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

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

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

By James Fisher

The histories of American Jesuit colleges and universities—especially those among the large cohort founded between 1840 and 1899—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 natives, Klamaths, and church-state separation absolutists. The subtle 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. Mibelich and Thomas J. Jablonsky cover the common ground, but their details reveal telling differences. While today's Omaha is widely viewed as a stable if highly livable "Midwestern" community, in 1878 Creighton was founded "in a ... frontier town," explains Mibelich, "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 still...
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Book Review

The long arm of Harvard President Charles Eliot reached both Milwaukee and Omaha in the 1900s. 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 unwhitened 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 ensured 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.

This article is not fully visible due to the cropping of the image. However, it appears to discuss the impact of Eliot and the changes in Catholic higher education during the 1900s, focusing on the role of Creighton and Marquette Universities. The text suggests a shift towards more modern and scientific education while still maintaining a "Catholic identity." The article also touches on the influence of outside factors such as Al Smith's presidential campaign and religious diversity in the student body.

Further content is not visible due to the cropping of the image. For a complete reading, please refer to the original source.
Omaha Archbishop Eledon 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 Mihalich’s history—the immensely popular spiritual writer Ann 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 devout 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-authored by 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 Mihalich. 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.