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The American University: National Treasure or Endangered Species?

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Over the past decade, America's research universities have been accused, with increasing frequency and passion, of a wide variety of sins. Universities do not devote enough attention to undergraduate education, the charge goes, or they pursue unnecessary research, or they award doctoral degrees that focus too narrowly and take too long to complete. What have these institutions done to provoke such criticism and why has financial support from both public and private sectors eroded? In The American University, a volume published in honor of Frank H. T. Rhodes, President Emeritus of Cornell University, distinguished scholars and administrators address these issues and suggest ways in which research universities can respond to current and future challenges. The challenges are complex, and the authors are willing to redefine fundamental objectives to rebuild public trust. Each essay addresses one of the issues on which the future of American research universities may pivot. What responsibilities does a university have to enhance social mobility? Why have the research partnerships between government and academia broken down? How comprehensive and how effective is undergraduate and graduate teaching? What are realistic prospects for the humanities and social sciences at the university, and what are the prospects for science and technology?

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