

NATIONAL PLANNING FOR INTERCULTURAL STUDIES \*

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It's a pleasure to have a part in this well-timed conference. Trinity University, and the director of the conference, are to be congratulated for their attention to a topic that is increasingly discussed. The discussions have involved national commissions, members of the Congress, members of learned societies, and many others. The media have reported many of the concerns, for example, Fred M. Hechinger in the NEW YORK TIMES just two weeks before this conference started wrote a commentary having the subtitle: "Seeking to shore up America's future by understanding foreign languages and cultures" (15 March 1989, p.23). The conference has not limited the topic to the situation in this country, but to the extent I am informed my knowledge centers on the United States, and I will direct my remarks at activities here.

This concentration raises a difficulty for my announced title. 'National planning,' as may be obvious from activities in Washington these last few weeks concerning even weightier matters than intercultural studies, is somewhat of a misnomer as far as this country is concerned. We have no Department of Culture or International Relations; our Department of Education, which barely survived under the previous administration, concerns itself chiefly with its designated topic in the schools as far as graduate level. We do have an Endowment for the Humanities, but at the same time an Endowment for the Arts, which presumably also has something to do with culture. These are merely the more obvious agencies involved in intercultural relations. In short, there is no one responsible agency for intercultural studies. And while our Constitution authorizes the Congress to "lay

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and collect taxes," "to borrow money," and to legislate on other practical matters, it makes no reference to plans concerning culture.

Similarly, we have no national academy housing eminent citizens intent on raising cultural and educational levels. Instead we have three organizations, the National Academy of Sciences, the Social Science Research Council, generally referred to as SSRC, and the American Council of Learned Societies, or ACLS. The three cooperate, often in differing alignments. For example, about twenty-five years ago, two of them, ACLS and SSRC, established IREX, the International Research and Exchanges Board, to encourage and support academic activities first with the Soviet Union, then with Eastern Europe. Besides substantial funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities, IREX has received most of its financial support from USIA; involvement of the United States Information Agency provides yet another illustration of the widely dispersed efforts relating to our cultural and educational activities here and abroad. Some time later the three counterparts to a national academy set up the so-called China Committee, whose mission is similar to that of IREX but with regard to the People's Republic of China. In short, much like the federal government, the academic establishment operates through a patchwork with reference to intercultural matters.

These heterogeneous, and almost chaotic, arrangements may assist in understanding the course of attention to language and culture in the country. Specific organizations, or individuals, may direct their efforts at improving the situation. Hence the importance of this undertaking! But when other goals occupy them, the situation falls into repose or even decline. Examples will be mentioned below. Here I may simply note the Ford Foundation, which for a time devoted a fair bit of its massive resources to international and intercultural studies; but with a change in leadership it turned to other matters. Continuity is not one of our characteristics — no more than central planning.

Our major interests, as well as our decentralized procedures for achieving them, may be illustrated by a quotation from the chairman of the National Governors' Association, reported by Hechinger. At a meeting of these fifty administrators shortly before this conference, Governor Gerald L. Baliles of Virginia stated: "The United States is not well prepared for international trade...We do not know the languages, the cultures or the geographic characteristics of our competitors." That is to say, we are not out there to get culture or education in the 'pursuit of happiness,' but for welfare in another area; in accordance with probably the most characteristic and most frequently quoted dictum of one of our less distinguished presidents, "the business of America is business." But as a republic consisting of fifty states, we set out to get it in our separate ways.

The situation deplored by the governors and now yet again to be remedied has a series of explanations, the major one probably our settlement history in the 19th century. When the "unwanted" and the "poor" from other countries, so labeled in the inscription of the Statue of Liberty, settled here, they were largely concerned to forget as quickly as possible their background. If I may be forgiven a personal reference, I am almost a fourth generation American; two of my grandparents were brought to this country as infants. And as far as I know, no members of the family ever had any contact with relatives left in the homeland. Parents wanted their children to compete with the Cabots and the Lodges; they could hardly do so by maintaining Italian, German, Slavic, or even Irish cultural practices. And the parents were helped by the schools. It is scarcely an exaggeration to state that the chief effort of our educational system in the 19th century was to assimilate wave after wave of immigrants. The term 'intercultural' would scarcely have been greeted with applause on the prairies of Nebraska seventy years ago.

The tender attitudes to foreign ways may be illustrated by the designations of groups in that relatively simple part of the melting pot. The inhabitants were of three backgrounds: British, German-speaking and Slavic-speaking. Labels for the three were: the Bohunks, the Irish and the Dutch. I could cite other labels, noting that these are for WASPS and not for despised minorities. But in a strange way, social conditions such as the large-scale disruption brought about by the draft in World War I countered the tendency to maintain cohesive cultural groups; at the same time that disruption did not encourage intercultural studies.

World War I had a further effect. There was a general feeling of let-down. The United States had loaned billions to other countries, who could not repay the debt. Only gallant little Finland kept up its obligated payments, as we school-children heard repeatedly in our classrooms. And in the post-war arrangements the idealism of President Wilson was blunted, especially when he became incapacitated. The country turned isolationist, as is well-known. We limited ourselves to learning only enough of foreign goings-on to keep up with scientific advances. The prime avenues to those were publications in German and French. Accordingly the minor intercultural contacts that were maintained required only a reading knowledge of languages, largely these two. Policy was left to the largest learned society in the humanities, the Modern Language Association of America.

Founded in 1883, the Association guided educational policy in a series of cycles. In 1901 one of its succession of committees put the emphasis on grammar-translation, downplaying the need to converse in a foreign language. After a comprehensive study in the 1920s another committee in a slight shift established as goal a reading knowledge of foreign languages. For both committees intercultural information was to be obtained largely through the study of literature. And the

members of the Association directed their attention to it and successive approaches in literary criticism.

When World War II broke out, we had few citizens acquainted with other countries and their cultures. Many of the small number were missionaries. Members of such families were virtually the only ones with a command of such languages as Japanese, which they had learned over long periods of residence. But we needed to learn rapidly other languages and their uses in their cultures. At this point the American Council of Learned Societies and one of its constituent groups, the Linguistic Society, took hold, inaugurating cycle III.

In linguistic study of the period it was considered important to learn an exotic language, and to concentrate on oral control. With the blessings and support of the military, as through USAFI, the United States Armed Forces Institute, ACLS and the Linguistic Society sought out members and assigned them to concentrate on a specific language considered important for strategic purposes. An overall course was drawn up that was to introduce students to elements of the culture as well as the language. The selected linguist was to learn the assigned language, write a grammar with the help of an informant, and teach the language to members of the military. In a small way, intercultural studies flourished, this time under the guidance of linguists – not the literary specialists who controlled language teaching and the training of language teachers in our academic institutions.

Many of the linguists had been concerned with cultural studies, as through positions in departments of anthropology. Their grammars and booklets provide introductions to the way of life as well as the language of lands with which we were soon in intimate contact. To indicate the type of information provided, I cite from the "Pocket Guide to Northern Ireland":

Some of you, Protestants or Catholics, may know at first or second hand about the religious and political differences between Northern and Southern Ireland. Perhaps they seem foolish to you. We Americans don't worry about which side our grandfathers fought on in the Civil War, because it doesn't matter now. But these things still matter in Ireland and it is only sensible to be forewarned.

There are two excellent rules of conduct for the American abroad. They are good rules anywhere but they are particularly important in Ireland: (1)

Don't argue religion.

(2) Don't argue politics (Washington, D.C. 1942: 2)

The booklet goes on to explain various matters, including why American troops are "not permitted to cross the border into Eire."

Even in the Short Guide to Great Britain" our troops were warned that they would "quickly discover differences that seem confusing and even wrong. Like

driving on the left side of the road, and having money based on an 'impossible' accounting system, and drinking warm beer." (1942: 11)

For Burma the authors drew on an encyclopedia that proclaimed of the Burmese: "The women are more industrious and businesslike than the men but their school education has been neglected. The Burmese women enjoy an amount of freedom unusual in non-European races. As a whole the Burmese are characterized by cleanliness, a sense of honor, and a love of sport, but addicted to a life of ease and laziness." (10).

It's hardly necessary to go on at length. For West Africa the military personnel were told: "Though apparently plain, simple, and trusting, the uneducated African is nobody's fool."

The information is simplistic, but in general accurate. It is also designed to overcome stereotypes, as in countering the picture of Burmese women in our Sunday supplements with necks stretched by coils of wire like those in a tribe of the Karens. But the recommendations on behavior or culture hardly soar to a high level, or provide momentous information on intercultural relationships, though the troops in India were advised on the importance of bargaining.

Many of the advanced handbooks were excellent, and maintained their value. The Norwegian textbook has scarcely been equalled for any language as an introduction to the geography and culture as well as the language of a country. Others, such as the Turkish and Japanese handbooks, included excellent grammars. And the German handbook was used by many thousands long after conclusion of the war.

But the dominion of the linguists was short-lived. Their most lasting effects concerned the teaching of English as a second language. Because our universities had no departments of linguistics, language teaching went back to the language departments. After being involved in an intensive program to teach an exotic language in the military for approximately three years, I returned to the academic position in a Department of Germanic Languages that I had been unable to fill during the war, and to a chairman who was admirable in many ways. Yet his goals were circumscribed. He called it pointless to teach students oral command of another language on the grounds that any head-waiter in Europe knew eight or ten better than they would ever learn one. And so intercultural studies lurched into another of its lows.

By a curious twist shortly after World War II, some of our national leaders sought a solution to our problems in international communication through raising the levels of mastery of English in other countries. Rockefeller programs sent some of our eminent linguists to Japan, to engage in one of our notable efforts, teaching teachers to teach, or even preferably, teaching teachers who teach teachers to teach. There were similar programs in the Middle East, not only supported by

foundations but also by the expanding Point 4 program, later known as the International Cooperation Administration, and then by other designations. Students were brought to this country; of nine language specialists in Egypt with M.A. degrees three were brought to Texas for a four-year program leading to the Ph.D. degree. Presumably if other countries learned our language, and our cultural ways, we could concentrate on more important topics, and President Coolidge's aims for the country would not suffer.

Rescue to this low in intercultural studies came not from another war but rather from a dog, Laika, that journeyed around the world above us. The perceived threat caused by sputnik in 1957 to our position as a world leader was so strong this time that remedies could not be left to scholars, nor even to the military; rather, the Congress took hold. An Education Act was passed, and even funded, in the name of defense to be sure, but with the further qualification of national. While the Ford Foundation also funded many international programs, the chief support came from national agencies in Washington. Centers were established in universities with specialists in most areas of the world. Fellowships were made available for interested students. Intercultural studies were again under way in a fourth cycle. But then one of our own rockets lifted an American astronaut a few miles beyond Florida. And other astronauts actually reached the moon before the Soviets. We regained our national pride. Business remained brisk. Other countries were buying our products with instructions and manuals written in English. Funding for the international centers was reduced by both the foundations and the federal government. Intercultural studies again began to falter.

Yet one effort during this cycle must still be recalled. In 1954 a notable secretary of the Modern Language Association, William Riley Parker, attempted to maintain the faltering language programs instituted in World War II, publishing a vigorous monograph in support of teaching foreign languages and cultures. When the National Defense Education Act was passed in 1958, Parker's recommendations could be put into effect. Institutes were established during summers to upgrade teachers. Experimental courses were introduced, even for children in the elementary schools. A small group of eminent scholar-teachers was brought together to produce a handbook for Spanish that would incorporate the excellent features of the so-called army texts, at the same time serving as a kind of pattern for handbooks dealing with other languages (1960). The Spanish handbook dealt with South America, rather than with the Prado or centers in Spain like Toledo. This effort brought about greater attention to current culture, as well as command of the spoken language. That command was strengthened through the use of equipment, notably tape recorders assembled in so-called language laboratories. Intercultural studies seemed to be marching along well, buffered by mechanical gadgets so dear to the American heart.

The humanities now were approaching the prestige of the natural sciences, when supervisors in white coats could preside over a room full of students instructed by machines. Language teachers could concentrate once again on the latest literary theories, this time from Paris. And while they lifted their salaries through abstruse articles on deconstruction and the like, the students droned through the recorded texts, grew increasingly bored, and emerged with little control of their foreign language, let alone foreign culture.

The students furnished another contribution. Foreign language courses have long enjoyed a reputation of being difficult. To the free spirits of the sixties the additional language no longer seemed relevant. Since the patients were running the asylum during that decade, requirements came to be abandoned. By 1980 the percentage of students taking foreign languages fell to another low. Knowledge of foreign ways, even of information formerly mastered in the fourth grade such as world geography, had become spotty. Parents, businessmen and legislators began to be alarmed.

Once again belts were girded. Articles and monographs were published. Conferences were arranged. Commissions were established. We are in the midst of this, the fifth, cycle. Its outcome, or even the most pervasive currents are still elusive.

Potentially the most influential commission was appointed by President Carter, at the suggestion of the Congressional Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, with Congressman, later Senator, Paul Simon as most eloquent voice. A chairman, who formerly headed one of the large eastern universities before being ousted in the turmoil of the sixties, was appointed. The commission of course prepared a report. Its impact may be gauged by the reaction of the president. In contrast with the treatment of most such august bodies, the chairman of the commission was not invited to the oval office, or even the rose garden, to communicate its recommendations to the nation's chief executive.

Among commissions at a less elevated level was one appointed by the Modern Language Association. It made its way through the operations standard for commissions in this country: planning meetings, hearings, exploratory conferences, and finally a report. The recommendations in the report were accepted by the Executive Council of the organization. The situation seemed ominous enough to appoint an advisory committee on foreign language study as well as print the notable words of the recommendations in the Association's publications.

Senator Simon may be the outstanding member of government to restore attention to intercultural studies, as through his book: "The Tongue-tied American", which is often funny when one isn't crying. As one example he cites how one of our largest international companies named a car 'Nova', only to change the name rapidly when it didn't sell in Latin American countries; competitors only had

to read the name slowly — *no va* 'it doesn't go' — to boost their own sales. Similarly, an advertisement in France for Colgate's toothpaste "Cue" elicited more laughter than sales because the name was also that of a pornographic book concerning oral sex.

Instead of amusement, or even a carrot, the most notable member of the academy to stir up action, Richard Lambert, functioned with a prod, or several, one electrically charged. After numerous poorly heeded publications seriously exhorting the profession, Lambert aroused sparks by proposing among other measures abandonment of reliance on the language teaching in the academy, on the grounds that it had failed and seemed incapable of remedy. Proceeding on his own, with grants from foundations Lambert established a National Foreign Language Center, located at the Johns Hopkins University in Washington, D.C.

The Center is flourishing, as many of you know and will learn further in this conference. But it has become clear that even the vigor of Lambert and his associates can deal with only a small number of the problems involved in "our annual investment in teaching foreign language...[of] more than two billion dollars," by Lambert's statement. Nonetheless, first of the ambitious tasks of the Center has been stated to be development of "a comprehensive national policy on foreign language teaching." As one step in that development the Center recently carried out "a survey of international studies at the undergraduate level." Among conclusions in a presentation to the annual meeting of the Modern Language Association Lambert states: "International perspectives must be diffused throughout the curriculum. We must make foreign language education the responsibility of all faculty, not just the language faculty." Yet advice on policy, however ideal, is only a part of planning. And planning in an advanced society must be directed at implementation, a stately term involving control over monies, or in more elegant parlance, federal support.

Five years ago a group of educators and foundation officials came together at a dinner "to discuss what might be done to stabilize long-term federal support for international studies and foreign language training" (Points of Leverage 1986: v). After further meetings steps were taken towards creation of a National Foundation for Foreign Languages and International Studies, like the two endowments for the humanities and the arts, and the National Science Foundation, among other federal agencies. With support from the Department of Defense an advisory committee was brought together under the wings of the Association of American Universities. The committee drafted a legislative proposal, published in rhetoric that would have pleased President Coolidge: "to strengthen the nation's investment in foreign languages and international studies" (Washington, DC: Association of American Universities, October 1, 1986). Subsequently, "To facilitate public discussion and education, the Coalition for the Advancement of

Foreign Language and International Studies (CAFLIS) has been formed" (ibid: vii). Lambert was asked to write an essay on the proposal. The 150-page essay "Points of Leverage" was published by SSRC in 1986. Discussion, and presumably, "informed debate" of fluctuating temperatures, have been carried on in a number of meetings. We are at the point of the inevitable report.

Since I have not been a participant in the sessions of informed debate, my comments on the current prospects and proposals are based on second-hand information. But it scarcely requires presence at One Dupont Circle to know that creation of the foundation rests on distribution of turf, some strongly guarded. And while the divisive turf of Ireland is only orange or green, that in Washington exceeds the colors of the rainbow. Although I have retained the lexeme 'create' in discussing the proposed new agency, literal meaning of the word may have been applicable when the National Science Foundation got its start and also subsequently the National Endowment for the Humanities. But the principal proponents of the National Foundation for Foreign Languages and International Studies coveted the relatively sizable funds of the Fulbright program, the lesser but still substantial funds in the Department of Education, and other budgetary provisions whose guardians needed no lessons from the harpies of classical fame.

Moreover, even the meek humanists had ventured out of their comfortable if modest cubicles to establish agencies in promotion of their interests. The most prominent of these may be the JNCL, the Joint National Committee on Languages — a double-pronged organization, one of whose prongs applies half of the scant dollars for idealistic, non-taxable pursuits while the other prong, labeled the National Council for Languages and International Studies, with the other portion of funds is legally authorized to lobby. Besides JNCL we look for succor to COSSA, the Consortium of Social Science Associations, and to the National Humanities Alliance while we clutch at the paltry handouts that somehow have escaped the military, the physical scientists, the biological scientists and others in the hierarchy of those wiser than we in obtaining solace by means of enhancement of ideals through handouts from the national treasury.

Quite apart from such gentle feelings regarding filthy lucre, we may recall the academic alignment in this country that separates the social sciences from the humanities, entailing differing stalls for pundits promoting international studies from those fostering the study of languages. Many of the social scientists have made a point of maintaining their intellectual integrity by avoiding any contamination of their native tongue with foreign languages. And diminishing funds under the once happy National Defense Education Act have sharpened their claws as well as their wits for getting control of the trickle from Washington in order to apply their chi-square tests to measurements gathered in monolingual innocence. When we note further that the bountiful provisions of supply-side

economics did not fulfill the prognostications of the previous administration by directing excessive revenues into national coffers, and that planes that are to penetrate the borders of other nations while our own borders are sacrosanct under a scarcely inexpensive electronic blanket directed the "nation's investment" towards the hue of the rainbow with greatest wave-length, i.e. into the red, the proposed scope of the new national foundation has developed in inverse relationship with our national debt. Sights now seem to be directed at an agency that contemplates policy rather than dispenses millions.

Before concluding I may touch briefly on two possible obligations I have slighted: (1) reference to national planning of other countries; (2) presentation of my observations in terms of a model. To illustrate my good intentions on both scores I refer to a paper published in December 1987 under the auspices of IREX, "Soviet Cultural Politics and Cultural Production," by Nancy Condee and Vladimir Padunov. The thrust of their analysis may be imparted through indicating that they set forth their interpretation in terms of a "Thaw Model." Hoping not to perch too heavily on their shoulders, I seek the authority of established methodology by claiming for my own analysis presentation through a "Flaw Model," as similarly apposite for intercultural efforts in this country.

Yet these final remarks take us beyond the present, a dangerous sphere as a few moments with virtually any statement on the future of our activities may illustrate. I cite only one, from an essay on 'second-language teaching' that I scanned in preparation for this function. Among its conclusions is the secure judgment that "the linguistic studies of English and the major foreign languages taught in the United States will be increasingly written in transformational terms" (Lado 1971: 416).

Current prospects may indeed suggest once again that "the major foreign languages" will be increasingly "taught in the United States". But as our past also suggests, if bets on that possibility were proposed, one might more securely devote excess funds to the purchase of lottery tickets. And with reference to creation of a national agency equipped with funds for execution of carefully devised plans for intercultural studies, we might recall that our optimistic country also includes citizens, some in Washington on national mandate, who put stock in establishing a settlement on Mars.

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