



Making Harvard Modern: The Rise of America's University

By Morton Keller, Phyllis Keller

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Early twentieth-century Harvard was the country's oldest and richest university, but not necessarily its outstanding one. By the century's end, it was widely regarded as the nation's, and the world's, leading institution of higher education. With verve, humor, and insight, Morton and Phyllis Keller tell the story of that rise: a tale of compelling personalities, notable achievement, and no less notable academic pratfalls. Their book is based on rich and revealing archival materials, interviews, and personal experience.

The Kellers begin in 1933, when James Bryant Conant became Harvard's president and set out to change a Brahmin-dominated university into a meritocratic one, and they shed light on the presidencies of Nathan Marsh Pusey, Derek Bok, and Neil Rudenstine. The Kellers cover such events as the campus turbulence of the 1960s, show how the university gradually opened its doors to growing numbers of foreign students, women, African- and Asian-Americans, and Hispanics, and examine the debates over affirmative action, political correctness, and the ever higher costs of higher education. For the updated paperback edition, the authors feature a new chapter on the controversial presidency of Lawrence Summers, who put Harvard into the national spotlight during his reign, and the abolition of early admissions, which began to change university policies nationwide. The Kellers will draw on archival materials, newspaper articles, and an interview with Summers. The book will appear in time for Class Day in June.

Making Harvard Modern is a candid, richly detailed portrait of America's most prominent university from 1933 to the present: seven decades of dramatic change. This fascinating account, the first comprehensive history of a modern American university, is essential reading for anyone with an interest in the present state and future course of higher education.

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Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #1762325 in Books
- Published on: 2007-08-29
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 6.10" h x 1.60" w x 9.10" l, 2.26 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 608 pages



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Editorial Review

From Library Journal

A former associate dean at Harvard, Keller collaborated with husband Morton (history, Brandeis) on this affectionate chronicle of Harvard's academic evolution. The first two parts of the book correspond with the terms of two contrasting presidents: James Bryant Conant (1933-53), who charted Harvard's course for meritocracy, and the more conservative Nathan Marsh Pusey (1953-71). In the past three decades, the authors maintain, the university has turned outward, becoming more involved with social and world issues. The Kellers relate the events of each era in scrupulous detail; the personal and departmental minutiae will no doubt interest those who share the authors' view of Harvard as "one of the most illustrious institutional adornments of American life." Even the staunchest devotees, however, may tire of the Kellers' flippant tone, as when they dismiss the campus unrest of the Sixties as adolescent angst or refer to John Kenneth Galbraith as his own "favorite subject." An unusual blend of scholarship, irony, and adulation, this book is recommended only for academic libraries. (Index not seen.) Susan M. Colowick, North Olympic Lib. Syst., Port Angeles, WA

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From Booklist

Starred Review America's premier academic institution well deserves this kind of carefully detailed chronicle. An accomplished Brandeis historian and Harvard's first female dean combine their talents to probe two successive transformations of the school: first, the change (between 1933 and 1971) that turned a regional university serving Boston's Brahmin elite into a meritocratic institution with the very best qualified faculty and students from around the country; second, the reordering of priorities (between 1971 and 2000) that gave the university a new worldliness evident in its new responsiveness to off-campus imperatives of commerce and politics and in its aggressive new recruitment of previously marginal groups (women and minorities). Though generally favorable in their treatment of this adaptive and dynamic school, the authors do expose administrative blunders, faculty squabbles, and student outrages. Readers revisit the paranoia of the McCarthyite fifties, the campus tumult of the sixties, and the political correctness of the eighties. The unpredictable personalities of the university's presidents receive particular scrutiny: Nathan Pusey's irrational stubbornness comes to light, for instance, as does Derek Bok's penchant for overheated rhetoric. But beyond personalities, the authors confront the perplexing challenges of keeping intellectual life vital in a burgeoning bureaucracy and of keeping the doors of an increasingly costly school open to middle-class families. As long as Harvard embodies the nation's highest cultural aspirations, this volume will find many appreciative readers. *Bryce Christensen*

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Review

"An unusual blend of scholarship, irony, and adulation."--Library Journal

"An incredibly detailed and deeply researched look at the players and issues of the last 70 years of Harvard history."--Harvard Crimson

"America's premier academic institution well deserves this kind of carefully detailed chronicle.... As long as Harvard embodies the nation's highest cultural aspirations, this volume will find many appreciative readers"--Booklist

"A fascinating and engaging account of the rise of Harvard since 1933."--Weekly Standard

"Harvard is both the most modern and the most ancient of American universities. Most ancient as a result of its founding date. Most modern by its commitment to being the best at everything it does--the first to pursue each new endeavor, the first to make each new discovery. Why this persistent commitment? As I read this beautifully written book by Morton and Phyllis Keller, I am confirmed in my belief that this commitment is based on the high quality of its academic leadership over the years--leaders who have kept Harvard out in front in the United States and who have shown the way for other American universities more generally to become among the greatest intellectual centers this world has ever known. Read, enjoy, and come to understand."--Clark Kerr, former Chancellor, University of California, Berkeley, and President Emeritus, University of California

Users Review

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Edris Sibert:

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