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# State Department Educational Exchange and the Promotion of American Studies in the Early Cold War

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## REIMAGINING DIPLOMATIC MODELS IN THE ENGLISH-SPEAKING WORLD

### Journée d'étude de l'Observatoire des Relations Extérieures du Monde Anglophone (OREMA), LERMA U.R. 853

#### Intro

- Thanks
- Preliminary research
- Date range
- Purpose and outline

#### Institutional background history

Government sponsored educational exchange was a new and exceptional idea, although it had some precedents.

Twice in the past, currency abroad had been used to pay for educational exchanges, in 1908 indemnities from China after the Boxer Rebellion were used to make the Boxer Indemnity Scholarship Program, and in 1920 excess relief funds in Belgium were used to create the Belgian-American Educational Foundation.

1930s, German propaganda in Latin America, Roosevelt "Good Neighbor" policy.

1938 The Division of Cultural Relations in the Department of State, plus 1939 Act for Cooperation with the Other American Republics - > first cultural attachés 1941

Latin America until 1945

"Denazification" priority "information" target

By 1949 "reorientation program" comes to an end

1945 Fulbright proposal Amendment to the Surplus Property Act of 1944

Binational educational commissions

Board of Foreign Scholarships in the US made up of presidential appointees to approve grant recipients.

Contract agencies for management of Fulbright program (today, we would talk about a public-private partnership)

U.S. Office of Education, for participants in primary and secondary school teacher programs, the Institute of International Education, for participants in graduate school programs, and the Conference Board of associated Research Councils, for programs involving research scholars and university lecturers. Box 192, page 51.

Council for International Exchange of Scholars (CIES); non-profit NGO founded in 1947 to administer program

Foreign currency - > private partnerships (Rockefeller foundation, Ford Foundation, especially in Japan, universities, small local groups)

The first participants-47 Americans and 36 foreign nationals in exchanges with China, Burma, and the Philippines-started their travel in the fall of 1948.

The U.S. Information and Educational Exchange Act of 1948, commonly called the Smith-Mundt Act, American Specialists and Foreign Leader programs.

USIS "information" worldwide.

Within a year, agreements had been signed with New Zealand, the United Kingdom, Belgium (including Luxembourg), France, Italy, the Netherlands and Norway. Participants, now 823 Americans and 967 from abroad, in 1949-50. [War geography]

[[The agreement with France established the United States Educational Commission for France which began programs the following year with an original budget of \$1 million, worth roughly \$11.5 million in 2023 dollars.]]

17 additional countries signed agreements before December 1952. For the academic year 1952-53 the number of Americans had grown to 1,253 and foreign nationals to 2,210 under binational program

1953 USIA becomes official agency. USIA most well known for running Voice of America (starting in 1942) and the American libraries. By 1948, 98 information centers and cultural institutes abroad; by 1953 there were 227.

In 1956, an amendment to the 1954 Agricultural Trade Development Act. Funding and larger geo

Finally, in 1961, the Mutual Educational and Cultural Exchange Act, known as the Fulbright-Hays Act, was passed.

Direct congressional appropriations.

Renegotiated binational agreements.

In 1965, the US Educational Commission for France was renegotiated and became the binational Franco-American Commission for Educational Exchange. The French Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Higher Education began participating actively and provided partial funding, although the original proportion remained heavily dominated by the Department of State: of the still \$1 million dollar budget, France provided \$250,000 and the US the remaining \$750,000. Inflationary pressure meant that this represented a steady decline in funds throughout the early period of the program.

By 1971, there was some form of academic exchange with 100 countries. Today, Fulbright operates in around 160 countries in all world regions. More than 400,000 people have received Fulbright grants.

### **American studies**

Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs noted that American studies abroad in a dismal state in the early 1950s. Literature under considered compared to English literature better known to most faculty in Europe and elsewhere. History nearly nonexistent. In countries like France with strict curricula, there was no set place for US history. In Italy, where history was taught chronologically from ancient times to today, eurocentrism and limited emphasis on contemporary history made the US nearly absent.

#### *1. Number 1 priority for educational exchange programs in many nations*

Very important. Number 1 project in the French Fulbright Commission plans from 1951 to 1980, and explicitly the most important until 1973.

- "Since Australia has a relatively substantial Fulbright program, we would like to be able to assume that much of it could be devoted to the development of American studies." Colligan 1963, CU box 165, folder 36, Frank Colligan = 1962 Director of Policy Review and Research Staff at CU (Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs)

#### *2. Interest in US driven by historical factors*

An important factor to highlight, American studies driven by interest abroad. Completely ignoring State Department or American efforts, the power of the US in the post-war world led to an interest by foreign academics.

when exchange programs established, it was often at the request of foreign universities or members of Fulbright commissions that a large number of teachers of American literature, history and 'civilization' were brought over.

Country-specific interests were important in shaping the field's content. In France, for example, greater emphasis was placed on American literature than history, in general. Although, the French wanted to study American texts as examples of "civilization", so teachers were expected to lecture not on literary merit or style, but on the fundamental Americanness of authors and works, giving rise to particular interests—James Fenimore Cooper, with his emphasis on the American frontier, was on more curricula in France than Nathaniel Hawthorne, despite Hawthorne's greater weight in literature curricula in the US. Some of these divisions remain important today, Cooper is still given relatively more weight in France and mostly ignored in the US.

### *3. Foreign students coming to US that study the country, most obvious, but very important*

1967 when the revised university curriculum in France introduced a requirement for 1 year course in American literature for all English degrees, of roughly 70 full-time professors and associates in American literature and civilization in France, 41 were former Fulbrighters.

Today, of full professors and associates in the AFEA, French Association of American Studies, 37 of 176, or 21%, are Fulbrighters.

### *4. Strategy for in-country activities*

Long-range strategy of getting country's to teach themselves—In-country, main goal was Establishing Chairs—a process. First fund senior teachers to provide courses that don't exist; matched with visiting scholars to US that study the field. Identify universities where a permanent invitation (permanent visiting scholar) can fill a 'chair' until local expertise develops. Provide necessary resources to support this scholar's work (books). On the US side, use foreign leader grants to bring educational/administrative influencers like superintendents/rectors/university presidents/ministers in charge of education to visit the US. Then when a foreigner fills chair, sometimes provide some funding for the first couple of years. Then leave the chair, and downgrade to lecturers to engage with undergrads or the like—program has now taken off. As more scholars in a nation work on US, support creation of an association of American Studies, sometimes with grants, sometimes with prestige. Continue book support. Help independent institutional links between universities. Provide support for visits to major centers of excellence (Bologna or Salzburg in Europe)

Pat yourself on the back for a job well done.

By the end of the 1960s a general strategy of short term grants to highly qualified experts to maintain centers of excellence, notably the Salzberg seminar, Hopkins Bologna center, American Studies Institute in India, to maintain the presence of these centers of excellence as hubs that work to continue the independent development of American studies beyond US exchange programs<sup>1</sup>

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- 1960 to 1965, funding for EAAS from CU to keep the association alive.

<sup>1</sup> CIES box 25, page 21 and on, letter to Assistant Sec State Frankel, head of CU

<sup>2</sup> CIES box 25, page 21 and on, letter to Assistant Sec State Frankel, head of CU

### 5. A problem

Among difficulties in finding good teachers is language barriers... CU box 317 page 7

Specific issues with American studies

Qualified experts?

American studies doesn't really exist in the US at this point, and what will later be called American studies (very culture, often minority focused) is not what was sought after abroad).

A lot of work creating lists of qualified professors

Complaint that mediocre teachers not really specialists in the field being asked to lecture on American literature or history

Unlike sciences and technical fields where US expertise recognized, and where foreign universities often requested specific specialists by name, this field required creation in the US

A problem for what was apparently a top priority, but could be damaging to the program if Fulbright scholars not seen as real experts

5.1 Reliance on *nongovernmental assistance* a key here: American Council of Learned Societies clearing house on information related to American studies

State Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs relied heavily on the Advisory Committee on American Studies of the Conference Board of Associated Research Councils, showing this tendency towards academic and nongovernmental leadership.

Similarly, John Hopkins center in Bologna a partnership with university

5.2 *Creation of 'American studies' in the US*, and networks dedicated to this effort, because of need abroad

### 5.3 *Success (and continuing mission)*

July 1967-June 1968 annual report to the board of foreign scholarships, on the American Studies section, starts with discussion of India and the coming of age of American Studies

"The study of American literature has come of age in India, and there is no longer need to defend or justify its inclusion in the curriculum of Indian universities, said Professor Sarup Singh, head of the English Department, Delhi University, at a three-day seminar in American studies held at Fulbright House in New Delhi last December. This is true not only in India but in most other countries where lecturing awards in American studies have been maintained under the Fulbright program over a period of years. The assistance of the American academic community continues to be of vital importance, however, in the task which remains, namely to strengthen and expand existing programs."<sup>3</sup>

To use the French case to illustrate slightly more: "The establishment of regular university courses in American literature and civilization, one of the basic goals of the Fulbright Commission, was achieved in the fall of 1967 when, under the revised university curriculum, all students concentrating in English were required to take a full year's course in American literature during the first two years of university study."

About 140 doctoral dissertations in American literature in progress. History much weaker, but still...

By 1973, Commission reporting to State that American Studies had "taken off" and no longer necessary to work on chairs, could downgrade to lecturers and other priorities.

1970s Of the average 500 senior scholars sent by CIES (Council for International Exchange of Scholars) each year (estimated at end of 1970s) about 20% are in American Studies<sup>4</sup>

### **Educational exchange vs. information**

In a 1962 appropriations hearing with USIA Deputy Director for the Information Center Service, Robert M. Beers, Arkansas senator John McClellan, representing if anything a distinct lack of his colleague Fulbright's internationalism, criticized the USIA book program for its inclusion of American literary classics with little direct propaganda value:

<sup>3</sup> CIES box 25, folder 7, July 1967-June 1968 annual report to the board of foreign scholarships, page 20

<sup>4</sup> CIES box 25, page 55

“These great American short stories, what do they concern? You mean these are just novels?” “We do some fiction, Senator.”

“That is the thing that gets me. I don’t know how this is going to influence anybody to read a lot of fiction written in America. How is that going to impress anybody? [...] It is very difficult to evaluate this sort of a program and what good they do. I think some books dealing with the history of this country and dealing with our progress and so forth as a nation and a free enterprise system, a representative form of government and all of that, are instructive. I still don’t think that a book of short stories or fiction is going to be of any great value or produce any results.”<sup>5</sup>

### *1. Exchange as diplomacy*

In the 1950s, just familiarity with US to fight prejudices. See CU box 317 page 104, fighting misunderstanding

USIA’s slogan “telling America’s story to the world”

### Fulbright-Hays statement of purpose

The purpose of this chapter is to enable the Government of the United States to increase mutual understanding between the people of the United States and the people of other countries by means of educational and cultural exchange; to strengthen the ties which unite us with other nations by demonstrating the educational and cultural interests, developments, and achievements of the people of the United States and other nations, and the contributions being made toward a peaceful and more fruitful life for people throughout the world; to promote international cooperation for educational and cultural advancement; and thus to assist in the development of friendly, sympathetic, and peaceful relations between the United States and the other countries of the world.

CIES box 25 American Studies Abroad paper (one of many copies) explains the rationale for promoting American Studies in the broader Cold War propaganda context

The historic role of Government’s educational exchange programs has been in part to nourish and stimulate an increased understanding of the United States abroad not by furnishing information but by imparting knowledge in depth—knowledge of our history, government, culture, and aspirations. (At the same time, the programs have been designed to increase understanding by Americans of other countries).

Many countries since 1945 have been deluged with propaganda attacks on the United States. The Fulbright and Smith-Mundt exchange programs have not attempted to counteract these distortions by combatting them on their own terms. Nor does the current legislation—the Fulbright-Hays Act, 1961. Instead, through the exchange of scholars, teachers, and students, the dynamic quality of an open society has been examined and analyzed from a balanced, scholarly point of view.<sup>6</sup>

### *Structural schism*

USIA, 40% budget so called ‘cultural’ programs in 1960s

Programs radio, films, tv, news, pamphlets, general public magazines, book translation, exchange programs, lecturers, performers.

Public Affairs Officer > Cultural attaché

### *2. UK/French model*

<sup>5</sup> John McCormick, “The United Snopes Information Service” Spring 1962 Kenyon Review, 1, CU Box 192

<sup>6</sup> CIES box 25, Folder 1, Walter Johnson, *American Studies Abroad: Progress and Difficulties; A Report to the United States Advisory Commission on International Educational and Cultural Affairs*, 1963.

Follow on effects of influencing cultural leadership in France, given prestige around the world  
 CU317pg130  
 French colonies/former colonies CU317pg190-198

The debate (argument on one side at least) for separating “culture” from “information” and allowing culture to be complex, intellectual and elite, on the British Council model. Show that honest criticism is good for reaching the elite.

### 3. *Overlap between information and culture*

At the same time USIS' *American Studies News* is very well received by the academics supporting exchanges.<sup>7</sup>

### 4. *Information lacks some of the non-state partnerships that were important for cultural exchange*

Walter Johnson criticizes in 1963 the fact that USIA, USAID and Office of Education programs less connected to Advisory Committee on American Studies of the Conference Board of Associated Research Councils for American studies work<sup>8</sup>

### 5. *The debate about teaching American culture*

Given dismal state at start of period

Even in countries where an interest for the US was taking root, a lack of key resources was noted. Books were often lacking if local publishers did not translate or reprint in English key texts. American literature professors bemoaned the complexity of introducing Melville when students could not find a copy of *Moby Dick*. Here, USIA and educational exchange partially overlapped. The educational exchange programs needed access to American materials, especially far away from capital cities which often had better resources. One of USIA's biggest program was distributing books and other published materials on America.

This was not without its limitations. USIA's propaganda mission did not lead naturally to academic publications. It generally focused on popular periodicals like *Time*, *Life* and *Reader's Digest* magazines, pamphlets that gave glowing summaries of the United States and film, tv and radio production or distribution and traveling performances and of what might be called “fast media”. University professors trying to take a look at American society, via literature or history, needed slower forms, and ideally critical forms. In 1959-60 of USIA's \$104 million budget, about 40% or 42 million in cultural activity (as opposed to ‘information’ activity). Congress, in particular, pressured USIA to focus on propaganda, as the Beers/McClellan hearing shows.

Congressional pressures cut into culture budget of USIA significantly in the mid-1960s  
 USIS libraries (in London and Paris closed in 1966)

Fulbright faces pressures by 1968 with division between senator Fulbright and the Johnson administration and these same budget pressures, however the transition towards binational funding for binational commissions helps make up for some of the lost US government support.

**Ultimately**, the success of establishing curricula, chairs and networks of American studies abroad, even if these should not be wholly credited to US diplomacy, is a clear example of educational exchange as a diplomatic practice with somewhat concrete results in both near and long terms.

Some thoughts

New models

    Binational

    Public private partnerships

        Especially academic/diplomatic networks

<sup>7</sup> CIES box 25 page 23

<sup>8</sup> Johnson, *American Studies Abroad*, page 4, 1963, CIES box 25 (pdf page 10)

Short and long range targets  
Reverse influence and networks