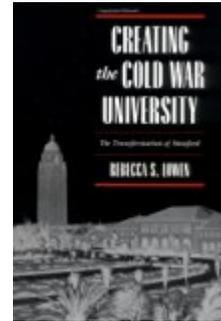


# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Rebecca S. Lowen. *Creating the Cold War University: The Transformation of Stanford*. Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1997. xii + 316 pp. \$45.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-520-20541-3.

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Let Us Pause a Moment and Consider— An Analysis of Stanford’s Ascendancy<a href=“<http://www.h-net.msu.edu/reviews/showrev.cgi?path=10434889206960#note1>”>[1]</a><a name=“fromnote1”></a>

Lowen’s book is a case study of Stanford as a “cold war university.” Lowen does an excellent job of substantiating her claim that Stanford’s administrators played a key role in changing Stanford into a cold war university. Her book includes “Acknowledgements” and an “Introduction,” plus very thorough endnotes, a list of “Abbreviations Used in the Notes,” a bibliography, and an index, but no charts, tables, or graphs.

Lowen is very much aware of the “long-running debate about the American university” (p. 4), to wit: there are those who blame universities for underemphasizing undergraduate education and providing “curricula emphasizing relevance and cultural diversity instead of transcendent values and traditions”; those who are concerned about the connections between government, business, and academia; and still others who defend this partnership (p. 4). The purpose of Lowen’s book is “to explore precisely how the changes that have provoked so much controversy came about” (p. 4). Her focus is the research university, or what she calls the cold war university (p. 1). For her, a university which received military-related research funds at a time when the national government was caught in an ideological war, and which at least in part shaped its relationship with the private sector because of the economic interests arising out of the research, is a cold war university. Put in another way, a university which attempted to make itself the knowledge component of the military-industrial complex became a

cold war university.

Lowen’s thesis is that university administrators, responding to internal pressures (financial exigencies) and external conditions (the dynamics of the larger socio-economic environment) and believing in the role of experts, played a major role in remaking universities into cold war universities. She uses Stanford as a case study to substantiate her claim. Why Stanford? Because it “was one of the top recipients of Defense Department patronage [during the cold war]; it was also one of the first universities to forge close relationships to private industrial concerns, many of which were developing war-related technologies” (p. 6).

Lowen realizes that Stanford is in important ways different from other cold war universities. It is not as old as Harvard and Yale. It was founded “with the fortune of a robber baron” (p. 6). Stanford did not, in the early part of this century, have the same prestige and influence as Harvard, Yale, John Hopkins, or the University of Chicago, achieving “top ten” status only in the 1960s. Stanford’s “swift rise to prominence, understood at the time as related directly to the university’s defense contacts and to California’s postwar economic boom (itself the product largely of defense spending), is Stanford’s most distinctive characteristic” (pp. 6-7). But then U.C. San Diego “experienced an equally dramatic elevation of reputation and influence during the cold war” (p. 7).

Herein lies the weakness of Lowen's book. I have no argument with her historical assessment: financial difficulties for universities waxing and waning; a university's need for patrons of some sort; the increased importance of research at the expense of undergraduate education (at least at research universities); the increased role of universities in providing expertise to both the military and to the market-place; and the influence of the cold war mentality on dampening certain viewpoints. And the book convinced me that, at Stanford, university administrators played a significant role in making it a cold war university. Certainly her book documents the fact that university administrators have the ability to change a university's direction. However, an equally careful study would have to be made of other research universities before we can say with any degree of certainty that administrators at other universities played as significant role as the administrators at Stanford in creating cold war universities. Therefore, Lowen's book, by virtue of the fact that it is limited to a careful consideration of only one university, cannot fully substantiate the claim that administrators at all research universities played a significant role in creating cold war universities. The difficulty of generalizing the results of a case study is a well-known weakness of the case study approach.

The strength of case studies is equally well-known: in comparison with other approaches, a case study allows one to capture more nuances and complexities and therefore uncover and explain with greater elaboration. This is certainly true of Lowen's book. Lowen has sifted through a large quantity of material and produced a well-written book that clearly substantiates the role played by university administrators at Stanford. In one sense, Lowen's book is a study of the influence of one man: Frederick Terman, an electrical engineer by training and for most of his academic career an administrator at Stanford, though of course Lowen recognizes "that Terman was not solely responsible for reshaping Stanford" (p. 14). Terman's administrative experience apparently began as chair of the electrical engineering department (p. 36). He went to Harvard in 1942 (p. 74), returned to Stanford about two years later as the dean of the engineering school (p. 80), and in 1954 became the Provost (p. 156). He retired in the mid-1960s (p. 265, end-note 53 of Chapter Five), which is also the period when the history covered in Lowen's book comes to an end (p. 5). Terman is a prominent figure in Lowen's book.[2]

Another influential individual is Herbert Hoover. Hoover became a member of the board of trustees in 1912 and returned to that position in 1933, after serving as

President of the United States for four years (pp. 17-19). He "was eager to reform Stanford, both to bring it into line with developments at other research universities and also to rationalize its operations and set it firmly on the path toward research and training of practical value." Hoover "encouraged" Stanford's first president, David Jordan, to retire; he was then replaced by John Branner, Hoover's "former mentor and friend." But Branner's efforts to "support" the faculty of the arts and sciences at the expense of the medical school led Hoover to seek Branner's ouster as well. Ray Lyman Wilbur, "Hoover's candidate" for president, the dean of Stanford's medical school and a friend of Hoover "since their days as undergraduates at Stanford," became the new president (p. 20). Wilbur returned to Stanford as president after serving as Hoover's Secretary of Interior (p. 17).

Efforts to make Stanford an elite institution rested on the fundamental problem of finding resources. The question of whether public funding for state universities has ever been adequate is certainly important, but at least state universities know that every year something will be coming from the state. In the 1930s, the leaders of Stanford and some faculty members felt that "the proper ally of the private university was private industry" (p. 18). Efforts to foster industry patronage began before the 1930s. In 1925, Herbert Hoover attempted to raise funds by encouraging industry to endow a National Research Fund in order to provide research funds "to deserving scientists." The desired amount of money was not forthcoming, largely because Hoover and others "could not guarantee that any one industrial concern that donated money would be the sole beneficiary" (p. 23). Then in the late 1930s, Hoover, along with his friend and the chair of the Department of Chemistry, Robert Swain, began planning "to create an institute for industrial research" (p. 36). Terman (at this point a department chair), along with Swain, "were interested in encouraging support from industry according to modes that did not conflict with the interests of academic scientists and engineers" (p. 36). Terman's efforts at this time met "with mixed success" (p. 37).

In the 1940s, Paul Davis, a Stanford administrator during World War II, sought to develop connections between Stanford and industry (pp. 70-72). Both Davis and Terman felt "that developing industrial patronage was important, as was the training of large numbers of students in subjects of direct interest to industrial concerns" (p. 73). Terman influenced Tresidder's thinking, as did Davis (pp. 70 and 72). Tresidder, who had previously been president of Stanford's board of trustees, succeeded

Wilbur as president of Stanford in 1943, and, between 1944 and 1946, he “attempted to elaborate an administrative structure, to create institutes and other organizations to attract industrial patronage, and to reorient particular university departments to serve better the interests of regional industry, particularly the aeronautics, electronics, and oil companies” (p. 75). It was Tresidder who in 1944 or 1945 offered Terman the position of Dean of the engineering school. Terman now had an opportunity both to advance his career at Stanford and to implement the reforms that he, Davis, and Tresidder had discussed (p. 80). Eventually, Terman was successful in developing ties to industry and on his own terms, the essence of which was that Stanford would serve as consultants to industry (see pp. 120-136). Stanford also helped arrange subcontracting (p. 128). This was due at least in part to increased military spending on research, because this research had to have a practical application (pp. 120 and 121), which also meant that industry had to be involved: industry had to produce the goods. (See also Chapter Two for Lowen’s discussion of the politics of military contracts. Stanford had some success in obtaining military related contracts—see p. 57 and Chapter Four.)

Here is the great irony which Lowen’s book makes so abundantly clear: it was federal funding related to the military, which increased dramatically due to the cold war, which made possible the really successful development of industry patronage. How, then, could administrators and others at Stanford argue that Stanford had maintained its autonomy? In two ways. First, by claiming that faculty members should be allowed to pursue any research project they wished, even if it was related to the military (see p. 143). Second, because of the kind of relationship the university had with the federal government. If one individual wanted to enter into a contract with, or serve as a consultant to, another person or company, the ability to decide whether or not to do so rested in the hands of both parties; no dependency was created, and both parties acted autonomously. In a similar manner, by developing a contractual or consultative relationship with the federal government, the university could claim to have maintained its autonomy (p. 48). However, and this is a telling point, the decision of whether to enter into a contract with the federal government was not simply and solely left up to individual faculty members. Administrators at Stanford actively sought to foster these kind of connections with the federal government. Administrators also solicited the interest of private foundations, which meant that certain kinds of research (and therefore certain kinds of scholars) were preferred

over others—for example, encouraging a behavioralistic or quantitative approach in social sciences (see Chapter Seven).

In short, in the drive toward elite status, in response to the kinds of patronage available, and reflecting or agreeing with the mainstream ideological abhorrence for certain opinions less favored during the cold war, the administration sought to influence the types of research done and the nature of the relationship between the university, industry, and the government, as well as who was hired, who was tenured, and who would be allowed to teach. As a consequence, the autonomy of departments suffered, as did undergraduate education.[3] “Overhead” was used for purposes other than those one would normally associate with “overhead.” And in fact this liberal use of overhead was not stopped by the National Defense Research Council or the Office of Scientific Research and Development (see pp. 50-51, 57-63).[4] In other words, Stanford became a cold war university.

Let me share an excellent (perhaps the most egregious) example from Lowen’s book of the administration’s efforts to shape events in the confluence of several issues: directions for research, faculty hiring and tenure, and undergraduate education. Three years before 1960, one of Stanford’s political scientists, Arnaud Leavelle, died. Leavelle was a theorist and the department chair wanted a theorist to take his place, and the department “also wanted a gifted teacher as well as scholar” (p. 212). And, indeed, the position was initially filled by David Smith, a political theorist, but “Smith soon left Stanford to return to Swarthmore. Terman, however, felt that “the department’s insistence on the importance of political theory was greatly exaggerated”; he preferred to fill the position with “a behavioralist, such as Ithiel de Sola Pool or David Truman.” As Lowen points out, “A prominent behavioralist would no doubt also attract external support to Stanford.” However, the Dean supported the department’s viewpoint, and “it was agreed that the department would hire a theorist as a temporary replacement for Leavelle” (p. 213).

The department chose Mulford Q. Sibley, a professor of political theory at the University of Minnesota. He was well known as a scholar and as a “remarkable” teacher. Sibley proved to be “a friendly, energetic, and stimulating colleague, and he quickly demonstrated his gifts as a teacher, attracting twice as many students as usual to the introductory course in political theory. The department’s decision to offer him a permanent position was unanimous. When the Chair passed the recommendation

to the Dean, he also passed along "the recommendation that the department hire Heinz Eulau, a political behaviorist"; the Dean, however, "endorsed" the latter but not the former, for "Without informing the department," the administration had already initiated its own search for a theorist. Terman wanted David Easton. Easton sought to develop an empirical approach, where "fact" was separated from "value" (pp. 213, 214).[5] As Lowen points out, "The disagreement over the value of traditional political theory versus empirical theory was not singular to Stanford" (p. 214). By implication, then, Terman stood on the "empirical" side of the argument, not the "normative" side.

After a confrontation with the department chair, the Dean agreed not to veto the appointment [of Sibley] but to pass the department's recommendation on to Terman" (pp. 214, 215). The Dean met privately with Terman and reached the conclusion that the department chair should be replaced—which he was. The Dean and Terman replaced him with a professor of public administration who was receptive to the behavioral approach and whom the administration believed to be "pliable." Surprisingly, the new Chair sought to have Sibley appointed to a permanent post, but apparently Terman did not like Sibley's politics, though Sibley's politics "had not dissuaded the department" from recommending him. One person close to Terman claimed that Sibley "could not be a very popular lecturer as he has [sic] extreme views on pacifism" (p. 215). The irony of this claim is, of course, the fact that Sibley was attracting students, if the growth of student enrollment in his introductory course was any measure.

There was also the question of funding. Lowen points out that it was likely that Sibley would not attract enough funding to support his position. Terman wanted to be able to use funds provided by "a right-wing businessman, [who] had placed restrictions on his patronage." Even though the funds could not be used to support Sibley, they could be used to support another faculty member, thus making available resources to keep Sibley on board. Indeed, this course of action was suggested to Terman by the Dean, but Terman rejected the suggestion. The fact that Sibley was active in his opposition to nuclear weapons in the spring of 1958—his case was once more before the administration in April—did not help him, either. Neither did "evidence," which indicated "that a significant number of Stanford students shared Sibley's views and may have been emboldened by him" (p. 217).

Stanford's decision to refuse to grant Sibley tenure was seen by students, alumni, and people in the area as a

decision based on politics. Students also felt tenure had been denied because of his Sibley's "strong commitment to undergraduate education," which the students believed the administration did not value. More than three hundred students signed a petition requesting that President Sterling reconsider the Sibley decision (p. 217). Sibley was not asked to return to Stanford.

Though Terman claimed his decision was based on the scholarship of Sibley (pp. 217 and 218), Lowen argues that "Sibley's politics had mattered, and particularly, his activism, as Terman's notes regarding possible replacements for Sibley suggest." Terman initially thought about Max Lerner, a noted journalist and liberal scientist, as a replacement. However, after further probing, it was found that Lerner was "well left of center"—and Lowen suggests that "that view may have been a factor in the administration's decision not to pursue Lerner." Wilmoore Kendall, "a vocal anticommunist," was instead selected by the administration. So, of course, Kendall's salary could be paid with funds donated by the department's conservative benefactor (p. 218).

Lowen's book really has a dual goal. Hopefully, I have provided enough of a sense of the book to show that she accomplished her stated goal: to explain how Stanford came to be a cold war university. Her other goal, which makes her book of contemporary value, is, I believe, to have the book serve as an introduction to a debate about the place of the university in society (see her epilogue in Chapter Eight and in particular the last three paragraphs of her book, pp. 237 and 238). I think she would be pleased if that debate became much more vigorous than it now is.

#### Notes

[1]. I wish to thank reviewers at H-Net for their comments on the first and second drafts, and Dr. Steven Trout for his comments and suggestions on the second draft of this book review (many of which I have used).

[2]. Lowen explains the selection of the mid-1960s as the end-point of her history in the following way: "I have declined here either to validate or criticize student activists, which is one reason that the history related here stops in the mid-1960s, before the campuses became scenes of organized political protests" (p. 5).

[3]. University officials also played a role in determining the kinds of services to provide students—for example, hiring a psychiatrist (p. 232) and establishing "faculty residents program" (p. 233)—in an effort to address

problems caused by the type of educational experience resulting from a cold war university: a concern about grades (pp. 228 and 229), an unexciting intellectual climate (p. 228), and lack of quality teaching at the undergraduate level (pp. 228, 230-232).

[4]. Vannevar Bush, head of the Office of Scientific Research and Development, in response to concerns about abuses in the use of overhead, wrote "it would be better to err on the side of liberality" (quoted by Lowen on p. 61; see also end-note 55 of Chapter Two on page 252). Bush was at one time "the president of the Carnegie Institute of Washington and the head of the National Advisory Committee on Aeronautics (NACA), a federal agency providing technical advice to the nation's air forces [sic]" (p. 43). Bush became the "head" of the National Defense Research Council and the Office of Sci-

entific Research and Development after his stint at NACA (p. 44).

[5]. Easton was not appointed. The Dean didn't want to push the political science department too hard; he felt that objections the department had to the decision regarding Sibley had "sufficient foundation so that we cannot properly ram him [Easton] down their throats" (p. 285, endnote 62). Five years after 1958, the administration was able to hire a political scientist who was a behaviorist and who would "attract not only attention to Stanford but also external support." That person was Gabriel Almond, who became chair of the department (p. 221).

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