

Book Reviews

*Trevor Colbourn,
Editor*

Robben W. Fleming. *Tempest Into Rainbows: Managing Turbulence* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), viii+280 pp. \$24.95.

Robben Fleming served as president of the University of Michigan from 1967 through 1978. My qualification to review his memoir is that I served on a committee he chaired, saw him up close for a few hours once or twice a year, and as a faculty member observed his presidency. My interest in reviewing his memoir arises from curiosity about a man that I came to respect, but never knew except in a very limited way.

Fleming served Michigan in difficult times, when Vietnam and cultural upheaval tore at the fabric of American academic life. But he was well equipped, personally and professionally, to cope with turbulence. Growing up in a small Illinois town, he knew trouble young, with the sudden death of a beloved elder brother and the economic difficulties of an ailing father. A nurturing mother and supportive family kept him steady, and he did well at Beloit College and Wisconsin Law School. World War II was less a time of trouble than of opportunity. He married well and happily. And the young lawyer got crash courses, first in Washington on labor relations, then in Germany, where he served as an Army captain in military government, in the chaos left by war. Admiring Wisconsin teachers helped at every step. Mediating and arbitrating labor disputes became his postwar specialty, which he pursued first at the University of Wisconsin, later at Illinois.

When the call came from Michigan, he knew that university presidents were the bull's eye, the soft target for hawks and doves, radicals and conservatives, who blamed the academy and its leaders for all they loathed in contemporary America. Fleming had also learned a lot about handling angry people, and with abundant good sense and a calm manner, he weathered crises and kept the vital interests of the University safe. Charismatic he was not, as readers of his vanilla-plain prose will discern. But he was straight and quietly strong, as even his critics came to concede. His instincts were conciliatory, which caused trouble with the elected Regents who oversee the University; but

if a few Regents wanted to fire him in 1970, the Board backed him, to its credit, and he left a year after the decade he had promised when appointed.

Bob Fleming says he started this memoir for his grandchildren, to tell them about his early years and ways of life long past, but continued it at the urging of friends and family. His story will interest those who lived through the Depression, World War II, and Vietnam, and perhaps younger readers as well, though he makes little effort to energize his narrative. His reflections near the end of the book on his public career as university president and "manager of turbulence" are, like the man himself, wise and pragmatic. To those who once denounced him as "gutless," he simply points to the results. He celebrated his eightieth birthday soon after completing the book, so it seems appropriate to wish this rock-solid servant of making the world more peaceable a long and peaceful life in his Ann Arbor retirement.

—John Shy

Michael Berube and Cary Nelson, Eds. *Higher Education Under Fire: Politics, Economics, and the Crisis of the Humanities* (New York: Routledge Publishers, 1995), 379 pp.

Colleges and universities have been at the forefront of American institutions scrutinized by public policymakers and the general public for a variety of perceived operational inefficiencies and performance failures. While more students are getting into college, the overall success rates of those students are increasingly dismal. Fewer than 25% of community college students receive an associate's degree prior to either leaving school or transferring to a four-year college. While such performance indicators are becoming common knowledge, there are constant reminders in the press about the cost of operating our colleges and universities. On March 6, 1996, *The Houston Chronicle* published the upper level administrative salaries at all public colleges and universities in the State of Texas. With an exhaustive list of over 525 identified administrators, many with salaries exceeding \$100,000, the implication is that students and taxpayers are getting a raw deal. The public demand on higher education is to deliver more services with less money.

Higher Education Under Fire is a collection of papers and interviews from a 1993 conference at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. The articles examine the modern history of higher education with regard to student access, state funding, faculty tenure, faculty load, and the impact of research on higher education.

In their introduction, Berube and Nelson present an informative analysis of the political landscape of faculty teaching loads in light of an institution's research mission. It is not uncommon, for example, for a biochemist research faculty member to teach no more than one undergraduate course per year. The rest of the biochemist's time is likely devoted to administering research and politicking funding agencies for additional monies. Liberal arts humanities faculty, on the other hand, are more likely to teach three or more undergraduate classes per semester. The editors' account of disparities among faculty teaching loads helps to make sense of an issue that is seldom understood by those less familiar with large research universities.

Berube and Nelson explore the trends for funding of public colleges and universities. Their review of reduced state funding is less of a revelation than a platform for other conference participants to bash administrators and defend faculty unions.

The book includes an article by Linda Ray Pratt on the history and current activities of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) that includes a discussion of the political posturing within higher education about faculty tenure. Following years of massive budget cuts and no pay raises at the University of Nebraska, faculty shunned participation in the AAUP, concerned that by joining the union they would succumb to the rank of "state employee." Other faculty writers, including Ernst Benjamin and Paul Lauter, elaborate the merits of faculty tenure and the need for faculty unification. These discussions illustrate an intense polarization between faculty and administration.

Throughout the volume, prominent liberal arts faculty describe various public policy blunders regarding higher education. Reasonable argument is given for the idea that equal access to higher learning is a mistake that compromises quality and accountability at the high school level. It is suggested that a proliferation of community colleges has diverted state funding from four-year institutions while, at the same time, diluting the quality of higher education

across the board. In his article, "Cultural Capital and Official Knowledge," conference participant Michael Apple argues the point that access to higher education should never have been changed. While higher learning was once reserved for the privileged cultural elite, it is now regarded as a right of every citizen. The most convincing contribution concerns the expectation that college degrees are passports to jobs and economic prosperity. Clearly, the number of underemployed adults with bachelor's degrees and huge debt from student loans is argument enough to dispel such myths.

Higher Education Under Fire is a collection of articles by predominantly liberal arts faculty from prominent state universities. Their analyses of what has happened in higher education to warrant such negative attention from policymakers, students, and taxpayers is very enlightening. The writing and dialogues are interesting and easily understood. The common ideas, however, are ultimately self-serving to a faculty work force that prefers a cultural and political climate that is long gone.

—John Tuohy