importance of African agency in their educational choices. The issue of African “cultural advancement” took an increasingly polemical turn in the context of Vichy’s National Revolution, as debates within the journal Dakar-Jeunes reveal. While some Africans preached forms of cultural nationalism, the defense of a more hybrid understanding of the relationship between French and African culture dominated. These debates emerged full force in postwar French West Africa as African elites increasingly demanded access to secondary education. Most interestingly, Gamble shows how African elites joined with metropolitan reformers to promote reforms that colonial officials opposed on the ground. Jean Capelle is the emblematic metropolitan figure, whose arrival in 1947 as director general of education in the AOF sparked a series of integrationist measures that dismantled the segregationist system established in the early decades of the century and incorporated the AOF into the metropolitan organization of academies in 1950. But the existence of French West Africa was by then increasingly being called into question. Educational reform was indeed a political issue and African politicians seized opportunities without buying into a vision of transforming Africans into French people, setting the stage for misunderstandings about an educated citizenry that would durably mark the decolonization process.

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I failed the higher education section of my comprehensive exam in my doctoral program at Teachers College in the late 1980s. My writing on the section was simply awful, and I knew it, but I didn’t really care because I had not liked any of the books I had read for that section. Thankfully, my academic career was salvaged by a brilliant pedagogical move by Professor Larry Cremin who, during my orals, allowed me to turn my cranky resistance to the history of higher education into a historiographical analysis when he asked me why I thought I did so poorly on that section. Because the writing on the history of higher
education was so boring, I said. Why was it boring? he asked. And off I
went, explaining how the history of higher education was largely insti-
tutional and policy history and there was little social history about stu-
dent life. Helen Horowitz’s recently published Campus Life was one
exception, as were a few new studies of women’s colleges. But, I com-
plained, that research was narrowly focused on a select grouping of
elite institutions. Not interesting. Why aren’t historians examining
the great variety of higher institutions and all the wild things that stu-
dents do in them?

Thirty years later, much has changed, and this terrific collection
pulls together the best of that new research, offering both new social
history content on diverse types of student life and new historiograph-
ical arguments.

The coeditors use Horowitz’s 1987 book—essentially the first
book about student life in higher education—as a frame for the essays
that explore students’ role in shaping college culture. The reference to
Horowitz is simultaneously respectful and critical: in her broad study
of over two hundred years of student life and culture, Horowitz iden-
tified three distinct ways of being an undergraduate: college men, out-
siders, and rebels. Largely focused on elite northeastern institutions,
she rarely considered gender, race, class, or sexuality in her analysis.
Both the editors and the authors of this collection identify these lim-
itations, and then move on: the point of the volume is not to critique
old history but to showcase new history and to offer new historiograph-
ical insights and recommendations. As many of the authors
note, Horowitz herself recognized the limitations of her initial foray
into a broad history of student life. Her oft-quoted comment is that
her study is like a photograph taken at a distance that offers only the
“broadest features of the landscape” and that does not capture specific
“hills and valleys.”

The volume begins with a dynamic historiographical essay by
Michael Hevel and Heidi Jaeckle that zeros in on the extent and nature
of historical research on college student populations, organizations, and
behaviors. The essay sets the stage for the subsequent chapters: the con-
centrated focus on higher education student life and the nature of the
research on this topic since the 1990s that offers “a more complete
and complex” portrait of higher education in the United States (p. 30).

And off we go. The following ten original research essays each
contribute to a new complete and complex view of the history of
higher education. The most obvious contribution is the diversity of

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1Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, Campus Life: Undergraduate Cultures from the End of
the Eighteenth Century to the Present (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), xiii-
xiv.
institutions under study: community colleges, state colleges, predominantly black colleges in the South, evangelical colleges, and normal schools are all locations for studies of student life. Even more powerful is the diversity of student cultures under study, including the history of gender-fluid drag culture; student engagement with labor, black, Mexican American, and evangelical Christian student activists; and new perspectives on fraternity and sorority life.

The definition of “student activism” itself comes under question and broadens the definition far beyond the typically identified 1960s and 1970s leftist political movements. Tim Cain’s study of student activists and organized labor charts the activism of students working both for and against labor. Christopher Tudico uncovers an organized Mexican American Movement that both predated and set the stage for the more popularly known Chicano student activist movement of the 1960s and 1970s. Marc VanOverbeke argues that students who organized to promote a football team at a California state college did so in part to make their college culture more “legitimate” by replicating more established colleges and by expanding access and inclusion of underrepresented students. Was there student activism at evangelical Christian colleges in the 1960s and 1970s? Yes, says Adam Laats, in a fascinating study of such students’ unique responses to in loco parentis guidelines. And Joy Williamson-Lott makes a powerful case for the study of black student activists on predominantly black college campuses, arguing that historians’ tendency to study black activist students in their off-campus engagements with white civil rights activists has obscured the recognition of black students’ activism and agency as students on their own campuses.

Another fascinating theme is that of students’ search for “legitimacy,” which itself critiques Horowitz’s conflation of elite northeastern colleges as the dominant model of higher education. Nicholas Strohl’s excellent essay on community colleges turns Horowitz’s frame inside out: at nonelite, nonresidential, and non-four-year community colleges, where the “nontraditional” student is the typical student, and where it’s not always clear whether community colleges even count as higher education, historical studies have tended to focus on what community colleges were not, thus ignoring the student life that did exist there. How students sought to gain the recognition and legitimacy of traditional higher education, while still maintaining their unique student culture is also a topic of the essays on state colleges and normal schools. The story of student life in these institutions is offered not as an exception to the rule but as a culture with its own shape and life.

The book title, *Rethinking Campus Life*, is both specific and referential. The essays offer a literal rethinking of traditionally told tales of college student life and offer a revision and refresher to Helen History of Education Quarterly

Rankin’s title represents a Howard Zinn-style commitment to recapturing the historical significance of ordinary citizens, here in shaping today’s instant access to digital information, communication, and entertainment. Rankin decries what she calls the misleading “Silicon Valley mythology” (p. 10) that credits Steve Jobs, Steve Wozniak, Bill Gates, and other “founding fathers” with liberating computer access for casual users in the late 1970s. In such accounts, these heroic geeks revolutionized technology itself, transforming enormous and expensive walled-off mainframes into affordable new personal computers. That story of progress then emphasizes the transformative magic of the 1990s internet in spawning the first social communities empowered by computers to transcend distance and differences.

Rankin charges that such oversimplified interpretations obscure essential developments in computer use prior to the marketing of PCs. In particular, she warns, a Silicon Valley narrative “minimizes the roles of primary and high schools, as well as colleges and universities, as sites of technological innovation” (p. 3). She counters with a carefully researched alternative, tracing how by 1970 thousands of students and educators were already using time-sharing systems to create and play games, write music and poetry, exchange messages, collaborate on programming, and explore computers’ potential in education. “Usually we think of public schools and college classrooms as the last stop for mature technology,” she notes, proceeding to challenge that assumption by revealing a far more complex history of computer development (p. 5).

Rankin opens at Dartmouth, where keen math professors convinced administrators in the early 1960s that new generations needed