

## THE ONE-UNIVERSITY IDEA AND ITS FUTURES

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### ABSTRACT

The University of California, the nation's first multicampus system, is unique in its central organizing principle, known as the one-university idea. Its premise is simple: that a large and decentralized system of campuses, which share the same mission but differ in size, interests, aspirations, and stage of development, can nevertheless be governed as a single university. Long regarded as a major structural reason for the UC system's rise to pre-eminence among public research universities, the one-university model has been a unifying administrative and cultural ethos within UC for more than 80 years. Today it represents a striking counterpoint to current theories of multicampus university governance that argue for ever-greater campus independence and hybrid public-private models to address the serious financial plight facing public research universities. Does it have a future in the era of disruptive innovation? The story of its origin and evolution suggests several points about governance and organizational reform in universities. Institutional redesign is rarely an impartial contest among rational alternatives. It is the product not only of financial and other external pressures but also of institutional conflicts, personal rivalries, temporary interests, and the irresistible urge to rectify the mistakes of predecessors. Actual reform in universities comes with a history, and UC's experience offers its own context for today's national debate about multicampus systems and new paradigms of university governance and organization.

**Keywords:** One University, Governance, University of California, Multicampus Systems.

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When the Great Recession of 2008 flattened state budgets around the country, it accelerated a long downward spiral in public support of higher education to historic new lows. The pain has been spread throughout public colleges and universities; some states have slashed funding per student by as much as 40 percent. This sea change in fiscal realities has coincided with a growing chorus of criticism aimed at American higher education. Clayton Christensen and Henry Eyring's *The Innovative University* argues that higher education's DNA must be changed "from the inside out"; Michael Crow and William Dabars's *Designing the New American University* sees research universities as mired in incremental change when the times call for radical reform. They are just two examples of a rising tide of books, papers, and other expressions of discontent with the current state of university organization and governance.

A longer-term backdrop for this trend is a shift in thinking about public organizations. Analyses of the university, in the form of administrative models and practices, have come increasingly from business schools rather than from political science, sociology, philosophy, or other academic disciplines.<sup>1</sup> The term *strategy*, once used almost exclusively to refer to war, crept into the lexicon of business in the 1970s<sup>2</sup> and is now ubiquitous in writings about academic institutions. Christensen's theory of disruptive innovation has reinforced the message that strategic behavior is as essential to public universities as it is to private companies: adapt or be displaced. American universities are not just underfunded but outmoded, menaced by powerful new rivals like for-profit and online education, and in need of fundamental reinvention if they are to survive in the teeming higher-education marketplace. It is as if thinking about higher education is recapitulating the deregulatory history of American business in the past thirty or forty years, with its emphasis on perfect markets and the damage inflicted by the state's restraining hand.

The combination of fiscal austerity and a proclivity for business and economic models of university organization has made multicampus systems, where most public research universities are housed, a special target. Now just shy of a century old, these systems have served political, budgetary, and educational ends. Early planners, economists, and legislators hailed their many structural advantages. They were a way of curbing local ambitions for expensive new campuses or redundant professional schools; they helped balance political power in the state; they were large enough to embrace a variety of academic programs

and services to meet the needs of the states and the nation, and to offer a large intellectual world for students who could navigate them. Higher-education systems had their share of criticism, especially during the 1960s, for their bureaucracies, their impersonality, and (especially at research campuses) large classes and lagging faculty interest in undergraduate education. But when American colleges and universities faced the demographic prospect of alarming declines in student numbers in the early 1970s, the advantages of systems came to the fore once again. Economist Kenneth Boulding argued that large institutions were the most likely to weather retrenchment successfully.<sup>3</sup> A 1975 report for the Carnegie Council on Policy Studies in Higher Education concluded that in an adverse environment, multicampus systems enjoyed two important strengths: a governance structure flexible enough to accommodate changing circumstances, and the adaptive resiliency of size.<sup>4</sup>

Times have changed. In Oregon, Wisconsin, and elsewhere conflicts over issues of independence and control have surfaced within public university systems, and between systems and governors and legislators.<sup>5</sup> Along with these conflicts has come a new focus on how multicampus systems operate, especially their shortcomings in the face of the challenges of sustaining academic quality in the aftermath of public disinvestment. Public research universities, which educate 3.8 million students annually, have seen massive cuts in state funding over the past decade that average 34 percent nationwide.<sup>6</sup> Various reform measures have been proposed to make them less dependent on public funding and more entrepreneurial, virtually all centered on system organization and governance.

Although the University of California, the nation's first multicampus system, shares many of the problems that beset other US systems, the discussion at UC is shaped by two special organizational characteristics. It is unusual among multicampus universities in that all ten campuses share the same research and public service mission. It is unique in that it functions under an organizing principle known as the "one-university" idea, which dates back to the 1930s. This paper will discuss institutional reform at the University of California in the context of the one-university idea and recent challenges to its relevance today.<sup>7</sup> At UC and other research universities, the struggle to adapt is not just about financial stress but about universities' understanding of what kind of institutions they are and should be.

### **A. One University: Origins and Evolution**

The premise of the one-university idea is simple: that a large and decentralized system of campuses, which share the same mission but differ in size, interests, aspirations, and stage of development, can nevertheless be governed as a single university, with a chancellor responsible for each campus and a president responsible for the university as a whole. It operates through a constantly shifting balance of centralization and decentralization, combining (with varying degrees of success) authority at the center with considerable independence on the campuses.

The one-university principle became a defining concept in the 1930s, thanks to the charismatic UC president Robert Gordon Sproul, who was worried about the tide of regionalism sweeping across California. He feared that local political pressures from the growing southern part of the state would split the University into two separate institutions, one at Berkeley and one at Los Angeles. In a message he took far and wide around the state, Sproul proclaimed that the University might be geographically scattered up and down California, but it was nonetheless impossible to think of it as anything but one undivided center of learning. Removal of any part would destroy the integrity of the whole.

Aside from the political utility of this argument—which served the University well, thanks to Sproul's imposing presence and forceful rhetoric—he found the one-university idea a compelling rationale for institutional centralization. Within the University, Sproul fought against what he described as "local prides and prejudices," loyalty to an individual campus that could submerge a vital sense of connection to the larger university of which it was a part. During his long tenure (1930-58) Sproul consistently resisted sharing administrative authority with campus officials, even as the University grew in size and complexity, along with the pressures on the president. His grasp of detail was impressive but administratively sclerotic in its effects; the last budget he submitted to the Regents as president was a line-item document that ran to more than a thousand pages and included the names and salaries of every single University employee.<sup>8</sup> It was not until 1952 that the Regents—against his wishes—established the position of chancellor at the University's two main campuses at the time, Berkeley and UCLA.

Clark Kerr, who had served as Berkeley's first chancellor in the teeth of Sproul's opposition to the very idea of chancellors, came to office as president in 1958 with an entirely new blueprint for the University of California. With some justice, he described the monumental changes he ushered in as "the first major reorganization in [UC's] history."<sup>9</sup>

It was a phased remaking of the University to prepare it for the explosive growth of the 1960s, and it proceeded in a number of iterations that stretched over eight years, from 1958 to 1966. The first step was a series of delegations of authority from the Regents to the president, clarifying his executive responsibilities and establishing him as the only administrative officer reporting directly to the Board of Regents.<sup>10</sup> Next was a series of redelegations from the president to the chancellors, whose effect was to

designate them as chief executive officers and end what had long been the involvement of systemwide vice presidents in day-to-day campus administrative affairs. Chancellors and campuses were henceforth to be responsible for developing academic, physical development, and fiscal plans, along with a capital outlay program and operating budget, that would reflect their different characters, styles, and aspirations. These, in turn, would become the basis for the University of California's "comprehensive and meaningful plans which will best serve the people of California and the world of scholarship." The outcome of this re-engineering, in Kerr's eyes, was to transform the highly centralized university from a "consolidated nation-state" to a strong "federation" of campuses.

Sproul knew all about the imminent challenges of growth. Why did he resist reform for so long? In Kerr's 2001-3 memoir, he speculated that his predecessor's excessive reliance on centralization sprang from two fears. First, that decentralization would end UC's existence as one university. Second, that it would ultimately result in "a move from a regental-presidential administration to a regental-presidential-chancellorial administration that, under pressure from the chancellors, could evolve into a regental-chancellorial administration, cutting out the president and threatening the concept, which Sproul so strongly supported, of 'one university.'"<sup>11</sup>

Sproul had wedded the one-university principle to centralization; Kerr divorced them. But he retained the one-university idea and even gave it a halo of constitutional legitimacy: "There will continue to be one University of California as provided in the Constitution of the State of California," he wrote.<sup>12</sup> He also continued, although in his very different and characteristically low-key way, the ceremonial and symbolic role that his extroverted predecessor had carried out with such unflagging enthusiasm.

Kerr's reorganization was to be one in which "administrative decentralization can be implemented within the context of a coordinated and integrated system in which each campus is strengthened and sustained by its membership within the greater University community." In this new world, chancellors had full executive power and authority for managing their campuses. Kerr's successor, Charles J. Hitch, wrote in 1968 that the decentralization of operating authority to the campuses was "virtually complete," along with "much of the initiative in planning."<sup>13</sup> The president, liberated from Sproul's global responsibilities, was free to concentrate on his role as the University's chief executive officer. In this capacity, the president appointed chancellors and reviewed campus performance; assembled its budget, presented it to the Regents, the governor, and the legislature, and ultimately decided on its allocation among the campuses; established top-level policy; and set the University's direction as a system.

By the time Kerr's reform agenda had been achieved in the mid-1960s, the one-university principle united old and new elements and meant the following:

- An array of campuses with the same teaching, research, and public service mission, the same expectation of high student potential and exceptional faculty performance, and the same opportunity for younger and smaller campuses to ultimately rise to the level of Berkeley and UCLA;
- A president who acts as the chief executive officer in managing the system, speaks on behalf of the university as a whole, and ensures the accountability of the University to the Regents and the people of California;
- Chancellors who act as the chief executive officers of their campuses, within policies set by the Regents or the president;
- A single State budget for the entire University, allocated to campuses by the president;
- An academic senate delegated responsibility over academic matters, consisting of individual campus senates and a systemwide body, made up of representatives from each campus;
- Uniform standards of undergraduate admission and tuition throughout the system, reflecting a commitment to the same high-quality UC education for students on every campus.
- Uniform policies related to faculty hiring and advancement overseen and administered by the Academic Senate in collaboration with top academic administrative leaders. The role of the Academic Senate, in these and other areas—review of new academic programs, for example—has been of major importance in the history of the one-university principle.

The one-university concept also became an organizational answer to the centrifugal forces in a growing multicampus system, a framework for balancing cooperation and competition among campuses, and a means of cultivating academic quality in new and old campuses alike. David Saxon, UC president during harsh budget times in the 1970s and 1980s, argued that this third dimension of the one-university idea was not a merely rhetorical statement. Managing a large and decentralized system as a single university meant that every campus that followed Berkeley into the University shared the same legacy and set of expectations. The UC system's "endemic excellence," confirmed by a succession of national studies, was the result of the one-university idea, not as a rarefied ideal but as an "operational principle . . . seriously intended and scrupulously applied":

Berkeley provided the initial inspiration for the other campuses. It set the norm, defined the standards, acted as a monitor and served as a challenge. Berkeley faculty and staff furnished expert assistance to the newer campuses. Berkeley demonstrated that absolute academic distinction actually could be achieved in a public university. When I came to the Los Angeles campus [in 1947] as a faculty member, it was because I was confident that ultimately the Berkeley heritage would assure a similar level of quality at UCLA. That confidence has been justified, and UCLA in turn has joined Berkeley as an example and a source of quality for the campuses that have followed.<sup>14</sup>

A major goal of his administration, he added, was to “retain and to extend and develop endemic excellence . . . throughout the University of California.” This assumption has guided University policy from the establishment of three additional campuses in the 1960s to the founding of the newest, UC Merced, in 2005.

Nonetheless, from the beginning the one-university principle lacked neither problems nor critics. As an administrative means of knitting the University into a single strong fabric, centralization—Sproul’s operational version of the one-university idea—ran into pockets of resistance from several directions. Faculty at Berkeley, the founding campus, continued to believe that Berkeley was the university and the rest, including UCLA, were outliers. UCLA, Berkeley’s potential rival, did not fail to notice its second-tier status. Defusing the tensions between the two was one of Sproul’s “most persistent problems,” according to his biographer, George A. Pettitt, who relates that Sproul, in a moment of frustration, once offered to resign if his leadership “seemed irreparably tainted” by his Berkeley degree.<sup>15</sup>

In similar fashion, the internal effects of Kerr’s decentralizing revolution on the relationship between the Office of the President and the campuses had a few seemingly paradoxical outcomes. At UCLA, a chancellor he appointed in 1960, Franklin Murphy, challenged his authority regularly, despite the campus’s newfound opportunities for self-determination.<sup>16</sup> In 1965, a committee of the UC Board of Regents commissioned Jerome Byrne, a Los Angeles attorney, to investigate and report to the Regents on the causes of student unrest. His report focused heavily on UC governance. It argued that the University should be reorganized as a system of separately chartered universities with a president whose role should be merged with that of the chair of the Board of Regents, which consisted primarily of presiding over Regents’ meetings. Although the report retained a few aspects of the president’s traditional role, Kerr felt that the commonwealth of independent universities it envisioned left no room for real presidential authority. The Regents declined to act on the report’s recommendations, but Kerr always suspected that the UCLA chancellor had a role in its genesis. He concluded in his 2001 memoir that he should have been more attentive to this failed attempt at presidential nullification as a bellwether of things to come.<sup>17</sup>

At Berkeley, not all of Kerr’s organizational and governance initiatives turned out to be popular. His enthusiastic advocacy of the other campuses was sometimes interpreted as slighting Berkeley’s academic superiority. Many on that campus felt it lost ground as a result of changes Kerr introduced or ratified. One was the shift to the quarter system, which by and large the faculty did not want and felt forced to adopt.<sup>18</sup> Another involved the reorganization of the Academic Senate. During Sproul’s time, it had existed as two divisions, northern and southern.<sup>19</sup> In recognition of the coming addition of three new campuses at Santa Cruz, Irvine, and San Diego, the Academic Senate, after lengthy debate, voted in December 1962 to replace the Northern and Southern divisions with a universitywide assembly of representatives from all the UC campuses. Kerr gave public support to this move, which the Berkeley faculty accepted only reluctantly.<sup>20</sup>

The resentment these actions aroused intensified when the 1964 Free Speech Movement at Berkeley pitted the chancellor, Edward Strong, against President Kerr, the campus against the Office of the President. For a number of Berkeley faculty, he came to represent a cascade of undesirable change that consolidated into lingering anti-system feeling.<sup>21</sup> In 1975, the Office of the President convened a committee of campus representatives to discuss the appropriate balance between centralization and decentralization within the University. Its members voiced concerns of one kind or another about how that balance should be struck. According to a written account of the meeting, the Berkeley representative objected to any further centralization on the grounds that UCB “has suffered as a result of the growth of the 9-campus system and proposals for further centralization will be further injurious.”<sup>22</sup>

Then and now, dissonance over system organization appears to vary by campus size and age. Younger and smaller campuses are more likely to see the gains involved in system membership—and thus the support, administrative and otherwise, the Office of the President can offer. Berkeley and UCLA have always been the most likely to feel the disadvantages and to push for greater independence. They have the most extensive networks of alumni, donors, and business contacts, a larger research presence and thus more revenue and opportunities for innovative experimentation, and more public awareness of their quality and worldwide influence. Their restlessness with various forms of oversight is among the system’s ongoing historical tensions.

## B. One University Today

Fifty years on from the successes and discords of the Kerr revolution, what is the status of the one-university idea? It is the cultural dimension of the one-university principle, its power as an institutional ethos that has had the deepest and most lasting effects. In their book on the emergence of American research universities, Hugh Davis Graham and Nancy Diamond note how large a departure it has been from the usual practice among state systems of favoring the flagship campus and shielding it from competition.<sup>23</sup> David Saxon's "operational principle . . . seriously intended and scrupulously applied" has been a model for creating campuses and programs of high academic quality while allowing broad access across the system. Graham and Diamond cite the extraordinarily consistent academic excellence among UC campuses, and the "astonishing" speed with which smaller campuses have risen to national prominence. The campuses have the one-university principle to thank for that.

Its strength as a political strategy remains impressive. I. Michael Heyman, Berkeley chancellor in the 1980s, once remarked that the goal of every chancellor is independence, but if Berkeley had not been part of a system during the long political turbulence of the 1960s it would have been decimated. The University of California is more fortunate than most public higher-education systems in having constitutional autonomy, which has shielded it from the kind of political battles that have engulfed the University of Wisconsin, for example, where the legislature recently voted to remove tenure protection from state law. The UC system's presence as ten campuses throughout California is an important safeguard where institutional independence and other critical issues are concerned, especially in a state in which laws are routinely made and unmade through the initiative process.

The symbolic role of the president has waned. Its high tide was during Sproul's administration, when he employed it adroitly within the University to reinforce his one-university message. Like Theodore Roosevelt, the first U.S. president to stride across the field during halftime at the Army-Navy game in a show of equal support for both rivals, Sproul made a ceremonial walk at the yearly football contest between Berkeley and UCLA. He used universitywide events—the All-University Faculty Conference for faculty and the California Club for students are two examples—as devices to build a sense of community throughout the University. Along with the annual universitywide celebration of UC's founding on Charter Day, which was discontinued in the 1980s, these are now history.<sup>24</sup> Public investiture ceremonies, with their academic processions and symbolic reaffirmation of academic values, still take place for chancellors, but there has been no public presidential inauguration in more than twenty years.

The University's budget from the State of California—once so central to the concept of one university and the role of the president—is now distributed largely by formula. Under reforms adopted in 2008 and 2011, intended to give campuses more flexibility and to bring more transparency to the allocation process, each campus is returned the revenues it generates—among them indirect costs related to research, patent revenue, and tuition.<sup>25</sup> State money is now distributed on the basis of a weighted formula intended to create equal support per student across the system. The president still retains the ability to set aside funds from the State budget for systemwide initiatives or special purposes before the campus allocations are made. But the magnitude of this transfer of budgetary control from the center to campuses exceeds anything contemplated under the one-university idea.<sup>26</sup>

## C. Reform Scenarios

The one-university concept still prevails within the University of California, but it has not gone unchallenged in the fiscally troubled years since 2008. Calls for reform within the University echo criticisms of struggling multicampus systems elsewhere. Aims McGuinness, an expert in the governance and organization of American higher education systems, points to three sources of discontent behind the post-2008 upsurge in demands for greater campus autonomy within a number of multicampus systems: a sense that the system board of trustees is too distant from what is going on at its constituent campuses; the conviction that as the state's financial investment withers, so should its role as a regulator and overseer; and the obstacles system organization presents to local control and the freedom to search out new sources of revenue.<sup>27</sup> These are exactly the issues that have been raised in several papers advocating governance and organizational change at the University of California.

One such reform plan, for example, argues for "modified self-sufficiency" in which UC would become a "quasi-governmental" rather than a state agency. Under this hybrid public-private arrangement, the University would no longer be supported with public funds but through the negotiation of rolling five-year contracts with the State of California. In exchange for release from various State controls, the campuses would provide services—education, research, and other activities—for an agreed-upon sum. These contracts could be entered into by the entire University of California, by groups of campuses working within UC, or by some campuses that would become "quasi-independent" of the UC system. With appropriate UC approvals, the hybrid model could also be an option for "schools, colleges, or other intracampus organizations."<sup>28</sup>

Another advocates the creation of campus boards that would be delegated authority to act on such matters as campus enrollment, tuition and fees, and capital projects. The University of California is governed by a 26-member Board of Regents that meets six times a year to consider an agenda set by the president. Current Regents would be assigned, in groups of two or

three, to one of these new campus boards, which would include the chancellor of the campus in question and other campus and community representatives. The president, the governor, and the lieutenant governor—all ex-officio Regents—could attend any campus board meetings they wish, but would have no vote. The plan calls for campus boards to meet six times a year, the full Board of Regents perhaps four times a year. Given the considerable amount of time Regents would spend on campus boards and the circumscribed role these bodies assign to the UC president, this represents a significant devolution of regental governance from the universitywide to the campus level. The rationale for this proposal is that the withdrawal of State support, the “uniqueness of individual campuses,” and the need to respond to the complexities of today’s higher-education environment require local action and innovation.<sup>29</sup>

A third UC analysis treats the same problem from the perspective of public flagship universities. Drawing on the history of public university system governance, it argues—quoting Hugh Davis Graham—that “the strength of American education has flowed from its competitive diversity, which has been nurtured by decentralized systems of control and campus-focused structures of governance,” not from systemwide governing bodies like the UC Board of Regents. And “even within the University of California, arguably the most successful university system in the United States, leading campuses have become restless with the lock-step constraints of the system office.” The environment demands entrepreneurial universities, which “to be truly entrepreneurial . . . need to be liberated from state and system controls.”<sup>30</sup>

#### D. Points of Contention

I am calling these and similar proposals *economic models* of university organization for two reasons, neither of which is intended to imply a lack of attention to academic values. First, their explicit aim is to shape a governance architecture designed to respond to the budgetary hardship UC faces in common with many other research universities. Second, the solutions they propose are strongly influenced by a conception of the university as a participant in the marketplace—perhaps forced into the marketplace by circumstances, but a participant nonetheless. In the UC context, the proponents of economic models might also claim their reforms are part—some would say a natural culmination—of UC’s tradition of decentralization and devolution of authority to chancellors and campuses. They make a case for weaknesses in the University’s structure that argue for greater local control. But the economic model also obscures, by omission, certain strengths of that structure.

The first is the role of the president. As a more or less natural outcome of their argument for maximizing campus autonomy, for the most part the president vanishes in these critiques, much as in the 1965 Byrne report. Yet the president’s role is pivotal in the UC system.

One of the powerful ways in which UC presidents have exercised their executive authority over the University is by setting the agenda for the Board of Regents’ meetings, making recommendations about important issues, priorities, and policies the University will pursue. These recommendations are typically finalized only after consultation with chancellors, the Academic Senate, and other members of the University community, and what the president puts before the Regents usually represents a synthesis or consensus of these various views.<sup>31</sup> Usually, but not necessarily: the president’s recommendations also represent his or her considered judgment, as the University’s chief executive officer, about the best course of action for the University as a whole.

In 1993, in response to a Regent who had suggested that the systemwide administration was just “one of several constituencies which seeks to influence [the Board of Regents’] decision-making,”<sup>32</sup> President Jack Peltason described what the president’s delegated authority as chief executive officer means under shared governance:

The administration—and this is true of the Academic Senate—is not just one of many constituencies, but is the Board of Regents’ *chosen and publicly designated agent* in whom it has vested confidence and to whom it has delegated responsibility to manage the University. . . . [For the Board to say it considers these recommendations as merely one among several competing recommendations from various constituencies] would radically undermine the authority of its officers and make it extraordinarily difficult for them to bring tough or controversial recommendations. Such a method of governing would not work in the best of times [*italics in original*].<sup>33</sup>

It is through this role that the UC president influences the development and sets the direction of the system, and the reason the deliberations of the Board of Regents are more than serial discussions of individual campus issues. Presidential leadership, perhaps better described as presidential action on issues with universitywide implications and on planning for the future, is the way the University has reconciled the one-university principle with an institutional commitment to decentralization and campus independence. As former UC president David Gardner puts it, the president “holds the single position within the University that is accountable for the totality of its endeavors.”<sup>34</sup> A weak president puts the University at greater risk externally, more vulnerable to the vagaries of state politics and less able to lead in California’s tripartite system of public higher education.

Sheldon Rothblatt, who knew Clark Kerr, writes that he struggled to define the nature of university leadership over the years, and that his definitions changed with the decades. This may be why he sometimes talked about the UC president's administrative role in a way that seems curiously at odds with his practice. Martin Trow, who was also personally acquainted with Kerr, called attention to this in a discussion of academic leadership. Although American university presidents had, and exercised, much more authority than their European counterparts, Trow said, Kerr consistently understated his own, describing the multicampus university head as "mostly a mediator," when in fact Kerr himself was much more: someone who "had an enormous impact on the institutions that he led [the Berkeley campus and UC]."<sup>35</sup> Trow concluded that Kerr's analysis reflected his view that "successful presidents have learned the trick of exercising authority without appearing to do so—to lead while appearing to follow, or facilitate, or mediate, or coordinate."<sup>36</sup>

Kerr's final statement on leadership, however, dealt with the role of the UC president and was quite explicit. It is to act "as chief executive of the university, as chief advisor to the Board of Regents and to the chancellors, as chief representative to the regents of faculty concerns, as chief representative of the university to the people of the state, as chief planner of new academic endeavors, as chief reviewer of campus performances, and as chief leader of one university."<sup>37</sup>

A second assumption of many economic models is that universitywide structures are somehow inimical to campus interests, and that those interests differ so dramatically they cannot be reconciled. Kerr recognized that a weakness of federal systems like UC is that they create new opportunities for antagonism: "campus versus campus; and campuses versus central authority. The public system is the most likely, internally, to experience a breakdown of mutual respect and mutual restraint."<sup>38</sup>

Yet all public university campuses, including the University of California's, live in a world in which political, legal, and other realities make collective strategies and centralized solutions wise, at times imperative. Campuses gain from membership in a system, for example, when governors and state legislators, federal officials, auditors, regulators, and angry citizens take complaints, demands, and blame to the system president—as they regularly do. This is a form of protection invisible on campus until a crisis or controversy looms.

There are internal advantages to system organization. UC's Office of the General Counsel eliminates the expense of ten separate legal offices on the campuses.<sup>39</sup> Collective bargaining, another systemwide responsibility, offers the same advantage. Both ensure the University has consistent representation and universitywide positions on issues that are important and sometimes highly contentious. The University's retirement program, managed by the Office of the President, is still among the most generous in the country and its benefits are the same across every campus. Perhaps the most tangible benefit of membership in the UC system is its credit rating, which is far better than that of any single campus. Thanks to its collective size and assets, the UC system has just issued its second hundred-year bond, a financial instrument that provides funding for long-term goals and repayment at a low rate over the course of a century. Campuses are currently using some of the proceeds to address deferred maintenance.

The Office of the President is a third point of contention. There is nothing unusual about disagreements between campuses and system offices. Most are resolved or overtaken by more pressing issues. But something more fundamental has been at work within the UC system over the past eight or nine years. UCOP has been the object of considerable scrutiny and several reports have questioned its organization and performance and stressed the need to clarify its mission.<sup>40</sup>

These reports have raised some familiar issues about the division of labor between UCOP and the campuses and the importance of further decentralization. The question of mission is a newer issue. Historically, the role of the Office of the President has been to support the president in his or her executive responsibility for managing the University of California. Central to that role have been universitywide policy, coordination, and oversight to ensure campus and University accountability to the Regents and the State. In the wake of the reports on UCOP, however, there have been signs of a growing shift in perception toward the Office of the President as primarily a provider of services of various kinds. It is likely that some of the budget reforms—including moving the source of UCOP's funding from the State budget to an assessment on each campus—have encouraged this perception. This was illustrated a few years ago when a UC San Francisco chancellor proposed to pay for certain services from UCOP but otherwise operate the campus more or less independently of the UC system. There were special campus circumstances in this case, no formal recommendation was ever made, and nothing further came of it. But the strictly customer-provider tenor of the proposal was strikingly inconsistent with the president's, and UCOP's, longstanding mandate for overseeing campus performance and compliance with universitywide policy.

A persistent, underlying difficulty in defining the right balance among UCOP's various responsibilities is that, for all the influence it exercises within the University, the Office of the President faces an asymmetrical situation: no one speaks on its behalf. When

controversy strikes, chancellors defend their campuses, the Senate defends the faculty, and everyone is at liberty to criticize the Office of the President. Jack Peltason described this phenomenon as the hierarchy of scapegoats: the faculty member blames the department chair; the department chair blames the dean; the dean blames the chancellor; the chancellor blames the president—and the Office of the President. This situation may be simply the normal state of affairs for system offices. But historically UCOP's role has been discussed largely in reports devoted to criticizing it. This has contributed to a sometimes lopsided conversation in which centralization is regarded as inherently suspect and decentralization as an absolute good.

### **E. The Importance of Models**

So far I have been talking about the University of California in terms of two different models of university governance, the one-university idea and several reform proposals that share some common characteristics—the economic model for short. The one-university idea was a way of dissipating recurring internal and external pressures before they become a danger to the integrity of the system. The economic model, on the other hand, views university systems as a confining shell that campuses—particularly flagship campuses—need to break out of in order to thrive. This sense of confinement turns up in the language typically used by its proponents. Campuses need to be “unleashed”; administrations are urged to be “nimble.” These two models envision a university with different structures and different internal relationships. But there are a few things that can be said about their general implications.

Universities have proven that they can stimulate and harness entrepreneurial talent and energy without transforming themselves into industrial outposts. Revenue-enhancing programs have been an important dimension of research university activities, a service both to society's economic vitality and to their own need for new sources of support. They will continue to be important. Extrapolated into the realm of university *governance*, however, economic models become something different.

They tend to provide a set of incentives that favor individual campus over universitywide interests. Within a system, campus decisions clearly have ramifications beyond the boundaries of the campus itself. Charging higher tuition at more selective campuses, for example, may be good for those that can command a higher price but it is bad for the rest, which are instantly relegated to second-class status. And even from a strictly market point of view, there has long been such a thing as a University of California education—the guarantee to students, parents, and the public that an outstanding undergraduate education can be obtained at *any* UC campus. Differential tuition says the reverse: you get what you pay for, based on how the market assigns value. A 2011 meeting of twenty-two former UC chancellors and presidents concluded that adopting differential tuition among the campuses posed two broad issues: whether it was really more effective than raising tuition across the University, and whether it could be done in such a way as to protect the strength and aspirations of the smaller and younger campuses. In promoting the loosening of system organization, economic models raise real questions about how to deal with truly universitywide issues and how to further the values of cooperation and mutual support among campuses. The risk is recreating, within the University, the same kind competition and lack of coordination that prevailed in California higher education before the 1960 Master Plan for Higher Education.

Governance by economic models holds out the hope of financial viability through emancipation from state and system controls. This is their principal claim to authority. To be liberated from state and system constraints, however, is to be not only an entrepreneurial university but a private one. Twenty years of State disinvestment have already put many public research universities on the road to a certain degree of privatization. The number of self-sustaining programs at the University of California—those that pay all the costs of their operation through student fees—nearly doubled between 2005 and 2014. They all involve professional programs, and UC policy forbids making PhD programs self-sustaining, though some master's degree programs are. The universitywide Academic Senate has raised a number of pertinent issues about whether the State will see a proliferation of self-supporting programs as an incentive to cut the UC budget even further, how far it is possible to expand in that direction without compromising the public character of the public university, and the ramifications for preserving UC's responsibility for diversity and broad access.<sup>41</sup>

If the State's contribution to UC's total budget has shrunk dramatically in the past decades, today's roughly 11 percent still amounts to close to three billion dollars a year—a sum that makes possible core functions of the University that are absolutely essential to its missions. And whatever the ratio of State to private funding, public universities are assumed to belong to the public. It is public money, public loyalty, and public support over many years that have built elite public research universities and the international reputations they now enjoy. California led the way. Multicampus systems are public in their origins and purposes. As former UC president Richard Atkinson has said, financial storms may require the University to move in the direction of the University of Michigan or the University of Virginia, “both distinguished institutions that are becoming less public and more private all the time,” as far as student fees and other ways of generating more revenue are concerned. But they are not a model for UC in the broadest sense: “We are a multicampus system, and we must work out our problems and our destiny as a system.”<sup>42</sup>



What unites many current redesign proposals, whether from UC or elsewhere, is their faith in the power of internal redesign to solve large problems that issue from the outside—profound shifts in societal attitudes about who should pay for college, who benefits from university research, and what other public priorities should come before funding for higher education. Most of the solutions to the revenue gap they propose—higher tuition, expansion of self-sustaining programs, more energetic private fundraising, greater recovery on indirect costs of research, relief from burdensome state regulation—can be pursued within the structure of multicampus systems as they exist today. Among all the possible alternatives, how much difference does organizational reform really make?

James G. March, an expert on organizations and decision making, has written that, while some innovation is essential to institutions over the long term, those who embark on reform should be aware of two inherent complications. First, most new ideas about reforming organizations are bad ideas—that is, likely to be unsuccessful. Second, separating the good from the bad can take a long time. Thus, as a general rule “those who invest in innovation are investing in failure.”<sup>43</sup> Organizational change can wither when the leaders who sponsored it move on. The lessons of experience are ambiguous and subject to misinterpretation; it is easy, after all, to overestimate benefits and underestimate costs.

The Kerr revolution, on the other hand, suggests that organizational innovation can be genuinely transformative. Yet it is fair to say that, real as the difficulties were, Kerr’s work was favored by the conditions of the time. They included reliable State funding, general consensus from the faculty and the Regents, and the imperative to rebuild the University’s administrative structure in the service of growth. The changes he advocated were carried out in a planned and orderly way, over a period of years and in response to well-defined problems to which there were relatively clear answers. These conditions are notably absent, and the goal of reform today is largely disassembly, not cohesion. It is not necessary to embrace March’s degree of skepticism, however, to wonder about the limitations of using a primarily economic model as the best or only blueprint for change in academic institutions. The success of universities over time has depended on their willingness to respond to the needs of society but also to resist fundamental change to their special organization as centers of learning.

Does the one-university idea have a future? The best evidence that it does, after more than eighty years as a political, administrative, and cultural force, is UC’s rise to become the world’s leading public university. There are different ways of thinking about a federation of campuses, however, and this means that the one-university idea has not one possible future but several.

UC governance could continue as it is today, with the one-university principle as an organizational ethos that shapes the administration of the University within the context of greater transfers of authority to campuses and an evolving role for the Office of the President. It could be displaced by one of the models I have discussed, or some version of them, should the president and the Regents decide to embrace an economic model for governing. There might, just possibly, be a reconceptualization of the one-university idea that somehow strikes a new balance between UC’s tradition of leadership at the center and independence on the campuses while also preserving the unity of the whole. Or, finally, there might be no sudden or abrupt break with the past, just a gradual transition in which the one-university idea becomes nothing more than an artifact of another time. In this case, many small changes will have created a very big change indeed.

Historian Daniel Rodgers argues that since the late twentieth century we have been living in an age of fracture—a time when increasing emphasis on economic choice, uncertainty, and the individual as the unit of action has made for what he calls a “thinning” of institutions of all kinds.<sup>44</sup> This has been an influential trend—though far from the only one—that has made a sense of connection difficult to sustain in institutions that span large communities, a category that obviously includes multicampus universities. UC has been governed by a philosophy that encourages a different kind of thinking. The one-university idea is a constantly shifting compromise that has had its challenges from the beginning, and perhaps never more so than today. But it is also the single most important reason the University of California has become an institution of distributed power and endemic excellence. And that makes it worth the struggle.

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#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> James G. March, “The Study of Organizations and Organizing since 1945,” *Organization Studies* 28 (1): 9-19.

<sup>2</sup> Lawrence Freedman, *Strategy: A History* (Oxford University Press, 2013), xiii.

<sup>3</sup> Kenneth Boulding, “The Management of Decline,” *Change*, 7, 5 (June, 1975), 8-9, 64.

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- <sup>4</sup> Eugene C. Lee and Frank M. Bowen, *Managing Multicampus Systems: Effective Administration in an Unsteady State* (San Francisco, Washington, London: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1975), 4.
- <sup>5</sup> In 2010, for example, the president of the University of Oregon sought to persuade state leaders to provide the university with an \$800-million endowment, to be matched with private funds, in lieu of the state's declining annual appropriations. The endowment plan was unsuccessful, but the University of Oregon won the right to establish, along with the other six campuses in the system, local governing boards independent of the Oregon State Board of Higher Education. Around the same time, the chancellor of the University of Wisconsin at Madison campus proposed a plan for greater independence from both the state and the University of Wisconsin system. This plan ran into political headwinds when the governor, Scott Walker, came out in favor of independence for the Madison campus—at the cost of steep budget cuts over two years. In the meantime, the legislature voted to remove tenure and shared-governance protections from state law. In the course of this complex dispute, University of Wisconsin campuses gained some further flexibility from the system and the state, but uncertainty lingers about the ultimate effect of the conflict over tenure and shared governance.
- <sup>6</sup> "Public Research Universities: Recommitting to Lincoln's Vision—An Educational Compact for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century," The Lincoln Project: Excellence and Access in Public Higher Education, an initiative of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2016, 4. This is the last of five Lincoln Project reports on the causes and consequences of reduced state investment in public research universities. The reports are available at <https://www.amacad.org/content/Research/researchproject.aspx?d=929>. The origin of public research universities like the University of California dates to the Morrill Act of 1862, which encouraged the creation of state-funded colleges to teach "agriculture and the mechanic arts" in service to a rapidly industrializing society. Over time they have expanded this mission to become a major source of teaching, research, and public service for the nation and innovation for its economy.
- <sup>7</sup> The UC system enrolls 246,000 students, a \$26 billion enterprise that includes campuses at Berkeley, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Davis, Santa Cruz, Santa Barbara, Riverside, Irvine, San Diego, and Merced. The San Francisco campus is devoted exclusively to graduate and professional programs in the health sciences. Internationally known for the academic quality of its campuses, UC is the State's principal agency for research under the Master Plan for Higher Education and produces the largest proportion of California higher education's science, technology, engineering, and mathematics graduates.
- <sup>8</sup> Clark Kerr, "Foreword," in Loren M. Furtado, *Budget Reform and Administrative Decentralization in the University of California* (Berkeley Public Policy Press, Institute of Governmental Studies, 2002), vii.
- <sup>9</sup> "Development and Decentralization: The Administration of the University of California, 1958-1966," undated, UC Office of the President. The first significant change in UC organization was the successful faculty struggle to establish its authority over academic matters against President Benjamin Ide Wheeler, known as the faculty revolt of 1919-20. Its sorting out of rights and responsibilities between the academic and administrative sides of the university is commemorated as the beginning of real shared governance. The second was the Kerr revolution forty years later. The role of the president relative to the faculty was at the center of the first reform and his role relative to the chancellors was fundamental to the second.
- <sup>10</sup> Except for the three Principal Officers of the Regents—the General Counsel, the Treasurer, and the Secretary of the Regents. Today the Secretary and Chief of Staff to the Regents reports directly to the Board. The General Counsel and Vice President—Legal Affairs and the Chief Investment Officer (formerly Treasurer) have a dual reporting relationship to the Board and to the president of the University, as does the Senior Vice President—Chief Compliance and Audit Officer, a new position created in 2007.
- <sup>11</sup> Clark Kerr, *The Gold and the Blue*, vol 1. (University of California Press, 2001), 224.
- <sup>12</sup> Kerr wrote in his memoirs that he included this statement as a direct response to the Byrne report.
- <sup>13</sup> Charles J. Hitch, "The Systems Approach to Decision-Making in the Department of Defense and the University of California," *Operational Research Society*, 19 (April 1968): 37-45.
- <sup>14</sup> "The Endemic Excellence of the University of California," Remarks to the UC Academic Senate, Fall, 1975.
- <sup>15</sup> George A. Pettitt, *Twenty-eight Years in the Life of a University President* (University of California Press, 1966), 134-5.
- <sup>16</sup> Franklin D. Murphy's 1976 oral history, *My UCLA Chancellorship: An Utterly Candid View*, lived up to its title. During his lifetime it was embargoed to anyone who did not have Murphy's written permission to read it. He died in 1994.
- <sup>17</sup> Kerr wrote in his memoirs that the Byrne Report's two principal recommendations, that the president's role be limited to chairing Board meetings and that University of California be reorganized as nine separate and autonomous campuses, each reporting separately to the Board, reflected the organization of the University of Kansas. He adds that circumstantial evidence suggests Chancellor Murphy (1960-1968) as a likely source of these recommendations. Murphy had been head of the University of Kansas for nine years before coming to UCLA. Kerr, vol. 1, 208-211.
- <sup>18</sup> As Angus Taylor relates in *The Academic Senate of the University of California: Its Role in the Shared Governance and Operation of the University of California* (Institute of Governmental Studies Press, University of California, Berkeley, 1998), the 1960 Master Plan for Higher Education recommended year-round operation as a cost-effective way of accommodating the coming surge in student enrollment during the 1960s. The UC faculty as a whole was divided over year-round operation. Opposition on educational grounds to a four-quarter academic year came mainly from faculty in the humanities and social sciences and was especially strong at Berkeley. As it turned out, summer quarters were held for only three years at Berkeley (1967, 1968, and 1969) and for two years at UCLA (1968 and 1969) because of budget constraints. 47-53. Today most campuses operate on a three-quarter academic year except for Berkeley and UC Merced, both of which operate on the semester system, as do the system's law schools.
- <sup>19</sup> The Northern Division included Berkeley, Davis, and San Francisco; the Southern Division, UCLA, Riverside, and Santa Barbara.
- <sup>20</sup> Russell H. Fitzgibbon, *The Academic Senate of the University of California* (Office of the President, University of California, 1968), 52-54.
- <sup>21</sup> Roger Heyns, one of Strong's successors as Berkeley chancellor (1965-1971) relates in his oral history that he made it clear to Kerr from the outset of his administration that "rightly or wrongly I was in charge. . . . That was very important, I think. President Kerr was associated in the minds of the faculty with some of the things that they disliked intensely. . . ." Roger W. Heyns, *Berkeley Chancellor, 1965-1971: The University in a Turbulent Society*, 38. University of California, Berkeley, Oral History Office, 1986. Kerr, for his part, felt Sproul had

- encouraged an “only child” syndrome at Berkeley, intensified by UCLA’s frequent grumbling over what it saw as unequal treatment, that made the rivalry between the two more intense as UC expanded in the 1960s. Kerr, vol. 1, 347-348.
- <sup>22</sup> John E. Jordan to Vice President Angus Taylor, May 9, 1975. University of California Bancroft Library, President’s Committees—Academic Planning and Program Review Board, 170-17R, 60:3.
- <sup>23</sup> Hugh Graham Davis and Nancy Diamond, *The Rise of American Research Universities: Elites and Challengers in the Postwar Era* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 149.
- <sup>24</sup> Today the inauguration of Berkeley chancellors usually occurs around March 23, the date of the University’s 1868 founding, and includes events celebrating Charter Day as a Berkeley campus occasion. The last annual universitywide Charter Day ceremony took place in 1985.
- <sup>25</sup> An exception is the approximately twenty-eight percent of revenue from annual undergraduate resident tuition that is reserved for student financial aid. This portion is distributed across the UC system such that campuses with students who have greater levels of financial need receive more funds. Nonresident undergraduate students who first enroll in 2016-17 or later will not be eligible for these financial aid funds.
- <sup>26</sup> Kerr thought that with the 1996 decision to grant bloc enrollment budgets to campuses, “the empowerment of the chief campus officers has probably about reached its limits within the parameters of one university.” *The Gold and the Blue*, vol. 1, 229-30.
- <sup>27</sup> Aims C. McGuinness, Jr., “Serving Public Purposes: Challenges for Systems in Changing State Context,” in *Higher Education Systems 3.0: Harnessing Systemness, Delivering Performance* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2013), 201. I am also indebted to Mr. McGuinness for useful information and insights he has generously shared with me regarding US multicampus systems in the context of organizational redesign.
- <sup>28</sup> Charles E. Young, “Policy Options for University of California Budgeting,” Research and Occasional Paper Series, Center for Studies in Higher Education, University of California, Berkeley, March 2011. Available at <http://www.cshe.berkeley.edu/policy-options-university-california-budgeting>.
- <sup>29</sup> Robert Birgeneau, George Breslauer, Judson King, John Wilton, and Frank Yeary, “Modernizing Governance at the University of California: A Proposal that The Regents Create and Delegate Some Responsibilities to Campus Boards,” Research and Occasional Paper Series, Center for Studies in Higher Education, University of California, Berkeley, April 2012. Available at <http://www.cshe.berkeley.edu/publications/modernizing-governance-university-california-proposal-regents-create-and-delegate-some>. See also C. Judson King, “On the Apportionment of Administrative Governance Functions within Multi-campus Universities and University Systems,” CSHE Research and Occasional Paper Series, December 2013, at <http://www.cshe.berkeley.edu/publications/apportionment-administrative-governance-functions-within-multi-campus-universities-and>, and James A. Hyatt, “Restructuring Public Higher Education Governance to Succeed in a Highly Competitive Environment,” CSHE Research and Occasional Paper Series, June 2015, available at <http://www.cshe.berkeley.edu/publications/restructuring-public-higher-education-governance-succeed-highly-competitive-environment>.
- <sup>30</sup> Robert Berdahl, “Thoughts on the History of University Systems in the US,” Research and Occasional Paper Series, Center for Studies in Higher Education, University of California, Berkeley, July 2014. [http://www.cshe.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/shared/publications/docs/ROP.CSHE\\_8.14%20Berdahl.UnivSystems.7.16.2014.pdf](http://www.cshe.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/shared/publications/docs/ROP.CSHE_8.14%20Berdahl.UnivSystems.7.16.2014.pdf).
- <sup>31</sup> Regents’ Standing Order 105.2 (d) specifically authorizes the Academic Senate to advise chancellors concerning campus budgets and the president about the University’s budget; 105.2 (f) authorizes the Senate to advise chancellors and the president about the administration of the University’s libraries.
- <sup>32</sup> Regent Ward Connerly to Board Chairman Howard Leach and members of the Board of Regents, December 21, 1993.
- <sup>33</sup> President J. W. Peltason to Regent Ward Connerly, January 4, 1994.
- <sup>34</sup> David P. Gardner, “The California System: Governing and Management Principles and their Link to Academic Excellence,” Twenty-fifth David Dodds Henry Lecture, University of Illinois at Chicago, October 20, 2005, 18. This lecture discusses eight reasons for the success of the UC system: 1) UC’s constitutional autonomy; 2) the effectiveness of the Board of Regents; 3) the commitment to the University of California as one university; 4) the Board’s willingness to delegate substantial authority to the president, and of the president to re-delegate authority to the chancellors; 5) the Regents’ 1920 decision to delegate full authority over academic matters to the Academic Senate; 6) a common standard of freshman admission across the University; 7) UC’s development of multiple sources of revenue; and 8) the support of the University by the citizens of California. Available at [http://www.uic.edu/depts/oa/ddh/25th\\_DDH.pdf](http://www.uic.edu/depts/oa/ddh/25th_DDH.pdf).
- <sup>35</sup> Martin Trow, “The University Presidency: Comparative Reflections on Leadership,” Ninth David D. Henry Lecture, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, October 31-November 1, 1984, 29. Available at <http://www.uic.edu/depts/oa/ddh/ddhlectures/Lec9.pdf>
- <sup>36</sup> Trow, 30.
- <sup>37</sup> Kerr, vol. 1, 230.
- <sup>38</sup> Kerr, *The Gold and the Blue*, vol. 1, 226-7. He also wrote the following: “Since 1966, in my judgment, there has been far too little interest in the question of how to build an effective system of checks and balances on the power of the chancellors.” 224-5.
- <sup>39</sup> UC campuses and the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory have their own attorney or attorneys, who have a dual reporting relationship to the campus and to the systemwide General Counsel’s office.
- <sup>40</sup> The first sign of trouble was an executive compensation controversy, centered on the Office of the President, that unfolded during 2005 and 2006. There were allegations of policy violations that led the Regents to declare the executive compensation issue “illustrative of a broader governance problem” within UCOP. Several reports ensued, including “The Monitor Group Report to the Regents: University of California Organizational Restructuring Effort,” September 12, 2007, a critical assessment of the organization, culture, and performance of the Office of the President; and the “Report of the Working Group on the Roles of the Office of the President,” Governance Committee of the Board of Regents, January 8, 2008,” which sought to define the role and responsibilities of UCOP in relationship to the president and to the campuses.
- <sup>41</sup> Academic Council Chair Bill Jacob to Provost and Executive Vice President Aimee Dorr, February 27, 2014. Available at [http://senate.universityofcalifornia.edu/reports/BJ2Dorr\\_SSGPDPreviewroundtwo.pdf](http://senate.universityofcalifornia.edu/reports/BJ2Dorr_SSGPDPreviewroundtwo.pdf).

<sup>42</sup> Richard C. Atkinson, "Defining the University of the Future," Remarks to the University of California Commission on the Future, Oakland, California, November 12, 2009. Available at <http://www.cshe.berkeley.edu/defining-university-california-future>.

<sup>43</sup> Mie Augier and James G. March, *The Roots, Rituals, and Rhetorics of Change: North American Business Schools after the Second World War* (Stanford University Press, 2011), 294. See also March, *The Ambiguities of Experience* (Cornell University Press, 2010)

<sup>44</sup> Daniel T. Rodgers, *Age of Fracture* (Harvard University Press, 2011).

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