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## Boyer's "Many Mansions: Lessons of Faith, Family, and Public Service" - Book Review

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**Kathryn Boyer**

***Many Mansions: Lessons of Faith, Family and Public Service***

Abilene, TX: Abilene Christian University Press, 2014 pb 288pp \$22.95

ISBN 978-0-89112-407-8

Kathryn Boyer, the wife of Earnest Boyer, did not write an academic book. She did not intend to (p. 239). *Many Mansions* is a memoir, a love letter of sorts, an honest and moving glimpse into the family and professional life of one of the most influential American educational figures in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Although hailing from humble beginnings, Earnest Boyer eventually served as the Chancellor of the State University of New York, the United States Commissioner of Education, and President of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advance of Teaching until his death in 1995. He was also a person of extraordinary personal faith, and he never forgot where he came from. Ultimately, I think that was the essential point of this book. Family, faith, and public service are not only possible; they make each one better, albeit with a great deal of commitment and sacrifice.

Creatively organized around the seventeen residences (the many mansions) where the Boyers lived as his career unfolded and their family expanded, the story begins with their marriage and their honeymoon cottage, and ends with his death. Along the way, we see the stresses that come to a family in public life, the enormous sacrifices of the spouse who moves for another's career, and the compelling faith that kept family and careers from unraveling. Indeed, it is a true love story—love of learning, love of students, love of service, love of family, and love of God. For this reason alone, I recommend it to anyone who struggles to balance career and family. *Many Mansions* will be an encouragement to you.

As an academic, I must confess that by book's end, I began to tire of the detail in the descriptions of all the houses and the moves. Certainly, seventeen different abodes is a lot to take in! Perhaps it would help the reader if they were somehow bundled in some fashion, making them easier to digest. I fear that this level of detail is more important to the writer and her family than to the intended audience.

This is not to say, however, that the book lacks academic merit. It is of interest to educators in at least three ways. First, *Many Mansions* gives us keen insight into the expansion of post-WWII higher education, as seen from the inside. We see a small college working to be accredited, the development of the January Term, the support of major foundations, student discontent in the sixties, and the development of a major statewide university. This is informative to all who study the history and development of higher education in the United States. Second, Earnest Boyer emerged as one of the most prominent and influential leaders of American education of the twentieth century, but his ideas and commitments did not appear *ex nihilo*. They were the result of being a reflective practitioner with insight, courage, and persistence. There is a lesson here for all academic administrators. And finally, *Many Mansions* is a testament to how one can live out one's Christian faith commitments in an honest and public way without trying to beat everyone over the head with the Bible, coercing them to think and believe in the same way. This book is a testament to faithful public service by a committed Christian. In this regard, it is recommended to anyone who seriously thinks about issues of faith and calling and service—and that includes academic administrators at all levels, K-12 and HE, public and private. We are all indebted to Kathryn Boyer for the courage and persistence to complete this book, certainly an emotionally difficult task at times. *Many Mansions*

chronicles the career of Earnest Boyer while giving us a glimpse of faith at work in the home and marriage of a true servant leader. He is a Sherpa for all who aspire to serve God and make a difference in education.

Patrick Allen