



Wesleyan University, 1910–1970: Academic Ambition and Middle-Class America

By David B. Potts

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In *Wesleyan University, 1910–1970*, David B. Potts presents an engaging story that includes a measured departure from denominational identity, an enterprising acquisition of fabulous wealth, and a burst of enthusiastic aspirations that initiated an era of financial stress. Threaded through these episodes is a commitment to social service that is rooted in Methodism and clothed in more humanistic garb after World War II.

Potts gives an unprecedented level of attention to the board of trustees and finances. These closely related components are now clearly introduced as major shaping forces in the development of American higher education. Extensive examination is also given to student and faculty roles in building and altering institutional identity. Threaded throughout these probes within in the analytical narrative is a close look at the waxing and waning of presidential leadership.

All these developments, as is particularly evident in the areas of student demography and faculty compensation, travel on a pathway through middle-class America. Within this broad context, Wesleyan becomes a window on how the nation's liberal arts colleges survived and thrived during the last century. This book concludes the author's analysis of changes in institutional identities that shaped the narrative for his widely praised first volume, *Wesleyan University, 1831–1910: Collegiate Enterprise in New England*. His current fully evidenced sequel supplies helpful insights and reference points as we encounter the present fiscal strain in higher education and the related debates on institutional mission.

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Review

“David Potts’s first volume on Wesleyan history was a major achievement not just in academic history but in social history more broadly conceived. This one is even better. It fulfills the highest aspirations for any historian of any social institution.” (Hugh Hawkins, Anson D. Morse Professor of History and American Studies Emeritus, Amherst College)

“This superb follow-on to Potts’s first volume on the history of Wesleyan University maintains the exceptional quality of its predecessor. College histories tend to puffery, but this one is a solid, critical and knowledgeable account. Potts here establishes himself as one of the finest historians of higher education, and Wesleyan gets the sort of history a great institution deserves.” (Stanley N. Katz, lecturer/professor, Woodrow Wilson School, Princeton University)

“An outstanding institution of higher education such as Wesleyan University deserves an outstanding institutional history, and David Potts has written just that. This is scholarship at its very best.” (David M. Stameshkin, author of *The Strength of the Hills: Middlebury College, 1915–1990*)

About the Author

DAVID B. POTTS is an independent historian and consultant on historical resources for higher education. His prior books include *Liberal Education for a Land of Colleges: Yale’s Reports of 1828* and *Baptist Colleges in the Development of American Society, 1812–1861*. He lives in Tacoma, Washington.

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