For Profit and For Good

Walden University 1970 – 2020

By

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BACKGROUND

The decades between 1970 and 2020 saw momentous developments in higher education in the US. Under the banner of progressive education, advances over this half century were to have an impact on what was taught, how it was taught, and why it was taught, and even the role of the university where esoteric studies and research had ruled. These are the years of Walden University, founded in 1970 and celebrating its fiftieth anniversary in 2020 on the eve of moving into a new corporate ownership and structure.

I chose to focus on Walden as a for-profit institution because it was one of a new kind of university that the times encouraged, progressive and proprietary at the same time. It continued as such to greater and lesser degrees through a variety of iterations over its five decades. I was also familiar enough with it to know where to look for information and seek answers. Despite the continuing negativity surrounding proprietary institutions, the Walden story reveals what it takes for the business and the university, the management and the faculty to bring about change in the lives of students, their professional worlds, higher education generally, and the larger community.

The Wider Context

Numerous societal forces were at work during these fifty years. The social unrest of the 1960s resulted in demands for more relevant content and more appropriate teaching methods for young adults and older returning students at the university level. It opposed elitist models and pressed toward a greater democratizing of higher education. The civil rights movement and the feminist movement of the sixties placed additional demands on higher education to include those who had been traditionally marginalized.

The requirements of changing industry, with multicultural, global, and technological developments, encouraged a rethinking of the curriculum

and gave professional education a more prominent place in the university.[1] The notion of "pure knowledge," unsullied by the messiness of the real world, was increasingly seen as anachronistic or restricted,[2] although the criticism was deemed by some to be evidence of a growing anti-intellectualism.[3] At the same time, the workplace demanded higher credentials so that professional and vocational education programs grew markedly during these years.[4] They would require a different kind of learning model and curriculum to meet the needs and interests of growing numbers of learners preparing for a different kind of workplace.

By the 1990s and well into the new century, computers and the internet became the tools for researchers and scholars and offered new media for teaching and learning with online courses, including MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses, usually free of charge, first offered in 2008) and email communication. Search engines, digitized books and journals, computer simulations and models, collections of "big data" and the means for analyzing them, and, increasingly, artificial intelligence and machine learning transformed research and access to information.

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[1] David F. Labaree, "Mutual Subversion: A Short History of the Liberal and Professional in American Higher Education," *History of Education Quarterly* 46, no 1 (Spring 2006): 1-15, doi: 10.1111/j.1748-5959.2006.tb00167.x. See also, David Boud and Nicky Solomon, eds., *Work-based Learning: A New Higher Education* (New York: McGraw Hill, 2009 [2001, 2003, 2008]); Tom Bourner, Tim Katz, and David Watson, eds., *New Directions in Professional Higher Education* (New York: McGraw Hill, 2000).

[2] Frank, M. Turner, ed., *John Henry Newman: The Idea of a University* (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 1996).

[3] See for instance, Ibanga B. Ikpe, "The Decline of the Humanities and the Decline of Society," *Theoria* 62, no. 1 (March 2015): 50-66, doi:10.3169/th.2015.6214203; Ben Agger, "Political Sentences: Anti-Intellectualism, Obscurantism and Polymorphous Perversity," *Sociological Inquiry* 78, no. 3 (August 2008), 423-430, doi: 10.1111/j.1475-682X.2008.00249.x; Ryan Coogan, "University Isn't for You: What 'Experts' Debate Tells the Working Class," *Times Higher Education*, no. 2266 (August, 2016): 28–29.

[4] Katherine Jelly and Alan Mandell, "Introduction," in Jelly and Mandell, eds., *Principles, Practices, and Creative Tension in Progressive Higher Education: One Institution's Struggle to Sustain a Vision* (Rotterdam, The Netherlands: Sense Publishers, 2017), 1.

The possibilities of online learning caught the attention of financiers: they saw how large segments of the population could undertake university studies without the accoutrements of campuses, buildings, and complex infrastructures. Scores of universities and colleges, both for-profit and not-for-profit, sprang up that offered online or hybrid degree programs while bringing profits to investors.[5] The combined effect of online universities, especially the for-profits with their resources and openness to innovation, was to change traditional universities that had been unwilling or unable to bring about much needed reforms. Asynchronous online learning was proving to offer the flexibility many adult learners were looking for and access to study programs that did not involve moving home, leaving jobs, and uprooting families to attend a bricks-and-mortar institution. Most universities of the 2020s were delivering online programs to supplement their face-to-face offerings, many using models developed by the for-profits. The pandemic of 2019-21 gave added impetus to offsite learning using web resources.

As well, the motivation to work for social justice that had been a hallmark of the sixties reappeared as support for directing the attention of universities toward the needs of their neighbors and even those further afield. It was increasingly recognized that the resources, research capabilities, and often the personnel within the university, along with community partners, could address many of the problems that beset local communities.[6] As a result, universities began to revitalize their mission statements, renew teaching models such as service learning, and seek out other ways of applying toward the common good what was being learned in the classroom, research laboratory, and clinic.[7]

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[5] United States Senate, Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee, Majority Committee Staff Report and Accompanying Minority Committee Staff Views, The Failure to Safeguard the Federal Investment and Ensure Student Success (July 30, 2012), 15. www.help.senate.gov/imo/media/for_profit_report/PartI.pdf, accessed December 8, 2020.

[6] Ernest L. Boyer, *Scholarship Reconsidered* (New York: Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1990).

[7] See for instance, D. A. Kolb, *Experience as the Source of Learning and Development* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1984); Ira Harkavy and Matthew Hartley,

Because of changing economic conditions, such as increased inflationary rates and stresses in the energy industries beginning in the seventies, government services were being reduced, forcing universities to seek funds beyond what state and federal governments were able to give. The downturn in the economy in the late 1990s and again in 2007-09 created even more stress on university budgets. Large grants for research and low tuition rates for students were early victims of tightened strictures on the use of tax dollars. University foundations and alumni associations assumed greater roles in fundraising and university administrators found themselves spending more time on cultivating donors. In the parlance of the times, state-run universities had become state-supported universities, and even the support was tenuous.

As a result, higher education was becoming more corporatized; that is, business models with goals of efficiency, accountability, and productivity became important priorities. While this management approach brought greater fiscal accountability to higher education, the corporatized university was characterized by a top-down bureaucracy and increasingly many decisions once made by the faculty were being made by the new-style managers, often without input from the academics. These decisions ran the gamut from the appointment of presidents, deans, and department heads to the selection of curricula and programs that would bring in more tuition revenue. This gave professional education programs more influence than those in the arts and humanities when it came to resource allocation. Online learning flourished in this environment because the number of classes and class size could increase without any investment in land-based classrooms. Replacing tenured faculty with adjunct and other part-time instructors was another cost-cutting, profit-enhancing move that emerged from the corporate model.[8] Many of these moves were recognized by the

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"Pursuing Franklin's Dream: Philosophical and Historical Roots of Service Learning," *American Journal of Community Psychology* 46, no. 3/4 (2010): 418-27, doi: 10.1007/s10464-010-9341-x.

[8] David Schultz, "The Rise and Coming Demise of the Corporate University," report from the American Association of University Professors, *Academe* (September-October, 2015), https://www.aaup.org/article/rise-and-coming-demise-corporate-university, accessed December 11, 2020.

professorate as threats to academic freedom, the set of fundamental values around integrity, self-regulation, and the unfettered search for truth.[9] Corporate models of management and new emphases on profitability often seemed to clash with traditional academic values and resulted in resentment and lowered morale among faculty members. Academic managers and those managed needed to find ways to bring the parties together and find compromises that both could accept.[10]

It was in this context that Walden University, among many others, was conceived and born and grew to maturity. From the beginning, it adopted a scholar-practitioner approach, opened access to many otherwise sidelined learners, instituted a learning model that centered on the individual learner, embraced a mission of social change, implemented practices in adult education, based operations on a faculty made up almost entirely of part-time faculty, pioneered online learning with the necessary support services, and increasingly adopted corporate models of organization as a for-profit institution. Developments at Walden reveal one way that institutions over these years applied the non-traditional trends in higher education to their own curricula and organizational structure, taking advantage of the opportunities the times afforded while also being compelled to find ways to negotiate the challenges. For this reason alone, the Walden story can be instructive about the major movements in higher education generally during these decades.

Walden University Among Many

The US has a long tradition of private institutions embracing community responsibility, real-world connection, more open access to higher

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[9] Andrew Miller, "Academic Freedom: Defending Democracy in the Corporate University," *Social Alternatives* 38, no. 3 (2019): 14-20. See also the American Association of University Professors' statement, "Academic Freedom and the Corporate University (January-February, 2011), https://www.aaup.org/article/academic-freedom-and-corporate-university, accessed December 24, 2020.

[10] Richard Winter, "Academic Manager or Managed Academic? Academic Identity Schisms in Higher Education," *Journal of Higher Education and Management* 31, no. 2 (May 2009): 121-131.

education, and student-centered approaches to learning.[11] Walden University, along with many other institutions established during the sixties and seventies, built on the foundation these earlier colleges had laid. In 1964, ten colleges formed the Union for Research and Experimentation in Higher Education, later known as Union Institute and University, in Cincinnati. Social relevance, interdisciplinary studies, outreach to non-traditional students, and independent, guided study based in the real world became the hallmarks of the consortium. By 1975, this network of experimental schools had grown to thirty-four, employing the practice of what became known as "universities without walls."[12] The Evergreen State College in Washington State was established in 1967 and allowed undergraduate students to design their own program of study in a variety of ways.[13] Warren Wilson College in North Carolina transitioned from a farm school to a four-year college in the mid-1960s, combining work experience and academics and recognizing the obligation to serve the community.[14] Empire State College, established in 1971 by the State University of New York Board of Trustees and chancellor, Ernest L. Boyer, aimed "to break the mold of higher education."[15] Building on the progressive education philosophy of John Dewey among others, the school set about "doing what is best *for* the student, but working *from* the student's very particular experience and *toward* the student's own unique goals."[16] And there were many more, so much so that together they formed a recognizable new movement in higher education, what historian of education Lewis B. Mayhew called a "watershed period" in the history of

[11] Among them, Antioch (with roots that went back to 1832), Alverno College (1887), School of New Learning, DePaul University (1898), Black Mountain College (1933), and Goddard College (1935).

[12] https://myunion.edu, see "About Union," accessed January 25, 2021. See for instance, James Ridgeway, "Universities without Walls," *New Republic* 168, no. 12 (1973): 17–19.

[13] https://www.evergreen.edu, see "Academics," accessed January 25, 2021.

[14] https://www.warren-wilson.edu, accessed January 25, 2021.

[15] See https://www.esc.edu/about/, accessed January 25, 2021.

[16] Katherine Jelly and Alan Mandell, "Introduction," in Jelly and Mandell, eds., *Principles, Practices, and Creative Tension in Progressive Higher Education: One Institution's Struggle to Sustain a Vision* (Rotterdam, The Netherlands: Sense Publishers, 2017), 4.

American higher education, even a "revolution."[17] The movement is identified as progressive education, familiar in elementary and secondary education but now influential in higher education as well.

Mayhew identifies several interacting themes pervading the schools that made up this progressive movement in higher education in the late sixties and seventies. Their goal was to provide a "democratic and egalitarian" education to all potential learners in ways that would meet their specific needs; opportunities to learn, therefore, would be "flexible"—tightly scheduled, large-group teaching would be "antithetical;" learning was to be seen as a societal responsibility shared by schools with business, industry, cultural groups, government agencies, and so on; and learning was to be individualized, so that each learner's goals and needs could be met. Such an approach to education implied that the new kind of student at the time—intentionally including older working adults, disadvantaged learners, and learners who were not always high achievers academically but were mechanically, artistically, or practically inclined—would also have opportunity to learn. Curricula and teaching methods would need to be redesigned and restructured to accommodate these goals, recognizing that many of the learners would need to be part-time, adapting to different learning styles, and helping learners to fulfill their chosen outcomes.[18]

Typical of the era, Empire State College embraced a mission of "democratic social change," which would be manifested in three ways: providing access to higher education by creating a "statewide footprint" so that the college existed wherever a mentor and mentee could meet; experimenting with individualized teaching methodologies and curricula that could transform higher education; and educating for societal engagement to "create and sustain a more just and equitable world."[19] This three-pronged objective, echoing throughout the new wave of experimental and innovative institutions, was embraced by the founders of Walden. Three key concepts capture these aspirations for Walden's founders: *access* (to higher education

[17] Lewis B. Mayhew, *Legacy of the Seventies* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1977), ix-x.
[18] Ibid., 42-44.
[19] Jelly and Mandell, "Introduction," 9-14.

especially for those who had been traditionally marginalized), *andragogy* (that is, a set of guidelines for adult learning), and *agency* (empowering learners for social change).

This non-traditional movement in higher education faced some serious obstacles and prospects in the ensuing years. Some were encountered at the macro-level: for example, educational thought and practice across time has swung between structured and de-structured models with theoretical underpinnings and successes to support each in turn, suggesting that the progressive movement would sooner or later give way to a more traditional movement.[20] Then, as new generations of teachers and learners populated the faculties, they would need to be prepared and willing to embrace the new philosophy or the institution would regress to doing what was most familiar rather than what was most innovative. This would carry significance for faculty development and student recruitment. Then too, tradition itself can be powerful, and since education is largely a conserving enterprise with deep cultural roots, bounded by the expectations of society, change in the way schooling is conducted takes considerable effort.[21]

Other complications and possibilities were encountered at the practical level. Financing non-traditional schools would require sometimes precarious sources of funding. The institutions that were state supported would be affected by changing state politics and oversight. Those that were not part of a state system would have to call on federal student grants and loans to survive or the gifts of philanthropists or organizations with a specific agenda such as religious organizations or the labor movement. This would inevitably put them under governing or regulatory and accrediting agency policies that might not always be a good fit with their mission.[22] Some non-traditional institutions found strength in developing consortia, with a common vision and shared resources and leadership. Many of the

[20] Mayhew, *Legacy of the Seventies*, 305-06. See also Melanie Burdick and Heidi L. Hallman, *At the Crossroads of Pedagogical Change in Higher Education* (New York: Routledge, 2022); Iris. M. Yob, "Teaching Models Used in NSW Since 1900," MEd thesis, Newcastle University, Australia, 1980, for a comparable study in elementary and secondary education.

[21] Mayhew, *Legacy of the Seventies*, 293-339.

[22] Ibid.

innovative programs relied on part-time faculty, glad for additional work with added income and the opportunity to participate in much needed reforms in higher education. The programs were glad that they did not have to pay benefits to these part-timers but had the advantage of bringing onto the faculty instructors who were experienced and committed to progressive practices. But full-time faculty carry additional responsibilities in service and other commitments to the university that the part-timers did not always assume. Then, too, unscrupulous financial and recruiting practices especially in some of the for-profit schools would put the whole sector under a cloud of suspicion.

Meeting the needs of a disparate body of learners appealed to democratic impulses but was challenging in practice. Motivating independent learners and keeping them focused, enabling them to articulate their scholarly goals and plan their learning programs, were key features of these non-traditional programs. These challenges demanded new-style skills that faculty members would need to develop. The necessary self-reliance required for learner success would be readily assumed by some learners but represented a daunting struggle for others. The impact of technology on education seemed to hold promise but would need to be adapted to the variety of learning contexts.

Mayhew argues that given the limitations and challenges of non-traditional approaches to learning in higher education, its goals may actually be seen as an over-reach. Surrendering to learners the what, how, and why of learning and sharing teaching with other entities, places, and contexts, he suggests, "quite properly should come to an early end." While it may have been ideal for some learners and some schools, it could not become the vision for all. The "logical extension" of the movement "in aggregate," he concludes, "so expands the concept of education as to render it meaningless."[23] The underlying assumption in this assessment of progressive education is that the only reliable and genuine learning in the end is that which is controlled, that is, education designed by experts and presented as a body of content to be assimilated in structured settings. Support for Mayhew's view is seen in the fact that in many if not most

[23] Ibid., 302.

instances, the institutions that were built on progressive ideals at the time had to modify their approach during the succeeding decades[24] or gave up entirely on the non-traditional principles. The question remains whether this was because progressivism was unrealistic in its expectations or whether external and internal circumstances worked against its fullest implementation. It may very well have been a combination of both forces. At the same time, at least some of the most powerful elements of progressivism not only endured in some of these schools[25] but have been woven into courses and programs in traditional schools where one can find examples of experiential and service learning, independent projects, and other alternatives to lectures and written assignments and tests such as competency-based learning, problem-based learning, and work-based learning. In other words, higher education more widely has benefited from the experimental work of the non-traditional movement of the seventies.

Working from a similar foundation of guiding principles and undergoing the same cultural, societal, technological, and political changes over the same time span as many other institutions, Walden University was grounded in the non-traditional movement. All the progressive institutions had to deal with similar challenges such as budgetary concerns, scaling individualized approaches between teacher and learner as enrolments grew, addressing the needs of a wider range of preparedness for higher education in incoming learners, recognizing and embracing the full richness of cultural and social interests and need in society and in the student body, and employing new technologies in ways that would

[24] See for example, Jelly and Mandell, *Principles, Practices, and Creative Tension in Progressive Higher Education*.

[25] See for example, Jaime M. Grant, "Building Community-Based Coalitions from Academe: The Union Institute from the Kitchen Table," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 21, no. 4 (1996): 1024-32, doi: 10.1086/495130; Lois Elfman, "Evergreen Education. (Cover Story)," *Diverse: Issues in Higher Education* 33, no. 12 (2016): 12–14; Steve Kolowich and Chris Quintana, "A Radical College's Public Meltdown," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, November 3, 2017; "The Evergreen State College," *Liberal Education* 79, no. 4 (1993): 35; Gregory Michie, "All Together Now," *Teacher Magazine* 13, no. 5 (2002): 18; J. McCormick, "A Class Act for the Ghetto," *Newsweek* 118, no. 26 (1993): 62; Pamela Schaeffer, "Using Chicago At DePaul," *National Catholic Reporter*, September 24, 1999.

preserve the ideals and hopes that lay at the heart of the school's vision, for instance.[26]

And yet, there is a fundamental feature that distinguishes Walden from its sister institutions of the progressive era: it functioned for over fifty years as a for-profit entity, owned and operated at different times by private investors, a private company, and a large corporation. Throughout its history, the university's business partners assumed a measure of control in decision-making and were the final arbiters in such issues as organizational structure and budgeting and in many instances, influenced even pedagogy and the programs that were offered. Always under the watchful eye of accreditors, the university's trajectory as a progressive institution would also be influenced by forces different from most other colleges and universities. Much of the institution's development over the years would depend on the degree to which its successive owners integrated the original progressive vision in its wholeness with the drive to maintain a profitable enterprise.

This account, then, specifically explores how the progressive mission of serving the common good and contributing to positive social change was expressed in an environment that was also concerned with returning profits to stakeholders. So, Walden is both similar to and different from many other start-ups of the time, each endeavoring to enact progressive ideals and each finding its own way to fulfill the vision of its founders. Walden's story can shed additional light on the progressive movement in higher education, how its basic principles could be interpreted and applied, and how its core values evolved or eroded in changing circumstances.

About This Study

The purpose of this study is to tell the Walden story against this background. The specific focus is on two of the university's most notable features: being for-profit and being for good. Both features grew out of these times but took on their own distinctiveness in the Walden setting,

[26] See for instance, Jelly and Mandell, *Principles, Practices, and Creative Tension in Progressive Higher Education*.

especially as they interacted in practice. Tracing the relationship between these two features over the decades is bound to expose times of tension and of resolution in varying degrees, in part, because ownership of the university changed hands several times and different financial interests and external demands on the academy had to be met. As well, society itself is dynamic and new issues of concern emerged during these years. The practice of profit-taking in higher education had to adjust to evolving regulatory demands and increasingly exacting corporate interests, and the mission of social change had to be renewed and reworked to remain salient.

One might expect a fundamental incompatibility between the twin motives of being for-profit and for good. The questions that are likely to arise might be whether Walden did overcome this incompatibility, and if it did, how did it do it and how successful was it? At the heart of this account of the Walden story are the circumstances that demanded answers, how these questions were answered, and the consequences that ensued. The tensions were always present but changed as conditions changed so that yesterday's answers no longer could satisfy the next day's questions. It was a matter of constant revision and reimagining.

The question of whether an education organization can not only be for-profit and but also contribute to the common good is especially pertinent entering the years beyond 2020. During the for-profit higher education boom of the previous two decades, when many schools went from family-owned or niche institutions to mega corporations, there were many unscrupulous or incompetent players in the field. Not all for-profits conducted business online since some were land-based or adopted a hybrid of face-to-face and online learning. Many across this spectrum took advantage of the new market that had yet to be well regulated and was financed in large part by tax dollars in the form of student loans. Numerous companies put profit-making over a quality education[27] and when exposed,

[27] Among the many for-profit institutions that failed, Corinthian Colleges filed for bankruptcy in 2015. Under the watchful eye of the Department of Education, the college across its twenty-four subsidiaries was successfully sued for attracting students with false graduation and job placement rates. ITT Technical Institute, one of the largest for-profit colleges in the US, filed for bankruptcy in 2016 after legal action against the institution for using coercive and misleading student recruiting

doubts were cemented in the minds of many about the whole sector. At least one accrediting body for independent colleges in this new environment was itself found to be disreputable and had to be dismantled.[28] Worries about for-profits were exacerbated by the fact that the greatest proportion of students enrolled in a for-profit distance learning program were enrolled in just five percent of the for-profit institutions,[29] a concentration that would have disproportionate impact if any one of those institutions were to fail. The story of Walden is a case study of how one university met the pressures and attempted to resolve in practice the tensions that come from holding in theory that for-profit and for good are co-equal and co-dependent driving forces.

The purpose of this historical account of Walden University addresses three fundamental questions at the heart of the relationship between being for profit and for good. Can proprietary institutions be trusted to provide a

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strategies and for offering high-interest student loans. According to news reports in 2017, eight hundred programs offered by for-profit colleges were found by the Department of Education to be promising potential graduates unrealistic prospects in the job market while ensuring their own profits from student loan debt. Some of these programs were being offered by DeVry University, the University of Phoenix, and the Art Institutes chain. See "Feds give 800 for-profit colleges failing grades," CBS News (January 20,2017), https://www.cbsnews.com/news/feds-give-800-for-profit-colleges-failing-grades/#:~:text=Although%20for-profit%20colleges%20represented%20only%2066%20percent%20of,ratings%2C%20offer%20a%20better%20value%20than%20for-profit%20colleges, accessed December 16, 2020. Argosy Universities were closed in 2019 for false advertising and questionable fiduciary practices. One of the most publicized failures was Trump University with a federal court settlement of $25 million for relief for students who were victims of fraud by the university. See "Trump University-related Lawsuits settled for $25 million," Fox News (November 18, 2017), https://www.foxnews.com/politics/trump-university-related-lawsuits-settled-for-25-million, accessed December 16, 2020.

[28] See https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/22/us/education-Biden-ITT-corinthian.html?smid=em-share, accessed March 31, 2022.

[29] Julia E. Seaman, I. Elaine Allen, and Jeff Seaman, "Grade Increase: Tracking Distance Education in the United States," Babson Survey Research Group (2018): 22-23, http://www.onlinelearningsurvey.com/reports/gradeincrease.pdf, accessed December 20, 2018.

quality education? Did this university, as one example in the for-profit sector, manage to find the right balance between profit-making and serving students well, especially as circumstances changed over the years? Furthermore, did it have something to offer higher education that was not already abundantly available in private and public institutions?

This account of Walden's historical development adopts a personal narrative approach. While many of the participants in the Walden story over time were embedded in the philosophy of progressivism, some were not, except perhaps tangentially. Nevertheless, it is useful to inquire about their hopes, ideals, and values in the context of a university that began with the same principles and vision as other innovative schools at the time. What were the motivations of these participants? What meaning did they ascribe to their efforts and experiences? What influenced them and in turn how did they influence the institution? The interviewees in this review of Walden wrestled with issues practically and personally against a backdrop of ideals not always well articulated and within prevailing realities. In other words, many of the tensions and challenges explicitly examined in other accounts,[30] are also addressed implicitly in this account of the Walden experience, where the focus is on the perceptions, commitments, and personal meaning making of those involved.

Histories are known for their accounts of notable events and dates, heroes and villains. So, in the strictest sense this is not a typical history. Significant events and time periods are simply scaffolding to what might better be called a story. There is no attempt to identify the good players from the bad but, rather, to give voice to those who gave their energy and commitment to what they believed would make Walden University a successful institution, whether they represented primarily the business interests or the academic programs. It is their account of how they worked toward making the university profitable while contributing to positive social change within their own specific roles. They share how they dealt with the conundrum of having two putatively irreconcilable goals. They describe the perspectives and understandings that guided them and the actions they supported or

[30] Ibid., for example.

took to fulfill either or both of these twin goals, depending on their function within the university. Their individual accounts also reveal the tension points in perspective they encountered and whether or how these were resolved for them personally.

To this end, over seventy people within the Walden community gave their stories in open-ended interviews lasting for at least an hour and many on multiple occasions. Often with the help of a notetaker, I met in person with interviewees where possible or by phone, Skype, or on Microsoft Teams. Because participants shared their own perspectives, there are some discrepancies in the interpretation of events, but these differences in viewpoint are reported here because they give a more authentic and fuller picture of the complexity of the way things were understood and managed.

Multiple decades ago, when Walden was much smaller, fewer people were engaged with the university, but the years since have and are taking their toll on these participants. Those who could be located and were able to share were included in the study. As time went by, many more people were employed with direct links to Walden or by Walden itself. A selection was chosen from this large pool of possible participants to represent key branches in the organization and to fill out the story. No doubt some important voices were not included but the main story line can nevertheless be told by those who were. The Walden narrative that emerged from the interviews was the result of weaving the individual accounts together and setting them in a context to show how the chronicle of the university took shape over the years.

The delimitations of the story lie in the fact that it focuses on the faculty and academic administrators, that is, their experiences and perspectives. Partners in the business office are a significant part of the story, especially as their work and roles were seen to impact the academic work of the university. No doubt there were important actions taken at the corporate level that shaped the university over the years that may not have been recognized by the faculty. That story remains to be told in fuller terms than is recorded here. Furthermore, participants in the study were chosen from the faculty and from among the academic and business officers but not from the student body, except in a couple of instances. How the students

over the years related to the for-good mission in a for-profit university remains as another study yet to be undertaken in its own right.

About the Author

I joined Walden University in 1995 as a part-time faculty member in the PhD in Education program when Jim Ackerman was owner and notables such as Dave Palmer, Kent Morrison, and Dale Good were the chief academic officers. I was an associate dean when Laureate Education, Inc. took ownership and saw first-hand the impact of big business on the university. I worked with successive presidents, Palmer, Morrison, Paula Peinovich, Jon Kaplan, Cynthia Baum, and Ward Ulmer, and numerous other academic officers. Over the years I have held various full-time administrative positions with the university in the PhD in Education program and the Center for Faculty Excellence. I was named Senior Scholar for several years and the Director of Social Change Initiatives. In 2015, I officially retired and was designated Faculty Emerita but have continued with dissertation committee appointments I had earlier accepted and as a member of the Social Change Advisory Council. In one role or another, I have been with the university for half of its first fifty years and was witness to and participated in numerous developments over this time. I have been personally acquainted and worked with many of the key players in both the business and academic offices and on the faculty.

This obviously gives rise to the possibility of bias in telling the Walden story, something I was very aware of and attempted to check by letting the interviewees speak in their own words in open-ended interviews cited throughout this account verbatim or in close paraphrase. Participants had the opportunity to review what was attributed to them in this report, including their thoughts and actions, to ensure accuracy. I reviewed news reports, university catalogs and handbooks, office memos, research studies and other professional literature, university board and college minutes, governmental reports, and accreditation self-studies and reports, as well as an assortment of other documents collected over the years and accumulated among my computer files to augment the details from the interviews.

I have also been the recipient of numerous awards and grants to support my scholarly endeavors over the years, including a Faculty Research Initiative Grant in 2015 to cover some of the costs of travel and transcriptions for this study. However, there has been no supervision of the study itself or vetting of this report from any department or individual at the university or in the business office. The only exception was that a draft version was submitted to the legal department for review to ensure that no confidential business details had been inadvertently revealed.

Some Conventions

Bruce Francis, summer residency instructor and eventually Vice President for Academic Affairs from the mid-seventies to the early nineties, recalled early conversations about how the faculty should refer to the enrollees in the program: mid-career professionals drawn from education, business, health services, and counselling psychology. "Student" seemed inappropriate and patronizing for these adult learners. "Fellow" did not fit women as well as men. So, "learner" was adopted. In recognition of this early decision and of the active learning that is a hallmark of progressive education, it is the convention used throughout this account.

In the early years, especially when the idea of faculty as co-learners with their mentees was a fundamental teaching-learning arrangement, instructors and learners used first names for each other in their interactions. The intimacy of the early years was largely overwhelmed as the university grew and classes increasingly replaced one-on-one mentoring, so that titles for faculty and administrators were being used more often. However, since this account is drawn from the perspectives of faculty members and administrators and not the learners, participants are referred to by their first names regardless of their roles in the university. Titles are given when context requires.

Through the years, one of the largest minority groups in the faculty and student body has been people of color. In consultation with representatives of this minority on the faculty, I have adopted the word Black rather than African American because it is more descriptive and inclusive in a university with a global view and drawing students from around the world.

These three conventions, calling those enrolled in Walden programs learners, using first names rather than titles among faculty and other officers and at times between instructors and learners, and using the more inclusive term Black rather than African American, can be further justified. In an abbreviated way, they capture some of the essence of what Walden has espoused over the years: an institution with a focus on transforming the lives of all learners by addressing their interests and needs, regardless of differences in origin and experience and empowering them to become agents of change.

CHAPTER 1

A NEW KIND OF UNIVERSITY

From its inception in 1970, the founders planned for Walden to be a different kind of university. Bernard L. "Bernie" Turner, his wife Rita, and their colleagues, including Harold "Bud" Hodgkinson, intended the institution they were establishing to be different in how teaching and learning were undertaken, the learners it recruited, its role in relation to other institutions and society at large, and how it would be financed. In essence, this new university was prepared to cut across educational norms to address an issue it regarded as significant for the betterment of society: the professional development of mid-career professionals, especially those who were blocked for one reason or another from undertaking advanced study. The university catalog for 1982-83 captured, a decade after the founding, this sentiment in a witticism from Henry David Thoreau's *Walden*: "It is time that we had uncommon schools."[1]

For several years in the 1980s, Rita placed another quote from Thoreau in the front matter of the catalog: "I left the woods for as good a reason as I went there. Perhaps it seemed to me that I had several more lives to live and could not spare any more time for that one."[2] In her mind, this quote came as close as anything to a mission statement for the university in its early years.[3] To have many more lives to live is a mission. It proved to be descriptive of the Turners' personal experience and what they hoped would be predictive of the lives of their students. The Thoreau statement is a forward-leaning, developmental view of the human journey, where new things are attempted, and positive change is the driver.

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[1] Henry David Thoreau, *The Illustrated Walden or, Life in the Woods,* (New York: Sterling, 2017 [1854]), 86. Quoted in Walden University Catalog, 1982-83, 1.

[2] Thoreau, *The Illustrated Walden,* 283. The quote appears at least in the Catalogs 1980-81, 1983-84 and 1985-86.

[3] Bernie Turner and Rita Turner, Interview, March 13, 2018.

Several More Lives to Live

Moving from one life to another takes a large measure of courage and self-assurance. For the Turners it seemed the courage and assurance came from the conviction that they must do what they could to promote the common good, as the Turner biographer, Wade Keller, notes.[4] In 1943, Bernie enlisted in the Organized Reserves (precursor to the US Army Reserve) during the Second World War. He was ordered into active military service where he saw fierce and very harrowing action across Europe with the 359th Inf. 90th Division, Patton's Third Army, until he was separated in 1946. The regimental motto, "Carry on,"[5] seems to fit his on-going experience admirably. In his address at the Walden University Commencement many years later, Bernie traced the "roots" of his thinking back to the questions that emerged in his mind from World War II: "How is possible for such tragedies to occur? Good human beings from so many countries—not only our allies, but those we saw as our enemies. Good people, okay?" He did not plan on a future in education, but "the thirst was there" to find answers. "How does a society develop the power to effect change in one fashion or another? That bothered me," he went on. "How do these things happen? Are we just toys to be kicked around? Or do we have potential roles to play?" "So that," he declared, "was the beginning."[6]

Back home, he matriculated at Columbia University with a major in economics with studies also in political science and psychology and, as soon as possible, took a job with the National Industrial Conference Board, collecting information on the cost of living across the country. During his travels, he was increasingly distressed by how workers were being treated as mere assets by the corporations, used or fired or ignored as needed for profit-making. He began graduate studies at the New School for Social

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[4] A full account of the Turners' life and activities from their early years through the establishment of Walden University is given in Wade Keller, *Aspire towards the Highest: Bernie and Rita Turner and the Founding of Walden University* (Marco Island, Florida: Keller Publishing, 2009).

[5] Turner and Turner, Interview, 2018.

[6] Bernie Turner, "The Conceptualization of Walden," Walden University Commencement, July 16, 2005. Published in Keller, *Aspire towards the Highest*, 376-78.

Research when in 1952 he was offered a position as business agent and organizer for the Amalgamated Clothing Workers Union (ACWU). His tasks were twofold: to act as negotiator between workers in the sweat shops and the bosses if there was a problem to be addressed and, the more exciting task for him, to locate and bring unorganized shops into the union. For him, it was "not just a question of [the workers'] ability to avoid being exploited, [but] to know that [they] were entitled to respect."[7] Now he could commit to work that would make a difference in the lives of working people. After the War, he began in earnest to live a new and different life of service. He remained with ACWU for eight years. And all the time, in his mind "the gelling of how a society was functioning got strengthened."[8]

This particular new life certainly took courage and commitment. Many of the unorganized shops were under mob control at the time and confrontation was inevitable. He was strong-armed, got into scuffles, and threatened with a pistol. He and some union members once laid down in front of the wheels of trucks rented to remove the tools from a shop in an effort to save the shop and the jobs it held.[9] On one occasion, the boss took Bernie's jacket while he went to talk with the workers. When he returned the jacket was not fitting properly. He discovered a huge wad of money, "enough to choke a horse," had been stuffed inside the pocket to silence him. Bernie upended one of the bosses into a clothing bin. In dealing with the bosses and their thugs, his experience as a combat infantryman was not wasted.[10]

Rita enrolled at Brooklyn College in 1949 when she was eighteen, even though her parents were aghast. She was determined to do more with her life than continue working as a shop clerk. Her parents could not see the wisdom in this, but she persisted. She soaked up her studies and found her focus on children with learning difficulties and special needs. She supported herself through college with a variety of jobs, sometimes taking time off school to earn enough for the next term, but eventually, she found a teaching position that was highly satisfying for her. In the early post-war

[7] Bernie Turner and Rita Turner, Interview, April 8, 2014

[8] Turner, "The Conceptualization of Walden."

[9] Keller, *Aspire towards the Highest*, 128.

[10] Turner and Turner, Interview, 2014.

years, there was a scarcity of school buildings, so Rita's first classes used the space available on a rotation. This left time in the school day when she was not able to use the room, so Rita could work individually with the children on their reading skills. Even under these straitened conditions, she was determined that while she and her third graders were together it would be a warm and welcoming environment, where learning could be fun. She participated in an independent living program of wilderness training and park maintenance with fifth graders: an early encounter with the effectiveness of an educational experiment "in organizing and implementing an unusual program for the betterment of the children," Rita wrote.[11] In these encounters at the beginning of her career, she experienced for herself the influence of humane and caring relationships on learning and the power of a creative alternative to traditional approaches to teaching. Later, she would complete her master's degree at City College of New York and take a position as a reading specialist for lower performing students on Long Island, challenging but professionally rewarding work where she could expand her skills and seek solutions in innovative ways to meet the needs of her learners.[12]

Meanwhile, in a student haunt on the Columbia University campus, Bernie's eyes fell on "this incredibly beautiful woman" and for Rita, catching sight of Bernie "was like instant glue."[13] They were married December 26, 1954, and thus began a combined lifetime committed to home, learning, and many dimensions of change making. Rita continued her studies, becoming even more interested in the psychometric movement of the day and began doctoral studies until she took time off to raise her family. With home responsibilities, Bernie moved out of the rough and tumble and occasional violence of union organizing into elementary school teaching where he taught up to sixth grade for fourteen years. He also worked as an adjunct professor at Hofstra University, teaching foundations of education courses.[14]

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[11] Keller, *Aspire towards the Highest*, 104.

[12] Ibid., 119-126.

[13] Ibid., 108.

[14] Ibid, 129.

While teaching and raising a young family, Bernie and Rita were active in the current social justice movements—peace, ecumenism, civil rights, religious rights, unions, open housing—with small deeds and large and always with strong convictions. Rita summed up their activism with the witticism: "We were constantly, it seemed, involved in all the goings-on of the era. … [W]e were always doing things at hand, you know—if something needed a hand, we'd do that."[15] Their daughter Amy described her father as someone who "had his mission and that mission was to make the world a better place, and whatever it took to do that, he was all in." Consequently, he was often deep in thought, and she recalled many nights when he would not be able to sleep. The family would ask him what was keeping him up. "I'm just worried about the world," was his standard reply. "I'm just worried." He carried this concern for the world at large all his life.[16]

On their way to Raleigh, North Carolina in 1964 with a one-year scholarship for Bernie to study, the family stopped along the way for coffee at a cafe with a sign in the window declaring, "No Blacks Allowed." This was during the time when activists from the north had been travelling south to support Black voters and some of these visitors had recently been killed. Without hesitating, Rita, a white woman, marched in for her coffee. "Haven't you heard about the new law?" she asked the owner. Bernie gave her a nudge and when she later questioned him about that, he said, "We have a little car with very slow capacity to move!"[17]

The college they were headed for was primarily an all-Black institution where they were the only white family ever to live on campus. They felt that they and their children would be less at risk living on-campus than elsewhere. One day, Rita invited the other families to join her for a bowling party in town. She went straight to the manager of the alley to tell him what she was planning. "Why do you want to be doing that?" he demanded. "Well, you know, it is their right to go bowling." So, she added, we went bowling, for the first time.[18] When she took the children of Black faculty

[15] Turner and Turner, Interview, 2014.
[16] Amy Turner, Interview, September 19, 2020.
[17] Turner and Turner, Interview, 2014.
[18] Ibid.

members with her children to the public swimming pool, everybody else left. On another occasion, a teenager with something that could have been a knife gleaming in his hand confronted Rita. Not knowing what else to do she went up to him and started chatting, figuring that if they talked, he might be less threatening. The gleaming object disappeared.[19] A keen sense of social justice combined with the courage to act on behalf of others had become a habit.

Their activism was not merely knee-jerk activity but instead was founded on two significant bases. First, critical thinking allowed them to think unconventionally, to probe, and to raise troubling questions and look for deeper answers. For effective social change, Bernie was clear: the role of critical thinking is vital in analyzing social institutions and social norms and in determining where and what kind of change might be needed.[20] He enjoyed the back and forth of a critical analysis of both sides of an argument.

The second basis of the Turners' social change activism was establishing an informed understanding of both society and change. This is essential, they believed, because one needs to have some sense of how society operates and how it can be changed if it is going to be changed. Bernie's ideas were influenced by the writings of Émile Durkheim, Robert McIver, Karl Marx, and other commentators who had theorized about social causation, alienation, and the cyclical nature of power and control in societies. Although these writers might be "old timers" (to use Bernie's label), he believed they could throw light on the contemporary problems such as the uneven distribution of power and wealth.[21] He kept a copy of a paper he wrote as a student. It was a response to the writing of Durkheim and was entitled: "Macro-Social Change: A Variation on a Theme."[22] In this paper he explored Durkheim's idea of *anomie*, a state in which previous norms in society or those prized by individuals no longer held. Bernie applied this concept to the steps one might take to effect social change: identify and then

[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Bernie Turner, "Macro-Social Change: A Variation on a Theme," unpublished paper.