

REVIEW ESSAY

The Troubled Present and Uncertain Future of Academic Labor

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Christopher Newfield, *The Great Mistake: How We Wrecked Public Universities and How We Can Fix Them* (Baltimore, MD, 2016).

Maria de Lourdes Machado-Taylor, Virgilio Meira Soares and Ulrich Teichler, eds., *Challenges and Options: The Academic Profession in Europe* (Switzerland, 2017).

Stefan Collini, *Speaking of Universities* (London, 2017).

Thomas A. Discenna, *Discourses of Denial: The Rhetoric of American Academic Labor* (New York, 2018).

Elizabeth Losh, ed., *MOOCs and Their Afterlives: Experiments in Scale and Access in Higher Education* (Chicago, 2017).

Guilbert C. Hentschke, Vincente M. Lechuga, and William G. Tierney, eds., *For-Profit Colleges and Universities: Their Markets, Regulation, Performance and Place in Higher Education* (Sterling, VA, 2010).

Tressie McMillan Cottom, *Lower Ed: The Troubling Rise of For-Profit Colleges in the New Economy* (New York, 2017).

Adrianna Kezar, Tom DePaola and Daniel T. Scott, *The Gig Academy: Mapping Labor in the Neoliberal University* (Baltimore, 2019).

Herb Childress, *The Adjunct Underclass: How America's Colleges Betrayed Their Faculty, Their Students, and Their Mission* (Chicago, 2019).

Ismael I. Munene, ed., *Contextualizing and Organizing Contingent Faculty: Reclaiming Academic Labor in Universities* (Lanham, 2018).

Abstract

This review article surveys recent studies of the state of and challenges to academic labor in the ongoing regime of academic capitalism, corporate managerialism, and neoliberalism in colleges and universities in the United States, Europe, and select other countries around the world. Some works analyze changing funding models, accountability mechanisms, and forms of administrative power, while others explore the discourses pervading higher education and impacting the self-understanding of academics. Higher education administrators, boards of trustees, and politicians have sought to create flexible and

inexpensive academic labor. New studies explore the three main strategies pursued: the failed effort to promote Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), the proliferation of for-profit colleges and universities (FPCUs), and the continuing expansion of contingent labor, full and part time. Other works analyze the innovative unionization efforts on the part of contingent faculty and graduate teaching assistants.

In the two decades spanning the turn of the century there was an outpouring of books on higher education from those alarmed at the changes they were witnessing. Sheila Slaughter and Gary Rhoades, Jennifer Washburn, and David Kirp focused on the commercialization of colleges and universities, the decline in public funding, the emergence of the academic entrepreneur, and the transformation of knowledge from a public good to an individual benefit to be purchased like any other commodity.² Benjamin Ginsberg tracked the rapid growth of administrators who amassed unprecedented power over all aspects of academic life.³ Marc Bousquet and Randy Martin investigated the rise in contingent academic labor and the decline in tenured faculty in what was labelled by some as “academic capitalism,” by others as “corporate managerialism,” and by still others the “neoliberal university.”⁴ This corporatization and contingency facilitated a growing assault on academic freedom, argued Ellen Schrecker.⁵ *The University Against Itself* used the 2005–2006 New York University (NYU) graduate student teaching assistant strike to explore the possibilities of resistance to the disturbing restructuring of higher education.⁶ A host of other works could be cited but the gist is clear: every aspect of higher education from the power of administrators and trustees to the funding of students and research, from the self-proclaimed mission of schools to the composition and treatment of the workforce, academic and nonacademic, was shifting. While most authors suggested ways to slow these trends, none were very optimistic about reversing them, much as they wanted to. Works written over the past decade suggest that such pessimism was warranted, even if there are some encouraging signs of pushback.

If earlier trends have simply come to fruition, is there any point in repeating the bad news? For several reasons, recent works do that but much more as well. Some continue to focus on the macro structural changes in higher education not only inside the United States but outside the country as well, analyzing new forms of managerialism, accountability, funding, and administrative power. Yet these works, as well as those focusing on technology, for-profit institutions, and labor, have garnered much less attention than earlier ones. It seems as if many inside and outside the academy have lived within the corporate university for so long that it has become an accepted fact of life. Recent studies that look in depth at the discourses pervading not only discussions of higher education but the self-understanding of academics help us understand why.

Higher education administrators and boards of trustees have long been preoccupied with creating a less expensive, more subservient, and, to borrow their favorite term, “flexible” labor force. New studies explore the three main strategies pursued: the promotion of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), the proliferation of for-profit colleges and universities (FPCUs), and the continuing expansion of contingent labor, full and part time. These developments have generated innovative unionization

efforts on the part of contingent faculty and graduate teaching assistants, which participants have analyzed. Any cause for optimism about the future of academic labor is, however, counterbalanced by the as yet unclear impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the one hand, and the culture war against so-called “divisive concepts,” Critical Race Theory (CRT), and the teaching of gender and sexuality on the other hand. Let’s look at each of these developments in turn.

Christopher Newfield’s *The Great Mistake: How We Wrecked Public Universities and How We Can Fix Them* provides an impassioned, detailed, and very readable analysis of the multiple macro changes in politics, the economy, and colleges and universities that have profoundly shaped academic labor. Newfield, a professor of English at the University of California Santa Barbara (UCSB), has written extensively on higher education. He also served on the academic senate committees for planning and budget for UCSB and the UC system-wide. His interdisciplinary approach combines institutions and culture along with policy and political economy to lay out the devolutionary cycle created by the privatization of so many aspects of still nominally public institutions. States and the federal government have shifted costs from society to students and families; universities outsource activities and depend on outside donors to fund research. As the public and nonmarket benefits of education are downplayed or completely dismissed, schools redefine their mission as one of maximizing the economic interests of students and creating human capital. Privatization, managerial strategies, and technology have not cured the economic problems of public universities, Newfield insists; they have created them.

He lays out the stages by which this occurred since the 1980s. As states, including progressive California, cut funding for colleges and universities and ceased to see education as a public good, university leaders instead of vigorously fighting back sought other revenue sources. In both publics and privates, research is increasingly funded by outside foundations and business donors, rather than federal funds, and universities have to subsidize the indirect costs of such sponsored research, with humanities, arts, and education departments paying the bulk of those cost. Out-of-state and international students are eagerly recruited because they pay higher fees. Tuition hikes are crucial to these new funding models. On average, between 2008 and 2015 alone, tuition has increased somewhere between 20 and 25 percent in public universities (and even more in many privates). Faculty salaries are not to blame, for they increased only a third to a half as fast as tuition. As tuition rose, states cut funding further and student debt rose astronomically. These policies and the demand for ever more austerity and productivity have translated into larger classes, fewer discussion sections, shorter library hours, and the less frequent offering of required courses. Administrators and parents and students want more vocationally oriented majors that will, it is hoped, secure a job at the end. Schools that recruit students with the lowest socioeconomic status and test scores suffer the most. Public universities no longer work effectively to create a broad, more egalitarian, and multiracial middle class.

Newfield backs his arguments with extensive statistical and qualitative evidence, drawn primarily from public institutions but with references to private ones as well. Private colleges and universities, like public ones, have developed bloated administrations, which pursue austerity, outsourcing, outside donors, tuition hikes, and insist on the private economic benefits of education over any social ones. After

three hundred pages of circling down “the doom loop,” (283), it was disappointing to find only thirty-five pages on how it might be reversed: Insist on the public social benefits of education. Reduce tuition and student debt to zero. Redirect all federal research and development money from business to universities. Equalize and improve learning across race and class. These proposals are all eminently desirable, but in the current political context they seem utopian.⁷ As with earlier works, it is easier to diagnose the problem than to propose a feasible solution.

Have European universities, the vast majority of which are public, gone down a similar devolutionary cycle? A 2017 collection of essays, *Challenges and Options: The Academic Profession in Europe* suggests that European universities and their workforces are changing in ways similar to the United States, albeit to different degrees and at different paces. The collection, part of a series called “The Changing Academy-The Changing Academic Profession in International Comparative Perspective,” analyzes structural changes in higher education and tracks faculty reactions as revealed in extensive survey data. The opening chapters, which lay out the broad contours of shifting academic careers are followed by case studies on Portugal, Austria, Germany, Italy, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. (East Central Europe is unfortunately missing.) Unlike the United States, there have not been dramatic cuts in state funding, even though support has diminished and calls for austerity, efficiency, and productivity abound. Tuition remains enviably low from an American perspective. Several countries acknowledge the need to create clear career paths for junior faculty and limit the reliance on contingent labor for both research and teaching, but concrete progress on this front remains limited. Faculty complain about a loss of status and power, deteriorating working conditions, and pressure from market forces in the face of a new managerialism and calls for higher education institutions to become “entrepreneurial and adaptive” (58). Junior and contingent labor are understandably the most dissatisfied.

Nowhere did these changes begin earlier or develop more rapidly than in the UK. Stefan Collini, a literary critic and English professor, elegantly dissects the British version of academic capitalism, focusing on the language used to promote funding cuts, tuition hikes, and the micromanagement of faculty via ever more extensive performance evaluations, research assessments, and control of curriculum. *Speaking of Universities*, a collection of essays, explores how the discourse on higher education coming from government officials, politicians, business leaders, and the new academic managers has been “increasingly colonized by an economic idiom, derived . . . from the language of management schools, business consultants and financial journalists” (93). According to its key tenets, the purpose of higher education is to promote economic growth; serve the needs of industry, finance, and commerce; and benefit the economic future of its customers (aka students). Requiring students to pay tuition rather than receiving grants, is said to empower them and make their choice of a school and subject area meaningful, even as it burdens them with years of debt. By requiring tuition, the government also wants “to create a level playing field that will enable private providers to compete on equal terms with public universities” (129). National and international university rankings and assessments of the impact of research are said to evaluate fairly how well schools pursue excellence, follow best business practices, and compete in the higher education marketplace. It is taken as self-evident that anything of value can be quantified and everything that can be quantified, however unreliable the numbers

might be, has value. Labour and Conservatives, students and parents, the media and taxpayers all insist that faculty must be audited, assessed, and controlled, lest they slack off and fail to deliver value for money to their customers.

Translated into policy, these claims have decreased faculty autonomy as control from the top and outside increases and departments are weakened or abolished in favor of larger units or interdisciplinary programs defined by administrators. Science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) subjects get funds beyond what tuition pays for while the humanities and qualitative social sciences suffer. The audit culture prioritizes research over teaching. The quality of teaching has declined in part for that reason, but even more because the student to staff ratio, which was 8:1 in 1960, was 19:1 in 2017. Moreover, many teachers now have contingent positions. “These ill-considered changes to funding, governance and assessment. . .” author Stefan Collini concludes, “have fundamentally altered not just the conditions in universities but the very sense of identity and relation to one’s work. There is an insidious process by which we become what the categories we use every day tell us we are” (59).

Thomas Discenna’s *Discourses of Denial: The Rhetoric of American Academic Labor* further explores what the neoliberal university says about academic labor and how faculty react? He argues that US universities insist the activities of faculty do not constitute labor, defined as a realm of necessity, constraint, material limits, and often exploitation. And it is not only administrators and critics who do so, but in various ways all faculty, from the most privileged tenured to the most precarious contingent. Discenna uses Critical Discourse Analysis and Critical Rhetoric, neither of which is clearly explicated, to argue that “denial is discursively constructed, constituting and constituted by the neoliberal assault on higher education that has refashioned the labor that takes place there” (11). On the one hand, there is overt denial, embodied in the criticisms of authors like Andrew Hacker, Claudia Dreifus, and Naomi Schaefer Riley, whose writings Discenna parses. In harsh and provocative language, they argue that faculty, especially tenured ones, don’t do much of anything. They recycle old lecture notes and spend only a few hours in class; they barely attend to research and writing or produce useless books and articles; the service and shared-governance tasks they perform constitute meaningless make-work. Tenured faculty waste the money of taxpayers and parents and deprive students of the education they deserve, while enjoying high pay, generous benefits, and life-long job security.

According to Discenna, faculty are complicit in masking the nature of their labor via what he calls “repressed denial.” They claim academic labor isn’t labor at all, for it ostensibly offers security, autonomy, control of time, and choice of classes and research subjects. For the 25–30 percent who are tenured or tenure-track (TT), the academy may well seem like a refuge from the stressful real world, where one can pursue one’s vocation, a term that is the antithesis of labor. To be sure, some are discontented with their situation, but blame their failure to gain recognition and rewards on their personal inadequacies, not on the conditions created by academic capitalism.

Contingent academics do not fully embrace this romanticized image of academic life, yet while they acknowledge their precarity, they also emphasize their passion for teaching, their meaningful relationships with students, and their love of their subject matter. Their university won’t love them back, to paraphrase Sarah Jaffe,⁸ but they

focus on the positives of their situation. Some even describe themselves as “entrepreneurial adjuncts” (122), who relish being free of ties to any one institution. Universities take advantage of these self-images to offer low pay and few, if any, benefits. The graduate student employees (GSEs) who have unionized criticize those professors and administrators who deny that their teaching is work; yet they too are ambivalent about how much they identify with other contingent faculty or workers outside the academy.

While Discenna’s portrait of the overt denial of academic labor is quite accurate, the views of faculty, particularly contingent ones are often more critical and cynical. Yet he is right that loving teaching and one’s subject, genuinely caring for students, and believing that education is a public good can be politically disempowering in that it facilitates faculty acceptance of the transformed nature of academic labor. According to Discenna, this also leads students to expect that their teachers’ precarious and exploitative working conditions will be the norm for the work they will later do.

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Like the businesses on which they model themselves, colleges and universities seek to enhance their revenue, market themselves competitively, and above all, lower fixed costs. Dorms, classrooms, and athletic facilities can’t be skimmed on if one hopes to attract students. Administrators won’t trim the bloated ranks of deans, associate deans, assistant deans, deanlets, and a similar array of provost positions. Nor will they lower their salaries, which are often well above those of faculty. So that leaves cutting the cost for academic and non-academic labor.

A decade ago, technology seemed to offer a promising way. According to the *New York Times*, 2012 was the year of the MOOC, which promised to transform teaching and revolutionize higher education. MOOC proponents from universities and the tech firms that partnered with them promised an extraordinary expansion and democratization of higher education. Thousands and thousands, not only at a particular school but across the country and globe, would have access to the wisdom of the best professors across a variety of fields. They would watch videos, engage in discussions—often peer-to-peer—and complete assignments that could be auto-graded. Private firms like Coursera, Udacity, and edX partnered with Harvard, Stanford, and MIT to develop courses with similar “content delivery” and “management systems,” to borrow their vocabulary.

By 2017, the MOOC bubble had burst, as Elizabeth Losh shows in her *MOOCs and their Afterlives*, a collection of essays by academics involved in MOOCs. Several authors look nostalgically at their dashed hopes in the new technology. Some in the sciences still believe that in a modified, smaller, and more local form MOOCs have a future. Critics are skeptical, pointing out that the vast majority of participants in MOOCs were from the Global North and had already completed two to four years of college. While many eagerly signed up, retention rates were only around 5 percent, and students did worse in those courses than in traditional ones. They had trouble learning without social interaction, and above all without trained teachers who understand how students learn a particular discipline. Ownership of the intellectual property created by MOOC professors remained contentious. Perhaps most importantly, MOOCs failed to generate the expected revenues for either universities or tech firms.

If technology couldn't dispense with the need for live bodies to teach, then only reducing the pay, benefits, working conditions, and security of faculty would do. For-profit institutes, colleges, and universities, some providing only vocational education and certificates, and others offering BA, MA, and PhD programs, have done this most aggressively. The for-profit sector was once a relatively small and overlooked part of the higher education landscape, but by 2007, according to *For-Profit Colleges and Universities*, edited by Guilbert C. Hentschke, Vincente M. Lechuga, and William G. Tierney, FPCUs accounted for 39 percent of all higher education institutions and enrolled 9 percent of students, mostly in certificate and two-year programs. By 2017, writes Tressie McMillan Cottom in *Lower Ed*, 30 percent of new higher education entrants chose FPCUs and total enrollment is estimated to be roughly two million. Once small and local, a growing number of FPCUs are large shareholder corporations.

Before finishing her BA, Cottom worked for a for-profit cosmetology certificate granting school and a national shareholder university offering BAs, MAs, and PhDs. She then returned to college and went on to grad school, writing her dissertation on FPCUs. *Lower Ed* provides fascinating, and at times horrifying, insight into their operations through statistics, revealing interviews with students, and astute analysis. Such schools are expanding and appealing because of the changing economy, which demands new skills and new credentials. They appeal to those neglected by more traditional colleges who want better jobs and more security in an increasingly unequal and precarious economy. They recognize that education has become the responsibility of the individual, not society, and pay by taking out large federal loans, which in turn account for the bulk of FPCU revenue. Those revenues are then spent on high executive salaries and dividends. One study reports that 22.4 percent of revenues at some schools went to marketing but only 17.7 percent for instructions. Students are disproportionately poor, minority, and female. Overall, one in twenty of all students in higher education in 2010 attended FPCUs, but one in ten Blacks, one in fourteen Latinos, and one in fourteen first-generation college students did. FPCUs, Cottom concludes, reflect, reinforce, and commodify social inequalities.

But who are the academic laborers who credential these students for the new economy? Cottom provides minimal information. Some national chains like Strayer University generate course materials in their national office, and thus both control content and are spared paying faculty to develop curriculum. There is no expectation that faculty do research. They lack tenure and defined career paths and are not unionized. Women are a majority in many schools, not just those in traditionally women's fields like cosmetology and health care. *For Profit Colleges and Universities* provides a somewhat more nuanced picture in a year-long study of fifty-two faculty in four FPCUs. While certificate programs and those offerings BAs did not usually require teachers to have a PhD, those offering graduate programs did. Only 5 percent of faculty in two schools were full-time and much of their work involved training and evaluating part-time faculty. While some faculty designed their own courses, at many schools, administrators and advisory groups develop and standardize content to meet student/customer desires and market needs. There is no faculty governance, and "academic freedom is of peripheral concern" (72)—at least to the administrators and owners. FPCUs hire a larger percentage of women and minorities than do public

and private nonprofit schools. Many are said to be older and supposedly happy to teach part-time because of age or other business and professional obligations. No statistics are provided for these assertions, nor were the authors able to interview faculty about their experiences and reactions to laboring under these conditions; most refused, some claiming fear of possible reprisals.

Outside the United States, for-profit higher education is less developed and functions differently. It is totally dependent on tuition and the state offers no supporting—and predatory—loans. The emphasis is on vocational training, and FPCUs do not compete with traditional universities, as they do in the United States. For-profit institutions are most widespread in the Philippines and the Middle East, though they are also growing rapidly in some African countries such as Kenya, Zaire, and South Africa. They are technically outlawed, but in fact exist, in Latin America, but are scarcely present in Europe, with the exception of Ukraine. But *For-Profit Colleges and Universities* provides no information on who teaches in these and under what conditions. As in the US case, academic labor seems the least important aspect of FPCUs both to their owners and to those studying them.

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If we know little about FPCU faculty, we know a great deal about their roughly one million contingent counterparts in public and private nonprofit institutions. Between 70 and 75 percent of academic laborers hold contingent positions, while the percentage tenured and TT positions dwindles yearly.⁹ These precarious academics are the subject of a diverse literature, ranging from adjunct novels and memoirs to more analytical works, often written by those who have themselves spent years, if not their entire career in various precarious jobs. *The Adjunct Underclass* by Herb Childress and *The Gig Academy* by Daniel T. Scott, Tom DePaola, and Adrianna Kezar are two insightful examples of the last type.

Contingent academics labor under a dizzying array of titles including postdoc, instructor, lecturer, adjunct, contract faculty, artist in-residence, and TA. There are clinical professors, visiting professors, research professors, and professors of practice at all ranks. Non-tenure track (NTT) or contingent faculty are the best umbrella terms. If full-time, they are paid significantly less than their TT counterparts, have a heavier teaching load, reduced benefits, little opportunity to do research, and few prospects of moving to the tenure track. Part-time faculty, for which adjunct is the best term, are paid by the course with their always inadequate wages pegged to the local labor market. Many teach at multiple institutions in any given term, and a quarter rely on public assistance of one kind or another to get by. They receive no health insurance or other benefits and often lack office space, access to photocopying, and other institutional supports. Those known as freeway flyers pay for their long commutes between schools. Adjuncts, who now comprise just over half of postsecondary instructors, are frequently hired and fired at the last minute depending on enrollments and student evaluations. And some schools have begun outsourcing hiring to recruiting firms.¹⁰ The majority of NTT faculty are female, but men are well represented. Neither study offered statistics by race.

Contingent faculty are spread unevenly over different types of schools. According to Childress, community colleges have the highest percentage of adjuncts (and the

least qualified ones), while regional public institutions employ a large percentage but with higher qualifications. The faculty at elite liberal arts colleges are overwhelmingly full-time, while in elite research universities TT faculty predominate. But even there, contingency is rising; at Harvard and Columbia, for example, 31 percent of full-time faculty are NTT, and at NYU 49 percent are, with entire divisions like Liberal Studies and the School of Professional Studies staffed entirely by NTT faculty.¹¹ Contingency is on the rise everywhere and in ways that reflect and reinforce class, race, and gender inequality.

Both works see the spread and mistreatment of contingent faculty as one more example of neoliberal capitalism's attack on labor by cutting wages, resisting unionization, mislabeling workers as individual contractors, and paring down or eliminating health, pension, and other benefits. In addition, there is an overproduction of PhDs that make qualified labor available and cheap at a time when the pool of potential students is shrinking. And as more and more schools emphasize career driven programs whose content shifts according to market needs and consumer/student demand, administrators want flexible, which means disposable, faculty. Colleges and universities treat their nonmanagerial, non-academic labor force—custodial, food prep, technology, security, maintenance, bookstore, etc.—no better. These workers have been outsourced to private firms. Support staff in departments and offices, as well as libraries, have shrunk while the ranks of higher paid professional employees in such areas as human resources and counseling are expanding along with upper-level administrators. Much as academic labor resembles the larger gig economy, however, there is one important difference: reduced labor costs don't translate into lower tuition bills for consumers/students because higher education institutions control not only the supply of and demand for labor but also the prices consumers pay.

Both studies employ qualitative and quantitative evidence to depict the experience of contingency, and Childress provides extensive quotes from his numerous interviews with NTT faculty. Work has become “deprofessionalized,” as the once united tasks of teaching, research, and service are unbundled. Contingent faculty generally teach only intro or general education courses and often deliver them from a standardized syllabus prepared by others. Full-time NTT are usually excluded from faculty governance and adjuncts always are. Their insecure appointments make academic freedom a meaningless concept. Contingent faculty complain about their isolation and invisibility to both the TT professors and administrators. There is no sense of an academic community. *The Gig Academy* cites a Gallup poll reporting that only a third of faculty and staff find their work meaningful, their work environment supportive, and management fair. Had only contingent faculty been polled the numbers would undoubtedly have been much higher. The conditions of work for teachers are the conditions of learning for students, and contingency thus impacts learning and later success negatively, especially for poor, minority, and first-generation students.

After analyzing large structural changes and their macroeconomic and ideological causes, Childress offers very individualistic solutions: TT faculty and administrators need to change their attitudes, prioritize building relationships among faculty of all sorts and between faculty and students. Prospective grad students should apply to only the top ten schools in their field, and if they fail to get in, should forego pursuit of a PhD. Schools need to buy less technology and invest in more full-time faculty

who should be hired from among local NTT academics. Faculty should take back control from administrators. He rejects collective action as a means to achieve these ends, arguing instead for changing values. He concludes on a deeply personal and painful note, describing how “the vast purgatory of contingent life” (161) harmed his physical and mental health and personal relationships. He describes contingents as “refugees from a nation that would not have us.” They suffer from economic precarity but equally importantly are overwhelmed by feelings of shame, despair, failure, and resentment.

For *The Gig Academy* authors, unionization is the only possible answer to the systemic crisis of contingency, and they are heartened by its progress in the past decade. Unionization among TT faculty has remained static; the National Education Association (NEA), America Federation of Teachers (AFT), American Association of University Professors (AAUP), and independent unions like the CUNY Professional Staff Congress have organized a quarter of TT faculty in public colleges and universities, while those in private ones remain prohibited from unionizing by the 1980 *Yeshiva* Supreme Court decision, which categorized faculty as managers. Among NTT and graduate student employees (GSEs) organizing and collective bargaining are growing rapidly. Their demands range from better pay, improved working conditions, and compensation for cancelled classes to participation in shared governance and protection against sexual harassment. Eschewing narrow business unionism, they often address broader social justice issues such as supporting and protecting undocumented students and divesting endowment funds from private prisons or fossil fuel companies. They consistently emphasize that their conditions of work determine students’ conditions of learning. Out of necessity, GSEs organize around their institutional workplace and are doing so not only in new public institutions but private ones as well, including Columbia and Harvard. After winning a union vote, they often have to strike to bring reluctant university administrations to the bargaining table.

Part-time contingent faculty, who often teach at multiple institutions, are pursuing the metro strategy. This is among the topics explored in *Contextualizing and Organizing Contingent Faculty*, a collection edited by Ishmael Munene, a tenured professor at the University of Arizona who has been involved in helping to organize the NTT. A chapter by Joe Berry and Helene Worthen, two life-long contingent professors active in mobilizing NTT faculty in Chicago and elsewhere, argue that adjuncts need to be organized not by school but by the geographic region in whose various institutions they work. While the AFT, NEA, AAUP, and TT faculty were reluctant to promote this strategy, the New Faculty Majority, established in the late 1990s, did so, trying first with little success in Boston and doing much better in Washington, DC. Then the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) launched its Faculty Forward campaign to organize adjuncts by metro region across the country and the AFT, United Steel Workers, and independent groups followed suit. Sometimes the NTT form their own union; at other times they have become part of TT bargaining units, as has been the case with adjuncts in the California State University system (but not the University of California system that includes the more prestigious research institutions). As tenure comes under increasing attack from administrators and politicians, TT faculty are more willing to ally with their

NTT counterparts. Another chapter on National Adjunct Walkout Day at the University of Arizona has interesting interviews with adjuncts and a wealth of tips on how to publicize and mobilize this ever-growing group.

Contingency is pervasive outside the United States as well as the Munene collection case studies of Kenya, Turkey, South Korea, and Canada show, but successful unionizing is not. In Kenya, for example, the rapidly expanding university system extensively employs NTT faculty, some with PhDs, many without. Although legally entitled to organize and bargain collectively, both university administrators and the state have effectively blocked any efforts to do so. In Turkish public universities, 75 percent of academics are NTT, while in private ones 100 percent are. Unionization is very limited, and since 2016 state investigations and terminations, especially of NTT, for political speech have increased. In South Korea two-thirds of academics are part-time and teach 40 percent of courses. Whereas in the 1990s at least eight despairing part-time faculty committed suicide, in the last decade they have organized demonstrations and strikes. The Part-Time Instructor Legislation, promising higher pay, benefits, and faculty status to this group, was passed in 2012, but its implementation was postponed until 2018 and may well be still unenforced. Academic capitalism is even more aggressive and disempowering outside the United States than within.

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The upsurge in contingent faculty unionization and the spate of strikes among teaching assistants—one thousand have walked out at Indiana University as I write this in mid-April 2022—are a most welcome sign of pushback. But as yet they have not significantly altered American academic capitalism with its commitment to managerialism and marketization and its preference for flexible contingent labor. The COVID-19 pandemic may well have strengthened these trends as universities and colleges of all types have seen revenues and enrollments fall and expenses rise. (Those with large endowments have seen them grow as the stock market boomed.) Many have offered generous retirement packages to expensive older tenured faculty, who will be replaced, if at all, by junior TT, or more likely, NTT academics. The humanities, it is feared, will be especially hard hit as the pressure from parents, students, and administrators to provide “practical” programs with promising economic rewards grows. From inside and outside the academy, calls to rethink, reform, or replace tenure are escalating.¹²

The current culture war represents a new danger to academic freedom and the rights and security of all faculty, both contingent and tenured. Right-wing politicians, pundits, and religious leaders seek to prohibit the teaching of CRT, which has been weaponized to mean any and everything they dislike. They want to limit how the history of slavery and discrimination is taught and issues of gender, sexuality, and anything touching on LGBTQ experiences are presented. Students are to be taught a bland and patriotic version of US history and never be made to feel uncomfortable by what a critical teaching of that complex history might reveal. While the principal target of these educational gag orders is K-12 schools, public higher education is also directly impacted by these capacious and amorphous bills and will be indirectly affected by the narrow and distorted education their students will have received in

states that pass such legislation.¹³ The future of academic labor remains uncertain and danger-filled; the struggles ahead are many.

Notes

1. Mary Nolan is Professor of History emerita at New York University. She is the author of *The Transatlantic Century: Europe and America, 1890-2010* and co-editor of *The University Against Itself: The NYU Strike and the Future of the Academic Work Place* and of *The Routledge Handbook of the Global Sixties*.
2. Sheila Slaughter and Gary Rhoades, *Academic Capitalism and the New Economy: Markets, State, and Higher Education* (Baltimore, MD, and London, 2004). Jennifer Washburn *University Inc.: The Corporate Corruption of Higher Education* (New York, 2005). David L. Kirp, *Shakespeare, Einstein, and the Bottom Line: The Marketing of Higher Education* (Cambridge, MA, 2005).
3. Benjamin Ginsberg's *The Fall of the Faculty: The Rise of the All-Administrative University and Why It Matters* (New York, 2011).
4. Marc Bousquet, *How the University Works: Higher Education and the Low-Wage Nation* (New York, 2008). Randy Martin, ed., *Chalk Lines: The Politics of Work in the Managed University* (Durham, NC, 1998).
5. Ellen Schrecker, *The Lost Soul of Higher Education: Corporatization, the Assault on Academic Freedom, and the End of the American University* (New York, 2010).
6. Monica Krause, Mary Nolan, Michael Palm and Andrew Ross, eds., *The University Against Itself: The NYU Strike and the Future of the Academic Workplace* (Philadelphia, PA, 2008).
7. President Biden's 2023 federal budget, for example, asks for \$88.3 billion for the Department of Education, while the military is getting \$813 billion.
8. Sarah Jaffe, *Work Won't Love You Back: How Devotion to Our Jobs Keeps Us Exploited, Exhausted, and Alone* (New York, 2021). This includes the chapter "Proletarian Professionals: Academia."
9. As Childress notes, numbers are hard to determine exactly, because some surveys divide faculty into TT and NTT, others into full-time and part-time, but many full-time are NTT. Moreover, the 15–20 percent of teachers who are grad students are not included.
10. APL nextED Match Recruiting Services, for example, promises to connect colleges and universities with subject-matter experts through their automated system, often in days. *Inside Higher Ed*, April 12, 2022.
11. AAUP, Faculty Compensation Survey, 2021–2022. <https://www.aaup.org/faculty-compensation-survey-results-tool>.
12. For a sampling of this debate, see The Chronicle of Higher Education, *Rethinking Tenure: Abolish, strengthen or replace it?* (2021). Accessed at: <https://store.chronicle.com/products/rethinking-tenure>.
13. For information on the culture war and academic responses to it, see the African American Policy Forum Truth Be Told. Accessed at: <https://www.aapf.org/truthbetold> AAPF and Historians for Peace and Democracy, bit.ly/hpadCWE; <https://www.historiansforpeace.org/>. For pending and passed legislation, updated regularly by Pen America, see <https://pen.org/in-higher-education-new-educational-gag-orders/>.