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## **The Honors of Inequality: Why Colleges Work for Some and Not for Others**

Chicago, Illinois | January 24, 2020 | Higher education—as an organized discipline or field of study—is a relatively recent invention in the history of colleges and universities. Historians place the origins of the modern university to the medieval era in Europe about 1,000 years ago. The professional associations of the modern disciplines for historians, economists, sociologists, and other social scientists first organized in the late 1800s, or about 150 years ago. By comparison, the academic study of higher education as an institutional or cultural phenomenon is much more recent, arguably the late 1950s. More exactly, the Association for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE) formed less than fifty years ago in 1976.

Clearly, the origins of the university and the modern professional associations for the social sciences differ markedly from the origins of higher education as a field of study and as an area of scholarly expertise. In point of fact, twentieth-century scholars of higher education borrowed concepts and adopted ideological arguments from the anti-New Deal literature in order to raise impediments to the scientific study of higher learning and to frustrate the accumulation of knowledge about what works for college student success. In a backlash to events they traced to the democratization of higher education, this cadre of scholars redefined academic freedom as a corporate right of the faculty that betrayed the principles of higher learning for college students and that redefined college administration as “an organized anarchy” functioning properly when committed to the status quo.

*Honors of Inequality: How Colleges Work for Some*, the latest work from historian Joseph H. Wycoff, Ph.D, delves into the origins and key contributions to the scholarship about American higher education during the last half of the twentieth century. It was no accident that higher education as a field of study emerged in the decade following the professional organization of administrative researchers, the implementation of the California Master Plan, and the student unrest on campuses in the mid-to-late 1960s America. The power to define what counts and what does not count as scholarship for higher education policymakers created the opportunity for faculty to exercise substantial control over the direction of college and university life after 1970.

Clark Kerr, former president of the University of California, once observed that “the essential conservatism of faculty members about their own affairs” dominates the governance of American university campuses. Key facets of that conservatism are evident in the literature on how colleges work that tenured faculty have written. In this critical history of higher education as a field of study, Dr. Wycoff uncovers the ideological, political, social, and cultural commitments that motivated early scholars and offers significant insights—to college-goers, parents, faculty,

administrators, policymakers, legislators, and the many other stakeholders in higher education—into the reason that colleges remain powerful instruments for shaping social and economic inequality in the early twenty-first century.

Dr. Wycoff is an independent scholar and consultant who has worked in academic, market, and institutional research during the past twenty-five years, including fifteen years in higher education. His doctorate in U.S. history focused on business and consumer history. His institutional research background encompasses professional experience in three sectors of higher education: a community college, a private nonprofit institution, and a Research I university, the University of Washington, where he also earned his doctorate. He has presented independent scholarship at conferences for the European Association for Institutional Research, Society for Social Science History, Business History Conference, New England Historical Association, and Historians of the Early American Republic.

“The underlying premise of *Honors of Inequality* is that ideas matter. When scholars routinely claim that institutions of higher education are unique and require institutional autonomy, they influence—directly and indirectly—the legislative policies and administrative practices that direct colleges and universities,” Dr. Wycoff shared. “These policies and practices in turn determine the mission of the public college systems in American democracy, how well colleges support Americans’ public interest, and which class of citizens American colleges seek to serve effectively, efficiently, and affordably. In short, scholars’ ideas influence colleges to work for some, and not for others, contributing to the intractable social and economic inequality that has fostered a deep cultural divide in the United States today.”

Dr. Wycoff’s insightful narrative reveals that the origins and ideological motivations for the organization of higher education as a field of study have deep roots in the traditions of anti-intellectualism, conservatism, and business enterprise in America life.

“By definition,” he adds, “the musings of an academician on academia is not academic. Tenured faculty have a political and economic stake in the ideas that their scholarship advances about how colleges work.” Faculty’s financial well-being, institutional control, academic freedom, and influence on state policies are inextricably connected to how much American families, students, citizens, politicians, and policymakers support higher education. Conversely, Americans’ understanding of higher education manifestly depends on the tenured faculty who study and publish academic works on student learning and university administration. In short, scholars have a vested interest in the areas of investigation and the conclusions drawn from their own research on the nature of higher education—and their academic power has shaped institutional and public policies accordingly.

*Honors of Inequality: How Colleges Work for Some* is available from Amazon.com, independent bookstores, and other retailers.

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