-Liberal University," *New Labor Forum*, no. 6 (Spring/Summer 2000): 73-79.

<sup>87</sup> Henry A. Giroux, *Neoliberalism's War on Higher Education* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2014), 6.

<sup>88</sup> The Coordinating Council was established under the Master Plan as an advisory body on university and state college issues. It was composed of representatives of the general public, the UC, the state colleges, the public junior colleges, and private institutions in California.

definition since its inception. Instead, it suggested a cost-benefit analysis, using market language to discuss education, and suggesting that students should bear a portion of the burden, since they would share in the benefit. Having examined the various benefits to the state (political awareness, social mobility, cultural advancement, economic growth, and capital formation) and to the student (increased lifetime earnings, social mobility, and consumer benefits that improve quality of life), the Coordinating Council remarked that “to approach an equitable distribution of the costs of education between society and the student, an effort to evaluate and measure the differential benefits to the student and to society seems necessary.”<sup>89</sup> The report clearly differentiated between the elements of higher education that could be considered a private investment versus those traditionally considered a public good. In doing so, it dismantled the notion that higher education was primarily a public good and suggested that costs should be shared between the private and public beneficiaries.

When Reagan joined the UC Board of Regents in 1967, he brought this language into the heart of the university itself. At a Regents meeting in mid-1967, Reagan tested the waters by suggesting that “a practical solution would be to ask those who are receiving an education at the University to bear a small portion of the increasing costs of that education.”<sup>90</sup> According to Governor Reagan, the current financing model for the university was not sustainable. By 1969, Reagan became bolder, articulating a vision for tuition “as a capital investment which could be amortized over the life of the investment.”<sup>91</sup> Students would pay in proportion to their benefits in lifetime earnings, and taxpayers would pay in proportion to societal benefits.<sup>92</sup> This rhetoric hinted at the utilitarian notion that education was nothing more than a private investment in human capital. Tuition was the logical next step.

The notion of education as a private investment was an early manifestation of a neoliberal worldview. In *Academic Capitalism and the New Economy*, Slaughter and Rhoades delineate the neoliberal state as an entity that “focuses not on social welfare for the citizenry as a whole but on enabling individuals as economic actors,” moving resources “away

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<sup>89</sup> Spalding et al., *An Evaluation of the Tuition-Free Principle*, 11-17.

<sup>90</sup> Regents Meeting Minutes, August 30-31, 1967.

<sup>91</sup> Regents Meeting Minutes, November 20, 1969.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

from social welfare functions toward production functions."<sup>93</sup> In much the same way, the educational fee conceptualized students as economic actors, as individuals making rational decisions based on expected economic returns rather than social actors with societal goals in mind. The language of the educational fee proposal unabashedly advocated the idea that students should contribute to the costs of their own education. The first line of the 1970 motion stipulated that "the University accept the general concept that the student is economically responsible for a part of his education costs."<sup>94</sup> In a stark departure from the no-tuition policy, the motion embodied a new understanding of a UC education: partially a social investment for public benefit, partially an individual investment for private gain. By implication, the burden of funding the university should no longer fall solely on the state.

### *"We Stand Between the Taxpayer and the Tax Spender"*

Armed with an understanding of education as a partially private investment, Reagan took his argument one step further. Invoking equity arguments, he announced that the California taxpayer could not reasonably be asked to continue providing abundant funds. Furthermore, Reagan rallied the public behind him. By exacerbating public response to student protests, he deepened already existing fissures between the students and the taxpayer base. He then used the public backlash against the university to justify underfunding it.

Reagan lauded "the generosity of the people of California to the university" but indicated "that the citizens cannot continue to support the University as generously as in the past."<sup>95</sup> Reagan's rhetoric reflected a fundamental shift from the Wheeler-era understanding of the university as a tool of the state. In his perspective, the university drained state resources, profiting from California citizens' "generous" willingness to fund it. Substantial university funding had been a gift bestowed on the university, but contemporary conditions meant that this gift would have to be less lavishly provided.

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<sup>93</sup> Sheila Slaughter and Gary Rhoades, *Academic Capitalism and the New Economy: Markets, State, and Higher Education* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 20.

<sup>94</sup> Regents Meeting Minutes, February 19, 1970.

<sup>95</sup> Regents Meeting Minutes, May 18, 1967, Box 1967, Folder 18-19: May 1967, UCA-BL.

A strong believer in the principle of small government, Reagan envisioned his role as a politician to be one of mediation between the forces seeking to entrench permanent structures of government and the citizens wishing to maximize their freedoms. In his mind, keeping government expenditures low was a duty to the taxpayer. In his inauguration speech, Reagan proclaimed he stood “between the taxpayer and the tax spender.”<sup>96</sup> Reagan portrayed himself as the taxpayer’s champion from the very beginning of his governorship. When Edmund Brown took office in 1974, Reagan counseled: “I would like to remind him that balancing the budget is like protecting your virtue—you have to learn to say no.”<sup>97</sup> Saying no—keeping budgets as low as possible—was an important element of Reagan’s political stance. Reagan saw himself as the defender of the taxpayer, since to “accept the University’s financial demands means a tax increase for our people.”<sup>98</sup> If meeting the university’s budget request meant an increased taxpayer burden, Reagan would side with the taxpayer.

Reagan styled himself as the politician willing to say “no.” Conveniently, taking a strong stance on university finance was a politically savvy move. The culture of protest of the 1960s had already been a source of discontent among the public, and incumbent governor Pat Brown had come to represent an inability to quell these protests. Campus unrest quickly became one of the chief issues in the 1966 gubernatorial campaign, in which incumbent Pat Brown was pitted against former-actor Ronald Reagan. Reagan used the issue strategically, blaming the chaos on Brown and riling up crowds. Lamenting the “degradation” of the university, Reagan claimed there was a “morality and decency gap,” where “a small minority of beatniks, radicals, and filthy speech advocates have brought such shame to and such a loss of confidence in a great University.”<sup>99</sup>

It is arguable whether Reagan’s words reflected or generated the loss of confidence he described. Reagan maintained that he was simply responding to popular uproar about Berkeley, but historian Gerard

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<sup>96</sup> Reagan, “Inaugural Address,” January 5, 1967.

<sup>97</sup> Rodney Angove, “Sounds Like Reagan,” Box GO 169, GOF67-75-SXII-RRPL.

<sup>98</sup> Reagan, “Excerpts from Remarks,” Commonwealth Club.

<sup>99</sup> Reagan, “Ronald Reagan Denounces the Morality Gap at Berkeley, 1966,” in *Major Problems in California History*, ed. Sucheng Chan and Spencer Olin (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1997), 366-67.

DeGroot boldly claims that Reagan had fabricated the public reaction. Though constituents consistently raised the question of what to do about Berkeley, it did not seem to have gained much traction as a political concern. DeGroot cites Stuart Spencer, Reagan's gubernatorial campaign manager: "Reagan escalated it into an issue," reflected Spencer, "and it started showing up in the polls."<sup>100</sup> The campus issue was politically convenient. By pointing at Berkeley, Reagan revealed incumbent Pat Brown "in the worst possible light," and "rendered his [own] conservatism mainstream." Presenting himself as a virulent opponent of the status quo and a man of action, "Reagan had become the hero of taxpayers outraged by campus unrest." "Yet," argues DeGroot, "that outrage was his creation."<sup>101</sup> DeGroot claims that Reagan was not simply responding to public apprehensions about the campus; he was constructing them.

Legal scholar David A.J. Richards similarly suggests that Reagan incited a popular backlash against the university. In angry response to students' disavowal of paternal and university authority, Reagan "mobilized a politics of patriarchal rage in others." He capitalized on parents' fears of losing control over their children and found "a resonance for his authentic moral voice in attacking student protest." Reagan's approach to the university became a crucial factor in catapulting him to the governorship.<sup>102</sup> Reagan engendered public indignation against the UC as a political tool in the fight to defeat Pat Brown.

This perspective is corroborated by allegations from Alan Post, the legislative budget analyst at the time. Post contended that Reagan was "exacerbating the public reaction," using it as a "political horse" to further his campaign.<sup>103</sup> Evidence suggests this was, in fact, the case. Berkeley was

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<sup>100</sup> Stuart K. Spencer, "Developing a Campaign Management Organization," an oral history conducted by Gabrielle Morris (1979), in *Issues and Innovations in the 1966 Republican Gubernatorial Campaign* (1980), Regional Oral History Office, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley (hereafter Oral History Office), quoted in Gerard DeGroot, *Selling Ronald Reagan: The Emergence of a President* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2015), 189.

<sup>101</sup> DeGroot, *Selling Ronald Reagan*, 199.

<sup>102</sup> David A.J. Richards, *The Rise of Gay Rights and the Fall of the British Empire: Liberal Resistance and the Bloomsbury Group* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 196-97.

<sup>103</sup> A. Alan Post, "Public Aims and Expenditure: A Divergent View," an oral history conducted by Gabrielle Morris (1981), in *Organizational and Fiscal Views of the Reagan Administration* (1984), Oral History Office.

not a politically significant issue until Reagan decided to make it so. As Lou Cannon notes in *Governor Reagan*, Reagan “acted from conviction rather than calculation, raising ‘Berkeley’ as a political issue when it was a minor blip in the polls.”<sup>104</sup> Yet the focus on campus unrest was still a politically savvy move, a means for discrediting Pat Brown’s administration and asserting the values that marked Reagan as a man of principle and conviction. By the time of Reagan’s election, all eyes were trained on the university, and few were sympathetic. In 1968, Reagan claimed to have received “3,735 letters, all against the University, two-thirds demanded withholding their tax money from the University.”<sup>105</sup> He wrote in a letter to the Regents: “The people of California are speaking, as I have never known them to speak before, against giving tax money to support the likes of Ergo, Cleaver, Marcuse, the Vietnam Commencement, a drug culture, bomb explosions, and violence.”<sup>106</sup> Reagan portrayed the university as irresponsible, radical, and unrepresentative of the people it was meant to serve.<sup>107</sup> It was spending tax dollars, but not fulfilling its end of the social contract.

Public outrage at the university, then, was at least partially constructed as a political move, vesting Reagan with the support of the public and a key instrument for pressuring the Regents to seek alternative funding. Reagan thus established a two-part rationale for underfunding the university. The first arose from an economic ideology: the university cost more than the taxpayer could be asked to provide, especially given the current condition of state finances and the understanding that higher education was both a public good and a private investment. The second arose from a cultural ideology: the university was no longer an institution producing objective knowledge, but a bastion of discontent that had relinquished its right to full public subsidy. Here, Reagan employed the taxpayers, acting as their champion and asserting the public desire to limit

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<sup>104</sup> Lou Cannon, *Governor Reagan: His Rise to Power* (New York: Public Affairs, 2009), 269.

<sup>105</sup> Reagan to Members of the Committee on Educational Policy, February 16, 1968, Box GO 169, GOF67-75-SXII-RRPL.

<sup>106</sup> Reagan to Regents, February 16, 1967.

<sup>107</sup> Eldridge Cleaver was a Black Panther leader and political activist who gave a series of lectures on campus. Reagan disapproved of his radical views and eventually banned his course. Herbert Marcuse was a self-professed Communist teaching at UCSD. The Vietnam Commencement was an anti-war gathering in Lower Sproul Plaza area at UC Berkeley. Between seven and eight thousand people came to hear speeches by anti-war leaders, and students took a pledge to refuse the draft.

its funding of the rebellious university. Convinced that the university was straying from its mission and that a new financing model should be constructed, Reagan envisioned tuition as a solution.

### *Tuition as a Disciplining Mechanism*

From Reagan's perspective, tuition could act as a mechanism for guiding the university away from the harmful politicization it had engaged with in recent years. On the one hand, it would make students more responsible and faculty more accountable. On the other hand, it would increase the opportunity cost for engaging in activities that Reagan considered unacceptable. Tuition was to be a tool for facilitating a conservative vision of what a university should be, how its students should act, and what forms of learning were socially valid.

Reagan believed that implementing tuition would be a financial motivator for students. Having invested money in their education, students would act more maturely, be more likely to graduate, and spend their time studying intensively. In a letter to faculty, he noted that "tuition might also increase the sense of responsibility among students and act as a spur to help them realize their goal: An education and a degree." With the current model, he added, only one-third of students who entered the University were graduating.<sup>108</sup> Reagan thought that students were not taking their educations seriously enough; if they paid to attend, perhaps they would act differently.

In an interview many years later, Reagan's Education Advisor Alex Sherriffs reflected that the Reagan administration latched on to the ideology of tuition even before Sherriffs arrived in Sacramento. Sherriffs asserted that the administration's public statements differed from what Reagan truly believed. "His arguments with me in private were not because the state needed the money," Sherriffs acknowledged, "but were essentially you don't value something you haven't given something to get."<sup>109</sup> Disavowing the necessity narrative, Sherriffs asserts that Reagan

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<sup>108</sup> Reagan, "Open Letter to Faculty at UC and State Colleges by Reagan," February 21, 1967, Box GO 168, GOF67-75-SXII-RRPL.

<sup>109</sup> Alex C. Sherriffs, "Education Advisor to Ronald Reagan and State University Administrator," an oral history conducted by Gabrielle Morris and Sarah Sharp (1981-82), in *The Governor's Office and Public Information, Education, and Planning, 1967-1974* (1984), Oral History Office.

believed in tuition on principle, not as a response to conditions but as a fundamental transformation in how students should relate to their educations. Until students were giving up financial resources in exchange for the services they received at the university, they would not know the value of what they were receiving. In other words, a free education would be valued less, simply because it was free.

Sherriffs laid out Reagan's belief that students would have higher standards for their education if they were paying tuition. In particular, they would hold their professors accountable, having "an investment in how that course is taught," and being "much more likely to suggest that keeping office hours is a good thought, and preparing your lectures is a good idea."<sup>110</sup> The student as customer would feel empowered to demand a better product. Students on a free ride would have "less reason to argue." Sherriffs suggested that, in this way, tuition could act as a device for holding faculty accountable. According to Sherriffs, Reagan had two motivations for wanting tuition: "in part to make the faculty more responsible, in his mind, and in part to have the students feel this was for their education, not some building or forced charity for somebody else."<sup>111</sup>

Tuition, then, was not a response to necessity, but a principle that Reagan believed would reorient the relationships among the faculty, the students, and the university. In this business-like model, the student was consumer and faculty the producers, and the relationship between them could be mediated by the financial transaction. As a result, students would act more responsibly and demand better quality, faculty would be held accountable to the students, and the conditions would be set for the university to return to its pursuit of objective knowledge.

With the university thus structured, the only problem left to eliminate was the issue of campus radicalization and politicization. Here, also, tuition would provide a solution. Tuition could act as a disciplining mechanism, weeding out the "undesirables," students "who are there really not to study, but to agitate." If tuition were charged, those students "might think twice how much they want to pay to carry a picket sign," Reagan alleged at a press conference in 1967.<sup>112</sup> Tuition could price out those students whose motivations for attending the university were not

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Ray Zeman, "Reagan: Tuition, but No Cuts," *Los Angeles Times*, January 11, 1967.

educational. Students would be forced to reconsider why they were attending the university: those who were more interested in protesting than in learning would be encouraged to rethink their actions.

Robert Finch, the lieutenant governor, expressed a similar idea. Speaking before the Republican State Central Committee in 1967, Finch clarified that the administration has "never advocated tuition as a revenue raiser."<sup>113</sup> This statement directly contradicts the necessity narrative. If tuition was not being levied as a way to make up for declining state funds, then why was it being charged? Finch argued that "we have thought of it as a discipline, as an investment in enriching the lives of students through fuller participation in the academic life of the campus."<sup>114</sup> Tuition as discipline meant tuition as a way to bind students to academics rather than political engagement. Though Finch spins this positively, as an enrichment for the student, the effect is the same: with the imposition of tuition, the opportunities for students to be politically active were limited.

Jesse Unruh, Speaker of the California State Assembly and ex-officio Regent at the time, accused the Reagan administration of "charging tuition as a punishment for student activists," calling this both "unfair and illogical."<sup>115</sup> Reagan, perhaps, did not see it in quite the same way. Instead, he saw tuition as an instrument for reasserting the university's mission as a place dedicated to rigorous, unemotional analysis and the production of objective knowledge. Tuition would discourage rebel students from attending the UC. In his view, these students did not deserve to be there anyway; they could only get in the way of progress at the university. In addition, charging tuition would enable other students to fully value their educations, would mature them and make them invested in educational outcomes. Faculty would be forced to respond to students, as students would begin to make more demands. In short, tuition could solve the challenges facing the university: it would depoliticize and deradicalize the institution while introducing business-like market transactions to introduce accountability and responsibility to its students and faculty.

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<sup>113</sup> "Tuition Proposal Grows Ever More Incredible," *Fresno Bee*, January 19, 1967.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Jesse M. Unruh, "California Higher Education: A Report from the Underground," in *In Search of Leaders*, ed. G. Kerry Smith (Washington, DC: American Association for Higher Education, 1967), 32.

### *The Great Persuader*

Philosophically, Reagan believed in tuition. However, in 1967 he failed to turn that conviction into a reality. The Board of Regents voted against his proposal to “adopt tuition as a policy of the University of California.”<sup>116</sup> Rather than as a pragmatic reaction to financial conditions, this proposal was about tuition as a principle. Regent Carter criticized this as “voting abstractly on the matter of tuition” without a sense of the purpose and plan for these revenues. Other Regents also expressed concerns with the wording of the motion, balking at the use of the word “tuition” as a denial of the long-standing commitment to tuition-free education. Eventually, Reagan backtracked: “he had not realized, in making his motion, that the use of the word ‘tuition’ would be objectionable.”<sup>117</sup> The Regents clearly expressed their disapproval of the principle of tuition, and Reagan was forced to take a new approach. Where tuition as a principle had not proved convincing, financial conditions and political pressures would.

When Sherriffs was asked how Reagan managed to convince the Regents to accept tuition, he replied:

They never did accept the tuition idea, and haven't yet. However, many are now asking the legislature to put in tuition, for the wrong reasons I suppose, because they're trying to prevent layoffs. The student's costs aren't the issue now!<sup>118</sup>

According to Sherriffs, Reagan never managed to convince the Regents to endorse tuition on principle. The Regents simply responded to a choice between implementing tuition and firing faculty. Furthermore, Sherriffs stated that a majority in favor of tuition was attained partly “by the appointment of new people,” and partly “by the wearing down.”<sup>119</sup> These two points indicate the level of influence that Governor Reagan wielded over the Board, and are a testament to the power of the governor in shaping conditions to his will. For one, he could appoint Regents when past terms expired. Notably, the five Regents appointed by Reagan all voted in favor of tuition. In addition, he had the last say on the UC budget, with the power to line-item veto portions he did not endorse and to pressure the Board of Regents by presenting an inadequate budget. By

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<sup>116</sup> Regents Meeting Minutes, August 30-31, 1967.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Sherriffs, “Education Advisor to Ronald Reagan and State University Administrator,” an oral history.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

consistently underfunding the university in certain areas—notably capital outlay expenditure and student financial aid—Reagan could create the conditions that necessitated an alternate source of funding, “wearing down” the university leaders until they had little choice but to charge tuition.

Governor Reagan also had the weight of the Californian people behind him. That is to say, he was in a position to allege that he represented the taxpayers, couching his tuition proposal in rhetoric concerning tax burdens and public approval. Rather than framing tuition as a merely personal conviction on his part, Reagan claimed to have a public endorsement for his mission. “There is every indication that the people of California, who support our entire state spending program, approve of tuition,” Reagan asserted. “Surely their wishes should be given some consideration.”<sup>120</sup> Reagan, championing the rights and desires of the California taxpayer, declared tuition to be a mandate from his constituency, making it more palatable and politically powerful.

Poised as the defender of the taxpayer, wielding control over the UC budget, and endowed with the power to appoint new Regents, Governor Reagan eventually pushed tuition through. If anything, this narrative suggests a fundamental problem in the governance of the University of California. Both inside and outside of the university, the governor and other ex-officio Regents have inordinate power to mold conditions that affect the university and thereby influence university policy through their votes as Regents and through the political channel. Reflecting on his time as Chancellor of UC Berkeley, Roger Heyns noted this contradiction. “It’s an anachronism,” he stated, referring to the existence of ex-officio Regents on the Board. “It worked for a long time but I don’t think it’s wise now. You can’t mix up the management of the university with the political process.”<sup>121</sup>

It is all too easy to paint Reagan as the antagonist in this story, especially considering the consistent increase in tuition costs till the present day. However, the evidence suggests that Reagan had a narrow view of tuition with a specific function—to encourage student

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<sup>120</sup> Reagan, “Open Letter to Faculty at UC and State Colleges by Reagan.”

<sup>121</sup> Quoted in William Trombley, “Heyns Looks at His Record, Future of UC,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 7, 1971.

responsibility and faculty accountability, as well as to depoliticize the university—and did not foresee a grander scheme of complete privatization of the public university. Reagan did not actively defund the university, but he did consistently underfund it. He made conditions just severe enough that tuition was required to offset costs, but not so severe that the university would be substantially harmed in the long run. Though the Board of Regents raised student fees once more in 1972-73, they remained constant thereafter for the remainder of Reagan's gubernatorial years. This further supports this article's claim that tuition was intended, not as a revenue-raising device, but as a targeted disciplining mechanism.

### *Conclusion*

Financing the University of California was not purely an economic problem. Abandoning the tuition-free principle was an orchestrated effort on the part of Governor Reagan. In 1966, Reagan began a campaign to reduce government spending. This campaign was motivated partially by existing financial conditions, and partially by a neoliberal ideology prescribing modest government budgets. In the case of the university, the effect was augmented by Reagan's belief that the university, like the state, had lost its way. Rather than passing on traditional values in an orderly, respectful manner, the university became a center of dissent. In Reagan's mind, this was not its original purpose and certainly not what the taxpayer should be subsidizing. Limiting university budgets thus became a disciplining mechanism, as Reagan redirected blame for the university's problems away from the financial and towards what he saw as the true crisis: the moral deterioration of a once-great university. Tuition would present a solution. By considering education as an investment, students would become more responsible and faculty more accountable. Sinking substantial funds into their UC degrees would prevent students from having the time or the motivation to protest. It would weed out the troublemakers from the rest, and the UC would once more become the pride of California.

Motivated by this belief, Reagan set out to slowly undermine the tuition-free principle. Some of the elements were already in place. For example, the notion that higher education was a public investment was gradually giving way to a neoliberal understanding that individual students should bear some of the burden rather than relying on society. Reagan merely expanded on this language. In addition, he used the

taxpayer to justify his push for tuition, vowing to stand between the taxpayer and the wasteful, dissenting university. Finally, he perpetuated language about financial crisis and cut key areas of the UC budget, pressuring the Regents to cut back university spending and consider alternate funding sources.

Though the UC continues to adhere to its mission of serving the state, admitting the best and brightest, and functioning as an engine of social mobility, this mission is being compromised as tuition exceeds \$13,000 in 2015. Students are saddled with debt and financial pressures and the student body over-represents those from high-income backgrounds. Though the university did not fully conform to Reagan’s neoliberal vision, it does display aspects of this worldview. For Christopher Newfield, scholar of critical university studies, the outcome of the neoliberal project has been “something like an agency crisis, a combination of a weak individualism and a weak socialization that made it harder to articulate objectives, desires, and activities other than those that adapted to direct economic pressures.”<sup>122</sup> Students face the pressure of debt and make choices based on long-term economic metrics rather than individual desire. Professors and lecturers are chronically underpaid, tied financially to the academy and dependent on producing profitable knowledge. Administrators are challenged with the recurring problems of funding, turning to financialization and privatization of the university’s assets. In Clark Kerr’s words, “An appropriate emblem for the American college might be the traditional open book, but an open book lying on a sales counter.”<sup>123</sup> The neoliberal view of higher education has not completely decimated the University of California’s potential for critical knowledge and engagement, but it has left a lasting mark.

Implementing tuition has far from solved the university’s funding problems. As Peter Schrag notes, the effect of the tuition-based model, and the perpetual budget conflicts that it engendered, has been to make California’s higher education system “subject to greater political and fiscal buffeting and uncertainty.”<sup>124</sup> Every year, the university budget is a source of contention, a battlefield of competing interests. The university and the

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<sup>122</sup> Christopher Newfield, *Unmaking the Public University: The Forty-Year Assault on the Middle Class* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 7.

<sup>123</sup> Kerr, *The Great Transformation in Higher Education*, 149.

<sup>124</sup> Schrag, *California*, 110.

state, once partners on a mission to build a great public university, have become antagonists in a political struggle that seems to have no end in sight.

On November 19, 2014, the UC Office of the President released a “Long Term Stability Plan for Tuition and Financial Aid.” Despite the four decades separating 1970 and 2014, not much had changed. “This proposal responds to an era of chronic State underfunding of UC,” the report reads, “which unfortunately has continued despite significant improvements in the economy and the State’s fiscal outlook.”<sup>125</sup> The language of the plan echoed the same problems the Regents faced in 1970, and the Board’s response was much the same: when state funding declines, student fees must increase. With the tuition-free principle effectively abandoned, it has been all too easy to continue raising fees.

What this article has shown, however, is that the problem of funding the university is not always purely financial. Ideology and politics played an important role in advancing the educational fee in 1970, and it is worth considering how it continues to play a role in the present day. The recurring rhetoric of austerity and necessity associated with economic downturns conceals the political, ideological, and cultural beliefs driving changes in financial policy. As former Clinton advisor Paul Begala wisely said, “The budget is a profoundly moral document;” allotting funds is a representation of values and priorities, not simply a string of numbers on paper.<sup>126</sup> In 1970, the educational fee was not simply about the budget. It indicated the triumph of Reagan’s ideology, which combined a distaste for a radical university with a belief in education as a private investment and a conviction that tuition would serve as a mechanism for restoring order. “Tuition is not a dirty word,” Reagan proclaimed at the Los Angeles Breakfast Club in 1967.<sup>127</sup> Perhaps not, but tuition is no virtue, either.

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<sup>125</sup> Committee on Long Range Planning, “Approval of Long-Term Stability Plan for Tuition and Financial Aid” (UC Office of the President, November 19, 2014), available at <http://regents.universityofcalifornia.edu/regmeet/nov14/l3.pdf>.

<sup>126</sup> Greg Sargent, “Paul Begala on the Real Lesson of Clinton Wars: ‘The Budget is a Profoundly Moral Document,’” *Washington Post*, April 12, 2011.

<sup>127</sup> Reagan, Speech at Los Angeles Breakfast Club, July 26, 1967.

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