

**A “Blue Shirt” UW for Milwaukee:****Making the Case for the University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee, 1948-1956****Seth Zlotocha, History Department, University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee**

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**Abstract**

*This paper examines the contested debates surrounding the merger of the Wisconsin State Teachers College and the University of Wisconsin – Extension in Milwaukee to form the University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee (UWM) in 1956. Sharp divisions developed around the creation of UWM with the primary separation existing between, on the one side, community voices from the Milwaukee who strongly advocated for a four-year UW for the city and, on the other, UW administrators in Madison who feared a UW in Milwaukee would detract from the flagship campus. While many histories point to national impetuses like the GI Bill to explain the boom in higher education after World War II, using primarily local newspaper accounts and editorials, I argue that the debate over the founding of UWM embodies the locally-rooted and economically-driven nature of the push for expanded access to a decidedly university education, not just generically postsecondary, in the postwar period; and, ultimately, this push both challenged and revised the perceived purpose of the state-sponsored public university in the state of Wisconsin*

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**Introduction**

Twenty-five years after the University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee (UWM) opened its doors in 1956, the university’s first provost and chancellor, J. Martin Klotsche, reflected on the importance of the new institution:

The milkman who used to deliver milk to us at the house said one morning to me, “This is a great day for my family because I’ve got six children and I couldn’t afford to send any of them away to college. I’d like all of them to go to college. The possibility now is here for this to happen.” I think that incident impressed upon me the fact that something really significant had happened when UWM was created.<sup>1</sup>

More than just a touching personal anecdote, this statement encapsulates the sense of change that accompanied the founding of UWM in 1956. What was changing, in particular, was the perceived role and purpose of the state-sponsored public university. Rather than an institution designed for the privileged, this new postwar urban university was explicitly devised with a non-traditional and decidedly working class student in mind.

The creation of UWM came at a time of great expansion in American higher education. Many historians have noted the expanded access to higher education in the United States after World War II, which is most commonly attributed to the benefits provided to returning veterans under the G.I. Bill. In his recent synthesis, John Thelin acknowledged the growing use of the phrase “postsecondary education” in the postwar period as a means for describing the proliferation of varied institutions that were created to accommodate the growing number of students.<sup>2</sup> Yet, as the work of Helen Leftkowitz Horowitz makes clear, there is a long history of non-traditional students in the world of the traditional American university. In her book, *Campus Life: Undergraduate Cultures from the End of the Eighteenth Century to the Present*, Horowitz traces this group of “outsiders” who eschew the social life of campus for the primarily utilitarian pursuit of a degree. According to Horowitz, “the consciousness of the outsider [was brought] to the fore” by GIs who, she writes, “were older, many were married, and they were serious.”<sup>3</sup> As Horowitz points out, this largely vocational and practical consciousness challenged and revised undergraduate culture at universities in important ways, such as the growing importance of grades as a means for sifting and winnowing students in the age of

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<sup>1</sup> J. Martin Klotsche, oral history interview transcript, April 21, 1981, found in UW-Milwaukee Oral History Project Records, folder 5, box 2, University Archives, UWM Libraries, University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee.

<sup>2</sup> John Thelin, *A History of American Higher Education* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 260.

<sup>3</sup> Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, *Campus Life: Undergraduate Cultures from the End of the Eighteenth Century to the Present* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987), 185.

expanded access. “[Universities] had once barred entrance,” Horowitz succinctly notes, “now they controlled the means of exit.”<sup>4</sup>

This paper is aimed at providing depth to the role of the vocationally driven student in the expanded access of the postwar period. Although Horowitz effectively outlines the impact of the outsider on postwar higher education, her focus on GIs overlooks the fact that entire universities were created around the outsider in the postwar era. State-sponsored public urban universities sprouted up in urban centers across the country in the 1950s and 1960s; these were institutions specifically designed to serve the student who was more interested in earning a degree, often on a part-time basis, and less interested in participating in any sort of campus life. Exploring in-depth the contested debate over the creation of UWM, one of these urban universities, will highlight the locally rooted and economically-driven nature of the push for expanded access to a decidedly *university* education, not just generically postsecondary, in the postwar period. Ultimately, this push both challenged and revised the perceived purpose of the state-sponsored public university.

In addition, there are important lessons for the field of Urban Studies in the history of UWM and its place in the broader trajectory of American higher education. When UWM was founded in the 1950s, its focus on providing a no-frills higher education for the vocationally driven student mirrored the perceived role and place of the industrial American city that dominated at the time. The industrial American city in the immediate postwar period represented a place of work in the mainstream mindset, while leisure was nestled in the suburbs. As cultural theorist George Lipsitz has found, television sitcoms in the 1950s presented life in the American city as a primarily working class endeavor, emphasizing everyday tasks and challenges associated with work, paying bills, and making it to the next day. Recounting one scene from *The Goldbergs*, a show about a working class family in the Bronx, Lipsitz describes how while looking over a pool table, the main male figure from the show, Jake, laments that he never learned to play since “pool is a game that requires leisure.” He then added, with a work-focused sense, “nice quality felt, though.”<sup>5</sup> The postwar American city was

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<sup>4</sup> Horowitz, *Campus Life*, 189.

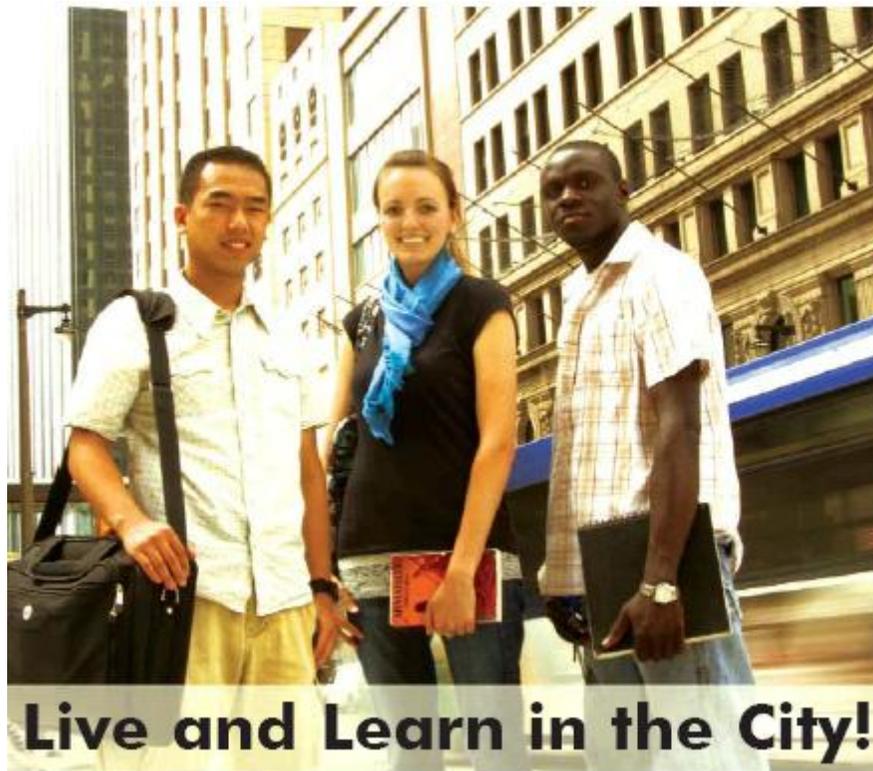
<sup>5</sup> George Lipsitz, *Time Passages: Collective Memory and American Popular Culture*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), 59.

a place for work, not play. In a similar manner, the arguments in favor of establishing a UW in Milwaukee framed the city setting as one that had no need for the frills of leisure, and therefore any campus that existed there should mirror the utilitarian nature of its urban surroundings.

By the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, however, the make-up of UWM was undergoing a significant transformation from utilitarian commuter institution to traditional residential campus. The percentage of part-time students attending UWM plummeted from just under one-half of the student population at the end of the 1980s to less than one-quarter of it by 2007-2008, while the student headcount increased from 25,558 to 29,338 during the same period.<sup>6</sup> In 1999, the UW Board of Regents approved adding a fourth tower on the only UWM dormitory at the time, Sandburg Hall, much of which was used for administrative offices for decades after its initial construction in 1970 due to a lack of students seeking to live on campus. Two more off-campus dormitories were added by 2008-2009 to meet the student demand for a residential experience at UWM, the same year the campus began using a new slogan of “Live and Learn in the City” on promotional materials for new students. The city surrounding UWM was no longer just for work.

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<sup>6</sup> UW System, Office of Policy Analysis & Research, “Student Statistics Reports,” available from <http://www.uwsa.edu/opar/ssb/> (accessed May 13, 2008).



**UWM campus promotional brochure from 2008-2009, featuring the new slogan, “Live and Learn in the City.”<sup>7</sup>**

During the same period that UWM was transitioning from a utilitarian to a residential campus, the idea of the city as a place for leisure and life beyond work was becoming part of mainstream thought alongside the public and private investments in revitalizing the post-industrial American city. While sitcoms like *Friends* and *Sex in the City* depicted a highly socialized city life for the popular mindset in the 1990s and into the 21<sup>st</sup> century,<sup>8</sup> developments utilizing the planning techniques of “New Urbanism” focused on creating pedestrian-friendly city environments made for leisurely living in addition to work. The public perception of the city transformed dramatically from a place for work in the 1950s to a place for leisure at the end of the century, and the parallel transformations at UWM during the same

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<sup>7</sup> From “UWM 2008-2009 Open House Brochure,” available from [http://www4.uwm.edu/future\\_students/visit\\_uwm/upload/2008-Open-House-program-of-events.pdf](http://www4.uwm.edu/future_students/visit_uwm/upload/2008-Open-House-program-of-events.pdf) (accessed July 21, 2009). Photo by Tobiah Deutsch (<http://tobiahdeutsch.com/>).

<sup>8</sup> William J. Sadler, “Metonymy and the Metropolis: Television Show Settings and the Image of New York City,” *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 29 (2005): 195-216.

period point to the strong impact its surroundings has on an urban university. In many ways, this is contrary to the traditional American university and college campuses, which have often served to define their surroundings.<sup>9</sup> Taking the relationship between the urban university and its surroundings into consideration through an examination of how advocates from Milwaukee pushed for a unique UW to meet the needs of their city provides an alternative perspective to the existing scholarship on urban universities and their communities, much of which has focused on the impact of the university on the city rather than the reverse.<sup>10</sup>

### **Public Higher Education in Milwaukee before UWM**

Prior to the opening of UWM in 1956, the State of Wisconsin maintained a lengthy presence in the higher education scene in Milwaukee. The Milwaukee Normal School was founded in 1885 to provide teacher training as part of the state normal school system. The normal school system became the state teachers college system in 1926 and the Milwaukee campus was renamed the Milwaukee State Teachers College (MSTC). In the same year, the state teachers college system expanded its curriculum from a two-year course to a four-year course that resulted in the awarding of a Bachelor of Education degree. Although the Milwaukee Normal School, along with the other normal schools in the state, offered a small liberal arts curriculum starting in 1911, including coursework in pre-med and pre-law, the focus remained on teacher training. In fact, even after the liberal arts curriculum was offered, two-thirds of the school's enrollment remained in the teacher-training track.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Blake Gumprecht, "The Campus as a Public Space in the American College Town," *Journal of Historical Geography* 33 (2007): 72-103.

<sup>10</sup> See David Maurrasse, *Beyond the Campus: How Colleges and Universities Form Partnerships with their Communities* (New York: Routledge, 2001), and Judith Rodin, *The University and Urban Revival: Out of the Ivory Tower and Into the Streets* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007).

<sup>11</sup> Frank A. Cassell, J. Martin Klotsche, and Frederick I. Olson, *The University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee: A Historical Profile, 1885-1992* (Milwaukee: The UWM Foundation, 1992), 11-21.



Image of Normal School classroom at the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>12</sup>

In addition to state teachers college system, the University of Wisconsin also maintained an institution in Milwaukee during the first half of the twentieth century in the form of an extension center. Although faculty from the UW flagship campus in Madison traveled to Milwaukee to offer courses as far back as 1892, those offerings were not a part of a formal institution until the UW-Extension Center in Milwaukee was created in 1907. No degrees were offered at the extension center; students who wanted to earn a degree needed to transfer the

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<sup>12</sup> Photograph from Cassell, Klotsche, and Olson, *The University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee*, 16. Permission granted by UWM Foundation for use of photograph.

two years worth of coursework that they could complete at the extension center to UW-Madison or another four-year institution.<sup>13</sup>

Although they existed as part of separate systems, MSTC and the UW-Extension in Milwaukee had much in common. There was some noticeable campus life at the extension center's downtown location – such as the existence of student government – but the vast majority of the students attended classes on a part-time basis at night. The same was largely true at MSTC, in spite of the fact that its Upper East Side location – dubbed the “gold coast” due to the lavish homes in the area – was more traditional in look and feel than the downtown campus of the extension center. Another similarity was the primarily vocational nature of the education at both MSTC and the UW-Extension. The vast majority of students at MSTC were there to become teachers, while the offerings at the extension center, in the words of an institutional history, “responded to the vocational and occupational needs of the community.”<sup>14</sup>

The commuting part-time students and vocationally-driven curriculums at MSTC and the UW-Extension put both outside of the traditional – or at least dominant in the popular imagination – collegiate experience during the first half of the twentieth century. These institutions were locally rooted and focused, as opposed to the national scope maintained by traditional state campuses like the University of Wisconsin – Madison. Students were attending to primarily or even exclusively earn their degrees, not necessarily participate in campus life. As long as these institutions remained teacher-focused, like MSTC, or two-year, like the UW-Extension, they were able to comfortably occupy a separate sphere from the state's traditional campus in Madison. Thus, it is not surprising that as demand for a college education increased in Milwaukee, as it did elsewhere, following World War II and discussions began to focus on creating a single state-supported four-year institution in Milwaukee, a contentious debate erupted over the purpose of higher education in the state.

### **Lines Drawn in the Merger Debate**

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<sup>13</sup> Cassell, Klotsche, and Olson, *The University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee*, 21-27.

<sup>14</sup> Cassell, Klotsche, and Olson, *The University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee*, 22.

The initial attempts to merge MSTC and the UW-Extension stemmed from a report that was released by a governor-appointed commission convened following the 1947 legislative session to broadly examine public education in the state. One of the major recommendations of the commission report, released in September 1948, was to equalize access to college-level education in the state. Part of this included a more specific recommendation to merge MSTC and the UW-Extension in Milwaukee.<sup>15</sup> In May 1949, this recommendation was formalized into a bill that was presented to the state legislature.<sup>16</sup> In what would become a consistent trend in the coming years, the initial 1949 bill on merging the UW extension center in Milwaukee and the MSTC found some favor in the legislature, evidenced by the fact that it made it out of committee, but the bill – like others that would follow – failed to pass the full body. When it was all said and done, a merger bill was proposed and rejected in the legislature at least four times between 1949 and 1955.<sup>17</sup>

Complicating the process was the fact that, starting in 1953, the merger bill for Milwaukee was often wrapped up into larger bills on the more controversial proposition of consolidating the UW system and the state teacher college system into one body, which was a top legislative priority for Governor Walter Kohler, who took over the top spot in Wisconsin politics in 1951. In fact, when the merger bill for Milwaukee was separated from the broader system consolidation bill and passed by both chambers of the legislature at the end of the 1955-1956 session, Kohler vetoed the bill out of his fear that it would siphon off support for system consolidation.<sup>18</sup> Kohler relented on that position later in the same year when he opted to sign a re-introduced version of the same Milwaukee-only merger bill at the start of the 1955-1956 legislative session,<sup>19</sup> but the back-and-forth exemplifies a frustrating period for those who wanted to see the establishment of a four-year institution in Milwaukee.

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<sup>15</sup> “College Setup Under Unified Board Asked,” *Milwaukee Journal*, September 24, 1948, found in UW-Milwaukee News Services and Publications Records (hereafter UWM Publications Records), folder 16, box 2, University Archives, UWM Libraries, University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee.

<sup>16</sup> “Committee Okay Is Seen for College Merger Here,” *Milwaukee Journal*, May 26, 1949, latest ed., p. B-1.

<sup>17</sup> J. Martin Klotsche, *The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee: An Urban University* (Milwaukee: University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee, 1972), 3-25.

<sup>18</sup> “Kohler Vetoes School Merger,” *Milwaukee Journal*, June 21, 1955, found in UWM Publications Records, folder 21, box 2, University Archives, UWM Libraries, University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee.

<sup>19</sup> “Kohler Signs College Merger Bill,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, October 14, 1955, found in UWM Publications Records, folder 22, box 2, University Archives, UWM Libraries, University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee.

The initial merger bill in 1949 did manage to establish lasting contours of a heated debate over what kind of institution should be created for Milwaukee and for what purpose. In all, three main camps of thought emerged on the merger issue. One position, held by UW administrators in Madison and their supporters, was firm opposition to any merger that created a four-year public university that would, in their eyes, compete with UW-Madison for resources and recognition. The opposite end of the debate were voices emanating out of the City of Milwaukee, embodied most clearly in the editorializing of the *Milwaukee Journal*, which were adamant about the establishment of a four-year university, with the UW name, in or around the downtown area of the city. The third group represented the viewpoint of the state colleges, and its primary figurehead was then-MSTC president, J. Martin Klotsche. The Klotsche-led camp supported a four-year institution in Milwaukee – like the city voices – but felt, more to the liking of UW administrators that putting it under the auspices of the state colleges was preferable to having it dependent on Madison for its livelihood.

In response to the 1949 merger bill, the University of Wisconsin regents situated the problem as one of limited resources, identifying the creation of a separate UW in Milwaukee as the beginning of the end for the high status of UW-Madison. According to a statement on behalf of the regents, if the decision is made to create a state university in Milwaukee, it will “mark the decline of the great university in Madison.”<sup>20</sup> In the eyes of the UW regents, the great benefit of a state-sponsored university was the prestige that it afforded the state through faculty research and national attention.

Since its founding along with the state itself in 1848, UW-Madison built a reputation around applied research, mostly in agriculture, that brought national respect as well as financial rewards to the campus. In an attempt to capitalize on and further this success in applied research, UW President Charles Van Hise conceived of the “Wisconsin Idea” at the start of the twentieth century as a means for linking the fruits of the university with the needs of the state. However, rather than influence the state through opening its doors to more students, the central notion of the Wisconsin Idea was that the UW could influence the state’s public and private sectors for the better through its research expertise and innovation. In other words, the

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<sup>20</sup> “Committee Okay Is Seen for College Merger Here,” *Milwaukee Journal*, May 26, 1949, latest ed., p. B-1.

fruits of the university came more from the work faculty did outside of the classroom than from the minds they molded within it.<sup>21</sup>

On the same day that the UW regents expressed their opposition to the 1949 merger proposal, the *Milwaukee Journal* published an editorial titled “Why Not a UW Here?” that rejected the limited resource argument and claimed that the regent’s attempt to protect the existing campus in Madison amounted to “looking through the wrong end of the telescope.” It was clear in this statement that more was at stake in the merger debate than just resources. To the *Journal* editorial board, the issue was quite clearly one of increasing demand for a university education in the state, specifically from segments of the population that did not traditionally attend a university. “The need and demand for college education is steadily increasing,” the editorial board wrote. “It is no longer confined to well to do families. It is becoming general.”<sup>22</sup> This populist, working-class rhetoric would characterize the arguments of the *Journal* and other proponents of a UW campus in Milwaukee over the next seven years.

The importance of the *Journal* editorial board’s opinion during this time period cannot be understated. In the midst of the merger debate in 1954, *TIME* magazine published a lengthy cover story on the *Milwaukee Journal*, or, as the magazine dubbed it in its title, “The Fair Lady of Milwaukee.” The *Journal*, as conceptualized in the *TIME* article, was a fiercely outspoken and independent paper that made a national name for itself during the early part of the 1950s when it openly confronted the anti-communist tirades of its home-state US senator, Joseph McCarthy. The real influence of the *Journal*, however, was local. As Frank Zeidler, who was then mayor of Milwaukee, told *TIME*: “The Journal is almost utterly dominant in the community. It’s the intellectual life of Milwaukee. You discuss the issues the Journal raises [and] you hardly know of the existence of any other issues. The Journal’s standard of morals, political and social, sets an all-enveloping stamp on the city.” The article goes on to credit the *Journal* with bringing Milwaukee “everything from the Milwaukee Braves to a \$327 million expressway, now a building.” As these statements make clear – along with others in the *TIME* article, such as the Milwaukee police chief explaining how the *Journal* would “take the flesh right off” the

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<sup>21</sup> Thelin, *A History of American Higher Education*, 137-138.

<sup>22</sup> “Why Not a UW Here?” *Milwaukee Journal*, May 26, 1949, editorial, latest ed., p. 20.

bones of any elected official who “step[ped] out of line” – the *Milwaukee Journal* was not only a force in shaping and expressing public opinion in the city, it also often got what it wanted.<sup>23</sup>

### **The Economy in Milwaukee during the Merger Debate**

Buttressing the populist, working class rhetoric of the *Journal* were changing economic and demographic conditions in Milwaukee that witnessed the growth of more and more young adults in the city with an interest in and time for college. As historian John Rury has noted, the shifting urban economy from industrial to service-based between 1920 and 1960 caused more young people to gain employment in offices, retail sales, the food service industry, and other areas that were primarily part-time in nature and, as a result, allowed work to be combined with schooling.<sup>24</sup> This dynamic, along with the increasing need for higher education to obtain a secure full-time position in what was quickly becoming a professionalized labor market, was pushing more and more teenagers toward a college education in a trend that historians are often too quick to attribute primarily to the benefits of the G.I. Bill.

Historians Marc Levine and John Zipp have specifically traced the decline of the industrial labor force in Milwaukee at the same time as jobs in professional and managerial work were on the rise in the city. In 1920, Levine and Zipp found, nearly 38 percent of the Milwaukee labor market in 1920 were operatives and laborers; that percentage, however, would drop throughout the century to 31 percent in 1950, 29 percent in 1960, and all the way down to less than one-quarter in 1980. Meanwhile, professional and managerial work encompassed a combined 9 percent of the Milwaukee labor market in 1920, but by 1950 the percentage jumped to 16 percent and by 1980 it was over 20 percent.<sup>25</sup>

This is not to say that Milwaukee’s economy was anything but predominantly industrial in 1949 when the initial merger bill was announced. As Levine and Zipp point out, Milwaukee was virtually at full employment in 1950 and, at the time, it was “firmly established as the

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<sup>23</sup> “The Fair Lady of Milwaukee,” *TIME*, February 1, 1954, available from <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,860305-1,00.html> (accessed on May 13, 2008).

<sup>24</sup> John L. Rury, “The Changing Social Context of Urban Education: A National Perspective,” in *Seeds of Crisis: Public Schooling in Milwaukee since 1920*, ed. John Rury and Frank Cassell, 10-41 (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993).

<sup>25</sup> Marc V. Levine and John F. Zipp, “A City at Risk: The Changing Social and Economic Context of Public Schooling in Milwaukee,” in *Seeds of Crisis*, ed. Rury and Cassell, 42-72.

mature industrial core of a thriving regional economy.”<sup>26</sup> However, that thriving economy was clearly in motion toward the professional-based service sector economy that took an increasingly prominent position in the region over the course of the second half of the century. Placed into this context, the pleas of the *Journal* editorial board for a move toward college access that was “general” and “no longer confined to well to do families” highlights the place of a university education as a working class need rather than merely a want.

This emphasis on need, in turn, adds to the utilitarian and functional flavor of the UW that city voices envisioned for Milwaukee, which differed dramatically from experientially rooted campus at UW-Madison where most students attended for more than just what they could accomplish inside the classroom. By 1950, UW-Madison had a booming campus life that was forged over the first half of the twentieth century. When they were outside of the classroom, UW-Madison students had on-campus options ranging from musical and dramatic productions to athletic events to Homecoming festivities that occupied their time and attention.<sup>27</sup> What was envisioned for Milwaukee, however, was an institution aimed at the student with little time or interest in the frivolities that were a part of traditional campus life. The UW in Milwaukee was to be a place for “the outsider” conceptualized by Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz.<sup>28</sup>

### The Debate over Location

Perhaps the clearest embodiment of this vision of a utilitarian, working class UW for Milwaukee came during discussions about where the new institution should be located. In a farewell address at the end of his stint as Wisconsin governor in 1950, Oscar Rennebohm – an advocate for a four-year university in Milwaukee – suggested that the state look into acquiring 100 to 150 acres of land west of Milwaukee that could be used as a site for the merged institution.<sup>29</sup> This position was supported by the findings of a survey conducted by the American Council on Education (ACE) out of Washington, D.C., which three months before

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<sup>26</sup> Levine and Zipp, “A City at Risk,” 49.

<sup>27</sup> E. David Cronon and John W. Jenkins, *The University of Wisconsin, A History: Politics, Depression, and War, 1925-1945*, volume III, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994), 623-682.

<sup>28</sup> Horowitz, *Campus Life*, 14-15.

<sup>29</sup> “New Institution Advised West of Milwaukee,” *Milwaukee Journal*, November 19, 1950, found in UWM Publications Records, folder 19, box 2, University Archives, UWM Libraries, University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee.

Rennebohm gave his farewell address released its recommendation for the establishment of a new university somewhere in the Milwaukee metropolitan area. The new university, according to the ACE report, would act as a parent institution for continued services at the UW-Extension in Milwaukee that would focus on adult education on nights and weekends. Meanwhile, the ACE report proposed, the MSTC could continue its work of teacher training at its location on the east side of the city.<sup>30</sup>

When the ACE report was released in August 1950, the *Journal* editorial board celebrated the recommendation of a four-year institution in Milwaukee, but opted to side-step the suggestion that the institution exist somewhere in the Milwaukee metropolitan area by stating that “if we now wrangle over the minor matters, we shall never rally the support necessary to reach the major objective.”<sup>31</sup> This approach was a fairly clear attempt to trumpet a major report that could generate some significant favor for the idea of the merger without allowing any objections to cloud that trumpeting. However, when Rennebohm took the suggestion of the ACE report and put it into a specific policy proposal a few months later, the *Journal* editorial board had to nip it in the bud. In an editorial titled “Location of Lake Shore College,” the editorial board explained that what it envisioned for an urban university in Milwaukee was not the traditional campus surrounded by rolling hills and full of trees lining open quads. Rather, the editorial explained, the urban university, “to be of greatest value, needs to be a low expense ‘blue shirt’ college. Frills and a spacious campus are of little real importance.”<sup>32</sup>

There are two points that are worth highlighting in this statement by the *Journal* editorial board. First, the use of the phrase “blue shirt” clearly brought into focus the working class nature of institution the editorial board wanted for Milwaukee. To be sure, one of the major justifications for a four-year institution in Milwaukee was the area’s large contingent of young people who were interested in and capable of pursuing a college degree, but were not able to

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<sup>30</sup> “Group Urges New Four Year College in City,” *Milwaukee Journal*, August 1950, found in UWM Publications Records, folder 19, box 2, University Archives, UWM Libraries, University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee.

<sup>31</sup> “Toward a Lake Shore College,” *Milwaukee Journal*, August 18, 1950, editorial, found in UWM Publications Records, folder 19, box 2, University Archives, UWM Libraries, University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee.

<sup>32</sup> “Location of Lake Shore College,” *Milwaukee Journal*, November 26, 1950, editorial, found in UWM Publications Records, folder 19, box 2, University Archives, UWM Libraries, University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee.

afford relocating to Madison to complete their coursework. The notion of a “blue shirt” is closely associated with the working class in American history. In fact, less than two decades before the *Journal* editorial board used it to describe the type of university Milwaukee needed, Father James Cox used the phrase “Blue Shirts” as the name of his organization comprised of an estimated two hundred thousand members from Pittsburgh, Chicago, New York, and other cities that fought for workers rights during the early part of the Great Depression.<sup>33</sup> The use of the “blue shirt” phrase by the *Journal* in relation to the merger debate was quite clearly an attempt at tapping into this tradition of class-based pride as a means for expressing the urgent need for and right to a UW specifically designed for the non-traditional students of Milwaukee.

Equally as striking in the *Journal* editorial board’s statement in opposition to the construction of new institution west of Milwaukee was its firm rejection of the need for “frills and a spacious campus,” attributes frequently associated with traditional universities in the United States. According to historical geographer Blake Gumprecht in his recent study of campuses in traditional American college towns:

Where the typical European university was cloistered and in-ward looking, the American college campus, in the words of the architectural historian Paul Venable Turner, has been ‘extroverted and expansive’ ... The distinctly American notion that college should be a total experience, not limited to the classroom, has also shaped campus development.<sup>34</sup>

By rejecting the need for a spacious campus capable of offering students “a total experience,” as Gumprecht put it, the *Journal* and other proponents of a UW for Milwaukee were charting a new course for university development in the United States that centered on what they perceived to be the needs of the urban working class college student. While the traditional college campus in many ways defined the traditional college town, the city defined the postwar urban university. Utilitarian in purpose, as opposed to experiential, UWM needed to be accessible to the masses in Milwaukee, in both financial terms and physical location. As the *Journal* went on to explain in its “Location of Lake Shore College” editorial, although frills and spaciousness were not important, “The classrooms...need to be near the city’s center, near

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<sup>33</sup> Thomas Coode and John Petrarulo, “The Odyssey of Pittsburgh’s Father Cox,” *The Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine* 55 (July 1972): 217-238.

<sup>34</sup> Blake Gumprecht, “The Campus as a Public Space in the American College Town,” *Journal of Historical Geography* 33 (2007): 72-103.

public transportation terminals, near sources of student employment and near important existing educational facilities such as the public library and museum.”<sup>35</sup> The “blue shirt” urban university, in short, needed to be ingrained within the city, not separated from it.

Location again became an issue after UWM opened its doors in the fall of 1956. Although primarily situated on the MSTC campus on the “gold coast” of the Upper East Side during its inaugural 1956-1957 school year, UWM also offered coursework downtown at the UW-Extension location. However, by late 1956, discussions ensued on the question of whether the Upper East Side should be a permanent location for UWM due to concerns about its limited growth potential.<sup>36</sup> In February 1957, City of Milwaukee planners drafted a report detailing four locations, in addition to the current Upper East Side site, for a permanent UWM campus. Two of those proposed locations were outside of the city, one at Milwaukee County-owned lands in the western suburb of Wauwatosa and the other at an unspecified parcel within 10-20 miles of the city. Either option would provide UWM with far more acreage than any site within the city, the planners explained, which would greatly benefit the institution in the long run.<sup>37</sup> As it did in 1950, the *Journal* editorial board reacted sharply to the proposal to move UWM outside of the city. In an editorial titled “Dream Stuff About UWM,” the *Journal* reiterated the need for the campus to remain close to public transportation and other important institutions located downtown to best accommodate “students who count pennies and get education the hard way, many only through help of part time jobs.” It continued: “Such an urban university can function well in close quarters, in multistoried buildings, without great, spacious tree shaded campuses,” attributes that the editorial board viewed as “a rank extravagance” for the urban university.<sup>38</sup>

Ultimately the decision was made to keep the UWM campus at the Upper East Side location rather than expand outside of the city. Like earlier debates over location, however,

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<sup>35</sup> “Location of Lake Shore College,” *Milwaukee Journal*, November 26, 1950, editorial.

<sup>36</sup> “Regents Discuss UWM Site on City’s Outskirts,” *Milwaukee Journal*, December 9, 1956, found in UWM Publications Records, folder 22, box 2, University Archives, UWM Libraries, University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee.

<sup>37</sup> “Four New UWM Sites Proposed by Planners,” *Milwaukee Journal*, February 7, 1957, found in UWM Publications Records, folder 22, box 2, University Archives, UWM Libraries, University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee.

<sup>38</sup> “Dream Stuff About UWM,” *Milwaukee Journal*, February 8, 1957, editorial, found in UWM Publications Records, folder 22, box 2, University Archives, UWM Libraries, University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee.

this later flare up again highlighted the deeply rooted changes that were taking place with the formation of UWM and other urban universities in the postwar period. There was something distinct and honorable in the *Journal's* conceptualization of the urban university students who earned their education “the hard way” with the help of part-time work as opposed to those who attended traditionally isolated campuses and, ostensibly, received their education on more comfortable terms. Much of this can be read as purely rhetorical; the *Journal* was trying to effectively argue for keeping the new UW within the boundaries of the city, and striking populist tones in that argument was a useful way to curry support from those in the city who viewed themselves as hard workers and subtly demean as soft those who preferred a traditional campus. Due to the fact, however, that the argument accompanied an undeniable increase in the number of students in general and the number of non-traditional students in particular attending universities in the United States in the postwar era suggests a genuine shift was taking place in the perceived purpose of a university education in the country at the time.

### **The Debate over Institutional Control**

Another place where this shift can be seen is in the debate over what kind of institution was to be created from a merger in Milwaukee. Rather than be content with the myriad of postsecondary options available to non-traditional students that developed over the first half of the twentieth century, ranging from community to technical colleges, the proponents of a UW for Milwaukee were adamant that the merged institution hold the title and prestige of a university. To proponents like the *Journal* editorial board, a high level of prestige and status was attached to a UW degree, and that prestige and status should be accessible to the working class in Milwaukee who could not afford to move to Madison for their college days.

Thus, when a proposal arose in 1954 to merge the UW extension in Milwaukee and the MSTC under the auspices of the state teachers college system, as opposed to the UW, proponents of a university for Milwaukee reacted sharply. While then-president of MSTC, J. Martin Klotsche, celebrated the proposal for the fact that it created a four-year institution for Milwaukee that was not bound by the whims of administrators in Madison, the city voices decried it as a second-rate option. As Milwaukee Mayor Frank Ziedler saw it, making the four-

year institution a part of the state college system “would be a mistake from the university’s point of view, and from the point of view of Milwaukee’s prestige.”<sup>39</sup> In an editorial titled “Unwise College Merger Plan,” the *Journal* added that allowing “young men and women of modest means” in Milwaukee the opportunity to pursue a university degree, which they “have their hearts set on,” would allow them to take coursework “held up to UW standards.”<sup>40</sup> Although no explicit mention was made in the editorial about the standards of the state colleges, the implication of how they were perceived to compare to the standards of the UW was clear. Students at the UW-Extension felt the same way; in a letter to the *Journal*, the president of the student government explained: “We feel that the people in this area are entitled to the university level of education at a reasonable cost and we are opposed to the plan of consolidation under state college regents because it would deprive us of such an education.”<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> “Urge Making UWM a Part of State College,” *Milwaukee Journal*, July 4, 1954, home ed., 1.

<sup>40</sup> “Unwise College Merger Plan,” *Milwaukee Journal*, July 12, 1954, editorial, found in UWM Publications Records, folder 20, box 2, University Archives, UWM Libraries, University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee.

<sup>41</sup> Alfred Hunsicker, “The Lake Shore College,” *Milwaukee Journal*, August 8, 1954, letter to editor, found in UWM Publications Records, folder 20, box 2, University Archives, UWM Libraries, University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee.



**J. Martin Klotsche, Chancellor of UWM, 1965-1973.<sup>42</sup>**

Reflecting on the episode years later, Klotsche expressed the view that the tussle that erupted in 1954 over who would control the merged institution in Milwaukee was a decisive moment for the larger merger debate; he summed it up this way in a 1981 interview: “That was the real turning point to the debate. The people in this area felt that the people in this region were entitled to a University of Wisconsin degree – not a Wisconsin State College degree, but a

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<sup>42</sup> From the Archives Department, University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee Libraries, UWM Archival Collection 6. Box 2, Folder 13.

University of Wisconsin degree. It was the prestige of the University of Wisconsin degree that finally prevailed.”<sup>43</sup>



**Sign change from Wisconsin State College to University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Jan. '57.<sup>44</sup>**

It is important to remember, of course, that the purpose of that prestige was itself contested terrain. From the perspective of UW administrators, as evidenced by their early and sustained opposition to a UW in Milwaukee due to its perceived impact on the UW already in Madison, the prestige of the UW was something to be protected and doled out by the single institution in Madison, not distributed by multiple UW institutions throughout the state. Those in Milwaukee, however, had a different view of it. From their seat within the most populated

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<sup>43</sup> J. Martin Klotsche, oral history interview transcript, April 21, 1981, found in UW-Milwaukee Oral History Project Records, folder 5, box 2, University Archives, UWM Libraries, University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee.

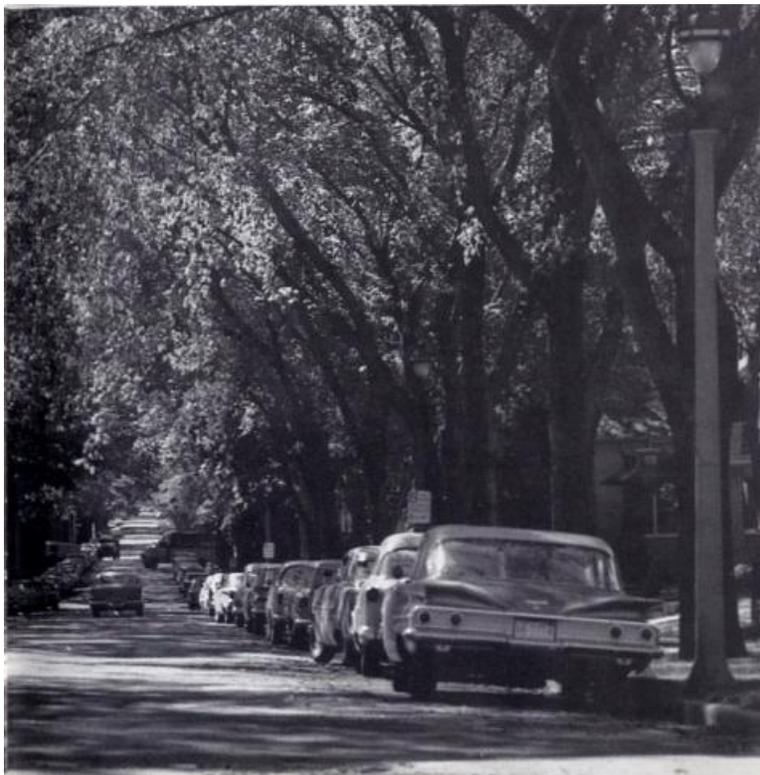
<sup>44</sup> From the Archives Department, University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee Libraries, UWM Archival Collection 6. Box 7, Folder 13.

region in the state, the purpose of the UW's prestige was to provide residents of the state with broad and unmitigated access to a renowned university education, and to do so through institutions tailored specifically to the needs of the students in the particular locale. Just as the prestige of the UW degree won out over the possibility of a Wisconsin State College degree in Milwaukee, the vision for that prestige held by the city voices in Milwaukee triumphed over the UW administrators in Madison when the creation of UWM was finally signed into law in late 1955.



**Aerial photograph of UWM campus at its founding in 1956.<sup>45</sup>****Epilogue**

In the years after opening its doors in 1956, the size of the student body at UWM grew dramatically. Initial projections completed during the planning stages of the new institution in March 1956 estimated that the total number of students attending UWM would first break the 10,000 marker in the 1965-1966 school year.<sup>46</sup> As it turned out, however, the 10,000 marker was broken in the 1963-1964 school year, two years earlier than projected, and the number of total students at UWM would increase to over 20,000 by the start of the 1970s.



**Image of street near UWM campus filled with cars from commuting students.<sup>47</sup>**

What did not change dramatically during the opening decades of UWM's existence was the significant percentage of part-time and commuting students who attended the university.

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<sup>45</sup> Photograph from Cassell, Klotsche, and Olson, *The University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee*. Permission granted by UWM Foundation for use of photograph.

<sup>46</sup> Committee of Thirty, *Summary Report of the Actions Leading to the Establishment of the University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee* (Madison: publisher unknown, 1957), 65.

<sup>47</sup> Photograph from Cassell, Klotsche, and Olson, *The University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee*. Permission granted by UWM Foundation for use of photograph.

In 1960-1961, for instance, the percentage of part-time students attending UWM was 34 percent, and when the campus first reached over 20,000 total students ten years later in 1970-1971, the percentage of part-time students remained virtually unchanged at 36 percent.<sup>48</sup> Further evidence of a staunchly commuter-based student body came at the start of 1970-1971 school year when UWM opened its first dormitories at Sandburg Hall to lower-than-expected interest; in fact, it would be another decade before full occupancy was achieved in the three towers that were opened at the start of the 1970s, and the campus even toyed with the idea of making a portion of Sandburg into a halfway house in 1975.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Klotsche, *The University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee: An Urban University*, 143.

<sup>49</sup> Klotsche, *The University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee: An Urban University*, 94; for data on occupancy at Sandburg Hall, see UW-Milwaukee Office of the Vice Chancellor Records, folder 11, box 89, folders 22-23, box 24, University Archives, UWM Libraries, University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee; for information on using Sandburg as a halfway house, see UW-Milwaukee University Relations Records, folder 18, box 8, University Archives, UWM Libraries, University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee.



**View of UWM parking lot in October, 1975.<sup>50</sup>**

Little of this, however, is true today at UWM. While the percentage of part-time students attending UWM at the end of the 1980s was 47 percent of the total student body – significantly higher than the 1950s and 1960s – that number dropped to 35 percent by the end

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<sup>50</sup> From the Archives Department, University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee Libraries, UWM Archival Collection 6. Box 26, Folder 9.

of the 1990s and even further to 24 percent by 2007-2008, putting it more in line with the average from the rest of the UW System, which was 19 percent in 1989-1990 and 16 percent in 2007-2008.<sup>51</sup> Another sign of UWM's move toward a more traditional university campus starting in the 1990s was the construction of a fourth tower for Sandburg Hall at the end of the decade along with the construction of two new residence halls in 2006 and 2008, respectively, to deal with the overabundance of on-campus living requests.<sup>52</sup> More construction is planned for the future, with UWM eyeing Columbia Hospital – located just outside the existing main campus – as a possible location for future dormitories to meet the campus goal, stated in 2006, of having enough room to house all incoming freshmen by 2011.<sup>53</sup>

Nevertheless, in spite of recent changes in student body make-up, the version of UWM that was conceived by proponents and founded in the 1950s signaled a significant change in the perceived purpose of a university education in the state. No longer a single place of centralized prestige that only benefited the state through applied research and educating a select group of its students, the postwar vision of the UW transformed it into a decentralized institution of access for individual locales in the state. To be sure, while Milwaukee was the first locale to get its own UW, it was not the last. In the mid-1960s, UW campuses were established at Green Bay and Parkside, and in the early 1970s the remaining state college campuses in Eau Claire, La Crosse, Oshkosh, Platteville, River Falls, Stevens Point, Stout, Superior, and Whitewater were given the UW title when the state college system merged into the UW system.

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<sup>51</sup> UW System, Office of Policy Analysis & Research, "Student Statistics Reports," available from <http://www.uwsa.edu/opar/ssb/> (accessed May 13, 2008).

<sup>52</sup> Whitney Gould, "UWM Tries a New Path in Woods," *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, September 28, 1998, p. 1; Tom Daykin, "Kenilworth Builds New Ties to Community," *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, November 6, 2006, p. D1; Tom Daykin, "UWM's New Digs," *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, December 1, 2007, p. D1.

<sup>53</sup> Sherwood G. Wilson, "North Avenue Freshmen Housing: A Creative Solution for the Future," presentation to UW Board of Regents, June 8, 2006, available from [http://www.wisconsin.edu/news/2006/06-2006/jun08\\_NorthAvenueStudentHousing.pdf](http://www.wisconsin.edu/news/2006/06-2006/jun08_NorthAvenueStudentHousing.pdf) (accessed on May 13, 2008).



**Original UWM Student Union in 1956.<sup>54</sup>**

In spite of the many more UWs that were founded within the two decades after 1956, UWM was still a unique institution with an emphasis on educating and improving its urban surroundings. The case that was made for a UW in Milwaukee between 1948 and 1956 was built upon populist working class rhetoric that was particular to Milwaukee, along with a vision for a new type of university that differed significantly from the UW in Madison and, for that matter, the UWs that popped up around in the state with system consolidation in the 1970s. To be sure, while the creation of UWM certainly had important significance for higher education in the state of Wisconsin, as an institution it is more than anything a part of the story of state-sponsored urban universities that were created across the country in the postwar period. Institutions such as Portland State University (1946), Wayne State University (1956), the University of New Orleans (1958), Cleveland State University (1964), the University of

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<sup>54</sup> From the Archives Department, University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee Libraries, UWM Archival Collection 6. Box 8, Folder 10.

Illinois – Chicago (1965), and the University of Pittsburgh (1966) all share with UWM a history of becoming state-sponsored urban universities during the two decades following the end of World War II and, for the most part, catering to a non-traditional urban student body.

These urban universities are largely left out of the narrative of the American university, and the non-traditional students who attended them are often placed within the broader amalgamation of new students enrolling in a variety of “postsecondary” options in increasing numbers throughout the middle part of the twentieth century. Considering urban universities as part of the history of the American university and their students as part of the university tradition, however, demonstrates that, in addition to being expansive, the growth of higher education in the postwar period also altered the trajectory of existing institutions. Historians of higher education, for instance, have pointed to a vocationalism in university students that developed on a widespread basis in the 1970s and 1980s, which some consider to be an individualist reaction to the communalism of the 1960s;<sup>55</sup> as the story of UWM suggests, however, the roots of this vocationalism in universities in the US were laid even earlier in the postwar era.

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<sup>55</sup> Thelin, *A History of American Higher Education*, 327; Horowitz, *Campus Life*, 20.