

## A Note on Sources

In conducting my research, I relied primarily on the archives of the University of Michigan, the University of California, Yale University, Harvard University, Columbia University, and Johns Hopkins University. My work in these archives was supplemented by published collections of these schools' and other educational institutions' annual reports as well as by various federal bulletins, contemporary newspapers, and secondary histories of the period generally and of higher education specifically.

I have drawn heavily on the personal papers of University of Michigan president James Burrill Angell. The Angell Papers, housed at the university's Bentley Historical Library, are enormously helpful for any scholar of higher education's development and its role in greater society at the turn of the twentieth century. The papers are valuable for a variety of reasons. First is the length and breadth of Angell's career: Angell served as president of the university for a remarkable period of thirty-eight years. Beyond this impressive biography, however, lies Angell's open mind and quiet nature. These traits not only guided his governance and service but also defined his relations with his peers. Thus, the Angell Papers comprise an exceptional repository not only of his ideas and opinions but of those of his colleagues from across academia and public life. Owing to both his tenure and his position as a linchpin between the established private universities of the East and the developing public institutions of the West and the South, Angell invariably found himself involved—not necessarily as an arbiter, but as a sympathetic ear—in the various debates that shaped higher education's contribution to the national state. Angell was not always the most vociferous participant in these debates. However, he was often the most central one—a conduit and a sounding board.

While certainly fundamental to this project, the Angell Papers and

other documents at Bentley Library were by no means the only resources I employed. I also visited a number of other campuses, focusing primarily on the papers of their various leaders. While an individual assessment of each collection does not seem necessary, a few observations are in order.

First, while seemingly mundane, a discussion of variations in the organization of the archives themselves is worthwhile. The Angell Papers were the best-cataloged and best-organized collection, in no small part owing to the exceptional staff and relatively abundant resources of Bentley Library and the University of Michigan's School of Information. Interestingly, unlike the papers of every other university president I visited, Angell's papers were organized strictly in chronological order. Delving into his papers, one encounters the gamut of administrative activities, from discussion of how to structure the archives of the federal government to an explanation to the parents of one sophomore that their son had been suspended for debauchery, including consorting with women that the parents would not entertain in their own home.

At other institutions, presidential papers were generally organized by correspondent or subject, a system that can cause the researcher some trepidation. For example, while it is certainly helpful to have all of California president Benjamin Ide Wheeler's correspondence with Gifford Pinchot in one file, a researcher cannot help but fear missing out on auxiliary discussions and issues when approaching collections organized according to this method. Inevitably, there are institutional idiosyncrasies. For example, at Yale, Arthur Twining Hadley's incoming correspondence is organized by author, whereas copies of his responses are organized chronologically. Obviously, there is no best method, but for the researcher, there are admittedly varying comfort levels and comparative advantages for each.

Generally, most of the archives at the schools I visited, while not necessarily including the extensive cataloging of Michigan's Bentley Library, were well organized and maintained. One notable exception was at Columbia. Housed in the regal Low Library, the Columbia archives were certainly useful. Unfortunately, at the time of my visit, they were pitifully understaffed and a tad disorganized. Uncertainty abounded as to where collections were actually housed and if they were available. The staff was very professional and courteous but seemingly shackled by a lack of institutional support. I mention Columbia's limits here not as a criticism but as a reflection of the diversity that exists between seemingly comparable resources.

Second, beyond simply adding new resources, these additional archives were essential for confirming the patterns and processes that I discovered. *Triangulation* is a somewhat loaded word stemming from the Bill Clinton–Dick Morris era of politics. However, it is the most apt description of how I used multiple sources to confirm observations. The necessity of this method is perhaps readily understood, but its value should not be underestimated.

Reconstructing history always presents difficulties. Detailing the historical development of a political process perhaps presents more, because decisions not made or actions not taken can have as significant an impact as those that are. The failure to establish a federally sponsored national university is arguably the most striking example of this. However, even small “nondecisions” present challenges, as our understanding of these events often depends on the reminiscences of the participants themselves. These recollections, in keeping with the limits of human nature and memory, sometimes might not be fully accurate. In the course of this work, I encountered the most striking example of this phenomenon in the letters from Northwestern president A. W. Harris to James Burrill Angell requesting advice on how to apply for membership in the Association of American Universities. Harris claimed that when the association was founded, Northwestern had been asked to join but, owing to the absence of the university’s president from the country, was not able to attend the initial meeting and so was not included in the association. This seems to be a perfectly legitimate explanation. However, as I mention in my discussion of this request in chapter 7, the letter sent to the original invitees and Benjamin Ide Wheeler’s draft letter of invitation make no mention of Northwestern. One might assume that Harris’s misrepresentation stemmed from faulty institutional memory rather than purposeful deception: Harris had not been at Northwestern when the AAU was founded. Nonetheless, whatever the reason, Harris’s mischaracterization underscores the value of and need for multiple sources when pursuing an accurate historical narrative.

Of course, despite these efforts at “triangulation,” there remains the question of source selection. Why did I focus on archives from the leading universities to examine universities’ efforts on behalf of the national state? In addressing such concerns, it is important to make two points. First, as I have discussed, my goal was not simply to prove that universities played a significant role in the development of the federal state. Numerous scholars of American political development have recognized universities’ influence. Rather, I sought to detail the process by which

universities came to play such a significant role. Thus, in pursuit of specificity, I made the nation's leading universities the primary focus of my research. Second, the influence of the nation's leading universities on the whole of higher education, especially in the period considered, cannot be overstated. This influence is significant to the researcher for a number of reasons. First and most obviously, the leading universities produced scholars who would fill professorships and leadership positions not only at research institutions but also at various smaller state schools and liberal arts colleges. Additionally and in some ways correspondingly, this influence also enhances the value of the leading universities' archives. Their peers, including those at smaller institutions, continually called on the heads of these institutions for advice and guidance. Thus, while not necessarily providing an absolutely complete picture, the archives of leading universities certainly provide an exceptionally full one.