Biographical Writing through the Lens of Lawrence A. Cremin's Leadership and Presidency at Teachers College

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Abstract
This article examines the complexities of biographical writing through the lens of Lawrence Cremin's (1925–1990) leadership and presidency at Teachers College, Columbia University. Cremin was president of Teachers College in the period 1974-1984 and a prolific author best known for his three-volume work *American Education* (published between 1970 and 1988). He was also a Professor of Education at Teachers College until his death in 1990. This article explores the subjectivity inherent in biographical writing, focusing on the ways in which archival research and personal reflection influenced the author's evolving perceptions of Cremin. The article begins with a discussion of Cremin's belief in the importance of educational thought that extended beyond formal schooling–an aspect that triggered the author's initial interest in Cremin's life and career. The narrative then focuses on Cremin's presidency during a challenging time for higher education. Analysis revealed that as an institutional leader, Cremin struggled with shared governance approaches and consistently opted for isolated and autonomous administrative decisions rendered with the power of his position as president of the College. Throughout the article, the author describes his gradual discoveries of Cremin's leadership experiences and complex beliefs, and emphasizes the uncertainty inherent in life-writing.

Keywords: Lawrence A. Cremin, Teachers College, higher education leadership, biographical writing, shared governance, presidential power, educational history, archival research

The subjective nature of biographical writing straddles the processes of reconstructing facts about a person's life and those of making complicated choices to highlight actions or traits of the biographical subject within the context of local, national, or international events. My own interest in biographical writing sparked from my desire to author a dissertation about

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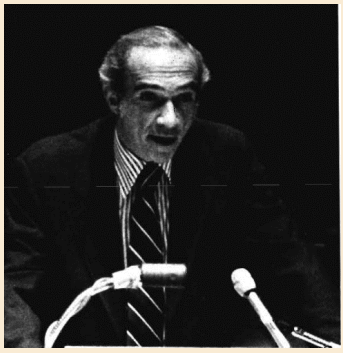
Lawrence Cremin, an educational scholar who also held the presidency at Teachers College in New York City. Cremin started his career as an instructor at Teachers College in 1951. He won the 1962 Bancroft Prize in American History for his book *The Transformation of the School: Progressivism in American Education, 1876–1957*, published in 1961. The prestigious Bancroft altered his career and gave him a national audience of educators and historians. This led to other prominent works such as his three-volume account of America's educational history: *American Education: The Colonial Experience, 1607–1783* (1970); *American Education: The National Experience, 1783–1876* (1980); and *American Education: The Metropolitan Experience, 1876–1980* (1988). In 1981, he won a Pulitzer Prize for the second entry in the collection. Educational historians and scholars frequently recognize Cremin as a foremost historian of American education.

Cremin's scholarship typically called for a broader view of education by emphasizing that agencies beyond formal schooling, such as families, churches, libraries, museums, publishers, benevolent societies, youth groups, agricultural fairs, radio networks, military organizations, and research institutes, also provide education and are "present in society… at points in time" (Cremin, 1965, p. 48). Cremin's thoughts about other agencies that educate had often piqued my professional interest and fed my wish to learn more about him as I believed his ideas to be practical and relevant. Setting out to chronicle his career, I discovered a digital archive and a special collection at Teachers College, Columbia University that provided a wealth of information about his personal and professional life.

I initially scoured the archives seeking a historical anecdote or artifact that would allow me to construct a captivating narrative about Cremin and his career. I recalled continuously asking myself, "As biographies commemorated athletes, military leaders, musical artists, politicians, and other historical figures then why can't there be more biographies about great educators?" I saw Cremin as one of those great educators. I wanted to find information about Cremin that supported my preconceived belief that he was a great educational thinker. One of the first artifacts I discovered during my initial archival search, an image of him speaking at his first presidential convocation in 1974 (Figure 1), aligned well with the image of Cremin as the great educator that I had in my mind.

The image captures Cremin confidently speaking to an audience of students, faculty, and staff at the all-college convocation. This convocation address marked his first occasion speaking as president of Teachers College, a position he held from 1974 to 1984. After opening his talk with words of appreciation for the opportunity to serve as president, Cremin transitioned to sharing his belief that Teachers College was a supportive and enriching environment. His words also revealed his vision for the College to the attentive crowd:

Figure 1
Cremin Speaking at Convocation, September 12, 1974



Note. Source: Teachers College, Columbia University, Gottesman Libraries Special Collections (Convocation Address, 1974).

> I myself have found Teachers College a superb context in which to do my work. The College has been a source of immense sustenance to me—in colleagueship, in scholarly stimulus, in spiritual support. I have always enjoyed coming here and I have always been proud of being here. And I would hope that everyone at the College would have reason to think and feel the same way. If we are going to lead most or part of our lives here, I would hope we might lead them together with dignity and decency and zest, and with a sense of serving together in a truly great cause. (Convocation Address, 1974)

Cremin's vision was founded on the ideas of serving together and these ideas set the expectation for how the institution would operate during his presidency.

The image of Cremin speaking to his audience, in conjunction with his convocation message, appealed to my interests as a researcher and biographer. The image sparked a strong desire to learn more about Cremin. However, as Cremin's career encompassed a multiplicity of roles and achievements, including those of scholar, educator, and leader, my initial intent to complete a dissertation that covered the entirety of his career increasingly appeared not realistic. The image of his convocation speech helped me refocus my research by narrowing it to the exploration of his leadership and presidency at Teachers College.

I would argue now that as I dug deeper into Cremin's achievements, I increasingly developed a degree of reflexivity into my role of researcher that I brought to the archival search process. As my journey in the archives continued, I recognized that Cremin had a complex, and even flawed, career at times. Cremin's journals provided a valuable source of insights into his experiences and visions. During his 40-year-long career at Teachers College, he journaled well over 1,000 pages. Admittedly, while reading his journal, I had moments where I often felt shocked by his thoughts as they clashed with my own initial image of him as a great educator that I had crafted initially. In an early conversation with my dissertation committee chair about my findings, he quipped, "Perhaps you could title your work *Never Meet Your Heroes*." The comment evoked Thomas Carlyle's Great Man Theory argument, developed in his *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* (1841). Carlyle's theory asserts that history is shaped by exceptional individuals whose actions and leadership influence events that shape society. Although Carlyle's (1840) work has not been widely accepted as rigorous scholarly theory and research and contains obvious gender bias (Spector, 2016, pp. 250–251), his ideas have spread amongst biographers. Biographers often value Carlyle's framework because it emphasizes the impact of how individuals are perceived as extraordinary for shaping history. Thus, with his comment, my dissertation chair evoked an awareness within me that I was still building Cremin as a heroic figure in educational history. In a seminal work on biographical writing, Edel (1959) referred to the biographical subject as the researcher's hero or heroine but cautioned that the biographer had to exercise proper impartiality when conducting research and writing about the subject (pp. 66, 99).

Had I embraced Carlyle (1840) by hero-worshiping Cremin and ignored Edel's (1959) reminder to exercise "proper impartiality" (p. 99), I likely would have provided a simplified understanding of Cremin's multifaceted career that was shaped by the unique circumstances of the historical context influencing his presidency. My first find in the Cremin archives, the image, provided a windowed glimpse into the confidence and ambition he exhibited throughout his life; however, his thoughts, provided in his journals, illuminated how daily financial challenges, that started in the 1970s and continued into the early 1980s, and internal struggles underlined his presidency, effectively reducing his initial pronouncements of shared governance to an uncompromising use of legitimate

power while also rendering his leadership approach to that of an institutional caretaker.

Cremin's Leadership and Presidency at Teachers College

Cremin's presidency occurred during a period of transition for colleges and universities in the United States: the end of higher education's "Golden Age" and the advent of the "age of hardship" (Thelin, 2019, pp. 260–362). In the 1970s, a poor economy strained higher education; reduced government funding, limited financial aid, and rising tuition fees increasingly made it harder for many students to afford college and forced institutional leaders to cut programs and resources. Gerber (2014) argued that the mid-1970s marked a shift in higher education as the rise of a "market model" had eroded faculty governance and empowered administrators to lead with authority (p. 120). This shift clashed with long-standing faculty-driven perspective, championed by organizations such as the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), that advocated for shared governance as the ideal leadership model in higher education. As early as 1915, AAUP-recommended governance norms established that academics needed autonomy in a shared governance model to conduct their mission; these norms received reinforcement in both the 1940s and the 1970s (Gerber, 2014).

During his own college presidency, Cremin struggled to thrive in a shared governance model and year-after-year preferred to make isolated and autonomous decisions to overcome declining enrollments and decreased operating budgets. He increasingly thought of himself as a president who needed to lead through power as he worked to keep Teachers College operational through annual economic struggles. The institution faced financial difficulties throughout the 1970s and 1980s. From 1977 to 1981, Cremin consistently reported to the board the ever-present and dire financial situation facing Teachers College. He reported that the 1976–1977 budget had "estimated deficit of $1.4–$1.5 million" and "$1.8–$1.9 million for 1977–78" ("Executive Committee Meeting Minutes," 1975a, p. 2). Cremin also shared with the trustees that a "strain" had overtaken Teachers College causing an "inevitable concomitant of decremental budgeting" ("Executive Committee Meeting Minutes," 1977b, p. 3). In addition, Cremin remained committed to his scholarly

work, and often wished he could assume a president-scholar role to combine his passion for scholarship with leadership. Often, his desire to pursue his academic research projects clashed with his efforts to fulfill his obligations as Teachers College's president.

In my exploration of Cremin's leadership and presidency of Teachers College, I decided to follow Cremin's own description of his leadership journey. In his journal, Cremin discussed his presidency under three formative periods: a "honeymoon period" that started in 1974 and ended in 1976; "the real presidency" period that started in 1977 and ended in 1981; and a "leaving the presidency" period that started in 1982 and ended in 1984 (Cremin 1972–1978; Cremin, 1978–1985). Cremin's ten-year presidency revealed that he viewed himself as only answerable to himself and his scholarly interests.

1974 to 1976: "The Honeymoon Period"

Cremin's presidency during the "honeymoon period" was shaped by economic challenges, labor strikes, and a rift with the board and faculty, all of which solidified his view that strong and decisive leadership was necessary. Cremin's decision-making approach soon emphasized his belief in exercising presidential power without extensive consultation from colleagues. His early efforts to occupy two leadership positions at the College simultaneously–that of the president and that of the academic dean–signaled his inherent desire for centralized authority. In addition, his handling of labor negotiations between the board and faculty highlighted his preference for authoritative leadership and reflected his own evolving understanding of the presidency as one that required solitary decisions.

When Cremin became president of Teachers College in 1974, the previous dean had just left his position. That created an opportunity for Cremin to either hire a new dean or consolidate authority. As president, Cremin provided leadership for the entire College whereas the dean held responsibility over decisions for the College's academic divisions (Cremin, 1972–1978, p. 87). While publicly advocating for collaborative leadership among campus constituents, Cremin privately believed that holding both positions would enable him to implement his educational vision more effectively and find time

to continue with his writing and publishing efforts. As a result, he also stepped into the dean's position on an interim basis right at the onset of his presidency.

His interim role as dean quickly reinforced his belief that he could best lead the College's academic initiatives if he continued serving as both president and dean. From his perspective, he had "been doing it de facto" or, covering the responsibilities of both roles since becoming president; the combined dual responsibilities would "help get things done" (Cremin, 1972–1978, p. 88). Cremin actively politicked with faculty to garner support for his plan to officially, through board approval, assume the permanent deanship of Teachers College (Cremin, 1972–1978, p. 88). Building on his rationale for holding both positions, Cremin also began to leverage his authority to implement changes with the College's structure. As the "de facto" dean, Cremin (1972–1978) noted that he appointed "a younger professor to a leadership responsibility with pre-service programs" (p. 98), a move that exemplified his use of legitimate power. He then candidly offered his thoughts about the decision: "THAT'S THE GOOD USE OF PRESEDENTIAL POWER–to get good things going" (Cremin, 1972–1978, p. 89; capitals in original). His emphasis on the use of presidential power, noted in his journal in all capital letters, indicated early on how he would lead Teachers College throughout his presidency.

Cremin might have seen himself as a president who valued teamwork and shared power, but he believed that strong leadership meant having the authority to produce results. In February 1975, he used a board meeting to formally propose that his role be expanded to officially include the deanship, which he had been holding on an interim basis for several months. He felt the leadership structure was too complicated, with too many layers between the professors, chairs, directors, dean, and president ("Executive Committee Meeting Minutes," 1975a, p. 2). When speaking to the board, Cremin brushed aside concerns from the faculty that he would "end up with too little challenge to his views" as other institutional leaders could "feel free to express their views" ("Executive Committee Meeting Minutes," 1975a, p. 3). He also suggested that if permanently appointed dean, Provost Kenneth Toepfer would take on the administrative leadership over the College, thereby balancing Cremin's own power as president and dean ("Executive Committee Meeting Minutes," 1975a, p. 4). The board agreed, passing a resolution that officially gave Cremin both the presidency and the deanship.

Cremin's desire to hold the dean's responsibility over the College's academic side, alongside his role as president, linked to his scholarship aspirations. The scholar Cremin valued academic freedom, intellectual growth, and the advancement of knowledge, particularly in his field of education. He wanted to establish and exemplify his own scholarly success for faculty and students to follow. He saw himself as a president-scholar. Publicly, Cremin embraced an educational vision for Teachers College as a campus where partners worked together; privately, however, Cremin enacted a leadership style in which he served in two senior leadership positions. Cremin acknowledged that prior leadership had handed him "a strong and vigorous institution… that has drawn the strength from the courage and integrity of its leadership" (Convocation Address, 1974, p. 2). At the end of his "first hundred days" as president, he concluded that the strong institutional leadership he inherited should fall under his authority (Cremin, 1972–1978, p. 87). The economic pitfalls that plagued Teachers College in his early presidency pushed Cremin to constantly make decisions for the College's financial viability that further distanced him from shared leadership practices. He recognized the economic despair early with his "first hundred days" report to the trustees at the December board meeting in 1974. He anticipated that the approaching budgetary constraints dictated a "need for 100 to 150 additional full-time students in the 1975–1976 academic year" ("Executive Committee Meeting Minutes," 1974, p. 10). The stagnant economy and looming labor strikes narrowed Cremin's decision-making to mostly himself. The economic challenges, and his desire to focus on his own scholarship, quickly stretched him thin. With so much time spent managing the College's financial crises he found himself unable to dedicate enough time to his research and writing, which made holding both the president and dean positions untenable. Faced with this reality, Cremin decided to relinquish the deanship after only a few months of combining the position with his presidency.

Labor challenges also played a key role in his decision to give up the deanship. Throughout 1975, economic challenges sparked a potential strike for the Teachers College Employees Association (TCEA). The College petitioned to end TCEA's attempts to align with a local Distributive Workers of America (DWA) affiliate that the National Labor Relations Board (NRLB) sanctioned ("TCEA, District 65 Affiliation Vote Upheld," 1975). Cremin (1972–1978)

observed that "the union situation has heated up" (p. 90). In addition to the TCEA, The Teachers College Maintenance Employee Association (TCMEA) threatened to strike if "their negotiations did not come soon" ("TCEA, District 65 Affiliation Vote Upheld," 1975). Cremin initially refused to enter contract talks but agreed to enter negotiations with the NLRB decision ("TCEA, District 65 Affiliation Vote Upheld," 1975).

Cremin embraced his presidential authority when entering negotiations with each labor association. He "ordered" College officials to not "openly discuss the negotiations" when questioned by media ("TC Union Fails to Vote on Strike as Talks Continue," 1975). He worked with the College's legal counsel but failed to provide details to the trustees on his agreement with TCMEA. The trustees' subsequent reaction to his admission "astounded" Cremin (1972–1978); they "gave us hell," he journaled (p. 92). He believed the trustees' disapproval he received was linked to "a whopping $12 tuition increase" (Cremin, 1972–1978, p. 92). He failed to consider that not keeping the board informed about the TCMEA agreement bothered the trustees. Cremin (1972–1978) dismissed their perspective: "It was all very decent in style, I guess, but they and I were a million miles apart in view" (p. 92).

With the TCEA strike a real possibility, Cremin operated with a belief that his presidential responsibility dictated that he resolves the situation to "keep the college open and solvent" (Cremin, 1972–1978, p. 95). However, throughout the negotiations with the unions, especially at times when they became rather taxing, he placed his own personal reputation as a scholar above his presidential and deanship duties. He worried that if he settled with TCEA, then "the propaganda may be put out to the effect that the president of TC came begging for settlement" (Cremin, 1972–1978, p. 95). As a result, he chose to avoid speaking publicly to the media, fearing that any public statements could further damage his credibility, especially as TCEA members "voted overwhelmingly to strike March 17, 1975, if agreement on a new pact… not reached" ("Clerical Workers Could Walk Out," 1975).

Cremin also made other decisions single-handedly. He initially agreed to by-pass a federal mediator and discuss the union's demands ("Union Leaders, TC President Meet to Negotiate New Pact," 1975). A week later, however, Cremin publicly communicated to the board that "the Association and the College were still far apart on terms" and he decided upon federal mediation

("Executive Committee Meeting Minutes," 1975b, p. 2). At the final board meeting on May 8, 1975, he did not discuss the negotiations and instead focused on educational happenings at the College. Cremin admitted a rare moment of humility, acknowledging that he struggled to balance his dual roles: "I failed on organized research and field education," he confessed, suggesting that his attempt to juggle both the presidency and the deanship had undermined his focus on academic priorities (Cremin, 1972–1978, p. 100). The board laughed when Cremin used the word "failure" as a concept applicable to him (Cremin, 1972–1978, p. 100). Their laughter signaled their awareness of Cremin's typical lack of ability to admit professional faults. He then informed the trustees of his decision to officially relinquish the deanship and hire a new dean although he kept his true motivation of wanting to focus more on his own scholarship a secret.

Cremin's approach to hiring a new dean further illustrated his belief in centralized decision-making power. Although he was required throughout 1975 to meet with a "committee elected by the faculty to consult on the deanship" (Cremin, 1972–1978, pp. 113–114), his collaboration with this committee was flawed from the outset. Rather than work with the committee on the search, Cremin ultimately canceled all scheduled meetings with them (Cremin, 1972–1978, p. 114) and single-handedly decided on the new dean appointee. By February 18, 1976, news that Harold Noah secured the deanship spread ("TC Professor Named School's Dean," 1976). Despite selecting a candidate while mostly bypassing the committee process, Cremin believed that the committee gave him "enthusiastic" support for hiring Noah (Cremin, 1972–1978, p. 116).

On February 19, 1976, College constituents questioned Cremin's use of presidential authority. Cremin felt he operated within his presidential purview and decided on February 29 "to face the issue of the Deanship head on" by reviewing the procedure with faculty that allowed him to nominate Noah to the trustees (Cremin, 1972–1978, p. 118). The institution's College Policy Council (CPC) and budget council, as the *Spectator* reported, criticized Cremin's use of power and decision to select Noah from within the College as a result of a less-than-optimal search procedure ("TC Policy Council Assails Dean Selection Process," 1976). Cremin did not shy from the criticism: When asked outright for his own opinion on what consultation should entail, Cremin declared that the "initiative" to choose the new dean "is mine… and consultation is to see if my

opinion is shared" ("TC Policy Council Assails Dean Selection Process," 1976). Cremin's remarks countered prevailing sentiment that leadership in higher education was focused on "collaborating with others and sharing power" (Kezar et al., 2006). He clarified that as president, he held the authority to make the decision at the expense of an inclusive committee search process.

Cremin realized that the "Spectator, the Columbia student newspaper" had "got wind of it" regarding his decision to hire a dean without the committee's involvement (Cremin, 1972–1978, p. 117; underlining in original). He also noted in his private journal that the concerns raised by campus groups and the student senate, regarding "views on inflation" and tuition increases, and questioning whether Noah had the necessary qualifications for deanship, as bothersome to him (Cremin, 1972–1978, p. 117). The criticism seriously bothered Cremin and sparked pensive self-reflection about his leadership and presidency. He (1972–1978) noted: "it could have been anything" but "it was the consultation on the deanship that did it" (p.116); for him "The 'honeymoon' period of the presidency was put behind" him (Cremin, 1972–1978, p. 117). At that point, Cremin (1972–1978) was now clear on how he intended to lead: "One might proceed thoughtfully, without haste, and according to certain principles and goals–and then so be it… And that's what the presidency has been and… shaping up to be" (p. 132). He realized the presidency often entailed prioritizing administrative work over scholarship. In his words, "the real presidency began" (Cremin, 1972–1978, p. 116).

1977 to 1981: "The Real Presidency"

During "the real presidency" years, Cremin faced continuous financial challenges and dire budget deficits. As the College grappled with financial struggles, Cremin's leadership approach continued to reflect a more authoritarian stance and prioritized executive decisions over collaboration. He abandoned his leadership responsibilities during the summer months to complete scholarly work. He recognized discontent existed among the faculty and staff, but he remained resolute in his decision to lead on his own terms even if it meant disregarding shared power. Cremin's "real presidency" was marked by tension between financial challenges, his personal scholarly goals, and his increasing preference for unilateral leadership.

From 1977 to 1981, Cremin consistently reported to the board the ever-present and dire financial situation facing Teachers College. He reported that the 1976–1977 budget had "estimated deficit of $1.4–$1.5 million" and "$1.8–$1.9 million for 1977–78" ("Executive Committee Meeting Minutes," 1977a, p. 2). Cremin informed the trustees that a "strain" had overtaken Teachers College that caused an "inevitable concomitant of decremental budgeting in an institution where creative individuals honestly disagree on the best ways to solve problems" ("Executive Committee Meeting Minutes," 1977b, p. 3). The gloomy financial situation further affected Cremin's approach to leading.

The persistent financial struggles and demands on the College underlined his "real presidency" period. Cremin (1978–1985a) frequently developed plans to deal with projected deficits: cut expenditures, decrease employee raises, and ask the trustees to accept operating deficits "all the while increasing tuition" (p. 100). He recognized the administrative doldrums of budget management to the point where he described it as an "almost novel situation" when only managing the budget controlled his workday (Cremin, 1978–1985a, p. 78). Cremin described his presidency and leadership for the College during this period of budgetary constraints as "to be a steadying, encouraging influence amidst much gloom" (Cremin, 1978–1985a, p. 67). However, amidst the economic uncertainties afflicting Teachers College, Cremin did not always exhibit characteristics attributed to a "steadying, encouraging" leader. He routinely vacated Teachers College during the summer months of his "real presidency" period to focus on completing his *American Education* trilogy. In 1979, he even documented spending "16 hours a day" to finish *The National Experience* (Cremin, 1978–1985a, p. 54).

Cremin was keenly aware that his colleagues often disagreed with his decisions and frequent absences from Teachers College. He acknowledged that some faculty members considered his actions "foolhardy" and felt he "wasn't really consulting, or rather… wasn't consulting seriously enough with the faculty" (Cremin, 1972–1978, pp. 140, 143). Even after negotiating pay raises for faculty with the board, Cremin struggled to understand his colleagues' concerns, especially since he had successfully negotiated on their behalf. In his journal, he questioned, "If not the President, then by whom?" (p. 147). This rhetorical question underscored his frustration, implying that if he, as president, was not making the hard decision, no one else would. His journal entries

indicated that he viewed himself as the ultimate authority in such matters. This sense of isolation in decision-making led to frustrations with leadership: "I am forcefully turned to other people's agenda" (Cremin, 1972–1978, pp. 150). As he navigated the "real presidency" period between 1977 and 1981, Cremin resolved to lead on his own terms, prioritizing his vision over the input of others.

In January 1978, an ordinary circumstance solidified Cremin's resolution. A call to serve on jury duty required him to spend a month away from Teachers College. The way in which the judge managed the courtroom during the civic obligation gave him an example of effective conduct and helped him justify his own approach to leadership (Cremin 1972–1978, p. 159). Reflecting on the experience, Cremin (1972–1978) wrote, "I don't know why it happened, but I suddenly realized, more clearly than I have at any time since 1974, that, like that judge, I'm in charge" (p. 160). The courtroom setting encouraged him to be honest with himself about his leadership style: he preferred to lead with confidence and power.

Observing the judge evoked a realization that he did not think about leadership as an inclusive process. The moment affirmed to him that he wanted to lead on his terms: "I can go at my own pace; I can do the things I want to do and not be programmed by every subordinate" (Cremin, 1972–1978, p. 160). He purposed to "listen and then deny or uphold–quietly… and decisively" and to worry "much much less… about what anybody and everybody thinks" (Cremin, 1972–1978, p. 160). He grew tired of listening to suggestions from peers and the administrative politics he felt the trustees, faculty, or other constituents had prioritized over his own presidential goals. Cremin (1972–1978) described the way in which a leader should make decisions in the following way: "one doesn't need to listen to every harebrained idea and try to give some satisfaction on it" (pp. 160–161).

Cremin's leadership insights during his jury duty experience also accommodated his long-held ambition, first developed in 1974, to blend the roles of president and scholar. As Cremin explained, "those lawyers and that judge would think a person an idiot who did not hold onto the power he had and make the most of it" (Cremin, 1972–1978, p. 161). He affirmed to himself, "And at this point, that's precisely what I plan to do–and write my books and continue with my scholarship–my way" (p. 161). Cremin knew he wanted to

balance his administrative responsibilities with a commitment to his scholarly pursuits and keep contributing to the academic mission of Teacher's College. Cremin put his resolve into action during a February 1978 board meeting.

Cremin reported to the trustees that he intended to lead with increased authority. He invoked the Teachers College statutes from 1972 that required him, as president, to uphold "inclusive, consensual policymaking," in which the "entire TC community participates" ("Executive Committee Meeting Minutes," 1978, p. 3), to be antiquated. He informed the board that he planned to use the statutory powers of administration that had "long gone unused" and that as a result "a measure of conflict within the College" would ensue ("Executive Committee Meeting Minutes," 1978, p. 4). Subsequent "conflict within the College" did not matter to Cremin. He never intended to appease faculty, staff, or students with an "inclusive, consensual" leadership conduct; he would rather manage the College authoritatively in order to open his own time to author books. He did not report to the trustees that his scholarly goals shaped his intentions to lead using statutory powers. In many ways, he was not looking to merge his administrative and academic responsibilities; instead, he sought more time to reconnect with his passion for writing and scholarship.

Cremin admittedly feigned inclusivity when navigating decision-making at Teachers College. He did not mind if his authoritative approach caused him "to take some brickbats" (Cremin, 1972–1978, p. 162). When faculty had needs, he contrived an inclusive decision-making scenario: "I told the faculty… to bring forward a proposal to get such a group" (Cremin, 1972–1978, p. 163). While doing so, Cremin dismissed "fury from those who thought I should have consulted them" about his directives (Cremin, 1972–1978, p. 163). He did not concern himself with any challenges to his presidential power: "My style <u>is</u> one of belief in certain ideals at the heart of what this college means, so I might but stay true to my style" (Cremin, 1972–1978, p. 164; underlining in original). He convinced himself that his leadership style best suited Teachers College. In his journal, he outright rejected leadership as an inclusive process:

> It's a favorite trick–to 'involve' everyone. And it does work. But it is <u>not</u> my style. And when one sets it in motion one can only 'accept' the ideas that come out of it and one is then stuck those ideas, whether or not one wants to lead in those particular directions. (Cremin, 1972–1978, p. 164)

His reflections confirmed his intentions to use statutory powers developed from

a need to sway from "the fairly Byzantine consultative arrangements at the College" (Cremin, 1972–1978, p. 165). He used "Byzantine" to exemplify that he did not want his leadership and presidency to comprise excessively complicated and administrative detail as guided by inclusive and shared leadership practices.

In late 1978, Cremin reflected on his presidency in his journals, revealing a lack of awareness regarding how others perceived his leadership. He noted with a touch of frustration: "No one… freely comes out and expresses any kind of appreciation for leadership… To write the words seems foolish on the face of it–appreciation for leadership, ha!" (Cremin, 1978–1985a, p. 27). He seemed disconnected from the tension within the College. He overlooked the fact that his authoritative leadership style likely fueled dissent. Instead of recognizing that his colleagues did not oppose leadership itself as a concept, he failed to recognize that their concerns were more personal and directed at his specific approach to leadership and decision-making.

1982 to 1984: "Leaving the Presidency"

Cremin always knew that his post-presidency plans would include research and writing. He referred to a continued interest in scholarly work without presidential obligations stating that he was "quite prepared to go back to being plain vanilla" (Cremin, 1978–1985a, p. 160). He also remained open to staying in leadership after the presidency: "I do think about the possibility for 1984 or 1985, after the TC presidency" (Cremin, 1978–1985a, p. 173). His interest in scholarly work and a potential leadership role branched from his original intent to lead Teachers College as a president-scholar. He never wanted to stop researching, writing, and publishing. In August 1982, his choice to leave the presidency became more concrete: "I announce my intention to step down from the presidency at the end of the 1983–1984 academic year" (Cremin, 1978–1985b, p. 1). By December 1982, he privately told many board members that he planned to resign (Cremin, 1978–1985b, p. 22).

Once Cremin (1978–1985b) finalized the decision, he formulated how the process would work: inform the trustees… and give faculty time "for whatever business it will need to transact in connection with the search" (p. 24). He informed the trustees about his resignation and retirement at the February

1983 board meeting and journaled on February 9, 1983, that they "approved the plan" to "step down from the presidency at the end of the 1984 summer session" (Cremin, 1978–1985b, p. 45). On February 14, the greater community learned about Cremin's plans: "he would retire from his post in September 1984 to resume teaching on a full-time basis" ("Cremin to Retire from TC Presidency," 1983). He eagerly wanted to return to teaching, and mostly his scholarship.

Cremin often viewed leadership throughout his presidency as inextricably linked to power, yet his resignation revealed a more complex set of motivations that contradicted his earlier desire to maintain that power. In a written statement to the trustees, he explained his decision to step down stating: "I have long held firm convictions about the advantages of frequent changes in officeholders and feel strongly that too many college presidents who survive beyond the usual half-life of four or five years end up remaining in the job too long" ("Cremin to Retire from TC Presidency," 1983). This reasoning presented a general belief about leadership term limits, but Cremin's journals revealed a deeper, more personal reason for staying in the position longer than he possibly intended. In one atypical journal entry, he reflected on his father's expectations, noting that he stayed in the presidency not just out of ambition for power but also out of a desire for his father's approval. After informing his father of his decision to resign, Cremin wrote, "I never thought he'd acquiesce for a moment in me… stepping down from any position of power or authority" (Cremin, 1978–1985b, p. 52). While he espoused the belief that presidents should not remain in office beyond five years, this "firm conviction" did not prevent him from holding the presidency for a decade. His decision to stay longer was influenced not only by his own drive for power, but also by his belief that his father wanted him to remain in the role.

Over a year after his official resignation, Cremin began to settle into the feeling that his presidency would be ending. On April 9, 1984, he penned in his journal: "Today is… a beautifully sunny spring day and the college is delightfully calm… I have the feeling that I'm really getting out of the TC presidency" (Cremin, 1978–1985b, p. 143). By May 23, he "cleaned off" his desk and observed: "It doesn't take long really to get back into the delights of thinking and writing" (Cremin, 1978–1985b, p. 149). August 1984 marked his final month as president of Teachers College after serving in the position for a decade.

Cremin's Presidential Leadership and Biographical Writing: Concluding Remarks

From 1974 to 1984, Cremin presented himself publicly as an intellectual leading Teachers College "in a truly great cause" to influence educational scholarship and practices (Convocation Address, 1974). He ascended to the presidency as an academic who compiled an impressive scholarly reputation while bypassing other leadership posts such as provost or dean. It made sense that he remained interested in scholarship and wanted it to guide his presidency, but as an institutional leader, he had to give more attention to budgetary challenges that shaped his leadership decisions. His leadership and presidency did not transcend beyond functional duties because Cremin did not lead with agency, creativity, or vision. His award-winning scholarship did not mirror his rather myopic presidency. Cremin's ten-year presidency revealed that he exercised a caretaker approach to attend to presidential formalities.

Cremin believed that he had an unequivocal and legitimate power as president of Teachers College. He exercised pragmatism in thinking that his legitimate power attached to the formal authority given to him. Cremin "internalized values about legitimate power… in which the power is very similar to the notion of… authority" (French & Raven, 1959, p. 159). By way of holding the presidency, Cremin believed that he should have legitimate power even if not aligning with the prescribed behavior of shared governance in higher education.

Cremin's actions in his early presidency started his detachment from shared-leadership governance. He failed to keep the trustees apprised when handling strikes between different Teachers College constituent groups. He also failed to keep the board informed when he wanted to increase tuition and he bypassed the College traditional practices and Policy Council, comprising staff, faculty, and students, in the appointment of Harold Noah as dean. He increasingly became absent from presidential duties during this period as exemplified by spending summers working on his *American Education* trilogy.

The criticisms Cremin received related to a struggling budget, potential strikes, and the Noah deanship appointment solidified how he wanted to practice leadership. He ascertained that he no longer needed "universal approval" to "please everyone" which marked his commitment to legitimate

power as authoritative. Cremin described his changing leadership thoughts as the start of the "real presidency" (Cremin, 1972–1978, p. 116). What Cremin identified as his "real presidency" was the exercise of legitimate power as "not only as a basis for the power of an agent, but also to describe the general behaviors of a person" (French & Raven, 1959, p. 161). His actions affirmed that he behaved within his perceived purview for using legitimate power as the president of Teachers College.

It is crucial to consider the context of the decade for which Cremin's presidency occurred in order to understand his resolve to conduct an authoritative presidential leadership style based on legitimate power. His presidency exemplified the changing landscape of declining enrollments prevalent in higher education throughout the 1970s. The stagnant U.S. economy and lower enrollment numbers resulted in a diminished budget for Teacher College. This historical context meant that Cremin had to increasingly focus on the financial bottom line and administratively make decisions based on budgetary constraints.

My approach to this study attempted to honor Edel's (1959) call to "search for the figure under the carpet" when reconstructing Cremin's leadership in the context of the economic challenges that he faced (p. 29). As an educational biographer, I had to "discover certain keys to the deeper truths" about Cremin as the subject (Edel, 1959, p. 29). The tapestry about his life and educational career had been known even before his death in 1990: a lauded author, Cremin achieved scholarly success when writing about educational history in America and successfully leading Teachers College through economic challenges. At his memorial service, Harold Noah spoke about Cremin's presidency:

> By 1976 a severe downturn in enrollments and external funding hit the College, as it hit every other school of education… and lasted for virtually the entire… year of Larry's presidency. The debt College owes to Larry… is that his leadership pulled us through that bad patch, and secured our future not just in terms of bare, meager survival but in splendidly good order, with a College ready to prosper. (Noah, 1990)

Noah captured the context for Cremin's leadership and presidency from 1974 to 1984, but failed to capture Cremin's tendency to lead with positional power.

When writing my dissertation, I initially hoped to use the first image I found to craft a biography that celebrated Cremin's educational achievements. I also envisioned concluding his career narrative on a positive note by focusing on a successful milestone or event from his presidency. Cremin certainly played a key role in keeping Teachers College operational during financial struggle, but I ultimately realized that no single defining moment from his career emerged as an ideal conclusion for his story. Oates (1991) cautioned that life-writing was not that simple. He believed that when a biographer undertakes life-writing, "we offer the people of history… understanding… and then if all goes well, they (biographical subjects) step forward, out of the mist" (Oates, 1991, p. 33). Bringing Cremin "out of the mist" meant that I made interpretations that might negatively reflect on him as a leader or person. I, however, did so while accounting for how the historical context of 1970s economic challenges shaped his leadership choices and presidency. My read of Cremin's presidential leadership was part of the life-writing journey, and, in Kridel's (2020) words on biographical writing, a "high adventure" (p. 11). Adventure, after all, is also part of a life lived.

Two days prior to the heart attack that ended his life, Cremin journaled for the final time, on Sunday, September 2, 1990. He discussed personal exchanges with peers about publishing opportunities and recorded his research efforts for a book about Dewey. Cremin (1985–1990b) noted the hiring of Thomas Bailey in 1990 as "a new young economist" and "nice addition to the college" (p. 75). Bailey, inaugurated in 2018, is the current president of Teachers College (as of 2025). After Bailey joined Teachers College, Cremin agreed to do a write-up about him for the American Educational Research Association (AERA) convention in April 1991. Cremin (1985–1990b) penned the final three words in his journals about the opportunity to do the write-up: "Might be fun" (p. 75).

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