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*Evan Watkins*

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and the Transformation of Higher Education*

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#4557085 in Books Fordham University Press 2008-09-15 Original language: English PDF # 1 5.90 x .40 x 8.90l, .35 #File Name: 0823229831128 pages | File size: 57.Mb

**Evan Watkins : Class Degrees: Smart Work, Managed Choice, and the Transformation of Higher Education** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Class Degrees: Smart Work, Managed Choice, and the Transformation of Higher Education:

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of myself, class, and the economic forces that impinge on and interact with education resulted from reading this book in (nearly) a single sitting.

A current truism holds that the undergraduate degree today is equivalent to the high-school diploma of yesterday. But undergraduates at a research university would probably not recognize themselves in the historical mirror of high-school vocational education. Students in a vast range of institutions are encouraged to look up the educational social scale, whereas earlier vocational education was designed to cool out expectations of social advancement by training a working class prepared for massive industrialization. In *Class Degrees*, Evan Watkins argues that reforms in vocational education in the 1980s and 1990s can explain a great deal about the changing directions of class formation in the United States, as well as how postsecondary educational institutions are changing. Responding to a demand for flexibility in job skills and reflecting a consequent aspiration to choice and perpetual job mobility, those reforms aimed to eliminate the separate academic status of vocational education. They transformed it from a cooling out to a heating up of class expectations. The result has been a culture of hyperindividualism. The hyperindividual lives in a world permeated with against-all-odds plots, from beat the odds of long supermarket checkout lines by using self-checkout and buying FasTrak transponders to beat the odds of traffic jams, to the endless superheroes on film and TV who daily save various sorts of planets and things against all odds. Of course, a few people can beat the odds only if most other people do not. As choice begins to replace the selling of individual labor at the core of contemporary class formation, the result is a sort of waste labor left behind by the competitive process. Provocatively, Watkins argues that, in the twenty-first century, academic work in the humanities is assuming the management function of reclaiming this waste labor as a motor force for the future.

No, classes haven't disappeared in the United States. But they certainly don't operate the way they did 150 or even 50 years ago. In this original and timely book, noted scholar and teacher Evan Watkins uses vocational education as a lens to focus on the dramatic changes that are currently taking place in the areas of work, choice, and higher education, which have led to new processes of class formation. He also shows how, if we challenge the assumptions about the magic of the economy, those of us who work in postsecondary education--including, and perhaps especially, the humanities--have a unique opportunity to "use where we are" to bring into being a social world without exploitation. (David F. Ruccio University of Notre Dame) One of America's foremost scholars of work, class, and education at the top of his game. (Catherine Prendergast University of Illinois, Champaign/Urbana) A crucial new work from one of our leading theorists. (Jeffrey Nealon Pennsylvania State University) About the Author Evan Watkins is Professor of English at the University of California, Davis. He is the author of *Class Degrees: Smart Work, Managed Choice, and the Transformation of Higher Education* (Fordham); *Everyday Exchanges: Marketwork and Capitalist Common Sense*; *Throwaways: Work Culture and Consumer Education*; and *Work Time: English Departments and the Circulation of Cultural Value*.