

Book Reviews / Comptes rendus

Schrecker, Ellen. (2010). *The Lost Soul of Higher Education: Corporatization, the Assault on Academic Freedom, and the End of the American University*. New York: The New Press: Pages: 290. Price: 27.95 USD (cloth).

Reviewed by Madeleine Hardin, EdD student, Simon Fraser University, and Faculty Contract Administrator for the Faculty and Staff Association of the University of the Fraser Valley.

Shrecker's latest book has a title that implies both a promise and a question. Schrecker delivers on the promise insofar as she provides a thoughtful and thorough job of delving into the current state of the American university. She is a historian who is also currently a member of the National Council and Committee on Academic Freedom and Tenure with the American Association of University Professors (AAUP). Her association with the AAUP and her training as a historian influence the way she frames her analysis in this book. She deftly situates the reader in the historical context of every theme. She is also a prolific writer with 11 books to her name. Two of her previous books (*No Ivory Tower: McCarthyism and the Universities* and *Regulating the Intellectuals: Perspectives on Academic Freedom in the 1980s*) and many scholarly journal articles provide the background and research that contributes to the nuanced depth of *Lost Soul*.

The historical perspective makes this book an important account of the events that shaped higher education in America in the last century, from the nascent labour movement, the anti-Communist fear mongering of the McCarthy era, the increased radicalism of the 1960s, and finally, to the present neo-liberal conservative backlash post 9/11. Though her book is about American higher education, the themes and historical background are relevant and transferable to Canadian higher education and to the global arena. She outlines how the cultural and ideological shifts in the 1960s and 1970s were the catalyst for the creation of Women's Studies, African American studies, and other curricula and canon changes. These new curriculum areas signalled an exciting and innovative new direction for universi-

ties that shifted the content of most disciplines to include some of the emergent theoretical perspectives such as feminist theory, critical race theory, post-colonial theory, and postmodern theory. This shift threatened both conservative faculty and political conservatives who saw the transformation as a plot of “the impudent snobs who characterize themselves as intellectuals” to pander to the political correctness of the day (Schrecker, p. 94). Thus, Schrecker traces the roots of what she calls the “culture wars.”

The implied question in the title of this book might be: What is the soul of higher education and how did it get lost? Arguably, most academics would say they cherish the academic freedom that is at the very core of the mission of the university because it is considered essential to teaching, research, and educating citizens. Schrecker argues that a fully developed higher education system cannot exist without academic freedom. Hard-won tenure supposedly guarantees multiple perspectives and allows for teaching and learning in an unfettered environment. Or does it? Schrecker uses specific cases of professors who were the “squeaky wheels” to illustrate that academic freedom is fragile and under attack and maybe always has been so. The cases she selects demonstrate how professors used their voices and tenured positions to express opinions that were counter to the values embedded in the dominant discourse of the academy and American political society. Schrecker persuasively shows how the professors she profiles have lost their jobs because they spoke out about the “most fraught political issues of the moment: industrial unrest, racial discrimination, unpopular wars, or questions of national security” (p. 40).

The central reason the academy exists is to educate students, though this point may be arguable in today’s research- and corporate-driven higher education systems. Academic freedom means the right to educate students by challenging prevailing beliefs through the free inquiry and open communication of ideas. I suggest this is what Schrecker considers the soul of the academy.

A complete restructuring of the academy has happened in plain view of higher education systems. Increasing marketization has meant the public good is being replaced by academic research funded by the highest corporate bidder and cost effectiveness is replacing teaching effectiveness. It has meant an increase in managerialism in higher education to handle cost-cutting, assessment, and fundraising. In the U.S., there are more private universities than in Canada; however, both private and public universities in the U.S. and in Canada now chase sponsorship money and corporate research partners. To maintain programs or to grow in the face of funding cutbacks and shrinking allocations, the academy has increasingly become a brand that seeks external private funding or cost savings through the use of contingent faculty labour.

There seems to be little reflection about the ethical tight corner these commercial relationships may engender. But if faculty are entrepreneurial when being paid from the public purse, this situation begs the question of whether the work they do is in the public interest.

The competition to raise capital has had a profound effect on faculty; it influences their concept of labour and of each other, and how faculty interact with students and the community. Schrecker documents how contingent faculty are increasingly teaching a higher percentage of courses because they are seen as a flexible labour force that can expand or shrink according to funding availability. In other words, they are seen as convenient and disposable. Contingent faculty are found in large numbers in all kinds of institutions, but their numbers are greatest in the American higher education sector, where they make up roughly two-thirds of all faculty members (Schrecker, 2010, p. 3).

Schrecker leaves the reader space to come to a conclusion based on the evidence she presents. The threat to academic freedom, the increasing marketization of the academy, the resultant, almost revolutionary change in how students and the professoriate are now perceived, have all undermined the "soul" of the academy. This book is both a chronicle and a cry to arms. Schrecker is sounding the alarm that what academics cherish most in higher education is under attack from within the academy as much as it is from the historical and political forces from without the academy. The book provides a compelling argument for the academy to defend and recover the spirit and integrity of higher education.✻

REFERENCES

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