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### Review Of "Universities And The Capitalist State: Corporate Liberalism And The Reconstruction Of American Higher Education, 1894-1928" By C. W. Barrow

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Review

Reviewed Work(s): *Universities and the Capitalist State: Corporate Liberalism and the Reconstruction of American Higher Education, 1894-1928* by Clyde W. Barrow

Review by: Robert C. Bannister

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## Universities and the Capitalist State: Corporate Liberalism and the Reconstruction of American Higher Education, 1894–1928

Clyde W. Barrow, Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1990, 329 pp., \$39.50 text edn., \$15.25 paper.

ROBERT C. BANNISTER

Do businessmen own and control American universities? Since Thorstein Veblen posed the question in *The Higher Learning in America* (1918), this proposition has somehow seemed too simplistic for serious academic attention. It is thus with considerable boldness that Clyde W. Barrow confronts it directly, answering yes with a theory of the modern state and a wealth of historical data.

Voicing an "emerging consensus" among Marxists, he argues that the state in advanced capitalist societies must meet the contradictory demands of a capitalist class that requires protection and privileges in the interests of economic growth and of democratic movements that call for redistributive policies. Because these conflicting demands result in periodic "accumulation crises," and with them the specter of class struggle, the state assumes the role of crisis manager. Institutionally, this management requires increasing reliance on bureaucratically administered controls, public and private. No longer "government" in the textbook sense, the modern liberal state is a complex of "overlapping public (and nominally private) associations," among them the nation's universities.

The relations between the state and capitalism, and the nature of historical class struggle, can be understood only within this specific institutional context, Barrow continues. At stake in this case are two competing models of the relation of the universities to society. The first (the "autonomy thesis") stresses formal guarantees of freedom, peer review, and self-governance in matters of certification and promotion. So viewed, academics are a class-above-class, independent of conflicting interests within society. The second model (the "heteronomy thesis") emphasizes the social composition of governing boards, the influence of corporations and educational foundations, and the role of the

federal government in policy-directed research. The academy, in this view, is the arena in which conflicts are played out as professors ally with one or another social class.

Defending the latter thesis, Barrow details the "corporatizing" of American universities from the 1870s through the 1920s. To document the growing power of businessmen in higher education, he first surveys the governing boards of some thirty-three colleges and universities in twenty-one states from 1861 to 1929. The gradual ascendancy of businessmen led directly to the rationalization of governance and curriculum under the leadership of the Carnegie Foundation, the General Education Board, and a network of related educational foundations. Chief architects of this restructuring included M.I.T. President Henry S. Prichett and the Taylorite Morris L. Cooke, whose *Academic and Industrial Efficiency* brought the benefits of scientific management to higher education. Under the aegis of progressivism, and the impact of World War I, the federal government played a key role in coordinating a national educational policy. These developments had immediate consequences in a sharp drop in faculty compensation relative to other expenditures after 1910, and a rash of academic freedom battles, first in the 1890s, and again in the 1910s.

In a brief postscript Barrow concedes that events of the past decade or more raise at least one awkward question for his thesis. If business owns and controls the universities, why have they apparently become havens for left-leaning intellectuals, whether the domesticated rebels of Russell Jacoby's *The Last Intellectuals* (1987) or the new left establishment of Roger Kimball's *Tenured Radicals* (1990)? Without really addressing the issue, Barrow instead plays Jeremiah. Struggles over academic freedom in the United States have occurred cyclically, he writes, first in the 1890s, next in the 1930s, and finally in the 1960s. In the first two instances rebellion was followed by a period of compromise, coercion, and "red scares" (forms of "state terror"). Although the rebellion of the 1960s has not yet been followed "by the expected round of reprisals," he warns, the reasons offer little comfort. One probable reason, according to Barrow, is the "opportunistic" survival strategies of radicals who hide behind esoteric, nonthreatening scholarship (a tactic early adopted by the economist Richard Ely after his brush with university authorities at Wisconsin in the early 1890s). Another is the "uneasy and deceptive" nature of a truce that could come unglued at

the first sign of student activism, economic crisis, or international turmoil.

Relating this story, Barrow provides informative accounts of the theories of leading foundation intellectuals, of the pre-war educational survey movement, and finally of the efforts of the AAUP and abortive faculty unions to undo the damage. Although his retelling of the best-known academic freedom battles contains much that is familiar, his analysis of administration strategies (the "Bemis model," the "Commons model") provides a useful synthesis not readily available elsewhere.

On balance, however, *Universities and the Capitalist State* suffers from excessive devotion to its thesis, often at the expense of its own qualifications. After surveying the trustees of the thirty-three colleges and universities, for example, Barrow sensibly concludes that business domination was not so complete as Veblen argued. Nor, he adds, can one deduce ideology from "positional analysis," that is, one cannot assume that the universities became an "ideological apparatus" of capitalism because trustees were also businessmen. But does not this concession undermine the point of the entire exercise?

Barrow's treatment of the educational foundations leaves similar doubts. Focusing on the writings of foundation officials, he does not demonstrate whether or to what extent their plans were implemented, or really what was so wrong with them, although "efficiency" is generally used as a pejorative. Rather, we are told that, "to the degree" they succeeded, access was restricted to "the highest levels of intellectual authority, skill, and professional status." These frequent references to diminished access to "the material means of mental production" seem to assume that resources are limitless, that American academia has suffered from a dearth of publishing outlets and library facilities, and that the world needs ever more graduate students—all dubious propositions throughout most of this century. If accomplishments in these areas are the result of "corporatization," a glance at university systems throughout most of the world should make us rejoice that "corporate capital" in the United States has been "more successful than elsewhere in pursuing its educational program."

In the effort to prove business control, Barrow also slights other factors. The periodic rise and decline in academic salaries during the past century, for example, raises important questions concerning supply and demand, competition from other sectors, and (in recent years) the effect of new entrants into the

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profession. Ignoring these issues, he reduces the story to one of efficiency-minded trustees and virtuous professionals. His account of the changing social position of academics during the early decades of the century (the "proletarianizing of the intellectuals," as he puts it) posits an earlier control and status that are assumed rather than proved. One wonders also whether "proletarianization" really describes a group whom most people to this day view as generally privileged.

In stressing business influence, Barrow largely ignores the dynamics of professionalization and bureaucratization, and the role of professors themselves in shaping the emerging academic order. A case in point is his handling of the events of World War I. If the outcome finally served the agendas of private industry and of the federal government, the motivating forces lay as much within the professions and educational institutions as in the influence of outsiders.

What finally surprises in *Universities and the Capitalist State* is less the facts themselves than the author's own surprise that professors are something other than a class-above-class that pursues ideas purely "for their own sake"; that business and government generally do not promote educational policies opposed to their interests, broadly conceived; or that a force as powerful as the culture of capitalism affects the way

people think and behave in all realms of social activity. Although professors, Veblen among them, have sometimes spoken as if the opposite were or should be the case, these statements are best understood in terms of professionalizing strategies or the personal psychology of the individuals involved, not as descriptions of an Eden from which we have fallen.

When all qualifications are tallied, business "ownership and control" in fact appears considerably less than absolute, and rather less sinister than Barrow's rhetoric suggests. Although the state (through its funding agencies) can encourage certain types of scholarly activity, it does not proscribe competing forms of investigation, teaching, or publication. Barrow concedes that the "negotiated range of theoretical free space between absolute autonomy and totalitarian control is real and substantial." Business has also found that the legitimacy of the university requires concessions to the democratic demands of the "wider public" (preeminently in providing broad and equal access to higher education) and to scholars themselves (hence their role, for example, in appointing and retaining colleagues). Although some will judge this ever-shifting balance to be a standing threat to the freedom, autonomy, and status of the professoriate, others may see it as the sign of the vitality of an educational system in a capitalist democracy.

## Achieving Quality and Diversity: Universities in a Multi-Cultural Society

Richard C. Richardson, Jr., and Elizabeth Fisk Skinner. MacMillan, 1991, 271 pages, \$29.95

MICHAEL A. OLIVAS

I really don't know what to make of this book. It deals with an extremely important issue and suggests ways of improving conditions for students of color. It argues persuasively that much remains to be done to increase access and graduation for minority students, and unapologetically advocates that these problems be given high priority in colleges and universities. In addition, it incorporates ten detailed case studies, testing the authors' model of access and achievements.

Nonetheless, the book is an elliptic and incomplete work, in part because of the authors' approach to measuring equity and in part because they do not

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go far enough in acknowledging racism as the historical root cause of the problems they are dealing with. The work is curiously deracinated, given the topic.

The book contains virtually no history of the longstanding problem of racial animus. For example, the authors date separate, dual systems of higher education to 1890 and the passage of the second Morrill Act, ignoring the white-only character of the 1862 Morrill Act and the institutions founded under it. Or there is the odd assertion that Texas has "responded to the presence of historically minority institutions by . . . incorporating [them] into systems that included both minority and majority institutions." This did not happen in Texas, whose two public, historically black institutions came into being under different circumstances: Prairie View A & M was created as a black public agricultural school to maintain Texas A & M's white (and male) character, and Texas Southern University was created by transforming a private black school in Houston into a public university to keep blacks from attending the University of Texas, in Austin, two

hundred miles away. By neutrally describing or blithely ignoring the extraordinary resources states spent to keep blacks and Mexicans out of their institutions, the authors underestimate the extent to which this poisonous legacy persists, in different guises.

Richardson and Skinner's model of equity scales may be useful to institutional planners who have no clue how to begin addressing their problems, and they offer many concrete planning and administrative tools that should help. But I urge caution in using their equity scales approach, in which the percentage of the group within the state is the denominator, to measure institutional achievement. Many institutions should be doing better than they are in attracting and retaining minority students, because most of their recruiting pools are local, where minority populations are better represented than they are in a state as a whole. Moreover, the scales measure senior institutions, without taking into account the presence or absence of two-year college enrollments. Richardson and Skinner tout the University of New Mexico, with a 23 percent Hispanic student enrollment, as something of a model, but the state's Hispanics are 38 percent of the total population (the percentage is even greater for 18- to 22-year-olds, and greater still in northern New Mexico) and there is no community college system in Albuquerque.

In their case study on institutions in New Mexico, the authors state that the University of New Mexico "had visible Hispanic leadership, including the vice-president for academic affairs." By the time this book was published, neither Latino administrator was in office, both having left and been replaced by Anglos. No Latino has ever been president of UNM, and qualified Latinos with executive experience have seemingly been passed over for Anglos without any such experience. One recent UNM president had never held an administrative position in higher education, but was hired for his Latin-American diplomatic credentials. One wonders when a Latino with academic credentials will ever be accorded such an opportunity at this institution with such "visible Hispanic leadership." It is little wonder UNM's few Hispanic and Indian faculty were "surprised" that their institution was considered successful. As a native of Albuquerque and Santa Fe, I was astounded to learn that UNM, a chronic underachiever, is considered worthy of emulation.

This book is well-intentioned, but a more critical, nuanced study remains to be written.