

AN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE OF THE ACLS
AMERICAN STUDIES PROGRAM, 1961-1986

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The American Studies Program of the American Council of Learned Societies began twenty-five years ago this month, and this afternoon's session is devoted to some aspects of that Program. Since I joined the Council staff also twenty-five years ago this month to organize and direct the Program, it was thought that I might be an obvious individual to give you a brief historical description of its activities. That I shall attempt to do without, I hope, too many statistics.

In the late 1950's, the International Affairs division of the Ford Foundation, particularly Mr. Shepard Stone and Mr. Stanley T. Gordon, became interested in giving some kind of assistance to support and encourage teaching and research concerning the United States in the universities of Western Europe. In 1958 and 1959 they discussed the possibilities with many individuals here and abroad, including myself, who, at that time, was serving in Rome as Director of the Italian Fulbright Program.

The results of those discussions, reviewed by Shepard Stone with the then President of the ACLS, Dr. Frederick Burkhardt, culminated in a five-year grant by the Ford Foundation to the ACLS to initiate such assistance in 1961—and I moved from Rome to New York to direct that Program.

At this point let me say that I find it impossible to express adequately the gratitude owed to the Ford Foundation. The Foundation's support has been continuous throughout these twenty-five years, amounting to over eleven million dollars to date, freely given with no strings attached, and with no attempt to guide, direct, or influence the ACLS in its development of the Program. It has been educational philanthropy of exemplary quality.

During the first five years the ACLS operated solely in Western Europe. In the next five years the Program was extended, with Ford approval and support, to Japan, Australia, New Zealand and Taiwan, and in the following five years it was further extended to Eastern Europe excluding the Soviet Union.

Throughout these fifteen years the Program remained basically unchanged. Assistance was provided by the Council to *institutions* and to *individuals*. The institutional assistance was primarily either the financing, for a period of three

to five years, of new teaching posts in such fields as American Literature, American History, American Economic History, American Art History, American Government, and American Studies, or grants to expand an institution's library holdings in those fields. In all cases where a teaching post was established with Ford Foundation funds, the receiving institution agreed to continue the post at its own expense upon termination of ACLS support—and the library grants were frequently made on a matching basis.

These institutional grants ceased, largely for financial reasons, in 1975, by which time 144 awards had been made at a total cost of about two million dollars. At the time, these grants were hailed enthusiastically in the foreign universities. They were undeniably helpful in focusing more adequate foreign scholarly attention on the U.S., but are not easy to evaluate. How does one evaluate the impact and effectiveness of a library grant without securing data on how many times and for what purposes each book was used? About all we can say is that because the necessary books were *there*, it was possible for certain courses to be taught and for certain term papers and dissertations to be written.

The impact of the teaching post grants can be measured a bit more precisely. With one exception, all teaching posts established with ACLS help continue today, and some of the students who took courses made possible by those posts have gone on to become candidates for ACLS American Studies research fellowships, and to occupy American studies teaching posts themselves. Just as the ACLS did not attempt to advise a university on what books to buy, no attempt was made to influence a university's appointment of a scholar to fill an ACLS-financed post. It was the sometimes implied hope of this Council that the post be filled by a national of the country concerned, and not by an American. This was because an American rarely would remain permanently in the post and because an American rarely could exert full pressure on (or even be aware of) the faculty in-fighting necessary in securing appropriate shares of library budgets, junior staff, influential university committee appointments, etc. Despite the Council's hopes, *very* occasionally an American was appointed to such a post, and our diminished expectations proved not out of line. Simultaneously, of course, the ACLS, through its research fellowships, was helping to give foreign scholars adequate training so that they could assume such posts.

In summary, those grants performed a very useful service, and, in the aftermath of the Second World War, at an appropriate time. Through them, course instruction on the United States is now solidly established in such institutions as the University of Uppsala, the University of Munich, the London School of Economics, the University of Paris, the Flinders University of Adelaide, etc. The existence of those posts, which led rival universities to establish similar posts, is a powerful inducement in encouraging young scholars today to think of specializing in the study of the U.S.

Let me turn now to the fellowship aspect of the Program—which has been always interesting and frequently entertaining. At the outset it was determined that the fellowships would not be for students—no recipient could enroll in an American university for degree purposes. The fellowships would be for research at the postdoctoral level and were aimed at individuals between the ages of 28 and 45 who were currently teaching at a university from the rank of instructor up to and including full professor. Our choice targets were individuals at roughly the assistant professor level who were preparing dissertations concerning the U.S. for such postdoctoral degrees as the *habilitation* in Germany, Austria, Switzerland, and Poland, the *doctorat d'etat* in France, Belgium, and Switzerland, the *libera docenza* in Italy, and for candidates in Japan, Britain, and other countries at an equivalent level.

It was also decided that the fellowships would be relatively generous, providing Visiting Scholar affiliation at the American university most appropriate for the proposed research, round-trip transportation, health insurance, and adequate maintenance for an academic year for the recipient *and* accompanying dependents, plus a special allowance for research expenses. Those emoluments are fine, on paper, but you would be amused by some of the problems and misunderstandings we encountered. For instance, our difficulty in convincing an Italian candidate that “dependents” did not include maids, even though the Italian maintained the maid was “dependent” on him in Italy. Or the Swede who had been cohabiting with his girlfriend for ten years, wanted her to accompany him to the U.S., and asked that the ACLS decide whether the two had to marry—which they were reluctantly willing to do—if this Council required such marriage to count her as a dependent. Or the Indonesian who assumed he could bring both wives and his eleven children at ACLS expense, which would have bankrupted the Council's South-East Asian funds for that year.

Until 1977 the ACLS annually held a continent-wide competition for European candidates, and a similar competition for Japan, Taiwan, Australia and New Zealand. A screening committee for Europe, consisting of six to ten scholars from a similar number of countries, and representing the various disciplines involved, was appointed each year, meeting at some central European point. Because of distances, no Asian screening committee was established. Candidates in Europe were considered as individuals, in competition with one another without regard to national origin or field of study, and the same was equally true of the four Pacific countries.

In addition to these academic-year fellowship awards, the ACLS also for a time granted two types of short-term assistance. These were a partial per diem allowance for periods of 30 to 120 days for senior American Studies specialists wishing to reacquaint themselves with the U.S., and one to four month scholarships, providing transportation, maintenance, and health insurance, for

foreign graduate students preparing M.A. or Ph.D. dissertations abroad concerning the U.S., and in need of a visit to this country to consult American scholars and bibliographic resources to complete those dissertations.

The shape of the Program changed materially in 1977. By that date the Ford Foundation concluded it could no longer be our sole financial support. Wanting to see the Program continue, however, it offered the ACLS a total of \$1,000,000 for the next three years if the Council could raise matching funds from other sources. To our great good fortune, the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation granted \$500,000 to the ACLS for those three years, and for that first year, 1977-78, we were able to raise \$170,000 from other, primarily foreign, sources. By the next year foreign contributions had nearly doubled, almost all on a dollar for dollar matching basis, and we no longer had to use Mellon funds to match the Ford contribution, but could use both Mellon and Ford funds to match the foreign contributions. Since the 1977-80 period Mellon and Ford have each contributed \$180,000 annually to the Program.

Foreign sources understandably made their contribution for use only for scholars from the contributor's country. This meant that where we were unable to raise funds, in such countries as Norway, France, Ireland, Portugal, Iceland, Taiwan, Australia and New Zealand, we had to terminate the Program. We began securing funds from the State Department and USIA for use in Eastern Europe, but since in their terminology Yugoslavia was not an Eastern European country, we had to discontinue the Program there. During the first two years of the new funding when Mellon money was used to help match Ford funds, we used the Mellon contribution to extend the Program to Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Malaysia. When we began using all of the Mellon and Ford funds to match foreign contributions, we had to withdraw from Indonesia and the Philippines, where foreign contributions were unavailable, but obtained matching funds to continue the Program in Malaysia and Thailand and to extend the Program to India and Korea.

This change in financing had a number of other consequences. Fellowships are now granted on a country by country basis, with awards limited by the funds available in each country, with the anomaly, for instance, that we grant at least three times as many fellowships each year in Denmark as in Great Britain. We also can no longer have regional screening committees, although in some countries we are helped in preliminary screening by the donor in that country. In Korea grants can be made so as to finance the expenses of the accompanying spouse, but not for children. In Malaysia we may provide transportation, but transportation only, for an accompanying spouse, with no assistance for other dependents, and in Thailand and India no assistance to any dependents has been permitted by the donors in those countries. Also at the donors' choice, only Japanese and German scholars are allowed to apply for a renewal of their fellowship for a second year.

All grants under the Program are made by the Council's American Studies Advisory Committee which is composed of six to eight outstanding American scholars from differing universities and in the various appropriate fields of study, by which I mean art history, economics and economic history, geography, government, history, law, literature, philosophy, and sociology—and we have been very lucky to have had Craufurd Goodwin on that committee for the past four years.

To give you one final statistic—since its inception, 1,104 foreign scholars have come to the U.S. with ACLS fellowships to do research on some aspect of American civilization and history, and have been affiliated with 122 different American universities and institutions.

By any evaluation, this Fellowship Program has been extremely successful. Except for some of the recipients of the short-term graduate student scholarships back in the early 70's, and except for fewer than ten of the recipients of the regular full fellowships, all have remained in academia and we know where they are and what posts they hold. Publications known to us which were made possible by the research undertaken during fellowship tenure average close to one book and five articles per scholar. In most of the countries in which the Program has operated for fifteen years or more, the overwhelming proportion of full professors considered "Americanists" held ACLS fellowships when they were struggling instructors or assistant professors, and they are the first to claim their fellowships were a primary factor in securing their promotions. Their eventual successors are now receiving our fellowships, since such research as sponsored by the Council is vital for the recipient to teach and publish with sufficient recognition to receive academic advancement.

Our current annual budget is close to one million dollars with less than 40% derived from combined Ford and Mellon foundation funds. The willing collaboration of other contributors is perhaps a testimony to the Program's effectiveness. But the availability to the ACLS of funds such as the Ford/Mellon grants used to match most of the other contributions remains a prime necessity.

Drawing upon my experience during these past years, I would like to make a few general, subjective, observations. In the early years of the Program I soon thought I could identify the nationality of the candidate just by looking at his or her research proposal. For instance, if the proposal focussed on the Civil War, the candidate was probably British. A candidate working on Faulkner or Poe was French; on Thomas Wolfe, German; on O'Neill, Swedish; on Hawthorne or the Puritan strain in American literature, Japanese, etc. Today that is no longer possible. Multi-disciplinary approaches and the increased sophistication of the research proposals is very noticeable.

Culture shock is almost never a problem for a West European coming to the U.S., rarely an obvious problem for a Japanese or East European, but frequently encountered with the South and South-East Asians, for whom exceptional care should be taken on affiliation, with such scholars often doing better, and having a more satisfying year if affiliated with institutions of less international prestige. On culture shock, I am reminded of a Japanese scholar who married the day before he and his bride departed for Berkeley where they spent two years. Five years after their return to Japan he confided to me that his wife was a constant embarrassment to him in public. She continued to address him, as she and all their colleagues had done in Berkeley, by his first name.

We have consistently tried to treat all Fellows equally, and to provide a reasonably adequate maintenance allowance. Perhaps understandably, if a Fellow believes that allowance is very inadequate, that Fellow will often be Swedish, whereas, if asked, an East European often will say the maintenance allowance is overly generous and might be decreased in the interest of financing more fellowships.

Of the 34 countries in which the Program has operated, the country which has consistently provided us with the scholars most conscientious in their obligations, the easiest to administer and the most cooperative in any follow-up measures is Japan. At the opposite end of the scale, scholars providing the most difficulty—in affiliation, administration, and follow-up—have been from India. And I am unable to fathom the reasons for this difference.

For what I suspect is my long-awaited conclusion, an American Studies Program of the type I have described is, I submit, truly enlightened self-interest. These foreign scholars are performing a very important task, both from the viewpoint of their own countries and the U.S., in teaching and writing about one of the major cultures in today's world *from the perspective* of firsthand observation. We Americans are slowly recognizing the benefits we can derive from their research as each year an increasing number of their writings are simultaneously being published in their own countries and in the U.S. One such ACLS Fellow had his research awarded the 1983 Pulitzer Prize in American History. Equally rewarding to the Council is the steadily growing number of former Fellows invited back as Visiting Professors for a semester or a year as a result of the impression and reputation they established during their ACLS year.

My twenty-five years with this Program have been an unremitting source of challenge, interest, and pleasure, and for that experience I shall always be deeply indebted to the American Council of Learned Societies.