

The Declaration Of Education

The revolutionary document that is the United States Declaration of Independence defines foundational rights of Americans: the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. In a contemporary, post-industrial society, public institutions of higher education are the mechanism by which we attain the necessary knowledge and skills to pursue our happiness, however we define it.

In 1960, California recognized that these unalienable rights were in jeopardy, particularly because the state lacked an affordable system of quality higher education—a system that could overcome divisions in class that exacerbate racial and gender divisions. To this end, California introduced the California Master Plan for Higher Education, signed into law by Governor Pat Brown, the father of our current governor, Jerry Brown. Over the course of a few decades, this master plan—providing affordable and quality higher education—transformed California's economy, making it the 8th largest in the world as of 2009, and home to innovations in film, music and technology, to name a few.

As access to affordable, public, higher education increased, California classrooms became a locus of collaboration among diverse students, whose experiences spanned multitudinous economic, ethnic, linguistic, gender, and geographical combinations. Within this climate of diversity, students have moved from simply tolerating differences to accepting and celebrating the unique fabric that is our broader community. It is this educational experience that has laid the foundation for progressive social movements and sustained advocacy for rights in California and beyond: from civil rights to Gay rights to immigrant rights and human rights.

Under the current economic crisis we stand to lose the gains that the implementation of the California Master Plan has won. The very mechanism that would close the growing disparity between the have and have-nots is currently at risk, and the consequences are staggering: As education in California becomes less affordable and consequently less accessible, the economically underprivileged will suffer further marginalization, more disenfranchisement, and ongoing oppression; meanwhile, the wealthy will continue to expand their political and economic clout, further crystallizing a class hierarchy that makes slaves out of the poor, and gluttons out of the rich.

The current premeditated attack on public education threatens to limit our right to pursue our happiness. In the spirit of the United States Declaration of Independence, we must act to protect our threatened rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness: "whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it."

March 14, 2011 marks not a moment, but a new era wherein students, educators, administrators, staff and legislators collaborate to renew the assailed institution of public education. Today we march to achieve tomorrow's vision: an unrivaled democratic system of public education—a system wherein economy does not dictate educational destiny. Today we march because we recognize that the stakes are too high; we cannot afford to be spectators: we must defend public education, for it cannot defend itself, and it cannot stand defenseless. Today we collectively and creatively express our determination to realize our vision of the future; we march to disabuse ourselves before our representatives and our nation by proclaiming: we are not expendable, for we have not expendable income; we are not something to cut, for we have not the power to cut our own pay checks, and we are not settling for scraps because we demand a seat at the table. Today we march, and tomorrow we sit shoulder to shoulder, for we recognize that we are our best representatives. Students, educators, administrators, staff and legislators of the world, UNITE!