

# Five 20th-Century College Presidents



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*From Butler to Bok (Plus Summers)*

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# Foreword

This book is composed of five essays on long serving American college presidents whose overlapping tenures largely spanned the 20th Century. Covered are Nicholas Murray Butler of Columbia (1900–1945); Robert Hutchins of the University of Chicago (1930–1951); James Conant of Harvard (1933–1955); John Sloan Dickey of Dartmouth (1946–1971); and Derek Bok of Harvard (1971–1991, 2006), with a coda on Lawrence Summers’s experience also at Harvard (2001–2006). Each 20th-Century president is discussed in his comparative roles as Leader, Manager, Energizer, Envoy, and Intellectual.

In brief as to each subject, although he was controversial, Butler did much to make modern Columbia. But besides his tyrannical ways, he clearly stayed on much too long. Hutchins was a boy wonder, dean of the Yale Law school at 27(!), and president of Chicago three years later. Handsome, brilliant, dashing, he embodied the charismatic leader of a quintessentially cerebral institution. Conant did much to remake a Harvard, long America’s leading university, into a post-Brahmin institution more redolent of a meritocratic German university, with widespread effects across the country.

John Sloan Dickey strove to adapt the highly prestigious but mainly undergraduate Dartmouth College to what were (in the opinion of many) its more scholarly Ivy League university counterparts. But, he also strove to retain its unique undergraduate ethos. Derek Bok, thrived in the tumult of the ’60s and proceeded further to turn back the clock to a long presidential tenure in a time of much shorter ones. He was then welcomed back on an interim

basis to preside over Harvard after the resignation of his successor but one. Indeed, it was that successor, Lawrence Summers, whose truncated tenure would seem to inversely portend what we may expect of college presidencies in the 21st century.

Jeffrey O'Connell  
Thomas E. O'Connell



# Acknowledgments

Chapter One herein is excerpted in part from an earlier and fuller effort by the authors in a related discussion of academic leadership. Jeffrey O’Connell and Thomas E. O’Connell, “The Five Roles of the Law School Dean: Leader, Manager, Energizer, Envoy and Intellectual,” 29 *Emory L.J.* 605 (1980). Chapter Two is adapted from the *DePaul Law Review* from an article by Jeffrey and Thomas E. O’Connell, “The Five Roles of Robert Hutchins,” 42 *DePaul L. Rev.* 935-57 (1992); Chapter Three is adapted from the *Brigham Young University Education and Law Journal* from an article by Jeffrey and Thomas E. O’Connell, “James B. Conant: A Giant on Academe’s Left, Right and Center,” 1997 *Brigham Young Univ. Educ. and L.J.* 109-28.

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