

IMPORTANT BOOKS ABOUT HIGHER EDUCATION

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In the half century following World War II, serious writing about higher education in the United States has occupied a distinctive, sometimes peculiar and subtle place, within the circles of publishers and editors. Important books about higher education have captured the attention of scholarly and general reading audiences alike. This magnetism has been remarkable. Yet the price of success and popularity often has been that discerning readers have increasing trouble in keeping track of the voluminous publications and ideas.

Illustrative of this growing interest for both readers and writers is the observation in 1968 by prominent sociologists David Riesman and Christopher Jencks. They noted in the Introduction to their memorable work, *The Academic Revolution* that the world of higher education writing was changing: “When we began studying higher education more than a decade ago, the number of scholars in the field was small enough so that we could know almost all of them personally and keep up a correspondence with them. Today this is no longer possible. Even keeping up with published reports is a full-time occupation, especially if one defines ‘the problem’ to include not only higher education but its relationship to American society.” (p. xii)

The result was that higher education analysts, whether on campus, at a foundation office in New York City, or as part of a national association based in Washington, D.C., seemed to have heeded the academic warning, “Publish or Perish.” Jencks and Riesman’s anecdotal observation about the proliferation of higher education writers was accurate. In the 1960s there had been a “great leap forward” in the number of authors who wrote systematically and seriously about higher education, ranging from campus profiles to analyses of a “knowledge industry.” More important, this was not a transient phenomenon. Publishers, whether of books or journals, seized the momentum. The initiative was compounded by the appearance of a few doctoral programs in higher education in the 1960s, followed by a steady growth of both doctoral programs and higher education research institutes. This campus-based trend then was extended and formalized in the creation and growth of such national groups as the Association for the Study of Higher Education. Writing books about higher education has continued well into the 21st century to be an enduring activity.

Frederick Rudolph, in the preface to *Curriculum: A History of the Undergraduate Course of Study Since 1636* warned readers that writing about higher education of the past and present could hardly ever rival the appeal of a work on the history of such highly dramatic themes as “How the West Was Won.” But, such self-deprecation and modesty among highly articulate higher education writers perhaps understated the magnetism that higher education, especially as a part of opportunity and mobility in American life, does have its enduring appeal. Americans have long given deference to education as a central feature of citizenship in a democratic society. And, going to college has gained increasing scrutiny as the elevator of talent combined with privilege to confer the prestige of meritocracy, if not always an elite of talent. By extension, sustained interest in college students or in the economic benefits of investment in higher education assured a reading audience not only among concerned parents, but also among governors, state legislators, and members of Congress.

For all this growth of publication and expansion of interest, one must be careful to avoid lapsing into the fallacious conclusion that writing about colleges and universities was “discovered” in the second half of the 20th century. To counter this myopia of the present, this analysis surveys those works that, published in their own time, generated interest and discussion, even controversy, to make higher education a timely, provocative topic to its contemporaries. The United States is a nation of list makers. Here, the approach is modified—it is an historical overview. It is imperfect and imbalanced—as is the topic of higher education—and as is most scientific exposition.

The Past as Prologue: The Legacy since the 17th Century

Innovation and expansion of books about higher education since World War II are noteworthy. Nonetheless, even these developments owe a debt to publishing trends that first surfaced in the 18th and 19th centuries. The first truly “American” publication devoted to higher education was *New Englande’s First Fruits*, published in 1643 by Harvard College officials. It represented the start of a tradition of writing that was on one level polemical and pragmatic, yet on closer inspection, reflective and insightful. The obvious interpretation of this pioneering publication was that it illustrated the colonial concern for education fused with virtue and long term mission—i.e., the need to educate a learned ministry for future generations. A less obvious analysis is that it was a strategic fund raising tract, directed at potential donors in England. It heralded an American penchant for combining heavenly vision with an earthly agenda.

By the late 18th century, and especially with the start of the “New Nationalism” period after the Revolutionary War, higher education in the United States found a niche in American writing and publishing as an enduring topic associated with national and regional development. Prominent national figures, including Benjamin Rush, James Madison, Benjamin Franklin, and Thomas Jefferson wrote thoughtfully and passionately about plans for a “national” university. In the period 1820 to 1880 focus shifted to the debate and dissection as to the character and composition of a “truly modern university,” with such university presidents as Philip Lindsley of the University of Nashville, Francis Wayland of Brown, and John Burgess of Columbia shifting their attention from bricks and mortar to pen and paper to make their respective cases.

Quite apart from these learned debates, after 1860 one finds a growing reader interest in accounts of campus life. Lyman Bagg, an 1869 alumnus of Yale College, combined his own penchant for saving college memorabilia with public curiosity about students at prestigious colleges, to write in 1871 an encyclopedic commentary that ran more than 700 pages, the incredible *Four Years at Yale*. There were few sequels that match Bagg’s extensive details. However, after 1880 profiles of college life and campus building became a staple feature in such high quality periodicals as *The Independent*, *Century* magazine, *The Atlantic Monthly*, and *Harper’s*. Indicative of this strand of excellent journalism and perceptive institutional analysis was Edwin Slosson’s 1910 anthology, *Great American Universities*—profiles of fourteen prominent institutions, each of which originally had been published as an article in *The Independent* magazine.

In addition to journalistic coverage, “college life” flourished as an attractive theme of American fiction. Juvenile readers—often as many as 3 million per week—bought the “Frank Merriwell at Yale” novels that glorified the world of intercollegiate athletics and student activities created by

undergraduates at the turn of the century. Yale alumnus Owen Johnson used that popular medium as the stage prop to write *Stover at Yale*—a dramatic fictional account of undergraduate activities and societies that surprised a national reading audience by shifting from celebration to criticism of what had become the popular “collegiate way.”

Whereas Owen Johnson relied on fiction to dissect the American campus, other analysts drew on either satire or surveys to provide a steady flow of expose and critical analysis about higher education. Thorstein Veblen’s *The Higher Learning in America* contributed an enduring caricature of university trustees and presidents as “captains of erudition”—an intentional connection with the “captains of industry” whose heroic albeit ruthless business practices had found a home in campus control and governance. Veblen’s dislike of the industrial ethos in higher education struck a similar chord in the leaders of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, yet in a markedly different genre. Instead of satire, they used the survey as the medium to describe and criticize the chaos, waste, and corruption they believed was both widespread and harmful in the sprawl of American higher education. Between 1910 and 1930 the Carnegie Foundation published highly conspicuous, controversial reports, including Abraham Flexner’s 1910 account of medical education and later, Howard Savage’s 1929 clinical indictment of intercollegiate athletics.

Although the campus was the crucial unit of celebration and criticism. There were important writings about the support system and infrastructure of American higher education. Illustrative of this work was Jesse Barnard Sears’ project for the federal government to make sense out of foundations, donations, and charitable trusts: his 1922 book, *Philanthropy in the History of American Higher Education*. Prior to Sears’ thorough documentation, there was no systematic grasp of the sources or impact of voluntary giving to higher education.

Abraham Flexner, who had enjoyed success for his Carnegie Foundation report on the deficiencies of medical education, tried to transpose this formula to a critique of the total American university. His 1930 book, published by Oxford University Press, was titled *Universities: America, British, German*. Flexner continued his tone of indictment and merciless expose. The undemanding curricula and pseudo-scientific character of new professional units within the American university structure provided obvious targets for Flexner’s attacks. Difficult for readers today to believe is that Flexner found some of the worst excesses of popular capitulation in the prestigious universities. The University of Chicago, for example, was cited for its commercialism and reliance on advertising billboards for its varsity football team. Harvard’s decision to create a “School of Business” also struck Flexner as inappropriate. In sum, he argued that the American university was a gangly adolescent that had yet to gain a clear, integrated personality. Flexner reserved his highest praise for the universities in Germany, thanks to their commitment to serious scholarship. Ironically, Flexner’s usually keen eye overlooked the censorship and discrimination that were symptomatic of the abuses of academic freedom in Germany’s celebrated institutions.

In the decade 1930 to 1939 serious books about higher education indicated the emergence of a professional audience. One innovation that endures to this day was the appearance in 1930 of *The Journal of Higher Education*—indicative of a critical mass of a reading constituency. Also, representative of this genre of professional scholarship on higher education was the 1937 report

commissioned by the American Council on Education, *The Student Personnel Point of View*. At the same time, both celebration and criticism flourished. Henry Seidel Canby's 1936 memoir, *Alma Mater: The Gothic Age of the American College* captured for a generation of alumni the nostalgia for the late 19th century undergraduate campus. In the same year, the iconoclastic young president of the University of Chicago, Robert M. Hutchins, continued the American tradition of self-scrutiny by writing *The Higher Learning in America*. His concise, sharp observations tempered nostalgia by reminding American alumni that perhaps the collegiate "good old days" were not especially good after all.

Books About Higher Education in Our Own Time

Given this prologue and precedent, important books about higher education from 1945 to 2000 can be broken out in chronological and thematic clusterings, decade by decade.

1945 to 1950: Policies and Plans in the Immediate Post-World War II Period

The most important books about higher education published in the late 1940s share the common feature of dealing with government relations and public policies. These are Vannevar Bush's *Science: The Endless Frontier* and the Report of the President's Commission on Higher Education, *Higher Education for American Democracy*, Chaired by George Zook. Taken together, they provide the rationale for the major federal initiatives toward higher education for several decades. But this comprehensiveness and cohesion is a bit misleading because at their time of publication, their respective arguments were disconnected—and perhaps even antagonistic. In sum, they represented "federal policies" toward higher education, as distinguished from a unified integrated "public policy" for higher education.

What makes each book extraordinary is that prior to this time there really was little in the way of a concerted, enduring federal presence in higher education. Apart from such important exceptions as the land grant acts and their related programs, federal involvement in research and development often took place in distinct federal agencies and laboratories. Connection with colleges and universities was hardly a requirement. The contribution of these books was to present the case, respectively, for sustained peace time federal involvement in large scale research, and to student access and affordability.

An important preview to these important books is the landmark event associated with higher education and the end of World War II: the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, popularly known as the "G.I. Bill." In retrospect, that legislation has been celebrated for having altered at least temporarily the conventional notion about who—and how many—should go to college. Amidst the post hoc celebration, however, it is easy to forget how uncertain passage of the Act was—and how unknown would be its consequences. Many college and university officials had reservations, even opposition, to the Act. What they really wanted was a resumption of "business as usual"—i.e., "real" college life of the late 1930s. The implication was that the immediate measure of providing a financial aid system for returning veterans to a wide range of institutional choices was not necessarily intended to represent a permanent change in higher education or in programs sponsored by the federal government. That it did signal a permanent, significant

change in public policies was in large part due to the influence of two books published immediately after World War II.

1945: Vannevar Bush, *Science: The Endless Frontier*

Vannevar Bush's *Science: The Endless Frontier* made a case for continuing federal support of large scale science research into peace time and for a domestic economy. Bush, a President of the Carnegie Institution and a physicist with strong ties to MIT, had headed up the war-time Office of Scientific Research and Development. His report indicated the appeal of a new model of federal involvement in "Big Science"—namely, reliance on competitive, peer reviewed grants submitted by scientists at universities to carry out government projects. This contrasted with proposals that the federal government ought to build its own laboratories and research agencies and infrastructure. Over time, the federal government would do both. Yet the innovation of competitive research and development grants advocated by Bush would be the genesis of the "federal grant university"—as well as the program and policy structures that would characterize serious large scale scientific research for decades to come.

1947: Report of the President's Commission on Higher Education, *Higher Education for American Democracy*

If Bush's report symbolized the manifesto of "big science as the best science" as the policy to match talent with high priorities, then the 1947 Report of the so-called Truman Commission represented the federal government's increasing interest in educational equity and access. Just as *Science: The Endless Frontier* represented an extension of federal research support into peace time, so did the Truman Commission Report suggest ways in which the federal government could—and should—extend the principles of the G.I. Bill beyond an intense, short term program. Rather, sound future policy called for an array of programs that would increase college choices and affordability to an entire generation of American citizens coming through the primary and secondary school pipeline.

All commission reports succumb in part to the blandness of compromise and generic discussion. Yet the Truman Commission Report managed to assert forcefully the analyses and recommendations that would be the blue print for subsequent federal policies involving student financial aid and the general expansion of postsecondary education opportunity. When viewed from the perspective of 1980 or 2000 it reads as if it were a script for a succession of now familiar and famous programs. It presaged, for example, the *Brown v. The Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* case and included discussion of the inequities and injustices of discrimination in education on the basis of race and income. Its chapters provide an early commentary on the imperative for legislation and programs today we coagulate as "social justice," ranging from the New Frontier through the Great Society and into the era of Pell Grants and guaranteed student loans. Furthermore, the Report contained a lengthy discussion of community colleges. And, as with all commission reports, there was no imperative that its recommendations would be linked to policies and implemented. One explanation was that for President Harry Truman, commitment to expanding educational opportunity lost out in priority when faced with a hostile Congress, an unsupportive press, and urgent matters of national defense. Ironically, state governments—not the federal government—would take the initiative in carrying out many of the recommended

measures. By the 1960s, however, many of the ideas and agencies first envisioned in the Truman Commission Report reached fruition as federally mandated and federally funded programs.

1950 to 1960: Back to Basics: Re-Thinking the Purposes of Higher Education

Peace and prosperity in national affairs did not bring either harmony or complacency to American higher education. Rather, readjustment to the post-war economy called both for fresh discussion of higher education in a mass society and for internal response to the external allegations of campus political disloyalty in the Cold War era.

1950: University of Chicago Faculty, Present and Former, *The Idea and Practice of General Education: An Account of the College of the University of Chicago*

Although variations on the theme of “general education” as a distinctive curricular emphasis are marbled throughout American colleges over time, the University of Chicago stands out as an institution with strong, special commitment since the 1930s. This compendium of essays and accounts, for example, surpasses Harvard’s famous Red Book (*General Education in a Free Society*, published in 1945) because the Harvard report, although widely distributed and read, had relatively little impact on its home institution. Furthermore, the Harvard Report dealt more with suggestions and recommendations for secondary education than for undergraduate curriculum. In contrast, the Chicago reports and accounts are markedly “home grown” and were central as a source of agreement and disagreement within the University of Chicago faculty, student, and alumni over time.

1951: William F. Buckley, *God and Man at Yale: The Superstitions of ‘Academic Freedom’*

Undergraduates as writers and editors for their campus publications had long enjoyed an opportunity for criticism, even sarcasm and parody, in their coverage of college and university events and actions. Yet for the most part their accounts were restricted to the immediate audience of fellow students—and anxious administrators. William F. Buckley, conspicuous as a staff member for *The Yale Daily News*, extended his in-house columns to a national audience. His major argument was that his Alma Mater, Yale, had—like the little lambs in the Yale Whiffenpoof song—lost its way. Its traditional commitment to political order and religious belief had been diluted and detoured. The surprise was, if Buckley’s depiction was correct, that an ostensibly conservative Yale had gone soft, indulgent in a new orthodoxy of political relativism and economic liberalism. The importance of the book is that it plunged the college campus into the mainstream of early 1950s Cold War political debates. And, it provided a launching pad for author Buckley’s long career as a national pundit, whether in print or later, as commentator and participant in television shows dealing with national affairs.

1951 Mary McCarthy, *The Groves of Academe*

Mary McCarthy, long considered to be one of America’s finest writers, had gained critical acclaim as a frequent contributor to the *New Yorker* and *The Atlantic Monthly*. In *The Groves of Academe* she relied on fiction to hit two birds with one satirical stone: namely, the culture of the

small college and the contemporary political excesses of the anti-Communist witch hunts in the years following World War II. She succeeded in transforming the “college novel” into a truly adult work, with focus on faculty and administration rather than the traditional preoccupation with undergraduate extracurricular activities. Set at fictional “Joeyln College” in Pennsylvania, novelist McCarthy exposed some of the absurdities of her namesake and political antagonist, Senator Joseph McCarthy. At the same time she captured and conveyed the nuances of professors’ life, work, and perpetual scheming at a college. McCarthy, also highly regarded for her non-fiction and political analyses, would return to the campus theme a decade later, with a best-selling novel about the alumnae of elite women’s colleges, *The Group*.

1956: David Riesman, *Constraint and Variety in Higher Education*

Sociologist David Riesman represented a rare academic, one who wrote as a “public intellectual” and distilled scholarly data and debates into fluid essays. As co-author of *The Lonely Crowd* he had gained national attention for probing dilemmas of integration and alienation in a mass society. *Constraint and Variety in Higher Education* was consistent with this tone and style. This slim volume provided a gallery tour of distinct yet related themes that were percolating within American higher education, especially as its size, complexity and importance in American society was gaining momentum. Most memorable is Riesman’s metaphor for the “academic snake” to explain the imitation and diffusion of ideas and innovations in an academic procession of institutional imitation.

1958: Theodore Caplow and Reece McGee, *The Academic Market Place*

To what extent could the tools of social science be turned onto the university itself? Sociologists Caplow and McGee took issue with the popular depiction of the campus as an “ivory tower,” exempt from the tensions and acrimonious practices of business and industry. By looking at searching and hiring for professors, they assembled a critical profile. What is interesting to a later generation of academics is that the era about which Caplow and McGee wrote—the late 1950s—often has been the object of nostalgia, especially for faculty seeking good and plentiful job options. Caplow and McGee presented an account sufficiently objective to avoid being called an “expose,” but in fact, one whose data were sufficiently graphic as to alter the image of the bucolic campus. A range of practices, including cronyism to scorpion-like interviews (in which one candidate is pitted against another) signaled a good-bye to Mister Chips, at least in the American faculty club. Collusion, turf wars, with department chairs acting as power brokers were the surprising objects of analysis in this sociological study.

1958: A.C. Spector, Editor, *The College Years*

Spector, long time and successful editor of *Esquire* magazine, combined a labor of love with a keen sense of the national reading audience. The result was a memorable anthology of fiction, verse, photographs, and memoirs about and by students, faculty, presidents, and alumni with their respective accounts of the college experience. Worth note is that at one time or another virtually every major American writer gave attention in a novel, short story, or essay to the college campus. Within a single volume one could at least sample how such celebrated yet varied writers as Damon Runyan, Scott Fitzgerald, John P. Marquand, Owen Johnson, George

Santayana, and Henry Seidel Canby demonstrated the indelible legacy of going to college. Although the anthology dealt in large measure with the American campus, it included Geoffroy Chaucer's good-natured profile of the "Clerke of Oxenford," chronicles of medieval town-gown riots, and diaries of 18th century student life.

1958: Michael Young, *The Rise of the Meritocracy, 1870 to 2033*

British author Michael Young caught the fancy of a large reading audience with what may be termed a "social science fiction" account of our confidence in both testing and talent as the durable duo of societal improvement. Imagine a social and educational system in which testing and tracking were truly accurate gauges of intellectual aptitude. If the brightest and best were systematically identified and promoted, how would such Western nations as England and the United States fare? This educational dream turns into a nightmare. Young playfully projects a counter-revolution in which the "left outs"—those who tested poorly— forfeited their familial wealth and privilege and fought back. Young's often overlooked point was that although all political and social systems require recruitment and placement of talented youth, no system—whether monarchy or democracy—can absorb such continual reshuffling within the socio-economic system. Stated in 19th century terms—ships would sink if there was not a strong distribution of intelligence and talent in the ranks of sailors and seamen. If intelligence were quarantined in the officers ranks, the bottom of boats (and nations) would collapse.

Young's satire was grounded in strong social and political history. His early discussion of the late 19th through mid-20th centuries then gave way to futuristic views. The enduring message was that meritocracy—an elite of talent—always must coexist with other entrees to power and resources. Given the polemics of such groups as the Educational Testing Service and advocates of the Scholastic Aptitude Test, Young's work was a readable, persuasive antidote.

1959: Mabel Newcomer, *A Century of Women in Higher Education*

An important precursor to Barbara Miller Solomon's *In the Company of Educated Women: A History of Women and Higher Education*, Mabel Newcomer's work pioneered for women writing about women's higher education. Newcomer, a nationally respected economist and a longtime Vassar professor, turned her hand to writing a comprehensive history about women's academic achievement and progress. Replete with comparative statistics and charts, Newcomer's work gained warm reception at the time of publication. Shy of her goal to account for women's individual accomplishments however, Newcomer's story relished in institutions, especially the eastern women's colleges. As a result, the omission of women's experiences in coeducation exists as a significant deficit. Unlike Solomon's scholarship that later benefited from women's increasing academic authority, vitality, depth, and ability to identify and discuss discrimination, *A Century of Higher Education for American Women* nevertheless survives as an example of a generation of women's historical writing about higher education prior to the women's movement.

1960 to 1969: *Popularity and Publishing*

During the decade 1960 to 1969 higher education as a topic enjoyed the periodic attention of established scholars drawn from a variety of disciplines, ranging from history and sociology to economics. What took matters beyond “business as usual” in publications about higher education was the appearance and success of three new entities: a higher education book series from Jossey-Bass publishers; a weekly “trade” newspaper devoted exclusively to higher education issues, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*; and *Change* magazine, a monthly journal that brought to mind higher education’s version of *The Atlantic Monthly* or *Harper’s Magazine*. The coincidence of these three publications represented both a cause and effect in reading and writing about higher education that remains strong into the 21st century.

In 1965 editor Allen Jossey-Bass left Prentice-Hall’s New York textbook headquarters and relocated in San Francisco to initiate a new publishing venture: books for professionals in the behavioral sciences. By 1967 that approach came to include a deliberate emphasis on books about higher education written for administrators and professionals in higher education—as distinguished from most university presses whose works were written by and for faculty scholars in distinct and often esoteric disciplinary fields. At about the same time that Allen Jossey-Bass was initiating his experiment, higher education also attracted editorial and financial support for another innovation: a professional journal in the format of a weekly newspaper. Contrary to the notion that a campus was slow to change, publisher Corbin Gwaltney showed that the American college and university was “news” indeed. The idea of a weekly trade paper took root in 1966 and continued, with expansion that included such regular features as book reviews, classified ads, opinion essays, and weekly news coverage.

Within this expanded environment of higher education publication, important books about colleges and universities in this decade included the following.

1961: Frederick Rudolph, *The American College and University: A History*

Making the history of higher education part of American social history was a task that required original research, synthesis of voluminous secondary sources, and an ability to present an engaging story. Historian Frederick Rudolph of Williams College took on the project. Thanks to the assistance of a junior senator from Massachusetts, John F. Kennedy, he gained access to a carrel and documents in the Library of Congress. Encouraged by long-time education statesman Francis Keppel, he spent about two years pulling together individual campus chronicles into a narrative that was fluid, had a point of view, and good wit. Rudolph’s history would be one of the staple references and resources for generations of higher education scholars and went through several editions until it went out of print in 1985. In 1990, it was re-issued by the University Press of Georgia, in response to popular demand. Interesting was that thirty years after its original publication, a later generation of historians remained reluctant to write a sequel or counter to Rudolph’s enduring single volume masterpiece.

An important related historical study was *Higher Education in Transition* (1956) by John Brubacher and Willis Rudy, published a few years before Rudolph’s book. Another pertinent reference work published at the same time as Rudolph’s history was a massive two-volume, fresh compilation of primary sources edited by Richard Hofstadter and Wilson Smith, *American Higher Education: A Documentary History* (1961).

1961: John W. Gardner, *Excellence: Can We Be Equal and Excellent Too?*

John Gardner, illustrative of “public service” associated with responsible, learned elites, drew from his background in major foundations, presidential cabinet positions, and university administration, to write an essay that brought together the disparate and conflicting threads within the American educational ethos. His ability to reconcile selective admissions and sorting within a democratic and ostensibly egalitarian nation provided the justification for an educational ethos that characterized the “New Frontier” and “Great Society” presidential administrations of the decade.

1962: Nevitt Sanford, *The American College: A Psychological and Social Interpretation of the Higher Learning*

Whereas Caplow and McGee had turned the analytic lens of social and behavioral science to look at the faculty and its job searches, psychologist Nevitt Sanford extended the research focus to American college students. As editor and contributing author, he marshaled an impressive roster of scholars to probe and ponder undergraduates. Although behavioral scientists represented a majority of the contributors, Sanford was judicious to make certain that such disciplines as anthropology, sociology, and history were included in the cumulative effort. Since the research started in the late 1950s and early 1960s—in advance of publication—Sanford was ahead of the curve in signaling that for all the growth and success of American higher education, there were disturbing developments and patterns among students.

1963: Clark Kerr, *The Uses of the University*

Clark Kerr, the quiet yet highly visible President of the University of California, traveled East to deliver Harvard’s annual Godkin Lectures in 1962. The resultant small book based on those presentations ended up being the most widely quoted and widely read higher education book of the quarter century. It is best known for its depictions of such contemporary phenomenon as the “knowledge industry,” the “multi-versity” and the “federal grant university.” According to Kerr, presidential leadership for this new American entity called for a “mediator” rather than the authoritarian, bombastic style of the heroic university builders at the turn of the century. Kerr’s writing style was seductive in that he fused past and present as if events were inevitable—which they were not. If Kerr had second (or third) thoughts about any of his original claims, he had numerous subsequent opportunities to amend the record. He wrote new post scripts in each of four reprintings, the most recent published in 2001.

1965: Laurence Veysey, *The Emergence of the American University*

Veysey’s monumental study of the heroic era of university building, circa 1870 to 1910, dominated the topic and shaped the depictions for several decades. Ideas led to institutions—a series of contests over such ideals as liberal education, science, utility, piety and discipline came into play within each emerging university. Often overlooked is the second half of Veysey’s work—dealing with “The Price of Structure,” a marvelous analysis of how academic bureaucracy developed—and how key individuals understood this new complex organization.

The temptation is to label this as an intellectual history of the nascent American university. Yet right from the start Veysey cautions about the dangers of attributing ideas to institutions in any direct way. Most of the university builders, whether donors, trustees, or presidents, often were silent and acted implicitly as they carried out their respective projects. Most of all, the complex institution called for synthesis and compromise, as Veysey concludes that the “tendency to blend and reconcile” disparate plans led by 1910 to the emergence of a “Standard American University” that worked reasonably well yet philosophically pleased no single group totally.

1968: Jacques Barzun, *The American University: How It Runs, Where It Is Going*

Characterized as a loving critic of universities, Jacques Barzun openly sparred with Clark Kerr and Kerr’s depiction of the multiversity as a satisfactory model for the American university. Despite the modern university’s numerous deficiencies, Barzun maintained his faith in the institution and championed the “unified” university over any loose association of autonomous units. Discouraged by increasing emphasis on “big science” and faculty “production” as measures of institutional prestige among other trends, Barzun cautioned that the university needed to regain its honor. Barzun prescribed for the university a strict regimen of simplification and selectivity in taking on new projects and activities. Above all, Barzun entrusted the faculty as the institutions’ reformers—most capable as future administrators to arrest the undignified institutional bloat and decide what the university should be.

1968: Christopher Jencks and David Riesman, *The Academic Revolution*

Titles can be misleading. Jencks and Riesman gained some unexpected publicity with a book title that many thought referred to student rebellion on the campus—very timely at publication date of 1968. In fact, the authors who had been writing on this since the early 1960s, were focusing on the “rise to power of the academic profession.” Perhaps less dramatic than undergraduate sit-ins and take-overs of administration buildings were the inroads that professionalization, including academic degrees, had made during the 20th century on all professions and jobs. And, at least for a few decades, faculty gained in the prestige and power.

A watershed in American society was that by the late 1960s, the American Dream of upward mobility had in part been revised: generations of prosperity led many families to view education as a hedge against downward mobility for their children. Each chapter was a free-standing analysis—and each was marbled with controversial observations that ran counter to conventional wisdom. For example, in response to allegations about tracking within mass higher education, Jencks and Riesman argued, “Testing is not unfair to the poor. Life is unfair to the poor. Tests merely measure the results.”

The authors were careful sociologists who made a sound distinction between social status and income. Rising economic prosperity for a large segment of Americans is not one and the same as leap frogging up the social ladder. Although many Americans prospered in the 20th century, it did not mean that there had been a major reshuffling of the nominal place on the social ladder. In sum, the major divisions in American life were attributed to socio-economic factors and lifestyle: lower middle class versus upper middle class. Nowhere was this subtlety more important than in the pecking order and orbits of higher education. If there is a single contribution the authors

made to our thinking about the college experience it is their observation that certification and socialization, not teaching and learning, are the really prized reasons for going to college.

1969 Kenneth A. Feldman and Theodore M. Newcomb, *The Impact of College on Students*

Whereas Nevitt Sanford edited an influential, pioneering anthology in his 1962 volume, *The American College: A Psychological and Social Interpretation*, Feldman and Newcomb's *Impact of College on Students* provided a fluid, integrated synthesis of four decades' worth of research literature on college students and the impact of the collegiate experience. Commissioned by the Carnegie Commission for the Advancement of Teaching, the impressive two-volume study rose to a new level of complex and critical account of nearly 1,500 published and unpublished reports. Feldman and Newcomb's painstaking detail and attention to new computations of original data yielded the understated but particularly rich finding that the collegiate experience influences some students in some ways. Reviewers quickly predicted that the changing democratic landscape of American higher education and advance of racial and ethnic minorities would be the only force to challenge Feldman and Newcomb's usefulness. However, the model of their work remained enduring. In 1991, Ernest Pascarella and Patrick Terenzini revisited and updated Feldman and Newcomb's approach with high acclaim in *How College Affects Students: Findings and Insights from Twenty Years of Research*.

1970 to 1989: *Probing the Problems*

A landmark event of the 1970s was the creation of the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education, and its 1974 successor, The Carnegie Council on Policy Studies in Higher Education. The center of this analytic storm was Clark Kerr, former President of the University of California and already influential as an author with his 1963 essay, *The Uses of the University*. The lore Clark Kerr tells about his tenure as president of the University of California is that he left the job the way he started it: "fired with enthusiasm." It was the same sentiment he then brought to his post-presidential post as chair of a new enterprise, the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education. What followed was an unprecedented initiative to scrutinize numerous aspects of higher education. The residual impression was that higher education as a "knowledge industry" was a "troubled industry." This was the tone of the voluminous literature published during the decade not only under the auspices of the Carnegie Commission but other institutes, research centers, and publishers as well.

Preoccupation with using scholarly analysis to solve problems facing higher education had some positive, enduring side effects. Foremost was the emergence of national associations whose long term commitment was to serious scholarship about higher education. This included the Association for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE). It included a multiplier effect, as ASHE aligned with the George Washington University Clearinghouse on Education and the ERIC database to sponsor the ASHE-ERIC series on higher education—a series of monographs on timely higher education topics that utilized the format of extensive reviews of scholarly literature. It demonstrated both the growing scholarship on higher education and the equally growing professional audience for such literature.

1971: The Liberal Arts College in the Age of the University, special issue of *History of Education Quarterly*

Influential works usually are associated with major publishing houses and large circulation media. One exception was the memorable journal issue published by the History of Education Society in Winter 1971. Drawing on the original essays of four distinguished historians—Hugh Hawkins, James Axtell, David Allmendinger, and David Potts—the cumulative impact of this volume was to upset the conventional notion that somehow liberal arts colleges had withered and died during the so-called “Age of the University,” circa 1880 to 1910. Relying on fresh data, clear writing, and new perspectives, the historians prompted a re-thinking of institutional history and organizational behavior. Its implications were so strong as to be embarrassing to earlier accounts. Axtell, for example, cut through the rhetoric of “university builders” by showing that enrollments and library holdings at, e.g., Amherst College in 1890 surpassed those at allegedly “Big Ten” universities such as Indiana or Illinois. One of its consequences for contemporary public policy was that it arrested the tendency to see the private colleges and the “independent sector” of higher education as having eroded in presence and influence.

1973: Earl F. Cheit, *Higher Education’s New Depression*

Earl Cheit, an economist and Dean of the Business School at Berkeley was the messenger who brought unexpected bad news to the higher education establishment in this provocative work published by the Carnegie Commission. After decades of support and growth, Cheit alerted his readers to some fundamental weaknesses in the financing and support of all American colleges and universities. He was correct. The book made a strong impact because its findings were so contrary to appearances. Given the American predilection for a monumental campus and grand academic buildings, Cheit’s probing of financial trends was as unwelcomed and unexpected as a termite inspection report that warns of a deteriorating foundation, despite a magnificent edifice.

Cheit’s book warrants special note because it was an example of scholarly research that made a difference in widespread organizational behavior. In response to his warnings, over the next decade American colleges and universities worked conscientiously and systematically both to gain a grasp of their on-going financial operations and to improve their fiscal fitness.

1973: Michael Cohen and James March, *Leadership and Ambiguity: The American College President*

The authors writing from the perspective of faculty at Stanford University combined sharp insights with wit to dismantle the misplaced faith in rational planning as an approach to leading and operating American higher education. Central to their book is the observation that the typical American campus cannot and ought not be viewed as another business. It lacks the centrality of purpose and clarity of goals one associates with, e.g., industrial production. The memorable metaphor for the American university is that it is best understood as a round soccer field upon which each of many constituencies has its own goal net, sets its own rules, brings its own soccer balls, and keeps its own score. Leadership henceforth would be both more difficult and more interesting. Cohen and March’s book was one of the most frequently cited works published by the Carnegie Commission.

1977: Howard Bowen, *Investment in Learning*

Howard Bowen responded to a succession of articles and books that questioned whether college education was worthwhile—and whether colleges and universities were “doing their job.” Drawing on prodigious national data sources, Bowen incorporated his experience as an economist and as the president of a private college and a major state university to examine the indictments. His thoughtful and gracefully written response turned the tide of public debate to suggest that investment in higher education was an appropriate, effective societal investment for the public good. His findings in this work sponsored by the Carnegie Commission represented a genuine conclusion, not a presumption or assertion. Indeed, Bowen was not blind to the shortcomings and foibles of college and university administration. He had gained reknown for his “revenue theory of higher education costs”—noting calmly that colleges raised all the money they could, and then spent all the money they raised.

1977: Alexander W. Astin, *Four Critical Years: Effects of College on Beliefs, Attitudes, and Knowledge*

University of California psychologist Alexander Astin relied on longitudinal data to probe the interconnection between institutional types and student outcomes. His comprehensive analyses confirmed that full-time residential campus life experiences showed relatively high positive consequences: degree completion, changes in cognitive performance, changes in values—all the good things invoked about the college experience. Large research universities fared less well. Most disheartening was the poor record of commuter and two year institutions in making a difference.

Astin’s final chapter, dealing with public policy implications of his student analyses, had harsh words about the policies and practices of the past half century—namely, the decision by many states to extend postsecondary education via two-year community colleges, without dormitories and with little encouragement for full-time study. Astin raised a fundamental question: was this good sense to have such an ineffective educational strategy and institution serve as the primary place where students who came from lower income, lower education families were to try to acquire an education? In 1993, by which time most undergraduates were taking 5 to 6 years to complete the bachelor’s degree, Astin revisited his original study in the sequel, *What Matters Most in College?* Reflecting Astin’s earlier criticisms of public policies building commuter two-year colleges, Astin excluded community college students from his 1993 analysis.

1977: Arthur Levine, *Handbook on Undergraduate Curriculum*

Arthur Levine emerged over three decades as a reflective administrator—one who fused scholarship with leadership roles at the Carnegie Foundation, then later as a college president. Dissatisfied with the lack of historical context that undergirded most debates over undergraduate curriculum reform, Levine found time to sort and make sense out of a large, important topic. What had started out as a tool to help him ground his own thinking was then published as an excellent, enduring reference work. The companion book to Levine’s book, also published under

the auspices of the Carnegie Commission, was Frederick Rudolph's *Curriculum: A History of the American Undergraduate Course of Study since 1693*.

1978: Chester E. Finn, *Scholars, Dollars, and Bureaucrats*

Chester Finn read the federal budget and then re-read the U.S. Constitution. He was left with a puzzle, or what he called a "15 billion dollar misunderstanding." By what authority was the federal government involved in higher education? The federal presence was existent and growing, despite there being no constitutional mandate for such a role. Finn's writing style is distinctive in that he combined historical background with the kinds of analyses one associates with political science. Titles and topics were dramatic and colorful—e.g., he devotes one chapter to "exploring the regulatory swamp." The policy dilemma of access versus choice makes sense when presented as "steak" versus "macaroni." It was a good primer at a crucial time about the episodes of student financial aid policy, federal research funding—and remains a knowledgeable glimpse at the curious patterns of discussion and decision making about higher education within the agencies and associations of Washington, D.C.

1980: Ursula Delworth, Gary R. Hanson, and Associates, *Student Services: A Handbook for the Profession*

Challenging fiscal environments of the 1980s made it somewhat surprising that precious university resources supported increasing opportunities and growth for employment and study in the field of student services. Yet, during this decade, the master's degree in student personnel services and student development gained new attention as a practical degree for professionals aspiring to work in financial aid, student activities, orientation, residence life, and career planning, among other areas. Described upon its release as a "modern treatise," this Jossey-Bass publication offered to these aspirants a small but sound bit of history, theory, practice models, techniques, and suggestions for organization and management. Referred to as "Delworth and Hanson," this handbook assumed a place on the bookshelves of many university administrators and, despite the shortcomings common to any "handbook," prevailed as a work that reached many higher education practitioners.

1983: George Keller, *Academic Strategy: The Management Revolution in American Higher Education*

American colleges and universities have long had a fondness and weakness for trying to transplant the allegedly effective techniques of business to the operation of the campus. Most of these efforts have been clumsy, superficial and unsuccessful. Keller, in contrast, brings the depth and perspective of a historian, dean, and executive to the myriad problems facing American higher education in the early 1980s. He draws on a rich source of historical episodes to explain and show how thoughtful planning—i.e., "academic strategy"—can be essential to the condition and character of a campus in the short run and over the long haul. This remarkable, well written work signaled the entry of The Johns Hopkins University Press into publishing a sustained series of books about higher education.

1983: Edward Shils, *The Academic Ethic*

Shils' short book is accompanied by his long, subtitle: "The Report of a Study Group of the International Council on the Future of the University." In fact, this was a self-appointed group that had no official standing beyond its members. They were a highly personal circle of long time colleagues, many of whom had written for *Minerva*, the journal of essays and opinions edited by Shils himself. Continuing the critical tradition of Flexner and Hutchins, Shils narrates the decline of the academic ethic in American life, a saga that he sees as no less than the academic priesthood's abdication of its solemn vows. The tale of woe is plausible and intriguing—and also dotted with inconsistencies. Shils, who decried the intrusion of federal funding into campus scholarship, would echo comparable themes when he himself was selected to be the National Endowment for the Humanities' Jefferson lecturer. For a thoughtful reader, the dilemma posed by Shils' critique is the hard question: "Who, other than Shils and his small circle of friends and colleagues, can fit into the mold that Shils has constructed for American higher education?" The provocative essay also left unanswered a riddle about the illogic of history: precisely where and when was the "golden age" of university propriety to which Shils alludes?

1985: Barbara Miller Solomon. *In the Company of Educated Women: A History of Women and Higher Education in America*.

So hungry were historians and other scholars for a comprehensive presentation of women's higher education past, that *In the Company of Educated Women* became an "instant classic." Clearly, Solomon's work remains invaluable to the task of teaching and learning about women's higher education. To Solomon the American story of women's higher education involved four themes: struggle for access, the dimensions of the collegiate experience, the effects of education on women's life choices, and the uneasy connection between feminism and women's educational advancement. Ultimately, Solomon's narrative remained bittersweet. Just as the themes conveyed a story of hope and increasing educational success for some American women, they also revealed new obstacles, barriers, and manipulations whereby women's educational opportunity was shaped more by women's perceived usefulness to men, children, and society than internal images of personal fulfillment and success. Over the years, critics have effectively revealed some of Solomon's limitations which include the following: an over-emphasis on the theme of access, over-reliance on source materials from women's colleges, weak coverage of the post World War II period, and failure to adequately account for variation in experience due to race, ethnicity, religion, and region. Nevertheless, Solomon's work, despite its shortcomings, has prevailed and successfully whetted the academic community's appetite for more scholarship about women in higher education.

1986: Howard Bowen and Jack Schuster, *American Professors: A National Resource Imperiled*

Whereas college students and their problems had preoccupied behavioral scientists for years, there had been relatively little systematic consideration of the character and condition of the faculty. Economist Howard Bowen and Political Scientist Jack Schuster amended this oversight. Their comprehensive survey of American faculty nationwide and at a range of institutions was prodigious in scope and chilling in its findings. Although professors had experienced substantial gains in prestige and earning power between 1955 and 1970, the national data indicated decline and danger signals in the subsequent fifteen years. Some of the problems were due to academic

policies set by presidents and boards within higher education—as distinguished from external threats. Most important were their discussions of new, young faculty who faced an institutional setting and national environment that was eroding in its appreciation for and support of dedicated teaching and scholarship—even though such endeavors benefited the life and economy of the nation.

1987: Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, *Campus Life: Undergraduate Cultures from the End of the Eighteenth Century to the Present*

Horowitz effectively interpreted the trajectory of American undergraduate campus life through the lens of social history. Particularly in four-year residential college settings, Horowitz discerned an important pattern for the shifting political and social dynamics of student life over time. Ideal and competing types—insiders, outsiders, and rebels—comprised the Horowitz’ undergraduate college culture. Identified as insiders or college men and women, most often fraternity men and later sorority women dominated the campus social and political scene through student government and athletics. Those on the “outside” or periphery of campus were often intellectuals or “grinds” that eschewed their peers for the approval of faculty and valued college as preparation for future pursuits. Campus rebels later donned the mantle of opposition to college men and women, striking out on their own to form new alliances and activities to enliven the extra-curriculum and lessen the grip of insiders on collegiate life. Although Horowitz’s quest to use her typology to fully explain the grade-consciousness of 1980s undergraduates was ultimately unsuccessful, she delivered a compelling and critical interpretative framework—which has all the more staying power because readers often sense in the printed page a bit of their own collegiate experience.

1989: Steven Brint and Jerome Karabel, *The Diverted Dream: Community Colleges and the Promise of Educational Opportunity in America, 1900-1985*

There is little argument that the community college has been a unique American contribution to higher education. Its All-American appeal is embellished by celebration and self-congratulations for providing a first entry port and a last resort for the educationally under-served. Beyond such polemics, however, sociologists Brint and Karabel reconstruct a more complex and troubling profile. Their study includes a thorough review of scholarly literature on the junior colleges and community colleges, resulting in what has been termed the ultimate revisionist history of this distinctive American institutional invention. In addition to the historical overview, sociologists Brint and Karabel provide a case study of community college transformation in one important state, Massachusetts.

1989: Michael Moffat, *Coming of Age in New Jersey: College and American Culture*

For some peculiar reason, anthropology has been an under-represented discipline in the study of higher education. Moffat, an anthropologist at Rutgers, helped redress this imbalance when he put aside plans to study a distant country and culture in order to do field work among a truly strange tribe: namely, undergraduates at his own university. Living in freshman dorms probably went beyond the call of hazardous duty, but the effort paid off. Moffat, for example, was able to reconstruct patterns of life within the campus that otherwise would have been unknown or

unappreciated. He relies on “mapping” to find how undergraduates each establish their orbits within the physical campus—and how they navigate the curriculum. Most refreshing for administrators is to learn that the vast majority of undergraduates have no idea as to who the Dean of Students is. The varsity football team is a source of some cheering and good will—but no more or no less than the NFL professional team that so happens to play in the same stadium. One residual finding is that perhaps the “real” curriculum for undergraduate studies in the large state university is less a core of courses and more the survival skill of finding and then pursuing a trajectory or path through a complex bureaucracy and a smorgasbord of degree requirements and course options that gets one to some individually-set goal.

1990 to 2000: Recent Trends and Developments

A salient characteristic about important books on higher education at the end of the 20th century to 2000 was that an increasing number of established publishers committed to creating distinct higher education series. The Johns Hopkins University Press, for example, had been the pacesetter for this starting in the 1980s. Vanderbilt University Press made a comparable move in the 1990s. Another noteworthy trend included the presence of The Mellon Foundation as a major source of sponsored research about higher education issues, ranging from affirmative action to intercollegiate athletics. When considered as part of the existing, flourishing higher education publishing, the cumulative profile indicated that higher education had grown, not diminished, as an important topic.

Some selected works that were both influential and provocative in the decade include the following.

1990: Henry Rosovsky, *The University: An Owner's Manual*

In contrast to a tendency for former presidents and provosts to lapse into vague abstractions, Henry Rosovsky invoked the example of a car owner's manual as the way to provide stewardship for the present and future of the university. Drawing from his experience as Dean of Harvard College, he walks an interested reader through the workings and wirings of a campus. It's limit is that he uses Harvard as the make and model from which to induct to the larger universe of all universities—or, rather, “the university.” Just as the Mercedes-Benz manual is not a great fit for the owner of a Plymouth, so it is that Rosovsky's complex luxury of the Harvard model does not provide perfect help for diagnoses and repairs at, e.g., a smaller campus that does not have all of Harvard's extras. Nonetheless, there is good wit and insight that leads to the lesson that one must understand the culture of the campus if you want to make it work and run effectively.

1990: Ernest Boyer, *Scholarship Reconsidered*

Boyer, as President of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, was prompted to undertake this project in response to on-going debates over research as part of the institutional mission. “Publish or Perish” had become the volatile theme inside and out the American campus to depict emphasis on faculty research and scholarship, especially at major universities. The real and imagined pressure for professors to publish research results also had gained

increasing presence within a variety of other institutions, including liberal arts colleges and comprehensive colleges and universities. Boyer, admittedly concerned about the research over-emphasis, set out to mediate the controversy. His resolution was to amend the dichotomy of “teaching versus research” by expanding the notion of “scholarship” into four variants: discovery, integration, application, and teaching. Implicit in the discourse was the observation (and recommendation) that a healthy institution allowed for and acknowledged many kinds of scholarly activities among faculty and student.

Scholarship Reconsidered was one of the more influential works in Boyer’s long series of occasional monographs and essays that he wrote while President of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. Format and formula became familiar: a literature review and a national survey commissioned by the Foundation became the platform from which Boyer observed and probed the campus condition. At best it heralded a resurrection of the Carnegie Foundation’s participation in the nation’s higher education discussions—along with such other works by Boyer as *College: The Undergraduate Experience* (published in 1984). One limit of this and related studies was that the monographs presented a synthesis of familiar, obvious criticisms yet, beyond discussion, had little direct connection to policy formulation at either the campus, state or federal level.

1991: Dinesh D’Souza, *Illiberal Education: The Politics of Race and Sex on Campus*

Dinesh D’Souza represented a new constituency in higher education: young, confident, articulate, and conservative alumni of prestigious institutions who depicted campus administrators as having drifted or capitulated into political correctness. It was a world turned upside down when, as author and also as editor of “alternative” campus magazines such as *The Princeton Review*, D’Souza and his counterparts moved to the right of the editors of established alumni magazines—a group ironically criticized in the 1970s by undergraduates for being far to the right and obsessed with football and nostalgia. D’Souza, described in one book review as the “consummate high school debate champion,” lines up the dates and data to document the campus drift away from sound thinking and values to flabby capitulation.

1994: John R. Thelin, *Games Colleges Play: Scandal and Reform in Intercollegiate Athletics*

When intercollegiate athletics move from the sports page to the front page, the big news usually is bad news. Such has been the heritage of an allegedly student activity, whether in 1890 or 1990. Using four national commission reports, starting with Howard Savage’s 1929 study for the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and continuing to the 1990 Knight Foundation Commission on the Future of College Sports, this study connects historical research with contemporary policies and practices.

The key finding is that academic leaders have had little inclination and less success in bringing about genuine reform of intercollegiate athletics within their own institutions and conferences. Also troubling is documentation of the trend that official “reforms” usually legitimize practices and policies that previously had been illegal. A good related work for *Games Colleges Play* is the present day organizational analysis provided by Murray Sperber’s *College Sports, Inc.: The Athletic Department Versus the University*, published in 1990.

1997: Hugh Graham and Nancy Diamond, *The Rise of American Research Universities: Elites and Challengers in the Postwar Era*

Historians Graham and Diamond examine the conventional wisdom that there has been little room at the top in the rankings and ratings of American research universities. Their methodological contribution is that they look at research grant dollars and scholarly awards on the basis of per capita faculty performance—as distinguished from the customary compilations of aggregate awards and gross research dollars per campus. When relying on this new criteria they find substantial gains and losses among the top fifty universities in the half century since World War II, with the residual message that “bigger is not necessarily better” in the pursuit of prestige. As prelude to their original analysis, Graham and Diamond provide the higher education community with a good summary and synopsis of the numerous national studies on rankings that have been a staple since around World War I.

1998: William Bowen and Derek Bok, *The Shape of the River: Long-Term Consequences of Considering Race in College and University Admissions*

The popularity of Bowen and Bok’s study on race-sensitive admissions not only affirms Gunnar Myrdal’s proposition that race matters, but also that we are eager to talk about it. Exchanging the metaphor of the minority pipeline in admissions for the more organic yet challenging contours of the river, Bowen and Bok effectively use the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation’s College and Beyond database to explicate the benefits of minority attendance at academically selective colleges and universities. To the extent that Bowen and Bok have given good data to an important discourse their scholarship fills an important gap. Ultimately, however, their scholarship leaves us hungry for answers to questions about race-sensitive admissions at less-selective public institutions, particularly large state universities that have been attacked by litigation and public backlash—and unfortunately, have the most to lose from a change in direction. One of the more interesting features of the point of view expressed in this 1998 study is its dramatic contrast with Bok’s reservations regarding affirmative action as president of Harvard University two decades earlier.

1999: Nicholas Lemann, *The Big Test: The Secret History of the American Meritocracy*

Author Nicholas Lemann personified the journalist turned historian whose reconstruction of our national obsession with standardized testing and sorting had become a rite of passage. His focus is on the “Masters of the University” at the Educational Testing Service in Princeton, New Jersey whose plan was to reduce the traditional advantage of family and fortune as an admissions ticket to the prestigious colleges. The SAT was their great hope to provide college admissions committees with information to sift intellectual talent and identify future leaders. Their American Dream, then, fused social order and social mobility with faith in high SAT scores as the key to the elevator going up to the top floor. The best plans go awry—and Lemann argues that what America got was a partial triumph of academic talent: an American “mandarin” group with high scores, professional success and arrogance. Their hubris was that they often mistook pursuit of their own ambition for “public” service. Most disconcerting was that ETS officials were blind to talent outside SAT measurement.

Although the story starts with a marked East Coast focus, Lemann takes readers to the Pacific Coast of the 1990s to track the ETS's quest to create an "aristocracy of talent" in the diverse, large arena of California's higher education and economy. On balance, the ETS architects and advocates failed to appreciate America's diversity. Talent is varied and widely distributed. Second, no matter how valid or invalid the measures of the SAT, it had only incidental connection with decisions about who goes to college where. The odd couple of talent and favoritism persist in varied forms, impervious to the measurements of a single test. Higher education in the United States remains an important activity in which historically prominent and academically prestigious colleges and universities can give preferential admissions treatment. It can be extended to allow an under-achieving student such as George W. Bush to attend Andover, Yale, and Harvard Business School—or to a low income minority whose formal education has not included the benefits of family and fortune.

Conclusion

In contrast to earlier days, at the start of the 21st century the body of higher education scholarship shows increased systematic rigor and complexity. Over the past fifty years writing about higher education has given well-deserved attention to important themes such as equity, affordability, and excellence. Researchers have investigated essential questions involving the purpose of higher education, what should be taught, the role of federal and state involvement in governance, and how best to meet the challenges of democratic expansion of educational opportunity in a diverse society, to name a few. In some cases, what perhaps appeared as old themes or forgotten questions became new again as scholars probed to meet the demands of their day or introduce fresh voices, experiences, and insights. Rather than offer resolution however, in most cases, the scholarship identified here as important has endured despite various limitations primarily because it encouraged the asking of meaningful, timely, and timeless questions.

Any compilation of important books in higher education obviously disappoints many authors and readers and injects the notion of a presumed canon. On one hand, this disappointment testifies offhandedly to the impressive volume and quality of writing about higher education in recent years. On the other, the disappointment signals the sober realization that the field of writing and reading about higher education has only recently begun to accommodate and affirm the scholarly contributions of women and scholars of color. Assuredly, if the increasing participation of previously excluded voices and the relatively recent fecundity of higher education scholarship offers predictive value whatsoever, the theme for the next fifty years of reading and writing about higher education resounds with great expectations.

See also: Access; Affirmative Action; Community Colleges; Foundations; Higher Education as a Field of Study; History of Higher Education; Liberal Arts Colleges; National Science Foundation; Political Contexts of Higher Education; Private Colleges; Recruitment of Faculty; Research and Scholarship; Strategic Planning; Student Attitudes; Tenure; Truman Commission Report; Women in Higher Education

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