WALLACE ATWOOD’S “GREAT GEOGRAPHICAL INSTITUTE”* 

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ABSTRACT. The decision to establish geography as a graduate academic discipline at Clark University beginning in 1921 is examined as a part of the strategy and structure of academic entrepreneurial activity. The institutional strategy of Charles Thurber, President of the Clark Board of Trustees and of President Wallace W. Atwood is traced from its formal inception in 1919 through its early implementation to the end of 1923. The ideal of a “Great Geographical Institute” is set against the specific contours of its host institution in this period to show how local and personal factors both permitted the adoption and limited the success of the strategy and therefore prevented the Clark Graduate School of Geography from attaining the broad and secure local institutional base.

The decade of the 1970s saw a number of small but cumulatively significant advances in the professional study of the history of geography in America. These advances began early in 1971 with the establishment of the AAG Committee on Archives and Association History and crested briefly in April, 1979, with an international conference at the University of Nebraska on the theme of “The Origins of Academic Geography in the United States.” Along the way one can sight and cite such landmarks as the deposit of the Association’s own archives in a secure public repository, the development of a series of historical sessions at AAG meetings, the production of a “Geographers on Film” interview series, the issuance of a special issue of these Annals on “Seventy-Five Years of American Geography,” and the publication of three significant historical works exemplifying both traditional and new approaches to the history of geographic ideas and institutions in America. These and other evidences of ongoing research and publication by a score of individual scholars suggest that, if the history of American geography has not yet come to maturity, it seems at least to be entering a healthy and vigorous adolescence.

These forays into the history of American geography have yielded new historical appraisals of our discipline, increasingly based on archival and manuscript research. In particular, new light is being shed on what A. P. Brigham identified in 1921 as a critical period.

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of acceleration in what he called the "evolution of geography in the west side of the Atlantic ocean," the thirty years from about 1890 to the close of World War I. That period of achievement was marked by such advances as the place given the teaching of physiography in the report of the National Education Association's Committee of Ten; an enlarged role for geography in several institutions of higher education; the rejuvenation of local geographical societies and, after 1915, of the American Geographical Society under Isaiah Bowman's leadership; the founding of the Association of American Geographers in 1904 and the National Council of Geography Teachers in 1914, the establishment of three new professional journals (the Annals, the Review, and the Journal of Geography), and the admission of geographers to a place on the National Research Council.  

From our vantage point sixty years later, we can discern in these events the emergence of a community of professional geographers. In the light of constructs now being employed to illuminate the histories of other disciplines, we can describe this period as one of professionalization and institutionalization, one in which universities, governmental agencies, and local scientific organizations were being significantly altered to serve new social purposes, resulting in new patterns of training, research, and career orientation. Geography's part in what has been recently called "the organization of knowledge in modern America" may be examined from alternate perspectives: the career strategies of individuals and the structural patterns of the institutions in which these academics hoped to assure geography's place in the scientific sun.

Not all attempts were successful. Even the


3 See the eccentric and provocative book by Burton J. Bledstein, The Culture of Professionalism (New York: W. W. Norton Co., 1976) and references; Alexandra Oleson and John Voss, eds., The Organization of Knowledge in Modern America, 1880-1920 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979) and references; and the indispensable Lawrence R. Veysey, The Emergence of the American University (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965). The categories "strategies" and "structures" as used in this paper are adapted from Alfred D. Chandler, Strategy and Structure: Chapters in the History of the Industrial Enterprise (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1962), Introduction.

mature students by the 1880s. Salisbury himself held appointments with the Wisconsin, Illinois, and New Jersey geological surveys.

Physical geography also had appeared in educational materials, at least as early as William C. Woodbridge's *Modern School Geography* (1844), and had been given an important place in such mid-nineteenth century textbooks as those of Arnold Guyot and Matthew F. Maury in the 1860s. The influential Report of the National Education Association's Committee of Ten (1893) recommended that physiography rather than political geography should be the approach used in the high schools, using the methods of physical science. With the publication of Alexis E. Frye's "revolutionary" series of texts beginning in 1895 and, two years later, Jacques Redway and Russell Hinman's *Natural Series*, the new approach to earth processes and landforms was incorporated into elementary school materials. In 1900 yet another widely adopted series, by Ralph S. Tarr and Charles A. McMurry, while continuing the stress on physical geography, added to it the human side of the science, with causal relationships and generalizations appropriate to the age and experience of the student.

These trends principally affected the career pattern of Wallace Atwood as student and as mature scholar. Winning the S.B. in geology in 1897, he stayed on at Chicago for graduate study in that field, and was awarded the Ph.D. degree in 1903 with a dissertation on the glacial geology of the Uinta Mountains, part of the great Rocky Mountain system to which he was to direct his scientific life. Appointments with the U.S. Geological Survey, beginning in 1901, further reflected his continuing interest in field studies, and in 1908 he published (with Salisbury) the widely used *Interpretation of Topographic Maps*. In 1909 Atwood was appointed to the rank of Geologist with the U.S.G.S., a position which enabled him to make his major contributions to research in geomorphology, his studies of the San Juan mountains of southwestern Colorado and, at a different scale, the reconstruction of the physiographic history of the Rocky Mountain region.

In the meantime Atwood taught in a variety of learning environments, from secondary schools through junior college, teacher training institutions, and adult education. Teaching in the University High School, then under the direction of John Dewey, further diversified his experience, and from 1902 on he held regular appointments in the university's Department of Geology. Atwood also reached outside the Quadrangles to become heavily involved in new forms of scientific education, especially museum educational programs, both for school children and adults. His com-

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At Harvard, where he began teaching in the spring of 1914, Atwood's introductory course in physiography drew a hundred or more students per term. He was able to offer the advanced courses Davis had been unwilling or unable to give, and his infectious enthusiasm for teaching and for field study communicated itself readily to his students. Local field excursions and systematic advanced field studies, both during the term and during the summer, became a significant part of the Harvard program. Such later well-known geologists and geographers as Kirtley F. Mather, Preston E. James, and Roderick Peattie (who had followed him from Chicago) were among those undergraduate or graduate students accompanying Atwood to the mountains of the West.

More important for Atwood's future, however, was his association with the Boston publishing house of Ginn and Company. Dr. Charles H. Thurber of that firm had earned his doctorate in education under President G. Stanley Hall at Clark University in 1900 after teaching at Cornell, Colgate, and the University of Chicago, and editing the School Review. After completing his degree he had become an editor at Ginn and Company in Boston and, in 1913, the first alumnus to be elected a trustee of Clark. In the spring of 1915 the Ginn sales representative in Chicago, whom Atwood had known from his earlier years there, arranged for Thurber and Atwood to meet and talk about the possibility of a new series of school geographies. Their initial meeting led to others, and eventually to a contract, under which Atwood was to undertake a revision of the popular but by then quite dated series of textbooks originally written in the 1890s by Alexis Frye. Both Thurber and Frye, who was still alive but in poor health in California, were excited about Atwood's plans, and by 1919 proofs of Atwood's first elementary text, the New Geography—Book Two of the new "Frye-Atwood Series" were

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being enthusiastically read in the Ginn editorial offices.  

In the meantime, Atwood was growing discontented with Harvard. Both at Chicago and Harvard he was a popular teacher and alleged also to be a generous grader. The combination of the two packed his classroom, but also drew the attention of President Lowell, the chairman of Atwood’s department, and at least two other colleagues, all of whom labored with him over the standards of his elementary courses. Atwood promised the president reform and instituted weekly written exams and other measures to stiffen course requirements. But he also ran afoul of Lowell over the control of students on a Mt. Monadnock field excursion in June, 1919. Under such circumstances, it is not surprising that when Atwood appealed to the president to secure his backing for a graduate program in geography which should make Harvard a leader in that field, Mr. Lowell was not receptive to the idea. A second proposal for a graduate school of geography was turned down in the context of Harvard’s uncertain financial position following the war. Bothered by this second setback, by what he perceived to be the undercutting of his role at Harvard by other faculty members, and by Lowell’s continuing suspicion of the degree of seriousness with which students regarded his courses, Atwood let it be known among his friends that he was ready to leave Harvard if a suitable opportunity came his way.  

As it happened, that opportunity was being shaped for him. Forty miles westward, Clark University was looking for a new president. Founded in 1887 and opened in 1889 solely as a Ph.D.-granting and postdoctoral research institution, Clark had initially specialized in the natural sciences and, after 1892, in psychology and education, although the doctor’s degree continued to be granted in the sciences and, by World War I, in several of the social sciences as well. The growth of other graduate institutions, and the cut in the value of Clark’s slender graduate endowments as a result of wartime inflation, combined with an aging faculty in several key departments, had made the institution especially vulnerable to the postwar pressures which had given even Harvard pause.

Clark’s venerable psychologist-President, G. Stanley Hall, had finally decided to step down and early in February 1919, had asked the trustees to look for a new president. His loyal subordinate, Edmund C. Sanford, who had given up a professorship of experimental psychology in the University to serve as president of the quasi-independent Clark College (founded in 1902), had also decided to step aside so that the trustees might, if they chose to do so, consolidate the two separately endowed institutions. The President of the Board of Trustees also decided to yield up his post, and, in October, 1919, Thurber was elevated to that position. As such he was ultimately responsible for the conduct of the presidential selection process.

Hall’s favored successor within the faculty, the forty-nine-year-old experimental psychologist John Wallace Baird, had died on February 2, 1919. Although Hall recommended another of his faculty members, the sociologist Frank H. Hanksins, the trustees looked first for another psychologist who would continue the Hall tradition of combining the presidency with leadership of the graduate program in psychology. From their standpoint, this seemed an obvious institutional strategy. In 1892, owing to financial deficits and the departure of seven out of the nine senior faculty members, Trustee John D. Washburn had sug-

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16 J. B. Woodworth to Lowell, March 1, 1918, Woodworth to Atwood, March 1, 1918, Lowell to Atwood, June 5, 1919, Atwood to Lowell, June 21, 1919, Daly to Lowell, June 28, 1919, Lowell Papers: Atwood to Salisbury, December 6, 1916, Salisbury to President E. J. James (University of Illinois), June 13, 1919, Salisbury Papers: Preston E. James to William A. Koelsch, Oct. 23, 1975, Feb. 21, 1976 (personal communications). Atwood’s “Geography in America,” Geographical Review, Vol. 7 (1919), pp. 36–43, was written while World War I was still in progress; internal evidence suggests that this paper contains in substance the second proposal to Lowell, and it prefigures the plan of instruction actually implemented in the early geography curriculum at Clark.
gested that the trustees reorganize the University around a single strong specialization in psychology and education "and make a school in that which shall be the first in the world . . . a new edition in these modern days of Plato and the Academy." 14

Although the Platonic standard was not quite attained by Stanley Hall, the strategy had put Clark on the educational map in psychology; in the institution's first twenty-five years, more Ph.D.'s were granted at Clark in that discipline than in any other American university. But replication of a strategy of thirty years before, even one which had worked, is not necessarily a good strategy, particularly when it had depended on the fortuitous circumstances that only the department headed by the president was left intact after the exodus. In any case, the replicated strategy did not work in its initial form. By early 1920, having failed to secure the interest of Hall's closest ally among American psychologists, E. B. Titchener of Cornell, and having received a second refusal from another nationally known psychologist and educator, Charles H. Judd of the University of Chicago, the trustees were in something of a quandary, since Hall had indicated his wish to make his retirement announcement at the close of the Spring commencement, 1920.

After the refusals of Titchener and Judd, no other psychologist-educators (including Clark alumni) were solicited. The leadership qualifications of such in-house candidates as historian George H. Blakeslee or Samuel P. Capen, a former faculty member who was the son-in-law of the late Clark College President Wright and a future chancellor of the University of Buffalo, seem also to have been overlooked. Instead, Thurber began to develop arguments concerning the advantages of a modified presidential strategy, to result in a concentration at Clark around a totally new subject, not surprisingly, geography. Atwood therefore was invited to address the annual Clark Founder's Day Banquet, over which Thurber presided, on February 2, 1920. Ostensibly there to bring the greetings of Harvard (for reasons no doubt quite unclear to all but a handful of those present), Atwood talked of the importance of training in geography, economics, and resource management in the postwar world, and even suggested that Jonas Clark himself might have foreseen a larger role for Americans in the affairs of the world when he founded the University in 1887. 15

Atwood was then brought to a series of luncheons with various trustees and asked to present his views on curricular and budgetary requirements for a graduate program in geography. The selection process was both intimate and informal, since the number of trustees, after the death of Orlando W. Norcross on February 27, was below the legal minimum (seven) for conducting official business in accordance with the University's charter. In late February or early March the trustees, acting through Thurber, tentatively offered Atwood the presidency of a reorganized University and College, and the opportunity to direct a major new graduate program in geography.

Although Clark had no courses in geography prior to 1920, Hall received a copy of Atwood's New Geography from Thurber and spent much of one day examining it carefully, calling it "far and away the best" of the school geographies he had yet seen. The need for reform of geographical teaching had occupied Hall intermittently since the 1880s and he had, as he put it, "kept tab on all the geographies" for many years. 16

Hall, then, was personally receptive to Atwood as a geographical educator, particularly since he seemed to be assuming the mantle of Frye whose texts Hall admired, and had worked with Hall's old student, John Dewey. Although Hall undoubtedly would have preferred to be succeeded by a psychologist, he may well have believed (as did the trustees) that no adequate replacement for himself as both head of instruction in psychology and as president could be found. Accordingly, as

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Thurber's introduction of Atwood to the Clark trustees was made, Hall, ex officio Secretary of the Board of Trustees, supported both the new man and the move to develop this new discipline at the graduate level. If the new president was not to be a leader in psychology, he seemed likely to continue the Hall legacy in pedagogy and children's work generally. The ever-loyal Sanford, too, appears to have supported the new direction of things.

In mid-April, after consultation with two former Chicago colleagues, the geographer Walter S. Tower and the sociologist George E. Vincent (then president of the Rockefeller Foundation), Atwood set forth the terms on which he would accept a formal offer. These included the establishment of a "graduate school of geography" which would prepare geographers for government, business, and educational institutions. In order to take leadership from existing departments elsewhere, Atwood demanded a budget of $20,000 the first year and "at least" $25,000 per year thereafter, exclusive of the president's salary and of library funding for books, maps, and illustrations. As part of a broader strategy of institutional survival, the College and the University administrations were to be merged, and graduate programs in biology, chemistry, mathematics, and physics, in which Clark could not compete with larger institutions, gradually discontinued. The remaining resources available for graduate work would be combined "to promote what we may think of as a great geographical institute," comprised of a Ph.D.-granting department of geography and "supporting departments in history, economics, and education." Atwood specified that the geography department should include physical, economic, and commercial geography and climatology.17

It was only at the April 19th meeting, after the Board had been "sold" and Atwood informally offered the presidency, that a committee, consisting of Thurber and the two members of the Finance Committee, was authorized "to act . . . as to the successor of Dr. Hall." Atwood was formally offered the post in a letter from Thurber dated April 27, 1920; he resigned from Harvard on May 12, telling President Lowell that he was accepting appointment to the Clark presidency in order to develop a Graduate School of Geography there. A seventh trustee having qualified for office on May 1, the trustees were now legally competent to act; they finally accepted Hall's and Sanford's resignations on June 4 and went through the pro forma ritual of electing Atwood president of the two Clark divisions.18

FLAWS IN THE STRATEGY

As of April, 1920, it must have seemed to Thurber and the harried trustees that the problems of Clark University as a small graduate institution of limited financial resources but substantial reputational endowment had been met, and the immediate future must have looked bright indeed. Atwood's program for geography, designed to meet the public needs of the postwar world and the professional need for broadening and deepening geographic learning to include the human aspects of that subject, seemed in principle a reasonable and foresighted one. Unable to effect it at Harvard, he had found it welcomed at a less tradition-bound institution.

Thurber had proposed a strategy for survival which on the surface seemed flawless: a policy of concentration which would eventually eliminate the high-cost, uncompetitive natural

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17 Atwood to Thurber, April 14, 1920, Thurber Papers; Atwood to Tower, June 2, 1920, Atwood Papers.
18 Atwood to Lowell, May 12, 1920, Lowell Papers; Clark University Board of Trustees, Minutes, Vol. III, passim. Atwood, in his reminiscences of the founding of the school, asserts that he was offered the presidency only much after he was asked to set up a Graduate School of Geography at Clark. This is not a likely sequence in view of the imminence of Hall's retirement announcement and the fact that there were no other candidates being considered for the presidency at the time. There is no independent documentation for it, indeed his March 28th letter to Vincent, op. cit., footnote 17, suggests the early linkage. Thurber's version, stressing that a combination of president and chief department head was being sought at the same time, is undoubtedly the correct one. Atwood, "Administrative Report, 1920–1945," Publications of the Clark University Library, Vol. 9, No. 7 (May, 1945), pp. 14–19; Atwood, "A Brief Review of Our First Twenty-Five Years," in The Clark Graduate School of Geography: Our First Twenty-Five Years (Worcester: Clark University, 1946), pp. 4–6; Broadside, "Statement made by Dr. Charles H. Thurber, President of the Board of Trustees, and Statement Issued by President Wallace W. Atwood upon the Request of the Boston Transcript," June 7, 1923, Atwood Papers; "Copy of Mr. Thurber's Confidential Letter . . . .," Wilson Papers.
science departments, create a new program in which Clark could develop a distinctive reputation (as it had done thirty years before in psychology), and build up ancillary social science departments, drawing on existing strengths in cognate fields and on the substantial independent endowment of the library for research resources. In Atwood the trustees believed they had a leader who could both bring off a general reorganization which would save administrative costs and set a direction which would bring new scholarly distinction to the University.

Yet the new strategy had its hidden weaknesses. Simply because Hall had been both president and chief psychologist, the trustees accepted without question the assumption that the next president should also be the head of the flagship department, without considering either changed institutional circumstances or incipient conflicts of interest. Nor is it clear that geography was the best of all possible fields in which Clark might have concentrated in 1920. Given the assets of Clark’s library and laboratories in psychology, as well as its traditional standing in psychology and education, it might have been just as profitable institutionally to rebuild in those fields. E. G. Boring was already in charge of the experimental psychology laboratories, and indeed, several psychologists who then held short-term appointments at Clark later attained eminence elsewhere.

Alternatively, a graduate program in anthropology, then on the verge of major scholarly advance and also not well represented in American universities, might well have been reestablished. Clark had awarded the first American Ph.D. in this field, and its recipient, A. F. Chamberlain, remained on the Clark faculty until his death in 1914. One suspects that former Docent in Anthropology Franz Boas would have been happy to seed a major new department at Clark with some of his top Columbia Ph.D.’s; indeed, late in 1916 he and Hall had had a discussion in Boston about several candidates for the position Hall had hoped to reestablish in anthropology.\(^{19}\) Thus, given

\(^{19}\) Boas to Hall, Nov. 28, 1916, Franz Boas Papers, American Philosophical Society. Boas had recommended H. K. Haeberlin, an outstanding recent Columbia Ph.D., who had then presented a paper at Clark. Hall was unable to move on the appointment, and Haeberlin in any case soon died of diabetes. See Haeberlin, “Types of Ceramic

additional strengths in the history and international relations department, the university might have rebuilt at the graduate level around social psychology, ethnology, social anthropology, and related historical and social sciences. Such a strategy would have allowed for the selection of an “inside” president like Blakeslee, or Capen, who would not necessarily have been simultaneously head of Clark’s leading department.

On the other hand, geography as Atwood conceived it required a strong thrust in physiography and climatology. Yet Clark lacked supporting departments in meteorology and geology; physics, which had no graduate applicants in 1920, was on the list of graduate departments to be closed out. Atwood also wanted to develop economic and human geography, yet economics (which had begun as a graduate subject with the selection of another president, Carroll D. Wright of Clark College) was currently suffering through a series of short-term junior appointments. Anthropology, cognate of anthropogeography, had been virtually unrepresented in the Clark curriculum since 1914.\(^{20}\)

The Board of Trustees, by the rather casual manner in which they translated Atwood and Thurberey’s hopes into a major educational decision, laid the basis for severe problems later. At that time the Board consisted entirely of Worcester and Boston lawyers, bankers, and businessmen. Thurberey, the only one with experience as an educator, had a clear conflict of interest as editor-in-chief for the publisher of Atwood’s geography texts. While agreeing to the sound principle that Atwood was to have a fixed budget for his own department, the other trustees evidently made no attempt to determine that the University could bear the projected costs of such a department in


\(^{20}\) A great many factual statements concerning the general history of Clark University in this period are not separately cited, but are documented by materials available in the Clark University Archives.
relating to other university costs and sources of income.21

To complicate matters further, since the beginning of the University there had been a proviso written by Jonas Clark, Bylaw I, annually reprinted in the Clark University Register, specifying that "no other department shall be established until those already introduced have been brought to the highest state of efficiency possible." While there had been at least two instances where new doctoral programs (in history and in economics) had been introduced without strict adherence to that elusive ideal, in no case had a department ever been discontinued to make room for another; continuity of development as well as concentration of forces had been the tradition at Clark. Evidently, however, the trustees of 1920 were either ignorant of their own bylaws, or chose to disregard them. And Atwood, asked about the matter by an A.A.U.P. investigating committee later, denied having had knowledge of that particular bylaw at the time he accepted the presidency.22

Furthermore, the trustees were on potentially dangerous ground in setting up the new department without faculty consultation. In 1915 they had approved the re-constitution of a University Senate composed of the president and all full professors. That body claimed from 1918 onward the authority "to determine the general policy of the university in matters pertaining to instruction and research." Yet only Hall and Sanford, who attended Board meetings ex officio, were aware of the new plans. Because of Hall's penchant for secrecy and his desire that the glow of his last Commencement not be diminished, the faculty had not been consulted in any way. The post-Commencement announcement of Hall's retirement and Atwood's selection, then, set off

what Hall called "a wild flurry of excitement in the faculty" as a number of members moved to protest the election, claiming that the faculty itself should have the right to select the new president. Atwood was in the San Juan Mountains by this time, and Hall reported to Thurber that the situation required several days of "pouring oil on troubled waters" to pacify his colleagues.23 The omens for the future were not, in this respect, favorable for the internal cooperation Atwood and Thurber would need in order to bring off their "great geographical institute."

A STRATEGY DISCLOSED

Atwood returned from the field in September and settled down to the task of reorganizing and leading the University along its charted but so far unexplored and potentially hazardous waters. Perhaps surprisingly, Atwood and the trustees made no general or local announcement of their plans. Indeed, when a New York publication suggested that, as Hall's university had been centered around psychology, Atwood's was to be developed around physiography, the new president declared that "Clark University's world-wide reputation as a center of educational and psychological research would be maintained while new departments were being 'built up.'" In another interview he asserted that he had not become president "with the idea of breaking down traditions which are good and helpful or of disturbing the plans of the institution."24

Yet there were also a few early hints that a major redirection of Clark's institutional emphasis was in the offing. In July, 1920, the faculty and alumni received an official university publication containing a biographical sketch of the new president. In it they were informed that Atwood would "hold a professorship and offer instruction in geography at the Univer-

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21 See Herbert Parker, Trustee, to Thurber, April 16, 1920, Thurber Papers. A supporter of Atwood's candidacy and his plans, Parker says that he assumes that "adequately providing for it" will require "a substantial appropriation of funds," and further that "I am assuming that adequate funds are available for such purpose."

22 Clark University Register and Thirty-Second Official Announcement, 1920, pp. 24-26. Atwood in his letter of tentative acceptance, op. cit., footnote 17, mentions having studied the catalogues of both university and college, as well as the treasurer's report; his copy of the Register suggests that he had read this particular section rather carefully, as evidenced by the bending of the pages and pencillings around Bylaw 4 and elsewhere in these pages. (Copy in CUA)

23 Clark University Board of Trustees, Minutes, Vol. III, p. 122; Clark University Faculty Records, Minutes, June 15, 1915-June 11, 1920, pp. 1, 28, CUA; Clark University Register and Thirtieth Official Announcement, 1918, p. 23; Hall to Thurber, June 23, 1920, Thurber Papers.

sity," and that "it may be expected that he will build up at Clark University a graduate school of geography, or a Geographical Institute, such as exists in certain of the European centers of learning." And, at his first meeting as Clark's representative to the Association of American Universities, Atwood announced that his presence there (as president of Clark) was owing to a group composed chiefly of businessmen who were interested in the university-level development of geography and related social sciences, to the pursuit of which they were prepared "to devote a large part of the income from a trust fund." He did not make it clear that these businessmen were Clark's trustees and that the "trust fund" was the Clark endowment.25

During the fall semester, 1920, the faculty began to deal with the problems of governance growing out of the merger of Clark College and Clark University. Their questions concerning new directions in educational policy were met by both Atwood and the Board with assurances that these matters would be dealt with in the new president's inaugural address, scheduled for February, 1921. In this address, "The New Meaning of Geography in American Education," Atwood set out his views on geography in America and made a first partial disclosure of what the trustees and new administration had planned for the University.26

We are a geographically illiterate people, he told his audience, and hitherto the American university had neglected its responsibility to develop research and teaching in "that field which should lead most directly to an understanding of the present actual living conditions in this and other lands." Seventy percent of the colleges and universities in America offered no geography at all, according to a recent National Research Council study, and of those that did only nine offered four years or more of continuous study; furthermore, "there is not a single institution east of Chi-

cago where graduate students are adequately provided for in the field of geography."

The remedy for this state of affairs was to be "the development at Clark University of a department unique in America and preeminent in its special field." Much of the work of the staff of this department would be directed toward research, but they would also make contributions to the work of the schools and to the solution of industrial, commercial, and international problems. Teachers, employees of large international corporations, and members of the consular and diplomatic services would be offered special facilities for study. The staff of the "graduate school in [sic] geography" would be made up of experts in the geography of different parts of the world, who would continually renew their expertise by foreign travel, with the aim of producing a series of regional volumes. Each staff member would offer some undergraduate instruction, thus expanding the curriculum of Clark College. The library was to be enlarged to become "the most complete geographical library in America." Finally, a Geographical Society was to be founded in Worcester, and the University had been requested to institute correspondence and extension work in geography. Summer school courses in geography and industrial history for teachers would also be offered.

If the anxious faculty of existing graduate departments were given no relief for their professional uncertainties in this address, their fears could scarcely have been alleviated by the amplification of it at the dinner that evening given by the Board of Trustees at the Hotel Bancroft, downtown. President Hall, claiming "I know nothing of President Atwood's plans" (patently untrue, at least in the large), reminded his former faculty that there was now a new president at Clark and that "changes, perhaps greater than they anticipated, are inevitable," advising loyal adjustment. Honored guest William Morris Davis, who told of his dream that a "graduate school of geography" might someday be established, expansively sketched out a future for geography as the study of world regions and praised Clark for its commitment to give that subject a large measure of its resources and scholarly attention.

Davis went on to suggest that there should be at least one professor for each continent,
as well as instructors, assistants, and supporting facilities. Each of these professors, he opined, should spend one year in five or six, at double pay, in the region of his choice, and be further exempt from teaching and administration upon his return, in order to give ample time for writing up the results. Graduate students should also be subsidized for field work abroad. Yet another speaker suggested that the prospects for geography at Clark were so great that "President Atwood and his corps of explorers and students" would "be able to tell the Lord about this wonderful earth of His and perhaps tell Him how to 'arise and amend it.'" [27]

Public reception of the announcement of the new plans for Clark University seems to have been quite favorable. The New York Times reported the inauguration and Atwood's address on February 2, and followed up the next day with an editorial entitled "Graduate Geography: The Momentous Importance of President Atwood's Plans for Clark University." Praising the plan for its research and discovery emphasis, the Times editorial directed attention also to geography's utility and indeed indispensability in business and government. "For the intending sales manager," said the Times, "advanced geography is destined to become what chemistry is to the manufacturer." But beyond that, the momentousness of the event lay in its harmony with new directions of evolutionary progress in the use of natural resources and with the increased world responsibilities of the United States toward shaping "the destiny of the race."

The Boston Herald ran a similarly supportive editorial entitled "Geography Up to Date," which declared geographic phenomena to be "the deciding factor in war and peace and even in the rise and fall of nations." A new policy of harmonizing local, national, and international interests was needed, asserted the Herald, and now "the word goes forth from Clark University that if it is to be done at all it can be done only through intensive studies in the new geography." Numerous congratulatory letters were received by Atwood as a result of the publicity in the New York Times and elsewhere. The anthropologist Clark Wissler thought that the establishment of such a school would stimulate the development of ethnography in America as well as benefit geography and society. "No greater service can be rendered to our culture and nation," wrote Wissler, "than by the increase and diffusion of geographical knowledge and its relation to man." [28]

A STRATEGY APPLIED

Meanwhile, the faculty had dealt intensively with Phase I of the Atwood-Thurber plan, reorganization and merger; now Phase II, the plan for a graduate school of geography, was also more or less out of the bottle. But neither the trustees nor the president were to spell out Phase III of the plan agreed on in April, 1920, the portion dealing with cutbacks in other departments, until three years after it had been devised and after, for various reasons, much of it had been implemented. Yet this failure of Atwood and the Board to communicate the third section of their plan to the faculty, students, alumni and the public turned out in the end to be a most serious blunder.

The trustees, in keeping with their rather casual attitude toward the possible human impact of the Atwood-Thurber proposals, simply assumed that the new president would handle the matter department by department diplomatically, as the opportunity arose. Naturally reluctant to tell graduate faculty of long standing that the fields they had cultivated with distinction would be downgraded or discontinued upon their departures, the strategy of nondisclosure ignored the hopes and aspirations of upward-mobile younger scientists who had a right to know of major decisions affecting their long-term prospects at Clark.

Except for the statement that "the study of history, economics, and the social sciences must proceed hand in hand with the study of geography," no assurances had been given in

[27] "Inauguration of Wallace Walter Atwood as President of Clark University, February 1, 1921," Publications of the Clark University Library, Vol. 6, No. 4 (April, 1921), passim. Davis amplified his remarks in a Clark commencement Address on "A Graduate School of Geography," Publication of the Clark University Library, Vol. 6, No. 8 (October, 1922); reprinted in Science, Vol. 56 (1922), pp. 121-34. His speech did not reassure a now traumatized faculty who were less impressed by the expansion of Davis' vision than by its expense.

Atwood's inaugural address concerning the specific prospects for any existing department. The Department of History and International Relations and the Department of Economics and Sociology, each of which was headed by a strong, well-established scholar (the historian George Hubbard Blakeslee and the sociologist Frank Hamilton Hankins) initially welcomed Atwood's overtures and made elaborate plans for cross-departmental collaboration and for the expansion and strengthening of areas allied to geography.

Shortly after the inauguration, rumors began to surface publicly concerning the new game plan insofar as it might affect other graduate departments. A Worcester newspaper carrying an account of the plans for merger of college and university noted "the unified institution will be transformed into a technological school of modern geography...is being predicted by those who know of what is being considered for the future of the university," clearly stemming from conversations with either Atwood or one of the trustees. After commenting that readjustments in the faculty were impending, the reporter added "there is rumor that the number of professors in some of the departments will be reduced to permit building a teaching force in geography." (The termination of the services of six faculty members, including three senior professors, had been authorized by the Board at its January 22 meeting.) The article promised an early announcement of the changes planned. No such announcement was made, however, and Atwood did not deny the "rumor" concerning the cutback of professors in the other departments.

In February, 1921, the newly merged faculty had set up a Graduate Board to oversee graduate work in the reorganized university and to maintain the old university's standards. Members of the Board discovered to their surprise upon reading proofs of the new catalogue that the new "Graduate School of Geography" with Atwood as "Director" had been set up independently of the Board's jurisdiction, and without either faculty advice or notification. In the end, though, Atwood and the trustees' original plans for discontinuance of the Ph.D. programs in natural science and mathematics were to be achieved: biology through a resignation and a death in 1921; mathematics through three retirements (at least one of them forced) in the same year; physics through a suicide in 1923; and chemistry, after failure of plans to convert Dr. Kraus's post into a research professorship, by resignation in 1924.

A STRATEGY DERAILED

If these were all the losses, and the other graduate departments could all have been brought together in a mutually agreeable and intellectually stimulating "great geographical institute," Atwood would have won recognition as an outstanding educational leader. Within two and a half years after his inaugural, however, Atwood's mishandling of the reorganization process and of other aspects of his role as president had lost most of the graduate faculty of 1920 and the support of all of his constituencies except the Board which had selected him. A flood of adverse publicity for Clark University and the new venture in geography ensued, eventually triggering off both alumni and AAUP investigations of his conduct as president of Clark.

These outcomes, of course, were not anticipated as by-products of the goals of the trustees in 1920. In the interim had come an unexpected development, the alienation of men in the principal social science departments arising out of the so-called "Nearing incident" of March 14, 1922. During the first year or so of the new administration, several members of these departments had responded enthusiastically to Atwood's designated role for them as important auxiliaries of the new Graduate School of Geography. Harry Elmer Barnes, Professor of the History of Thought and Culture, was particularly enthusiastic, speaking on the relations of geography and history to

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the New England History Teachers' Association meetings at Clark, and inviting Atwood to speak to his recent American history class on natural resources as bearing on American industrial history and in so doing "to arouse enthusiasm in geography." Barnes also planned a course (never actually offered) on "The Development of the Concept of the Relation of Geography to History." Assistant Professor Herman Hilmer in economics offered a course on the Economic Geography of Europe in the new School the first year, and there were signs of cooperation from other Clark social scientists.31

In March, 1922, however, Atwood's support among most social science faculty members and among the undergraduate students evaporated when Scott Nearing, a Socialist lecturing on "The Control of Public Opinion" under the auspices of the Liberal Club, an undergraduate-sponsored speaker's forum, was cut off in mid-speech by Atwood's orders. The president, who had come into the hall late because of a competing geography lecture, listened for a few minutes to Nearing as he held forth on business control of universities after the manner of Thorstein Veblen (ironically, Atwood's brother-in-law; both had married daughters of the prominent Chicago lawyer Alexander Towle Bradley).

Then, angered by what he took to be a gratuitous personal reference, the President suddenly stopped the lecture and asked all present to go home. When the startled audience (which included ex-President Hall, other faculty, and townsfolk as well as students) did not move out quickly enough, Atwood ordered the janitor, Arthur Gunderson, to flicker the lights, an action which quickly became the symbol of Atwood's supposed threat to the right of free inquiry in an institution whose motto is "Fiat Lux." An impetuous act done in a hasty fit of temper, the "Nearing incident" was to galvanize student, alumni, and liberal faculty against Atwood as president and thereby insure both the failure of his and Thurber's great plan for geography at Clark and the destruction of his own reputation as an educational administrator within and without the university.32

31 Barnes to Atwood, Feb. 23, 1921, Atwood Papers; Barnes, "Clark University," passim; Koelsch, "Harry Elmer Barnes," passim.
32 Documentation of the Nearing incident and its after-

The Nearing incident was like a match setting off a series of firecrackers, and the atmosphere of the university remained fairly noisy over the next two years. The issue of a suitable academic plan for the survival of Clark was displaced by a political issue, in which the personality and political stance of Atwood himself, rather than the wisdom of concentrating the university's resources, became the key element.

Atwood compounded his initial error of judgement by making a similar linkage. Opposition to his plans and administrative actions was perceived by the President as stemming from a cabal of radical faculty who were out both to get rid of him as president and to undermine and destroy geography at Clark. Yet Atwood, absorbed in his plans for geography and in his extensive community involvements, was unaware that, just before the Nearing incident, about three-fourths of the full professors had agreed to sign a special communication to the Board of Trustees. This letter requested a formal statement of policy which would alleviate the uncertainties of the faculty as to the status of their departments, as well as disclosure of certain financial data and the future degree of financial support to be anticipated for the various divisions of the university.

The six-page letter was specifically critical of the trustees for their lack of faculty consultation on such matters as the independence of the Graduate School of Geography, the es-

mabh is abundant; see Barnes, "Clark University" . . . , pp. 286–87; Boring, Psychologist at Large (New York: Basic Books, 1961), pp. 32–39; and Nearing's own account in The Making of a Radical (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), pp 79–81. (I have also talked with Near-
ing, who was awarded an honorary degree from Clark in 1974). See also clippings and correspondence in the Atwood Papers and in Clark University scrapbooks, especially "Nearing Affair, 1922 Clippings." In addition to material in the Atwood Papers, manuscript material exists in the Boring Papers, Harvard University Archives; the Barnes Papers, University of Wyoming; the Henry D. Sheldon Papers, University of Oregon Library; the Edward B. Titchener Papers, Cornell University Library; and the Melville, Thurber and Wilson Papers at Clark. See also W. A. Koelsch, Interview with the late J. Ross Fraser (Student President of The Liberal Club in 1922), Feb. 10, 1973, CUA; W. A. Koelsch, interview with Mrs. Gladys Diliberto (daughter of Arthur Gunderson), June 12, 1974, CUA. Preston James to William A. Koelsch, October 23, 1975, Feb. 21, 1976, op. cit., footnote 13, nicely clarifies the context of the incident and provides a reasoned interpretation of Atwood's behavior.
establishment of the Summer School, and the proposal to create a correspondence school of geography; it also criticized Atwood's performance of his dual role as president and head of the new department. The Nearing incident actually temporarily saved Atwood the humiliation of a public rebuke by his senior faculty, for the more apolitical or conservative professors, in the aftermath of that incident and its interpretation by the conservative Worcester press, felt that they would be typed as radicals if they signed it, and the document was quietly killed.

The conservative trustees were, however, galvanized into visceral support for an embattled Atwood now seen as the saviour of the College and the minds of the young men enrolled there from radical contamination. "We want no apostle of anarchy here," fumed the former President of the Board, a prominent local insurance company executive. "[Nearing] belongs in Russia." And to Thurber he wrote "that Atwood must be supported thoroughly and cordially, no matter what happens to some of the radical members of the teaching force, seems to me very clear."

The sound and fury which were the aftermath of the Nearing incident, and which wasted the favorable national publicity which Clark had received as a result of the announcement of its new institutional strategy, should not be permitted to obscure the central point. A series of mistakes had been made in the implementation of a plausible educational proposal. Most important, perhaps, was the failure of the new president, preoccupied with his own plans for a "great geographical institute," to articulate, to those whose whole-hearted support and cooperation he needed, a persuasive case that this plan and his leadership would benefit the institution as a whole.

Instead Atwood consistently confused his role as chief geographer with his role as president; when various criticisms of his administrative actions arose in the wake of the Nearing incident, he saw them as attacks upon geography and based his strategy for a counterattack on the perceived opportunity to strike a grand blow for geography and for acceptance of the notion that he and the trustees had been entirely justified in their actions in setting up a Graduate School of Geography. His critics similarly refused to separate Atwood the "reactionary" university president from Atwood the geographical leader. This was the hidden hazard in the "Presidential" strategy of the Clark Trustees. It is no wonder that a specially constituted investigating committee of the Alumni Council plaintively put it that "Your committee is firmly convinced that much of the unrest at Clark is caused by an overdose of geography, which seems for the moment to eclipse everything else that the University stands for."

The AAUP Committee, chaired by Professor Arthur O. Lovejoy of the Johns Hopkins University, concluded that, regardless of the abstract merits of the policy of concentration around geography, Atwood as president had been unable to command those qualities of "tact, administrative wisdom, coolness and good humor under opposition, fairness in controversy, and ability to see other men's points of view" that were requisite to success in the difficult process of reorganizing the university. Critical also of the trustees, the committee asserted that their new stated policy simply had not worked. "It would not appear," they wrote, "that there has yet been a close approach to the realization of the purpose of establishing at Worcester a school of geographical research 'unique in America and pre-eminent in its special field.'"

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24 Clark University Alumni Association, "Report of Committee appointed by the Clark University Alumni Council in Accordance with a Vote of the Alumni Association, June 10, 1922" (Worcester: Clark University Alumni Association, 1923), p. 3. (Copies in Melville and Thurber Papers; the copy in the Melville papers has useful annotations.)


26 A. George Bullock to Atwood, March 13, 1922; Bullock to Thurber, March 17, 1922. Thurber Papers.
A STRATEGY IN RUINS

Atwood later claimed that "no plans made in the reorganization of the University, and no administrative policies[,] have in any way worked to the disadvantage of the other departments of the institution" and that appropriations for the other departments were enlarged with funds saved through administrative reorganization. On the now available evidence, this statement cannot be sustained. Indeed, it is not difficult to see in Atwood's post-Nearing handling of the graduate departments in social science elements of a personal vendetta which overrode all prior considerations of education policy. 28

Hankins' and Barnes' resignations, however, permitted the president to eliminate the course in political and social science for entering students and to shift the center of the gravity of the Department of Political and Social Science from sociology to economics, a subject supportive of Atwood's interests in developing economic and commercial geography. The quality of Clark's history department was maintained, thanks to its strong and influential head, and both psychology and the new Department of Economics and Sociology had added promising new faculty by 1924.

The proposed Dean of the College, economist and Clark alumnus Donald Taft, was not appointed in spite of the unanimous endorsement of the faculty committee on appointments, after he had refused to take sides between Atwood and Hankins over the Nearing case; instead, without consulting that committee, Atwood appointed Homer P. Little, a geologist and Executive Secretary of the National Research Council's Division of Geology and Geography, who introduced geology to the undergraduate curriculum. In principle, as Atwood told Lovejoy, the combination of these several departments with geography would "fit together, and enable us to deal effectively with the problems concerning man and his relation to his environment." 29

That principle, however, was no more to be realized under Atwood's leadership than the attainment of a new Platonic Academy under Hall. The vestigial "Graduate School of Geography" which emerged unfilled out of a university diminished in impact and spirit by the turmoil of these years bore small resemblance to the "great geographical institute" which Atwood and Thurber had envisioned in 1919-20. In fact, the School of Geography in its early years drew fewer graduate students than several "lesser" Clark departments. The department which emerged out of the bungled strategy of administrative reorganization was to be central to Clark's outside image (whether positively or negatively) without quite managing to be intellectually respected inside. As a result of the way in which he had handled his presidential function, Atwood was unable as a department head to enlist the cooperation of faculty members in related departments in working wholeheartedly toward the goal of creating at Clark "a department unique in America and preeminent in its special field."

Hall too had made disastrous errors of administrative judgement in his first three years as president of Clark. Through his dynamic personality and his special and comprehensive brand of psychology, however, he had been able to play both roles in such a way as to galvanize related departments and dominate the Clark intellectual enterprise of his day. At best unable to attract more than the pro-forma respect of his Clark peers, Atwood left the running of the College to the Dean and, after 1923, largely retreated into his own departmental and disciplinary concerns, especially the production of several very popular series of school textbooks. Geography, far from being the "Queen of the Sciences" at Clark, enjoyed at best a rather morganatic status for the remainder of the Atwood regime.

The trustees who had installed Atwood as president, however, still held high the banner of faith in the wisdom of the course they had set. At the height of the furor, at a time when the Lovejoy Committee had begun taking tes-

28 Atwood, "Administrative Report, 1920-1945," p. 19. "A Brief Review . . . ." p. 6; Lovejoy, et al., op. cit., pp. 418-20; Clark University, Reports of the Treasurer, 1919-1923, CUA. Atwood also told the AAUP Committee that "when I accepted the Presidency of the University no arrangement had been entered into with the Trustees of the University or with any other body looking to the abandonment or dropping of the work in any of the older departments." (Lovejoy, et al., p. 418, quoted from Atwood to Lovejoy, July 25, 1924, Atwood Papers.) Atwood's letter to Thurber dated April 14, 1920, op. cit., footnote 17, of course spells out precisely such an arrangement among the agreed-upon conditions for Atwood's acceptance of the position.

29 Lovejoy, "Memorandum of Conversation with President Atwood on January 17, 1924," p. 4, Atwood Papers.
timony in its investigation, and as groups of alumni on both the Atlantic and Pacific coasts were organizing to petition the Board for Atwood’s removal, the trustees met in solemn conclave to transact university business and to hear a report from the president concerning “the organization, development and progress made in the School of Geography.” At the conclusion of the report, it was moved, seconded, and unanimously voted: “That the Board spread upon its record a statement expressing its unqualified approval and endorsement of the organization, development and progress of the School of Geography, and its appreciation of the wise and efficient activities of the President in that connection, and in the discharge of his official duties.”

ENVOI

Ten years after the publication of the Loewith Committee’s report, Atwood wrote Thurber a letter of reminiscence and appraisal of the accomplishments of the Graduate School of Geography. Citing the recent American Council on Education study which had identified Clark as one of four departments rated “distinguished” as trainers of Ph.D.’s in geography, Atwood dismissed two of the other three, Wisconsin and California, as “not well equipped for graduate work” and “far below our standard.” The third, at Chicago, he thought lacked leadership, and its scholarly output he judged “pitifully weak and ineffective in the profession.” Clark, on the other hand, was then “on the verge of establishing leadership in this country.” Crediting Thurber’s “vision of the possibilities that might be realized if Clark University would promote this field of study,” Atwood confidently asserted that “we shall be recognized within a few years . . . as the outstanding school of geography in America.”

Such judgements were, at best, premature. By 1934 Atwood had fleshed out his staff and program, and the staff of eight (five full-time) had attracted a steady stream of Ph.D. candidates. But he had lost his most productive research scholars, Ellen Churchill Semple and Charles F. Brooks, and he and most of his staff were primarily concerned with the production of textbooks and in lecturing before community and educational groups, not in advancing the frontiers of geographic research. Although the founding of the Graduate School of Geography in such an early period at a reputable university did confer significant benefits to geography, and although special emphasis on geography continues to confer certain strategic benefits on Clark, the department was not in 1934 and has never been “the outstanding school of geography in America” which Atwood persuaded himself that he directed. The intellectual leadership in the profession which was in fact being provided by Wisconsin, Chicago, and California in the 1920s and early 1930s might indeed have been the outcome of the “great geographical institute” dreamed of in Atwood and Thurber’s institutional strategy. It is unfortunate both for Clark and for American geography that Thurber and Atwood were unable, through their own limitations as policy-makers and managers, to implement their strategy successfully and create a structure in these critical four years from 1919 to 1923 which would have permitted their dreams to be actualized.

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40 Clark University, Board of Trustees, Minutes, Vol. IV, pp. 104-05.
41 Atwood to Thurber, June 19, 1934, Thurber Papers. “Distinguished” in this context means roughly that the department was rated in staff and facilities in the top twenty percent of all Ph.D.-granting departments by a majority of well known scholars in the field; see discussion in Laurence Foster, The Functions of A Graduate School in a Democratic Society (New York: Huxley House Publishers, 1936), pp. 17-18.