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Anthony O. Edmonds, E. Bruce Geelhoed. *Ball State University: An Interpretive History.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001. xiv + 350 pp. $29.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-253-34017-7.

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Ball State University and the Quest for Respect

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Growing up in east-central Indiana in the 1960s and 1970s, Ball State Teachers College, later Ball State University, was a constant presence in my life. My mother, aunts, and uncles were alumni. So were almost all of my teachers. For most of my friends and me, it was the first college campus we ever saw, visiting relatives or going to the planetarium or art museum or attending a debate tournament or music workshop. Yet, despite its omnipresence, it was not a place that inspired affection or respect. "Fruit Jar Tech" and "The High School with Ashtrays" were the standard appellations for it. With a few exceptions, it was either the fallback school for those who could not afford or gain admission to Indiana University at Bloomington, Purdue or a private college, or it was the choice of those who wanted some specialty with a limited future, such as elementary education, in which Ball State was good.

This is one of the two central themes of this excellent institutional history by Anthony O. Edmonds, a history professor at Ball State, and E. Bruce Geelhoed, the director of Ball State's Center for Middletown Studies. Ball State deserves study because of its very typicality. For most of its history, it has been a regional institution with low admissions standards, taking most of its students from its surrounding counties of Indiana. Starting as a training school for teachers, it participated in the explosion of college enrollments after World War II, with an accompanying expansion of its curriculum and programs. In 1965 came the formal transformation from Ball State Teachers College to Ball State University, with continued growth into the 1970s. Then, as enrollments leveled off, came financial problems and a kind of identity crisis with which the institution still struggles today. This is a story that dozens of state universities could tell. It is important because these are the institutions that have educated a significant number of Americans in the last half-century.

What makes Ball State unusual, Edmonds and Geelhoed argue, is the degree to which it has been tied to its community. Its home is Muncie, Indiana, made famous, or notorious, by the sociologists Robert and Helen Lynd in their *Middletown* studies in the 1920s and 1930s. The very name reflects the all-pervasive influence of the Ball family, whose glass factory dominated Muncie's economy and whose financial support made it possible to transform a moribund private normal school into a state institution. Even as Balls became less visible on the college/university's board, members of what one administrator called their "entourage" continued to dominate the school. Muncie's elite, and their money, has been central to the development of the school.

Edmonds and Geelhoed begin their story with an overview of the development of higher education in the United States in the nineteenth century. They see Ball State's story as part of the Jacksonian quest for democratization, to make education accessible to all (or at least all whites). Closely linked was the idea that education should be useful. Decoupled from ministerial training, it was now a means of access into professions. Finally, colleges were tools of local boosterism. City planners and "boomers" wanted colleges for the same reasons that they wanted factories and railroad connections: they perceived them as economic assets. Thus Muncie's leaders encouraged the opening of a privately owned normal school to train teachers in 1893, and tried to keep it open as it struggled financially for the next quarter century. In 1917, as the school failed again, members of the Ball family had a new idea: they would purchase the property, and then turn it over to the state. Fortuitously, Indiana governor James P. Goodrich was from an adjacent county and was sympathetic, and a Muncie legislator was in a position of power in the Indiana house of representatives. So, with intricate legislative and legal maneuverings, the failed normal school became first the Eastern Division of the Indiana State Normal School in 1918 and

Ball Teachers College in 1922, finally achieving independence as Ball State Teachers College in 1929.

The interplay of state support and Ball family money was critical for Ball State's survival in its first two decades. The state subsidized the school, but donations from Ball family members made possible the construction of several buildings and especially the foundation of the hospital connected with the college. Thus Ball State was poised to take advantage of the enrollment boom in higher education that followed World War II, growing from less than one thousand students in 1945 to about nine thousand in 1963 to over seventeen thousand in 1969. The explosion of students led to a proliferation of programs and departments and a declining emphasis on the original mission of the school, preparing public school teachers. After 1970, as enrollments stagnated and inflation took its toll on university budgets, Ball State found itself challenged to stabilize and rationalize. That meant reevaluating policies of virtually open enrollment, dropping weak graduate programs, and moving toward a merit pay system for faculty.

In telling this story, Edmonds and Geehoed range widely. As is the case with most college histories, presidencies provide the basic framework. Central to the story is John R. Emens, who became president in 1945 and remained in office until 1969, presiding over the critical years of growth. Curriculum, the development of physical facilities, athletics, student life, and community relations all receive attention, and all are handled in a convincing fashion. Alumni receive their due (Dave Letterman gets two pages to himself).

Edmonds and Geelhoed are models of fair judgment and careful research in evaluating this growth and its consequences. They have mined all of the obvious archival resources, and made considerable use of oral history as well. Their status as insiders certainly gives them sensitivity to nuances of the school's history that would probably escape an outsider, but it does not make them uncritical. Troubled aspects of the university's history receive due attention: the departure under fire of presidents John Pruis in 1978 and Jerry Anderson in 1981, the less-than-stellar quality of many Ball State students, the dubious recognition by *Playboy* of Ball State as one of the nation's leading "party schools." While some of Ball State's programs and departments have attained national recognition, and while the credentials of the faculty have become steadily more impressive over the past two decades, the institution has remained largely provincial.

These facts, however, probably justify writing this history. One might even argue that the experience of Ball State students has probably been more typical of American college students of the twentieth century than that of the elite institutions that have received considerable attention from historians. This is particularly true of the crucial decade of the 1960s, when the great crusades of the period–civil rights, the antiwar movement, feminism–made relatively little impression at Ball State. Edmonds and Geelhoed may thus have made an important contribution to a better understanding of the history of higher education in the United States. Certainly they have provided a worthy account of an important Indiana institution.

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