Spring 1965
Midcontinent American Studies Association (MASA) Bulletin

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• INTELLECTUALS, INFLUENTIALS AND ISOLATOES: Unstated, though strongly implied, in one of the book reviews in this issue is the fact that the author of the book under review is grievously out of touch with the best people in this specialty. My impression, although his specialty is not mine, is that the fault is probably not his -- there probably was no way in which a bright man coming to the field could conveniently find out what was the consensus of the best opinion. Good scholarship, one knows for a fact, exists, but it exists in isolation, often in articles written to fit the formulae of specialized magazines. In the sciences, specialists go to conventions for the purpose of finding out such things as, Where do we stand? What is the implication of the new work which has been done since we last met? What are we sure of, what is hypothetical, where are the debates? I do not wish to suggest any simple analogy between the pursuit of knowledge in the sciences and in the humanities, but it is clear enough that our conventions should but certainly do not generally serve this function. I can think of some exceptions, including, I am proud to say, some of the annual sessions of the MASA, but we all know that generally the purpose of an academic convention is to provide opportunity for large numbers of people to get their names on the program, just as the purpose of academic journals is to provide opportunity for people to get their stuff in print. It is the policy of this magazine not to accept articles which do not plainly indicate how the new work contained in the individual article affects its field, although I am sorry to report that frequently when we ask an author to provide this information about his own perfectly good work he is not only unable to do so but reports back sadly that there doesn't seem to be any place to which he can turn to find out. Too many very good men, in other words, are working, essentially, in isolation.

I do not think that the remedy for this situation is a proliferation either of scholarly organizations or of journals. That would, I fear, produce only more fragmentation. A simpler solution is suggested by the situation in some of the sciences: the science historian Donald Fleming speaks of men whom he calls "influentials," by which he intends something a bit different from what the Saturday Evening Post means by the term. He says that research in a great many areas centers around men often known less for their own original contributions than for their ability to keep in touch with a number of different people doing related work. Often working informally, the "influential" does a great deal to steer new scholars into areas in which the work is needed and to keep tabs on directions in which established people are going. Indeed, because he acts to some extent as a spokesman for men in his field, he often can exert a

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certain beneficial influence on the total aim of new research. If he uses his influence modestly and well, he is liable to have the confidence of a great many very good men who will see to it that he is a prominent member of organizations and committees which make decisions about such varied things as new graduate programs, foundation or government support of research and even faculty placement. Now it is of course doubtful, since the cash underpinning in humanistic fields and in the social sciences is so much less considerable than in science, that "influentials" in these fields could ever achieve the stature which they do in the sciences. And there are obviously dangers to be avoided -- the clique, old-school-tie and personal prejudice especially. Still, the need seems great enough to be willing to risk these things and to place some trust in the really very high professional ethics of our vocation. I am sure that we have in all fields admired and solidly established scholars, not necessarily of the first-rank in originality, but sane, steady, open-minded, considerate and reasonable -- perhaps the kind who now tend to wind up in administration but unhappy with it -- who could perform such functions were they called upon to do so. The gains would be very great. I take it, for example, that some of the difficulties encountered by the author of the book under discussion at the beginning of this note were largely the result of a kind of intellectual isolation. (It happens that he is on the faculty of a major university, which makes the story even sadder.) Were men working in that field in continuous, close and friendly contact through the good offices of an "influential," the book in its present form would never have been published; instead we would have had the far better book which the same author would have produced had he had a good sense of the attitudes and opinions of other bright men working in the area. At the very least, the university press which published the book, having decided -- correctly, I believe -- that here was a work which deserved publication, could then have obtained for the author contact with those people whose collective points of view could have given his work the tempering which it needs. Our reviewer tries honestly to indicate the nature of the difficulty, but of course we do not give him the space he would need to document what he says in a satisfactory manner: clearly, by the time the work reaches the reviewer, it is too late. What is needed is friendly professional contact with the community of investigators working on related problems. Since universities and even departments are not set up to provide this very specialized type of community, and since specialties now are too fragmented for even the professional journals of societies to provide it, I can think only of the "influential" system to do the job.

-- SGL

• Here is the program for the tenth annual meeting of the Midcontinent American Studies Association, Saturday, April 3, 1965, on the Alton campus of Southern Illinois University:

Conference Theme: *"The Settling of St. Louis"*

9:30 - 10:45 a. m. First Session

Chairman: James Austin, Professor and Chairman, American Studies Program, Edwardsville Campus, Southern Illinois University

Paper: "The French Settlement of St. Louis" J. F. McDermott, Research Professor, Southern Illinois University

Discussion Leader: George Brooks, Director, Missouri Historical Society

11:00 - 12:15 p. m. Second Session

Chairman: C. H. Schultz, Historian, Jefferson National Expansion Memorial, St. Louis

Paper: "The German Settlement of St. Louis" Ernst Stadler, Technician, Anheuser-Busch

Discussion Leader: J. Orville Spreen, Secretary, The Westerners of St. Louis

12:30 - 1:45 p. m. Luncheon (Student Union, SIU, Alton) and Business Meeting

Chairman: Kenneth LaBudde, Past President MASA

Greeting by Robert W. MacVicar, Vice President for Academic Affairs, Southern Illinois University

Presidential Address: "The Minor Writer in American Studies" – John Q. Reed, President MASA

2:00 - 3:15 p. m. Third Session

Chairman: John C. Abbott, Head Librarian, Edwardsville Campus, Southern Illinois University

Paper: "Fifty Years of Negro Settlement in East St. Louis" – Elliot Rudwick, Professor, Southern Illinois University

Discussion Leader: Seymour Mann, Director, Public Administration and Metropolitan Affairs, Southern Illinois University

Nicholas Joost was in charge of the program and of local arrangements.

• Our next issue will be devoted entirely to articles on the current situation of the American Indian. If we are able to obtain a fairly substantial foundation subvention, the issue will be extremely large -- ten papers are already accepted. If not, it will be merely oversize, not huge, and the articles which don't fit will appear in future numbers. In either case, the single-issue price for that one number will be $2.00 instead of the usual $1.25 (though we will honor orders made prior to our decision to

change the price.) Subscribers will, of course, receive the special issue at no extra cost. We would appreciate your mentioning the issue to friends in anthropology; it has already been adopted as a text for several courses, but since we plan to print only as many copies as we receive advance orders, single or group orders must be placed before September 1. For personal orders, a check for $2.00 made out to MASAJ goes to Professor Hauptmann at Park College, Parkville, Missouri. For class adoption, orders go to Professor Hauptmann, who will make available the usual bookstore discount.

Fall 1965
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HAIRY LEGS AND GOVERNMENT TASK-FORCES: A NOTE ON AMERICAN STUDIES AND THE PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF DIVERSE MATERIAL: The purely scholarly importance of communication between people of different specialties is obvious. It is surprising, however, how often practical applications lurk just around the corner. I spent the summer of 1965 as a Fulbright Lecturer in Costa Rica. During a question and answer period in my American history class the discussion turned to the American Indian. Steeped as they are in American cinema and television, Costa Ricans are understandably curious about the subject. I fielded their questions as best I could from what I had just learned about our Indian population in the course of editing this series of papers, and had occasion to remark that although of course many acculturated Indians or people with only a little Indian blood living in the general culture know very little about their Indian heritage, they are usually quite proud of their ancestry, and perfectly willing to bring it to your attention. In point of fact, although I had had no idea of the size of our part-Indian population, I had been aware since my high school days that there were a lot of part-Indian people around; several schoolmates had told me with some pride that they were part Indian. While working on the present collection, I had confirmed their ubiquity by asking my own students at the University of Kansas how many knew that they carried some Indian blood. Four in a class of 41, two in a class of 12 and one in a class of nine said that they did. None looked in any way to me to be "Indian"; all were quite happy to be so identified. The Costa Ricans, however, shook their heads in disbelief. Although Costa Rica has relatively little racial trouble, Indian blood is thought of as something to be hidden. Indians, a Costa Rican will tell you, have no body hair. So well-groomed middle-class women in snazzy dresses and high heels, elaborately coiffured and elegantly mascara-ed, show hairy legs under their tinted stockings, hirsute evidence that they bear no Indian blood. To my students, what I said (I finally convinced them) was obviously deeply shocking. For they knew all about American attitudes towards Negroes, and the fact that there is a country in the world in which Indian blood is something to be proud of forced a rethinking of all basic assumptions about class, race and democracy. Latin American students, even the good ones, tend to be very know-it-all. They like to lean heavily on easy generalizations and to refer anything you say to their own set of opinionated ideas. I date a more pragmatic approach on their part toward history in general to that discussion of the Indian.

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More important applications are easy enough to conceive. One of our contributors points out the fact that our experience with our own tribal peoples should be richly instructive as we learn to deal with the problems of tribal people in the emerging nations. All well and good; he is undoubtedly right. But our experience with Indians will do our diplomats and foreign aid personnel no good at all if they are unaware of it. We have as yet no systematic means of getting people in diverse specialties into contact with one another, even when we are faced with a problem as large as national diplomatic policy. How, after all, is a diplomat to know that an anthropologist who does not even specialize in tribes in the area in which the diplomat is working may have something very useful to say to him? And the anthropologist, like any academic, thinks in academic terms: he wants to communicate with his colleagues in a paper delivered at a convention or an essay in a scholarly journal. He would, of course, be happy to contribute what he knows if asked; indeed, he would probably be deeply flattered to do so. But the chances of his volunteering information are slight, and his chances of being asked, slighter.

The problem of getting what we should from what we know has arisen in the past in our national experience. I suppose the most notorious example of a failure of communications is in nineteenth century land policy. Congress, with access to the sound findings of a series of distinguished projects of exploration and analysis, behaved throughout the century as though it knew nothing of the character of the land it was parcelling out.

In encouraging contrast is the story of the mustering of scientific talent immediately before and during the Second World War. A group of distinguished scientists from diverse fields went to President Roosevelt to explain to him that science and technology could, in all probability, spell the difference between victory and defeat in the war which they felt was coming. His favorable response made possible the creation of a federal agency to keep the right people in touch with one another and to provide focus for research of all sorts which could have military significance. The accomplishments of this directed effort are famous and impressive: the production and application of penicillin and blood plasma, the impressively rapid improvement in radar (in close cooperation with Great Britain), the development of the atomic bomb and the perfection of the proximity fuse are but a few. (James Phinney Baxter's Scientists Against Time [Boston, 1947] is a good account of its operation.)

So far as I know, no one has ever considered any comparable mustering of diverse talent for political or diplomatic ends. Perhaps such an organization would be too cumbersome to operate effectively, for after all, since its aim would be to bring into focus the knowledge and hypotheses of very different and often apparently unrelated areas, it would be exceedingly

difficult to tell from which source a useful idea might appear. Why, for example, should anyone think to tap the experience of an anthropologist who specializes in American Indians when the problem at hand is an aid problem, let us say, in an African nation? The government can and does often call in teams of specialists to give it advice on specific problems; my guess is that it would at present be impractical to try to design machinery to make available the contributions of people from diverse areas. Which means that in practical terms responsibility for transmitting such information lies on the shoulders of our growing group of interdisciplinarians, people who as a professional commitment keep in close touch with a number of disciplines. It is one of the functions of the present Journal, and this issue in particular, to serve as a medium through which such contact can be established and maintained.

But although everyone agrees that such contact is desirable, the various disciplines are damnably self-perpetuating and insular. The interdisciplinarian who is making a living as a sociologist too often tends to measure himself only against other sociologists. He even has an in-group language designed, originally, for rapid and almost "coded" communication, but which in fact serves to keep outsiders away. So too with other specialties and other specialists. Within American Studies itself, there has of late been a response to this tendency. The administrators in some American Studies programs at American schools now want to de-emphasize the "interdisciplinary" aspect of their programs and to insist on American Studies as a discipline in its own right. Of course it is, and can hold its own against other and more traditionally established disciplines, but if it too insulates itself it is liable to become entirely a "secondary" field, not in sufficiently close touch with the good new work in the various disciplines. And the American Studies specialist will then be, as he sometimes is already, a pretty dilute product: a second-rate anthropologist, a history buff and an amateur literary historian. Live contact with current research seems to be essential. It is in no sense antithetical to an equally genuine commitment to work which transcends the boundaries between the disciplines. But the quality of work which thus cuts across boundaries depends largely upon the availability of reliable generalizations from the various specialties.

Then, too, there is the problem of doing something about what one has seen. The present collection of essays once again offers a quick illustration. Sometimes the conclusions of scholars working in one area would be immediately useful to people in others if the good people in others only knew about them. I do not think that we have many readers who are now actively engaged in the administration of secondary education. In their paper, the Waxes arrive at their conclusions about high school drop-outs through work with an Indian community high school. But as they point out, "The practices and policies of most high schools attended by underprivileged urban children are proving more like those [of the Oglala Community

High School] than they are unlike." The Waxes' conclusions are, so far as I know, new; they are certainly also bright, stimulating, suggestive. Will they ever get into the hands, let us say, of school administrators in New York or Chicago? Will the War on Poverty people in Washington be influenced by them? They will only if some of the twelve hundred or so readers of the present collection do the job of putting them where they can do some good. Thus another one of the purposes of the present collection is to provide information, observations and recommendations which will be of use not merely to people working directly with the complex problems faced by the American Indian community, but to others, in fields as diverse as diplomacy and education as well.

-- SGL