

REVIEW

***The Capitalist University: The Transformations of Higher Education in the United States Since 1945* by Henry Heller**

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The Capitalist University: The Transformations of Higher Education in the United States Since 1945 by Henry Heller coalesces a myriad of historical events and theoretical frameworks to address the seminal question of how American higher education arrived at where it is today. Heller, a professor of history at the University of Manitoba, Canada, presents an intricate and well-developed exploration of the question through this book.

The book's opening chapter examines the American higher education landscape in the years preceding World War I. Chapter 2 documents the American higher educational pathway from 1945 through 1960, specifically focusing upon the fields of the humanities and social sciences. Heller chronicles the 1960s in its own chapter (chapter 3). In chapter 4, Heller moves into "the retreat from history" (1980-2008). *The Capitalist University* concludes with "the neoliberal university" (chapter 5).

Any one of these chapters could serve as a stand-alone reading, whether in an education course or one across the social sciences and humanities fields, although anyone asking the question of how American higher education got to its current state will find this book of great insight. For anthropologists, passages regarding anthropology during the Cold War era (pages 68-76) focusing on the works of Boas, Linton, Mead, and Steward, and anthropology during the 1960s, particularly the work of Wolf (pages 127-129), showcase a few areas where anthropology came into the historical context of the times. Additional passages on Fulbright, geography studies, and additional social sciences may be interesting in relationship to anthropology as well.

Admittedly, the book's organizational structure would make it challenging to assign passages for students; however, the information and key premises of the book are accessible and enlightening reads for students questioning the current societal debates related to American higher education, its future, and the positionality of social science and humanistic studies within its walls. Additionally, students and scholars within educational anthropology might find this theoretical and historical book a good primer for their studies and research.

For context, readers encounter political economic themes throughout all five chapters. Capitalism makes frequent appearances, as does neoliberalism in later chapters. Heller traces how the work of many social scientists and humanists in the mid-1900s was tied closely to funding related to government and global political interests (chapter 3). In the mid-to-late 1900s, American higher education opened to larger cross-sections of the population, to more academic disciplines, to student and faculty protests, and to more interdisciplinary work (chapters 3-5). Heller presents the rise of several challenges facing higher education today with an increase of contingent faculty, more ardent critique of liberal arts education, and more conflict about what a higher educational institution prioritizes as a business entity. Heller brings all of these shifts into “historical and theoretical context” (viii), while adding to the “resistance” movement against the tides readying to change American higher education (viii), and while also appreciating how much has come from American higher education, “particularly in the humanities and social sciences” (viii).

Overall, I was struck by Heller’s clear writing style and argumentation, particularly in the final pages of each chapter. The sheer volumes of theories, examples, and nuanced points of research came together well. Each time that I started to question where the evidence was for a particularly strong claim that could be perceived as debatable or overgeneralized, Heller clarified the perspective with pertinent support and brought forth another tenet of the overall thesis. There have been so many separate stages within the development of American higher education that we likely have paid attention to in isolation, or in a small-scale context, that Heller’s book opens the doors to a deeper exploration.

However, the writing approach does lend itself to two challenges. First, there is the risk that those looking for a bold statement could paint American higher educational history in broad strokes. Heller ultimately contextualizes his premise as the chapters unfold, but as we know from some of the contemporary public critiques and assessments of the value and production of higher education within American society at present, some critics will not await the full talking point before running with the opening lines.

Likewise, the approach of developing argumentation later in passages lends itself to a second challenge. With so many disciplines represented, some chapters – most notably chapter 2 (and to some regard, chapter 3 as well) – become highly partitioned into quite short sections with some fewer than one or two pages in length. If readers are to appreciate the larger chronology and stay focused on the bigger picture, it might have served better to have either fewer sections or fewer distinctions among disciplines. This point seems even more true considering some might disagree that some of the theories and theorists fell exclusively within a single field.

At times, the interdisciplinary lens posed by the research questions seems muddled as each historical period presents a view fixated on disciplines in silos. It felt imbalanced and as though some disciplines or theoretical developments were not as pertinent or supportive of the points being argued during each the time period. Fortunately, by the last

two chapters, Heller's approach leaves much of this hyper-division of examples by discipline behind, and the book regains its focus.

Heller's text offers readers a holistic and historically organized exploration of how American higher education developed into its twenty-first century manifestation. Heller has a keen understanding of how these pieces arose from ashes and foundations of iterations and historical stages' pasts. The approach of this book makes for a highly educational and critical read. Although largely U.S.-based in focus and argumentation, Heller has acknowledged influences from theoretical movements and developments beyond the country as well, making it an applicable case study within higher education literature writ large.