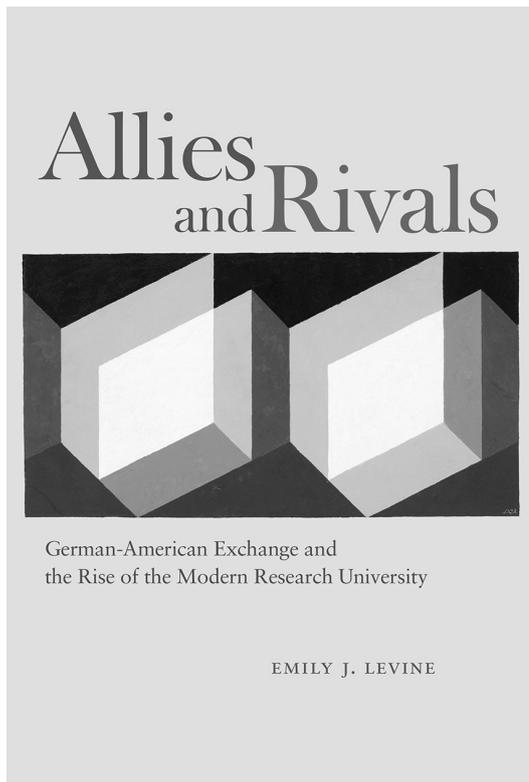




INTERVIEW WITH EMILY J. LEVINE



You chronicle a moment of interchange and competition between America and Germany. What were some links across the two countries and the figures you chronicle that were particularly surprising?

I was particularly drawn to the stories of Martha Carey Thomas, the second president of Bryn Mawr, and the black sociologist W.E.B. Du Bois, both of whom studied in Germany and used their German graduate education to advance their own careers and their broader educational reform agendas. What was surprising is that like most people, I knew mostly of the stories of those American visiting students to Germany who were male, white, and Protestant, but what was clear from my research was that many industrious and resourceful women, blacks, and Jews used the openings they found, before the system that hardened into its social hierarchies and structures. Their resulting innovations, the first PhD granting women's college Bryn Mawr, and the Atlanta Seminars, raised the profile of women's education and black education and ultimately changed the shape of the field at large. Far from being on the margins, Jews, women, and blacks, have played a profound role in the long historical cycle of institutional innovation.

You memorably describe the opening of Johns Hopkins University under Daniel Coit Gilman as conceptualized as a "Göttingen at Baltimore." In our age of the "global university" and many university outposts in different countries, what can this history tell us about how universities have always existed globally as well as locally? How does exchange shape innovation?

All global universities have conditions of possibility that are local in origin. Whether Göttingen in 18th century Germany or Stanford in the 1960s, they are both the result of their time and place, and become globally renowned because they transcend their time and place. The irony of exchanging ideas is that visitors to these institutions aim to take what they experience there and then recreate it elsewhere. This is what Daniel Coit Gilman meant when he said in Cleveland, for example, that it too, could create a "Göttingen" in its city. But this fact—this potential adaptation at home—also raises the stakes of that knowledge exchange because it means that one's most important collaborators are also one's fiercest future competitors.

Could you explain the particular significance of the relation between German and US education systems in the development of the research university we know today?

In the 19th century nearly 10,000 Americans traveled to Germany to study in German research universities. In the 20th century American universities led the world. American reformers did this by combining the German graduate school with the English liberal arts model to create a hybrid institution that we know as today's modern research university. The cooperative and competitive relationship among German and American reformers who innovated these systems tells us something, both about these emerging empires that were vying for world power at the turn of the 20th century, but also about what makes knowledge advance and universities evolve—that it requires the open exchange of ideas, even with one's potential rivals.



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Who is a figure you found particularly interesting or revelatory in your research?

Abraham Flexner is a particularly revealing figure for he had his hands in so many reforms from the professionalization of the field of medicine, resulting from the Flexner Report, published in 1910, to the founding of the Institute for Advanced Study, which opened in 1933. His efforts to found a pure German-style research institute in Princeton, NJ coincided with Hitler's rise to power and the largest exodus of scholars the world ever created and he offered many of the most elite of them, including Albert Einstein and Erwin Panofsky, positions at the Institute. Though a Jew himself Flexner vowed this move was more driven by the desire to give America a leg up in the international scientific competition than out of any humanitarian concerns. Did Flexner tout the economic and scientific benefits of hiring refugees to avoid fanning the flames of antisemitism when his heart really lay with the Jews? Or did he really prioritize the aspiration of U.S. scientific hegemony and used hard-off refugees to get closer to that goal? It's difficult through the thicket of history (and even today) to identify genuine motives. But what's interesting to me is that Flexner's ability to speak to different audiences and reach many constituents was a mark of a successful academic entrepreneur one shared from the ur-German university founder Wilhelm von Humboldt through the post-war creator of the University of California system Clark Kerr.

What does looking at this moment in education between and including the two world wars show us about how universities respond to moments of crisis and speak to how we might move forward following this COVID-19 moment?

An excavation of particular historical moments reveals that universities have used crises to recover a sense of their public good. This was the case following the Napoleonic invasion when the King of Prussia created a new institution that was given an unprecedented amount of autonomy in exchange for serving the state—the University of Berlin. And it was the case at the height of the American Civil War, when the Morrill Act of 1862 brought into existence land-grant institutions with the public mission of educating mechanics and farmers across the country. In the years following World War I and the 1918 flu pandemic, innovators developed alternative models of higher learning that refined their social mission from adult education (the New School, 1919) to teaching (Black Mountain College, 1933). And following World War II the GI Bill was passed further widening access of higher learning, not only in America, but through similar post-war programs around the world.

From a historical perspective, a pattern emerges: Once a contract was exhausted, academic entrepreneurs found new partners, formulated new ideas, and established new institutions—sometimes outside the university. What will become of March 2020 is not yet clear. But what is clear is that in the recovery, universities will have the opportunity to recraft what higher education offers as a public good. It is my hope that this book contributes to this project!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Emily J. Levine is associate professor of education and (by courtesy) history at Stanford University. She is also the author of *Dreamland of Humanists*, published by Chicago in 2013.

Join Emily for a virtual launch event for *Allies and Rivals* on September 23 at Noon Eastern, hosted by Book Culture and Goethe Institut New York. She will be in conversation with Till van Rahden and Jennifer Ratner-Rosenhagen. Register at bookculture.com/upcoming-events.

