

Editor's Note

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The Education of Henry Adams teaches that all universities and colleges must be judged failures if their goal is thought to be the education of the young. Writing of Harvard College, Adams insists that the university is always behind its own time, always a poor provider of what is most needed, and useful only as a “negative force” that might weaken biases in politics, knowledge, and desire that are already in place. How did Harvard fail in its task? It did not give Adams knowledge, nor did it give him the means to acquire or produce it. Specifically, it gave him neither mathematics nor modern languages; it never mentioned the name of Karl Marx, who alone, after 1848, “foresaw radical change.”¹

Adams portrays Harvard's failures as only one of many frustrations in his effort to acquire an education. As the failures in formal education mount, Adams calls the small education he acquires “accidental,” attributing it generally to those moments when the biases of acquired knowledge collapse in encounters with realities to which he is brought totally unprepared. Formal

1. *The Education of Henry Adams* (New York: Library of America, 1983), 750.

education never lets anyone know what is needed in advance; the educated person is never sufficiently cultivated to deal successfully with the new and unexpected, not without upheaval and surprise.

Of course, this is not (or was not) how it should be. The young Adams (b. 1838) was, after all, on the verge of entering Harvard when Cardinal John Henry Newman wrote that the purpose of the university is “the cultivation of the intellect, as an end which may reasonably be pursued for its own sake.”² If Adams comes to believe anything about education, though, it is that the young should be educated for “success.” In fact, *The Education* traces many of the ways Americans were educated for success, in the crudest sense of that term. But the person who laments Harvard’s ignorance of Marx lauds success not for its crudity of wealth and position (both of which he inherited and augmented) but for its accuracy as a measure of historical vectors.

Even research universities are like Adams’s Harvard, in that the most they offer is a mechanism for catching up with what has already been thought—this despite the fact that universities have been great machines for knowledge production. Increasingly, of course, as a great deal of recent writing makes clear, university-based research turns toward the “applied,” toward knowledge with immediate market consequences. The sciences, especially, find themselves transformed into devices for capital’s expansion within a culture of entrepreneurial values and corporate transnationalism. The humanities are left simply with the crumbs of service and the marginal business of cultural commodification for the market. This might suggest that universities finally do what Adams urged: educate for success. To a degree, this is just what happens.

To educate for success means two things: to supply a need and to foresee a future. The first of these two is not interesting. For decades, educators have lamented the market forces that, by shaping career possibilities, shape educational paths. The second matters much more. As universities embed themselves within the culture of the practices of transnational capital, they must accept the role assigned to them or be starved of funds; they must produce certain kinds of valuable knowledge and spin off economic entities that both return royalties and enrich the circulation of ideas and products within the technologies of globalized economies.

2. John Henry Newman, *The Idea of a University*, intro. and notes by Martin J. Svaglic (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982), 114. Newman gave the lectures that formed this book in the spring of 1852.

Yet more important, universities must share in the demand that globalizing economic agents make on all our lives and on history, namely, that the future become what they intend to make it. Universities do this in two ways: by supplying the brains and training these agents require, and by redesigning themselves to act more quickly, to show more speed, both in imagining the future as the present configuration wants it to be and in adjusting to the constantly changing future that the rapidly altering “present” demands. Universities nest themselves, necessarily, within the flows of time and intelligence that globalization requires; to do otherwise would be not to succeed. It would be not to survive. Indeed, this means that what, for Cardinal Newman and for many of us, once looked like a university is no more. In the new scheme, universities are not a source of thoughts and knowledges that might equally rapidly circulate and flow in competition with the global capital order; they do not cultivate; they do not compete. They educate for success.

Why would Adams, an admirer of Marx, have education be “education for success”? There is a short answer that can be seen in the two ways Harvard College fails: It fails to provide knowledge or the tools for producing it; more important, it fails to take note of a kind of thinking that moves with the times, a thinking that clings, as Marx’s thinking does, to the movements of history and capital as they drive helter-skelter across the globe modernizing, destroying, and remaking. Harvard College could be what looked like a place of “cultivation” at a time when Adams knew cultivation was not a virtue or a value to be pursued, because it did not prepare for the twentieth century, for the metonymically known speed and power of “America.” When people wake from the nightmare that they do make their own history in ways they don’t understand, then they wake to an even worse nightmare that now history is made successfully by some according to a plan. We are accustomed to hearing scare stories of such possibilities attached to totalitarian regimes. Fortunately, in history, none of these had the power, intelligence, or foresight to achieve their visions or to last for a very long time.

Adams insists over and again that America acts on blind impulse, but he also shows the existence of certain minds that know what the United States is and how it acts, to which ends and by which means. Impersonal and unconscious as the American system might be in its compulsive advances, and so dangerous in its desires, more dangerous still is the United States as a knowing success that has or believes it has the power to move (with) history in its own directions, according to its own plans.

To educate for success, then, means to educate so that minds can

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bring to consciousness this powerful plan and the vectors along which it moves. Of course, the existence of such minds does nothing to guarantee the “enlightenment” of their judgments or actions. (One thinks of Admiral Alfred Thayer Mahan, who understood a great deal about the United States, who understood its logic and transformed it into an empire.) For that very reason, to educate for success is the program American universities “ought” to adopt, and it is the very reason, as well, why Adams has only a limited interest in the subject who knows. Production occurs without the vanguard; with it, especially when cast as the state intellectual class, it does little more than bring itself to consciousness. The aim is to direct its power to prevent the eruption of turbulence that might surprise and disorient it. U.S. diplomats always insist that America wants stability.

Rather than interesting himself in how universities might produce subjects of knowledge, Adams turns his own attention to the subject of intelligence, especially to the fact and possibility of those surprises and eruptions, the appearance in history of special gifts, that might redirect history and teach the limits of systemic knowledge and power, the limits of success. “Success” is what must be studied to understand the very vectors of history; because it exists as a limit, it cannot be avoided. Yet as a limit, what it constrains, what it forbids, must be searched for; the problem is that the intellect that it constrains is rare and almost accidental. When it appears, it looks like a singular event. Its coming into being redeems the easy transformation of secularism into commodification, of intelligence into prophesy.

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The essays collected in this issue of *boundary 2* were written in response to a call for papers that would treat the contemporary university, in various regions and stages of formation around the world, in light of the interaction between local and global realities. Underlying this project is the assumption that profound changes in economy and world organization transform the function and value of universities in tension not only with the regional histories and forces in which particular universities function but also with what used to be called “the idea of the university.” The authors of these essays approach this topic in two ways: Some present the history and current situation of the university in a particular place and politics; some write of the new university’s political economy emerging as the state withdraws support for higher education and hands the institutions over to entrepreneurial and transnational corporate culture. None of these essays defends the idea that the university pursues knowledge for its own sake. Yet

there is a tinge of nostalgia for this very idea, or at least for the idea that the university's task is to educate, to destroy bias, to cultivate. Of course, such an idea remains the public justification for the existence of the university, especially in the advanced capitalist societies, whose higher classes benefit the most from the globalization of economic production. Gerhard Casper, president of Stanford University until 31 August 2000, offers us a good example of such talk. When asked by an interviewer for the *New York Times*, "With Silicon Valley and other industries demanding an endless stream of high-tech workers, how can universities stay focused on thinking, rather than training?" he offers this reply: "I still think a broad liberal arts education at a research-intensive university, where students really learn to question the evidence, question their own prejudices, is by far the best education for anything in life, because if you learn how to do that, then you will be able to do it later, both in relation to your own life but also in the job you hold."³ Corporate executives, Casper admits, support this idea in principle; corporate recruiters do not.

As the recent *boundary 2* supplement on Tunisia (vol. 26, no. 2 [summer 1999]) makes clear, the issues of education within globalization affect regions of the world unevenly but with repeated demands that the systemic effects and intents of globalization be analyzed everywhere they appear—and as such, that is, not merely as local instances of traditional problems or as instances of "imperialism" on an old nationalist model. In this collection, the complexity of the current situation of universities within the catachrestic pressures of local and global clearly appears. From the overthrow of apartheid and its effects on education, to the abusive consequences of Israeli occupation for Palestinian institutions of higher learning, to the transformations within the U.S. academy witnessed by teachers of long-standing commitment, these changes—all marked, recorded, and analyzed—give every indication that universities have little hope of offering themselves as a principal location where the knowledge needed to conduct analysis and to create critical theories of new realities will occur. Rather, one effect of globalization that each of these essays reports is the degradation of the university as a place of knowledge reproduction: Students are left untaught, faculty sow themselves into narrow slots of career and thought, and administrators struggle with the needs to fund even those processes they know are necessary to the old ideal Casper echoes from Newman.

These contributors were asked to write not hortatory essays but ana-

3. Jodi Wilgoren, "Exiting Stanford, Noting Many Challenges Ahead," *New York Times*, 22 September 1999, national edition, sec. C, p. 31.

lytic and descriptive articles. For the most part, they have done so and opened up a discussion that needs to be continued about the structural situation of universities in their different places in a globe marked by forces extending across its face. Humanistic criticism, in particular, has not committed itself very much to the task of understanding how the present exists nor how the present exists as an apparent unit called “the global.” We know, of course, that it cannot exist without certain regimes of knowledge and that the invention of new knowledges, circulating in competition with those necessary regimes, might be threatening to many who would rather not encourage a thousand flowers to bloom—or an alternative network to speed emerging new ideas.

Much remains to be written about the university, even if it is only its history. Indeed, epitaphs can be long. But just as Adams did not allow mourning to arrest his thinking, so too intelligence, we know, will find its own places to erupt. It simply seems doubtful that the university will ever again see itself as the place or time to encourage and solicit such turbulence.