

Their aim is to open horizons about what is, or was, or could be. If students are already intensively practically oriented, then we are in fact confronted with a profound philosophical question about education: should we meet students where they are and provide them with what they demand? Or should we question those demands and present them with something they would otherwise not likely encounter, or something that no longer is? This is a central concern of history of education. Perhaps it is the job of foundations to get students to think beyond schools, beyond institutions, and to strive to ask new and old philosophical questions about education that are not measured by their capacity to solve problems in institutions today.

With these critiques in mind, perhaps this book could be a nice complement to other historical readings and perspectives.

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David F. Labaree

A Perfect Mess: The Unlikely Ascendancy of American Higher Education

Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017. 222 pp.

David Labaree's *A Perfect Mess: The Unlikely Ascendancy of American Higher Education* is intended as a political intervention. His purpose is to warn reformers who have their eyes on higher education to back off; if they try to change American higher education, they will ruin it. He argues that American higher education is a series of contradictions held together in delicate balance. In Labaree's view, the inter- and intra-institutional workings of the sector are so complicatedly interwoven that intervening, in any way, may topple the whole structure. This, he maintains, would be a tragedy; as flawed as the system might seem, it has produced the best universities in the world. American higher education, according to this account, seems to be "gold made from straw." The United States produced the best universities in the world even without strong governmental support and lofty shared purposes, but simply with an abundance of people pursuing self-advantage in various forms. Labaree's message is: don't mess with perfection.

Labaree's intervention is explicitly directed towards reformers associated with either conservative politics or entrepreneurial innovation. But it is also aimed at liberal members and friends of higher education. To these latter groups, his message is: do not make too much of a fuss about declining levels of governmental support or inequalities of access or lack of serious purpose on the part of students or institutional leaders. These are problems, but they are necessary problems. They have existed throughout history and are deeply engrained in the system. In Labaree's view, the good outweighs the bad and the bad is inevitable.

The book is an impressive work of synthetic scholarship and an interesting example of how to use (or misuse) a historical narrative to bolster a political program.

Labaree makes a few key assertions about the history of higher education: nineteenth century colleges were created for private ends, such as enhancing the reach of a religious denomination and increasing the value of land; the great expansion of higher education in at the turn of the twentieth century was driven by students' individual economic interests; the Cold War was the only period when public aims dominated higher education and it was an anomaly; reductions in public funding for higher education over the past three decades simply represent a return to the mean. In addition to these historical claims, Labaree asserts certain trans-historical truths such as: the older the institution, the richer and more prestigious it is; educational opportunities expand to keep mobility and privilege in balance; and stratification is an inevitable part of the expansion of education. Labaree moves between historical and trans-historical arguments fluidly and without acknowledging their different character, making the book a dizzying read.

It is easy to raise objections to a book this complex. For example, many older colleges are worse off than some institutions founded after them. Age is associated with prestige but largely through means other than the simple passage of time. We can also raise questions about Labaree's historical interpretations. Is it correct to characterize the motives of churches in establishing colleges as private? They saw themselves as engaged in securing the moral character of the nation. What about the public purposes of Progressive Era higher education? This was a period of tremendous growth in government support of higher education and educational leaders imagined higher education would play an expansive role in the improvement of society. Should this period really be characterized only by the pecuniary aims of students? How does the growing population of female students fit in Labaree's account of the expansion of higher education at the turn of the twentieth century? Labaree ignores the significance of their entry into higher education and their role in the expanding numbers of college students at that time.

My most serious historical questions relate to how we interpret post-1970s changes in higher education, such as the rise of vocational undergraduate degrees, the decline of state support, the rising cost of tuition, and the increasing stratification of higher education and separation of elite institutions from the rest. Labaree tends to dismiss these as insignificant or normal corrections in historical trends. For example, he argues that liberal arts, despite the rapid increase in vocational majors since the 1970s, are winning out over vocational subjects. He cleverly notes that in the past, most professions did not require higher education and now they do. All professionals who would have been trained through apprenticeship but now study in colleges and universities are being exposed to some amount of liberal education. However, this does not engage historical questions about the rise of vocational majors. What does the rise of vocational undergraduate degrees mean? Is this a necessary adjustment to the market? Would students have not enrolled in college if they could not pursue vocational degrees? Or does this represent institutional differentiation of the sort community colleges went through? In the post-Second World War years, growing numbers of institutions tried to follow a template set for collegiate education by the Harvard Red Book or other some other influential report on higher education. If this

had continued after the 1970s, would higher education be less stratified today? We cannot answer these questions because we do not have enough empirical evidence. We need the scholarship that will answer these questions and others raised by the significant changes in higher education since the 1970s. We cannot simply accept Labaree's claim that these changes represent a return to the mean.

Specific objections, however, do not do full justice to a book like this one. I salute Labaree for his ambitions. We need broad historical syntheses that attempt to shed light on political problems. I am sympathetic to Labaree's desire to protect American higher education from the meddling of policy makers or the disruptive potential of reformers who want to take the profitable aspects of higher education and let someone else worry about those functions that are not self-supporting. But higher education cannot escape change—it is not a complex institution of perfectly-balanced, opposing impulses that will stay the way it is if we only leave it alone. We need to shape its future and we will be better able to do this wisely if we understand the developments of the late twentieth century.

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Jason Reid

Get Out of My Room! A History of Teen Bedrooms in America

Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017. 299 pp.

The sign pictured on the book's cover may read "Keep Out!," but in *Get Out of My Room! A History of Teen Bedrooms in America*, Jason Reid props the door wide open and invites readers inside for a good snoop. What we find are eight engaging and well-researched chapters charting the emergence and spread of the teenaged bedroom from the antebellum era to the early twenty-first century, and examining the various experts who popularized the ideal. It is a compelling history that reveals how teens' rooms became the idealized locus of children's maturation, personal expression, and educational enrichment, while continuously shaping and reflecting broader social and cultural change in the United States.

In the first chapter, Reid finds support for the idea of separate bedrooms for children (and especially for girls) among select architects, child-rearing experts, and young people themselves beginning in the early nineteenth century. In four subsequent chapters, he traces the growth of both the idea and the practice of separate bedrooms in the late-nineteenth and twentieth centuries. By the 1920s, many child development experts championed separate bedrooms for both girls and boys, claiming they would increase a teenagers' academic ability, cultivate liberal values of self-reliance, individuality, and love of property, and improve parent-child relations. Business interests adopted these arguments to sell furnishings and room décor. By the 1960s, separate bedrooms were widespread, and the privacy of these spaces—as well