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Book Reviews: Creighton and Marquette both shaped and have been shaped by Omaha and Milwaukee, Dennis N. Mihelich, The History of Creighton University, 1878-2003, Creighton University Press, 2006, Thomas J. Jablonsky, Milwaukee's Jesuit University: Marquette, 1881-1981, Marquette University Press, 2007

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Creighton and Marquette both shaped and have been shaped by Omaha and Milwaukee

Dennis N. Mihelich, The History of Creighton University, 1878-2003

Omaha: Creighton University Press, 2006, 528p.

Thomas J. Jablonsky, Milwaukee's Jesuit University: Marquette, 1881-1981

Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2007, 438p.

By James Fisher

The histories of American Jesuit colleges and universities—especially those among the large cohort founded between 1840 and 1890—feature many common themes not difficult to identify, from tales of heroic founders to pressures to adapt the *Ratio Studiorum* to a pragmatic culture of higher education, to periodic struggles waged against assorted nativists, Klansmen, and church/state separation absolutists. The subtler differences between Jesuit schools often prove more instructive: as these histories of Omaha's Creighton and Milwaukee's Marquette reveal, the distinctive educational and religious character of urban environments inhabited by Jesuit institutions was shaped by their presence just as the cities shaped these schools.

In these lively chronicles of Creighton and Marquette, respectively, Dennis N. Mihelich and Thomas J. Jablonsky cover the common ground, but their details reveal telling differences. While today's Omaha is widely viewed as a staid if highly livable "Midwestern" community, in 1878 Creighton was founded in "a raucous frontier town," explains Mihelich, "that possessed an ample number of drinking establishments and houses of prostitution, but lacked paved streets and virtually every other amenity today associated with urban living." Those amenities that did exist were largely due to the tireless enterprise of the brothers Creighton—Edward and John—Irish American entrepreneurs who in pursuit of their fortune migrated from Ohio to the Western frontier in the 1850s. There they found prodigious riches in telegraph, railroad and finally banking endeavors that made the Creightons the "most prominent clan" in Omaha and enabled their survivors to found a Jesuit academy which—like many that came before and later—more nearly resembled an elementary school than a college in the early going.

Though Marquette was founded three years later than Creighton, its host city was far better established; its ethnic dynamics far more volatile. At Marquette's cornerstone-laying ceremony in 1880 the Milwaukee diocese's vicar general hastened to quell fears that the new academy would "be little German, too much Irish" by promising (in German) it would be "Catholic American. We are proud to live in this land and we shall make it the object of our lives to be people who are ready to give our property and shed our blood for our faith and American citizenship." The Jesuits who opened Marquette were already found in the city working as missionaries, recruited beginning in the 1850s by the Swiss-born bishop John Martin Henni and processed via the St. Louis headquarters of the Missouri Jesuit province. That agency figured heavily in the creation and early histories of both Creighton and Marquette: it is strik-

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ing to note how the already-declining status of St. Louis—especially in comparison with its upstart rival Chicago—was reflected in the unwillingness of the province to fully commit dwindling resources and manpower to these fledgling educational apostolates (and while Omaha thrived as a distant planet in Chicagoland's orbit, nearby Milwaukee suffered).

The long arm of Harvard president Charles Eliot reached both Milwaukee and Omaha in the 1890s: Eliot's highly influential reform agenda focused on electives and research at the expense of the classical humanities "core" that marked Jesuit higher education. These Catholic institutions might have adopted a countercultural pose of resistance; their leaders wisely recognized instead that in the absence of local students adequately prepared to benefit from an undiluted *Ratio Studiorum*, some accommodation with modernity was wise. The resulting compromise greatly deepened the engagement of Creighton and Marquette with their communities: both opened "medical departments" which led in Marquette's case to an affiliation with a secular proprietary medical college. Co-education, religious diversity in the student body and public controversy in the form of faculty protest over a ban on therapeutic abortion ensued in Milwaukee and all by 1919! In the late 1920s—in the wake of Al Smith's presidential campaign and complaints from Rome—Marquette staunchly reasserted its "Catholic identity." The situation in Omaha was more placid, by Mihelich's account; there Creighton's proliferating schools and programs saw more lay faculty hired, people of color admitted and ties binding the university and community greatly strengthened with relative ease.

Both schools struggled between the world wars from a combination of financial insecurity, unsteady enrollments and tepid leadership; the lure of big-time athletics was as irresistible as success was unsustainable. Yet Creighton found ways to enhance its Catholic Jesuit character during this period by housing such programs as the Rural Life Institute, an innovative apostolate featuring an earth-friendly "biodynamic" approach to farming. Marquette established a "Labor College" in the early 1940s designed to instill principles of social justice into the practices of both labor and management in its highly industrialized local setting. In the 1950s retreats at Marquette's Gesu church became a popular feature of campus life (Gesu was among Dorothy Day's favorite churches; though she is cited but briefly by Mihelich, her affinity for Marquette helps account for the establishment of the Catholic Worker archives in the university's library). From the evidence in these books Marquette was both "edgier" than Creighton yet more solicitous of local sensibilities: African-American women were admitted to Marquette by the 1940s but only if they were married; blacks were denied entry into the medical school for fear of local prejudice "against Negro physicians," as the university's president explained.

Clock tower at Creigton University.

The "1960s" generally arrived late to Jesuit campuses and these schools were no exception: male students were prohibited from sporting "effeminately long" hair as late as 1965. Yet controversies over invitations to outside speakers erupted early in the decade at Marquette. At Creighton the militantly pro-choice feminists Gloria Steinem and Florence Kennedy spoke at a Student Leadership Conference in 1971 (two years prior to the Supreme Court decision in Roe V. Wade) apparently without incident. In fact Creighton's history seems so blessedly irenic ("all Creighton theologians received their *mandatum*" from

Marquette University campus sparkles at night.

Omaha Archbishop Eldon F. Curtis in 2000 in yet another display of harmony) it was striking to learn that just this past September—four years after the end date of Mihelich's history—the immensely popular spiritual writer Anne Lamott had her invitation to speak on campus rescinded by Creighton president John P. Schlegel, S.J., reportedly after Father Schlegel read a passage from Lamott's latest book treating her involvement in the assisted suicide of a friend suffering from terminal cancer. Without denying the seriousness of this issue, Lamott, it should be noted, is a devoted Christian convert with a large Catholic readership, whose first volume of spiritual reflections (*Traveling Mercies*, which I have taught to fine effect in Fordham theology classes) was co-dedicated to a prominent Jesuit spiritual director.

Though reports that Creighton was pressured by local Catholic leaders to rescind its invitation to Lamott were vigorously denied by Father Schlegel and university spokespersons, the case raised an issue unforeseen in the voluminous account provided by Dennis Mihelich. After 130 years of carefully tending its relationship with the local community without compromising its Jesuit ideals, Creighton came face to face with fundamental questions over the nature and role of a university, an issue much larger than concerns over its "Catholic identity." The case served as another reminder that the current atmosphere in American Catholic academic life—while not wholly without precedent—quite likely signals the dawn of a strange new dispensation. ■