

Certainly these stereotypes exist in reality; there really *are* absent-minded professors and politically correct ones to boot. But to focus on them would be to overlook the enormous sea changes that have taken place in academia over the past twenty years. We now live in a time when the walls between the “real world” and academia have fallen down. Professors are no longer comfortable or tweedy (in the deeper sense of that term); they increasingly take the form of underpaid graduate students or part-time adjuncts rushing from one university to the next. The professoriate is not a “community of scholars” that governs itself; rather its work is reviewed by administrators who chant “accountability” while throwing merit pay rewards at those lucky enough to have full-time jobs. University leaders don’t sneer at the profit seekers at their gates; rather they welcome them with open arms, cutting deals and pioneering high-tech schemes that put courses online, packaged cheaply for worldwide consumption. Welcome to academia, twenty-first-century style.

Of course, some might argue that the business imperative has always invaded the hallowed halls of academia. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, social critic Thorstein Veblen noted that those who gave their dollars to the universities—the Gilded Age wealthy who sought out new forms of conspicuous consumption—did so in order to build up their reputations. They wanted their names on buildings, their reputations bolstered by being connected to genteel institutions of higher learning. If some professor espoused radical politics, the pressure might be turned on, and said professor would hit the pavement. Trustees called the shots, no doubt, making clear that wealth spoke clearly and audibly in the hallowed halls of academia even a century ago.

Today, business leaders have gone one step further. They want to assert not just influence but much more control over the educational processes themselves, and understanding this transition is crucial. Our *au courant* jet-setting business types concern themselves not just with conspicuous consumption but with direct management of education on their own terms: They don’t want ivory-covered buildings with their names on them but rather training camps for their workforce. They probably don’t even care all that much if nutty left-wing profs shoot their mouths off. They’ve got more important things on their minds, namely what the new managerial theorists call “just in time” knowledge. Corporate leaders want their employees to gain knowledge *now*, immediately, not on the plodding terms set by the ivory tower of yesteryear but the terms set by corporations, providing only enough knowledge for their employees to get their jobs done, not to ask fundamental questions about the society in which they live. If need be, corporations will

do the educating themselves (but, for obvious reasons, still prefer others to float the costs). In his *Free Agent Nation*, a manifesto for today’s new economy, Daniel Pink glorifies the radiant promises of distance learning—the selling of courses online by for-profit educational institutions. “More free agent teachers and more free agent students,” he writes, “will create tremendous liquidity in the learning market—with the Internet serving as the matchmaker and market maker for this marketplace of learning.”¹ The use of the term “market” three times in a single sentence tells us something about the demands that the new economy is putting on higher education. The message is clear: So long, ivy-covered walls, tweedy professors, and genteel university presidents—hello to markets, profits, and computers.

If you want to get a better sense of this, just read about John Sperling, CEO of the Apollo Group, the parent company of the University of Phoenix. He’s no Rockefeller who hands out money to the University of Chicago and then sits back and waits for the prestige to rise; this is a man who wants to call the shots—down to ensuring that his temporary teachers make next to nothing and have no say in course content as they conduct job training that is shamefacedly called higher education. Sperling is not someone who hopes to lift up his name by attaching it to an institution of genteel culture; this is a man who would probably like to dynamite the universities that still exist physically (those like Rockefeller’s University of Chicago) and replace them with for-profit entities. Sperling symbolizes the revolutionary power of market thinking in terms of the world of higher education.

This love affair between the market and higher education has helped prompt some within academia to rethink their status as laborers and their relation to labor unions. Once again, noticing historical changes that have taken place is crucial. Sure, there have been professional associations and faculty unions since the early twentieth century, but they’ve often been old boy networks, looking out for the academic freedom of a select few. Historically, organizations like the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) stepped into occasional political disputes, sanctioning schools for threatening the professoriate’s civil liberties in time of war, for instance. Today, academic unions might still be concerned with academic freedom, but the terms have changed. The threat is no longer an occasional war or political crisis, but the ever present pressures of corporatization. Now unions are fighting for academic freedom, plus some much more basic needs—pay that can put food on the table, health-care benefits. You will read in this collection how graduate students organized themselves into unions precisely because they stopped thinking of themselves as teaching apprentices taking their first step into a community of scholars. Rather, they think of them-

selves as employees—recognizing the economic imperatives that recent academic reforms have made brutally clear. The world of tweedy profs and culture wars seems to have faded.

This book explores this sea change in academia—the rise of the corporate university and an academic labor movement. For readers interested in learning more about academia—that is, readers not part of this world—this book can highlight significant changes; it can tell you something about the reality of contemporary academic life, breaking through the myths that have dominated so much current debate. For those concerned with the future of progressive politics, this book offers a new look at how some within academia are thinking about this future (and it may surprise some to find an emphasis on Old Left concerns with socioeconomic inequalities, not just cultural problems). For those working within academia, we are certain that this book will strike a chord but that it may also challenge you to see things differently. For those who have faced the brunt of these changes—especially graduate students doing the bulk of teaching at many institutions or those adjuncts paid next to nothing for their travails (and travels)—we hope this book inspires you to think about ways to improve your situation. But be warned: We are not cheerleaders. We don't just tell how the good guys always win. Since they don't, we talk about academic labor's defeats as well as its victories. We make clear that organizing within the corporate university is an uphill battle.

To appeal to this wide range of readers, we have organized this anthology as follows. We open with a section on the changing world of academia, stressing the importation of corporate practices into the university. We then move onto a section documenting how these changes affect those who work here and close with descriptions of labor conflicts that have erupted. Section 1 tries to make clear just how much the ethic of profit has invaded the university. It opens with Ana Marie Cox's essay about the rise of for-profit universities that increasingly turn education processes into commodities bought and sold on the market. Cox's essay is a prime example of an older style of journalism that seems waning today—namely, muckraking. She digs up the ways in which for-profit education leaders have wielded influence in Washington to get what they want and how, in the process, they have degraded our conception of higher education. After introducing the reader to the literal meaning of the *corporate* university, we then reprint an essay that has become something of a classic among academic labor activists—David Noble's "Digital Diploma Mills," which discusses the perils of distance learning. Noble shows that by putting courses online, administrators can easily commodify teaching and manage teaching (the way the

University of Phoenix has). The next two essays extend from Noble's critique of the de-skilling of the professoriate and the evisceration of faculty control over their own labor. Denise Tanguay dissects the rise of merit pay systems, showing how they increase managerial control over faculty members. Benjamin Johnson then makes clear just how far the "part timing" of America's teaching force has gone. As he suggests, the full-time tweedy professor is now truly a thing of the past, replaced by a pool of underpaid contingent laborers with little, if any, benefits and no job security.

The essays in section 1 use historical and sociological approaches to understand changes wrought in academia. But this is only a part of the story. Historical changes affect real, living people, as social historians have been telling us for years.² So it is with the restructuring of academia. This is, of course, partially obvious. When full-time jobs are replaced by part-time jobs, for instance, some people cannot find work. But much more happens. There's the scramble to make ends meet, doing what can be done to put food on the table, as Alexis Moore documents so painstakingly. The lives of adjunct professors are structured around the need to accept the terms of those doling out bit jobs. This is no victory for "free agents" as Daniel Pink would have it; it is a hard life of traveling from one teaching gig to the next, patching together a meager salary and expending a great deal of personal energy and gas doing so. When this happens, one's consciousness changes. In academia today, a new generation of young scholars are not just finding it harder to locate decent work, they are changing the way they think about themselves. It might once have been easy for professors to see themselves as different from the rest of America's working population, as white collar and privileged, as the sort who work with their heads rather than their hands. But for someone like Kevin Mattson, this distinction makes little sense today. The changing circumstances of work in the modern academy are such that academics see themselves increasingly as workers. This change in consciousness—felt, lived, experienced in everyday life—goes a long way in explaining the energy and anger that sustain the new academic labor movement.

This anger has generated conflicts among those who work within academia. Perhaps most explicitly, it has destroyed the ideal of teaching apprentices learning from their mentors. Nothing makes this clearer than the story Corey Robin tells. As he points out in his essay on the drive among Yale graduate students to get a union, the terms of full-time teaching can implicate people in unfair systems that prompt their worst behavior. Robin shows how full-time faculty often turned on the very same people they were supposed to be mentoring, even writing letters of recommendation for prospective employers that chastised their students. A worse fate can await

those who have the courage to side with their graduate students. Witness the story of Joel Westheimer. Testifying on behalf of graduate students organizing at New York University (NYU), Westheimer found himself fired—denied tenure by the very same people who just months before his testifying were singing his praises.

Westheimer's story makes for a nice transition into section 3, which tries to show how people caught within this new academic system can in fact do something about it. Westheimer's story shows the stakes of these struggles, as do the opening essays in section 3. Lisa Jessup documents the long and hard struggle to win rights for NYU's graduate students—the struggle Westheimer was supporting. She makes clear that university leaders have clued into what's happening and have garnered hired guns willing to crush union drives, precisely the sort of highly paid organizations that helped quash a struggle at the University of Minnesota. Telling this story, Michael Brown and his colleagues explain just how difficult organizing can be, even in the seemingly free and open world of academia in a state with a strong presence of organized labor.

The union drives at NYU and Minnesota sought to organize graduate student teaching assistants at individual institutions. Many academic labor activists are starting to move beyond this approach in order to find wider forums in which to make their case. Cary Nelson argues that disciplinary associations need to become places where full-time professors can articulate the need to confront the problems of academic underemployment. Of course, this relies upon struggle, debate, contention, and, ultimately, negotiation and making what were once simply "networking" and professional associations into voices of criticism. But what Nelson's argument makes clear is the widening perspective of academic labor activists, as does the struggle documented by Barbara Gottfried and Gary Zabel in their discussion of the Coalition of Contingent Academic Labor (COCAL). These activists try to expand beyond isolated drives on different campuses (and even among different types of employees) within the Boston area. In other words, they are trying to put the word "movement" back into the labor movement by building broad popular support for what might otherwise become localized struggles. Because a more just system at one university doesn't entail justice at another, a network and coalition approach is utterly necessary. We end this section with a discussion of the California Faculty Association, a union representing a broad coalition of employees in the nation's largest state university system. Susan Meisenhelder makes clear that the union has not only struggled to better the conditions of its members but has also tried to change the terms of debate about the future of higher education in this country.

And that is the purpose of this book: to make a new entry into the debate about the future of higher education in America and what role the academic labor movement has in shaping this debate. Any critical reader of these essays will notice that the authors carry on a debate among themselves. We have collected a diverse set of writers; all of them speak from experience with the conditions they describe rather than as "experts" in some theory of education or administration. Some, like Cox, are journalists who have covered the world of academia for a variety of magazines; others are full-time or part-time academics trying to get along in this often strange world; and some are organizers working within unions and professional associations to win a voice for those who have been screwed over by the system. Beyond this diversity, our authors come to differing conclusions about the problems addressed. For instance, Ana Marie Cox argues for professors to stop clinging to tenure as a solution—one of the most well-known and controversial higher education practices—so as to embrace more fully collective bargaining. But Benjamin Johnson sees tenure as defensible and as part of a larger attempt to defend not just academic freedom but job security. Though they may disagree, they both want to *look beyond* tenure for new ways to confront the problems at hand.

Another tension is with the ways in which authors characterize how far corporatization has gone—that is, how much room is left for struggle. At times, David Noble suggests that de-skilling has almost fully transformed the university, yet he documents how faculty have successfully fought it. Ana Marie Cox argues that the for-profit spirit has captured numerous institutions and has spread far beyond what it was five years ago, but she too believes that something can be done about it. If you look at the cold hard numbers that Benjamin Johnson presents—60 percent of the teaching is now done by contingent teachers—the struggle to improve academic labor conditions would seem hopeless. Still, while presenting gloomy prognoses, the authors resist talking about academia as if it were some "one-dimensional society," to use Herbert Marcuse's term. In fact, most of them recover a vision of education that stresses democratic processes and critical self-insight. Though this vision may have been suppressed, none of us thinks it useless to resuscitate it in protest against what's happening today. Just how much can be done with it, of course, is still open to debate.

There are other tensions throughout this book, but there's no need to spell them out here. A diversity of viewpoints is a central indicator that a social movement has reached a certain level of maturity. That seems to be the case with the academic labor movement. Disagreement and debate need to be aired, if only to show that the movement is healthy and vibrant. So long

as those debates help a wider public think more critically about the future of higher education, then the movement has obtained the first step in a long-term strategy.

If the academic labor movement has something to teach us about the future of higher education, we also believe it needs to learn from and teach the wider labor movement. After all, the academic labor movement emerged at an opportune moment in organized labor's history. Since the 1970s, labor unions have been losing members and influence. What labor historians call "business unionism" provided services for those organized in certain industries (automobile manufacturing, steel production, mining, etc.), but those industries have become less and less important to the overall economy as service sector work has replaced America's industrial base. One result of all this is that unions became stereotyped as things of the past, relics of an industrial era gone by. Steelworkers may have needed unions, but fast-food fry chefs and computer programmers don't—or so the reasoning went.

The academic labor movement shows this up for what it is: ideological reasoning. Sure, unions haven't scored too many victories in the service sector. But this is not the same thing as saying that employees are banishing unions from the public consciousness (social researchers constantly point out that when polled, many Americans openly embrace unionization). The terrain has shifted, as "flexibility" and "contingency" have made things harder. But gradually the union movement is starting to think more creatively about these changes in order to find new ways to inject some equality back into the picture. Some activists are returning to older models of craft unionism—such things as "hiring halls and employment bureaus," as one author describes them. Instead of focusing on individual firms through which contingent employees are moving in and out faster and faster, labor activists are trying to create a "unionism emphasizing cross-firm structures and occupational identity."³ This new direction—one that can truly grapple with increased contingency—is seen evocatively in the COCAL example discussed in section 3. Academic labor activists are pioneering some new ways of organizing, and they are showing that *white-collar* employees—and those with advanced degrees at that—do not see unions as dinosaurs or things of the past. For these reasons, academic labor activists have a lot to learn from the labor movement, both in historical and contemporary terms—including a sense that unions can emerge where you least expect them.

In identifying with white-collar unionization, the editors of this anthology (if not necessarily all its writers) identify with a broader tradition of activism among middle-class citizens. Historically, it's been fairly easy for

social critics to assume that the middle class is stupid, self-interested, complacent, and conformist. This tendency has created some provocative social criticism, but it has also allowed us to forget that the middle classes often face some of the worst aspects of socioeconomic change. For instance, deskilling, loss of control over one's work life, job insecurity—these are things that all workers in America face today, white collar and otherwise. As this anthology makes clear, white-collar employees face them in distinct ways that can prod us to think more critically about their ramifications. Additionally, the problems of the professoriate are linked to the problems of doctors struggling against the bottom-line mentality of HMOs and the problems of writers struggling to negotiate a world in which the Internet has transformed traditional meanings of intellectual property rights. Though white-collar employees feel the brunt of these changes in peculiar ways, this is no excuse for them to separate themselves from the plight of other workers. Indeed, if a Ph.D. can no longer save you from mistreatment and abuse, then it is time for the idea of middle-class exceptionalism to be tossed into the dustbin of historical clichés. The academic labor movement makes this clear.

Very often, middle-class activists focus on problems far away from home. Some might argue this is a legacy of the student movement against the Vietnam War, a movement that centered on universities. Middle-class student activists today are very worried about the plight of those within the Third World. Who could deny the importance of struggles against Third World poverty or child labor? Nonetheless, sometimes protesting conditions halfway across the world becomes abstract; worse yet, sometimes it leads middle-class people to forget the injustices that exist right in front of their noses. Confronting practices closer to home is often harder than protesting problems across the globe. At the same time, the struggles to improve the global relations of universities—how they act as consumers of goods—is clearly connected to how they treat their own employees.

As this final note makes clear, this is a book about the strange world of academia and how it has shaped the lives of those who work within it. It is a book by and about a movement trying to shape the future of this peculiar world. Recognizing the peculiarity of this world is crucial, but it can also become limiting. After all, we believe that the university holds an enormous promise—the promise of facilitating the processes of democratic education, critical thinking, self-examination, and debate. A good education ensures that citizens will have the skills necessary to govern themselves, to participate in making their world a better one. If we don't protect higher education from becoming job training in the narrowest sense of that

term, if we don't ensure that citizens have access to full-time quality teaching, if we don't carve out spheres of life safe from the pressures of profit and money, we cheat our democracy of its future. As we believe this anthology makes clear, nothing less than the link between democracy and education is at stake in the struggle between the academic labor movement and the corporate university.

SECTION ONE

The Rise of the Corporate University

The 1960s stand as the last decade when big questions were raised about the modern university. Students who were starting to congeal into the New Left protested the university's collusion with government and defense corporations as the Vietnam War raged on. Intellectuals like Paul Goodman defended the free-speech movement (FSM) at the University of California-Berkeley, arguing for a renewal of the medieval conception of the university as a "community of scholars" capable of governing itself and resisting outside forces. As a key leader of and spokesperson for the FSM, Mario Savio famously strode onto the top of a policeman's car to give a ringing protest speech against the "multiversity." As Savio saw it, the vision of the university most fervently advocated by Clark Kerr, the president of California's entire university system, represented "the greatest problem of our nation—depersonalized, unresponsive bureaucracy." Its enormous size, its conformity, its tendency to churn out students like products on a factory line—all these features of the modern university symbolized how America was "becoming ever more the utopia of sterilized, automated contentment."¹

Savio's speech captured the sensibility behind so much of the New Left's earlier protest against the university. The complaint centered on conformity and boredom, attempting to renew an existential vision of politics as resistance and rebellion. The business world that awaited students after leaving the university was dull and complacent. As Savio explained, "The university is well-structured, well tooled, to turn out people with all the