that matter, consisted not just of arrests and surveillance but even health officials running tests on his pet monkeys! Johnson deftly handles the complicated racial dynamics of the physique press, acknowledging the influence of Jim Crow on Grecian Guild’s southern origins, while also reminding us that physique imagery was nonetheless more integrated than many gay bars of the time.

Johnson acknowledges LGBTQ anti-capitalist critique that runs from gay liberation through queer theory, but he could have spent a bit more time elaborating on how the market itself, far from being run by an invisible hand, is instead beholden to a racialized, classed, and gendered hand that shaped and constrained the conditions of possibility for the consumer politics he so insightfully examines. Still, Buying Gay is radical in its own way, for its reclaiming of the disparaged, the prurient, the sexualized, and the erotic as sources of power, community, and resistance. As something of the opposite and equal to the state repression of The Lavender Scare, it is the perfect follow-up.

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New England has played an outsized role in the historiography of American higher education due to the numerous studies of its elite private colleges and universities, many of which are among the best in the field. And thanks to Richard Freeland, Massachusetts’s public and less well-known private institutions have also received skillful attention. His 1992 Academia’s Golden Age: Universities in Massachusetts, 1945–1970 examined the evolution of the state’s higher education in the quarter century after World War II. That book provided a rounded picture covering a range of institutions from Harvard and MIT to urban universities to the former state teachers colleges that provided the base for Massachusetts’s belated creation of a state system.

Freeland brings the rare perspective of an academic historian whose career has been primarily in administration—a career that
concluded as President of Northeastern University from 1996 to 2006, the focus of his new book. His coverage actually spans far more than the decade in the subtitle, and he situates that decade in the longer perspective of the trials and tribulations of American urban centers and of the colleges and universities accidentally situated in, or actively embracing, their urban environments.

If Freeland’s previous book examined Massachusetts’s institutions in a golden era for academe, this one chronicles an institution trying to reinvent itself as American cities and their colleges and universities emerged from the dark ages of urban crisis. Urban universities went through dramatic changes as they negotiated the twentieth century. A plethora of urban universities were founded in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and many older ones increasingly found themselves in highly urbanized environments—a cohort ranging from urban Ivies to institutions catering to working class students. Northeastern, founded as a YMCA evening school in 1898, was among the latter. It later joined the Association of Urban Universities, established in 1914 by institutions committed to being “of” cities, not merely “in” them. As Northeastern College (soon renamed Northeastern University), it began offering baccalaureate programs in 1916 and developed a reputation as one of the foremost practitioners of the “co-op” curriculum that mixed classroom education with off-campus “hands-on” training. Northeastern carved out a comfortable niche, albeit with little academic glory, serving less affluent Bostonians than its better known and more prestigious neighbors.

But urban universities of all stripes were hit by the postwar decline of older American cities. Even the word “urban” became a liability and, in 1977, the members of the Association of Urban Universities disbanded. Like others bearing the “urban university” brand, Northeastern shared the low status of a largely local, non-selective institution, serving families of modest means. It prospered in that role, growing into the largest private university in the United States during the 1960s and early 1970s. Massachusetts was one of the nation’s last states to make a serious commitment to public higher education, leaving room for Northeastern, Boston College, and Boston University to thrive.

However, by 1990, with the rapidly growing University of Massachusetts Boston campus attracting many of its former clientele with low tax-subsidized tuition, Northeastern’s enrollments collapsed. Severe retrenchment followed, forcing a 20 percent reduction of staff and faculty and creating the need to fundamentally change
course under the ethos of “smaller but better.” It was in this context that Freeland arrived as President in 1996 with the task of revising Northeastern’s mission and repositioning it within higher education. He faced the dilemma of trying to remain loyal to Northeastern’s traditions of serving Boston’s needs and embracing the “co-op” curriculum, while developing a new market niche that would yield sustainable enrollments.

Toward that end, Freeland and his administrative team decided not to follow the Boston University and Boston College model of repositioning themselves as nationally recognized research universities. Instead, they decided to concentrate upon recruiting undergraduates from outside the Boston region and raising its national profile, including in the all-important, if flawed, US News and World Report rankings while continuing to serve its urban environment. The formula called for Northeastern to be student-centered (especially undergraduate), practice-oriented (building on its co-op reputation), and urban-focused. Once stabilized, they would try to raise its research standing, particularly stressing programs that addressed urban problems.

But negotiating the transition to its revised mission was a challenge. Marketing took on a new importance and reaching the Top 100 in its US News and World Report category became a critical goal. Changing reality was more painful. The institution had significant weaknesses and some ugly housecleaning followed, paired with hiring a few academic stars.

There were also surprises. Freeland admits to having underestimated the importance of upgrading physical facilities to faculty and student morale, recruitment, and even graduation rates. Although presidents are often criticized for their brick-and-mortar fixation, he came to believe that attractive physical facilities had become fundamental to repositioning institutions. Northeastern began fighting the amenities war.

Northeastern progressed upward in the US News and World Report rankings and, correspondingly, so did its enrollments and its budget. Although research and doctoral programs received more attention, Freeland believes that becoming more selective in undergraduate admissions and improving the undergraduate experience was the key to increased reputation, despite competing within US News and World Report’s research university category.

Combining upward academic mobility with a commitment to being an engaged urban university was more difficult, as dramatically
demonstrated by the Super Bowl Riot of 2004 in which students and non-students rioted in Boston's main student centers. Freeland admits how painful the situation was and that it set back his attempt to make Northeastern a valued contributor to urban life. That mayhem revived Boston officialdom's suspicion that the universities were more of a detriment than an asset to the city.

As one of its architects, Freeland recounts Northeastern's renaissance as a success story. But despite his closeness to the subject, the author writes with an admirable sense of perspective. Freeland's book is a valuable case study of an institution wrestling with the dilemmas facing America's cities and their urban universities. It is a perceptive and well-written account of one case of higher education's radically expanding societal role as it intersected with the dynamics of New England's leading city.

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