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BOOK REVIEWS / COMPTES RENDUS

Russell K. Skowronek and Kenneth E. Lewis, eds.  
*Beneath the Ivory Tower:  
The Archaeology of Academia*

Gainesville, Florida: University Press of Florida, 2010. ix, 341 pp.

Blake Gumprecht  
*The American College Town*

Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2008. xx, 438 pp.

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Place matters! That is the powerful message of two recent American books that seek to historically and culturally examine the *space* and *place* of higher education. Hailing from the disciplines of archaeology and cultural geography, both books offer historians of higher education novel interdisciplinary methods and theoretical ways to think about their objects of study. In *Beneath the Ivory Tower: The Archaeology of Academia*, editors Russell K. Skowronek and Kenneth E. Lewis bring together archaeologists, anthropologists, curators, and archivists to consider how the campus is a vital “backdrop for examining commonly shared experiences” (xvii). The book is divided into three sections: archaeology, historical preservation on campus, and the potential and promise of archaeological research. The various chapters shed light on lived-experience through “material evidence of past lives on college campuses” (5). Lastly, a more disciplinary and political series of chapters comment on the role of archaeology on campus and its relation to institutional mandates and interests and the broader disciplinary project of public archaeology and public community outreach.

Organized into fourteen chapters (a chapter on the progressive era and sanitation reform in rural schools, although interesting in its own right seems discordant in a collection that is centred on higher education) the authors in this edited volume

employ an integrated topical analysis and are diversely focussed on the importance of the spatial context of the university, the campus environs, and the nature of student (and by extension professorial) life. One key theme examines how archaeological excavation on campus points to forbidden and elicit behaviours by students (smoking, drinking, gambling and reckless use of firearms on fellow students and professors), and raises compelling issues around agency and social control, resistance and power. A number of chapters also draw attention to lost or forgotten buildings and the changing topography of the campus. Excavated taverns, ale houses, hotels, and student residences provide material evidence of students' life as well as those mostly female "staff members"—kitchen staff, washers, cleaners, bar keepers—who served elite male students.

Significantly, the editors seek to counter the encyclopaedic official histories, which, focused on broader institutional goals and agendas, were/are "...less concerned with the daily lives of the students and faculty who lived and interacted on the campus" (xvii). To a lesser extent, educational stereotypes propagated by popular media representations, we are told, have inscribed romantic images of collegiate life, distorting our understanding of the actual lived-experiences of students and professors on campus. Alternatively, editor Lewis notes, the book is not meant to replace institutional histories but merely "...obliges us to see them in a new light"(4). While the past is "fixed" in these official historical accounts, the present they argue is complicated by the institution's complex relationship to contemporary campus modernization and dissemination of its heritage. Accordingly, a number of chapters problematize "...the conflict that arises when a school embraces idealised concepts about "tradition" and "history" while actively destroying the evidence of that history" (xix). The story of Holden Chapel (1742-1744) at Harvard highlights the complexity of how universities sanitize their troubling historical pasts in an effort to re-imagine themselves in the present and for the future. John D. Staubbbs et al. argue that remembering Holden Chapel in reminiscent volumes, simply "as a gem of Georgian architecture" (112) overlooks its early history as a site of medical dissection and dubious recreational activities by students.

While the book offers varied ways to think about the university campus, it is unduly limited in its knowledge of the vast critical historiography of higher education in the United States and internationally. While the editors' focus on the scholarly limitations of institutional histories is well warranted it is based on the flawed assertion that critical histories of universities have not been written. As well, there is an increasingly large international body of literature that has focused on the space and place of the campus and how it has shaped collegiate identity, meanings, and experiences. To overlook the broad literature on the histories of higher education that has discerningly grappled with the complex matrix of socio-cultural identity (and subjectivity) as well as issues of race, gender, professorial life and academics on campus is disappointing and a scholarly misrepresentation of the topic of study.

In *The American College Town*, cultural geographer Blake Gumprecht also focuses his inquiry on the campus and the broader town in which it is situated. Largely an "American phenomenon," according to Gumprecht, "college towns are exceptional

places, worth knowing and worth knowing about" (xvii). Thematically organized, the book presents a series of college town portraits, from Norman, Oklahoma (University of Oklahoma), to Newark, Delaware (University of Delaware), and many points in between. These universities, "exert a dominant influence over the character of the town" (2) in which they are located. Applying both a historical and landscape approach to the study of "places," the book is enlivened by Gumprecht's personal anecdotes of growing up in, travelling through, and living in, a variety of college towns. Copiously researched the book is well-written and insightful, showing the author's deep understanding and concern for the topic.

For Gumprecht, the American college town is—a "distinctive place," common and yet different from other such local, regional, and national examples. "Students and faculty reflect and shape those differences [as] they shape the character of the towns in which they are located" (22). College towns he argues "are comfortable yet cosmopolitan... a mix of sophistication and simplicity" (xv). To define the ubiquitous college town he utilizes both quantitative and qualitative measures. In 2000, 305 American towns/cities met his criteria of which he chose 60 with which to begin his investigation. Gumprecht lists a series of intriguing characteristics, drawn from local and national statistical instruments, which distinguish the college town from other American towns/cities. He notes that college towns: are youthful places; their population is less likely to be married; they have a highly educated populace; they are home to more bookstores than other American towns/cities (a fascinating statistic); the town's residents are more likely to work in white collar jobs; although the college town resembles a company town they are more stable economically; they are comparatively wealthy but have higher living costs. Finally, he remarks that student transiency produces "a predictable seasonality... the archaeologist could learn much about youth culture on trash day in May in any college town" (11).

Significantly, Gumprecht illustrates the way in which college towns were to some extent manufactured, in some cases alongside the towns in which they sprang. For example, early founders such as Samuel Eliot Morrison of Harvard University tried to recreate the residential and monastic Oxbridge model in the new world. Locating colleges in small towns and rural areas also allowed faculty to limit the popular distractions and unhealthy "evils" students might encounter outside the walls of academe. Despite such pedagogical reasoning, and as is clear in *Beneath the Ivory Tower*, students had little difficulty resisting and circumventing educational authorities. Small town boosterism and persuasion was also critical in the establishment of many well-known college towns, through their gifts of land, buildings, and other incentives. Idyllic environments such as park like settings, rows of trees, and a campus green were not found but rather were created by a host of historical agents who sought to philosophically link contemporary higher education with the classical ideal of Plato's Academe. Gumprecht shows that the relationship between town and gown is vastly more complicated than a simple binary opposition between us and them.

Critical historical and cultural inquiries into the *space* and *place* of the university do matter as does the interdisciplinary imagination which shapes our investigations.