

Ernest L. Boyer:
A Cultural Biography
Todd C. Ream and Drew Moser
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Introduction/Basic Subject of the Book:

Like almost all sectors of American society, education underwent unprecedented waves of change during the latter half of the twentieth century. At the same time schools on all levels were pressed to reevaluate the material being taught, seismic enrollment shifts prompted teachers to think anew about how to pedagogically engage the students they now served. Gains made by the civil rights and women's movements were just the beginning as changes in immigration patterns also yielded an ethnic diversity of students previously unseen and, for many educators, previously unforeseen.

Polarized voices rising from the right and the left made the most dramatic pleas for public attention during this era. Pandering to the sentiments of individuals longing for a quieter and simpler time, some educators lobbied for a closed curricular canon conjoined by a firmer measure of authority. Their adversaries would pander to the sentiments of individuals decrying the oppressive nature of past structures and thus pled all critical dimensions of the educational establishment must be reimagined. Few, if any, educators in the middle found many friends as strength in numbers was simply not a strategy at their disposal.

Amidst the polarizing voices defining the American educational landscape, Ernest L. Boyer rose above the clamor. The views he came to hold proved difficult to typify based upon the criterion of his generation. Raised in Dayton, Ohio, Boyer was deeply influenced by his "Grandfather Boyer"—an Anabaptist minister who left the agrarian pattern of life embraced by his predecessors to plant a mission church amidst the diverse array of immigrants now calling America's cities home. His ministry sparked commitments within his grandson that drew from the wisdom of the past in order to meet the challenges of the future.

These commitments served as the bearings for an imaginative compass that guided Boyer through his service to a number of critical institutions. Boyer's efforts would eventually result in his recognition as America's most influential educator by *U.S News and World Report* (1990). Twenty years later, Vanderbilt University's John M. Braxton and I sought to quantify Boyer's ongoing influence and discovered the rate at which Boyer's work was still being cited was nothing short of "staggering" (*Crisis on Campus? Hopeful Responses from Ernest L. Boyer*, SUNY Press, Forthcoming).

Paying attention to Boyer's creative call for coherence, or his compulsion to draw together the frayed intellectual and/or social threads defining our society, helps us assess his considerable influence on education. Where others saw fragmentation, Boyer sought integration. Where others saw division, Boyer sought unity. Forged in a mission church in Dayton, Ohio, by his Grandpa Boyer, Ernest Boyer would take this message to a country struggling to adjust its eyes to the light generated by a new era of challenges and opportunities. In writings about students populating America's educational institutions ranging from preschool to college, Boyer sought to

create common experiences in which the children of all Americans could equally participate.

Perhaps one way to capture Boyer's legacy as defined by his creative call for coherence is by detailing a photograph taken of him on March 25, 1971. During a meeting of the Board of Trustees at State University College at Buffalo, students holding a rally outside reportedly created so much noise they disturbed the meeting. In contrast to the logic practiced by many of his contemporaries who held students at arms-length, Boyer walked out the front door of the building, waded into the midst of the protestors, and engaged their leaders in conversation. Reflective of the creative call for coherence he so often preached, a photographer caught Boyer on that day in his suit calmly talking with Ralph Kurland (President, College Student Association), Scott Flynn (Vice President, College Student Association), and two other students, Tyrone Trammel and Amos Johnson.

In *Crisis on Campus? Hopeful Responses from Ernest L. Boyer*, John Braxton and I (along with the contributors we partnered with in this effort) sought to bring this vision into direct dialogue with the issues currently plaguing, in particular, college and university campuses. The challenge now is to tie the pieces of Boyer's life story together in a way that not only assesses the impact of his creative call for coherence for all sectors of education but to do so by utilizing his life as an iconic window into the educational landscape of the latter half of the twentieth century. As a result, I propose what is now needed is a project tentatively entitled *Ernest L. Boyer: A Cultural Biography*.

Significance of the Book:

Although Boyer passed away almost twenty years ago, his work continues to receive considerable interest absent a biography of him in any form. Most of Boyer's publically accessible works are found in reports published by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. For example, in *Creating Campus Community: In Search of Ernest Boyer's Legacy* (Jossey-Bass, 2002), William M. McDonald and associates reviewed the impact Boyer's reports had on how educators now design both curricular and co-curricular learning communities. In a comparable sense, John Braxton, William Luckey, and Patricia Helland's *Institutionalizing a Broader View of Scholarship Through Boyer's Four Domains* (Jossey-Bass, 2002) considers the impact of the ideas Boyer offered in *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate* (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1990).

However, until recently a considerable number of Boyer's ideas remained inaccessible to the general public. Initially, Boyer's unpublished papers were housed in Princeton, New Jersey, under the care of the Carnegie Foundation. In the late-1990s, those materials (primarily comprised of large numbers of speeches and letters) were transferred to Messiah College (Boyer's alma mater) in Grantham, Pennsylvania. Over the course of the last couple of years, officials at Messiah labored to make those items available to the public via a digitized archive system. On Friday, April 13, 2012, an event was held launching such access.

The completion of this process proved to be of considerable benefit to a number of groups. As previously mentioned, Boyer's publically accessible ideas are generally found in reports published during his years at Carnegie. In addition, beyond the previously mentioned secondary

sources by William M. McDonald and his associates along with John Braxton, William Luckey, and Patricia Helland, only a few other comparable books exist with the most prominent being Kerry Ann O'Meara and R. Eugene Rice's *Faculty Priorities Reconsidered: Rewarding Multiple Forms of Scholarship* (Jossey-Bass, 2005), Charles E. Glassick, Mary Taylor Huber, and Gene I. Maeroff's *Scholarship Assessed: Evaluation of the Professoriate* (Jossey-Bass, 1997) and Pat Hutchings Mary Taylor Huber, and Anthony Ciccone's *Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Reconsidered: Institutional Integration and Impact* (Jossey-Bass, 2011). Surprisingly, no full-length biography considers Boyer's legacy. This project thus seeks to fill that void, and to do so while also telling the story of the unprecedented waves of change that swept through education during the latter half of the twentieth century.

Design for Each Chapter:

In the preface to *Pearl S. Buck: A Cultural Biography* (Cambridge University Press, 1996), Peter Conn explains he “tried to situate Pearl Buck's career in the many contexts that are needed to understand her development and her significance. This has involved a continuous act of negotiation between her life and the social and political circumstances that surrounded her” (p. xviii). Similar patterns are found in Robert W. Gutman's *Mozart: A Cultural Biography* (Harcourt, 1999) and David S. Reynolds' Bancroft Prize winning *Walt Whitman's America: A Cultural Biography* (Vintage, 1995). Situating Billy Graham as an iconic window into the religious landscape of twentieth-century America, Grant Wacker is currently completing a cultural biography of the evangelist for Harvard University Press.

In a comparable manner, each chronologically ordered chapter of *Ernest L. Boyer: A Cultural Biography* is designed to offer an iconic window into the educational landscape of the latter half of twentieth-century America. As a result, these chapters will not only tell Boyer's life story but do so as a means of understanding what is arguably the most exciting epoch in the history of American education. To begin, Boyer's own grandparents represent a wave of change in the United States population from agrarian to urban life. The mix of people groups—particularly the diverse array of immigrants in Dayton—raised many of the same questions for the Boyers that were raised in the minds of Americans with comparable roots. Just as the Brethren in Christ Mission they led in Dayton looked, sounded, and worshipped in a manner different than the church they left in the farmlands of rural Ohio, America's cities would also prove different as they continued to emerge in the early half of the twentieth century.

As previously mentioned, Ernest Boyer's vision for education as defined by the creative call for coherence is one he learned through the model of his grandfather. For Grandpa Boyer, the Dayton Mission was a place where diverse people groups could come together and embrace their common humanity in worship of God. For his grandson, America's schools were places where all people shared common spaces while also struggling with the possibility of common ideas. For example, in elementary schools where teachers from one grade level had little interaction with teachers from another, Boyer lobbied for vertical structures drawing teachers together under a common purpose. On college campuses where faculty members and student development administrators also had little to no interaction, Boyer lobbied for the integration of what is now commonly referred to as the curricular and the co-curricular.

As a result, the biographical dimensions of each chapter will draw almost exclusively from primary sources (speeches, notes, and letters—much of which I identified when working on the *Crisis on Campus?* volume) along with interviews from a variety of living family members, friends, and colleagues. Perhaps of greatest importance, I already established a relationship with Ernest Boyer's wife, Kay Tyson Boyer, who agreed to help with this project in any way she can. My plan is to also utilize primary sources in relation to the contextual dimensions of each chapter as much as possible. However, unlike the biographical dimensions, this component of each chapter will also draw heavily from secondary sources.

I find myself fortunate to be proposing to write a cultural biography of someone I generally admire. Boyer was undoubtedly a person of goodwill, sincerity, and depth of thought. However, he was not without his detractors. For example, in an interview I conducted with Paul Boyer (Ernest Boyer's younger brother and a noted American intellectual historian who served on the faculty at the University of Wisconsin, Madison), he talked at length, despite his love and appreciation for his brother, about his reservations concerning the four-fold typology Ernest developed in relation to faculty scholarship. In essence, Paul believed his brother reduced the value and urgency for faculty to participate in the practice of original research by relegating it to one of four categories labeled as the scholarship of discovery. Needless to say, Paul was not alone in those sentiments. When relevant, such observations and evaluations will prove to be necessary components of the fabric of each chapter.

Intended Audience:

In many ways, this cultural biography is designed to capitalize on interest in Boyer's life hopefully generated by the publication of the *Crisis on Campus?* volume. As a result, the four particular audiences for both books prove quite comparable. First, this cultural biography is also designed to meet the needs of scholars considering the history of the state of New York. In particular, Boyer is arguably the most well-known chancellor of the SUNY system. Part of his legacy is defined by the fact that he faced an onslaught of problems during the early-1970s—problems arguably not all that different from the ones facing colleges and universities today. Unfortunately, given the absence of a biography detailing his life story, the manner in which he faced those challenges remains relatively unexplored. This cultural biography will thus give students of New York history a deeper appreciation for Boyer's legacy and the challenges the SUNY system faced during his time as Chancellor.

Second, this cultural biography is also designed to help expand the base of scholarship in education—particularly the history of education. Boyer's thought has proven to be highly influential yet a previously noted shortage of primary and secondary sources still exists. Education scholars are quick to cite Boyer as a leading authority but no effort has been made to tell the life story of the person behind those ideas. This book would seek not only to provide education scholars with the details of Boyer's life but also what can arguably be used as a textbook in courses dealing with the contemporary history of education.

Third, educational administrators will also benefit from a cultural biography of Ernest Boyer. Arguably, Boyer's influence has proven to be greater on administrators than on education

scholars. Evidence to this fact is found in the sheer number of programs in both K-12 education and higher education that reflect Boyer's ideals. However, such ideas are often implemented with little thought given to the person who proposed them and the context out of which they emerged.

Finally, policy makers are arguably weighing in more on the fate of education than ever before. Cries for greater accountability were raining down from governor's mansions, state legislatures, and Congress even prior to the economic recession that began in the fall of 2008. Constrained budgets have only added to the pitch and frequency of those cries. At times, such concerns reflect challenges needing to be addressed. At other times, they reflect an ill-informed and reactionary impulse posed by the tyranny of the urgent. As a result, this book will provide policy makers with the narrative account of a person who not only faced comparable crises to the ones they are facing but did so during a time arguably more challenging than our own.

Market Need/Competing Books:

As previously stated, no biography of Ernest L. Boyer currently exists and this book is designed to fill this void. In addition, this book is designed to employ Boyer's life as an iconic window into the fascinating educational landscape of the latter half of the twentieth century. Ironically, no singular volume even covers the student protests of the late-1960s and early-1970s, more or less that particular period of time in education as a whole. Similar voids occur in many places in the contemporary history of education. This book is designed to also initially fill many of those voids.

Outline of the Book:

Prologue: "Cultivating a Creative Call for Coherence" – As a way to situate Ernest Boyer's life, as well as the larger context in which he lived, the epilogue will draw comparisons between the perspectives held by Boyer and Clark Kerr. Like Boyer, Kerr served as the Chancellor for one of the largest university systems in the country, the University of California, and then went on to lead a think tank, the Carnegie Council on Policy Studies in Higher Education. In contrast to Boyer, Kerr resigned himself to the pervasive fragmentation in education. He even went so far in the Godkin Lectures he gave at Harvard University in 1963 to refer to the university as the more accurately defined "multiversity." Boyer never resigned himself to such a position and, as a result of the manner in which he was raised, set out to issue what I detail in the chapters that follow as a creative call for coherence.

Chapter One: "Off the Farm" – In order to understand the origins of Ernest Boyer's creative call for coherence and the society he sought to serve, his story must begin with his grandparents and the societal shifts they experienced during the late-1800s. As members of the Brethren in Christ tradition, an Anabaptist religious group with roots in the waves of immigration emanating from central Europe in the 1700s, Ernest Boyer's grandparents, William and Susie Boyer, initially lived a primarily agrarian life, being raised on farms in rural Ohio. Industrialization and the rise of manufacturing centers compelled them to leave the only life their respective families had known for generations and move to Dayton to seek employment.

Chapter Two: “Gather Round at the Mission” – In Dayton, as in many other emerging manufacturing centers, patterns of religious life were also undergoing considerable changes. For generations, Brethren in Christ churches were populated by descendants of a small number of ethnic groups. William and Susie Boyer, however, found themselves committed to meeting the needs of all people where they lived. As a result, instead of founding a formal congregation in Dayton, they founded a storefront mission. This impulse to meet people where they lived and draw them together through the needs met by the mission left a considerable impression upon their grandson, Ernest Boyer (born September 13, 1928), who internalized these lessons. Instead of accepting the pervasive fragmentation of the urbanized society of his day, Ernest Boyer learned to look to education as a means of issuing a creative call for coherence.

Chapter Three: “Bible College and Beyond” – As a young man who showed considerable intellectual promise, Ernest Boyer left home and enrolled at Messiah College—a Bible college at that time sponsored by his denomination. Like many Americans who came of age in the 1940s and 1950s, opportunities for access to higher education were expanding rapidly. Seeking more than a two-year degree, Boyer, and his now wife, Kathryn Garis Tyson, moved to Greenville, Illinois, where he completed his undergraduate degree at Greenville College. The geographical ties that once bound their parents to a particular place would not apply to Ernest and Kathryn. After Ernest served as a graduate student for a short period of time at The Ohio State University, the Boyers left the Midwest and joined the postwar, westward migration to California.

Chapter Four: “California Dreaming” – The University of Southern California, once a college sponsored by the Methodist Episcopal Church /United Methodist Church, was growing rapidly and embracing what was becoming the predominant model known as the research university. At USC Boyer concluded both his master’s and Ph.D. degrees in communication (1956). He and his family returned to the Midwest for a brief period during his post-doctoral fellowship in medical audiology at the University of Iowa Hospital. However, evidence of the warming of relations between Catholics and Protestants in post-war America came via the fact that Boyer’s first administrative position was at Jesuit Catholic Loyola Marymount University back in Los Angeles.

Chapter Five: “Tough Questions, Real Results” – Boyer’s ties to the Brethren in Christ tradition next compelled him to serve as a professor and academic dean for one of their colleges just north of Los Angeles, Upland College, for four years (1956-1960). When Boyer arrived, Upland was not accredited and, like many small schools at this time, was struggling to find its identity as a more diverse array of learners was seeking a college education. Boyer embraced this challenge, assessed the school’s strengths and weaknesses, and was eventually able to secure regional accreditation for the first time in Upland’s history. In order to secure this form of recognition, Boyer opened the Upland community up to a host of creative educational paradigms he would utilize as a means to form the core of its identity.

Chapter Six: “Experiments on the Beach” – This passion for creative educational paradigms led Boyer to serve as the Director of the Western College Association’s Commission for the Education of Teachers (1960-1962) and then eventually as the Director of the Center for Coordinated Education at the University of California at Santa Barbara (1962-1965). In both

roles, Boyer faced variant strands of the challenge being posed to a wide range of educational institutions. In essence, how could the needs of a larger and more diverse group of learners be met while still reflecting something of our common identity as people? The creative answers Boyer offered, answers reflective of the ideals he learned from his Grandpa Boyer, brought him to the attention of prominent educators such as the University of California at Santa Barbara's Sam Gould.

Chapter Seven: "Bigger but Not Necessarily Better" – When announced as the founding Chancellor of the SUNY System, Sam Gould asked Boyer to follow him east to serve as his Vice Chancellor and Executive Dean (1965-1970). Challenged with creating a coordinating structure worthy of the nation's largest system of higher education, Gould and Boyer quickly recognized that, in contrast to the prevailing wisdom of the age, bigger institutions and bigger systems were not necessarily better. Given the size of some of SUNY's campuses and the system as a whole, Gould and Boyer faced considerable challenges, ranging from resource allocation to student unrest as they strove to make higher education accessible to as many people as possible.

Chapter Eight: "Access for All" – When Gould retired as the Chancellor of the SUNY System in 1970, Boyer assumed the position (1970-1977). Within months, he launched what he and Gould had dreamed of in terms of access to higher education for residents across the state of New York who did not live within a convenient distance from a SUNY campus. Known as Empire State College, Boyer and his colleagues developed a network of faculty mentors who served small groups of working adults. These mentors would then help their students with a number of non-traditional opportunities such as the learning potential made available through partnerships with for-profit and not-for-profit entities. This revolutionary paradigm essentially would become a model for a nation struggling with how to educate its rapidly growing and changing population.

Chapter Nine: "Students at the Gates" – At the same time as Boyer labored to establish Empire State College, students on campuses across New York and around the country were engaging in protests. As institutions grew in size, their administrative structures also became more dependent upon relationships their administrators and faculty members forged with a host of governmental and industry partners. Frustration with the Vietnam War then facilitated student outrage with a number of these partnerships. Fearing the violence that befell Kent State University and Jackson State University would surface on their campuses, administrators often tried to appease students while also holding them at arms-length. In contrast, Boyer sought to engage students in dialogue, listen attentively to their demands, and utilize the virtues historically definitive of higher education to work together for the betterment of all parties.

Chapter Ten: "Down and Out in DC" – Like many charged with representing the interests of large educational institutions and systems, Boyer learned the needed political skills to work well with members of the executive and legislative branches of state government. As a result of the reputation he established in Albany, Boyer was called upon by United States Presidents Richard M. Nixon, Gerald R. Ford, and Jimmy Carter to serve as a member of their national education commissions. Those experiences culminated with President Carter's appointment of Boyer to serve as the United States Commissioner of Education (1977-1979). Regardless of his commitment to continue to cut through the bureaucratic barriers hindering the elevation of expectations for America's students, like many other educational leaders Boyer arguably found

more challenges to such efforts in Washington than successes.

Chapter Eleven: “Common for All” – Although Boyer would continue to maintain an office in Washington, DC in order to stay aware of the nature of policy debates pertaining to education, the position he would hold until he lost a three-year battle with cancer (December 8, 1995) was the one for which he would arguably gain the most notoriety, President of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (1979-1995). Shortly after moving the Foundation to Princeton, New Jersey, Boyer engaged its resources in a review of education across the lifespan of the student. Reflective of the creative call for coherence he utilized in every position he held, Boyer began his career at Carnegie by issuing *A Quest for Common Learning: The Aims of General Education* (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1981). In the face of an increasingly fragmented and divisive college campus, Boyer (along with Arthur Levine) sought to refocus the concerns of a generation on the qualities defining the human condition.

Chapter Twelve: “Nair the Tween Shall Meet?” – The first two formal studies Boyer led after becoming President of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching were *High School: A Report on Secondary Education in America* (Harper and Row, 1983) and *College: The Undergraduate Experience in America* (Harper and Row, 1987). Long now an advocate of increasing access to higher education, Boyer and his colleagues decided they needed to take a look at how well high schools and colleges were preparing students for their future. As critics often argue today, what Boyer and his colleagues found on both levels were socially and intellectually fragmented cultures. Declaring these conditions unacceptable, Boyer sought not only sweeping changes in the curriculum but also how school units were designed and staffed.

Chapter Thirteen: “Fragmented Spaces, Fragmented Places” – As college and university campuses grew, faculty members and administrators found themselves tending to more specialized sets of tasks. As a result, educators responsible for the experience in the classroom became unfamiliar with the roles played by educators responsible for the experience beyond the classroom and vice versa. Students were thus left to face a fragmented experience divided between a host of disparate curricular requirements and extra-curricular offerings of their choice. In response to this challenge, Boyer and his associates released *Campus Life: In Search of Community* (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1990). Fueled by his desire to issue a creative call for coherence, Boyer would envision a seamless relationship between what came to be known as the curricular and the co-curricular.

Chapter Fourteen: “A Noble but Broken Calling” – Ask university faculty members today what, if anything, they would want more of and the answer is likely time. They feel overwhelmed by competing pressures to teach, conduct research, and be of service to various communities. Such pressures inspired what is arguably Boyer’s most widely cited report, *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professorate* (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1990). The solution, as Boyer saw it, was to broaden the definition of scholarship and weave it into what came to be known as the scholarship of integration, the scholarship of teaching, the scholarship of application, and the scholarship of discovery. The underlying commitment for Boyer was to not perpetuate further subdivision of functions but integrate the tasks of teaching, service, and scholarship into a larger understanding of the academic vocation.

Chapter Fifteen: “Back to Basics” – Consistent with his commitment to issue creative calls for coherence, Boyer became fond of referring to education as it existed across the lifespan of a student as being a seamless web. As a result, he came to the conclusion that his efforts at Carnegie would prove incomplete without addressing the elementary school and preschool experience. Realizing the profound impact of those two components on a student’s educational career, several state legislatures recently sought to provide funding for full-day kindergarten and for what is coming to be known (as was even proposed by United States President Barack Obama in his February 12, 2013, State of the Union address) as universal access to preschool. In *Ready to Learn: A Mandate for the Nation* (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1991) and *The Basic School: A Community for Learning* (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1995), Boyer prophetically acknowledged the prominent role the early years played in preparing a student for educational success and to envision core excellences worthy of their efforts.

Epilogue: “The Legacy of a Creative Call for Coherence” – In this concluding section, I argue Boyer’s life not only offers an iconic window into the educational landscape of the latter half of the twentieth century but also our own. As John Braxton and I argued in *Crisis on Campus? Hopeful Responses from Ernest L. Boyer*, the problems facing colleges and universities today (and arguably K-12 institutions as well) are not that different from the ones facing Boyer’s generation. Just as needed today are leaders willing to stare down the pervasive waves of fragmentation. Educational institutions at all levels are larger, administrators and teachers are more specialized, and the curriculum is even more disjointed. As a result, students at all levels are left to wonder alone about the significance of their education as a whole. Boyer’s legacy, despite its rightful critics, gives us hope that creative calls for coherence can continue to be issued and members of educational communities on all levels will prove to be the rightful beneficiaries.

Length of the Book:

The manuscript is scheduled to include a prologue, fifteen chapters, and an epilogue. The prologue and the epilogue are designed to be approximately 15 pages a piece. Each one of the chapters is designed to be an average length of 25 pages. As a result, the full length of the manuscript (minus the acknowledgments and bibliography) is 405 pages.

Completion Schedule:

Work on this volume is scheduled to begin in August 2013 and be completed by the end of August 2016. I have identified many of the needed resources from the archives but am still conducting interviews with a number of Boyer’s family, friends, and former colleagues. For example, one critical interview I am still trying to secure is with Jimmy Carter. Funding provided by the Lilly Endowment to Indiana Wesleyan University is in place to not only support travel to these interviews but also to transcribe them. At a completion rate of approximately one section (prologue, chapter, or epilogue) every other month, the initial draft of the manuscript will be completed by the end of March 2016.

Scholars invested in Boyer's work such as John Braxton, Cynthia Wells at Messiah College, and Mary Taylor Huber at the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching will be asked to read that draft in April, May, and June 2016, and propose any changes. In addition, I will also work with Gary Giddens, the Executive Director of the Leon Levy Center for Biography at the City University of New York's Graduate Center, to identify an appropriate reader familiar with the craft of cultural biography. The changes proposed by these four scholars will then be incorporated into the manuscript in July and August 2016 with the revised manuscript being submitted to the publisher by the end of August 2016.