Review Essay *John Knox*

Julius Getman, *In the Company of Scholars: The Struggle for the Soul of Higher Education.* Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992, 294 pp.

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Yet another book on higher education, this one by a Harvard-trained law professor. Why should *Metropolitan Universities* readers care?

"Jack" Getman's excellent memoir/critique *In the Company of Scholars* transcends the artificial boundaries of higher education and provides keen insight into the troubles and the triumphs of academia, whether you are an administrator, a professor, or even a graduate student in the physical sciences (such as myself). The broad reach of this book is due to Getman's own extraordinary background and career. The son of intelligent but largely uneducated immigrants, Getman attended the Bronx High School of Science, the City College of New York, and Harvard Law School (where he did *not* make law review, he is reminded repeatedly); was a teaching associate to famed sociologist David Riesman; has taught labor law at Harvard, Chicago, Indiana, Yale, Stanford, and now Texas law schools; and in the 1980s served as general counsel and later president of the American Association of University Professors.

In addition, Getman brings to this book the perspectives of a political liberal with a clear affinity for those groups ignored by or disaffected with academia. His voice, therefore, carries well above the din of the numerous, fulminating conservative critics of higher education.

The "struggle" Getman outlines is the tug-of-war between elitist and egalitarian tendencies within higher education—a tension felt keenly by the child of immigrants at Harvard Law School, to be sure, but also illustrated by numerous stories and anecdotes Getman has collected during interviews with colleagues from various fields. The book is organized into five chapters, entitled The attraction of academic life; The basic academic processes and the search for meaning; The relationship of faculty to academic institutions; The struggle for change; and Special features of academic life. This somewhat loose structure permits Getman to tell story after wonderful story from his and others' experiences, which address many of the topics discussed in the previous issue of *Metropolitan Universities* that was devoted to faculty roles and rewards. If you read this book, you will inevitably find yourself quoting these stories to your friends and colleagues!

My own personal favorite involves a female assistant professor of french horn at Indiana in the early 1970s who was manifestly terminated on the basis of her gender. Getman served as her counsel, and recounts the following exchange between himself and the dean of the music school before the Faculty Board of Review at Indiana, as reconstructed from a tape of the hearing:

Getman: "Have you ever heard the expression 'It takes balls to play brass?' "

Dean: "Oh, yes."

Getman: "Is that a commonly used expression among brass players?"

Dean: "Fairly common."

Getman: "Would you say it reflects feelings of masculine superiority?"

Dean: "No, it's just an expression referring to the aggressive style necessary for good brass playing, a kind of pulsing virility which most brass instruments re-

quire."

Getman: "You don't think that's sexist?"

Dean: "No, not at all, because a woman might be said to play with balls."

Getman: "Can you describe the last time you heard that expression applied to compliment a woman brass player?"

Dean: "Not offhand."

Whether the topic is gender discrimination, "tenured radicals," or the arcane rituals of faculty recruitment, Getman has a story to tell which the reader may applaud or reject, but cannot ignore.

Faculty, administrators, and even students at a wide range of institutions will thus identify with and learn much from Getman's insights. But as with any great teacher, one learns ultimately by example, not so much from facts. Getman's great example, as revealed in this memoir, is that of an accomplished scholar and teacher who resists all attempts to lionize himself, who is comfortable revealing his professional and personal missteps and epiphanies in wincing detail, and who confounds the easy political stereotyping of the modern academy by proclaiming, "I find myself almost as critical of academic liberals as I am of its traditionalists."

To read this book is to be in the presence of a fully mature spirit – a rare and energizing experience in academic settings. *In the Company of Scholars* now resides in my library alongside Page Smith's historical critique *Killing the Spirit* (Penguin, 1990) and Fredrick Barton's acclaimed novel *The El Cholo Feeling Passes* (Peachtree, 1985) as testimonies to the notion that one can embrace pluralism and still think that something is terribly wrong with higher education.